

Exploring first-year students' experiences of the demands and resources at a rural- based university delivery site

NV Manaka

 orcid.org/0000-0001-9652-8317

Mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree [Master of Commerce](#) in [Industrial
Psychology](#) at the North-West University

Supervisor: Prof K Mostert

Graduation: May 2019

Student number: 26576805

COMMENTS

For the purpose of this dissertation, the following remarks are important to note beforehand:

- The editorial guidelines specified by the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* were followed in the presentation. Where the former guidelines may deviate, the editorial style follows the format prescribed by the publication manual (6th ed.) of the American Psychological Association (APA). The latter was also followed in the referencing of sources that are cited. This practice is in line with the policy of the programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus.
- This mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of three chapters, namely an introductory chapter (Chapter 1), a research article (Chapter 2) and a concluding chapter (Chapter 3).
- The researcher followed the recommendations suggested by Levitt et al. (2018).¹ These authors were tasked by the American Psychological Association Publications and Communications Board Working Group on Journal Article Reporting Standards for Qualitative Research to examine standards of journal-article reporting for *qualitative* research. Amongst others, they found that qualitative manuscripts, compared to quantitative ones, tend to be longer and require more manuscript pages. This is mainly because the method section outlines detailed procedures and the results section applies a demonstrative rhetoric, which includes rich descriptions. As a result, the research article presented in this mini-dissertation exceeds the standard length of quantitative research articles.

¹ Levitt, H. M., Bamberg, M., Creswell, J. W., Frost, D. M., Josselson, R., & Suarez-Orozco, C. (2010). Journal article reporting standards for qualitative primary, qualitative meta-analytic, and mixed methods research in psychology: The APA Publications and Communications Board Task Force Report. *American Psychologist*, 73(1), 26-46. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000151>.

DECLARATION

I, Nomfanelo Valencia Manaka, hereby declare that this dissertation titled “**Exploring first-year students’ experiences of the demands and resources at a rural-based university delivery site**” is my own work. The views and opinions expressed in the present research study are my own and relevant literature references as shown in the reference list.

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



Nomfanelo Valencia Manaka

November 2018

DECLARATION FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

WELLINGTON

7655

16 Nov 2018

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I hereby confirm that the Master of Commerce in Industrial Psychology mini-dissertation by Ms NV Manaka (student no: 26576805) was edited and groomed to the best of my ability. The processing included recommendations to improve the language and logical structure, guide the line of argument as well as to enhance the presentation. I am satisfied that, provided my changes to the text and my recommendations are implemented, the language would be of a standard fit for publication.

Rev Claude Vosloo

Language and knowledge practitioner and consultant

Home of Creativity/Kreatiwiteitshuis

<http://homeofcreativity.co.za/info>

ID: 590806 5146 085

South African Translator's Institute reference no: 100 2432

Associate Member of PEG (Professional Editor's Guild)

Home of Creativity LTD 

Don't think outside the box, reinvent the box

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this study to my late father, Rev Mbulelo Philip Mvunyiswa (1941-2013), who will always remain the most extraordinary and inspirational person I ever knew.

My first thanks goes to our heavenly Father, for the insight He gave me into this study and the strength to complete this research. Psalm 30:5 carried me through this journey: "... weeping may last through the night, but joy comes in the morning."

Then I would like to express my sincerest and deepest gratitude to everyone who supported me throughout the journey of my studies. Thank you to the following people:

- My supervisor, Prof Karina Mostert, for her hard work, persistent and empathetic support, motivation, words of encouragement as well as guidance and patience. You are my source of inspiration and I will always be grateful to you.
- My co-supervisor, Carlien Kahl, for her input and feedback, motivation when I felt I could not carry on; her guidance, empathy and friendly enquiries; also, her passion for research and her compassionate nature. Thank you for inspiring me, I will be forever grateful to you.
- Rev Claude Vosloo, for his patience, encouragement and superior quality language-and-technical editing of my research study and translation of my summary into Afrikaans.
- Jenna Molale, for her assistance in conducting and transcribing the interviews.
- My mother, Irene Mvunyiswa, for her spiritual guidance, unconditional love and belief in my capability. I love you Zizi, Mpofana.
- My husband, Corlett Manaka, for his love, motivation, support and the long nights we worked side by side.
- My children, Anathi, Lethabo and Tumisho, for their love, support, encouragement and believing in me.
- My only brother, Bhongolethu Mvunyiswa, for his love, encouragement and being a source of strength from the time I applied for my studies to the present.
- My sisters, Nompumelelo, Yolisa, Nontando and Phunyezwa, for their love and continuous support.
- My friend, Bongani Tejane, for his love, support, motivation and believing in me.
- My circle of friends, for showing interest in my work and filling my life with beautiful memories.

- Thank you to the research project, StudyWell: Student Wellbeing and Success, for supporting this sub-project.
- Thank you also to the North-West University, specifically the office of the Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, for funding this part of the project.
- Thank you to all the participants for their valuable input.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of tables	viii
Summary	x
Opsomming	xii
 CHAPTER 1	
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Problem statement	1
1.2 Literature review: Extant Theories on First-Year Transitions and Experiences	5
1.2.1 General Model for Assessing Change	6
1.2.2 Theory of Student Departure	6
1.2.3 Model and Theory of Involvement	6
1.2.4 Job Demands-Resources Theory	7
1.2.5 Scope for Research: First-year Students' Experiences of Demands And Resources	9
1.3 Research objectives	12
1.3.1 General objective	12
1.3.2 Specific objectives	12
1.4 Research design	12
1.4.1 Research approach	13
1.4.2 Research strategy	14
1.5 Research method	15
1.5.1 Literature review	15
1.5.2 Research setting	16
1.5.3 Entrée and establishing researcher roles	16
1.5.4 Sampling	16
1.5.5 Data collection methods	17
1.5.6 Recording of data	18
1.5.7 Data analysis	18
1.5.8 Strategies employed to ensure quality data	19
1.5.9 Reporting	20
1.5.10 Ethical considerations	20

1.6 Chapter division	21
1.7 Chapter summary	21
References	22
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH ARTICLE	36
Introduction	38
Literature review	40
Theoretical framework: The Job Demands-resources model	40
The Job Demands-resources model in the student context	42
Demands and resources of rural students	43
Research design	46
Research approach	47
Research strategy	47
Research method	48
Literature review	48
Research setting	49
Entrée and establishing researcher roles	49
Sampling	49
Data collection methods	50
Recording of data	50
Data analysis	51
Strategies employed to ensure quality data	52
Reporting	53
Ethical considerations	53
Findings	53
Discussion	56
Limitations	75
Recommendations	76
References	77
CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
Conclusions	84
Limitations	90
Recommendations	91
References	97

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Description	Page
Table 1	Summary of themes, sub-themes and associated keywords	54

SUMMARY

Title: Exploring first-year students' experiences of the demands and resources at a rural-based university delivery site.

Keywords: First-year students, higher education institutions, rural university, study demands, study resources, student support structures, qualitative enquiry

The transition from high school to university can be challenging and stressful for rural first-year students and may be a factor preventing them from completing their studies successfully. These students face a wide range of demands, from personal problems, language issues, financial challenges, to accommodation. Resources should be available to support these students and help them adapt to student life at university successfully.

The objective of the present research was to explore first-year students' experiences of their demands and available resources at a rural-based university campus, as viewed from the perspective of the support structures. Thereby, the study contributed to developing a theoretical framework tailor-made for a South African university. This instrument was based on the Job Demands-resources (JD-R) theory, which is well-researched in the work context and has recently been applied to the educational environment.

The study followed a qualitative approach with the research setting a rural university campus in South Africa. The participants ($N = 16$) were selected from psychological services, first-year lecturers, the Student Representative Council, peer mentors, the university's Finance Department and hostel parents. The researcher conducted in-depth interview sessions in person or through video-conferencing, depending on the preference and availability of participants. The data were transcribed verbatim and coded by using the programme ATLAS.ti.

The findings of the present study identified five major themes, namely: 1) the complex lives of first-year students; 2) the nature of the academic environment; 3) the economic experiences of studying; 4) accommodation and facilities; 5) and transition to university: adjustments and expectations. Each category delivered key subthemes supporting the central themes. In correlation with the study demands, several study resources were identified that are available to first-year students in a rural-based university. The mentioned major themes delivered several subthemes for resources as well that were analysed and discussed.

Finally, recommendations were made for the individual, the institution, and for future research on this topic.

OPSOMMING

Titel: Verkenning van eerstejaar-universiteitstudente se ervarings van die eise en hulpbronne aan 'n landelike universiteit se aanbiedingsplatform.

Sleutelwoorde: Eerstejaarstudente, hoëronderwysinstellings, landelike universiteit, studie-eise, studiehulpbronne, studente-ondersteuningstrukture, kwalitatiewe ondersoek

Die oorgang van hoërskool na universiteit kan vol uitdagings en spanning wees vir landelike eerstejaarstudente en kan dalk 'n faktor wees wat hulle verhoed om hulle studies suksesvol te voltooi. Hierdie studente kry te doen met 'n wye reeks eise: van persoonlike probleme, taalkwessies, finansiële uitdaging tot verblyf. Daar moet hulpbronne beskikbaar wees wat hierdie studente help om suksesvol by die universiteitslewe aan te pas.

Die doel van die huidige navorsing was om eerstejaarstudente se ervarings van eise en beskikbare hulpbronne aan 'n landelike universiteitskampus te verken, soos gesien deur die oogpunt van die ondersteuningstrukture. Daardeur lewer die studie 'n bydrae deur 'n teoretiese raamwerk afgestem op Suid-Afrikaanse landelike universiteite te ontwikkel. Hierdie instrument is gebaseer op die werkseise-hulpbron-teorie, ('job demands-resources') wat deeglik binne die werkopset nagevors en onlangs op die onderwysomgewing toegepas is.

Die studie het 'n kwalitatiewe benadering gevolg met die navorsingsopset 'n landelike universiteitskampus binne Suid-Afrika. Die deelnemers ($N = 16$) is uitgesoek onder sielkundige dienste, die Verteenwoordigende Studenteraad, portuurmentors, die universiteit se Finansiële Departement en koshuisouers. Die navorser het in-diepte onderhoude gevoer deur persoonlike onderhoudsessies of videokonferensies – afhangend van die deelnemers se voorkeur of beskikbaarheid. Die data is woordeliks getranskribeer en gekodeer deur die program ATLAS.ti. in te span.

Die huidige studie se bevindings het vyf hooftemas uitgewys, naamlik: 1) die verwikkelde lewe van eerstejaarstudente; 2) die aard van die akademiese omgewing; 3) die ekonomiese studeerervaring; 4) verblyf en fasiliteite; en 5) oorgang na universiteit: aanpassings en verwagtings. Elke kategorie het sleutel-subtemas opgelewer wat die kerntemas ondersteun het. In korrelasie met die studie-eise is verskeie studiehulpbronne geïdentifiseer wat tot beskikking is van eerstejaarstudente aan 'n

landelike universiteit. Die genoemde hoofemas het eweseer oor hulpbronne verskeie subtemas opgelewer wat onleed en bespreek is.

Laastens is aanbevelings gedoen vir individue, die instelling asook vir toekomstige navorsing oor die onderwerp.

CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction

The focus of this mini-dissertation is exploring the views and perceptions of the support structure at a rural-based university campus about the demands and resources that first-year students experience. The support structure is a resource that helps first-year students adapt to university. The method followed was in-depth interviews that followed a conversational tone. This allowed participants to express themselves in ways that were culturally meaningful and appropriate. Participants were made up from a wide spectrum: psychological services, first-year lecturers, the Student Representative Council, peer mentors, the university's Finance Department and hostel parents. These participants were included in the present study based on their experience of dealing with first-year students from the time the latter arrived on campus until they adjusted to their new environment.

Chapter 1 outlines the problem statement, drawn from the background of the study and investigates relevant literature on first-year student's experiences at university. This literature incorporates demands and resources with the theoretical framework used in the present study. The research questions and research objectives (general and specific), are outlined after the problem statement. This is followed by a description of the design and method for the research, and finally, an overview of the chapters.

1.1 Problem statement

One of the primary objectives of the government post 1994 was providing all South African young people access to higher education (Chetty, 2004). According to Ziguras and Law (2006), the central role played by higher education institutions (hereafter HEIs) in paving the way for social and economic development has been in discussion since the 1960s. The primary objective was ensuring the inclusion of all students to participate in higher education (Fraser & Killen, 2005). As a result, Government policy required that HEIs in South Africa change structuring, funding, and student numbers to transform higher education in the country (Gbadamosi & De Jager, 2009). According to Roman, Titus, and Dison (2016), South Africa's HEIs face various challenges. These include dealing with the diversity of the student population, increasing their throughput, while

simultaneously providing quality education. In this study, HEIs will refer mainly to universities, thus highlighting the proximity of the institutions to post-matric level.

The sudden increase in students accessing South African universities since 1994 have resulted in the admission of large numbers of previously disadvantaged students (Jaffer, Ng'ambi, & Czerniewicz, 2007). Admission of these students was meant to address the inequalities from the past and to desist all forms of discrimination within a framework of values, which upholds justice, equality, and solidarity (Cross & Carpentier, 2009). In 2011, statistics indicated that a high number of previously disadvantaged groups registered at universities. This was a significant increase from 1994, where student numbers grew by an average of 6.2% per annum in the period between 2000 and 2009 (CHE, 2013; Chetty, 2013; Cloete, 2014).

Despite these improvements, the Parliamentary Monitoring Group published information from Higher Education South Africa (HESA) indicating some of the challenges still faced by previously disadvantaged groups when accessing higher education. These problems include the poor state of basic education and a lack of funding (NPC, 2011). In concurrence with HESA's findings, Steyn, Harris, and Hartell (2014) point out that the number of students who complete their courses is disconcertingly low, mainly because they find academic work and the learning environment challenging (Zulu, 2011). Furthermore, Wilson-Strydom (2011) argues that another reason for students dropping out is growing access without increasing the success of ill-equipped undergraduates from impoverished backgrounds. This is supported by the Council on Higher Education report that concedes that students entering university do so from positions of extreme inequality (CHE, 2010).

The challenges that HEIs experience seems amplified for first-year students. This is not only the case for South African HEIs, but internationally as well, where the first year at university implies a vital transition for young people (Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2006). This period represents a separation from the patterns and norms related to prior experiences, whereas the behavioural patterns of the university context have not yet been established (McInnis 2001). Furthermore, a mismatch between students' dreams and expectations about university and its reality can cause difficulties in the transition process (Matshotyana, van Rooyen, & du Randt, 2015). Even though first-year students may be more mature compared to high school learners, these students face new challenges and stressors associated with university life (Fincham, Roomaney & Kagee, 2015).

There are several important challenges that first-year students face internationally and in South Africa (Chetty, 2014; Davies & Elias, 2003; Yorke & Thomas, 2003; Zulu, 2011). These entail the following: a lack of preparedness for university life due to various factors (Davies & Elias, 2003; Lowe & Cook, 2003); establishing new friendship networks (Rickinson & Rutherford, 1996); internalising novel and unfamiliar learning, teaching, and assessment strategies (McInnis, 2001; Yorke & Thomas, 2003); and the quality of relationships between academic staff and students (Yorke & Thomas, 2003). Compatibility between the students, their chosen courses and the institution, depends partly on enough information about pre-entry but often is influenced more by students' experience once they start off with their degree.

In addition to dealing with new interpersonal, financial, and other issues, first-year students are confronted with emotional problems. Should these matters be underestimated, students may fail to cope psychologically, which may eventually cause them to drop out of university (Bouhey & McKenna, 2016; Zembylas, 2012). Students may also feel detached and hopeless (Reeve, Shumaker, Yearwood, Crowell, & Riley, 2013) when they have less resources to deal with an unfamiliar environment characterised by high study demands (Salanova, Schaufeli, Martinez, & Breso, 2010). In South Africa specifically, the challenges that first-year students face include factors such as socio-economic status and poverty, language barriers, and inferior scholastic education (De Villiers, 2014; Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014).

The first year is extremely challenging and important for universities' management and students alike. Therefore, it is important to ensure proper resources are in place to support students during this transition period. For example, Noble, Flynn, Lee, and Hilton (2007) and Strayhorn (2012) suggest that participation in transition programmes such as orientation may contribute to academic success and the completion of undergraduate studies. Research on student adjustment indicates that perceived social support is a crucial consideration and helps candidates acclimatise to student life (Retief & Thata, 2008). Social support may include peers, family, and university staff and can be viewed as a predictor of students' success at university (Danielsen, Wiium, Wilhemsen & Wold, 2010). It is also important to consider that students' background, particularly from a cultural and academic side, can affect their preferences and needs regarding the university environment (Matoti, 2010).

Furthermore, it is important to investigate the challenges and demands that first-year students experience as well as the resources they require to be successful. If adequate support is not provided to South African first-year students, the challenges or problems they experience could escalate. It may even lead to the significant reduction of graduation prospects, as reflected in the country's statistics on high failure and dropout rates (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010). Student drop-out has long-term financial implications for the country in general; thus, the academic performance of students is a crucial determinant of any university's success (Goodman et al., 2011). On a macro level, South African HEIs are not attaining the predetermined developmental goals, while on a micro-level, numerous students fail to reach their full potential (Letseka & Maile, 2008). Moreover, student attrition is not only disheartening to students and universities, its effect is detrimental to society due to the existing scarcity of manpower in the various spheres of the economy (Opoku-Asare & Siwa, 2015).

Bakker, Albrecht, and Leiter (2011) stress the importance of identifying circumstances that contribute to demands and recommend interventions that will promote people's wellbeing. Universities can contribute positively to students' welfare by providing relevant support when needed, thereby reducing students' exposure to negative challenges. This will help increase students' engagement and cultivate a positive attitude towards their development (Woosley & Miller, 2009; Woosley & Shepler, 2011). Furthermore, it is important to minimise first-year students' under-preparedness in their academic career and rather expose them to resources that will ensure they function optimally (Zulu, 2011), and succeed in their studies to later enter the job market.

One of the biggest responsibilities that shape the life of an individual is the decision associated with career choice (Atli, 2016). Career planning and planning to attend a university after high school are definite methods of preparation of future professions by first-year students (Xiao, Newman & Chu, 2018) are made during the years of high school education (Atli, 2016). The current business environment has become highly competitive, thus making skilled employees the major differentiating factor for most organisations who rely on their employees' expertise to compete favourably and gain a competitive advantage in the international markets (Samuel & Chipunza, 2009). Several studies (Bennett, Dunne & Carre, 2000; Gallagher, 2000) found that organisations, in relation to university education, give the impression of being impacted by the explanation of specific and desirable graduate attributes, capabilities and competencies (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick & Cragolini, 2004). Engaged students will be able to survive and thrive in a new work

environment and deal with the challenges that accompany the volatility of a global economy (Cilliers, Mostert & Nel, 2017). As a result, universities across the globe are increasingly required to produce highly skilled graduates that can respond positively to the ever changing and complex needs of the workplace (Possa, 2006; Sleezer, Gularte, Waldner & Cook, 2004). Furthermore, globalisation requires that countries produce proficient citizens who will acquire knowledge effectively, as well as internalise and reproduce it. This will help them contribute positively to uplifting their society and the country (Van Schalkwyk, 2002).

Considering the discussion above, it is critical to improve the advancement rates of students and reduce the attrition numbers. Thereby, skilled workers are produced within the developing economy (Zewotir, & North, 2015). In this regard, the present study makes an important contribution to the field of Industrial and Organisational (IO) Psychology. The reason is that IO psychologists are concerned with employees' wellbeing, motivation, job satisfaction, and mainly "to enhance the dignity and performance of human beings, and the organisations they work in, by advancing the science and knowledge of human behaviour" (Rucci, 2008, p. 19). The same principles that IO psychologists apply to employees in the work environment, is relevant for first-year students in university, helping them function optimally, not only at university, but also as future employees. Accordingly, fostering a better understanding the first-year experience and first-year students' experiences of their study demands, and resources is needed.

1.2 Literature Review: Extant Theories on First-Year Transitions and Experiences

In order to understand extant perspectives of first-year students' demands and resources when transitioning to university, a review of literature was necessary. An extensive volume of studies focus on the transition from secondary to tertiary education as well as the first-year experience. In this literature, the three main theories that are used are the General Model for Assessing Change (Pascarella, 1985), the Theory of Student Departure (Tinto, 1993) and the Model and Theory of Involvement (Astin, 1999). In addition, a fourth theory is provided as alternative to understand and frame first-year students experiences of demands and resources, i.e., the Job Demands-Resources Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). These theories are discussed subsequently, with an integrated critical reflection for the scope of research on first-year students' experiences of study demands and resources.

1.2.1 General Model for Assessing Change

Pascarella's General Model for Assessing Change (Pascarella, 1985) identifies several core components that form part of the model. These components entail: students' precollege traits, the university's organisational characteristics, the campus culture, socialising agents on the campus, and the quality of effort provided by the students. Pascarella maintains that what students bring to the institution in qualities, skills, and attributes combined with the extent and quality of their efforts will interact with the institutional environment, leading to positive change and growth. This theory makes explicit the need to connect with agents of socialisation, namely the faculty, administrators, and professionals in student affairs (Pascarella, 1985).

1.2.2 Theory of Student Departure

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (Tinto, 1993) enhances the understanding of students' individual traits (pre-entry attributes), their goals and their commitment to achieving those goals. The theory also focuses on the experiences of students within the institutional environment, as well as their ability and willingness to integrate these encounters with their own goals, and the outputs triggered by the previous concepts. Universities also manifest unique individual characteristics, which form part of the interaction between students and their environment (Long, 2012). Tinto suggests that the reasons behind student departure can be found primarily in three specific areas: academic problems; failure to integrate socially and intellectually with the culture of the university; and a low level of commitment to the university (Tinto, 1987).

1.2.3 Model and Theory of Involvement

Astin's Model and Theory of Involvement (1999) assumes that the degree to which students perceive and give meaning to their involvement with the institutional community will contribute positively towards retention, graduation, and performance. The model has three core components, namely: (a) student characteristics that are brought with them when entering the institution; (b) the institutional environment itself with which the students interact; and (c) outcomes of the interaction between students' inputs and the university environment.

Astin (1999) argued that five key elements are fundamental to reach ultimate tertiary outcomes. These elements are: (a) the quality of psychological and physical involvement; (b) continuous involvement with students investing various amounts of energy in their university careers; (c) involvement in both qualitative and quantitative senses; (d) students' development and effective learning being directly proportional to quality and quantity of involvement; and (e) the overall impact of the educational experience concurrent with the level of the students' involvement.

1.2.4 Job Demands-Resources Theory

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is a well-known and validated theoretical framework used in organisational psychology to study wellbeing in the work environment. The JD-R theory has recently been applied to the student context of wellbeing. This model works from the primary assumption that, where every occupation may have its specific risk factors associated with job stress, these factors are classified into two general categories, namely job demands and job resources. Job demands can be defined as: "Those physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and associated with certain physiological costs." Job resources, on the other hand, are: "Those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 274.).

Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001) suggest that job demands may bring about health-impairment if employees' daily workload keeps on getting overloaded during an extended period. In this regard, job demands may cause unabated exhaustion, which may contribute to physical or cardiovascular health problems (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). On the other hand, job resources establish a motivational process that contributes to employees' engagement, commitment and dedication, by providing meaningful assets and satisfying basic needs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018).

In support of the JD-R theory, Bakker and Demerouti (2017) point out that longitudinal studies were conducted by scholars who found evidence for both causal and reversed causal effects between job demands, resources, and wellbeing. Hakanen, Perhoniemi and Toppinen-Tanner (2008)

established that task-level job resources can buffer the impact of job demands. Comparably, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli (2009) found that job resources contribute positively towards personal resources and work engagement. Both mentioned studies concur that engaged workers have an optimistic attitude and can satisfy their needs by participating in roles within the organisation (i.e. organisation-based self-esteem) (Bakker, 2011).

The JD-R theory is a useful instrument that can be adapted to the student context, seeing that it considers both negative and positive outcomes and processes. In addition, this model can be tailored to the specific needs of the university and students – given different situations and circumstances. Certain studies have used the JD-R theory as theoretical framework to investigate student wellbeing. Hartrey, Denieffeb and Wells (2017) conducted a study on barriers and supports regarding the participation of students with mental health difficulties in higher education. The study examined factors internal to the individual student (symptoms of mental illness, fear of disclosure and knowledge of mental illness), and external factors (knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of the university community).

Symptoms of mental illness include students' inability to be consistent in their school work and attending of classes (Knis-Matthews, Bokara, DeMeo, Lepore & Mavus, 2007). Furthermore, these students were found to experience difficulties with stress, focus, motivation and emotions that alter moods (Knis-Matthews, et al., 2007; Martin, 2010; Schindler & Kientz, 2013). These symptoms were reportedly buffered by supportive teachers, medical intervention and peer support (Megivern, Pellerito, & Mowbray, 2003). Hartrey et al. (2017) point out that it is crucial for universities to explore ways to support the progress of students with mental health difficulties outside traditional methods of reasonable accommodations and adjustments.

Mokgele and Rothmann (2014) conducted a study to test a structural model, based on the JD-R, by focusing on study demands and resources, student burnout, engagement, health, and satisfaction with life. The results from their study indicated that study demands, and a lack of study resources were positively connected to burnout. These aspects included essential nature of study tasks, how students relate with lecturers, and social support from peers. Furthermore, the accessibility of study resources was found to be positively associated with psychological wellbeing and engagement. They also found that burnout partially mediates the relationship between a lack of study resources

and psychological wellbeing, while engagement partially mediates the relationship between the availability of study resources and satisfaction with life (Mokgele & Rothmann, 2014).

A study by Salanova et al. (2010) investigated the mediating role of students' wellbeing (i.e., burnout and engagement) in the relationship between perceived obstacles to performance and facilitators and future academic performance. According to the results, performance facilitators showed a positive connection to engagement; performance obstacles a negative relationship with engagement; and both obstacles and facilitators a positive correlation with future academic performance (Salanova et al., 2010).

A recent study (Cilliers, Mostert, & Nel, 2017), also employed the JD-R theory as theoretical framework for a sample of university students. This was used to investigate how study demands and resources impact the engagement levels of first-year South African university students and how personality characteristics contributed to their experiences in this environment. The results of their study emphasise how important support from lecturers and opportunities for growth and development are, to encourage engagement of students. In addition, the focus on achievement (a facet of conscientiousness) was found to be essential for predicting students' engagement (Cilliers et al., 2017).

The results of studies using the JD-R theory in the student context show promising results. Although these findings are helpful to understand the relationships between study demands, study resources, and student wellbeing to an extent, there are certain areas that must be explored further.

1.2.5 Scope for Research: First-year Students' Experiences of Demands and Resources

In addition to the general review of theories applied within first-year students experiences, the above theories are integrated to provide a possible scope for research on first-year students experiences of demands and resources. Firstly, the above-mentioned studies measured study demands and resources more generally. There is thus room for an in-depth investigation of the specific demands and resources that students experience during their first year.

Secondly, the theoretical differences between demands and resources are not as clear-cut as it seems on the surface; job demands are viewed in a negative and resources in a positive way (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Crawford, LePine and Rich (2010) point out that demands and resources are not necessarily experienced in the same way. Certain demands may be viewed in a positive light, and resources may be viewed negatively based on individual circumstances. An explorative qualitative study may shed more light on this distinction.

Thirdly, most of the studies conducted on first-year students' demands and resources, also studies using the JD-R theory as theoretical framework, were done from the perspective of students. It may be important and provide valuable input to focus on students' own perceptions; however, this approach holds certain limitations. For example, students are not the only stakeholders within university communities; they may lack the experience to perceive their demands and resources in context and are often unaware of their own deficiencies (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). HESA (2014) views academic, non-academic, and support staff as the primary point of contact and sources of support for first-year students. It is therefore necessary to include the views and perceptions of these support groups, based on their experience while working with first-year students. These impressions concern the different demands that first-year students face and the resources they require to deal with these challenges successfully (Naidoo, 2015).

In addition, there is a necessity for intensified efforts from student support structures to aid and contribute positively towards first-year students' struggles (Naidoo, 2015). The view is to bring these students to a planned level of equity and excellence. This is done by developing and utilising programmes that can help them adapt and make informed decisions about their social, academic, and career advancement (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010).

Finally, there is a gap in the study field, where the present study could be relevant. Despite numerous studies about disadvantaged first-year students' transition to university and the problems these students experience, there is scant focus on students from *rural* areas (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014). This situation is complicated because there are no definite numbers available of students from rural backgrounds within South African HEIs. The reason is that these students are placed either under the general category of 'disadvantaged students' or fall under the group of students who require financial aid (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014). Rural universities are isolated geographically and are based mostly in underdeveloped communities. Kasha (2012) describes

rural areas as “deprived, lacking so many government developmental interventions such as potable water, electricity, good roads and school infrastructure to improve upon the lives of the people” (p. 12).

Rural-based universities experience significant challenges concerning first-year students, who mainly come from impoverished, rural communities (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010). For the most part, these students were educated at under-resourced public high schools that do not offer the skills and competencies which may empower students to be prepared for tertiary education (Zulu, 2011). According to Kimani and Mutweleli (2012), the perception that rural first-year students may experience challenges when they enter universities for the first time is a concern, as this may affect their performance, adaptability, career development, and advancement. Nelson, Duncan, and Clarke (2009) point out that no single cause has been identified to explain why students in a rural-based university drop out before they complete their course. Instead, Kift and Nelson (2005) highlight, as contributing factors, multiple issues and variables in the personal, social and academic domains, which include educational and social adjustment, varied or unmet expectations, and extra-curricular commitments.

It is widely known that schooling opportunities and the quality of education accessed by rural students is inferior because of the South African political history (Pillay & Thwala, 2012). It is therefore vital that structures and communities within universities help rural students acquire and build essential skills necessary to succeed in higher education (Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014). Furthermore, it is crucial to gain an in-depth understanding of demands and resources that first-year students experience, in order to ascertain whether HEIs and their support structures in rural areas have the resources to support this category of students (Nkambule et al., 2001).

Based on the problem statement above, the purpose of this study was to provide insight into first-year students’ adjustment to the university environment, as viewed from the perspective of the student support structure. Due to the widening gap between students’ expectations and their actual experiences after arriving at university, the goal was to understand first-year students’ experiences. This especially concerns the demands they have, and resources required to deal with such challenges, as perceived by their support structures.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated based on the scope for the need for better understandings resulting from the review of literature above:

1. According to the literature, which demands, and resources do first-year university students, studying at rural universities, experience?
2. Which demands, and resources do first-year university students experience at a rural-based university's delivery site, from the perspective of the student support structures?
3. What conclusions and recommendations can be proposed for future research and, practice.

1.3 Research objectives

The research objectives were divided into a general aim and specific objectives flowing from it.

1.3.1 General objective

The general aim of this research was to explore first-year students' demands and resources at a rural-based university's delivery site from the perspective of the support structure.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

The following specific objectives are to:

1. Establish the demands and resources that first-year university students, studying at rural universities, experience, according to literature.
2. Explore the demands, and resources first-year university students experience at a rural-based university's delivery site, from the perspective of student support structures.
3. Draw conclusions and make recommendations for future research and practice.

1.4 Research design

The research design bridges the gap between the research questions and the implementation of the research. Thus, consistency between the research questions and research design is meant to generate useful data (Maxwell, 2012). In this section, the researcher discusses the most appropriate

approach, strategy, and methodology for the present research study. Furthermore, the research questions are presented, and a clear understanding provided the way the researcher conducted the study.

This research formed part of a larger project on student demands, resources and wellbeing. The present study reports on the qualitative explanations of first-years' adjustment experiences to university as viewed by student support structures at the university. These entail the following: psychological services, first-year lecturers, the Student Representative Council, peer mentors, the university's Finance Department and hostel parents.

1.4.1 Research approach

Qualitative research was well suited for the present study to produce detailed evidence-based research on the investigation of a *specific context* (i.e. first-years' adjustment experiences to university life) and *specific people* (i.e. student support structures), thus not aiming for the end goal of generalisation (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 3) define qualitative research as: "A situated activity that locates the observer in the world; it consists of a set on interpretive, material practices that make the world visible." While qualitative research provides contextual understandings of phenomena, universal understandings of the study phenomena may be possible. The reason is that the researcher interacted with the participants in ways which explored their understandings and views of their reality in its most vivid form (Matveev, 2002). A qualitative approach thus includes information about the "human" side of a problem – that is, the different behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships between individuals (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delpont, 2011).

Accordingly, the researcher followed an interpretive, descriptive approach (Thorne, 2000, 2016; Thorne, Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997) to understand diverse people's subjective experiences of a specific phenomenon. Creswell (2013) explains that interpretive description seeks to understand the real-life world of participants, where they develop subjective meanings of their experiences. They are many and different experiences that cause the researcher to look for complex rather than limited meanings. The researcher's sole aim is to focus on the participants' views (Creswell, 2013).

1.4.2 Research strategy

The interpretive description approach fits into the social research paradigm of constructivism (Creswell, 2013), which relates to beliefs about reality or ontology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This means that the researcher seeks participants' own explanations and understandings of their world. Such explanations are diverse and ensure the researcher focuses on the complexity of the different experiences rather than searching for underlying meanings behind it (Creswell, 2009). Social constructivism accepts there is no presence of an objective reality alone; instead, facts are developed individually, through social construction, with each person creating his/her meaning and truth (Doucet, Letourneau, & Stoppard, 2010; Tsai, 2008). Consequently, constructivist researchers' paradigm depicts the processes of interaction and the contexts in which the participants exist, thus shedding light on their historical and cultural setting (Creswell, 2009, Creswell, 2013).

The researcher worked from epistemological (understanding) and ontological (real-life) assumptions. Based on these assumptions, the aim was to grasp the various meanings which student support structures attribute to construct their understandings of study demands and resources for first-year students' who seek academic success at a rural university (Creswell, 2009). The researcher built her perception of participants' reality on that of the student support structures. The reason is that these structures provide a different perspective on working with first-year students that could guide the investigation of the research problem (Creswell, 2009). These structures could also provide insight into ways students react towards their problems and help point out personal and university resources available to resolve these challenges (Creswell, 2009).

The researcher understood her role in the research process as that of an outsider (*etic*) looking into the insider (*emic*) experiences. In this sense, *emic* implies having an insider's view or personal experience of a specific culture or society, whereas *etic* points to the outsiders' perspective, thus someone who does not have a personal link or has not experienced a certain culture or society (Patton, 2002; Young, 2005).

1.5 Research method

The present study was informed by a thorough literature review as well as empirical research that is detailed below.

1.5.1 Literature review

The researcher conducted a comprehensive review to search systematically for information on first-year students' adjustment into university within the context of a rural university site. The researcher examined related keywords, which included but were not limited to: first-year students (student); support structures (personnel, staff, the student representative council); universities (higher education institutions, [HEI]); college, tertiary education); rural (isolated, geographic location); demands and resources (student demands and resources, student wellbeing, challenges, difficulties, support); and other relevant search terms.

The literature was used to extract relevant themes under investigation. The researcher referred to recent and related articles through the following databases: South African Journals (SA ePublications) to determine the literature presented in South Africa for first-year students. Thereafter, the research was expanded to include other databases: Academic Search Premier; PsycINFO, APA PsycArticles; EBSCOHost; Emerald; ProQuest; SACat; Google Scholar and library services of the North-West University.

The focus was literature reporting on first-year rural students' adjustments to university. Literature was thus excluded which focused on students other than first-years, such as older students, graduates and those entering the workplace. This also applies to studies reporting on urban findings, which did not compare the challenges to those experienced at a rural university.

The most prominent academic journals that were used to conduct the literature review were: *Research in Higher Education*, *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, *Higher Education*, *Higher Education Research & Development*, *Journal of Advanced Academics*. Other journals are *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Journal of Higher Education*, *Research in Higher Education*, *South African Journal of 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, and Higher Education Review.

1.5.2 Research setting

The research was undertaken at a rural university delivery site (campus) in South Africa. To date, there were studies on first-year students' transition to university; however, few researchers have focused on the context of rural universities (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014). These universities may be geographically isolated from resources with fewer structural resources in the communities surrounding such institutions (Msila, 2010). People residing in the communities around the university thus have insufficient resources and suffer further structural deficiencies (Bot, Wilson & Dove, 2001; Msila, 2010).

1.5.3 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

The researcher negotiated access to a site at a rural university campus. Permission to conduct the study was obtained beforehand by identifying gatekeepers who also participated in the study (De Vos et al., 2011). The gatekeepers provided names and contact information of possible participants. The researcher sent e-mail forms to selected candidates containing ethics information, recruitment invitations and referral requests. Following the invitations, the researcher obtained informed consent from the participants, and planned for the data collection which is discussed in the following sections.

1.5.4 Sampling

Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbon (2015) define sampling as “the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives” (p. 1772). The researcher relied on purposive, voluntary sampling (Patton, 2002). The inclusion criteria required participants to work with, support and/or provide services to first-year students at university in various capacities; and as support structures they had to be in contact with these students on a regular basis (Patton, 2002). The strategy ensured the sample represented various departments, structures, and faculties from the HEI (Boehnke, Lietz, Schreier, & Wilhelm, 2011).

The researcher followed up on potential participants to confirm availability as well as to answer questions the participants had on the nature of the project, the duration of, and the mode of conducting interviews. During interviews, snowball sampling was used providing access to additional participants (Merriam, 2009). The sample size was commensurable with the willingness and accessibility of the participants. However, the researcher did take additional measures to assure (and maximise) the variability of the sample by recruiting key informants from a broad range of structural support staff (Tracy, 2012). Data were collected concurrent with the analysis until no new information were contributed to the existing study, which meant the data were saturated (Gentle et. al., 2015).

1.5.5 Data collection methods

The researcher conducted in-depth interview sessions in person or used video-conferencing facilities, depending on the preference and availability of participants. Sessions were arranged in private spaces where disruptions were minimised by putting an interview sign on the door and ensuring phones were switched off (Patton, 2002). The researcher trained and worked with a bilingual translator (English-Setswana and English-Afrikaans), which allowed participants to converse in their preferred language (Patton, 2002). Interviews were recorded digitally, transcribed and translated into English, where needed.

The in-depth conversational interviews explored the experiences of participants and the meanings they attribute to them; researchers also encouraged participants to talk about matters pertaining to the research question by posing open-ended questions (Chilisa, 2012; Ong & Cheong, 2011). One central open question was used: *“Tell me about your experiences in working with first-year students at the university.”* Furthermore, researchers asked probing questions (Patton, 2002), to gain a better understanding of participants ideas relating to demands and contexts of adversity that first-year students experience when adjusting to university. Probing questions, for example, explored demands and resources in the context of the participant's experiences with first-year students at the specific rural-based site: *“In your opinion, what are some of the challenges or difficulties that students face when transitioning or adjusting to university here?”*; *“What are some of the resources that students have themselves, or have access to, that facilitate their adjustment to this university?”*; and, *“In what ways do you support students’ adjustment to this university?”* The interviewer re-worded, re-ordered, or clarified the questions for more in-depth investigation of topics introduced by the respondents (Ong & Cheong, 2011).

1.5.6 Recording of data

As was explained above, interviews were recorded in two ways, depending on participants' availability and preference: in person or through video-conference. An audio recorder and Adobe Connect facility was used to record the interviews. In addition, through field notes, the researcher could capture as much information as possible (Creswell, 2007). The researcher beforehand informed participants of the use of a voice recorder and obtained their consent (Tracy, 2012). The mentioned field notes focused on the observed participants' body language, reactions and other information that was useful or enhanced understanding of participants' explanations (Creswell, 2007). The interviewer recorded the date and the time the interviews were conducted, and the place where the conversations took place. The data were transcribed verbatim and translated into English from Afrikaans and Setswana where necessary. The transcribed texts were translated by a second listener, to ensure quality and validity (Choi, Kushner, Mill, & Lai, 2012; Suh, Kagan, & Strumpf, 2009).

1.5.7 Data analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research involves preparing the information, creating data segments, coding it, reducing the coded segments into themes and condensing the coded findings to understand the patterns and themes. The latter can be depicted in figures, tables, or assessed in discussions (Creswell, 2007). As was mentioned previously, the present research formed part of a larger project that conducts an interpretive, descriptive analysis to understand the thematic patterns of first-year students' demands and resources when adjusting to the university environment (Thorne, 2016). The analysis occurred in two phases: primary and secondary coding (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2012). For primary coding, researchers had to familiarise them with the data transcripts. Then they sought segments of meaningful quotes, and created open codes, which they attached to the transcribed responses (Saldaña, 2016). Thereafter, the researchers grouped the codes, organised these groups into categories, which they sorted into themes and subthemes (Saldaña, 2016).

The above-mentioned thematic analysis was done inductively, in other words, working from the participants' words within their situation by using open coding and creating codes that are related closely to the data under research (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). The inductive process was refined to create a project codebook to analyse the gathered data from the present study and adding

additional codes to the book (Tracy, 2012). The data analysis was done by two separate researchers and reviewed by the project leader (primary investigator of the larger project). The two researchers conducted independent analyses and met at a later stage to discuss and reach consensus on which codes would be part of the codebook, and which ones would be merged into other pre-existing codes (Tracy, 2012).

The researchers continued with the secondary level coding (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014; Tracy, 2012), grouping codes together on a conceptual level. This meant that they organised code groups into categories by using ATLAS.ti v.8 to explore the relationships of the different codes, supported by evidence (Friese, 2014). Thereafter, they organised these categories into themes and subthemes, based on the gathered data.

This coding process was facilitated by a software programme, namely ATLAS.ti v.8 (Diccobloom & Crabtree, 2006). This is a qualitative data-management programme that helps researchers manage and organise themes and codes (ATLAS.ti, 2014). Using software to support qualitative analysis is also found to be particularly useful in the study fields of social sciences (Hwang, 2008).

1.5.8 Strategies employed to ensure quality data

It is imperative that qualitative studies are credible and trustworthy (Tracy, 2010). The factors identified by Brantlinger et al. (2005) are guidelines used as referrals to ensure quality data. These guidelines also applied to the research approach, as well as methods to collect and analyse the data, which the researcher used in the present research. The factors relevant to this specific study are (Brantlinger et al., 2005):

- *Triangulation*: Search for evidence of convergence of, or consistency among multiple and varied data sources. This implies comparing researchers' observations with contents in the interviews as well as comparing participants' responses.
- *Disconfirming evidence*: After establishing preliminary themes/categories, the researcher sought evidence inconsistent with these themes (outliers), also known as negative or discrepant case analysis.
- *Researcher reflexivity*: The researcher attempts to understand and self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs, values, and biases (i.e. being forthright about position or perspective).

- *External auditors:* Using outsiders (to the research) to ascertain whether and affirm that a researcher's inferences are logical and grounded in findings.
- *Peer debriefing:* Having a colleague or someone familiar with the studied phenomena, review and provide critical feedback on descriptions, analyses, interpretations, or the study's results.
- *Audit trail:* The researchers kept track of the conducted analysis by using ATLAS.ti v.8.
- *Thick, detailed description:* Reporting enough responses (i.e., evidence-based reporting) and field note descriptions to provide evidence for the researcher's interpretations and conclusions.

1.5.9 Reporting

The researcher aimed to report on the present study with integrity by presenting reliable findings. During the reporting, the researcher sought consistency between the data presented and the study findings, including both major and minor themes (Tong, Sainsbury & Craig, 2007). The researcher reported critical findings under each central theme, including sub-themes, by using appropriate verbatim quotes to illustrate those findings (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). This method is often referred to as a realistic view of the participants' experience since the researcher reports the participants' own words, thoughts, and feelings (Michie, Fixsen, Grimshaw, & Eccles, 2009). In this present study, the researcher took care to note bias that may influence her assumptions by being part of a team, using co-data collection, co-analysis as well as working under supervision of a primary investigator (Patton, 2002).

The writer characterised the report through thick descriptions. This entails enough descriptive quotes and field note descriptions to provide evidence for the interpretations and conclusions. Furthermore, the researcher used clear presentation, subheadings, tables, and figures to assist with the analysing of the data (Morrow, 2005).

1.5.10 Ethical considerations

This larger project under which the present study resorts, was reviewed by the Ethics Board Committee of the North-West University and granted ethical clearance (No: NWU-HS-2014-0165). The primary purpose of research ethics is to protect the welfare of participants (Wasserman, 2013). Therefore, the researcher showed moral consideration by respecting the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants (Creswell, 2003). The researcher informed participants beforehand about

the purpose, selection, procedure, and expected duration of the study. To ensure this study's ethical sensitivity, the researcher adopted the prescribed ethical guidelines for healthcare researchers (Health Professions Council of South Africa, 2016):

- Adhere to ethical standards while conducting this research by acting in the best interests of the research participants by placing participants' life, wellbeing, privacy, and dignity before other interests.
- Demonstrate respect for participants by protecting their privacy and showing consideration for their needs.
- Inform participants sufficiently about the nature and effect of the research, enabling them to make informed choices about their participation, which includes the option to withdraw at any stage, without repercussions.
- Protect the confidentiality of research data or other disclosures by participants.
- Safekeep the data of the participants electronically with restricted access and being password protected.

1.6 Chapter division

This mini-dissertation consists of three chapters with the following outline:

- *Chapter 1*: presents the introduction, problem statement and research method.
- *Chapter 2*: entails the research article with its discussion.
- *Chapter 3*: provides the conclusions, limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research and practice.

1.7 Chapter summary

The problem statement and research objectives were explained in this chapter. The data collection and the research method used were explained, followed by an overview of the chapters to follow.

References

- Abdullah, C., Elias, H., Mahyuddin, R., & Uli, J. (2009). The relationship between emotional intelligence and adjustment amongst first-year students in a Malaysian public university. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(9), 95-106.
- Anderson, G. (2002). *Building a people's university in South Africa: Race, compensatory education and the limits of democratic reform*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Astin, A. W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518-529.
- ATLAS.ti. (2014). ATLAS.ti: Product. Retrieved from <http://www.atlasti.com/product.html>
- Babatunde, M. M., & Olanrewaju, M. K. (2014). Class size and school climate as correlates of secondary school students' scholastic achievement in Itesiwaju Local Government area of Oyo State, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Human Social Science: G Linguistics & Education*, 14(3), 14-21.
- Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). (2013). 'The first-year experience of tertiary students'. Retrieved from: www.acer.edu.au/enews/2005/10/the-first-year-experience-of-tertiary-students
- Bakker, A. B. (2011). An evidence-based model of work engagement. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20, 265-269. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0963721411414534>.
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). The job demands-resource model: State of the art. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22(3), 309-328.
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2017). The job demands-resource model: Taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 273-285.
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2018). Multiple levels in job demands-resources theory: Implications for employee wellbeing and performance. In E. Diener, S. Oishi, & L. Tay (Eds.), *Handbook of wellbeing*. Salt Lake City, UT: DEF. doi: nobascholar.com
- Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2008). Positive organisational behaviour: Engaged employees in flourishing organisations. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 29, 147-154.
- Bakker, A. B., Albrecht, S. L., & Leiter, M. P. (2011). Key questions regarding work engagement. *European Journal of Work & Organisational Psychology*, 20(1), 4-28.

- Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Euwema, M. C. (2005). Job resources buffer the impact of job demands on burnout. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 10*, 170-180.
- Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., De Boer, E., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2003). Job demands and job resources as predictors of absence duration and frequency. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 62*, 341-356.
- Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., Hakanen, J. J., & Xanthopoulou, D. (2007). Job resources boost work engagement, particularly when job demands are high. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*(2), 274-284.
- Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., Taris, T. W., Schaufeli, W. B., & Schreurs, P. J. G. (2003). A multigroup analysis of the job demands-resources model in four home care organisations. *International Journal of Stress Management, 10*(1), 16.
- Bakker, A. B., Sanz Vergel, A. I., & Kuntze, J. (2015). Student engagement and performance: A weekly diary study on the role of openness. *Motivation & Emotion, 39*, 49-62. doi: 10.1007/s11031-014-9422-5.
- Baruthram, S. (2018). Attending to the affective: Exploring first-year students' emotional experiences at university. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 32*(2), 27-42.
- Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.20853/32-2-2113>
- Bennett, N., Dunne, E. & Carre, C. (2000). Developing skills in higher education and employment. ESRC Learning Society Programme. Retrieved from <http://www.staff.ncl.ac.uk/f.j.coffield/summaries/bennet.rtf>
- Boehnke, K., Lietz, P., Schreier, M., & Wilhelm, A. (2011). Sampling: The selection of cases for culturally comparative psychological research. In D. Matsumoto & F. J. R. Van de Vijver (Eds.), *Cross-cultural research methods in psychology* (pp.101-129).
- Bot, M., Wilson, D. & Dove, S. (2001). *The education atlas of South Africa 2000*. Pietermaritzburg: Education Foundation.
- Botha, L., Du Plessis, A., & Menkveld, H. (2007). *'n Ontleding van deurvloeikoerse aan die Universiteit van Stellenbosch*. Stellenbosch: Universiteit van Stellenbosch.
- Boughey, C., & McKenna S. (2016). Academic literacy and the decontextualized learner. *Critical Studies in Teaching & Learning, 4*(2), 1-9.

- Bowden, J. L. (2013). What's in a relationship? Affective commitment, bonding and the tertiary first year experience: A student and faculty perspective. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing & Logistics*, 25(3), 428-451. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/APJML-07-2012-0067>
- Brantlinger, E., Jimenez, R., Klingner, J., Pugach, M., & Richardson, V. (2005). Qualitative studies in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 71(2), 195-207. doi:10.1177/001440290507100205
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Breier M. (2007). *Pathways through higher education to the labour market: Factors affecting student retention, graduation, and destination. Case study report: University of the Western Cape*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council.
- Brüssow, S. (2007). *A learning facilitation framework to enhance academic skills development among underprepared learners in South African higher education*. Bloemfontein: University of the Free State.
- Burnard, P., Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). Analysing and presenting qualitative data. *British Dental Journal*, 204(8), 429-432.
- Burns, N., & Grove, S. (1997). *The Practice of Nursing Research: Conduct, critique, and utilisation*. (3rd ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Saunders.
- Chetty, N. (2013). The first-year augmented programme in physics: A trend towards improved student performance. *South African Journal of Science*, 110(1/2), 1-9.
- Chetty, R. (2014). Class dismissed? Youth resistance and the politics of race and class in South African education. *Critical Arts Projects & Unisa Press*, 28(1), 88-102.
doi:10.1080/02560046.2014.883692
- Choi, J., Kushner, K. E., Mill, J., & Lai, D. W. L. (2012). Understanding the language, the culture, and the experience: Translation in cross-cultural research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11(5), 652-665. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691201100508>
- Cilliers, J. R., Mostert, K., & Nel, J. A. (2018). Study demands, study resources and the role of personality characteristics in predicting the engagement of first-year university students. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 32(1), 49-70. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.20853/32-1-1575>

- Cloete, N. (2014). The South African higher education system: Performance and policy. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(8), 1355-1368. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.949533>
- Council on Higher Education. (2010). *Access and throughput in South African higher education: Three case studies. Higher Education Monitor No 9*. Pretoria: Author.
- Council on Higher Education. (2013). *A proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa: The case for a flexible curriculum structure*. Pretoria: Author.
- Crawford, E. R., LePine, J. A., & Rich, B. L. (2010). Linking job demands and resources to employee engagement and burnout: A theoretical extension and meta-analytic test. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95, 834-848.
- Crebert, G., Bates, M., Barry, B., Patrick, C., & Cragolini, V. (2004). Developing generic skills at university, during work placement and in employment: Graduates' perceptions. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 23(2),147-165.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cross, M. (2004). Institutionalising campus diversity in South African higher education: Review of diversity scholarship and diversity education. *Higher Education*, 47(4), 387-410.
- Cross, M., & Carpentier, C. (2009). 'New students' in South African higher education: Institutional culture, student performance and the challenge of democratisation. *Perspectives in Education*, 27(1), 6-18.
- Czerniewicz, L., & Brown, C. (2014). The habitus and technological practices of rural students: A case study. *South African Journal of Education*,34(1), 1-14.
- Danielsen, A. G., Wium, N., Wilhelmsen, B. U., & Wold, B. (2010). Perceived support provided by teachers and classmates and students' self-reported academic initiative. *Journal of School Psychology*, 48(3), 247-267.
- Davies, R. & Elias, P. (2003). Dropping out: A study of early leavers from higher education. (Research Report no.386). Colegate:Norwich.
- Retrieved from http://www.nao.gov.uk/publications/vfmsublist/vfm_edu.htm.

- De Villiers, A. B. (2014). How student counselling can address students' emotional wellness and learning in higher education. *Journal of Counselling and Development in Higher Education Southern Africa*, 2(1), 4-16.
- De Vos, A. S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C. B., & Delpont, C. S. L. (2011). *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human service professions* (4th ed.). Cape Town: Van Schaik.
- Demerouti, E., & Bakker, A. B. (2011). The job demands-resources model: Challenges for future research. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 37(2), 1-9. doi:10.4102/sajip.V37i2.974.
- Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2000). A model of student burnout and life satisfaction amongst nurses. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 32, 454-464.
- Demerouti, E., Nachreiner, F., Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2001). The job demands-resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 56, 499-512.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dicicco-bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). Making sense of qualitative research: The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40, 314-321. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02418.x
- Doucet, S. A., Letourneau, N. L., & Stoppard, J. M. (2010). Contemporary paradigms for research related to women's mental health. *Health Care for Women International*, 31(4), 296-312. doi:10.1080/07399330903518509.
- Fincham, S. M., Roomaney, R., & Kagee, A. (2015). The relationship between worldview, self-efficacy, psychological distress, and a health-promoting lifestyle among a South African undergraduate university sample, *South African Journal of Psychology*, 45(4), 508-520.
- Fraser W., & Killen, R. (2005). The perceptions of students and lecturers of some factors influencing academic performance at two South African universities. *Perspectives in Education*, 23(1), 25-40.
- Friese, S. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis with ATLAS.ti* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Gallagher, M. (2000). The emergence of entrepreneurial public universities in Australia. Paper presented at the IMHE general Conference of the OECD Paris, September. Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Higher Education Division: Occasional Paper Series 00/E. Retrieved from <http://www.detya.gov.au/highered/occpaper/00e/00e.pdf>.

- Gbadamosi, G., & De Jager, J. (2009). 'What you see is what you get': Service quality, students' perceptions and satisfaction and South African Universities. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 23, 877-893.
- Gentles, S. J., Charles, C., Ploeg, J., & McKibbin, K. A. (2015). Sampling in qualitative research: Insights from an overview of the methods literature. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(11), 1772-1789.
- Goodman, S., Jaffer, T., Keresztesi, M., Mamdani, F., Mokgatle, D., Musariri, M., Pires, J., & Schlechter, A. (2011). An investigation of the relationship between students' motivation and academic performance as mediated by effort. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 41 (3), 373-385.
- Gordon, L., & Meyer, J. C. (2002). Career indecision amongst prospective university students. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 32, 41-47.
- Grant, A. M. (2008). Designing jobs to be good: Dimensions and psychological consequences of prosocial job characteristics. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 3, 19-39.
- Hakanen, J. J., Perhoniemi, R., & Toppinen-Tanner, S. (2008). Positive gain spirals at work: From job resources to work engagement, personal initiative, and work-unit innovativeness. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 73, 78-91.
- Hannaway, D. A. M. (2012). The influence of eco-systemic factors on black student teachers' perceptions and experiences of early childhood education (M.Ed. dissertation). Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- Hartrey, L., Denieffeb, S., & Wellsc, J. S. G. (2017). A systematic review of barriers and supports to the participation of students with mental health difficulties in higher education. *Mental Health & Prevention*, 6, 26-40.
- Health Professions Council of South Africa. (2016). Confidentiality: Protecting and providing information. Booklet 5. Pretoria: Author.
- Henning, E. (2004). *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). (2014). *South African higher education in the 20th century*. Cape Town: Author.
- Hobson-Horton, L. D., & Owens, L. (2004). From freshman to graduate: Recruiting and retaining minority students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 3, 86-107.
- Hwang, S. (2008). Using qualitative data analysis software: A review of Atlas ti. *Social Science Computer Review*, 26(4), 519-527. doi:10.1177/0894439307312485.

- Jacklin, A., & Le Riche, P. (2009). Reconceptualising student support: From 'support' to 'supportive'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34, 735-749.
- Jaffer, S., Ng'ambi, D., & Czerniewicz, L. (2007). The role of ICTs in higher education in South Africa: One strategy for addressing teaching and learning challenges. *International Journal of Education & Development Using Information & Communication Technology*, 3(4), 131-142.
- Jansen, J. D., Sehlapelo, H., & Tabane, R. (2007). *I must study double now: How students encounter and negotiate academic lives at the University of Pretoria*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- Kashaa, N. (2012). Teachers in deprived communities: Is it a punishment? Featured article on 14 November. Retrieved from www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Teachers-In-Deprived-Communities-Is-It-A-Punishment?
- Kezar, A., & Eckel, P. (2002). The effect of institutional culture on change strategies in higher education: Universal principles or culturally responsive concepts? *Journal of Higher Education*, 73(4), 435-460.
- Kift, S., & Nelson, K. J. (2005). Beyond curriculum reform: Embedding the transition experience. In Brew, A. And Asmar, C. (Eds.). *Proceedings of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australian Annual Conference*, 28,, 225-235, The university of Sydney, Sydney, Australia.
- Kimani, E., & Mutweleli, S. M. (2012). Transitional challenges facing university first-year students in Kenyan public universities: A case of Kenyatta University. *Interdisciplinary Review of Economics & Management*, 2(1), 41-50.
- Knapp, M. L., & Daly, J. A. (2002). *Handbook of interpersonal communication*. Sage Publications, CA: Sage.
- Knight, P., & Yorke, M. (2003). *Assessment, learning, and employability*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Knis-Matthews, L., Bokara, J., DeMeo, L., Lepore, N., & Mavus, L. (2007). The meaning of higher education for people diagnosed with a mental illness: Four students share their experiences. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 31(2), 107-114.
- Letseka, M., & Maile, S. (2008). *High university drop-out rates: A threat to South Africa's future*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press.
- Lewin, T., & Mawoyo, M. 2014. *Student access and success: Issues and interventions in South African universities*. Cape Town: The South African Institute for Advancement.

- Long, D. (2012). Theories and models of student development. In L. J. Hinchliffe & M. A. Wong (Eds.) *Environments for student growth and development: Librarians and student affairs in collaboration* (pp. 41-55). Chicago, IL: Association of College & Research Libraries.
- Lowe H., & Cook, A. (2003). Mind the gap: Are students prepared for higher education? *Journal of Further & Higher Education*, 27(1), 53-76.
- Martin, J. M. (2010). Stigma and student mental health in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 29(3), 259-274.
- Matoti, S. N. (2010). The unheard voices of educators: Perceptions of educators about the state of education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 24(4), 568-584.
- Matshotyana, N. V., Van Rooyen, R. M., & Du Randt, S. (2015). Experiences of first-year nursing students at a public nursing college in South Africa. *Africa Journal of Nursing & Midwifery*, 17, 105-121.
- Matveev, A. V. (2002). The advantages of employing quantitative and qualitative methods in intercultural research: Practical implications from the study of the perceptions of intercultural communication competence by American and Russian managers. *Theory of Communication & Applied Communication*, 1, 59-67.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. London: Sage.
- McInnis, C. (2001). Researching the first-year experience: Where to from here? *Higher Education Research & Development*, 20(2), 105-113.
- McInnis, C., James, R., & Hartley, R. (2000). *Trends in the first-year experience in Australian universities*. Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Retrieved from http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/eippubs/eip00_6/execsum.html
- McMillan, J. W., & Barrie, R. B. (2012). Recruiting and retaining rural students: Evidence from a faculty of dentistry in South Africa. *Rural & Remote Health*, 12, 1855. Retrieved from: <http://www.rrh.org.au>
- Megivern, D., Pellerito, S., & Mowbray, C. (2003). Barriers to higher education for individuals with psychiatric disabilities. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 26(3), 217-231.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative case study research: A guide to design and implementation* pp.39-54. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Michie, S., Fixsen, D., Grimshaw, J. M., & Eccles, M. P. (2009). Specifying and reporting complex behaviour change interventions: The need for a scientific method. *Implementation Science*, 4(40), 1-6.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mokgele K. R. F., & Rothmann, S. (2014). A structural model of student wellbeing. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 44(4), 514-527.
- Moodley, P. (2015). Student overload at university: Large class teaching challenges. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 29(3), 150-167.
- Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counselling psychology. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 52(2), 250-260.
- Msila, V. (2010). Rural school principals' quest for effectiveness: Lessons from the field. *Journal of Education*, 48, 170-185.
- Naidoo, V. (2015). A comparative study between staff and student perceptions on service quality. *Journal of Contemporary Management*, 12, 40-60.
- National Planning Commission (NPC), (2011). *Diagnostic overview*. Pretoria: The Presidency, Republic of South Africa: Author
- Nelson, K. J., Duncan, M. E., & Clarke, J. A. (2009). Student success: The identification and support of first-year university students at risk of attrition. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, 6(1), 1-15.
- Nelson, K. J., Kift, S. M., & Clarke, J. A. (2012). A transition pedagogy for student engagement and first-year learning, success and retention. In I. Solomonides, A. Reid, & P. Petocz (Eds.), *Engaging with learning in higher education* (pp. 117-144). Oxfordshire: Libri Publishers.
- Ngwenya, T. (2010). Correlating first-year law students' profile with the language demands of their content subjects. *Per Linguam*, 26(1), 74-98.
- Nkambule, T., Balfour, R. J., Pillay, G., & Moletsane, R. (2001). Rurality and rural education: Discourses underpinning rurality and rural education research in South African postgraduate education research 1999-2004. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 25(2), 341-357.
- Noble, K., Flynn, N. T., Lee, J. D., & Hilton, D. (2007). Predicting successful college experiences: Evidence from a first-year retention program. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 9, 39-60. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.2190/6841-42JX-X170-8177>.

- Ntshoe, I., & De Villiers, P. (2008). Steering the South African higher education sector towards transformation. *Perspectives in Education*, 26(4), 17-27.
- Ong, B., & Cheong, K. C. (2011). Sources of stress among college students: The case of a credit transfer program. *College Student Journal*, 43(4), 1-6.
- Opoku-Asare, N. A. A., & Siaw, A. O. (2015). Rural-urban disparity in students' academic performance in visual arts education: Evidence from over six senior high schools in Kumasi, Ghana. *SAGE Open*, 5(4), 1-14. doi: 10.1177/2158244015612523.
- Pascarella, E. T. (1985). College environmental influences on learning and cognitive development: A critical review and synthesis. *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, 1(1), 1-61.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pekrun, R., & Linnenbrink-Garcia, L. (2012). Academic emotions and student engagement. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.). *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 515-539). Doi:10.1007/978-1-4614-2018-7.
- Pillay, A. L., & Ngcobo, H. S. B. (2010). Sources of stress and support among rural-based first-year university students: An exploratory study. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 40(3), 234-240.
- Pillay, A. L., & Thwala, J. D. (2012). Are rural students from previously disadvantaged communities prepared for Psychology studies at university? *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 22(3), 419-424.
- Possa, G. (2006). Europe's universities response to Europe's challenges. *Higher Education in Europe*, 31(4), 355-357.
- Ray, A. (2012). *The methodology of sampling and purposive sampling*. GRIN Verlag Munchen, Germany.
- Reason, R. D., Terenzini, P. T., & Domingo, R. J. (2005). First things first: Developing academic competence in the first year of college. *Research in Higher Education*, 47(2), 149-175.
- Reeve, K. L., Shumaker, C. J., Yearwood, E. L., Crowell, N. A., & Riley, J. B. (2013). Perceived stress and social support in undergraduate nursing students' educational experiences. *Nurse Education Today*, 33, 419-424.
- Retief, E., & Thata, B. M. (2008). *The link between an academic library and student retention: A case study*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.

- Rickinson, B., & Rutherford, D. (1996). Systematic monitoring of the adjustment to university of undergraduates: A strategy for reducing withdrawal rates. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 24*(2), 213-225.
- Roman, N. V., Titus, S., & Dison, A. (2016). Relationship between student preparedness, learning experiences, and agency: Perspectives from a South African university. *African Journal of Health Professions Education, 8*(1), 30-32.
- Rucci, A. J. (2008). I-O psychology's 'core purpose': Where science and practice meet. *The Industrial-organisational Psychologist, 46*(1), 17-34.
- Sader, S. B., & Gabela, N. P. (2017). Spatialities of widening participation: Narratives of first-year students receiving financial aid. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 31*(1)227-242.
- Salanova, M., Schaufeli, W., Martinez, I., & Bresó, E. (2010). How obstacles and facilitators predict academic performance: The mediating role of study student burnout and student engagement. *Anxiety, Stress & Coping: An International Journal, 23*, 53-70.
- Saldana, J. (2016). *Ethnotheatre: Research from page to stage (qualitative inquiry and social justice)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Samuel, M. O., & Chipunza, C. (2009). Employee retention and turnover: Using motivational variables as a panacea. *African Journal of Business Management, 3*(8), 410-415. Retrieved from <http://www.academicjournals.org/AJBM> doi:10.5897/AJBM.125
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Taris, T. W. (2014). A critical review of the job demands-resources model: Implications for improving work and health. In G. Bauer and O. Hammig (Eds.), *Bridging occupational, organizational and public health*. Amsterdam: Springer, in press.
- Schaufeli, W. B., Martinez, M., Pinto, A. M., Salanova, M., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). Burnout and engagement in university students. *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology, 33*(5), 464-481.
- Schindler, V. P., & Kientz, M. (2013). Supports and barriers to higher education and employment for individuals diagnosed with mental illness. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 39*, 29-41.
- Shrivastava, M., & Shrivastava, S. (2014). Political economy of higher education: Comparing South Africa to trends in the world. *Higher Education, 67*, 809-822.
- Sibanyoni, N., & Pillay, R. (2014). 'Like playing with fire under a hut' – you will get burnt if you do not adjust: Reflections of social work students on adjusting to university life. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning, 2*(1), 96-119.

- Sleezer, C. M., Gularte, M. A., Waldner, L., & Cook, J. (2004). Business and higher education partner to develop a high-skilled workforce: A case study. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 17(2), 65-82.
- Sommer, M., & Dumont, K. (2011). Psychosocial factors predicting adjustment and academic performance of students at a previously disadvantaged university. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 41, 389-395.
- Stein, P., & Newfield, D. (2006). Multilateralism and multimodality in English education in Africa. *English Studies in Africa*, 49(1), 1-22.
- Steyn, M. G., Harris, T., & Hartell, G. C. (2014). Institutional factors that affect black South African students' perceptions of Early Childhood Teacher Education. *South African Journal of Education*, 34(3), 1-7.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. London: Routledge.
- Strydom, J. F., Basson, N., & Mentz, M. (2012). *Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning: Using student engagement data to establish a culture of evidence*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- Strydom, J. F., Kuh, G., & Mentz, M. (2010). Enhancing success in South Africa's higher education: Measuring student engagement. *Acta Academica*, 42(1), 259-278.
- Suh, E. E., Kagan, S., & Strumpf, N. (2009). Cultural competence in qualitative interview methods with Asian immigrants. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 20(2), 194-201. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043659608330059>
- Thorne, S. (2000). Data analysis in qualitative research. *Evidence-based Nursing*, 3(3), 68-70. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1136/ebn.3.3.68>
- Thorne, S. (2016). *Interpretive description*. London: Routledge. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315426259>
- Thorne, S., Kirkham, S. R., & MacDonald-Emes, J. (1997). Interpretive description: A noncategorical qualitative alternative for developing nursing knowledge. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 20(2), 169-177. Retrieved from [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1098-240X\(199704\)20:2<169:AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-I](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1098-240X(199704)20:2<169:AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-I)
- Tinto, V. (1987). Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition. *Liberal Education*, 65, 4.

- Tinto, V. (1993). Building community. *Liberal Education*, 79(4), 16-21.
- Tong A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): A 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Healthcare*, 19(6), 349-357.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851.
- Tracy, S. J. (2012). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. [eBook], Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. Retrieved from <http://www.wiley.com/go/tracy>
- Tsai, C. C. (2008). The preferences toward constructivist Internet-based learning environments among university students in Taiwan. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 24(1), 16-31. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2006.12.002
- Van den Berg, G. (2012). Students’ perceptions of the role of lecturers in online discussions. *Progressio*, 34, 71-85.
- Van der Berg, S. (2008). How effective are poor schools? Poverty and educational outcomes in South Africa. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 34, 145-154.
- Van Heerden-Pieterse, E. (2015). *Life skills: My journey, my destiny*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Van Schalkwyk, S. (2002). Dealing with the dilemma facing higher education in South Africa against the backdrop of economic globalisation: A Technikon perspective. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 16(1), 183-187.
- Van Wyk, B. (2008). Learning and an African life world in (higher) education. *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 7(2), 171-180.
- Viljoen, C., & Deacon, E. (2013). Factors influencing first-year students’ intention to stay on at an educational institution. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 27(1), 239-262.
- Wasserman, D. R. (2013). Ethical issues and guidelines for conducting data analysis in psychological research. *Ethics & Behavior*, 23(1), 3-15.
- Wilson-Strydom, M. (2011). University access for social justice: A capabilities perspective. *South African Journal of Education*, 31, 407-418.
- Wintre, M. G., & Yaffe, M. (2000). First-year students’ adjustment to university life as a function of relationships with parents. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 15(1), 9-37. doi: 10.1177/0743558400151002.

- Woosley, S. A., & Miller, A. L. (2009). Integration and institutional commitment as predictors of college student transition: Are third week indicators significant? *College Student Journal*, 43, 4.
- Woosley, S. A., & Shepler, D. K. (2011). Understanding the early integration experiences of first-generation college students. *College Student Journal*, 45, 4.
- Xanthopoulou, D., Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2009). Reciprocal relationships between job resources, personal resources, and work engagement. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 74, 235-244. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.11.003>
- Yorke, M., & Thomas, L. (2003). Improving the retention of students from lower socio-economic groups. *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management*, 25(1), 63-74.
- Young, J. (2005). On insiders (emic) and outsiders (etic): Views of self, and othering. *Systemic Practice & Action Research*, 18(2), 151-162. doi:10.1007/s11213-005-4155-8
- Zembylas, M. (2012). Reinstating or disrupting the dichotomy of reason/emotion in higher education? A historicized approach. Keynote to the Higher Education Close-up Six Conference, Rhodes University, July 2012.
- Zewotir, T., & North, D. (2015). Analysis of attrition and retention rates using the generalized linear model. *South African Statistics Journal*, 49, 259-271.
- Zhang, Y., & Wildemuth, B. (2009). Qualitative analysis of content. Applications of Social research methods to questions in information and library science. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited. Retrieved from http://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~yanz/Content_analysis.pdf
- Ziguras, C., & Law, S. (2006). Recruiting international students as skilled migrants: The global 'skills race' as viewed from Australia and Malaysia. *Globalisation, Societies & Education*, 4(1), 59-76.
- Zulu, C. (2011). Empowering first year (post-matric) students in basic research skills: A strategy for education for social justice. *South African Journal of Education*, 31, 447-457.

CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring first-year students' experiences of the demands and resources at a rural-based university delivery site

Orientation: The demands and resources that first-year students experience at a rural-based university delivery site should be explored from the perspective of the support structures, thereby contributing to existing research in this field.

Research purpose: Explore first-year students' experiences of the demands and resources at a rural-based university delivery site, as viewed from the perspective of the support structures.

The motivation for the study: The research focused on a rural-based university delivery site to address the challenges disadvantaged communities face which impede progress for first-year students in their transition from high school to university.

Research design, approach and method: The study followed a qualitative design. Based on epistemological and ontological assumptions, the researcher investigated the meanings that student support structures assign to the demands and challenges that first-year students experience. Thereby these structures construct their understanding of these students' basic needs, which can be addressed by assessing the relevant resources at the university concerned. The research setting was a rural university campus in South Africa. The participants ($N = 16$) comprised psychological services, first-year lecturers, the Student Representative Council, peer mentors, the university's Finance Department and hostel parents.

Main findings: The findings from the collected data indicated five distinctive themes of the demands and resources that first-year students experience, as viewed from the perspective of the support structures at such a rural university site. These included the complex lives of first-year students; the nature of the academic environment; the economic experiences of studying; accommodation and facilities; and transition to university life (adjustments and expectations). From each category key subthemes emerged, which supported the main theme.

Practical/managerial implications: The perspective of the student support structures about their experiences of first-year students' demands and resources could contribute to the effective implementation of improving resources to support first-year students based on the major themes that emerged from this study.

Contribution/value-add: The present study contributes to the body of knowledge in this field by a sound theoretical framework. This information can be used to analyse the demands and resources experienced by first-year university students in a typical rural university site, as perceived by the student support structures.

Keywords: First-year students, higher education institutions, rural universities, study demands, study resources, students support structures

Introduction

University life can be demanding and arduous for first-year students, especially those from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). Momanyi, Ogoma, and Misigo (2010) emphasise the importance of research to identify factors that contribute to students' wellbeing and success in their first year at university. This is done by assessing the relations between different psychological, physical, and academic variables. Studies on previously disadvantaged first-year students concur that these students are at a higher risk of abandoning their studies as compared to their counterparts (Ishitani, 2003; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Students entering university coming from rural areas find it difficult adapting to the university environment. This is due to a deficient foundation and exceedingly less than optimal school education they received in rural areas (Cross & Carpentier, 2009).

First-year students in general must deal with new interpersonal, financial, and other issues. In addition, they must handle emotional issues which, if underestimated, may prevent them from coping psychologically and eventually cause them to drop out of university (Boughey & McKenna, 2016; Zembylas, 2012). Students tend to feel detached and hopeless (Reeve, Shumaker, Yearwood, Crowell, & Riley, 2013) when they have insufficient resources to function in an unfamiliar environment characterised by high study demands (Salanova, Schaufeli, Martinez, & Bresó, 2010). In South Africa particularly, the challenges that rural first-year students face include factors such as socio-economic status and poverty, language barriers, and institutionally inferior education (De Villiers, 2014; Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014).

Entering the second decade of the twenty-first century, management of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) needs to make dramatic changes in its policies and practices to improve student retention (CHE, 2010; Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014; Strydom, Kuh & Mentz, 2010). The relevant role-players must stay committed to handle demands confronting first-year students, while at the same time providing resources and help these students find solutions and the ability to cope on their own (Carter, 2006). Speckman and Mandew (2014) raise the issue of material support to, and access into universities by students from rural, poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. These scholars further query whether there are intervention strategies that are imperative and functional for these students (Speckman and Mandew 2014). Certain HEIs have implemented policies and programmes to help students deal with the transition. This is done by offering bridging courses, mentoring programmes, individual orientation sessions and tutorial classes (Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas & Thomson, 2004).

South African political history has contributed to the inferior schooling opportunities and the lower quality education students in rural communities experience (Pillay & Thwala, 2012). Structures and communities within universities have the responsibility to ensure rural students receive the support and assistance helping them acquire the necessary skills that will contribute to their success at university (Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014). It is also important to investigate whether the universities have the capacity and resources to support students who experience challenges during their first-year entrance to university (Nkambule et al., 2001).

Previous studies on the mentioned topic provide a comprehensive overview of the factors influencing rural students' transition to university. However, these studies do not necessarily address how students experience, perceive, and subsequently manage those different influences (Clark, 2005). There has been growing interest in the concepts of student demands and resources, which lead to improved studies. The latter based their hypotheses on organisational studies and theoretical frameworks, including the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, 2018). The JD-R theory is an investigative rather than a specific theory that concerns well-defined sets of demands, resources, mental states and outcomes (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). However, to inform the JD-R theory more comprehensively, requires an in-depth exploration of the specific demands and resources that students experience during their first year.

Various studies focused on students' perspectives of their first-year experience (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). It may be valuable and important to focus on the students' own perceptions, but limitations of such an approach are that students are not the only stakeholders within university communities. Especially first-year students often lack the experience to perceive their demands and resources in context and are often unaware of their own deficiencies (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2014) views academic, non-academic and support staff as the primary point of contact and sources of support for first-year students. It is therefore necessary to include views and perceptions of these groups, based on their experience of working with first-year students. This would help researchers focus on the different demands that first-year students encounter and the resources they require to deal with these demands (Naidoo, 2015).

In addition, there is a clear need for intensified efforts from student support structures to assist first-year students and contribute positively towards their challenges in this context (Naidoo, 2015). The aim is to elevate these students to the planned level of equity and excellence. This could be done by developing and utilising programmes to help these students adapt and make informed decisions

about their social, academic, and career advancement (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010). It is therefore important to understand how rural first-year students deal with their demands and resources (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

Considering the information above, the present study aimed to provide insight into first-year students' adjustment to university from the perspective of the mentioned support structure. Due to the widening gap between students' expectations and the actual experiences when they arrive at university, the goal is to understand first-year students' experiences in this regard, especially the demands they have, and resources required to deal with these demands.

Literature review

The review of the literature for the present study focused on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory as a theoretical framework, its application in the student context and the demands and resources of rural students.

Theoretical Framework: The Job Demands-Resources Theory

The JD-R theory is a well-known and validated theoretical framework used in organisational psychology to study wellbeing within the work environment. One of the primary assumptions of the JD-R theory is that, whereas every occupation may have its specific risk factors associated with job stress, these factors can be classified into two general categories (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 274):

- *Job demands*: “those physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and is associated with certain physiological costs.”
- *Job resources*: “those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development.”

Job demands are facets of work that deplete energy, for example, workload, complex tasks, or conflicts (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Certain researchers argue that job demands can be classified as either challenging or hindering, depending on the circumstances (LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005). These demands can be described as follows:

- *Challenging demands*: “demands that cost effort but that potentially promote personal growth and achievement of the employee” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 278). Examples of challenging job demands are high levels of workload, time pressure, and responsibility (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).
- *Hindrance demands*: “job demands or work circumstances that involve excessive or undesirable constraints that interfere with or inhibit an individual’s ability to achieve valued goals” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 277). Examples of hindrance job demands are role conflict, role overload, or role ambiguity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

According to LePine et al. (2005), challenging job demands contribute positively to performance, while hindrance demands tend to impede performance.

Job resources, on the other hand, are the characteristics of work that help employees deal with job demands to attain their objectives. These resources are aspects such as performance feedback, social support and skill variety, which provide meaning to employees in their work environment and satisfy their basic psychological needs (for competence, relatedness, and autonomy) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Several studies indicate that job resources can buffer the impact of various job demands on negative strain. The resources mentioned in this regard are: autonomy, skill variety, performance feedback, and task identity (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; Bakker, Van Veldhoven, & Xanthopoulou, 2010; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007).

An initial proposition of the JD-R theory is that job demands, and resources have distinct and unconventional effects on employees’ wellbeing (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands may initiate a process of health impairment if employees are exposed to repeated or daily demands, which may degenerate into chronic overload if the situation continues over an extended period (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018, p. 2). This means that job demands may bring about chronic exhaustion or job strain, which may eventually cause physical health problems such as cardiovascular diseases or impede job performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Negative job strain leads to self-undermining behaviours such as poor communication, regular mistakes, and continual conflict, which again lead to higher levels of job demands, and even higher levels of job strain – the continuation referred to as a “downward spiral” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Bakker and Wang (2016) found that self-undermining behaviour was related positively to work pressure, emotional demands and exhaustion, and negatively predicted supervisor-ratings of job performance.

In comparison, job resources initiate a motivational process with a positive impact on job performance by providing meaning, satisfying people's basic needs, and contributing positively to work engagement. This may result in a fulfilling state of vigour, dedication and absorption (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, 2018; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This process leads to so-called "gain spirals", where motivated employees rather tend to show job-crafting behaviours (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2012, p. 174). In turn, crafting behaviour leads to higher levels of job and personal resources and even increased motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Vogt, Hakanen, Brauchli, Jenny, and Bauer (2016) found that proactive employees who build a resourceful and challenging work environment for themselves, also increase their own psychological capital such as hope, resilience, self-efficacy and optimism.

The JD-R Theory in the Student Context

Due to the solid foundation, well-researched and substantiated assumptions, and flexibility of the JD-R theory, several researchers began using this model as a framework to study student wellbeing. Salmela-Aro and Updyaya (2014) used the JD-R theory to test the impact of study demands and resources within the school environment. According to these scholars, demands present a challenge to study-related goals, while resources are functional in achieving such goals. The results showed that over-loaded study demands exhaust learners' energy and lead first to burnout and then to diminished mental health, whereas the availability of resources leads to engagement and builds life satisfaction. In Salmela-Aro and Updyaya (2014)'s study, no specific demands and resources were measured, but participants were asked to evaluate the extent they have progressed towards achieving a goal and how challenging this goal was.

Robbins, Roberts and Sarris (2015) used the JD-R theory to test the impact of demands and resources among students in nursing, occupational therapy, social work, and psychology. Their study aimed to validate the JD-R theory for the student population, thereby contributing to the theoretical understanding of burnout and engagement in students as similar or different to those in workers. The study demands that these researchers explored were subjective workload and the pressure to perform as a competent professional, while the study resources included social support and supervisor support. Workload was found to be related positively to exhaustion, while supervisor support was found to be important in preventing burnout.

Two South African studies could be found that used the JD-R theory as theoretical framework to study student wellbeing. Mokgele and Rothman (2014) test a structural model of study demands,

study resources, student burnout, student engagement, health, and satisfaction with life. Study demands measured in their study entail the workload students must face and the time pressure necessary to meet their deadlines successfully and reach their study goals. Study resources they highlighted were: the nature of the task, lecturer relations, and social support of peers. Their research focused firstly on study demands, defined as study conditions that evoke stress reactions when they overwhelm students' personal limits. The results showed that these demands were associated positively with burnout and ill-health. Thereafter, study resources with the strongest effect on the energy and motivation of students were found to be: supportive relationships with lecturers, the nature of study tasks, and social support of peers.

Cilliers, Mostert and Nel (2017) investigated how study demands and resources, together with personality characteristics, influence the engagement levels of first-year South African university students. The measured demands were found to be the pace and amount of work and cognitive demands, while study resources entailed family support, lecturer support, friend support and opportunities for growth and development. The results showed that study demands (pace and amount of work and cognitive demands) had a statistically significant (negative) relationship with student engagement. Students typically must remember several facts simultaneously, concentrate for extended periods at a time, and experience their academic training as are taxing. When such students are unable to handle these demands, they will most probably also experience lower energy levels and decreased dedication to their studies. Furthermore, results showed that study resources are related significantly and positively to student engagement, specifically opportunities for growth and development.

Demands and Resources of Rural Students

Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) (200, p. 195) defines rural areas as 'those outside metropolitan areas, and which are categorised as farming, tribal, or traditional areas where communities are predominantly poor' (Pillay & Thwala, 2012). Universities that draw most of its student population from these communities, face challenges of families that present high levels of unemployment and illiteracy, which contributes to extreme poverty (Themane & Taole, 2013). According to research by Zulu (2005; 2007; 2008), most of the schools from which first-year students, come do not always use teaching methods to help them advance in life. Furthermore, these institutions lack resources to provide the educational foundation that would equip these learners with skills and competencies that a first-year university student would require (Zulu, 2011).

Mzokwana (2008) highlights the circumstances that impede rural students' learning and hamper their performance. These factors are cultural background, psychological problems, curriculum challenges, over against the teaching methods applied by lecturers. As a result, the number of "overwhelmed" first-year students have grown considerably. In this regard, universities report that the use of counselling and psychological services has increased (Bojuwoye, 2002). Sources of stress for first-year students were found to be: unrealistic expectations, difficulty to meet these expectations coupled with academic uncertainty as well as failure and early departure from university (Bangeni & Kapp, 2000). On the flipside of the coin, there is a distinct lack of university support that systematically monitors first-year students and intervenes to assist those identified as "at risk of attrition". This contributes to the demands that these students experience (Nel, Troskie-de Bruin & Bitzer, 2009).

Maxwell and Mudhovozi (2014) point out that in South Africa, first-year students from rural communities find it difficult to access university. This is due to factors such as poverty, particularly a lack of financial resources; deficient elementary and intermediate education; historical background and lack of information. Government funding, which is the largest source of financial assistance to universities, have decreased considerably, making students and/or their parents liable for sharing the cost of higher education (Sader & Gabela, 2017). English, as a second or third language, was found to be a barrier to students participating in class. The reason is that rural students conceptualise in their mother tongue and find it hard to translate their thoughts into English (Sader & Gabela, 2017). The result is a lack of participation, which leaves first-year students feeling despondent since they are not proficient in the prevailing academic language (Mouton, Louw & Strydom 2013). Another challenge that first-year rural students face is insufficient technological skills, which can be due to the lack of computers in their schools (Jansen, Tabane & Sehlapelo 2010). Due to technological illiteracy, rural students are unable to access important information on lectures, bursaries, and upcoming campus events (Sader & Gabela, 2017).

The high numbers of first-year students who access HEIs and require accommodation on campus can be challenging for students and university management alike, mostly due to limited available space (Monako, 2009). According to Rensburg (2011), the high levels of poverty in rural communities and the unsuitability of the home environment makes it difficult for first-year students to pursue their studies. This fact raises concerns about these students' commitment to their academic programmes. Thus, there is a dire need to provide suitable accommodation (Mudau, 2017). Living off-campus for first-year rural students implies limited opportunities for social

contact with fellow students; such interaction is important for students' learning and development (Mudau, 2017).

Furthermore, students spend excessive time commuting between home and university. They also face difficulties when expected to attend academic programmes that take place early in the morning, evenings, and on weekends (Rensburg, 2011). Students living off-campus are sometimes exploited by landlords who charge high rent, which may necessitate sharing rooms. Such forced arrangements may compromise their privacy and interrupt their focus on their studies (Mudau, 2017). Conversely, Nel, Troskie-de Bruin and Britzer (2009) indicate that the advantage of staying in a university hostel is that friendships are formed to provide a support network, an essential resource for first-year students. Bojuwoye (2002) acknowledges that such experiences determine how these students will cope academically and respond to social integration. On the other hand, Modipane (2011) points out that students also face taxing challenges in the residences. These entail hygiene concerns from sharing bathroom facilities and littering; and security concerns due to insufficient control of entry into the hostels. Further challenges are loud music, and social get-togethers (e.g. "parties") that are not controlled by management.

Conversely there are evident positive resources that can help rural first-year students' develop and prosper at university. These resources are: sound career choices, competent academic staff, enough support, and a comprehensive retention strategy at institutional or faculty level (Retief & Thata 2008); also, academic preparedness, motivation and student engagement (Pascarella & Terenzini 2005). Empowering rural post-matric students in their first year may help them develop critical academic skills necessary to participate successfully in the university's educational experience (Steyn, Harris & Hartell, 2011).

Based on the explication above, the onus lies with university management to identify different strategies and methods that could address these study demands and thus contribute to academic success. Due to the various demands, a single strategy or teaching method will not meet all students' needs (Fraser & Killen, 2005). Furthermore, a study resource is computer literacy courses for first-year students. This would empower them with the necessary computer skills, thereby providing a platform for sound communication and interaction between students and lecturers within the learning environment (Mouton, Louw & Strydom 2013).

Research on students' adjustment indicates that perceived social support is deemed extremely important and helps these individuals acclimatise to student life (Retief & Thata, 2008). Social

support entails information from others that help individuals believe they are cared for, loved and esteemed; it enhances the quality of life and provides a buffer against adversity (Alarcon, Edwards & Menke, 2011). This mentioned support can increase the available resources and replace lacking or lost ones. In this regard, Jacobs and Dodd (2003) associate social support with lower incidences of attrition among first-year students. In addition, findings show that certain students perceive their parents as supportive, whereas others find parental support lacking (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010). Students carrying the perception of being unsupported are affected negatively in their academic programme. Such a situation causes severe stress that could cause them to drop out of HEIs altogether (Traag & Van der Velden, 2006).

Coles and Coleman (2010) emphasise that universities in the rural communities should take the first step in ensuring psychological services are accessible to students to reduce mental health challenges. Despite the sporadically available health services on campus, these mentioned services are under-utilised because of the “perceived stigma” and lack of privacy (Hussain et al., 2013). In addition, Yorgason, Lonville and Zitzman (2008) found that several students were unaware of their campus mental health services.

Research shows that schooling opportunities and the quality of education accessed by rural students are inferior due to the South African political history (Pillay & Thwala, 2012). Thus, it is vital that structures and communities within universities help rural students build essential skills necessary to succeed in higher education (Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014). Furthermore, it is crucial to gain an in-depth understanding of demands and resources that first-year students experience. Finally, there is a need to investigate whether universities and their support structures in rural areas indeed have the resources to support students (Nkambule et al., 2001).

Research Design

The aim of a research design is to bridge the gap between the research questions and the implementation of the research, where the consistency between the questions and design will generate useful data (Maxwell, 2012). In this section, the focus was on the most appropriate approach, strategy, and methodology for the present study.

This study formed part of a larger project on student demands, resources and wellbeing. The present study investigated the qualitative explanations of first-years’ experiences in their adjustment to university as viewed by student support structures. The latter entail: psychological services, first-

year lecturers, the Student Representative Council, peer mentors, the university's Finance Department and hostel parents, at the tertiary institution.

Research Approach

It was found that qualitative research was well suited for the present study to produce detailed evidence-based research on the investigation of a *specific context* (i.e. first-years' adjustment experiences to university life) and *specific people* (i.e. student support structures), thus not aiming for the end goal of generalisation (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 3) define qualitative research as: 'A situated activity that locates the observer in the world; it consists of a set on interpretive, material practices that make the world visible.' While qualitative research provides contextual understandings of phenomena, universal understandings of the study phenomena may be possible. The reason is that the researcher interacted with the participants in ways which explored their understandings and views of their reality in its most vivid form (Matveev, 2002). A qualitative approach thus includes information about the "human" side of a problem – that is, the different behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships between individuals (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delpont, 2011).

Accordingly, the researcher followed an interpretive, descriptive approach (Thorne, 2000, 2016; Thorne, Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997) to understand diverse people's subjective experiences of a specific phenomenon. Creswell (2013) explains that interpretive description seeks to understand the real-life world of participants, where they develop subjective meanings of their experiences. They are many and different experiences that cause the researcher to look for complex rather than limited meanings. The researcher's sole aim is to focus on the participants' views (Creswell, 2013).

Research Strategy

The interpretive description approach fits into the social research paradigm of constructivism (Creswell, 2013), which relates to beliefs about reality or ontology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This means that the researcher seeks participants' own explanations and understandings of their world. Such explanations are diverse and ensure the researcher focuses on the complexity of the different experiences rather than searching for underlying meanings behind it (Creswell, 2009). Social constructivism accepts there is no presence of an objective reality alone; instead, facts are developed individually, through social construction, with each person creating his/her meaning and

truth (Doucet, Letourneau, & Stoppard, 2010; Tsai, 2008). Consequently, constructivist researchers' paradigm depicts the processes of interaction and the contexts in which the participants exist, thus shedding light on their historical and cultural setting (Creswell, 2009, Creswell, 2013).

The researcher worked from epistemological (understanding) and ontological (real-life) assumptions. Based on these assumptions, the aim was to grasp the various meanings which student support structures attribute to construct their understandings of study demands and resources for first-year students' who seek academic success at a rural university (Creswell, 2009). The researcher built her perception of participants' reality on that of the student support structures. The reason is that these structures provide a different perspective on working with first-year students that could guide the investigation of the research problem (Creswell, 2009). These structures could also provide insight into ways students react towards their problems and help point out personal and university resources available to resolve these challenges (Creswell, 2009).

The researcher understood her role in the research process as that of an outsider (*etic*) looking into the insider (*emic*) experiences. In this sense, *emic* implies having an insider's view or personal experience of a specific culture or society, whereas *etic* points to the outsiders' perspective, thus someone who does not have a personal link or has not experienced a certain culture or society (Patton, 2002; Young, 2005).

Research Method

This study was informed by a thorough literature review as well as an empirical investigation detailed below.

Literature Review

The researcher conducted a thorough review to search systematically for information on first-year students' adjustment to university within the context of a rural university campus or site. The literature was used to extract relevant themes for the topic under investigation. The researcher examined related keywords, which included but were not limited to: first-year students (student); support structures (personnel, staff, the student representative council); universities (higher education institutions [HEIs], college, tertiary education); rural (isolated, geographic location); demands and resources (student demands and resources, student wellbeing, challenges, difficulties, support); and other relevant search terms.

Research Setting

The research was undertaken at a rural university delivery site (campus) in South Africa. To date, there were studies on first-year students' transition to university; however, few researchers have focused on the context of rural universities (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014). These universities may be geographically isolated from resources with fewer structural resources in the communities surrounding such institutions (Msila, 2010). People residing in the communities around the university thus have insufficient resources and suffer further structural deficiencies (Bot, Wilson & Dove, 2001; Msila, 2010).

Entrée and Establishing Researcher Roles

The researcher negotiated access to a site at a rural university campus. Permission to conduct the study was obtained beforehand by identifying gatekeepers who also participated in the study (De Vos et al., 2011). The gatekeepers provided names and contact information of possible participants. The researcher sent email forms to selected candidates containing ethics information, recruitment invitations and referral requests. Following the invitations, the researcher obtained informed consent from the participants, and planned for the data collection, which is discussed in the following sections.

Sampling

The researcher relied on purposive, voluntary sampling (Patton, 2002). The inclusion criteria required participants from support structures to work with, support and/or provide services that relate to first-year students at university in various capacities, and to be in regular contact with these students (Patton, 2002). The researcher ensured the sample represented various departments, structures, and faculties from the institutions (Boehnke, Lietz, Schreier, & Wilhelm, 2011). Invitations were followed up with potential participants to confirm availability as well as answer possible questions on the nature of the project, the duration of the interviews, and the mode of interviewing.

During the interviews, snowball sampling was used to gain access to additional participants (Merriam, 2009). The sample size depended on the participants' willingness and accessibility. Nevertheless, the researcher took measures to assure optimum variability of the sample by

recruiting key informants from a broad range of structural support staff (Tracy, 2012). Data were collected concurrent with the analysis until the collection of new data did not contribute any new information to the existing study and thus became saturated (Gentle et. Al., 2015).

Data Collection Methods

The researcher conducted in-depth interview sessions in person or used video-conferencing facilities, depending on the preference and availability of participants. Sessions were arranged in private spaces where disruptions were minimised by putting an interview sign on the door and ensuring phones were switched off (Patton, 2002). The researcher trained and worked with a bilingual translator (English-Setswana and English-Afrikaans), which allowed participants to converse in their preferred language (Patton, 2002). Interviews were recorded digitally, transcribed and translated into English, where needed.

The in-depth conversational interviews explored the experiences of participants and the meanings they attribute to them; researchers also encouraged participants to talk about matters pertaining to the research question by posing open-ended questions (Chilisa, 2012; Ong & Cheong, 2011). One central open question was used: *“Tell me about your experiences in working with first-year students at the university.”* Furthermore, researchers asked probing questions (Patton, 2002), to gain a better understanding of participants ideas relating to demands and contexts of adversity that first-year students experience when adjusting to university. Probing questions, for example, explored demands and resources in the context of the participant's experiences with first-year students at the specific rural-based site: *“In your opinion, what are some of the challenges or difficulties that students face when transitioning or adjusting to university here?”*; *“What are some of the resources that students have themselves, or have access to, that facilitate their adjustment to this university?”*; and, *“In what ways do you support students’ adjustment to this university?”* The interviewer re-worded, re-ordered, or clarified the questions for more in-depth investigation of topics introduced by the respondents (Ong & Cheong, 2011).

Recording of Data

As was mentioned above, interviews were recorded in two ways depending on participants’ availability and preference, namely; in-person or from a video-conference. An Adobe connect facility was used to record the interviews and field notes were made. These measures helped the

researcher capture as much in-depth information as possible (Creswell, 2007). The researcher informed participants that a voice recorder would be used and obtained their consent before the process commenced (Tracy, 2012). The mentioned field notes were used to observe and report on participants' body language, reactions, and provided additional information that was useful or contributed to understanding participants' explanations (Creswell, 2007). The interviewer recorded the date and the time when the interviews were conducted, and the place where the discussions took place. The data were transcribed verbatim and translated into English from Afrikaans and Setswana, where necessary. The transcribed texts were translated by a second listener to ensure its quality and validity (Choi, Kushner, Mill, & Lai, 2012; Suh, Kagan, & Strumpf, 2009).

Data Analysis

The current research formed part of a larger project that conducted interpretive descriptive analysis to understand the thematic patterns of demands facing first-year students adjusting to university and the resources available to them (Thorne, 2016). The analysis took place in two phases: primary and secondary coding involving co-researchers (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2012). The primary coding entailed that researchers familiarise them with the data transcripts. Thereafter, the researchers searched for segments which contained meaningful quotes, and created open codes they attached to the quotes (Saldaña, 2016). Finally, the researchers grouped the codes, organised these groups into categories and condensed them into themes and subthemes (Saldaña, 2016).

The thematic analysis was done inductively, which means working from the participants' actual words by using open coding and creating codes that are related closely to the data (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). The inductive process was refined to create a project codebook, which the researcher used to analyse the present study and adding additional codes that were not in the codebook (Tracy, 2012).

The analysis was done by two separate researchers and reviewed by the primary investigator. The two researchers conducted independent analyses and met at a later stage to discuss and reach consensus on the codes to be part of the codebook, and those to be merged into other pre-existing codes (Tracy, 2012). The researchers continued with the secondary level coding (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014; Tracy, 2012) to group codes together on a conceptual level. This meant that they organised code groups into categories using ATLAS.ti v.8 to explore the relationships of the different codes with supportive evidence (Friese, 2014). Thereafter, they organised these categories into themes and subthemes based on the data.

This coding process was facilitated by a software program, ATLAS.ti v.8 (Diccico-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This is a qualitative data management programme that assists with the managing and organisation of themes and codes (ATLAS.ti, 2014). Research also indicates that using software to support qualitative analysis is particularly useful in the study fields of the social sciences (Hwang, 2008).

Strategies Employed to Ensure Quality Data

It is imperative that qualitative studies are credible and trustworthy (Tracy, 2010). The factors identified by Brantlinger et al. (2005) are guidelines which researchers use as referrals to ensure quality data, and this also applies to the research approach, data collection methods and data analysis. The following factors are relevant to the specific study (Brantlinger et al., 2005):

- *Triangulation*: Search for evidence of convergence of, or consistency among multiple and varied data sources. This implies comparing researchers' observations with contents in the interviews as well as comparing participants' responses.
- *Disconfirming evidence*: After establishing preliminary themes/categories, the researcher sought evidence inconsistent with these themes (outliers), also known as negative or discrepant case analysis.
- *Researcher reflexivity*: The researcher attempts to understand and self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs, values, and biases – being forthright about their position or perspective up front.
- *External auditors*: Using outsiders (to the research) to examine whether and affirm that a researcher's inferences are logical and grounded in findings.
- *Peer debriefing*: Having a colleague or someone familiar with phenomena under investigation to review and provide critical feedback on descriptions, analyses, and interpretations or a study's results.
- *Audit trail*: The researchers kept track of the conducted analysis by using ATLAS.ti v.8.
- *Thick, detailed description*: Reporting enough responses (i.e. evidence-based) and using field note descriptions to provide evidence for the researcher's interpretations and conclusions.

Reporting

The report for the present study was written with integrity to present reliable findings. The researcher reported critical findings under each central theme including sub-themes, by using appropriate verbatim quotes to illustrate those findings (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). This method is often referred to as a realistic view of the participants' experience since the researcher reports on the participants' own words, thoughts, and feelings (Michie, Fixsen, Grimshaw, & Eccles, 2009). For the present study, the researcher took care to note bias that would influence her assumptions by working in a team, through co-data collection, co-analysis and working under supervision of a primary investigator (Patton, 2002).

Ethical Considerations

The larger project under which this study resorts, was reviewed by the Ethics Board Committee of the North-West University and ethical clearance granted (NWU-HS-2014-0165). The primary purpose of research ethics is to protect the welfare of participants (Wasserman, 2006). Therefore, the researcher showed moral consideration by respecting the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, the researcher informed participants about the purpose, selection, procedure and expected duration of the study.

Findings

To deliver findings, the data were categorised into five major themes: 1) the complex lives of first-year students; 2) the nature of the academic environment; 3) the economic experiences of studying; 4) accommodation and facilities; and 5) transition to university: adjustments and expectations. Each theme has key subthemes that support the main theme. The subthemes demonstrate a deeper understanding of the phenomena and relate to the codes that were used to analyse the data. Note that each of the themes capture and describe nuanced implications that relate to study demands and resources in context. Table 1 below presents the summary of the themes and sub-themes.

Table 1

Summary of themes, sub-themes and associated keywords

Themes	Sub-themes	Associated keywords
The complex lives of first-year students	Personal crises place additional demands on students' adjustment to university	Pressure, personal problems, complications, psychological problems
	Students rely on personal resources leading to growth and responsibility	Self-motivation, self-awareness, resilience, social skills, cause and effect, social relationships
	Formal psychological resources and support	Psychologist, psychiatrist, peer counsellors
	Informal resources and support	Staff members, friends, older students
The nature of the academic environment	High study-related workload	High volume of work, difficult course content, lack of academic and practical skills (academic writing, referencing, computer skills), lack of lecturer support, changes in class schedules, module clashes
	Uncertain and unsupportive academic environment complicates navigating academics	Lack of academic support, negative attitudes from lecturers, unmet expectations from university, need to teach students communication skills to approach lecturers with problems, help and support from other lecturers to assist students with transition
	Language issues	Difficulty understanding, writing and expressing in English as second language, poor English education in school, fear of stigmatisation when practicing English outside the class room, first-language English speaking students struggling with writing, support from lecturers and senior students to address language-related problems
	Infrastructure and services	Insufficient infrastructure (buildings): Overcrowded lecture halls, disproportioned student-lecture ratio, difficulty for lecturers to teach effectively, students do not learn the necessary practical skills, imbalance compared to other delivery sites Supportive services: library, computer and reading laboratories, on-campus internet
	Supportive people and resources that assist and facilitate demands and challenges	Lecturers, staff, residence wardens, peer mentors, senior students (academic friends)

The economic experience of studying	Financial difficulties	Insufficient bursaries, lack of information and communication on funding opportunities, financial stress places greater burden on students' adjustment, no access to computers or Internet to acquire information or apply for funding, unanticipated costs, uncertainty whether bursaries will pay out
	Support from the university to relieve financial strain	Provide information to students on funding opportunities before enrolling in university and while still in school, Funding, meal-a-day programme and food packages (but stigmatisation should students utilised it)
	External and internal financial resources	External bursaries, external loans, institutional bursaries (orphan, academic merit, leadership bursaries)
Accommodation and facilities	Challenges for on-campus students	High academic requirements, limited on-campus accommodation, lack of space, difficult to adjust due to different social backgrounds, conflict with roommates, lack of recreational facilities
	Support and resources for on-campus students	Cultural, social, and sports activities, supportive role from university staff, support from residence house committees
	Challenges for off-campus students	Personal safety, being mugged, theft of personal belongings, crime, lack of transport, exclusion from on-campus activities
	Support and resources for off-campus students	Access to university accredited accommodation, transport provided by university
Transition to university: Adjustments and expectations	Adjustment to a new environment	University life differs from high school, independent learning, individualistic environment, culture shock, orientation programme too generalised, first-generation students
	Course enrolment	Unavailable courses, enrolment in alternative courses, mismatch with course, dispassion with alternative course
	The effect of political unrest on students' adjustment	Destruction of university property, intimidation, negative impact on academic schedules, academics and access to resources, disrupted orientation programme, resilience despite challenges
	Multicultural experiences as a resource through social relationships	University life experienced as multi-cultural, multi-lingual and diverse, different values, importance of forming friendships, social support

Discussion

Theme 1: The complex lives of first-year students

Theme 1 focused on the complicated lives of first-year students. The complexity was reflected by students' state or situations they found hard to comprehend, therefore, experiencing university as confusing. Students did not understand what university life entailed. Accordingly, they experienced their transformation from being learners to becoming students as a challenge. Furthermore, students entered university with pre-existing problems that exacerbated their problems of adjusting to their new environment. The subthemes on the complex lives of students contained four aspects: students' personal crises place additional demands on their university adjustment; students rely on personal resources that lead to growth and responsibility; formal psychological resources support students' transition into university; and informal support or resources that students relied on to facilitate their adjustment to first-year at university.

Personal crises place additional demands on students' adjustment to university

First-year students find it extremely difficult to cope with the pressure and extent of personal crises. Such crises include problems that participants experienced with their families and the pressures of performing and adjusting well at university. As a result, their arrival in the new environment were found to reflect prior complications in their personal lives: *"They are leaving families at home with no food and no family and things like that, so they come already stressed"* (P7, Quote 168:1). Some of the students experienced personal problems with their parents that affected their studies and they would approach staff for support: *"I have this student, currently in my residence, she is suffering because the mother does not want her, she kicked her out of the house"* (P3, Quote 164:87).

In addition to the problems from home, students also struggled with psychological problems that complicated the demands they encountered when arriving at university: *"Some of them do have depression because of the pressure maybe of the work here at school"* (P3, Quote 164:4). At times, students felt lonely and longed for their homes but struggled to communicate their true feelings: *"I do not fit in, I do not want to do this, I want to leave school [university]"* (P7, Quote 168:12). As a result, lecturers had to step in and assist students with problems unrelated to academics: *"I tell them to come to me if they have any problem even if it does not relate to the courses that [they study] – you know I am teaching yea"* (P8, Quote 169:27).

Students' rely on personal resources that lead to growth and responsibility

Students experienced individual growth that allows them to deal with their study demands through self-motivation, self-awareness, resilience, social skills and recognising the cause and effect of choices they made: *“So, I believe that the motivation comes from within the person, if you really know what you're here to study and what it is that you want to achieve”* (P2, Quote 163:1). By attempting to help students develop, one of the lecturers (P1) encouraged students to focus on improving their personal development: *“So, if we learn them about yourself and being self-confident and how it works to be aware of yourself and the influence that you can have on the people around you”* (Quote 162:63).

Growth also had to become apparent outside the classroom into students' personal spaces by them engaging in social relationships: *“They have to grow, and it doesn't only happen academically but also the lifestyle they live”* (P2, Quote 163:52). However, there were students who had to undergo challenging experiences to recognise the importance of taking personal responsibility: *“I have one student who is doing my module this time for the third year, and then he told me, ‘I realised that I have to attend’ oh you got it eventually; it took a while”* (P1, Quote 162:75). It was also important for students to understand the concept of cause and effect early in their development: *“If you feel you're managing your time properly you need to acknowledge first and say, ‘My time management is not right, let me seek help ... ’”* (P7, Quote 168:49).

Formal psychological resources and support

Formal psychological resources that supported first-year students in their adjustment to university life, academically and socially, were found to be available on- and off-campus. These resources support students helping them perform better in their studies while improving their relationships with other students, lecturers, and support staff. The resources comprise on-campus facilities such as the in-house psychologist, intern psychologists, registered counsellors, guidance from lay counsellors, and career counselling. The Student Counselling Centre offers psychological services by using peer counsellors: *“In the counselling centre we hold interviews, so, students volunteer to become a peer counsellor, there's only 15 of them. They are all registered students, registered senior students”* (P7, Quote 168:10). Peer counsellors are senior students who volunteer to counsel first-year students. The value of this resource becomes evident from the following excerpt: *“You get them from second-year upwards. Moreover ... in the office we train them with basic counselling skills [and] they have first aid. I would like to think of them as mental health first aiders on the campus”* (P7, Quote 168:10).

In addition to the on-campus psychological support services, participants also mentioned off-campus facilities whose resources are: a psychiatrist, social worker, and psychotherapy services at the local Wellness Centre. The participant who is a psychologist (P7), reported that she refer students who have experienced severe anxiety for psychotherapy: *“Uh ... depending on the severity, sometimes I have to refer to a psychiatrist, and then we medicate”* (Quote 168:25). Some of the challenges the students experienced, while accessing and making use of off-campus psychological services, are that they and their parents are unable to afford the consultations and medication prescribed by the psychiatrist. As a result, the psychologist would speak to the psychiatrist to seek alternatives: *“If the parent can’t [foot] the bill, and it’s an emergency, then I can speak to Doc and find out if this cannot be one of the pro-bono cases”* (P7, Quote 168:33).

Informal resources and support

For informal resources and support first-year students can reach out to staff members and/or rely on friends and fellow students who study the same modules. Students approach residence staff to discuss their problems and getting help to resolve issues: *“They will come to my office, talk to me, tell me like what they are going through from home until here. Then I must step in as a mother and see what I can do”* (P3, Quote 164:4). Furthermore, staff ensure students are aware of campus events, and share information that may help make their lives pleasant: *“So, on my side even today, I still do the same thing, I still motivate them, I still talk to them. Whatever information that I find out about, what’s going on here on campus, I would share it with them”* (P2, Quote 163:43).

Older students get involved with first-year students to help them settle into university life: *“With the soccer institute the new boys coming into those who have been here before, then they have to mingle with each other to assist in that way”* (P9, Quote 170:33). First-year students also form relationships and social bonds with each other: *“I think what eventually helps them to transition is social support. So, they quickly form a bond with other university students”* (P1, Quote 162:30). Even though first-year students have access to resources that help them adjust to their new environment, some did struggle despite those supportive relationships: *“But what I hear from the student is, it seems like they are still struggling, so I don’t know if the support systems are not functioning well”* (P1, Quote 162:33).

Theme 2: The nature of the academic environment

Theme 2 focused on the nature of the academic environment. This context was considered a place of learning where students prepare for their future professional lives and contribute to their personal

development and subjective wellbeing. The following subthemes emerged: a high study-related workload of content and volume; uncertainties and an unsupportive academic environment making it difficult to navigate these uncertainties. These were aspects that taxed students' abilities to adjust well to university. Further subthemes included: language issues; problems and support from the infrastructure including buildings and services; supportive people; and resources that assisted with and facilitated their academic adjustment.

High study-related workload

Students' high academic workload was taxing, not only in terms of difficult course content but also the required practical skills to complete coursework at tertiary level. This demand is evident from the excerpt below:

Right at the beginning, they are expected to write assignments, to type their assignments, while many of them have not seen a computer. That's very demanding, and that can be very confusing, by the end of a semester at least when they are still trying to get hold of what is happening, the semester is ending. (P4, Quote 165:44).

Furthermore, first-year students found it difficult to write and cite academic references correctly since they lacked exposure to academic writing: *"They do not know how to structure their assignments, they do not know what to include, and then the other thing is referencing is a big problem"* (P6, Quote 167:35).

Another reported issue was that certain lecturers did not support students by explaining how to answer assessment questions or giving constructive feedback on how to complete assignments correctly: *"Most students feel like 'Ok, if I am getting 15 and I have been applying myself, I do not get feedback?' And some of them are scared to go to the lecturer and confront them"* (P6, Quote 167:11). Regarding the demand of students' increased workload and required abilities to complete coursework at a tertiary level, students also experienced sudden changes in class schedules and module clashes that exacerbated the academic challenges. Lecturers reported a disregard for first-years among colleagues who made changes to class schedules, which confused students: *"Because they [colleagues] schedule tests during our period and not during their period, students are torn between two pieces"* (P8, Quote 169:8).

Uncertain and unsupportive academic environment complicate navigating academics

Some students experienced their new academic environment as unsupportive, which affected their adjustment to university. A lack of support and negative attitudes from several lecturers had a

negative impact on students: *“And it is like you get attitudes from a lecturer and then you are going to have that negative attitude towards that lecturer and the module itself”* (P6, Quote 167:50).

At times, the students were frustrated when they did not receive the support they needed from the university: *“They demand to know. They will come and say, ‘I was here the other time for this and this and I demand to know what is happening’”* (P5, Quote 166:15). Participant 7 emphasised that the university had a responsibility to support and address the challenges that students encountered, especially with their lecturers: *“Students need to be taught skills in how to approach lecturers. They need to go to consultation hours because this is where you get to do the one-on-one with the lecturers”* (Quote 168:46). Other staff members and management had to take measures to ensure students adapt well to their new environment: *“I tell them I am here for them – anything that they want ... they must come to my office. They must just relax. They are here now to experience a new life away from home”* (P3, Quote 164:3).

Language issues

English as medium for learning and academic communication was viewed as a challenge for first-year students. In this regard, students for whom English was a second, third or even fourth language, had much difficulty understanding and expressing themselves in this language: *“I think the language is definitely a big problem because it is not only about understanding what I teach in class, which is in English, it is also about understanding the textbook.”* (P1, Quote 162:107). Students informed their lecturers that high school teachers taught most of their school-subjects in their mother-tongue, caused them difficulties to express themselves in English: *“I ask them, ‘What happened in school?’ They say ‘... but even the English teacher spoke Setswana.’ So, they never totally got this type of English thing”* (P1, Quote 162:35).

Lecturers also realised that students do not practice conversing in English after class because they fear being stigmatised by fellow students if they turn to English outside lecture rooms. When lecturers asked students why they did not take the initiative to learn and practise speaking English, they responded: *“If you speak English, you are seen as somebody who wants to be white, or somebody who wants to be smart, or who think they are better than others if you don’t speak your language”* (P1, Quote 162:29). Significantly, there were students who went to quality schools, yet found it difficult to write English even though they spoke the language fluently: *“Yeah, they*

struggle, and one of the students even confessed that ‘When it comes to writing, I hire someone to help me.’ So, we do not know what’s happening in those model C schools²” (P8, Quote 169:30).

To address these challenges, lecturers decide to simplify the module content to make it easier for students to understand the language of the module: *“So, in my class I try to use the textbook where I, of course it is terminology, but I try to make it simpler. So, I read the original [text], and then I repeat it in simpler language”* (P1, Quote 162:5). Senior students also helped first-years and they were able to relate better with them compared to certain lecturers: *“Senior students teach them [first-years] some of the aspects you know, because at least these are their peers. They are free to ask questions if they do not understand”* (P8, Quote 169:45).

Infrastructure and services

The physical infrastructure in this context refers to the lecture halls or classrooms, while services entail functions provided by lecturers and the university. Most lecturers of first-year students reported overcrowded lecture halls with an unaccommodating student-lecturer ratio that had too high student numbers in specific modules: *“Ok, so I teach first-years. I teach psychology, so I have about 600 in my class”* (P1, Quote 162:1). The overcrowded classrooms were pointed out as a challenge for both students and lecturers, especially modules that required of students to participate meaningfully during contact sessions: *“The other big problem is that of overcrowding in classes, not that students sit on the floor, but this is a type of module where skills are practiced”* (P4, Quote 165:6). The situation causes concern for lecturers since overcrowded classrooms undermine their ability to lecture effectively and it hamper the students’ ability to learn effectively: *“I am trying to say, I don’t think that we help the students the way we would like to help them if we are not given the facilities, like space”* (P4, Quote 165:9). Staff reported problematic student-lecture ratios to this study’s site compared to other campuses of the same institution. Accordingly, other campuses (delivery sites) have fewer students in their classes and, therefore, were found easier to manage: *“I’ve seen in other campuses that you can’t have a class of more than 40 or 50 students. And that’s manageable – you can help students”* (P4, Quote 165:8).

Despite the insufficient infrastructure of the campus facilities, participants referred to supportive services that are available to the students and that they rely on, for example, the university library, computer and reading laboratories, and internet access on campus: *“Students going to the library or searching the databases to collect information that will help them to write that particular*

² Model C Schools form part of the Apartheid legacy that privileged White education above that of learners from other ethnicities. These schools are considered privileged in infrastructure and available resources (Spren & Vally, 2006)

assignment” (P8, Quote 169:46); “They also have to attend the reading laboratory lessons for them to improve their speed reading and writing skills” (P8, Quote 169:42).

Access to supportive people and resources that nurture academics

Despite the academic demands that first-year students experience, lecturers and staff support first-years and help them deal with their challenges: “And they struggle; so, over the years I have adapted my programme in a way to help to assist them” (P1, Quote 162:2). “Well, we have to be there for them, you know. As lecturers, we also have consultation periods” (P8, Quote 169:12). The residence wardens encouraged students to work hard on their academic work to gain confidence, as is clear from the excerpt below:

I mean, in the first semester they are asking themselves whether they will make it or not. However, after the results and everything are out, that is when they have the self-confidence to say, “... but now I can do this” (P3, Quote 164:14).

According to participants, peer mentors play a vital role in supporting first-year students when the latter do not understand lecturers: “... or they couldn’t understand the lecturer or something to that effect, they need a little bit of help with some theories or whatever ... then you could help them understand better” (P6, Quote 167:1). Second- and third-year students sign up to become academic friends to first-years. They are called peer mentors and the programme is run by the Academic Development Centre: “So they can be tutors to these ones [first-year students]. So, that really helps because that person can tell you ‘Nah, this lecturer is like this, approach them like that’; it gives them a blueprint” (P6, Quote 167:28). First-years also relied on students who studied the same modules and helped them understand their academic work through peer-teaching: “And you always make sure they mix in with those ones that you think are a little bit brighter you know; or they’re hardworking. And you make sure they engage” (P6, Quote 167:25).

Theme 3: The Economic experiences of studying

Theme 3 dealt with the economic experiences of studying as a first-year student. Such experiences point to the financial difficulties that students encounter from the moment they decided to further their studies at a higher education institution. This experience also entails the resources that are available (although not necessarily used or known about), including support and initiatives from the university to help students, as well as available bursaries and loans (external and internal to the university).

Financial difficulties

The financial officers working with first-year affairs, highlighted financial problems as a major source of stress for first-year students. There is a dire lack of bursaries and funding opportunities for university students, especially those from previously disadvantaged communities. This situation impacts first-year students in several ways. Concerns about finances affect students thus, making their adjustment to university even more difficult. Students were confused about what they should do. The main reason was that they were unfamiliar with sources of financial aid or bursaries available to help them pay for their university and accommodation fees, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

This is the biggest problem I think overall for universities in the country – lack of funding and lack of information. I do not think they [students] are familiar with the opportunities at the university and all the different types of bursaries that are available (P10, Quote 171:102).

Exacerbating matters for students is the insufficient communication from universities on bursaries and sources of financial aid available for students to apply, as the following excerpts attest to:

They [university recruiters] are not informing students enough. We [can] do the social media; so, it does not necessarily have to be standing up and making a presentation. You should just put it up on social media. Many of our students are orphans. We have the orphans' bursary in the university that students can apply for. But students do not know that it exists (P7, Quote 168:39).

For student (and because coming from high school) all you know is NSFAS [National Students Financial Aid Scheme], and if NSFAS rejects you, then you are lost. You do not know what else there is. But you can [come to] campus and apply for something that's available on the campus (P7, Quote 168:39).

Applying for financial assistance or funding is further complicated since numerous students lack access to computers and the Internet. The university placed most of the information about bursaries online, but many students do not know how to apply: *“Another problem is, they [the university] had an online system where you had to apply. Now the problem we have with our students is that a lot of them are from rural areas that have no access to the internet”* (P10, Quote 171:8).

In addition to problems about funding opportunities, there were unanticipated costs of studies. The students were unaware of these costs, did not plan for it, nor understood when they initially registered (i.e. “costs on-top-of costs” or “hidden costs”). These costs included, but were not limited to, those for transport to and from campus, textbooks, data/Internet for studies, food and accommodation on and off campus, as a participant pointed out:

It was a problem, because I must buy books, I must eat every day, and I must study ... lectures will ask us to do certain things, eh, projects which costs me money ... I don't have money for such; it was a problem ... mentally you must survive. (P11, Quote 171:89).

In addition, students were uncertain whether they would indeed receive the bursaries for which they applied to cover the costs of studying. They also raise funds for registration without knowing where they will find the rest of the money, as the following excerpts explain:

But the problem is, they pay the registration fee but only to find out later, in a few months, NSFAS declined them. They paid the registration fee, but now they still got the outstanding fees they need to pay for the rest of the year (P10, Quote 171:13).

Accommodation, they need to get books and meals. So, that is where the problems come in. They took the risk of getting registered, and then eventually they do not get funding (P10, Quote 171:13).

Support from the university to relieve financial strain

As mentioned above, participants reported a lack of available information that students could use to apply for financial support. In response to this need, one of the finance officers suggested that the solution would be to inform learners already in high school about available funding opportunities. Even though this strategy is not yet in place, participants suggested that their involvement in providing early information to schools could mean assisting schools and learners with applications for funding (recruitment, advertising and recommendations). This is evident from the quote below:

I think if we can speak to all the stakeholders and then arrange a specific day and invite different schools from rural areas and so on ... students can get all the relevant information. I think that can also provide a solution (P10, Quote 171:30).

To relieve some of the financial strain among students, the university offers nutrition support called the 'meal-a-day' programme. This initiative provides food packages to students from disadvantaged communities who lack finances to buy food for themselves. Non-perishable foods are handed out monthly to selected students: *"I think every month they give them food. They call them, there's a package that they give them ... every month. So, they must go collect that"* (P3, Quote 164:12). The challenge with this programme is that students feel stigmatised and are categorised as "struggling". As a result, students decided not to collect the food packages, as the following participant attests:

What I hear from the students is that, if you are known to take [the food packages], you are in the needy category. And especially the guys do not want to feel like they fit into that needy category. This is sad, because the opportunity is there (P1, Quote 162:42).

External and internal financial resources

External and internal financial resources include loans and bursaries offered to students. For example, external bursary options imply student loans from Educational loan (Edu loan) and the government-based National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS): “Yes, we have the Edu loan office here, we have the NSFAS office here ... it is like a bursary office” (P2, Quote 163:77). Students were also encouraged to apply for bursaries at their local municipal offices: “Because with some municipalities they are willing to help if you are coming from that area, so we give the students the contact details and the email address. We even call the guys from the municipality” (P11, Quote 171:17).

Internally, the university offers institutional bursaries for which specific students are eligible. Examples are the orphan bursary, the merit/academic bursary and the leadership bursary. However, the most important concern is that students are not informed about these bursaries, despite their financial need for such sources of funding: “The merit, leadership and orphanage bursaries ... are kept a secret. I do not know [why], it is a closely guarded secret; these things are not communicated to the first-years (P6, Quote 167:40).

Theme 4: Accommodation and facilities

Theme 4 focused on first-year students’ experiences of accommodation on-and off-campus. Accommodation on-campus refers to the students residences that is provided by the university. Off-campus accommodation includes places for rent nearby campus, some of which are accredited by the university, or which other students find on their own. The experiences include challenges and support/resources for on-campus and off-campus students respectively.

Challenges for on-campus students

According to the participants, admission to on-campus accommodation seems extremely difficult. First-year students are expected to meet specific academic requirements to gain entry to on-campus residences. Students also must apply for accommodation at the same time they register for their studies but are only able to gain access to accommodation based on performance on their

Admission Point Score (APS). The APS is calculated from students' final school year results (Grade 12) to determine acceptance points needed for university entry, as a participant elucidated:

First-years – they get residence here according to their APS scores” (P2, 163:126); “It’s a struggle here, it’s a struggle for our students, it’s a struggle. The yearly cries that we hear from them getting accommodation here ... stuff like that (P2, Quote 163:34).

Apart from the academic requirements to receive on-campus accommodation, the campus has limited accommodation placements available for first-year students: *“It’s just stress at the beginning of the year when you must give them keys, uh ... Some do not have accommodation, they will come with lots of stories that are sad, and they have not applied ...”* (P3, Quote 164:21). Unfortunately, not all students met the criteria for secured accommodation, and some would resort to underhanded methods to acquire a place of residence: *“A student is coming to you and offering you a bribe so that you can help him. Some of them they do qualify to get a room. Unfortunately, there’s no space”* (P2, Quote 163: 75).

Several first-year students are from family backgrounds that are differed from life on campus. Accordingly, they struggle to adjust to campus life’s different social setting. The differences at times may cause conflict between students who share the same rooms as Participant 3 (residence warden) stated:

This one maybe is rich; this one is poor. So, it is a bit of a challenge, because one [student] will [mis]treat another [student], which will make her feel like maybe she is being belittled and stuff like that (Quote 164:4).

Another challenge that students face on campus is the lack of recreational facilities: *“We don’t have places where students go and gather and sit there you know”* (P2, Quote 163:135). Or: *“We recently had TV rooms which we call our ‘rec halls’, where they play pool and watch TV and stuff like that. Those things were converted into classrooms”* (P2, Quote 163:85).

Support and resources for on-campus students

Participation in cultural and social activities brought a sense of unity to the students. This includes events where senior students interact with first-years to motivate them and share their experiences. Participant 2 highlighted these activities:

We would have soccer tournaments; we would have business ideas shared by different people. We even had an unveiling of our residence. We changed names, we came out with logos, we came out with mottos for those logos; you know we came up with so many things (Quote 163:50).

We do have events that we are doing. We will say, maybe motivate a sister then we will call other students from other residences. They will call and come to motivate them, take them through the journey of their first year and tell them that they will make it (Quote 164:83).

Students who live on-campus have water and electricity even when the surrounding areas may have challenges, which the following quote emphasises:

In the area, we often don't have water, but on campus, they have some other reservoir. So mostly, when we don't have water and when we don't have electricity in part of our area and in town, normally the campus is fine. So, they are not so much affected by these types of things that off-campus students might have to deal with (P1, Quote 162:50).

Participants reported that on-campus students lived in an environment that was supportive and safe, making their adjustment to university life easier, as explained in the excerpt below:

So, we are putting things in place on the campus that will make life slightly easier for them. For instance, the students living in the residences – we have our residence outreaches are quite vigorous in the first- year residences (P7, Quote 168:67).

Participants pointed out that university staff build strong relationships with students and play a supportive role. This is especially true for residence wardens who work as in-house staff during the day: *“Whether it is personal problems, whatever problems they have, we will always be there to assist them. So, it is the trust you build with them, for them to listen to you at the end of the day”* (P2, Quote 163:84).

Residence wardens also help address students' problems: *“They will come to my office, talk to me, tell me like what they are going through from home until here. Then I must step in as a mother and see what I can do”* (P3, Quote 164:4). House-parents (day staff living in residences) looked after the students at night and were available to support students when they fell ill: *“The house parent need to be here and alert the control, but the house parents need to be here. He needs to know that I have a student who is sick, in which block”* (P3, Quote 164:34). The Residence House Committee was elected by students to oversee their lives and activities: *“People who are willing to sacrifice*

their own time for them, so that they can have that positive lifestyle which is now the culture that we've started building for our students" (P2, Quote 163:49).

Challenges for off-campus students

Responses showed that students living off-campus face numerous challenges that make life difficult for them compared to those living on campus, especially regarding personal safety. Participant 2, a residence warden, explained:

For someone who stays off campus, you must go to this village here and then coming here [to campus] is a problem because these guys [criminals] are always on the road waiting for people. You can get mugged and stuff like that (Quote 163:109).

Participants also mentioned that students report being mugged or mentioned theft of their personal belongings at their off-campus accommodation: *"They complain all the time. We hear about cases whereby they complained that they [other people at accommodations] stole their laptops and the cell- [cell phones]"* (P12.2, Quote 172:39). In addition, off-campus students often find it difficult to attend campus activities due to a lack of transport, as the following quote demonstrates:

Because our programs usually start in the morning and obviously students who stay off campus wouldn't want to wake up in the morning just to come and do some of these activities because there was no off-campus transport for first-years to attend the orientation (P12.1, Quote 172:19).

The exclusion of off-campus students from culture, social and sports activities was also a concern, as a participant pointed out:

We know there is an orientation programme. We're just not stressing the importance of it. And somehow, we've created an idea that orientation is for students that are living on the campus. So, once you have your approval for residence and you come and register, and you're placed in residence, there's [this] idea ... and it's not supposed to be like that (P7, Quote 168:32).

Support and resources for off-campus students

Certain students who live off-campus have access to university accredited accommodation, which participants considered a safe type of accommodation for the students who unable to live on campus (or preferred to live off-campus): *"Three outside accommodations that are accredited by the university... so, especially on NSFAS and other bursaries we pay for that accommodation"* (P10, Quote 171:21). The university provides students with transport to and from the accredited residences. The only disadvantage is that the transport is not accessible throughout the day: *"And*

they are also providing transport as well. But the disadvantage is when you want to go home now, and transport is coming three o' clock. But at least you are working with something" (P12.2, Quote 172:36-38).

Theme 5: Transition to university: Adjustments and expectations

Theme 5 dealt with university's expectations and adjustments that first-year students had to make when arriving on campus. Participants reflected on several experiences of first-year students, specifically challenges to adjust on different levels (academically and socially). First-years compared high school to university student life and mentioned they rely on their personal and social resources to deal with the adjustment to university.

Despite the structures in place to support students' adjustment to university, some reported uncertainties and experienced that their needs were unmet, especially regarding political unrest that made adjustment even more difficult. Students reported on university orientation programmes that they perceived as too generalised. For first-years to adjust well to university, such programmes must support students' needs better to help them adjust to the demands of university life.

Adjustment to a new environment

First-year students explained that they daily face an environment that differs from high school. They typified learning at school as teacher-driven compared to the independent learning expected from lecturers at university. Students found the new environment individualistic, and achievement driven, therefore first-years must adjust to a different way: *"There are so many challenges in their way, they are not used to how things are done here, and I think that is a culture shock also for them"* (P1, Quote 162:138). The shock first-years experienced included moving from their home environment to university: *"There are so many challenges ... [moving from] where they come from, not only the school system, but also their cultures back at home"* (P1, Quote 162:138).

Participants pointed out that students are encouraged to attend the structured orientation programme that helps first-year students familiarise them with their new surroundings, activities and people on campus: *"They should attend orientation, take part in most or almost whatever is happening around. They should take part, but then they should know if this is right or wrong"* (P12.3, Quote 172:55). However, students were found to experience the orientation programme as too generalised and one-dimensional. As a result, they are unable to access important information that would be beneficial for them when finding their way on campus, as the following quote explains:

But it seems like it is not enough, so in the beginning, it seems like they do not get enough information as to how this life works on campus and where exactly they can go if they have certain needs (P1, Quote 162:54).

Adjustment to university is particularly difficult for first-generation students due to the high expectations and pressure for them to do well, as a participant explained:

Many of my students still come and they are still first-generation students. So, they really come from backgrounds where maybe they are the first one to go to university or the first generation anyway ... they might have all the cousins, but the first generation to go to university. But it is important for them to kind of make it here. The problem it is just that sometimes the difficulties are so many (P1, Quote 162:101).

Course enrolment

According to the participants, course enrolment poses another challenge to first-year students. They found that certain courses were not available for these students to register once they arrived at university. For example, first-years' primary course choice is not available if they do not meet the course requirements; thus, must enrol in alternative courses. This experience is explained by the following quote:

You find that some of them, they are not in the course [they prefer] and they don't like the course that they are doing. Let's say you wanted to do IT, it's 29 APS score. Ten you come with 25 and you simply can't bear the thought of staying at home for that one year to improve your results ... and then you just take whatever course there is (P6, Quote 167:101).

Other reasons for enrolling in alternative courses are late registration due to financial challenges or if too many students registered for that specific course and there was no space available for them. The choices that first-years have to make cause a mismatch to their needs and they end up enrolling for courses they are not passionate about: *"They'll tell you, 'I honestly wanted to do this, but I'm currently doing that; and then I sort of like it ... I'm starting to like it.' But you can tell that this person is not passionate about what they are doing"* (P6, Quote 167:105).

The effect of political unrest on students' adjustment

Participants reported political unrests that occurred during first-years' adjustment to university (i.e., the #FeesMustFall campaign³). The violent unrests that occurred on campus resulted in the destruction of university property and intimidation of staff: *"This office has been burnt, when was*

³ South Africa's student protests associated with the "#FeesMustFall" movement demanded free and decolonised education (Ngcobo, Manyathela and Bateman 2016).

it, last year in the beginning of the year or it was in 2015” (P10 & P11, Quote 171:60). The strikes impacted negatively on the academic schedule and required changes to class sessions and timetables, submission of academic work and access to academic resources: “Months of no class, and then trying to catch up and bullets around you and going on with teaching, do you think that would really give you a good idea of the first-year experience?” (P1, Quote 162:86).

First-year students were affected negatively by the strikes since it disturbed the orientation programmes, which are for their benefit to access information about the university and other activities focusing on them: *“And it did not proceed, the orientations did not proceed because of the strikes” (P12.4, Quote 172:13). However, it was pointed out that first-year students remain resilient despite the negative experiences associated with the strike actions on their campus: “Well, at least we can say that our students are resilient, even last year with all the things happening. We completed our programs, and it was stress, and it was hectic, but we did it” (P1, Quote 162:87).*

Multicultural experiences as a resource through social relationships

The students’ experience of university is diverse, in other words, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and typified by students’ different socio-economic backgrounds. Students are expected to adjust to an environment and people that are necessarily different from their experiences before university, as is evident from the following excerpt:

A university, in a normal community, others come from different backgrounds, so now in a university, there are certain ways of how you should behave. I am sorry to say that, but it should be like that. You cannot behave like you are in a shebeen, if I may say. A university has different values; respect comes in (P9, Quote:170:7).

Forming friendships forms an essential part of adjusting to a new environment and embracing diversity: *“Friendship and unity are very [important]. Understanding one another, understanding one’s culture, understanding one’s religion and the most important thing that I teach them is to respect” (P2, Quote 163:72). Social support includes getting involved in activities that take place on campus such as cultural activities and sports: “We have a day like we said, a programme to say this is what we do today. We do like sports days on the grounds. Like we have basketball, netball ... They go there, and they meet, and then they start to play” (P12.2, Quote 172:14).*

Some students would encourage others to leave their rooms and take part in games outside with fellow students to have a feel of being at home in this strange environment. They often play indigenous games where they teach one another variations from their diverse cultures, as the following quote points out:

So, they would just go to the other ladies and just make friends with them and try to play. I had the other ones who were playing outside – they were just playing Khathi [an indigenous Tswana game] and other indigenous games (P3, Quote 164:40).

Discussion

The aim of the present study was contributing to a theoretical structure that is tailor made for South African HEIs and based on the JD-R framework. The latter is a theory that is well-researched in the work context and has recently been applied to the educational environment. The specific aim of the study was obtaining further information to expand the demands-and- resources components of the JD-R theory related to South African first-year university students. Due to the limited research conducted on the demands and resources experienced by first-year students in the framework of the JD-R theory, particularly in rural universities, the study aimed to provide more information towards building a comprehensive framework on the demands and resources experienced by first-year students studying at a rural based university.

Several study-related demands and resources could be identified by extracting five themes from the data. First the focus is on the demands that emerged from the data.

Demands

Several demands emerged from Theme 1, *The complex lives of first-year students*. These were: pressure, personal problems, complications, and psychological issues. Research among South African rural university students showed that they experience high levels of psychosocial vulnerability that impede their academic success (Van Breda 2013; Wade 2009). Hussain, Guppy, Robertson and Temple (2015) also recognise that students arrive at university with pre-existing mental issues, which are exacerbated by the university environment, as was corroborated by the present study.

Demands emerging from Theme 2, *The nature of the academic environment*, were: a high volume of work; difficult course content; lack of academic and practical skills (academic writing, referencing, computer skills); and insufficient lecturer support. This includes changes in class schedules, module clashes, lack of academic support and negative attitudes from lecturers. These themes correspond to literature. Sommer and Dumont (2011) point out that academic competencies

(e.g. reading with understanding and critical writing) continue to predominate in studies that focus on a lack of academic success.

Further demands concerned language and infrastructure. Language issues refer to these students' difficulty to understand, write and express them in English as second language. Sader and Gabela (2017) affirm that English, as a second or third language, is found to be a barrier hindering first-year students from participating in class since they are unable to express themselves clearly. Infrastructure problems include overcrowded lecture halls, which causes a disproportional student-lecture ratio and makes it difficult for lecturers to teach effectively. The above-mentioned demands relate to different studies, which indicate that the South African schooling system does not prepare students adequately for higher education (Nel et al., 2009; Strydom et al., 2010).

Demands that emerged from Theme 3, *The economic experiences of studying*, are: a lack of bursaries; insufficient information; poor communication on funding opportunities; limited access to computers or Internet to access information or apply for funding off-campus. This includes hidden costs such as textbooks, data/Wi-Fi for Internet access, money for food and transport to and from campus. These perceived demands are in line with a study by Maxwell and Mudovhozi (2014) where reference is made to a lack of information and advanced communication tools such as the Internet that limit information access about application procedures. In addition, finance matters are considered a serious stressor among students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010). The reality is that access to higher education in South Africa is barred by the high costs of fees and lack of bursaries (Pillay & Thwala, 2012).

Regarding Theme 4, *Accommodation and facilities*, the demands for first-years include high academic requirements for access to on-campus residences; limited on-campus accommodation; and a lack of recreational facilities. Off-campus students' demands were found to be: personal safety; being mugged; theft of personal belongings; difficulties with transport; and exclusion from on-campus activities. According to literature, students experience similar challenges related to crime and violence and difficult living circumstances, which hamper their focus on their studies (Van Breda, 2017). In addition, participants viewed travelling to and from campus as unproductive, which does not add value to the students' learning (Mbara & Cilliers, 2013).

Specific demands emerged from Theme 5, *Transition to university: adjustments and expectations*. These demands were: first-year students' experience of university as individualistic causing culture shock and forced enrolment in alternative courses due to late registration or insufficient points for

entry into first-choice courses. According to the participants, course enrolment poses another challenge to first-year students. Weiss and Bearman (2007) point out that rural students struggle to search for and enrol into their intended degree programmes due to limited spaces in HEIs, under minimum selection requirements and economic hardship.

Adjustment to university is particularly difficult for first-generation students since there is high expectations and pressure on them to achieve. Similarly, Mhlongo and O'Neill (2013) indicate that parental expectations may place overwhelming pressure on students, especially where they are the first in their family to attend university. This demonstrates a perceived lack of socio-emotional support for students since the parents lack the knowledge and experience of the circumstances their student offspring presently face at university (Mhlongo & O'Neill, 2013). Participants emphasised that political strikes affected students due to the destruction of university property and intimidation, which impact negatively on academic schedules. Mutekwe (2017) mentions buildings and vehicles at several universities that were burnt in the waves of protests by rioting students.

Resources

Several study-related resources were identified in the present study. Regarding Theme 1, *The complex lives of first-year students*, the focus was on personal resources, which included self-motivation, self-awareness, resilience, social skills and understanding the impact of cause and effect. Formal resources refer to available psychologists, psychiatrists and peer counsellors, while informal resources point to staff members, friends and older students. Sommer and Dumont (2011) found that intrinsic motivation, perceived stress, and attitudes towards seeking help were associated with students adjusting to university. Similarly, Lewis, Pea and Rosen (2010) stress that students engage better with their peers and the academic community if they are given the opportunity to develop self-efficacy.

Theme 2, *The nature of the academic environment*, pointed to resources such as academic support, lecturers, residence wardens, peer mentors, and senior students (academic friends). Steyn, Harris and Hartell, (2011) suggest that empowering rural post-matric students in their first year may help them develop critical academic skills they require to participate in the university environment successfully.

Theme 3, *The economic experiences of studying*, indicated the following resources: support from the university to relieve financial strain including information to learners on funding opportunities

before enrolling in university; and the meal-a-day programme and food packages. External and internal financial resources were found to be external bursaries and loans as well as institutional funding (orphan, academic merit, leadership bursaries). Participants mentioned the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which was established to help students access public HEIs by providing loans and bursaries to candidates who meet the criteria (Sader & Gabela, 2017). The finance officers in the present study confirmed that they also encourage students to approach their municipalities for financial assistance.

Resources that emerged from Theme 4, *Accommodation and facilities*, consist of cultural, social and sports activities; the supportive role from university staff; support from residence house committees for on-campus students. This includes access to university-accredited accommodation and university transport provided for off-campus students. The finding is in line with Mbara and Celliers (2013) who acknowledge that most universities provide transport for students who have university-accredited accommodation. Responses from the present study showed that first-year students' experiences of social support contribute positively to their overall wellbeing, which in turn helps them adapt more easily to student life (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld 2005).

Theme 5, *Transition to university: Adjustments and expectations*, incorporated multicultural experiences as a resource where social relationships were emphasised. Participants pointed out that support helps increase the number of resources that students view as accessible to them and replaces insufficient resources. This meant that social support was associated with lower reports of drop-out among first-year students (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003).

Limitations

Despite the contributions and gains from the present study, certain limitations must be pointed out.

Firstly, the study explored only the experiences of support structures from a specific rural university. These structures collectively could provide in-depth experiences of their dealings with the demands experienced by rural first-year students and the resources available to them. However, the results do not account for the environments of other HEIs, which may present different demands and resources.

Secondly, interviews conducted on student support structures was the only source of data collection. It is possible that inclusion of additional methods could unfold greater understandings of

the phenomena through triangulation of methods that allow different modes of expression than in-depth discussions alone.

Thirdly, the participants were invited to converse in their mother-tongue (Setswana). During the interviews, certain participants appeared to be comfortable with English as the medium of communication and considered themselves competent in spoken English. Nevertheless, language barriers could have led to unclear self-expressions, which prevented participants from providing in-depth responses as they would in their mother-tongue.

Finally, several interruptions occurred during the interviews due to the loss of network connection on the video-conference interviews. Furthermore, despite the “Do-not-disturb” sign on the doors of venues for individual face-to-face interviews, interruptions did affect the flow of the conversations. As a result, some information was not shared since the participants had forgotten the rest of their intended response.

Recommendations

Considering the findings and the above-mentioned limitations, certain recommendations can be made for the present study.

For the individual: students must learn to acknowledge the demands they face academically, psychologically, financially and their difficulty in finding accommodation. They should optimally utilise the resources (formal and informal) that are available to them. These include psychological services, academic resources, house-parents and wardens, peer mentors, senior students, peers, and their own personal resources.

For the organisation: Universities should improve their communication channels and put more effort into sharing information about resources available to first-year students. These would entail bursaries, improved orientation programs, workshops to train first-year students in self-empowerment and the availability of an on-campus social worker.

For future research: The challenge is to develop a scientific and validated model to explore, measure, and monitor the university experiences of first-year students. Valid, reliable, and culturally fair instruments to measure demands and resources of first-year students must be utilised based on the findings of the present and other qualitative studies.

References

- Awino, J. O., & Agolla, J. E. (2008). A quest for sustainable quality assurance measurement for universities: Case study of the University of Botswana. *Education Research Review*, 3(6), 213-218.
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2017). Job demands-resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22, 273-285.
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2018). Multiple levels in job demands-resources theory: Implications for employee wellbeing and performance. In E. Diener, S. Oishi, & L. Tay (Eds.), *Handbook of wellbeing*. Salt Lake City, UT: DEF Publishers. doi:nobascholar.com
- Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Euwema, M. C. (2005). Job resources buffer the impact of job demands on burnout. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 10, 170-180.
- Bakker, A. B., Van Veldhoven, M. J. P. M., & Xanthopoulou, D. (2010). Beyond the Demand-control model: Thriving on high job demands and resources. *Journal of Personnel Psychology*, 9, 3-16.
- Bakker, A. B., Vergel, A. I. S., & Kuntze, J. (2015). Student engagement and performance: A weekly diary study on the role of openness. *Motivation and Emotion*, 39(1), 49-62. doi:10.1007/s11031-014-9422-5.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: Freeman.
- Bangeni, B., & Kapp, R. (2005). Identities in transition: Shifting conceptions of home among “Black” South African university students. *African Studies Review*, 48(3), 1-19.
- Bojuwoye, O. (2002). Stressful experiences of first year students of selected universities in South Africa. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 15(3), 277-290.
- Booyesen, F., & Botha, F. (2011). *The gold of one's ring is not far more precious than the gold of one's heart: Reported happiness among married and cohabitating South African adults*. Paper presented at the Bi-annual Conference of the Economic Society of South Africa, University of Stellenbosch, 4-7 September.
- Botha, F., Snowball, J., De Klerk, V., & Radloff, S. (2013). Determinants of student satisfaction with campus residence life at a South African University (Working paper no. 388). Retrieved from Economic Research Southern Africa (ERSA) website: <http://www.academia.edu/2906909>.
- Bowen, W. G., Chingos, M. M., & McPherson, M. S. (2009). *Crossing the finish line: Completing college at America's public universities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Breier, M. (2007). *Pathways through higher education to the labour market: Factors affecting student retention, graduation, and destination. Case study report: University of the Western Cape*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council.
- Council on Higher Education. (2010). *Access and throughput in South African higher education: Three case studies. Higher Education Monitor 9*. Pretoria: Author.
- Chemers, M. M., Hu, L., & Garcia, B. F. (2001). Academic self-efficacy and first-year college student performance and adjustment. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93(1), 55-64.
- Chiloane, M. (2016, September 26). Wits worker dies after inhaling extinguisher fumes set off during protest. *Eyewitness News*. Retrieved from <http://ewn.co.za/2016/09/26/Wits-worker-dies-after-inhaling-extinguisher-fumes>.
- Chow, H. (2005). Life satisfaction among university students in a Canadian prairie city: A multivariate analysis. *Social Indicators Research*, 70, 139-150.
- Cilliers, J. R., Mostert, K., & Nel, J. A. (2018). Study demands, study resources and the role of personality characteristics in predicting the engagement of first-year university students. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 32(1), 49-70. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.20853/32-1-1575>
- Davis, M., Dias-Bowie, Y., Greenberg, K., Klukken, G., Pollio, H. R., Thomas, S. P., & Thompson, C. L. (2004). 'A fly in the buttermilk': Descriptions of university life by successful Black undergraduate students at a predominately white south-eastern university. *Journal of Higher Education*, 75, 420-445.
- De Ridder, D. T., Lensvelt-Mulders, G., Finkenauer, C., Stok, F. M., & Baumeister, R. F. (2012). Taking stock of self-control: A meta-analysis of how trait self-control relates to a wide range of behaviours. *Personality & Social Psychology Review*, 16(1), 76-99.
- Diab, P., Flack, P. S., Mabuza, L. H., & Moolman, H. (2015). Curriculum challenges faced by rural-origin health science students at South African medical schools. *African Journal of Health Professions Education*, 7(1), 51-54. doi:10.7196/AJHPE.390
- Diener, E., Diener, M., & Diener, C. (2009). Factors predicting subjective wellbeing of Nations. *Social Indicators Research Series 38*, 43-70. doi:10.1007/978-90-481-2352-0_3.
- Dolan, P., Peasgood, T., & White, M. (2008). Do we really know what makes us happy? A review of the economic literature on the factors associated with subjective wellbeing. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 29, 94-122.
- Drentea, P. (2000). Age, debt and anxiety. *Journal of Health & Social Behaviour*, 41, 437-450.
- Dwyer, R. E., McCloud, L., & Hodson, R. (2011). Youth debt, mastery and self-esteem: Class-stratified effects of indebtedness on self-concept. *Social Science Research*, 40, 727-741.

- Dyson, R., & Renk, K. (2006). Freshmen adaptation to university life: Depressive symptoms, stress and coping. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 62*(10), 1231-1244.
- Ebrahim, A., Botha, F., & Snowball, J. (2011). *The determinants of happiness among race groups in South Africa*. Paper presented at the Bi-annual Conference of the Economic Society of South Africa (ESSA), University of Stellenbosch, 4-7 September.
- Feldman, D. B., Davidson, O. B., & Margalit, M. (2014). Personal resources hope and achievement among college students: The conservation of resources perspective. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. doi:10.1007/s10902-014-9508-5.
- Frey, B. & Stutzer, A. (2002). What can economists learn from happiness research? *Journal of Economic Literature, 40*, 402-435.
- Hunt, J., Eisenberg, D. (2010). Mental health problems and help-seeking behaviour among college students. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 46*(1), 3-10.
- Hussain, R., Guppy, M., Robertson, S., & Temple, E. (2013). Physical and mental health perspectives of first year undergraduate rural university students. *BMC Public Health, 13*, 1-11.
- Ishitani, T. T. (2003). A longitudinal approach to assessing attrition behaviour among first-generation college students: Time-varying effects. *Research in Higher Education, 44*(4), 433-449.???
- Ishitani, T. T. (2006). Studying attrition and degree completion behaviour among first-generation college students in the United States. *Journal of Higher Education, 77*(5), 861-885.
- Jones, B., Coetzee, G., Bailey, T., & Wickham, S. (2012). *Factors that facilitate success for disadvantages higher education students. An investigation into approaches under by REAP, NSFAS and selected higher education institutions*. Retrieved from http://www.reap.org.za/pieces/reports/pdf/tracking_reports/2008_June_factors_that_facilitate_success.pdf
- Kember, D. (2004). Interpreting student workload and the factors which shape students' perceptions of their workload. *Studies in Higher Education, 29*, 165-184.
- Leicht, K., & Fitzgerald, S. (2006). *Post-industrial peasants: The illusion of middle-class prosperity*. New York, NY: Worth.
- LePine, J. A., Podsakoff, N. P., & LePine, M. A. (2005). A meta-analytic test of the challenge stressor- hindrance stressor framework: An explanation for inconsistent relationships among stressors and performance. *Academy of Management Journal, 48*, 764-775.
- Lewin, T., & Mawoyo, M. (2014). *Student access and success: Issues and interventions in South African universities*. Cape Town: The South African Institute for Advancement.

- Lewis, S., Pea, R. & Rosen, J. (2010). Beyond participation to co-creation of meaning: Mobile social media in generative learning communities. *Social Science Information*, 49(3), 1-19.
- Llorens, S., Bakker, A. B., Schaufeli, W. B., & Salanova, M. (2006). Testing the robustness of the Job Demands-resources Model. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 13(3), 378-391.
- Maxwell, G. M., & Mudhovozi, P. (2017). Transiting from rural high school to university: The challenges of getting into an appropriate degree programme. *New Voices in Psychology*, 10(2), 3-14.
- Mbara, T. C., & Celliers, C. (2013). Travel patterns and challenges experienced by University of Johannesburg off-campus students. *Journal of Transport & Supply Chain Management*, 7(1), 1-8. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/jtscm.v7i1.114>.
- Meltzer, H. P., Bebbington, P., Brugha, T., Jenkins, S., McManus, S., & Dennis, M. S. (2011). Personal debt and suicidal ideation. *Psychological Medicine*, 41, 771-778.
- Mhlongo, Z. S., & O'Neill, V. C. (2013). Family influences on career decisions by Black first-year UKZN students. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 27(4), 953-965.
- Mokgele K. R. F., & Rothmann, S. (2014). A structural model of student wellbeing. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 44(4), 514-527. doi: 10.1177/0081246314541589
- Møller, V. (1998). Quality of life in South Africa: Post-apartheid trends. *Social Indicators Research*, 43(1-2), 27-68.
- Møller, V. & Dickow, H. (2002). The role of quality of life surveys in managing change in democratic transitions: The South African case. *Social Indicators Research*, 58(1-3), 267-292.
- Møller, V. & Saris, W. E. (2001). The Relationship between subjective wellbeing and domain satisfactions in South Africa. *Social Indicators Research*, 55(1), 97-114.
- Momanyi, M. J., Ogoma, O.S., & Misigo, L. B. (2010). Gender differences in self-efficacy and academic performance in science subjects among secondary school students in Lugari District, Kenya. *Educational Journal of Behavioural Science*, 1(1), 62-77.
- Mortimer, J. T. (2003). *Working and growing up in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mouton, N., Louw, G. P., & Strydom, G. L. (2013). Present-day dilemmas and challenges of the South African tertiary system. *International Business & Economics Research Journal*, 12(3), 285-300.

- Mowbray, C. T., Mandiberg, J. M., Stein, C. H., Kopels, S., Curlin, C., Megivern, D., ... Lett, R. (2006). Campus mental health services: Recommendations for change. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 76, 226-237.
- Mutekwe, E. (2017). Unmasking ramifications of the fees-must-fall-conundrum in higher education institutions in South Africa: A critical perspective. *Perspective in Education*, 35, 142-154. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v35i2.11>.
- Nel, C., Troskie-de Bruin, C., & Bitzer, E. (2009). Students' transition from school to university: Possible for a pre-university intervention. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 23(5), 974-991.
- Ngcobo, Z., Manyathela, C., & Bateman, C. (2016). FeesMustFall protests turn violent, bus set alight in Jhb CBD. Retrieved from <http://ewn.co.za/2016/10/10/Bus-set-alight-during-Wits-protests>.
- Opoku-Asare, N. A. A., & Siaw, A. O. (2015). Rural-urban disparity in students' academic performance in visual arts education: Evidence from over six senior high schools in Kumasi, Ghana. *SAGE Open*, 5(4), 1-14. doi: 10.1177/2158244015612523.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research* (Vol. 2). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Pike, G. R., & Kuh, G. D. (2005). First-and second-generation college students: A comparison of their engagement and intellectual development. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(3), 276-300.
- Pretorius, M., & Blauuw, D. (2014). Happiness among first-year students at a comprehensive tertiary institution: An exploratory study. *Journal of Economic & Financial Sciences*, 7(2), 467-484.
- Rensburg, I. (2011). *Report on the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Provision of Student Housing at South African Universities*, Department of Higher Education and Training, South Africa.
- Rosenbaum, J. (2001). *Beyond college for all: Career paths for the forgotten half*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Rothmann, S., & Rothmann, S., Jr. (2010). Factors associated with employee engagement in South African organisations. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 36(1), 1-12. doi:10.4102/sajip.v36i1.925
- Salmela-Aro, K., & Upadaya, K. (2012). The Schoolwork Engagement Inventory: Energy, dedication and absorption (EDA). *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 28(1), 60-67.

- Salmela-Aro, K., & Upadaya, K. (2014). School burnout and engagement in the context of demands-resources model. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 84, 137-151.
- Shkullaku, R. (2013). The relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance in the context of gender among Albanian students. *European Academic research*, 1(4), 467-475.
- Sommer, M., & Dumont, K. (2011). Psychosocial factors predicting academic performance of students at a historically disadvantaged university. *South African Journal of Psychology* 41(3), 386-395.
- Statistics South Africa. (2001). *Investigation into appropriate definitions of urban and rural areas for South Africa: Discussion document/ Statistics South Africa* (Report No. 03-02-20). Pretoria: Author.
- Steyn, M. G., Harris, T., & Hartell C. G. (2014). Institutional factors that affect Black South African students' perceptions of early childhood teacher education. *South African Journal of Education*, 34(3), 1-6.
- Strydom, F., Kuh, G. & Mentz, M. (2010). Enhancing success in South Africa's higher education: Measuring student engagement. *Acta Academica*, 42(1), 259-278.
- Sullivan, T. A., Warren, E., & Westbrook, J. L. (2000). *The fragile middle class: Americans in debt*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Thomas, L. (2002) Student retention in higher education: The role of institutional habitus, *Journal of Education Policy*, 17(4), 423-442.
- Traag, T., & Van der Velden, R. K. W. (2006). Early school-leaving in the Netherlands: the role of family resources, school composition and background characteristics in early school-leaving in lower secondary education. *Irish Educational Studies*, 30(1), 45-62.
- Türkdoğan, T. & Duru, E. (2012). The role of basic needs fulfilment in prediction of subjective wellbeing among University Students. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 12(4), 2440-2446.
- Van Breda, A. D. (2013). Psychosocial vulnerability of social work students. *Social Work Practitioner Researcher*, 25(1), 19-35.
- Van Breda, A. D. (2017). Students are human too: Psychosocial vulnerability of first-year students at the University of Johannesburg. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 31(5), 246-262.
- Van den Heuvel, M., Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2010). Personal resources and work engagement in the face of change. In A. B. Bakker & M. Leiter (Eds.), *Work Engagement: A handbook of essential theory and research* (pp. 54-68). New York, NY: Psychology Press.

- Wade, B. L. (2009). *UNISA social work students' experiences of trauma: An exploratory study from a person-centred perspective* (Doctoral thesis). University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Wilcox, P., Winn, S., & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). 'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 30*(6), 77-722.
- Xanthopoulou, D., Bakker, A. B., Dollard, M. F., Demerouti, E., Schaufeli, W. B., Taris, T. W., & Schreurs, P. J. G. (2007). When do job demands particularly predict burnout? The moderating role of job resources. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 22*, 766-786.
- Yorgason, J. B., Linville, D., & Zitzman, B. (2008). Mental health among college students: Do those who need services know about them? *Journal of American College Health, 57*(2), 17-181.
- Zulu, C. (2005). Academic reading ability of first-year students: What's high school performance or prior exposure to academic reading got to do with it? *Southern African Linguistics & Applied Language Studies, 23*, 111-123.
- Zulu, C. (2007). First-year university L2 readers' patterns of performance in a test of academic reading ability. *Language Matters, 38*, 316-331.
- Zulu, C. (2008). An exploratory study of first-year students at a historically Black university campus in South Africa: Their academic experiences, success and failure. *Africa Education Review, 5*, 30-47.
- Zulu, C. (2011). Empowering first year (post-matric) students in basic research skills: A strategy for education for social justice. *South African Journal of Education, 31*, 447-457.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter provides the conclusions of the present study's general and specific objectives as presented in Chapter 1. Thereafter, the limitations are pointed out and recommendations made for the individual, university, and future research.

Conclusions

The main aim of the present research was to explore first-year students' experiences of their demands and available resources at a rural-based university delivery site, as viewed from the perspective of the support structures. This aim was formulated to inform a theoretical framework tailor-made for a South African university rural-based campus. This instrument was based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demrouti, 2017, 2018), which is well-researched in the work context and has recently been applied to the educational context. Due to limited existing research on the demands and resources experienced by first-year students, particularly in rural universities, the study aimed to provide more information for a comprehensive framework on this topic. This main aim was broken down into specific objectives, which are expounded below.

Objective 1

The first specific objective of the study was to establish the demands and resources that first-year university students, studying at rural universities, experience. Job demands is conceptualised as "those physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and is associated with certain physiological costs." Job resources, on the other hand, can be defined as "those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 274).

The present research was based on studies that used the JD-R theory as conceptual framework (e.g. Rothmann & Mokgele, 2010; Cilliers, Mostert & Nel, 2017; Salmela-Aro & Updyaya, 2014; Robbins, Roberts and Sarris, 2015). From these studies, the present study identified the more

prevalent demands and resources. The main demands that were measured were found to be: inferior education; lack of financial resources; hampered access to information; English as medium of communication; insufficient technological skills; and lack of access to accommodation. The main resources emerged as: competent academic staff; social support; personal resources that include academic preparedness; and motivation and engagement. Further resources were identified as computer literacy; psychological services; and access to accommodation.

The present study provided an overview of the demands and resources measured by the studies that applied the JD-R theory as framework to the student context. The main demands that were investigated were subjective workload and the pressure to perform as a competent professional. Other study demands that were measured concern the workload students must face and the time pressure to meet their deadlines successfully in order to reach their study goals.

Additional study demands involved the pace and amount of work and cognitive learning. Further study resources include social and supervisor support, the nature of the task, lecturer relations, and social support of peers. Finally, study resources also covered support by family, lecturers and friends, as well as opportunities for growth and development. From their side, Salmela-Aro and Updyaya (2014) used the JD-R theory to test the impact of study demands and study resources within the school environment.

In the present study, demands were perceived as presenting a challenge to study-related goals, while resources were viewed as helping students achieve such goals. In the study by Salmela-Aro and Updyaya (2014), no specific demands and resources were measured. Instead, participants were asked to evaluate the extent they have progressed towards achieving a goal and how challenging this goal was.

Objective 2

The second specific objective of the study was to explore the demands and resources that first-year university students experience at a rural-based university's delivery site, from the perspective of the student support structures. Five broad themes were identified in the literature, which provided a framework for discussion, viz.: the complex lives of first-year students; the nature of the academic environment; the economic experiences of studying; accommodation; and facilities and transition to university: adjustments and expectations. The findings of the present study correlate with those of

literature. The results help expand existing literature, by providing a holistic framework to assess student demands and resources as viewed from the perspectives of the support structures.

Theme 1: Based on the results of the present study, the complexity of first-year student life indicated personal crises that first-year students experienced such as problems from home, issues with parents, and mental health. These problems include pressures to perform and adjust well at university. Pillay and Ngcobo (2010) refer to the high stress levels that are a source of concern, especially since it impede students' functioning at university. Similarly, Coles and Coleman (2010) stress the importance for universities in the rural community to take the first step in ensuring psychological services are accessible to students to mitigate mental health challenges.

In the present study, findings showed that students rely on their personal resources, which leads to growth and responsibility. Similarly, students experience individual growth that allows them to deal with their study demands through self-motivation, self-awareness, resilience, social skills, and the recognition of cause and effect in their personal choices. This concurs with the study of Mathotyana, Van Rooyen and Du Randt (2015) who point out that some students tend to develop personal behaviours and strategies that help them complete their studies successfully.

The results of the present study furthermore affirmed the importance of formal psychological resources that should help first-year students adjust to university academically and socially; and which should be available on- and off-campus. These services include on-campus facilities such as the in-house psychologist, intern psychologists, registered counsellors, guidance from lay counsellors, and career counselling. Even though these resources are available, it is necessary to be aware of possible problems associated with such services. Mathotyana et al. (2015) emphasise that, despite available health services on campus, these are under-utilised due to the "perceived stigma" and lack of privacy. In addition, Yorgason, Lonville and Zitzman (2008) found that some students simply were uninformed about the mental health services rendered on campus.

In addition to the formal dimension, the results showed the importance of informal resources and support. These include first-year students reaching out to staff members as well as relying on friends and fellow students who follow the same modules. Other studies on student adjustment indicate that perceived social support is extremely important to consider and may help individuals acclimatise to student life (Retief & Thata, 2008).

Theme 2: The nature of the academic environment was highlighted in the present study. According to the participants, first-year students experience high study-related workloads. Students find it difficult to write and cite academic references correctly because they lack the exposure to academic writing. English, as a medium of learning and academic communication, is considered as a challenge for first-year students. According to Sader and Gabela (2017), first-years find English, as second or third language as a barrier to participate fully in class. The students process thoughts in their mother tongue, which is not that easy to translate into English.

Various other studies affirm that academic preparedness is vital for success at university (McMillan & Barrie, 2012). Unfortunately, students from rural high schools experience first-year level at university as extremely taxing (Zulu, 2011). The primary reason is the inferior quality of rural schooling in South Africa leaving students unprepared for their first year at university (Breier, 2007). Kapp and Bangeni (2011) identify the main challenge that students from rural backgrounds experience as lack of academic literacy, which includes reading, writing, and processing of information.

Regarding academic support, peer mentors are trained to assist first-year students academically. Senior students also help first-years handle the academic challenges they encounter. As a result, first-years tend to relate better with the senior students, compared to certain lecturers. Peer support could also be effective, as students can usually relate more easily to peers. This view is in accordance with Steyn, Harris and Hartell, (2011) who stress that empowering rural post-matric students in their first year will help them develop critical academic skills they require to participate successfully in the university's educational experience.

Furthermore, the results of the present study showed that certain lecturers were unsupportive. For example, they did not provide feedback on assignments to the students, to help the latter learn from mistakes in their work. Fraser and Killen (2005) emphasised the importance that lecturers identify different strategies and methods to teach students. The lecturers should understand that a single strategy or teaching method will not meet all the students' needs. Responses from the present study indicated other challenges that first-year students experience, namely overcrowded lecture halls and a disproportionate student-lecturer ratio in certain modules. However, participants pointed out that there are students who utilise physical infrastructure positively, for example the university library and computer laboratories, academic development centre, and campus Internet (Wi-Fi).

Theme 3: The economic experience of studying is highlighted widely in literature. Most South African university students, especially those from rural communities, cannot afford the cost of tertiary studies (Pillay & Thwala, 2012). The reason is that rural families are the most impoverished (McMillan & Barrie, 2012). The financial officers working with first-year affairs made it clear in their responses that financial problems are a major source of stress for first-year students. These financial officers further reported a dire lack of bursaries and funding opportunities for university students, especially those from previously disadvantaged communities. The financial challenges these students face outweigh the fact that bursaries are available, seeing that they are not that readily accessible (Diab, Flack, Mabuza & Moolman, 2015) and are extremely limited (McMillan & Barrie, 2012).

Breier (2007) identifies issues such as high university fees, cost of accommodation, food and textbooks, which could prevent first-year rural students from accessing university. This is mainly due to the financial burden on their families. Participants labelled the financial matters as “hidden costs”. Such financial challenges include but are not limited to: costs for transport to and from campus, textbooks, data/Internet for studies as well as the problem of acquiring food and accommodation on and off campus.

The results indicated further that information on funding was not readily accessible for rural students to apply. This was mainly due to lack of Internet access, which reduced their chances to obtain funding. Sader and Gabela (2017) point out that technological illiteracy is a factor preventing students from accessing important information on lectures, bursaries, and upcoming university events. Chetty (2014) emphasises that students will be able to apply online if they have access to Internet facilities.

Theme 4: Accommodation and facilities, and particularly the different challenges and resources facing on-and off-campus students, emerged from the data. Access to accommodation and lack of access to on-campus residences were prominent issues, due to the limited available accommodation . According to Monako’s (2009), the high number of first-year students who access Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and require accommodation on campus could be challenging for both students and university management due to limited space on the campus. Furthermore, Nel, Troskie-de Bruin and Britzer (2009) point out that the advantage of living in a university hostel is that friendships form to facilitate a support network – an essential resource for first-year students. However, many students found sharing a room with a stranger as unnerving since it would be their

first time in a new environment where they engage with new people (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005).

The present study also highlighted the conflict due to different values and interests between students who share rooms. Living off-campus for first-year rural students implies limited social contact opportunities with fellow students, which is important for their learning and development (Mudau, 2017). The findings from the present study showed that students living off-campus face several challenges such as being exposed to crime and theft, compared to students who lived on-campus. However, the results showed that certain students who lived off-campus have, as a resource, access to university-accredited accommodation and transport supplied by the university.

Another challenge for students was that activities, classes and orientation take place on weekends, early in the morning, or late in the evening. This is problematic for students who have transport challenges. According to Mbara and Celliers (2013), the disadvantage of living off-campus is the considerable amount of time students spend commuting to the university, coupled by unreliable public transport systems. As a result, students may arrive late at the campus, tired or miss lectures altogether, which clearly hampers their studies.

Theme 5: The final theme addressed the adjustments and expectations linked to the transition from school to university. Students entering tertiary education institutions are from diverse backgrounds and their ages vary (Gordon, Reid & Petocz, 2010). Background differences vary and may include culture, attitudes, values, language, socio-economic status, education, ethnicity, and religion (Bruce, Klopper & Mellish, 2011). Participants in the present study identified the forming of friendships as an essential part of adjusting to a new environment and embracing diversity. Other studies point out positive resources that can contribute to rural first-year students' prospering at university. These factors were found to be: sound career choices, competent academic staff, enough support, and a comprehensive retention strategy at institutional or faculty level (Retief & Thata 2008). This includes aspects such as academic preparedness, motivation, and students' engagement (Pascarella & Terenzini 2005). However, participants in the present study reported that first-year students experience the new environment as individualistic and achievement driven, which means they must adjust to doing things differently.

The findings from the present study also indicated that some rural first-years were first-generation students whose families at home expected them to prosper, in order to complete their studies and acquire jobs to improve their lives. These results are in line with various studies indicating that

first-generation students more often are from lower-income families (Penrose 2002; McCarron & Inkelas 2006).

Finally, participants highlighted political unrests, which erupt during first-years' adjustment to university (e.g. #Fees-Must-Fall campaign⁴), as a major demand first-years face in their transition to university. Participants mentioned that the violent unrests occurring on campus resulted in the destruction of university property and intimidation of staff. Motekwe (2017) reports about buildings and vehicles at several universities that were set alight in the waves of protests by rioting students.

Overall, the results indicated unique experiences of rural students who face financial, educational and information challenges. These challenges stem firstly, from their geographic location in under-resourced, rural areas. Their socio-economic circumstances hamper their access to educational facilities and infrastructure. In addition, these students lack high-quality linguistic input such as development of critical language and literacy skills in their early years. A further challenge identified in the study was lack of access to computers and the Internet for students to apply at universities and access to information relevant to bursaries and other possible available financial resources.

Participants highlighted a lack of recreational facilities as a challenge at the institution since students could not leave the site for recreation. Television rooms, termed "recreation halls", where students play pool and watch television, were converted into classrooms. Furthermore, participants mentioned efforts by the university to relieve financial strain. In this regard, they referred to the "meal-a-day" initiative, which is a programme providing food packages to students from disadvantaged communities who lack finances to buy food for themselves. This was found to be an important resource for disadvantaged students, although students who partook were stigmatised as "poor".

Limitations of the research

Although the present study made contributions to the literature on demands and resources that first-year students experience, certain limitations had to be factored in.

⁴ South Africa's student protests associated with the "#FeesMustFall" movement, demanded free and decolonised education (Ngcobo, Manyathela and Bateman 2016).

Firstly, the study explored only the experiences of support structures from a specific rural university. These structures collectively could provide in-depth experiences of their dealings with the demands experienced by rural first-year students and the resources available to them. However, the results do not account for the environments of other HEIs, which may present different demands and resources.

Secondly, interviews conducted on student support structures was the only source of data collection. It is possible that inclusion of additional methods could unfold greater understandings of the phenomena through triangulation of methods that allow different modes of expression than in-depth discussions alone.

Thirdly, the participants were invited to converse in their mother-tongue (Setswana). Findings showed that certain students were comfortable with English as a medium of instruction and perceive themselves as competent in spoken English. Nevertheless, language barriers led to unclear self-expression, which prevented certain participants from providing in-depth responses.

Fourthly, several interruptions took place during video-conference interviews due to the loss of network connection. In addition., despite the “Do Not Disturb” sign on the doors, sporadic interruptions occurred during face-to-face interviews as well, which affected the flow of the conversations. It was also found that information was not shared since participants would lose their train of thought.

Finally, although valuable insight has been gained into the demands and resources that first-year students experience, there was a deficiency due to the *qualitative* nature of the study and its focus on a specific contextual experience. The findings could not be generalised to other contexts or students to improve generalisability.

Recommendations

The recommendations that can be drawn from the findings, focus on the individual (students), the institution, and future research.

Recommendations for the individual (students)

The findings of the present study provide valuable insight for individuals regarding the demands and resources encountered by first-year students at a rural university. Considering these findings, recommendations can be made for individuals (i.e. first-year students).

Firstly, it must be remembered that people do not necessarily experience demands and resources in the same way. Certain demands may be viewed in a positive light; conversely, certain resources may be viewed negatively based on individual circumstances.

Secondly, students must discern the challenges they face. This would help them approach the appropriate support structures and help them adjust to university academically and socially. Students should be aware of the two types of support structures:

- *formal* – psychologists, counsellors, psychiatrists, social workers near the campus; and
- *informal* – House-parents, residence wardens, lecturers, financial officers, older students, peer helpers and friends. Students must utilise and capitalise on available resources that will help them function optimally in their new environment.

Thirdly, first-year students must understand that they are on their own and should take personal responsibility by learning the cause-and-effect of choices they make. The support structures expect of first-year students to develop their own personal resources by dealing with their study demands through self-motivation, self-awareness, resilience, and the necessary social skills. Some first-year students go out, attempt to make friends and find out which students are doing well in class, form study groups, and improve their learning. Therefore, more students are encouraged to use available information for their own benefit and utilise resources that will contribute to their personal development (e.g. attending orientation programmes).

Fourthly, regarding financial challenges that first-year students face, it is recommended that matric learners should attend the presentations which universities deliver at their high schools. This will inform aspiring students about requirements for university entry as well as the offered courses, funding opportunities (bursaries and loans), and accommodation (on-and off-campus). In this way, learners will be prepared and apply on time before arriving on campus.

Furthermore, aspiring students must take the responsibility to enquire about bursaries at their municipality offices or apply for NSFAS (National Student Financial Aid Scheme) and other bursaries during their matric year. This will help prepare them financially for their first-year at university. Another opportunity is to take advantage of the books that senior students make

available to new students who cannot afford their own textbooks. In addition, students living on-campus should utilise basic resources available to them (e.g. Wi-Fi) to enhance their learning.

Fifthly, to counter academic challenges, the Academic Development Centre (ADC) and the Academic Literacy (AGLE) modules are available for first-year students to practice reading and writing skills. Peer mentors and academic facilitators may help first-years with language issues, advising them how to approach lecturers for clarity on academic work or to query marks. Furthermore, the university library, as well as IT and reading laboratories with Internet access on campus are available resources for students to utilise.

Sixthly, students can adapt to their new environment by participating in social activities such as sport, poetry sessions, games, and cultural activities to become part of the residence community. Off-campus students can form groups and partake in riding clubs to commute between their homes and campus for personal safety.

Finally, it must be emphasised to first-year students that they should empower themselves. They must understand that university level requires independence and responsibility. Should they need extra help or additional support, they must take the responsibility and make the effort to seek for it. In this regard, they should realise the importance of attending orientation at the beginning of the year. These students should understand that these sessions provide them with the relevant social, academic and other information to help navigate this transition to university life. Such orientation include knowledge of the lecture halls' location, the student counselling centre, the library's functioning and other important aspects related to university life.

Recommendations for the HEI

Students and support structures are stakeholders within university communities. Academic, non-academic and support staff are first-year students' primary point of contact and sources of assistance. Against this background, certain recommendations can be made for the institution.

Firstly, intensified efforts are needed from student support structures to understand and have a positive influence on first-year students' coping with the various demands. The aim is to bring these students to the planned level of equity and excellence. This can be done by developing and utilising programmes that can help them adapt and make informed decisions about their social and academic life and progress toward a career.

Secondly, the university should assist and inform first-year students about personal resources through workshops and presentations. Such discussions should empower and equip students to be self-sufficient. In addition, the support structures can be employed more strategically:

- The counselling centre should be arranged to be more private, student-friendly and welcoming, to avoid the perception of students being stigmatised.
- The university and support structures must teach students skills and how to approach lecturers or attend consultation hours (for one-on-one sessions with lecturers). Through engaging with lecturers, students will gain the confidence that will prepare them for the world of work, where they will be involved with colleagues on every level.
- The services of counsellors, peer mentors, and other service providers must be advertised all over campus, informing students where to find assistance.
- The appointed students providing these services must be screened beforehand to ensure they will not take advantage of first-year students.

Thirdly, regarding financial aid, the university must be more vigorous and proactive in advertising available bursaries recruitment drives in high schools. One participant mentioned a fundraising initiative to assist students, handled by the Dean of Students and the Campus Student Representative Council (CSRC). Thus, a follow up is recommended to ascertain whether this initiative is still driven and how it works. The finance department can also be included during the Winter School's career exhibition for high school learners, to provide more information on available financial resources for first-year students.

Fourthly, there is concern that the university responds late to students' applications, especially those for accommodation. Thus, application processes must be streamlined so that students know on time whether they have been accepted for accommodation on-campus. This would allow them time for alternative arrangements to apply for accommodation off-campus if they were unsuccessful. Furthermore, the university must create a form of support for students living off campus, especially those in their first year. The university should utilise its resource structures to orientate first-year students on "what life is like when off campus" and how to utilise the services which landlords provide.

Fifthly, regarding psychological demands: Participants pointed out that the campus as setting for the present research lacks a social worker. As a result, a large amount of students problems must be

handled by the only psychologist on site, who is not equipped to help with certain challenges (e.g. family problems or food security). Therefore, it is recommended that HEIs employ a full-time qualified social worker on campus to assist students with the various demands and challenges.

Finally, first-year students seem to be aware of an orientation programme, but its importance is not highlighted or emphasised sufficiently. The responses showed that the university formed an impression that orientation only applies to students living on campus, which is an unacceptable perception. Thus, it is recommended that the importance of orientation is stressed for first-year students. Thereby, first-years will meet fellow students following the same course and get acquainted with the various support structures as well as the personnel who will deliver their teaching and learning. Since several aspiring students from rural areas lack internet access, the university can use pamphlets and booklets to distribute information about the university that will be helpful for high school learners from such areas.

Recommendations for future research

The results of the study make an important contribution to the larger project, of which this study forms part. The present study provided a sound basis, tailored to the South African HEI context. As stated previously, the research was carried out at a rural university campus, therefore further studies focusing on other HEIs within rural South Africa would expand the framework. It is thus recommended that similar studies be conducted in other rural campuses and geographical locations. This would enable researchers to investigate the demands and resources experienced by first year-students over a wider range.

Furthermore, other stakeholders such as parents, family members, high school staff, landlords, should be targeted as participants in the recommended further studies. This would provide different perspectives on the demands and resources experienced by rural first-year students.

The challenge of future research is to develop a scientific and validated model that would help explore, measure, and monitor the experiences of first-year students. Valid, reliable and culturally-fair instruments building on the present study can be constructed to measure demands and resources of first-year students in a rural university setting. A further recommendation would be a comparative study that utilises these measuring models to test and ascertain the different experiences of demands and resources between first-years from a rural- and an urban-based university campus.

Finally, the proposed interventions for the university must be implemented on a primary, secondary and tertiary level, which means that they should be implemented from school level (Grade 1) upwards. It can be done through the department of education providing improved educational opportunities, learning outcomes and personal development of learners. Furthermore, by employing qualified teachers who show competency in the subjects they teach.

References

- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2018). Multiple levels in job demands-resources theory: Implications for employee wellbeing and performance. In E. Diener, S. Oishi, & L. Tay (Eds.), *Handbook of wellbeing*. Salt Lake City, UT: DEF. doi:nobascholar.com
- Breier, M. (2007). *Pathways through higher education to the labour market: Factors affecting student retention, graduation, and destination. Case study report: University of the Western Cape*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council.
- Bruce, J. C., Klopper, H. C., & Mellish, J. M. (2011). *Teaching and learning the practice of nursing* (5th ed.). Pearson Education South Africa.
- Chetty, R. (2014). Class dismissed? Youth resistance and the politics of race and class in South African education. *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, 28(1), 88-102. doi: 10.1080/02560046.2014.883692
- Coles, M. E., & Coleman, S. L. (2010). Barriers to treatment seeking for anxiety disorders: Initial data on the role of mental health literacy. *Depression & Anxiety*, 27(1), 63-71.
- Diab, P., Flack, P. S., Mabuza, L. H., & Moolman, H. (2015). Curriculum challenges faced by rural-origin health science students at South African medical schools. *African Journal of Health Professions Education*, 7, 51-54. doi:10.7196/AJHPE.390.
- Fraser W., & Killen, R. (2005). The perceptions of students and lecturers of some factors influencing academic performance at two South African universities. *Perspectives in Education*, 23(1), 25-40.
- Gordon, S., Reid, A., & Petocz, P. (2010). Educators' conceptions of students diversity in their classes. *Studies in Higher Education*, 35, 961-974.
- Kapp, R., & Bangeni, B. (2011). A longitudinal study of students' negotiation of language, literacy and identity. *Southern African Linguistics & Applied Language Studies*, 29(2), 197-208.
- Matshotyana, N.V., Van Rooyen, R. M., & Du Randt, S. (2015). Experiences of first-year nursing students at a public nursing college in South Africa. *Africa Journal of Nursing & Midwifery*, 17, 105-121.
- Mbara, T. C., & Celliers, C. (2013). Travel patterns and challenges experienced by University of Johannesburg off-campus students. *Journal of Transport & Supply Chain Management*. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/jtscm.v7i1.114>

- McCarron, G. P., & Inkelas, K. K. (2006). The gap between educational aspirations and attainment for first-generation college students and the role of paternal involvement. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(5), 534-549.
- McMillan, J. W., & Barrie, R. B. (2012). Recruiting and retaining rural students: Evidence from a Faculty of Dentistry in South Africa. *Rural & Remote Health*. Retrieved from <http://www.rrh.org.au>
- Monako, D. (2009, September 23). Varsities run out of housing. *Mail & Guardian*, pp. ???.
- Mudau, T. J. (2017). An exploration of the challenges faced by students residing off-campus in rural universities in South Africa. *Gender & Behaviour, 15*(4), 10568-10580.
- Mutekwe, E. (2017). Unmasking ramifications of the fees-must-fall-conundrum in higher education institutions in South Africa: A critical perspective. *Perspective in Education, 35*, 142-154. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v35i2.11>
- Nel, C., Troskie-de Bruin, C., & Bitzer, E. (2009). Students' transition from school to university: Possibilities for a pre-university intervention. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 23*(5), 974-991.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Penrose, A. M. (2002). Academic literacy perceptions and performance: Comparing first-generation and continuing-generation students. *Research in the Teaching of English, 36*(4), 437-461.
- Pillay, A. L., & Ngcobo, H. S. B. (2010). Sources of stress and support among rural-based first-year university students: An exploratory study. *South African Journal of Psychology, 40*(3), 234-240.
- Pillay, A. L., & Thwala, J. D. (2012). Are rural students from previously disadvantaged communities prepared for psychology studies at university? *Journal of Psychology in Africa, 22*(3), 419-424.
- Retief, E., & Thata, B. M. (2008). *The link between an academic library and student retention: A case study*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Sader, S. B., & Gabela, N. P. (2017). Spatialities of widening participation: Narratives of first year students receiving financial aid. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 31*(1), 227-242. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.20853/31-1-1056>
- Steyn, M. G., Harris, T., & Hartell, G. C. (2014). Institutional factors that affect Black South African students' perceptions of early childhood teacher education. *South African Journal of Education, 34*(3), 1-7.
- Wilcox, P., Winn, S., & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). "It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people": The role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 30*(6), 707-722.

- Yorgason, J. B., Linville, D., & Zitzman, B. (2008). Mental health among college students: Do those who need services know about them? *Journal of American College Health, 57*(2), 17-181.
- Zulu, C. (2011). Empowering first year (post-matric) students in basic research skills: A strategy for education for social justice. *South African Journal of Education, 31*, 447-457.