

Student satisfaction in open distance learning in a BEd Hons programme

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my husband Aaron and our children Tlotlo and Thapelo for their love and support throughout the many years that I have spent on this project to realise a life-time ambition.

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ABSTRACT

Many students in South Africa are unable to cope with the academic demands of tertiary education as they are not fully prepared for Higher Education (HE). Various inefficiencies in the South African HE system have been identified, including low throughput rates, student dissatisfaction, unsatisfying graduation rates, learner dropouts, learner repetition, motivation, self-efficacy, attitude, personality differences, maturation, the retention of failing learners and unit costs. Student performance and satisfaction cause concern for the government and the HE sector.

The purpose of this study is to understand student satisfaction amongst Open Distance Learning BEd Hons students. It further aims to improve student satisfaction and quality in the programme by recognising the context sensitive needs, expectations and experiences of students from different cultural-language groups, as well as constructing guidelines to improve satisfaction. The purposeful sampling consisted of Second year BEd Hons teacher-students enrolled for open distance learning at the School for continuing teacher education (SCTE). A total of 34 students participated in the study. This number comprised of fifteen students from the focus-group interviews and nineteen students who completed open-ended questionnaires. Students were chosen according to three criteria dimensions: major language groups, gender and number of years teaching experience. This study followed a qualitative investigation of two semi-structured, open-ended focus-group interviews in the format of conversations, as well as documentary analysis of the teaching and learning policy of the North West University (NWU), and an open-ended questionnaire. The data were tape-recorded for accurate transcription and analysed by using Atlas.ti™. Through the use of Atlas.ti™, I constructed categories of recurring patterns in the dataset, and explored the relationships of these categories. Different strategies were used to enhance validity and reliability respectively.

The findings indicated that students' satisfaction with HE environment is influenced by the quality of the programmes offered to them, communication between lecturers/facilitators and students, environment at the learning centres and the support that students received from HEI. The students in their capacity as clients with Higher education institutions (HEIs) are influenced by the support they receive from their work environment, as well as the level of appreciation they receive from HEI regarding their own culture and values. They also value

the environment they experience during course facilitations at the HEIs. The various student attributes also play a significant part in their satisfaction levels towards the HEIs.

Findings also highlighted that students were not satisfied with the support they received from the Open distance learning (ODL) unit. It is clear that the students' perception of the quality of the programme influences their level of satisfaction. Students are mostly satisfied with the quality of the programme but they feel the communication as well the support from HEI and ODL is not adequate. The students indicated that HEI and ODL do not display sufficient understanding and concern for students. They feel there should be a greater commitment from HEI and ODL to understand and consider the profiles of the students. HEI and ODL should actively consider the background, culture, values, attributes, and personal, as well as domestic circumstances of their students. The BEd Hons programme is a valuable and popular programme, but the responsibility rests with both HEI and ODL to ensure that both the quality and delivery of this programme are enhanced and improved so as to guarantee higher levels of satisfaction amongst students.

Keywords

Open distance learning

Student satisfaction

Higher Education

Learning experience

Student needs

Students' perceptions

Student fears

Quality of programmes

Environmental satisfaction

Student attributes

OPSOMMING

Talle studente in Suid-Afrika kom nie die mas op in terme van die akademiese eise wat deur Hoër Onderwys nie aan hulle gestel word nie, aangesien hulle nie voorbeeld is vir Hoër Onderwys nie. Verskillende ondoeltreffendhede is in die Suid-Afrikaanse Hoër Onderwysstelsel geïdentifiseer, insluitend lae deurvloeyfers, ontevredenheid by studente, onbevredigende graueringsgetalle, uitval van studente, herhaling, motivering, self-doeltreffendheid, gesindheid, persoonlikheidsverskille, volwassewording, die retensie van leerders wat nie slaag nie en die koste van eenhede. Die prestasie en ook die tevredenheid/satisfaksie van studente veroorsaak kommer by die regering en die Hoër Onderwyssektor.

Die doel van hierdie studie is om die tevredenheid van studente te begryp wat die BEd Hons deur middel van Oopafstandsleer (OAL) doen. Dit het verder ten doel om die studente se tevredenheid asook die kwaliteit van die program te verbeter deur binne die konteks die behoeftes, verwagtinge en ervarings van die studente van verskillende taal- en kultuurgroepe te identifiseer, en riglyne daar te stel om hul tevredenheid te verbeter.

Die doelgerigte steekproef het bestaan uit tweedejaar BEd Hons-studente wat deur OAL aan die Skool vir Voortgesette Onderwysersopleiding (SVO), NWU, studeer. Vier en dertig studente het aan die studie deelgeneem: vyftien aan die fokusgroep-onderhoude en negentien wat die oop-einde-vraelys voltooi het. Studente is gekies volgens drie kriterium-dimensies: hooftaal-groepe, geslag en aantal jare onderwyservaring. Die studie het 'n kwalitatiewe ondersoek behels van twee semi-gestruktureerde oop-einde fokusgroeponderhoude, ook in gespreksformaat. Die studie benut ook 'n dokumentanalise van die onderrig-en leerbeleid van die NWU, en 'n oop-eindevraelys. Data is met band opgeneem vir akkurate transkripsie, en ge-analiseer deur van Atlas.ti TMgebruik te maak. Hierdeur het ek kategorieë van herhalende patrone in die datastel geïdentifiseer en die verband hiertussen ondersoek. Strategieë is gebruik om die betroubaarheid van die studie te verseker.

Die bevindings het aangedui dat die tevredenheid van studente met die HO-omgewing beïnvloed word deur die kwaliteit van die programme aan hulle gebied, kommunikasie tussen dosente/fasiliteerders en student, die omgewing by die studiesentrums en die ondersteuning wat hulle van die HOI kry. Studente in hul kapasiteit as klante van die HOI's word veral beïnvloed deur die ondersteuning wat hulle van hul werkomgewing ontvang, asook deur die

waardering wat hulle van die HOI kry ten opsigte van hul eie kultuur en waardes. Hulle heg ook waarde aan die omgewing wat hulle ervaar tydens kursusfasilitering aan die HOI's. Die verskillende karaktereenskappe van die studente speel ook 'n belangrike rol in hul vlakke van tevredenheid met die HOI's.

Bevindings het ook getoon dat studente nie tevrede is met die ondersteuning wat hulle van die OAL-eenheid ontvang nie. Dis duidelik dat hulle persepsie van die kwaliteit van die program die vlak van hul tevredenheid beïnvloed. Studente is meesal tevrede met die kwaliteit van die program, maar hulle voel dat die kommunikasie sowel as die ondersteuning van die HOI en die OAL nie voldoende is nie. Hulle het aangedui dat die HOI en die OAL nie genoeg begrip toon vir en bemoedienis maak met hul studente nie. Hulle verwag meer toewyding en begrip van die HOI en OAL om hul bepaalde profiel te verstaan. Beide die HOI en OAL behoort die agtergrond, kultuur, waardes, karaktereenskappe en persoonlike sowel as huislike omstandighede van hulle studente baie meer in ag te neem. Die BEd Honsprogram is 'n waardevolle en gewilde program, maar die HOI en OAL bly verantwoordelik vir die verdere verbetering van hierdie program en die aanbieding daarvan om hoër vlakke van tevredenheid by studente te bewerkstellig.

Sleutelwoorde

Oopafstandslereer

Studentetevredenheid

Hoër Onderwys

Leerervaring

Studentebehoefte

Studente persepsies

Studentevrese

Kwaliteit van programme

Tevredenheid met omgewing

Studente se karaktereenskappe

SOLEMN DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

CERTIFICATE OF PROOFREADING AND EDITING

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CERTIFICATE ISSUED ON 15 MARCH 2011

I hereby declare that I have linguistically edited the dissertation
submitted by ms M Mdakane for the PHd degree.

Student satisfaction in open distance learning in a BEd Hons
programme



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ETHICAL CLEARANCE

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACE	Advanced certificate in education
BEd HONS	Honours in Education
CHE	Council of Higher Education
DL	Distance learning
ETQA	Education and Training Quality assurance
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher education Institution
HEIs	Higher education Institutions
HEQC	Higher education Quality Assurance
HU	Hermeneutic Unit
ICTS	Information and communication Technologies
NPDE	National professional Diploma in Education
NQF	National qualifications Framework
NWU	North-West University
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
ODL	Open Distance Learning
OLG	Open Learning Group
SA	South Africa
SAIDE	South African Institutions for Distance Education
SAQA	South African Qualifications authority
SCTE	School for continuing Teacher education
T & L	Teaching and Learning
TPD	Teacher professional development
TQM	Total quality management
UFS	University of Free state
UK	United Kingdom
UNISA	University of South Africa
UP	University of Pretoria
USA	United States of America

LIST OF ADDENDA

- Addendum 3.1: Background questionnaire to individual research participants
- Addendum 3.2: Focus group interview questions
- Addendum 3.3: Semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire
- Addendum 3.4: Hermeneutic Unit: Student satisfaction in ODL
- Addendum 3.5: Sound file of focus group 1 focus group interview
- Addendum 3.6: Sound file of focus group 2 focus group interview
- Addendum 3.7: Information letter to research participants in focus group interview
- Addendum 3.8: Information letter to research participants in completing open-ended questionnaire
- Addendum 3.9: Consent form for research participants
- Addendum 3.10: Ethics clearance from the North-West University
- Addendum 3.11: Atlas.ti™ demo program
- Addendum 3.12: Copy bundle of the hermeneutic unit: Student satisfaction in ODL

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION

1.1. General problem statement

In the current South African context, many students are not fully prepared for Higher Education (HE). They are unable to cope with the academic demands of tertiary education and consequently a significant number never graduate (Nair & Pillay, 2004:303; Paras, 2001:70; Roberts, 2006:220). According to the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2004), some of the major inefficiencies in the South African HE system include low throughput rates, student dissatisfaction, unsatisfying graduation rates, learner dropouts, learner repetition, motivation, self-efficacy, attitude, personality differences, maturation, the retention of failing learners and unit costs. Unsatisfactory student throughput rates and high dropouts result in the Government losing millions of Rand on student subsidy each year. HEIs suffer heavy losses with respect to subsidy income which is dependent on throughput rates (Nair & Pillay, 2004:303). The academic and professional development of Higher Education (HE) students is crucial for the socio-economic development of the country. Both government and the HE sector are therefore concerned with the performance and satisfaction of students (Fraser & Killen, 2005).

Research indicates that student satisfaction involves various aspects of tertiary education, including student needs, expectations, perceptions, values, learning experience, motivation, academic relationships, programme design, content of study material, resources, infrastructure, student support, etc. (Allen, Bourhis, Burrell, & Mabry, 2002; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Elliott & Healy, 2001; Liegler, 1997; Sahin, 2007). In order to attract and retain students, universities must identify and meet student expectations (Elliott & Healy, 2001:1). Sahin (2007) and Douglas et al. (2006) maintain that student recruitment and throughput rates in distance education are connected to student satisfaction and expectations. However, students' satisfaction in HE has been overlooked in the past by various researchers (Astin, 1993; DeBourgh, 1999; Navarro & Schoemaker, 2000). This could possibly be contributed to the fact that most dissatisfied students do complete their post-graduate studies regardless of their dissatisfaction. Also, in their study among college students, Bean and Bradley (1986:408), found that academic performance does not correlate significantly with student satisfaction, and that academic achievers are more honest about

their dissatisfaction than non-achievers. The relationship between student satisfaction, retention and throughput rates is therefore very complex, and more research is needed to ensure satisfactory retention and throughput rates.

In South Africa, distance learning and open distance learning modes are predominantly used for delivering professional in-service training to practising teachers across geographical distance and socio-economic barriers. Bolliger and Martindale (2004:44) describe distance education as instruction where students and teachers are separated by distance and context. ODL, also referred to as *flexible learning*, is a learner-centred distance learning approach that allows learners to choose when, where, how, and at what pace they want to learn (Kanuka & Conrad, 2003). Many HEIs, for example the Open University of the United Kingdom (OU of UK) (2009), the University of South Africa (UNISA) (2009) and the School of Continuing Teacher Education (SCTE) (2009) at the North-West University (NWU), offer distance education printed media, e-learning and contact sessions. Distance education affords access to a large and diverse student population of adult students and school leavers whose education needs would otherwise not be met. The South African Institution for Distance Education (SAIDE) (2011:3) reports that in 2004 more than 265,000 higher education students had been studying through distance education in South Africa. This presents around 36% of all HE students. Most of these students were studying part time. About 80% were over 23 years of age, more than 50% were women and 76% were African.

The SCTE offers three open distance learning programmes: the *Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)*, the *National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE)* and the *Honours in Education (BEd Hons)*. The SCTE also puts in place various initiatives to evaluate and encourage the active involvement of students, for example internal and external programme evaluations and SMS reminders. All academic matters and quality-related procedures are in the hands of the NWU, including the development, upgrading of study materials, training and retraining of facilitators, setting and moderation of exam papers, marking and moderation of assignments and exam papers, and monitoring of adherence to entry requirements of ODL qualifications. The SCTE regularly evaluates the programmes that are offered and encourages the active involvement of students, which includes internal and external programme evaluations (NWU, 2011). A team of internal programme evaluators continuously assesses programmes. The programme evaluators aim to promote and co-ordinate quality and ascertain improved service delivery, quality academic products, sustained competitive advantage and increased productivity. In order to achieve this, the quality assurance team ensures that the quality of the curricula is in accordance with national

and international requirements; they adhere to departmental and institutional requirements and include content that is technologically accessible and practice orientated.

Currently, no researchers at the SCTE of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) are investigating the student satisfaction of BEd Hons students. This study intends to qualitatively examine student satisfaction among a group of BEd Hons students. The BEd Hons programme of the NWU was aligned for both on and off campus students, therefore there should be no difference between the aspects of student satisfaction between on and off campus students. In a meta-analysis of previous research that compared student satisfaction of distance education students with that of on-campus students at higher education institutions (HEIs), Allen *et al.* (2002:83-97) found no differences between the satisfaction of on-campus and off-campus students. The experience of student satisfaction was therefore not dependent on the mode of delivery, and we can therefore not refer to student satisfaction in open-distance learning as opposed to student satisfaction in on-campus learning. While the mode of delivery differs, the aspects of student satisfaction appear to be similar. According to Creswell (2003:88), it is important to focus on a single phenomenon to be explored. The topic I explored in my study was student satisfaction of Open Distance Learning (ODL) BEd Hons students. Because of my involvement as a full time lecturer at the SCTE, I decided to qualitatively explore student satisfaction amongst a group of open-distance learning BEd Hons students, and to enhance student satisfaction amongst our BEd Hons ODL students, by making recommendations applicable to the BEd Hons programme for both on and off campus students, guided by my findings. While I take note of the meta-analysis of Allen *et al.*, the intention of this study was not to verify their findings, but to explore student satisfaction among ODL students. I combined the theoretical frameworks and models for student satisfaction identified by Aitken (1982), Allen *et al.* (2002), Astin (1993), Bean and Bradley (1986), Bollinger and Martindale (2004), Castles (2004), Elliott and Healy (2001) and Sahin (2007), to assist me in conceptualising this study. From these frameworks, I identified three main themes: (i) student satisfaction with HE; (ii) client satisfaction with HEIs; and (iii) student satisfaction with ODL. These aspects constitute the conceptual framework for this study of meeting of students' expectations, as well as improving quality of HE delivery through ODL.

Various research initiatives at the SCTE are currently evaluating student retention, throughput rates and contact class attendance. However, none of these studies specifically explore student satisfaction, for this involves human perceptions and experiences that are difficult to study from a quantitative approach through the analysis of inter alia student records and attendance registers. The critical question that arises is, How can the SCTE

increase student satisfaction in its BEd Hons programme? This calls for a qualitative exploration into the satisfaction of BEd Hons students at the SCTE, in support of quality education.

While the SCTE spends much effort and money on the internal and external evaluation of its programmes, currently no record of research exists on the student satisfaction of BEd Hons ODL students at the SCTE. Because student satisfaction contributes to the quality of education at the SCTE, I believe a study of this nature was imperative. I was interested in a deep understanding of the human experience of satisfaction, rather than mere quantitative correlations between student satisfaction, retention and throughput rates. A research study of this nature would deliver valuable qualitative insights into student satisfaction that could lead to the overall improvement of students' experience of distance education, and ultimately, the quality of open distance learning at the SCTE.

1.2 Review of relevant literature

Various theories and models relate to student satisfaction. Liegler (1997:357) describes student satisfaction as the degree to which students' needs and expectations are met concerning the curriculum design, course delivery, resources, student support, relationships with academic staff, etc. Student satisfaction is generally accepted as a short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of a student's educational experience, and results when actual performance meets or exceeds the student's expectations" (Elliott & Healy, 2001:2). It involves students' perceptions of tertiary education, including perceived value and learning experiences (Bollinger & Martindale, 2004:44). Astin (1993:278) regards student satisfaction as an "intermediate outcome" that is important because it influences the student's level of motivation, which is a psychological factor. Other aspects associated with student satisfaction include student characteristics, quality of relationships with faculty members, curriculum and instruction design, content and methods, student life, support services, resources and facilities (Astin, 1993:59). In HE, student satisfaction is viewed as a key psychological-affective outcome and one of the most direct measures of success in tertiary education (Astin, 1993; Jones, 2008:376). Aitken (1982:33) developed a structural model which identified two categories of student satisfaction, namely academic satisfaction and living satisfaction. Academic satisfaction includes, among others, expected minimum average for course, course satisfaction, isolation, satisfaction with major subject, satisfaction with instructors, and satisfaction with advisors. Living satisfaction, which refers more to on-campus students, includes peer relationships, satisfaction with room and hostel, isolation,

age of roommates, security, size of living area, quality of food, satisfaction with student councillors, etc. Elliott and Healy (2001:1-11) identified instructional effectiveness, campus climate and student centredness as practically significant aspects of student satisfaction. Bean and Bradley (1986:400) also identified social life, academic integrity, academic difficulty, class size and membership to student organizations as aspects of student satisfaction.

Castles (2004:168) argues that three main factors could affect the success rate and satisfaction of mature students: (a) social and environmental factors, (b) traumatic factors, and (c) intrinsic factors. Social and environmental factors include: the time and space available for study, study methods, support from significant others, accommodation, inclusion in social activities and friendship. Traumatic factors include: illness, bereavement, unemployment, lack of support from family members, caring for younger children or the elderly, and the level of adaptation of the students to the everyday stresses of life. Intrinsic factors include: students' attitudes, motivation and qualities such as persistence, hardiness, coping ability, approaches to study and learning styles. Sahin (2007:113) adds that many factors such as infrastructure, quality of support systems, quality of content and assessment, and peer support networks, may all influence student satisfaction and success in distance learning. Building on Castle's categories of factors, Qakisa-Makoe (2005) from UNISA, points out that many South African students come from families where they are the first generation to achieve a higher education qualification, and they are expected to adjust to new ways of learning and to learn independently. They have to make numerous and complex adjustments, including adapting to new teaching and learning strategies and mastering new learning skills (Allen *et al.*, 2002:85), coping with academic work while running households and pursuing careers, and accomplishing learning outcomes required by distance learning (Van Heerden, 1997:78).

Another important factor that could affect students' success is socio-cultural influences. There is insufficient South African research to indicate how students and lecturers from different cultures interact and interpret information for the purposes of learning (Shade, 1997:140). Qakisa-Makoe (2005:49) points out that cultural learning styles are often neglected in teaching and learning. In the South African context, Western and African cultures often share the same classroom, regardless of socio-cultural differences in the learning experience. For example, in Western cultures passive learners are perceived as uninterested. The Western ontology is mainly individualistic and secularly orientated, is predominantly competition driven and prefers individualistic work above group work (Qakisa-Makoe, 2005). On the other hand, Traditional African culture prefers collective values. The

Setswana saying: “*Motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe*,” which means a person is a person through other people, explains why many Africans prefer group work to individual achievement. However, these socio-cultural dimensions are constantly changing within society, especially as a result of cultural integration, westernization and globalization.

According to Bolliger and Martindale (2004:52) the major satisfaction indicators in distance education include: technological aspects, instructor issues, communication, course management, course web site, navigational components, interactivity and general information. Distance education programmes increasingly make use of a broad spectrum of learning technologies. These include traditional distance learning materials (study guides, tutorial letters, textbooks, time tables, information booklets), as well as Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (DVDs, educational software, telecommunication, Internet access to libraries, online learning environments, interactive TV, mobile learning) to enhance the abilities of lecturers and students to communicate with each other over distances (Akinsolua, 2005:62). New technologies add additional dimensions to learning: computer literacy, access to ICTs, technophobia, and e-readiness that may affect student success and satisfaction.

De Beer (2006:40) identified various problems that distance education students experience that may negatively affect student satisfaction and throughput rate: lack of learning ability and poor school preparation, selecting an inappropriate or unsuitable HEI, failure to assume responsibility, interference from psychological problems, lack of personal standards of quality, poor language skills, inappropriate choice of major subjects or learning areas, vagueness surrounding long-range goals, misunderstanding of the amount of work required, other social activities, and poor distance education delivery. In addition, Du Plessis *et al.* (2005:685) and Fraser and Killen (2005) list the following as problems distance education students experience by attempting to achieve the outcomes of specific modules in general: inappropriate prior learning, the impact of biographical factors such as home language which differs from the language of instruction, motivation, different approaches to studying, cultural expectations, time management skills, peer culture, student support structures offered by the university, administrative support services, guidance, and learning material support.

From the above exposition it becomes clear that various factors influence student satisfaction. Consequently a multi-dimensional approach was necessary. The main research question that arises is: *How can the SCTE improve student satisfaction and quality of education in its BEd Hons programme, by recognising the context sensitive needs, expectations and experiences of students from different cultural-language groups?*

1.3 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to reach a general qualitative understanding of student satisfaction amongst BEd Hons students, and if students are not satisfied, to construct guidelines to improve student satisfaction and quality of education in this programme by recognising the context sensitive needs, expectations and experiences of students from different cultural-language groups.

1.4 Research design and methodology

A qualitative approach was used in this study to investigate the student satisfaction of a small group of BEd Hons students enrolled at the SCTE. The qualitative subjective nature of this study nature falls in the Interpretive research paradigm because it measures the subjective contexts, experiences, beliefs, behaviours, practices, expectations, fears, needs, etc. of BEd Hons open distance learning students.

1.4.1 The proposed literature study

A focused literature study provided a theoretical and conceptual framework, to explore and to obtain insight into student satisfaction in both distance learning and on-campus education. Various databases, including EbscoHost, SAEpublication, Emerald and Sabinet online, were used to search for relevant journal articles and books. Key words that were used include: Student Satisfaction; Student Fears; Student Needs; Student Expectations; Distance Learning; Open Distance Learning; Off-Campus.

1.4.2 Research design

This study followed a qualitative investigation of semi-structured, open-ended focus-group interviews in the format of conversations (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Semi-structured open-ended focus-group interviews in the form of conversations were able to render thick, rich and in-depth data to explore and uncover understanding of student satisfaction among BEd Hons students (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam, 1998:3-25).

Qualitative research allowed me to explore cultural, historical, gender and situational interpretations of student satisfaction (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006:71). I am a Setswana

speaking person and have been teaching BEd Hons subjects at the SCTE for the past five years. My Setswana culture is a sub-division of the Sotho cultural group. We differ from the Nguni cultural group in our language, customs, rituals and attitude. For example, in general the Sotho people seem more submissive than the Nguni people, who in turn, are well known for their assertiveness. I interact with different cultural groups at the SCTE, including other African language groups, as well as Afrikaans and English speaking students. Qualitative focus-group interviews created an opportunity for me to hear different cultural viewpoints on satisfaction.

1.4.3 Document analysis

Documentary analysis was used where the teaching and learning policy of the NWU was analysed to compare policies and practices as teaching and learning play an important role in student satisfaction.

1.4.4 Site or social network selection

Second year BEd Hons students who enrolled for open distance learning at the SCTE were selected through a purposeful sampling strategy according to availability. Data were collected and analysed until no new information came to light, i.e. until the data were saturated. Students were purposefully selected according to three criteria dimensions: major language groups, gender, and number of years teaching experience (Table 3.1 and 3.2). Open distance learning student's active involvement in the second year modules of the BEd Hons programmes acted as the social network selection criteria. I obtained student information from the North-West University's student data-base with the assistance of Academic Administration in order to make an inclusive and purposeful selection of students, representative of different language and gender groups, including number of years teaching experience.

1.4.5 Researcher's role

According to Thietart (2007:183-184), the researcher's participation in group interviews can either be: (a) complete participation, i.e. the researcher does not reveal his or her role as researcher and participates in the group discussion; (b) participant as observer, i.e. the researcher opts for a lesser degree of participation and has a greater degree of freedom as he or she can supplement observations with interviews from his or her own subjective experience; and (c) observer as participant, i.e. the researcher as observer openly

participates in the group interview with the full knowledge of the participants; their role is thus clearly defined as researcher, and remains marginal. For the purpose of this investigation, I couldn't take on the role as complete participant because all the participants already knew me in my capacity as lecturer, and I was not able to participate as observer because I did not want my own subjective experiences to be reflected into the data. I therefore took on the role of observer as participant, for I needed remain objective while facilitating the focus-group interviews in my capacity as researcher and lecturer.

1.4.6 Participant selection

Second year BEd Hons students were purposefully selected according to three criteria dimensions: (i) major language groups, i.e. the Nguni, Sotho, Afrikaans and English; (ii) gender; and (iii) number of years teaching experience. Different gender groups have different needs and expectations concerning student satisfaction, therefore gender was used as the second criterion dimension. Teaching experience was used as the third selection criterion because the number of years teaching experience may possibly have an influence on student satisfaction (Table 3.1 and 3.2).

1.4.7 Data collection strategies

Students were identified from the North-West University's student database according to the selection criteria (Table 3.1 and 3.2), and then contacted and invited to participate voluntarily. Sessions were arranged for the focus-group interviews during vacation schools in Potchefstroom. The open-ended questionnaire was handed out during contact classes. Focus-group interviews and an open-ended questionnaire yielded multiple opinions from participants on the same issue (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

1.5 Data analysis

I used Atlas.ti™ to transcribe and analyse audio-visual data obtained from the members of the focus-groups in order to identify information-carrying multi-media clips pertaining different aspects of student satisfaction, to assign keywords and codes to the clips, arrange the clips in an analytical way, create complex collections of interrelated clips, and explore meaningful relationships in the dataset. These provided visually supported detailed transcripts of the experiences, needs and expectations of open distance learning students concerning student satisfaction. Through the use of Atlas.ti™ I constructed categories of recurring patterns in the dataset, and explored the relationships of these categories to each other within the

conceptual frame of student satisfaction, in order to construct and describe possible new knowledge in the field (Merriam, 1998:155-177).

1.6 Ethical aspects of the research

As a researcher I applied for ethical clearance from the North-West University's Ethical Committee before the commencement of fieldwork. To comply with general ethical requirements, participants were informed in conversation and by means of an information letter, about the nature and intention of the study and their involvement. The research process was transparent, and participants were asked to participate voluntarily in focus-group interviews. Formal consent was obtained from all participants with the understanding that their confidentiality would be respected, and they were also informed of their right to withdraw at any time during the research process.

1.7 Outline of chapters

The conducted research is presented according to the following chapters:

Chapter 1

This chapter deals with the orientation of the study. This involves an outline of the study and provides a clear framework of the research into ODL students' satisfaction with the BEd Hons programme that has been presented.

Chapter 2

This chapter identifies factors in relevant literature that influence student satisfaction in ODL at the NWU and theories and models of student satisfaction. I examined South African HE, including the context of the SCTE at the NWU, as well as teachers as adult students, and how these relate to student satisfaction within open distance learning. The dimension of client satisfaction with HEIs is described, as well as the crucial role of student retention. Student satisfaction with ODL is also emphasized, and four central categories of student satisfaction that relate to learning satisfaction, viz. academic satisfaction, environmental satisfaction, personal satisfaction and social satisfaction were described. The three main themes were identified: (i) student satisfaction with HE; (ii) client satisfaction with HEIs; and (iii) student satisfaction with ODL. These aspects constitute the conceptual framework for this study of meeting of students' expectations, as well as improving quality of HE delivery through ODL.

Chapter 3

This chapter deals with the research design methodology of this study. The nature and methodology of this research are explained, the qualitative data collection method is discussed and the motivation is given for choosing this particular research approach. The strategies implemented to ascertain trustworthiness are also displayed. The data analysis process and the use of ATLAS.ti™ are outlined, and the preliminary theory and codes are provided. The ethical considerations are considered and the limitations of this study are discussed.

Chapter 4

This chapter details an analysis of the data collected from the two focus group interviews, the open-ended questionnaire, and the analysis of the Teaching and Learning Policy of the NWU. Data are discussed according to three sub-questions: how satisfied are ODL students with the HE environments; how satisfied are ODL students as clients with HEIs; how satisfied are ODL students with the learning experience. These sub-questions allowed me to analyse the perceptions and experiences of BEd Hons students in an ODL environment comprehensively.

Chapter 5

This chapter concludes the study and provides us with information about the synoptic overview of the inquiry together with the synopsis of the key findings. The chapter also offers a proposed theoretical framework with the limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter illustrates the value and contributions of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

STUDENT SATISFACTION IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING

2.1 Introduction

Before embarking on examining students' satisfaction of their ODL experiences, one should understand the requirements of ODL students as adult learners, as well as what previous studies indicate regarding student satisfaction of ODL as mode of education delivery. This chapter identifies factors that influence student satisfaction in ODL at the NWU. I will examine:

- (i) South African HE, including the context of the SCTE at NWU
- (ii) teachers as adult students
- (iii) characteristics of adult students
- (iv) theoretical research in the field of adult learning
- (v) studies relating to student satisfaction
- (iv) satisfaction with open distance learning
- (v) categories of student satisfaction according to existing literature
- (vi) student retention.

These aspects are addressed as three main themes: (i) *student satisfaction with HE*; (ii) *client satisfaction with HEIs*; and (iii) *student satisfaction with ODL*. These aspects constitute the conceptual framework for this study of meeting of students' expectations, as well as improving quality of HE delivery through ODL. From this conceptual framework, and through the literature study, I will address the central research question: *How can the SCTE increase its student satisfaction and meet student expectations in its ODL programme?*

2.2 Student satisfaction within a higher education environment

2.2.1 South African higher education

In South Africa, the Higher Education Act of 1997 assigns the responsibility for quality assurance of HE to the Council on Higher Education (CHE). This responsibility is discharged through its permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC)

(Council on Higher Education, 2004). The mandate of the HEQC includes, amongst others, quality promotion, institutional audits and programme accreditation. In the current South African context, many students are not fully prepared for HE and this impediment contributes to students being unable to cope with the academic demands of higher education (HE). Consequently a considerable number of students never graduate. I, along with other authors, propose that one of the reasons is that their expectations do not meet the realities of HE (Nair & Pillay, 2004:303; Paras, 2001:70; Roberts, 2006:220).

The HEQC's quality assurance mandate is performed within the framework of the Regulations for Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which has the responsibility to oversee the setting of standards and quality assurance in support of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (Council on Higher Education, 2004). The work of the HEQC, including its institutional audit activities, is conducted within the context of ongoing reform and restructuring to transform and improve the quality of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It aims to address the complex knowledge development needs of South African HE learners (Council on Higher Education, 2004:3). The Ministry of Higher Education (2001:26) reports in its National Plan for Higher Education that the HEQC of the CHE, which has the executive responsibility for quality assurance, has formulated a framework to guide its work in the development of a robust quality assurance system. The National Plan mentions that both the HEQC and institutional quality assurance mechanisms are crucial factors in transforming HE. Benchmarking institutional, faculty, and departmental performance against other equivalent quality reference points on national and international levels is useful when setting goals that encourage continuous self-improvement (Council on Higher Education, 2004:19). User surveys are conducted at institutional levels in order to gather and analyse information from different stakeholders in an effort to create evaluation instruments that measure the effectiveness of service delivery of the HEIs. These surveys embrace, for example, aspects such as student satisfaction, graduate tracking and employee satisfaction (Council on Higher Education, 2004:20).

According to CHE surveys (2004), some of the major inefficiencies in the South African HE system include factors such as low throughput rates, student dissatisfaction, unsatisfying graduation rates, learner dropouts, learner repetition, motivation, self-efficacy, attitude, personality differences, maturation, the retention of failing learners and unit costs. Disappointing student throughput rates and high drop-out rates result in the loss of millions of Rands of student subsidy each year. Directly related hereto, HEIs suffer heavy losses with respect to decreasing subsidy income which depends on throughput rates (Nair & Pillay,

2004:303). The throughput and professional development of students in HE is essential for the socio-economical growth of the country. Therefore, both Government and the HE sectors have a vested interest in the satisfaction and performance of students at HEIs (Fraser & Killen, 2005:28). In order to attract and retain students, universities should identify and meet student expectations (Elliott & Healy, 2001:1). Sahin (2007) and Douglas *et al.* (2006) maintain that student recruitment and throughput rates in distance education are connected to student satisfaction and expectations. However, student satisfaction in HE is often disregarded (Astin, 1993; DeBourgh, 1999; Navarro & Schoemaker, 2000) as many dissatisfied students do complete their post-graduate studies, regardless of their dissatisfaction with HE. Bean and Bradley (1986:408) found that academic performance among college students does not correlate significantly with student satisfaction, and that academic achievers are more honest about their dissatisfaction than non-achievers. The relationship between student satisfaction, retention and throughput rates is therefore complex. Additional research, such as this study, should provide in depth exploration of the role of student satisfaction to ensure acceptable retention and throughput rates.

2.2.2 SCTE as an ODL unit

The SCTE (2009) at NWU offers distance education programmes through a multi-modal approach (Picciano, 2009:4) that combines the use of printed media, contact sessions, CD-ROMs, mobile devices and inter-active whiteboards as part of curriculum delivery and student support (SAIDE, 2011). The SCTE offers three open distance learning programmes: the *Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)*, the *National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE)* and the *Honours in Education (BEd Hons)*. These ODL programmes are delivered to approximately 24 000 in-service teachers throughout South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Lesotho. The *BEd Hons* programme offers a choice of three specialized curriculums i.e. (i) *Teaching and Learning*, (ii) *Educational Management, Law and Systems*, and (iii) *Learner Support*.

In South Africa, distance learning and ODL are the only available modes of delivering professional in-service training to practising teachers across geographical distance and socio-economic barriers. For its ODL delivery, the SCTE currently employs 39 permanent and three temporary academic staff members and 25 permanent and eleven temporary support staff members. Furthermore, the SCTE employs thirty contact coordinators at the various contact centres, 250 part time facilitators, and 56 temporary staff members in charge of resource and computer centres countrywide. As part of curriculum delivery the SCTE offers various support services to students such as contact sessions and vacation schools,

student-centred study guides, tutorial letters, textbooks, time tables, information booklets, DVDs, regular SMS communication, telephonic assistance, email and Internet access (SAIDE, 2011), as well as mobile learning through administrative SMSs, supportive screencasts and mobisite and through a learning management system (Blignaut, 2010).

In the next section, I will discuss the teacher-student as an adult student, describe the characteristics of adult students, and lastly elucidate on theoretical research in the field of adult learning.

2.2.3 Open distance learning students as adult students

At most HEIs, student bodies include adults who aim to improve their professional qualifications, and therefore it is vital to clarify the concept *adult learner*. When discussing the concept *adult learner*, it is logical to start with the concept *adulthood*. The term adulthood can be defined as one of the main stages in the life cycle of the developing individual, i.e. childhood, adolescence, adulthood (including young adulthood, adulthood, and midlife), maturity and old age (Els, Van Eeden, & Du Plessis, 2011; Erikson, 1982; Pearson, 1991). The main developmental motives of adulthood are, amongst others, identity, responsibility, self-improvement, and ambition, integrity and authenticity (Els *et al.*, 2011), and include status, and acceptance by society as adults (Gravett, 2005:6). In this study the term *adulthood* is used to refer to adult students outside of the school environment. Adulthood is distinguished from the teaching and learning of children and adolescents within the school. Adulthood is not directly connected to age, but is related to individual physical maturity, the ability to provide for oneself, moving away from parents, having children of one's own and being able to make one's own choices (Tight, 1996:13).

Knowles (1990:12) describes an adult student as one who is autonomous, free and growth oriented, while Merriam (2001:4) views the adult student as one having an "independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning" and who "is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors." Literature presents significant debates on what it entails to be an adult student besides the obvious chronological age. In general, one can say that adult students do not enrol at HEIs immediately after completing their schooling, are most likely working individuals, and probably older than the average student (Buchler, Castle, Osman, & Walters, 2002). Since adult students have the experience of managing many aspects of their own lives, they are able to direct their own learning. Students who form the focus in this study are older than on-campus students (full-time students), are married, hold a full-time teaching position, and are part-time students. These aspects relate

to the characteristics of an adult student (Ashby, 2002:12). In defining the concept *adult* in HE in the United Kingdom (UK), young students and mature students are defined as usually older than 21 years. In the South African context, students of 23 years are usually regarded as adult students. These students are affected by factors such as time management, family and work responsibilities, economic barriers and logistical challenges. Adults facing such circumstantial barriers need additional services to enable academic adjustment and allow them to concentrate on their role as students. Examples of such services are assistance with regard to transportation, child care, and family care for those students who are responsible for both their children and parents. In addition to this, such students also require alternatives to full-time study such as independent study, correspondence courses, contract learning and creative financial aid, e.g. flexible payment plans and tuition reimbursement (Kerka, 1989). It is therefore essential for HEIs and course facilitators involved with adult students to be fully aware of the characteristics and factors that influence the academic performance and satisfaction of adult students.

2.2.3.1 Characteristics of adult students

Many scholars describe distinct characteristics of adult students which lecturers and facilitators should consider during teaching and learning (Erasmus, Loedolff, Mda, & Nel, 2008; Gravett, 2005; Knowles, 1990; Lasswell, 1990; Smith, 1991). Depending on the authors' background and their theoretical orientation, the descriptions of the characteristics of adult students vary and include:

- coming from diverse backgrounds and having different prior learning experiences
- voluntarily participating in the learning experiences
- learning best if they have control over their learning environment
- desiring practical applications
- requiring a respectful environment, in which all individuals and ideas are valued
- enjoying collaboration
- integrating new concepts with prior knowledge
- believing in lifelong learning.

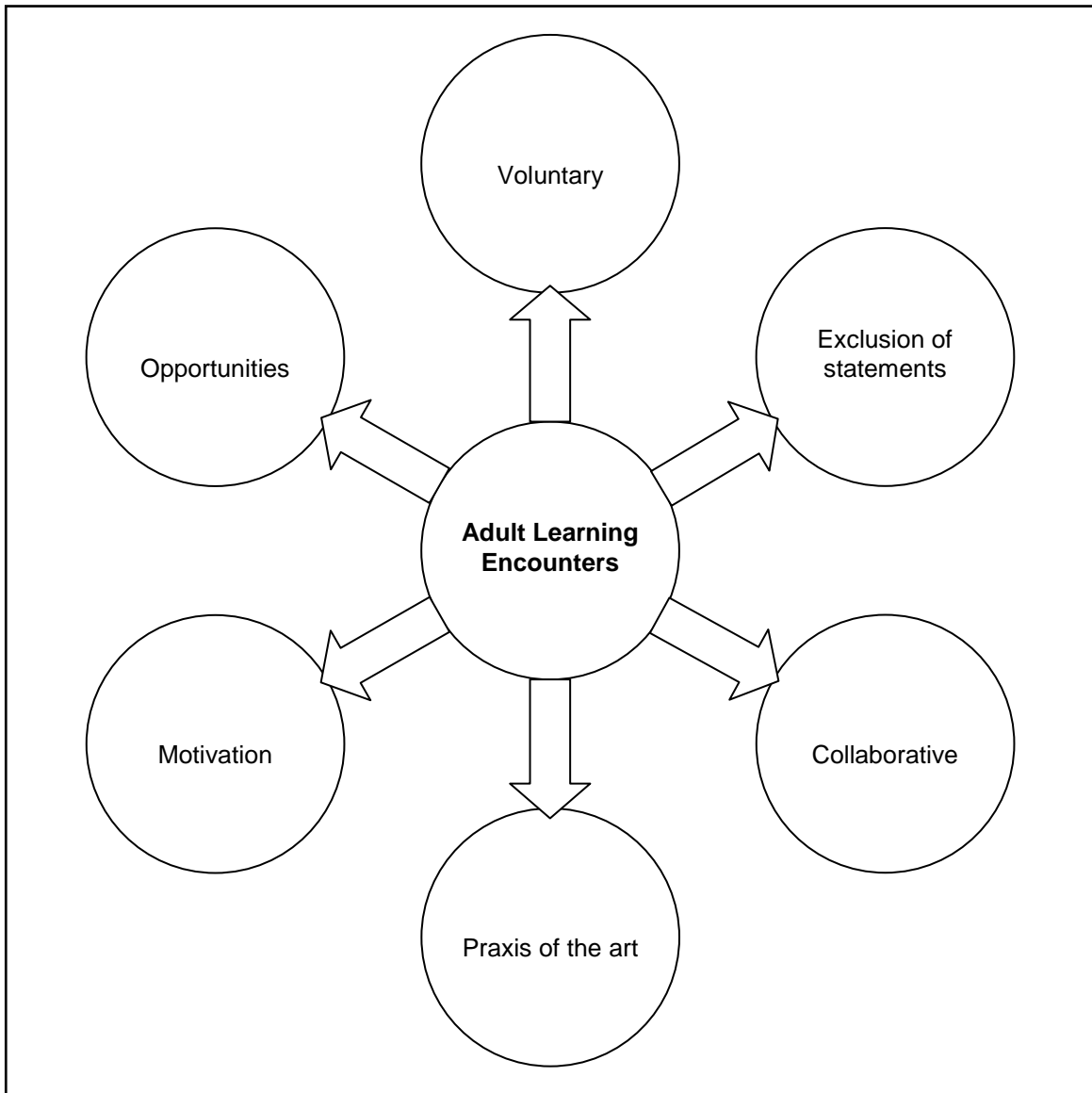
The aim with this study is to gain a thorough understanding of the way in which student satisfaction amongst BEd Hons students within an ODL programme is realized and maintained. Satisfaction with learning experiences plays an important role in evaluating HE and is associated with student success (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Since the addition of distance learning as a crucial part of their mode of delivery, universities have been compelled to expand evaluation activities (Frederickson, Reed, & Clifford, 2005). The evaluation of

learning experiences of adult students will have to take the challenges that adult students face into account. These challenges include competing demands made on time and energy by work, family and other responsibilities. Adult students bring their own experiences into the educational setting and have definite expectations with regard to what they require from the learning experience. It is essential to be aware of the nature of adulthood and the manner in which adults learn in an effort to evaluate the satisfaction within their learning experience at HEIs (Knowles, 1990).

2.2.3.2 How adults learn

The ideal adult learning situation, according to Knowles (1990:89), is a group small enough for all participants to be involved in every aspect of planning each phase of the learning activity. The teacher/lecturer retains responsibility for facilitating the planning of the learning experience by suggesting procedures and coordinating the process. Knowles (1990:95) advocates four central assumptions on which andragogy (adult learning) is based, *i.e.* adults are self directed students, their experiences becomes an increased resource for learning, the readiness to learn is increasingly oriented to the individual's social roles, and individuals have a tendency to become less subject-centred and increasingly problem-centred with regard to learning. Brookfield (1991:41) promotes six critical practices for successful adult education encounters (Figure 2.1):

- voluntary participation
- exclusion of statements which belittle others or which involve physical or emotional abuse
- collaborative education
- reflective praxis after conclusion of activities
- opportunities in which adults are prompted to reassess ways of thinking and living that are alternative to those they are already practising
- pro-active motivation of adults and persuasion of individuals to engage in a continuous re-creation and improvement of their personal relationships, work worlds, and social circumstances.



* Adapted from Brookfield (1991:41)

Figure 2.1: Adult learning encounters *

Adults enter classrooms with knowledge and experiences that could either enhance or hinder their learning experiences. Facilitators should therefore guard against making assumptions about students, based on their own learning experiences (Andrews, 2007:19). According to Timarong *et al.* (2006:2), the willingness of “adult learners to learn is often affected by their need to know, and they are usually motivated because of internal or intrinsic factors.” Facilitators should also be wary of planning activities that have no relevance to the adults’ frame of reference, and of activities that would not enhance or benefit personal knowledge and growth.

The political, social, and economic environments exert influence on the manner in which an adult learns. Adult participation in education is affected by variables such as socio-economic

status, perceived value of participation, readiness to participate, and barriers to participation (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982:35). With the political change in South Africa, there has been a change in the manner in which the learning process occurs. The introduction of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) into schools intended to create learning environments in which students are more involved in their own learning. Lessons are aimed at the holistic development of the student. Educators are required to facilitate and not to dominate the learning process. Facilitators have to guide and facilitate according to students' individual learning needs. It is vital that lecturers (facilitators) do not take the lead in lessons, but take cognizance of the experience that adult students bring to the classroom.

Adult students should consider four critical elements for learning. These elements include motivation, reinforcement, retention, and transference (Lieb, 1991). Adult students enter the learning environment with "baggage" of diverse past educational learning experiences, and it is not always possible for facilitators to accommodate individual students during contact sessions. Many adult students, particularly in South Africa, have little experience of formal education when crossing the border into HE (McMillian, 1997:19). Facilitators should plan tasks and activities in order to enable students to attain success.

Socialisation takes on a different meaning with regard to the education of adult students, as they generally enjoy group work and studying together (Kerka, 1989). Facilitators should make a concerted and coordinated effort to develop a comprehensive plan to target and assist at-risk students (Heisserer & Parette, 2002:72). The academic and social integration of adult students have direct and indirect effects on the persistence to achieve success at HEIs (Napoli & Wortman, 1998:425). Students who are socially integrated, who have clear goals and who are committed to being successful in their studies are likely to be more persistent in their studies. Moreover, students who are equipped with the skills of integration and commitment are motivated to continue learning despite the barriers that may hinder their participation.

Satisfaction studies that focus on BEd Hons adult students will comprise and inform most of the empirical research. Andragogy or adult learning that concentrates on self directed learning contributes towards the theoretical framework for this study.

2.2.3.3 An andragogical approach to teaching adult students

Lecturers who base their courses on andragogical assumptions tend to respect students' lived experiences, respond to students' perceived needs for learning, and explain and justify

the procedures they use. Merriam and Cafferella (1991:46) assert that adult learning in formal settings, for the most part, is still facilitator designed and directed. Even though facilitators understand the andragogical principles, they often continue to use pedagogical methods. Educators who say they believe in andragogical approaches do not necessarily use a different style when they teach adults (Kerka, 1989).

In a survey of 455 graduate students, White (1990:1125) found that the majority of teachers in most instances present information by means of the direct delivery of knowledge. When students are actively involved, and react accordingly, teachers reinforce learning through praise, grades, gold stars and prizes. The teacher's goals are to either attain the correct response or achieve high test scores. The teacher does not test for convergence, logic, divergence or creative thinking. Although these samples of graduate students adhere to components of pedagogy in social learning and information system theory, they still adhered to a Skinnerian theory of more than fifty years ago. Teachers of today reflect the theory and methods learnt during their own teacher-training programmes (White, 1990:1126).

“It is not enough for educators to say to students do what you want, learn what you want, in however manner you wish” (Brookfield, 1991:49). Adult students feel insecure in an environment that does not challenge their current assumptions, or in which they are not confronted with new ways of doing. Facilitators and lecturers should balance being friendly with the effort of challenging adult students. They should be able to determine appropriate ways of evaluating learned information. With regard to how achievement or growth is measured in adult environments, keep in mind that learning is often assumed rather than overtly measured (Merriam & Cafferella, 1991:48). When adults know that tests are the measure of their achievement, then the goal of training becomes passing the test rather than acquiring the skills. An alternative would be to demonstrate identified skills. This would be more useful than formalized testing.

2.2.4 Adult students within an ODL framework

ODL, designed to meet the needs of adult students, has important implications for understanding how adults learn, and creates opportunities to build knowledge that can contribute to adult learning theory. BEd Hons students are serviced through ODL due to the flexibility it provides for balancing work, family, and academic demands. The unique characteristics of adult students and their learning styles should be taken into account (Els, Du Toit, & Blignaut, 2009). However, lecturers should adapt their traditional teaching

strategies to a learning environment that is defined by a physical separation between lecturer and student (O'Lawrence, 2007:3).

Since the establishment of adult education as a professional field of practice in the 1920s, researchers have focused on the central question of how adults learn (Merriam, 2001:94). Most theories of adult learning are based on research about childhood learning, but adapted to account for the unique characteristics of adults (Knowles, 1975). Adult learning theory contends that adults learn differently from children and adolescents (Evans & Miller, 1997). “There will never be a single theory of adult learning powerful enough to capture the complexity of this phenomenon and continue to argue that what we have to date - a prism of theories, ideas and frameworks that allows us to see the same phenomenon from different angles and is therefore, a more vibrant model” (Merriam, 2001:94).

The theories most often associated with adult learning will be discussed in the following section—although not all can be defined purely as theories. Some are tentative frameworks for directing research and suggest future directions (Elias & Merriam, 1995:35). Other efforts can be labelled as models, when we define a model as a visual representation. What these “theories” offer, regardless of their label, is a means to approach and understand the characteristics of adult learning better (Elias & Merriam, 1995:37).

2.2.4.1 Adult learning theories

Definitions and goals with regard to adult learning depend on the researcher’s philosophical orientation (Merriam, 2008:97). The researcher’s philosophical orientation affects her preferences with regard to teaching and learning within a specific learning theory, e.g. the behaviourist, constructivist, or cognitive learning theory.

Knowles (1990) defines adult learning as “the art and science of teaching children,” as well as the “art and science of helping adults learn.” Adult learning is also viewed as “a process between existential and epistemological perspectives” and as a broad field of education that is suffering from paradigmatic plurality (Harris, Cavanagh, Reynolds, & Giddings, 2004:1-11). In addition, through the multifaceted lens of a kaleidoscope, adult learning is a “dynamic and interconnected set of processes that are emotional, social, physical, cognitive and spiritual” (Kiely, Sandman, & Truluck, 2003:18). Merriam and Cafferella (1991:132) define adult learning as an orientation in which students take control over their initiation, planning, implementing and evaluating of learning process. This definition emphasizes the student's ability to be self-directed and be responsible to manage his or her own learning.

2.2.4.2 Views on adult learning

Researchers distinguish between distinct philosophical orientations within the adult learning theory, namely, the behaviourist, progressive, liberal, radical and the humanistic philosophical (Cross, 1981:228; Zinn, 1990:39-56). I will briefly explain adult learning theory according to Knowles (1990) as it relates to this study (Table 2.1). The adult education inventory is used as assessment to assist adult educators in order to identify their personal philosophy of adult education and to compare it with prevailing philosophies in the field of adult education (Zinn, 1990:39). Self directed learning from the humanistic philosophical view will also be discussed as I regard it as the most influential theory that resonates the strongest with the aim of my study and also with my educational experiences as a lecturer for adult students. I also believe it can assist students to find meaning in what is being taught and that it may allow me to obtain new information by means of examining their previous learning experiences.

Table 2.1: Five philosophies of adult education *

Theory	Liberal Adult Education	Behaviourist Adult Education	Progressive Adult Education	Humanist Adult Education	Radical Adult Education
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop intellectual powers of the mind • make a person literate in the broadest sense: intellectually, morally, spiritual, aesthetically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bring about behaviour that will ensure survival of the human species, societies and individuals • promote behavioural change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transmit cultural and society structure • promote social change • give students practical knowledge and problem-solving skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance personal growth and development • facilitate self-actualization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bring about fundamental social, political, and economic changes in society through education
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Renaissance person” • cultured • always a student • seeks knowledge rather than just information • conceptual and theoretical understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student takes an active role in learning • practising new behaviour and receiving feedback • strong environmental influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student needs, interests, and experiences are key elements in learning • people have unlimited potential to be developed through education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student is highly motivated and self-directed • assumes responsibility for own learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equality with teacher in learning process • personal autonomy • people create history and culture by combining reflection with action
Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “expert,” transmitter of knowledge • authoritative • clearly directs learning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manager • controller • predicts and directs learning outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organizer • guides learning through experiences that are educative • stimulates, instigates, and evaluates learning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitator • helper • partner • promotes but does not direct learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coordinator • suggests but does not determine direction for learning • equality between teacher and student

Theory	Liberal Adult Education	Behaviourist Adult Education	Progressive Adult Education	Humanist Adult Education	Radical Adult Education
Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • liberal learning for its own sake • rational, intellectual education • general education • traditional knowledge • classical humanism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stimulus response behaviour modification • competency based • mastery learning • behavioural objectives, trial and error • skill training • feedback reinforcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problem-solving • experience-based education • democracy • lifelong learning • pragmatic knowledge • needs assessment • social responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student is highly motivated and self-directed • assumes responsibility for own learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consciousness-raising • praxis • non-compulsory learning • autonomy • social action • deinstitutionalization • literacy training
People and practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socrates, Aristotle, Adler, Kallen, Van Doren, Houle • Great Books • Lyceum • Chautauqua • Elderhostel • Center for the Study of Liberal Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinner, Thorndike, Watson, Tyler • APL (Adult Performance Level) • competency based teacher education • behavioural modification programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spencer, Dewey, Bergevin, Sheats, Lindeman, Benne, Blakely • ABE • ESL • citizenship education • community schools • cooperative extension • schools without walls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rogers, Maslow, Knowles, May, Tough, McKenzie • encounter groups • group dynamics; self-directed learning projects • human relations training • Esalen Institute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brameld, Holt, Kozol, Freire, Goodman, Illich, Ohliger • Freedom Schools • Friere's literacy training • free schools

* Adapted from Elias and Merriam (1995:160)

2.2.4.3 Andragogy as adult learning theory

Since the 1970s, adult learning theory has offered a framework for educators who train adults. Knowles was among the first proponents of this approach. In his book, *The Adult Learner: a Neglected Species*, Knowles coined the concept *andragogy*, a term popular in German education circles during the early 1800s, and used the label to create a unified theory for adult learning. Knowles introduced the concept of andragogy (adult learning) on the rationale that adults represent an unique population of students with distinct needs and preferences (Knowles, 1990:12). The convergence of two independent trends made andragogy especially relevant to education in the 21st century. The first trend is that adult students (25 and older) constitute the fastest growing population in HEIs (Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2003:11). The second trend is the accelerating demand for ODL in higher education institutions (Ashby, 2002:51). ODL has become established as a mode of formal instruction and it is no longer regarded as an option, but a necessity (Maushak & Ellis, 2003:139). Around the world ODL has become common practice and is available in a number of formats that reduce the time, cost and space constraints associated with traditional classroom practices (Verduin & Clark, 1991:81). Because most adult students are

employed, they are not able to attend on-campus classes and therefore they revert to ODL. On average, distance students tend to be older than their on-campus counterparts (Ashby, 2002:11). However, the learning experiences of ODL students have not been adequately documented. Knowles (1990) acknowledges that adult students, like their younger counterparts, are a diverse group. Unfortunately, in reality not all adults are self-directed students (Candy, 1991:6). An assumption that guides this study is that those who are capable of self-directed learning will be most satisfied with the characteristics of an ODL environment. The characteristics of adult students make them the ideal candidates for engaging in an ODL environment.

A preference for self-directed learning is the hallmark of adult students (Merizow, 2000:167). Descriptions of adult students by various authors depict them as the ideal participants within the ODL environment. Andragogy is regarded as the most student-centred of all educational programming (Houle, 1996:51). The domain of adult learning theory has been described as “extremely diverse and complex” (Kiely *et al.*, 2003:18). The overall implication is that no theory can singularly capture the nature and process of adult learning. Nevertheless, most adult learning theories either explicitly or implicitly invoke Knowles’ (1990) conception of andragogy. “In an inclusive adult educational encounter all participants learn, no one has a monopoly on insight, while dissension and criticism are regarded as investable and desirable dynamics of the learning process” (Knowles, 1975). Full implementation of andragogy, or any method, is not possible if the students are required to be there. Table 2.2 illustrates the main differences between pedagogy and andragogy based on Knowles’ (1990:19) six assumptions that have been adopted as the principles of adult learning.

Table 2.2: A comparison of pedagogy and andragogy*

Assumption	Pedagogy	Andragogy
Teachers need to know	Teachers determine what the students need to know	Adults need to know why they are learning something before they learn it
The student' self-concept	The student is deemed a dependent personality	Adults are responsible and self directed students
The role of experience	Experience is devalued	Experience is valuable and students are rich sources of information
Readiness to learn	Readiness to learn is irrelevant, one learns what the teacher dictates to pass or get promoted	Learning should focus on the things one need to know in order to cope with real life situations
Orientation to learning	Learning is subject-centred	Learning is life, task-or problem-centred
Motivation	Motivation is external, dependent on grades and teacher's or parents' approval	Motivation is intrinsic, including increased job satisfaction, self esteem and improved quality of life

* Adapted from Knowles (1990:19) and Uehling (1996:67)

2.2.4.4 Self-directed learning of adult students

Self-directed learning, as central assumption of adult learning, has its foundation in the teachings of Aristotle, who believed that all men, by nature, are lifelong students. Cooper (1932:65) quotes Aristotle:

Learning, and wonder, as a rule, is pleasant, for wonder implies the desire to learn, so that the wonderful is something desired, and desire is always for the pleasant, while learning implies a settlement into normal state. All men desire to know, complete knowledge is the settled state to which we tend; and by definition pleasure is a settling into our normal nature.

Knowles (1990) developed a theory of adult learning that is consistent with Aristotle's observations. During the same time that Knowles introduced andragogy to North America, self-directed learning was conceptualized in order to distinguish between the learning phenomena of adults and children (Merriam, 2001:19). This concept was accepted by many with almost "a cult-like quality" as "the essence of what adult learning is all about" (Merriam, 2001:25). Knowles (1975:18) defines self-directed learning as "a process in which individuals take the initiative with or without the help of others, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify human and material resources for learning, determine and implement appropriate strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes." Self-directed learning has the individual student as the primary focus and is primarily directed on a person's abilities (Candy, 1991:7; Pintrich, 1995:10). The learning is self-initiated and implies that adults plan and manage their own learning, but this does not necessarily insinuate that learning is solitary. However, the process of learning, which is centred on the need of the individual, is viewed as more important than specific content, implicating that the role of the educator is more that of a facilitator or guide rather than a content expert (Merriam, 2008:95).

As with andragogy, self-directed learning emphasizes the value of autonomy and individual freedom during the learning process. However, self-directed learning may only be appropriate when there is some indication of the student's own commitment to learn—this is not always the case in all educational settings. The most significant characteristic of self-directed learning is that the student is totally in control of the learning process that encompasses the planning, implementation and evaluation of learning. This idea is in most instances incompatible with the formal educational settings (Gravett, 2005:8).

Brookfield (1991:44) maintains the assumption that self-directed learning is a "joyful, wholly fulfilling experience in self-actualization, in which the educator's intent and student's needs are matched in a marriage of perfection." This assumption is not always watertight as self-

directed learning encompasses several distinct stages. Table 2.3 represents Grow's, as quoted by Delahaye *et al.* (1994:197), different stages of the self-directed learning model. It provides a guide to allow individuals the freedom to take control of their learning if they are indeed ready and willing to do so.

Table 2.3: Grow's staged self-directed learning model*

Stage	Student	Teacher	Examples
1	Dependent coach	Authority, immediate feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coaching with drill informational lecture overcoming deficiencies and resistance
2	Interested	Motivator, guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspiring lectures plus guided discussion goal-setting and learning strategies
3	Involved	Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion facilitated by teacher who participates as equal seminar; group projects
4	Self-directed	Consultant delegator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internship dissertation individual work or self-directed study group

* Adapted from Delahaye *et al.* (1994:197)

An individual can, at any given time, fluctuate between the stages of a self-directed learning experience. It is, however, important to note that “no act of learning is fully self-directed if this is taken to mean that the student is so self-reliant that he or she can exclude all external sources or stimuli” (Brookfield, 1991:48). Various issues influence satisfaction even before a student enrolls for a particular course. In order to ensure that a student is satisfied with a particular programme there are several factors that may have a significant impact. In reflection of the different theories and models in the literature (Aitken, 1982; Allen *et al.*, 2002; Astin, 1993; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Castles, 2004; Elliott & Healy, 2001; Elliott & Shin, 2002; Sahin, 2007), I identified four central categories that relate to learning satisfaction, i.e. *academic satisfaction*, *environmental satisfaction*, *personal satisfaction*, and *social satisfaction* (Table 2.4). The modern competitive academic environment provides students with numerous options and opportunities at any institution of their choice. It is therefore imperative that stakeholders such as students, academics, and educational institutions have to seriously consider factors that affect students' satisfaction.

Table 2.4: Student Satisfaction Categories *

Categories of Satisfaction	Aspects of Satisfaction
Academic satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum design Instruction design and method Study content Course satisfaction

Categories of Satisfaction	Aspects of Satisfaction
	Quality of relationships with faculty members Satisfaction with instructors and advisors Satisfaction with major subject Attitudes of lecturers Motivation from lecturers Learning experience Student centredness Support services Academic integrity and difficulty Quality of assessment Self-directed learning Expected minimum average for course
Environmental satisfaction	Infrastructure of higher education institution Facilities of higher education institution, class size Campus climate when communicating or visiting the HEI Time and space available for learning Accommodation and resources
Personal satisfaction	Own attitude and expectations Fears, stress, needs Perceived values Different learning styles Bereavement Illness and trauma Coping Abilities, ability to adjust Unemployment, persistence Personality and characteristics
Social satisfaction	Social and Student Life Attitudes of other students Membership to student organisations Isolation Lack of Support from family and friends, friendship Caring for others (e.g. children and elderly people) Language barriers Cultural and world-view differences

* Adapted from Aitken (1982); Allen (2002); Astin (Astin, 1993); Bean and Bradley (1986); Bollinger and Martindale (2004); Castles (2004); Elliot and Healy (2001); Elliot and Shin (2002); and Sahin (2007)

Satisfaction is a state of mind, i.e. an attitude that reflects an individual's preferences or apathy with regard to certain aspects of an environment (Noord, 1986). A person's attitude represents a set of complex cognitions, emotions and behavioural tendencies (Aldemir & Gulcan, 2004:110). Hence, I will examine the topic of satisfaction within ODL, compare studies that relate to student satisfaction and list the main categories of student satisfaction according to existing literature in the discussion that follows.

2.2.5 Student satisfaction with higher education institutions

Various theories and models in the literature link to student satisfaction. Liegler (1997:357) describes student satisfaction as the degree to which students' needs and expectations are met with regard to aspects of curriculum design such as course delivery mode, resources, student support and relationships with academic staff. Student satisfaction is a "short-term attitude that results from an evaluation of a student's educational experience and results when the actual performance meets or exceeds the student's expectations" (Elliott & Healy, 2001:2). It encompasses students' perceptions of tertiary education, including the perceived value of the learning experiences (Bollinger & Martindale, 2004:44). Astin (1993:278) regards student satisfaction as a psychological factor—an "intermediate outcome" that is significant as it influences the student's level of motivation. Other aspects associated with student satisfaction include individual student characteristics, quality of relationships with faculty members, curriculum and instruction design, content and methods of programme delivery, students' social life, academic and other support services, resources and facilities (Astin, 1993:59).

In HE student satisfaction constitutes a significant psychological-affective outcome that is one of the most direct measures of success in tertiary education (Astin, 1993; Jones, 2008:376). Aitken (1982:33) developed a model which identifies two categories of student satisfaction, namely academic satisfaction and living satisfaction. Academic satisfaction includes aspects such as the expected minimum average for a course, course satisfaction, isolation, satisfaction with major subject, satisfaction with instructors, and satisfaction with advisors. Student life, which refers to on-campus students, includes peer relationships, satisfaction with accommodation, isolation, age of roommates, security, size of living area, quality of food, satisfaction with student councillors, etc. Elliott and Healy (2001:1-11) identifies instructional effectiveness, campus climate and student centredness as aspects of student satisfaction. Bean and Bradley (1986:400) also identify social life, academic integrity, academic difficulty, class size and membership of student organizations, as aspects of student satisfaction.

Wiers-Jensen *et al.* (2002:185) define student satisfaction as the students' assessments of the services that are provided by universities and colleges. These services include maintaining and improving the quality of teaching and learning, constructive supervision and feedback from academic staff. It also mentions a relevant and coherently developed curriculum that balances the different forms of organized teaching activities and self-tuition,

quality-driven support facilities, physical infrastructure of superior quality and access to leisure activities conducive to a social climate.

Recruitment of students has always been an important activity of HEIs. The rapid expansion of HEIs, significant increases in HE costs, and shifts in population demographics force HEIs to pay substantial attention to the impact of student satisfaction (Kara, 2004:1). Moreover, dissatisfied students may decrease the number of courses or increase the drop-out rate of a HEI completely. Therefore the satisfaction of students in HEIs should be studied, and carefully managed. Course satisfaction is a critical component in improving learning achievement in traditional classrooms, and even more crucial in ODL environments (Akinsolua, 2005:65). Global competition to attract students in order to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage amongst educational institutions is of strategic importance.

The concept of satisfaction revolves around quality and performance as key factors in a cyclical relationship (Petruzellis, D'Uggento, & Romanazzi, 2006:351). The higher the quality of services offered in ODL, the better the satisfaction based on students' expectations and perceptions of service quality. Tools that measure student satisfaction also indicate their preferences with regard to their specific needs and expectations while also defining a more precise profile of the specific students (Petruzellis *et al.*, 2006:381). Therefore, student satisfaction refers to the students' perceptions and evaluations of the various outcomes and experiences associated with education (Elliott & Shin, 2002:198). Jones (2008:376) refers to student satisfaction as the degree to which students' needs and expectations are met. In HEIs student satisfaction is used to determine the degree of satisfactory delivery of education. Student satisfaction is recognised as a core element for defining the areas in need of improvement, and relates to academic, registration and customer service areas. Satisfied students are more likely to be successful students, as particularly evidenced by higher graduation rates (Noel-Levitz, 2009:1).

In general, assessing student satisfaction is based upon probing students with regard to a single course or programme they completed. The scope of the satisfaction assessments ranges from reflecting on the quality of the programme, satisfaction with the subject content and overall rating of teaching and learning experiences. To be truly effective, student attitudes should be measured on items such as quality of facilitation, value of interaction with facilitators or lectures, as well as other students and course applicability. Overall satisfaction with a programme can also include students' attitudes concerning factors beyond the classroom context, e.g. experiences related to admissions, registrations, and library services.

Student satisfaction in general (with regard to the HEI), depends largely on the information and advice they receive from family, friends, administrators, faculty and staff (Karemera, 2003:310).

2.2.5.1 Assessing student satisfaction with HEIs

Due to the increased competitive and dynamic educational environment, in the context of numerous challenges such as declining enrolments, many HEIs are vigilant about student satisfaction. The intensified value that is placed on student satisfaction may be ascribed to the fact that it has a positive impact on student motivation, recruiting efforts and fundraising (Elliott & Shin, 2002:197). Student satisfaction has become imperative to HEIs and their management. The aim of ensuring student satisfaction is to minimize dissatisfaction, retain students and improve the institution's academic performance (Douglas *et al.*, 2006:252).

Student satisfaction is a subtle, yet complex phenomenon (Elliott & Shin, 2002:198). Most of the tools that assess student satisfaction are designed to simply assess the global experiences or general satisfaction of a student, student affairs and alumni offices. Aldridge and Rowley (1998:198) identify the importance of collecting detailed student feedback in order to improve student satisfaction. Detailed student feedback:

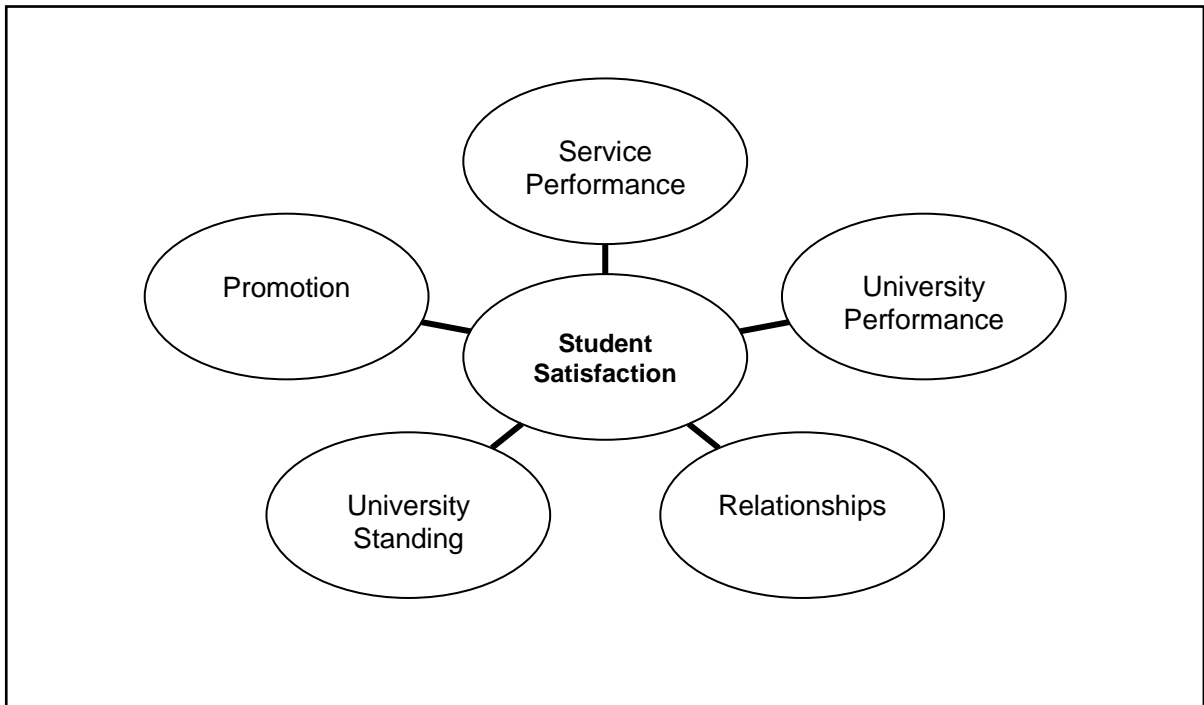
- provides evidence that students have the opportunity to pass comments on their courses
- encourages students to reflect on their learning environment
- allows institutions to benchmark and provide indicators that will enhance the reputation of the HEI
- provides students with an opportunity to express their level of satisfaction with regard to their academic experiences.

Most HEIs collect feedback from diverse students with regard to a vast array of experiences at the institution. For this study, I will specifically collect feedback from BEd Hons students within an ODL programme in order to gain a lucid understanding of the level of satisfaction that they experience. This form of evaluation usually serves two purposes: (i) for internal use to guide improvement, and (ii) to gather information that may direct other stakeholders and potential students (Smout, 2002:25). It is important that such information should be about student learning and the supporting resources. Satisfaction surveys should not only focus on scoring lecturers' performance, but should also provide an indication of the manner in which courses are organized, the structure and essence of the content, the skills that are mastered, the inculcation of lifelong learning, and the learning support infrastructure (Harvey, 2001:12).

Traditionally, HEIs often assess only one dimension of student satisfaction. To obtain an accurate portrayal of the level and impact of satisfaction, satisfaction should stem from students' authentic expectations (Noel-Levitz, 2009:1). Harvey (2001:2) adds that student satisfaction surveys should provide the basis for comparisons between study programmes and for longitudinal benchmarking. It is important to ensure that the reporting of results contributes towards the easy understanding and interpreting of data for comparative purposes at programme and at HEI level.

International and national surveys on the operations of HEIs provide feedback on student satisfaction after the delivery of education. Many describe the manner in which institutions employ different mechanisms to qualitatively and quantitatively collect feedback (Aitken, 1982; Allen et al., 2002; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004). In general, HEIs include aspects in surveys such as student representation on local and institutional committees, staff-student liaison committees, lectures or seminars, tutorials, discussion groups, as well as other informal mechanisms. With the addition of ODL as an alternative or complementary mode of delivery to classroom-based courses, an increasing number of HEIs are expanding their systematic assessment and evaluation (Noel-Levitz, 2009:2). Therefore, for HEIs to be successful and gain a competitive edge, they should initiate methods to increase their students' satisfaction by means of reflecting on aspects such as the quality of service they render, the HEI's own performance, the student's institutional relationship with the HEI and the standing (the way other institutions rate a specific institution), as well as the HEI's promotion dimension (Jurkowitsch, Vignali, & Kaufmann, 2006).

The aspects depicted in Figure 2.2 relate to a pre-conceptualized model of student satisfaction, and could be significant for depicting the aspects of student satisfaction that relates to this study. These aspects are discussed in the following sections.



* Adapted from Jurkowitsch *et al.* (2006:12)

Figure 2.2: Pre-conceptualized model of student satisfaction *

2.2.5.1.1 Service performance

Service performance in higher education refers to the implicit quality of lectures and course content (Jurkowitsch *et al.*, 2006:12). “A university’s product is more than its academic programme. It is the sum of the student’s academic, social, physical and even spiritual experiences” (Elliott & Shin, 2002:198). Positive information with regard to quality influences ODL student satisfaction. HEIs are obliged to assess the quality of service by reviewing students’ perceptions of quality. Reliable student satisfaction ratings in HE can be achieved when the students receive a curriculum that meets their expectations and needs, that focuses on high quality instruction, and provides opportunities to develop their skills (Jurkowitsch *et al.*, 2006:13). In brief, higher satisfaction ratings in ODL are achieved when a curriculum is delivered that meets students’ expectations, especially when the focus is on high quality instruction and diverse interactive opportunities aimed towards skills development.

2.2.5.1.2 Higher education performance

Universities also provide other services than purely academic assistance (Hill, 1995:13). Additional services become crucial to successful course completion for many students in an ODL environment. This means that some students will attend at a university and perform well because of the nested structures of the particular institution. Student satisfaction may

be increased because of the HEI's overall performance. "Student satisfaction may be influenced by poor classroom facilities of which the instructor may have limited resources to change" (Elliott & Shin, 2002:200). Aspects linking to campus environment like class size, campus climate when communicating or visiting the HEI, time and space available for learning, all constitute a web of connected interactions that influence student satisfaction. However, it is necessary to enhance "the perceived value by providing services or service attributes not provided by the competition" (Glavcomb & Martin, 2001:391). Smaller institutions generally have more satisfied students than larger institutions, and additionally different environments within the institution can have substantial influences on students (Wiers-Jenssen *et al.*, 2002:12).

2.2.5.1.3 Institutional relationships

The relationship of students with a HEI varies amongst individuals. This institutional relationship may range from strictly transactional to a highly relational bond (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999:72). Bonding and empathy are important factors in the context of higher education relationships (Olivier & DeSarbo, 1988:497). When the two parties (HEI and student) engage in a relationship, they bond with each other and this may result in a unified disposition towards a desired goal. Communication between students and lecturers is but one factor that may enhance the quality of an institutional relationship. Empathy in an HE environment can be defined as trying to understand someone's desires and goals (Olivier & DeSarbo, 1988:498). This links student satisfaction directly with the quality and intensity of institutional relationships.

2.2.5.1.4 Standing of HEIs

In recent years HEIs have become aware of the importance to retain students instead of merely concentrating on attracting new registrations. This may be ascribed to the fact that student satisfaction contributes to maintaining a competitive advantage (Elliott & Shin, 2002:205). It is important to examine the HEIs standing because substantial marketing efforts focus on communication with ODL students (Spreng, MacKenzie, & Olshavsky, 1996:18). Furthermore, HEIs should manage expectations of the students, including the perceived benefits associated with attending a particular HEI. For example in ODL, location, facilities, image, curriculum and quality of students will have an influence on the students' decision of which HEI to choose (Gwin & Gwin, 2003:30).

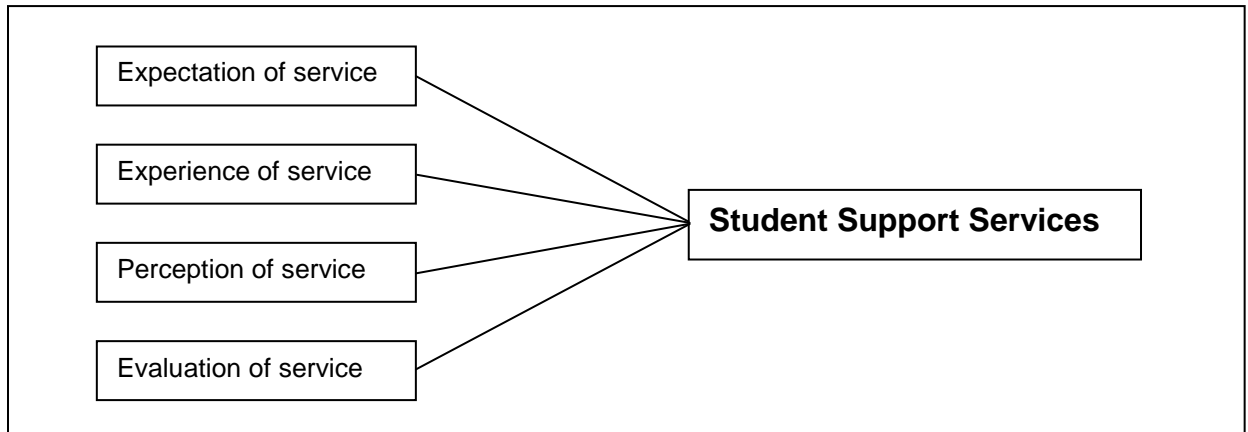
2.2.5.1.5 Promotion

The promotion dimension of student satisfaction models refers to aspects such as trust, commitment and future intentions. Trust, as a level of confidence, results in valued outcomes, as well as commitment. Students with dedicated institutional relationships display higher levels of trust and commitment which form a central part of their attitude and belief structures (Morgan & Hunt, 1994:26). Another component of commitment for the institution is student loyalty. Increasing a student's loyalty, and by implication satisfaction, helps to secure future association of students with the institution (Jurkowitsch *et al.*, 2006:14). Student satisfaction has a positive influence on student motivation, student retention, recruiting efforts and fundraising (Elliott & Shin, 2002). This implies that when students are satisfied and loyal to the HEI, they will engage in positive word-of-mouth communication about the HEI. This can lower the cost of attracting new students for the HEI and enhance the HEI's overall reputation (Alves & Raposo, 2007:575). Furthermore, students can return for graduate studies and recruit other prospective students, for example those who have completed an ACE programme and experienced student satisfaction may return to the same HEI and register for the BEd Hons programme. In view of to the above mentioned aspects, student satisfaction may positively contribute towards the promotion of a HEI.

2.3 Client satisfaction with higher education

2.3.1 Client satisfaction

"The client fulfilment response is a judgment that a product or service feature provided a pleasurable level of consumption" (Olivier, 1997:120). Satisfaction is also a feeling—it is a short-term attitude that can change, given a constellation of circumstances. Satisfaction commonly has thresholds at both lower level (insufficiency or under fulfilment) and upper level (excess or over fulfilment) (Olivier, 1997:22). Satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, is more than a reaction to the actual performance quality of a product or services. It is also influenced by prior expectations regarding the level of quality (Willard, 2002:4). With this in mind, I developed an initial model for student satisfaction for this study (Figure 2.3). This model underpins the research on client satisfaction and it indicates the necessity of student support services (Olivier, 1997:121).



* Adapted from Hom (2000); Olivier (1997); and Woodruff and Gardial (1996)

Figure 2.3: Basic Model of Student Satisfaction

The various elements that influence student support services are (Figure 2.3):

- *Expectation of service*: differs when a service is complex and when the client (student) is unfamiliar with the service
- *Perception of service*: evaluation of perceived performance according to one or more comparison standards. It can have a positive effect, a negative effect or zero effect on the client
- *Experience of service*: applies when a client has different levels of satisfaction for different parts of service experienced
- *Evaluation of service*: represents the outcomes of feelings of satisfaction which involve the intent to repurchase, word-of-mouth (students' communication) with their network in terms of their approval/disapproval of a service or complaints.

Treating students as clients has been accentuated since scholars began proposing the application of total quality management (TQM) at HEIs (Watjatrakul, 2010:1) where students are the main and foremost clients of HEIs. Many HEIs in South Africa (e.g. the North West University (NWU), University of Pretoria (UP), University of South Africa (UNISA); and University of the Free State (UFS) have, due to increasing competitive pressures, established student-centred teacher training programmes. In order to ensure that universities are marketable to their current and potential clients, they generally follow a business management practice. This practice embraces a client satisfaction perspective within the TQM as a key to institutional survival and to retain a competitive advantage in higher education (Watjatrakul, 2010:1). In an educational context this implies that before determining how to satisfy the client, one must determine who qualifies as the client. Difficulties arise in identifying which client should be satisfied and what is regarded as satisfaction. Beaver (1994:112) confirms the difficulty to decide exactly who is viewed as an

end-user: those who receive the education, those who pay for it, or those who are affected by its application.

Some students regard themselves as clients since they pay for services that are provided to them, while others consider that being a client has connotations of suffocating free inquiry, expression and open discussion (Potts, 1999:85). Schwartzman (1995:218) compares HEIs to business practices. He states that students must have an active and participatory role in their learning while businesses actually attempt to minimize client input into transactions. Business clients may feel comfortable with their perceptions of their wants and needs, while students may be dependent upon the HEIs determining their career and educational decisions (Schwartzman, 1995:220).

HEIs are also comparable with the service industry as educational services are tangible, heterogeneous and inseparable from the person delivering it, and the student as a client participates in the process (Shank, Walker, & Hayes, 1995:75). HEIs are increasingly finding themselves in an environment that is conducive to understanding the role and importance of service quality. Therefore, in respect of viewing the student as client concept, HEIs may be regarded as producers and providers of services. HEIs manage their operations, monitor efficiency and produce quality services to meet the current needs and expectations of all students (Watjatrakul, 2010:2). However, many students behave like passive clients who react (whether they like or dislike services) and respond by expressing their views (either satisfied or dissatisfied) through teaching and service evaluations. Students as clients behave as clients in business. When they are not satisfied with their performance, they may take their business elsewhere and this may lead to the HEI losing clients (Stover, 2005:9). Should an HEI not provide satisfactory services to students, they may drop out and look for another HEI in order to pursue their studies. However, despite the larger enrolment size, ODL institutions face the common problem of larger withdrawal of students before completing their studies. Business income of ODL institutions can also be affected by poor student retention. Poor student retention is therefore a major business issue faced by all ODL institutions. Hence, I will examine the topic of student retention within ODL, factors influencing student retention and the strategies thereof.

2.3.2 Student retention in higher education

According to Bean and Bradley (1986:395), student attrition and retention can be defined as the percentage of students in a particular year who neither graduate nor continue studying in the same institution during the following year. Waleri (1990:24) states that retention can be

described in terms of programme completion. He also concludes that for some students in special programmes retention can be defined only in terms of student objectives. In addition Sharma (1998:211) states that retention can be described in terms of institutional courses and programmes along with individual student attributes.

A specific retention rate indicates the number of students who enrol for a programme in comparison to the number who manage to successfully complete the programme. The programme retention indicates whether or not students have graduated in the qualification they enrolled for. Student retention also pertains to whether or not the student has attained his/her academic or personal goal at exit (Sharma, 1998:215).

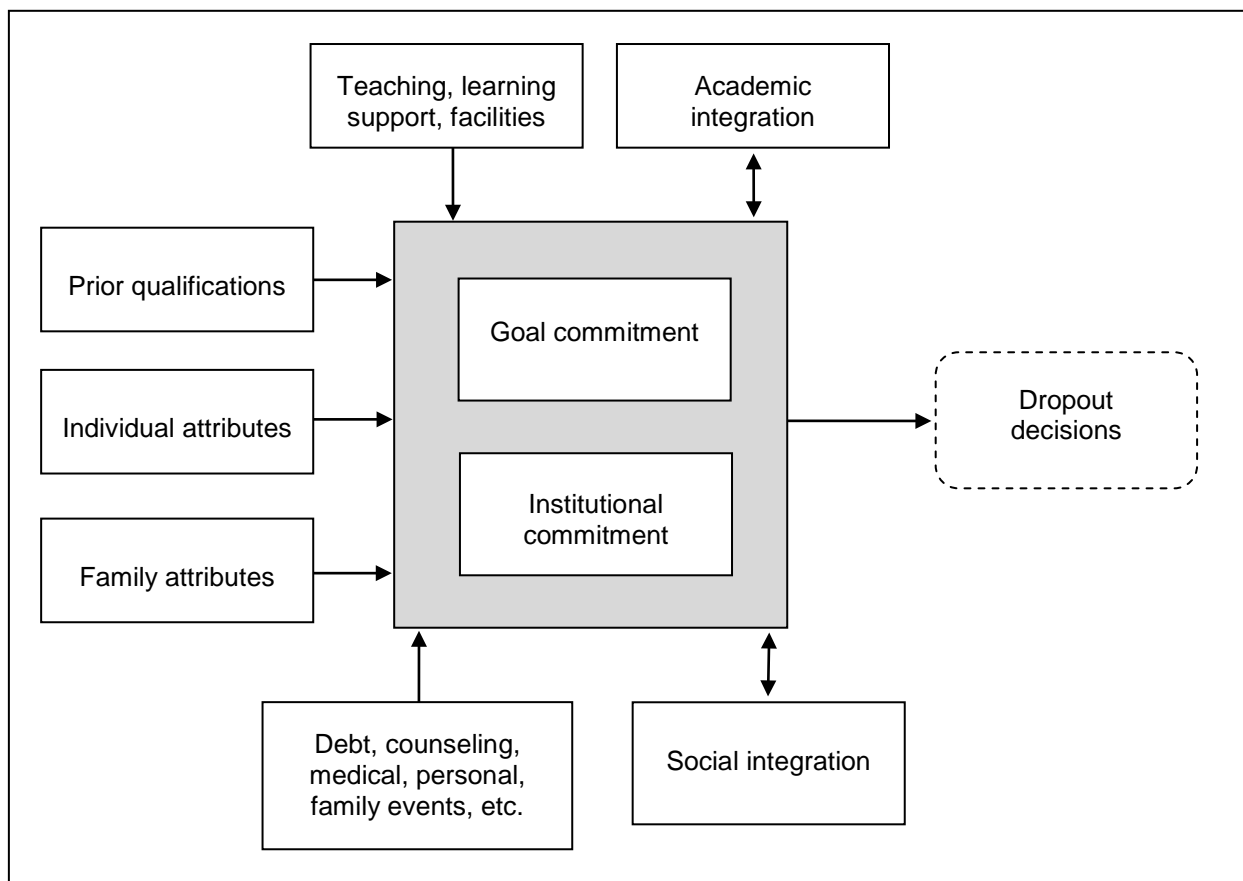
The competitive environment in which higher education institutions are operating has changed. Kara (2004:1-16) states that within a business perspective educational institutions have diverse customers such as students, staff, faculty alumni, donors and others. Therefore, a drop in student retention without compensating enrolment increases the impact on all the above customers. The need to manage a HEI's retention process from student entrance to graduation, and also students leaving HEIs before completing their studies, continues to be a growing concern for many researchers (Astin, 1993; Elliott & Healy, 2001; Fraser & Killen, 2005; Nair & Pillay, 2004). The problems associated with low student persistence and high attrition, i.e. those students leaving HEIs without having achieved their higher education goals, are part of this concern (Braxton, 1999-2000:94). Unsatisfactory student throughput rates and high dropouts result in the government losing millions on student subsidies each year. HEIs also suffer heavy losses with respect to subsidy income which is determined by throughput rates (Nair & Pillay, 2004:303). One of the most significant issues in HE is that of developing strategies in order to improve student retention. HEIs are constantly developing strategies to keep students happy and satisfied—especially with the knowledge that students leave for many other reasons that are beyond the control of the HEI (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Once students enrol at a HEI, the factors that increase retention should be addressed. Although satisfaction and retention are not equals, factors that promote satisfaction quite possibly contribute to retention (Napoli & Wortman, 1998:419).

New students, whether classified as on-campus or off-campus, must experience a sense of satisfaction and belonging with regard to their initial encounters at any HEI. This includes contact with the admissions office staff via phone or email, printed material about the HEI or any other areas in which students can look for similarities between the HEI and themselves, and can be a crucial factor in developing students' expectations of the institution and in their adjustment to the HEI's environment (Allen *et al.*, 2002:83).

Although several theories have been forwarded in order to explain the HEI persistence process (Bean & Bradley, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1997), only two theories have been able to provide a comprehensive framework with regard to college departure decisions. These two theoretical frameworks are Tinto's (1975:89-125) student integration model and Bean and Bradley's (1986) student attrition model.

The literature indicates that the student integration model has a steady line of research that expands over a decade. Therefore, the most commonly referred to model in the student retention literature is that of Tinto's. This model was initially presented in a literature review and has since been broadly incorporated within a considerable range of research (Bean & Bradley, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This model receives a large amount of support that includes initial dispositions and intentions with respect to college and personal goals. The literature claiming to support it seems to be about reporting weakly consistent evidence, uncontrolled experiments, or comparing alternative theories against Tinto's with respect to data (Bean & Bradley, 1986:393) (Figure 2.4).

Tinto's model (1975:89-125) (Figure 2.4) suggests that the process of retention at an HEI is viewed as a longitudinal process of integrations between individual and the academic and social systems of the HE. Individuals enrol at HEIs with a variety of attributes (sex, race, and ability), pre-HE experiences (academic and social attainments), and family backgrounds (social status, value climates). The fundamental characteristics and individual attributes also influence the development of the educational expectations and commitments that the individual brings with him or her to the HEI. Given individual characteristics, prior experiences and commitments, the model also indicates that it is the individual's integration into the academic and social systems of the HEI that relates most directly to continued studies at HEI.



* Adapted from Tinto (1975)

Figure 2.4: Tinto's model of student integration and retention

The last phase of the model illustrates the interplay between the individual's commitment to the goal of completing a HEI programme and commitment to the institution that determines whether or not the individual decides to drop out from HEI. A student's decision to drop out (or continue) his or her studies is primarily influenced by a prior personal commitment to the goal of HE completion and an institutional commitment. The lower the level of an individual's commitment to the goal of HE completion or the institution, the more likely it is that the student will drop out from the HEI. It appears that a student's decision to voluntarily withdraw from an institution is largely determined by personal experiences in the academic domain after a re-evaluation of educational experiences and expectations.

2.3.2.1 Factors influencing student retention in higher education

A large body of international and national researchers explore theories on the individual social and organizational factors that affect student retention in HE (Astin, 1993; Nair & Pillay, 2004; Paras, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1997). This comprehensive body of literature suggests that there is a wide range of interacting personal and social

attributes as well as institutional practices which impact on both retention rates and performance. Thomas (2002:426), identifies seven areas that impact on student retention and performance. Academic preparedness is the extent to which students feel they are ready to study at higher education level and the manner in which the institution provides academic support. Academic experience embraces curricula, teaching and learning issues, accessibility and relationships with staff, timetables and deadlines, and opportunities for repeating courses.

As a third category, commitment and institutional expectations arise from fastidious traditions and social charters of the HEI, and enable the graduates to enter prestigious areas of employment. Berger and Braxton (1998:103-119) examined the expectations that students had with regard to their HEI and the extent to which they thought the institution would realize their goals. The researchers also investigated the primary reason for entering a HEI and the extent to which students believed that their HEI would assist them to achieve their personal objectives. The fourth area investigated was academic and social match, in other words the degree of academic and social integration into their institutions.

Finance and employment is another significant category. The relationship between financial issues and student withdrawal is currently receiving serious attention at many HEIs in South Africa. Many students in HE pay for studies by means of student loans that consequently has a serious financial implication at a later stage. Several students terminate their studies because they cannot continue to afford the high cost of tertiary education.

The sixth area of interest is family and community support and commitment. Much of the previous research on retention in both the USA and SA stresses the importance of the external environment - especially the family. Families or communities with little or no experience of HE may not be supportive of their members who attend HEIs.

Lastly, the strategies that institutions employ to render support and to overcome factors that might contribute to early withdrawal are also significant. In general, this refers to the manner in which a HEI assists students to continue their studies in higher education, and how students are supported.

2.3.2.2 Conditions for student retention

Tinto (1997:599-623) highlights several conditions that can support retention strategies in HE. Firstly, students are likely to persist and graduate in settings that expect them to

succeed. High expectations appear to be a condition for student success. Secondly, settings that provide clear and consistent information with regard to institutional requirements and effective advice on the choices students have to make in respect of their study programmes also make a positive contribution towards attaining success.

The third setting provides academic, social, and personal support. Some distance education students at the SCTE may need social or personal support while others may need academic assistance in view of the fact that many students are from families in which they are the first generation to achieve a HE qualification—they are often expected to adjust to new ways of learning and to learn independently (Qakisa-Makoe, 2005:45).

Fourthly, students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that involve them as valued members of the institution. The quality of contact with faculty members, staff and other students is an important predictor of student satisfaction.

Lastly, successful learning experiences have proven to be the key to student retention. Students who learn and experience success are students who stay. Institutions that is able to establish settings in which students flourish, are successful in retaining their students.

2.3.2.3 Retention strategies

Successful retention programmes should include a comprehensive database with regard to background information on students' needs and the factors that affect retention. Braxton *et al.* (2000:570) suggest that members of HEIs need to be committed to the welfare of students and should have a stake in the success of policies and practices that reduce attrition. Karp and Logue (2002:145) also assert that the design, development and implementation of a successful retention programme must encompass the areas of need and desires of students while taking the available resources into consideration. Holmes *et al.* (2000:43) further state that for continuous improvement practices the entire campus, including internal and external boards, should be involved in a comprehensive effort to develop and maintain retention programmes that address both academic and non-academic factors in a meaningful manner. Finally, retention strategies ought to include the setting of attainable priorities, execution of plans, and continuous improvement and implementation of programme modifications.

2.4 Student satisfaction within an ODL environment

2.4.1 ODL as mode of education delivery

ODL is an advantageous mode of education delivery due to the fact that it makes learning more accessible to many students and provides them with the opportunity to control their own learning schedules (Ko & Rossen, 2001:40). Holmberg (1989:168) refines the definition to:

Distance education is a concept that covers the learning-teaching activities in the cognitive and/or psychomotor and affective domains of an individual learner and a supporting organisation. It is characterized by non-contiguous communication and can be carried out anywhere and at any time, which makes it attractive to adults with professional and social commitments.

The term ODL has been interchangeably used to describe a diverse variety of settings and programmes (Sherry, 1995:338). ODL is not a new concept and has gained ground in recent years. It may incorporate elements of traditional classroom education, yet differs from traditional educational experiences in many ways. In general, ODL students receive more support services such as tutorial letters and contact classes (Ashby, 2002). DiBiase (2000:131) defines ODL as “education or training courses delivered to remote (off-campus) students via audio, video (live or pre-recorded), or computer technologies, including both synchronous and asynchronous instruction.” ODL also refers to organized, formal training, and education in which the students are separated from the learning resources that require the achievement of predetermined instructional outcomes. In ODL, one important resource - the facilitator - is remote from students. ODL fosters learning and teaching in a variety of ways. One of the many advantages of ODL is that it offers instructors and students a flexible learning environment in terms of time and location (Sahin, 2007). Learning experiences are created by means of sharing ideas, thoughts and personal interactions between participants (Fraser & Killen, 2005:290). Factors like infrastructure, quality of support systems, quality of content and assessment, peer support networks, planning and designing of ODL, delivery methods, motivation for enrolling in the course and learning objectives may influence the open distance learning experiences (Fraser & Killen, 2005; Trinidad & Pearson, 2004; Wilson, 2001).

I agree with the many authors who maintain that sufficient research needs to be conducted on the aspect of student satisfaction in ODL (Allen *et al.*, 2002; Astin, 1993; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004). Existing research primarily focuses on undergraduate, rather than on postgraduate learning experiences, and it highlights the achievement of learning outcomes,

rather than enhancement of satisfaction (Maushak & Ellis, 2003; Zarghami & Hausafus, 2002).

Most European HEIs have implemented student evaluation of teaching in an attempt to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Wiers-Jenssen *et al.*, 2002:183). Although these assessments provide valuable and valid feedback with regard to teaching and learning, the focus of the processes is extremely narrow. These processes do not consider that a student's learning depends on characteristics such as prior merits and cognitive skills, personal motivation, individual efforts, as well as on related group characteristics of the students. In order to render the best possible service to students, lecturers should understand how satisfied online students engage with their educational experiences both inside and outside of the classroom setting (Noel-Levitz, 2006:6). Noel-Levitz (2006:8) used an instrument that includes institutional factors like academic advising, campus climate, support services, concern for the individual, instructional effectiveness, admissions and financial aid effectiveness, registration effectiveness, responsiveness to diverse populations, safety and security, service excellences, student centredness and other academic services to render the possible service to students. Students ranked their perceptions on a seven point Likert response scale with indicators ranging from "importance to you" and "satisfaction with." Three scores are provided: an importance score, a satisfaction score and a gap score. The performance gap score indicates the difference between importance and satisfaction.

It is important to evaluate distance education innovations that include aspects related to student outcomes and student satisfaction (Frederickson *et al.*, 2005:646). There is a need for well-designed and carefully controlled studies that accurately indicate student satisfaction. Evaluation should form an integral part of the programme implementation rather than an add-on. Students' satisfaction is continuously affected by repetition of experiences of student life on campus. The campus environment is a web of interconnected experiences that overlap and influence the overall satisfaction of students. Students' classroom experiences are integrated with other experiences on campus. Students' global satisfaction relate to their assessment of the quality of courses and other curriculum related factors (Browne, Kaldenberg, & Brown, 1998:3). Several studies focus on analysing the effects of satisfaction with emphasis on social factors such as student-student relationships, student-faculty relationships, and student self-evaluations (Moro-Egido & Panades, 2009:3). Gregg (1972:483) found that satisfaction (academic and non-academic) was positively associated with competitive student relationships and expectation discrepancies. In addition hereto, Benjamin and Hollings (1997:14) stated that student-life satisfaction was affected by family ties, self-evaluation, academic satisfaction and the impact of recent events. They

furthermore indicated that “on-campus” factors such as academic services and social activities were not directly associated with satisfaction. Mayser and Dejong (2003:37) suggest that research on student satisfaction of ODL students may be more useful than research on student performance as standard for evaluating distance learning. Astin (1993:60) concludes that student satisfaction is viewed as a key psychological-affective outcome and is one of the most direct measures of a HEI’s success. Little or no difference can be indicated between traditional and distance education in terms of grades and overall grade point average (Allen *et al.*, 2002:84; Russel, 1999:1). However, these performance indicators may reflect background preparation, effort, or test-taking ability more than any experiential sense of learning. Another outcome of this study alludes to the likelihood that a student will recommend a HEI to friends or relatives according to the extent of interaction between the student and HEI personnel. It is therefore important that education can be viewed as a product towards student satisfaction, and attaining student feedback is important.

The specific interaction between students and the HEI personnel acts as the framework for this study. The framework will ultimately focus on the improvement of student satisfaction and enhancement of the quality of education within the BEd Hons programme while recognizing context sensitive factors.

2.4.2 Factors related to student satisfaction

According to the CHE (2004:8), some of the major inefficiencies within the South African HE system include factors such as low throughput rates, student dissatisfaction, unsatisfying graduation rates, student dropouts, student repetition, motivation, self-efficacy, attitude, personality differences, maturation, the retention of failing students and unit costs. Castles (2004:168) maintains that there are other factors that could influence student satisfaction and the success rate and satisfaction of adult students. These factors encompass *social and environmental factors* such as the time and space available for study, study methods, support from significant others, accommodation of social activities and friendship; *traumatic factors* like illness, bereavement, unemployment, lack of support from family members, caring for younger children or the elderly, and the level of adaptation of the students to the everyday stresses of life. Other *intrinsic factors* include students’ attitudes, motivation and personal qualities such as persistence, endurance, coping ability, approaches to study and learning styles. Sahin (2007:113) adds that many factors such as infrastructure, quality of support systems, quality of content and assessment, and peer support networks, may all influence student satisfaction and success in distance learning.

Different authors list different aspects that relate to student satisfaction. Some regard retention and throughput as an integral part of student satisfaction (Douglas *et al.*, 2006:252; Sahin, 2007:113), while (Bean & Bradley, 1986:393) suggest that student satisfaction is influenced by a variety of factors such as background characteristics, institutionally related factors regarding classroom experience and the strength of student friendships. In view of the above, I agree that student satisfaction entails various aspects of tertiary education, inter alia: student needs, expectations, perceptions, values, learning experience, motivation, academic relationships, programme design, content of study material, resources, infrastructure, and student support, as well as retention and throughput rate (Astin, 1993:61; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004:65; Liegler, 1997:358).

In the following sections I will discuss academic satisfaction, environmental satisfaction, personal satisfaction and social satisfaction as indicators of students' general satisfaction with HEIs.

2.4.2.1 Academic satisfaction

Academic satisfaction involves students' perception of the quality of academic programmes, study requirements, teachers' treatment and instructions, and improved attitudes with regard to subject matter (Belcheir, 1999:1-33; Danielson, 1998:1). Academic satisfaction also relates to values in terms of ability, effort, and motivational goals. Students' perceptions of the quality of academic programmes, study requirements, teachers' treatment and instructions, and positive attitudes toward subject matter are aspects that add to and influence academic satisfaction (Entwistle, 1986:1).

Aspects of academic satisfaction also include curriculum design, instructional design and instructional delivery methods, study content, course satisfaction, quality of relationship with faculty members, satisfaction with instructors and advisors, attitudes of lecturers, motivation received from lecturers, learning experiences, student centredness, support services, academic integrity, academic difficulty, quality assessment, self-directed learning and expected minimum average of courses (Aitken, 1982; Allen *et al.*, 2002; Astin, 1993; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Castles, 2004; Elliott & Healy, 2001; Sahin, 2007).

Research contributes to understanding the causes and consequences of satisfaction in work settings (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Spector, 1997). Regrettably, it seems as though academic satisfaction is not researched as vigorously as job satisfaction. In an attempt to address this

shortcoming, psychological and educational researchers have examined factors such as self-efficacy and goal progress relevant to academic satisfaction (Gade, Fuqua, & Hurburt, 1988:185).

This research focuses on factors that determine student satisfaction. Students' academic satisfaction relates to many classroom aspects and activities (Hassan, 2002:444). Some authors are of the opinion that student satisfaction relates to academic performance. Dart *et al.* (1999) investigated the relationship between academic satisfaction and the learning approach that is followed with secondary school students. They report a significant correlation between the "deep learning" and classroom environments that encourage active participation. Price (1998:1) argues that students who follow a formal style of learning require higher cognitive thinking in order to cope with the formal learning strategies. Kember *et al.* (1996:345) report weak relationships between approaches to learning, hours of study and perceived workload amongst 174 students at the Hong Kong University. Students whose learning styles matched their teachers' instruction styles indicated academic satisfaction with their teachers' effectiveness (Biggs, 1999:58). Students who adopted "deep approaches" to studying preferred different methods of teaching and assessing than traditional methods (Entwistle & Tait, 1993:2). This may imply that ODL lecturers should employ various teaching styles to match their students' diverse learning styles in order for students to learn better and be more satisfied with their learning. Students' attitudes towards learning constitute an aspect related to their academic satisfaction and therefore to their approaches to learning. For example, students who experienced poor teaching as reflected by their attitudes were less likely to use deep learning approaches (Ramsden, 1983:700). Moreover, teaching students with interventions that matched their learning styles preferences resulted in more positive attitudes towards learning (Griggs & Dunn, 1996:1-3).

Literature refers to many factors that may impact on students' academic performance and satisfaction. These factors include the dimensions of student satisfaction, teacher-student relationships, teacher and student attitudes, lack of support from the academic environment, ineffective study methods, individual personalities and cognitive factors. According to Townsend *et al.* (1993:443), three categories of factors pertain to degree completion. These include student centred explanations (academic and personal characteristics); institutional centred explanations (educational cultural practices and co-operation) and societal explanations (economic and political factors). Similarly, Gerders and Mallinckrodt (1994:282) identify three areas as influential on rates of institution attrition, namely academic adjustment, social adjustment and emotional adjustment. Hassan (2002:445) states that "students' approaches to learning are affected by certain aspects of the learning context, and these

factors in turn constitute the main ingredient of what is regarded as academic satisfaction.” Hassan focuses on curriculum design, instructional design mode, study content, course satisfaction, quality of relationship with faculty members, satisfaction with advisors, satisfaction with major subject(s), attitudes of lecturers, motivation from lecturers, learning experiences, student centredness, support services, academic difficulty, quality of assessment; self-directed learning and expected minimum average for course.

2.4.2.2 Environmental satisfaction

Based on Murray’s theory of environmental press, Lawton (Lawton, Windley, & Byerts, 1985) defines environment as the “set of stimulus or a context which is seen as having potential demand character for any individual.” It is vital to consider different levels within an learning environment when studying student satisfaction as it varies with the scale and location in the environment (Francescato, Wiedermann, & Anderson, 1989:2). Francescato *et al.* further maintain that relationships between satisfaction and levels of environments have rarely been addressed empirically. Student satisfaction refers to students’ subjective evaluation of the various outcomes associated with education. Brown *et al.* (1998) and Astin (1993) agree that environmental satisfaction influences student satisfaction and students’ learning experiences.

Environmental satisfaction includes various factors such as the infrastructure, facilities, class size, campus climate when communicating or visiting the HEI; time and space available for learning and accommodation are important aspects to consider when determining the level of environmental satisfaction (Aitken, 1982; Allen *et al.*, 2002; Astin, 1993; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Castles, 2004; Elliott & Healy, 2001; Sahin, 2007).

Researchers such as Bouton and Garth (1983:73) and Hannum and Briggs (1982:10) state that the traditional paradigm of instruction (teacher to student) expects the student to receive knowledge from an instructor. This situation may predispose the student to a passive state of learning and usually disregards individual differences and needs of the students that may result in the lecturer not paying attention to problem solving, critical thinking, and thinking skills. In ODL, students’ participation is relatively low and this leads a lecturer to dominate the learning experience. Castle (2004:168) argues that the following factors could affect the success rate and influence the satisfaction of adult students:

- social and environmental factors like the time and space available for study
 - study methods
 - support from significant others
-

- accommodation of social activities and friendship
- traumatic factors like illness, bereavement, unemployment, lack of support from family members, caring for younger children or the elderly, and the level of adaptation of the students to the everyday stresses of life
- intrinsic factors like students' attitudes, motivation and qualities such as persistence, hardiness, coping ability, approaches to study and learning styles.

Various researchers suggest that the extent to which students are academically integrated in the context of the institution and their involvement in the classroom influences learning (Astin, 1993; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Perrucci, 1995; Petruzellis *et al.*, 2006; Sahin, 2007). These authors also state that students who feel they do not fit academically into the environment of an institution usually possess lower levels of satisfaction than those who feel they belong.

Most students who are older than 25 years of age live off-campus, work more than twenty hours per week, have families, attend HEIs part-time and prefer to study via ODL (Arnold, Kuh, Vesper, & Schuh, 1993). The learning and the personal development of these students are affected by environmental elements such as the quality of relationships between student peers and faculty members, classroom educational research and the characteristics of student involvement or effort such as time spent studying in the faculty library or participating in educational programmes. Fraser and Killen (2005) add that student satisfaction may be related to how well the classroom environment matches student preferences. Frazer (1994) also found that students prefer classroom environments that enhance their outcomes, such as satisfaction. According to Masterson *et al.* (1994), culturally diverse classrooms offer communication challenges to lecturers and students alike. Therefore, a typical ODL cohort includes students whose concept and value of time is culturally different from traditional Western time standards, students who have full-time jobs, spouses, children, financial obligations and little spare or free time, compared to other students who have no external responsibilities and a great deal of free time.

Satisfaction also relates to “perceptions of being able to achieve success and positive feelings about the achieved outcomes” (Keller, 1983:388). Several studies, in this regard, have explored student satisfaction with online programmes (DeBourgh, 1999; Enockson, 1997; Johanson, 1996). Enockson (1997), for example, assessed distance education in a HEI setting and found that students were satisfied with online instruction because it provided flexibility and responsiveness to their learning requirements and expectations. Similarly, Johanson's (1996) study of an online classroom indicated that students' satisfaction was

positively influenced when the technology was transparent and functioned well. The course was designed to support student-centred instructional strategies and the instructor's role was that of a facilitator and coach who was accommodative and displayed a reasonable level of flexibility. In contrast to this, Debourgh (1999) found that student satisfaction depended more on the quality and effectiveness of the instructor and the instructions than on the technology.

2.4.2.3 Personal satisfaction

Personal satisfaction is defined as “a person confident of his abilities and able to face life courageously without being disappointed” (Ainley, 1993:88). For the purpose of this study the concept “personal satisfaction” will refer to various human factors such as personality, attitudes, skill, stress, values, goal commitment, family support and study habits.

Furthermore, personal satisfaction is an indication of the special interests and skills of a student's personality. This implies that the personal satisfaction of a student is determined by his or her career choice and the preferred HEI (Ainley, 1993:88). According to Balachandran *et al.* (2007), life satisfaction includes social and personal satisfaction as a general requirement for the overall well-being of adult students.

Aspects of personal satisfaction include individual attitude, expectations, fears, stress, needs, perceived values, different learning styles, bereavement, illness and trauma, coping abilities, ability to adjust, unemployment, persistence, personality and other individual characteristics (Aitken, 1982; Allen *et al.*, 2002; Astin, 1993; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Castles, 2004; Elliott & Healy, 2001; Sahin, 2007).

Personality greatly influences an individual's behaviours and attitudes (Paunonen & Ashton, 2001:527). The development of personal satisfaction and self-concept among distance education students at the SCTE at the NWU is a serious concern. The study of the manner in which learning unfolds and the characteristics of students include aspects such as learning styles; attitudes; personality; locus of control; motivation and attrition (Mclsaac & Gunawardena, 1996:375). Dubois (1996:21) adds that ODL should be concerned with more than just cognitive learning and describes its ability to develop competencies that enable individuals to live and work effectively in this new and changing era. ODL also fosters the development of individuals who are knowledgeable about the world and who possess skills, values, and commitment which empower them to live productively and harmoniously in the international economic and cultural community of the future. Rokeach (1972) as quoted by Windmiller *et al.* (1980:203) state that values are the priorities that individuals and society attach to certain beliefs, experiences, and objects in deciding how they shall live and what

they shall treasure. Halstead (2000) suggests that values are the principles and fundamental convictions which act as general guides to behaviour, and that values are the standards by which particular actions are judged as good or desirable. Values are also defined as “a type of belief centrally located within one total belief system, about how one ought to or ought not to behave, or about some end state of existence worth attaining” (Rokeach, 1972:124).

Many HE students experience a low self-esteem. They are mostly passive and negative to such an extent that it affects their academic achievement in higher institutions (Azizi *et al.*, 2009:302). This situation presents itself because their action is influenced by a low self-concept. The establishment of students’ self-concept is influenced by their family, as well as personal and social background (Azizi *et al.*, 2009:302). However, academic achievement is often associated with factors such as parents, peers, teachers and the community. Costa and McCrae (1988:258) and Paunonen and Ashton (2001) identify five traits known as the “Big Five”, which appear to be the most widely used and empirically validated theory. The “Big Five” personality traits are *openness* (imaginative, independent thinking, aesthetics, emotions, ideas, actions and values); *conscientiousness* (sensibility, dependability and goal directed behaviour), *extroversion* (sociability, assertiveness), *agreeableness* (co-operation, trust-worthiness) and *neuroticism* (anxiety, depression and negative emotions). Specific information and research with regard to students’ personal satisfaction is limited. Deneve and Cooper (1998:200) conducted a meta-analysis of personality traits and subjective well-being. An analysis of the “Big Five” personality traits revealed that low levels of neuroticism (anxiety, angry hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability) (Costa & McCrae, 1992) are the most significant indicator of life satisfaction. In addition, conscientiousness was found to correlate the strongest with life satisfaction while extroversion and agreeableness were equal predictors of positive effect. Openness obtained the lowest correlation with life satisfaction. The “Big Five” personality traits could be important factors that influence personal satisfaction. The study of Van Chaick *et al.* (2007:46-50) focuses on the relationship between the “Big Five” personality traits, college major subjects and academic satisfaction which was represented as one’s satisfaction with his or her chosen major. The study hypothesized that both an individual’s personality and his or her choice of major subjects would predict academic satisfaction, and concluded that neurotics, conscientiousness, extroversion and agreeableness proved to be significant predictors of academic satisfaction. In studying personality relationships and learning styles, Busato *et al.* (1999:129-140) found that conscientiousness correlated positively with three successful learning styles. These styles are *meaning directed*, *application directed* and *reproduction directed*.

2.4.2.4 Social satisfaction

Castles (2004:166), Von Hippel *et al.* (2008:435), and Jones (2008:373) describe social satisfaction as a life experience that distance students have, which may lead to more harmonious social relationships. This implies that the immediate improvement of outcomes for stressed individuals, for example emotional support (attentive listening, sympathy, and expressions of affection) can help relieve distress, while informational support (counselling and advice) can assist in problem-solving efforts.

Social satisfaction includes various aspects such as social and student life, attitudes of other students, membership of student organizations, isolation, lack of support from family and friends, friendship and caring for others (Aitken, 1982; Allen *et al.*, 2002; Astin, 1993; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Castles, 2004; Elliott & Healy, 2001; Sahin, 2007).

Numerous studies aim to understand the factors that account for low achievement (Aitken, 1982; Belcheir, 1999; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Danielson, 1998). These studies envisaged to identify the determinants of academic failure and have succeeded to identify social factors that affect student satisfaction. Social satisfaction, according to Diaz (2007:45) explains academic failure with three elements that intervene in education, viz. parents (family causal factors), teachers (academic causal factors) and students (personal causal factors). However, there is an ever-increasing awareness of the importance of the role a family plays in the progress of a student's educational development. Diaz (2007:46) also highlights family background as an important factor in determining the academic performance attained by a student, as it influences the social class of the student. In addition, Qakisa-Makoe (2005:45) points out that many South African students come from families where they are the first generation to enrol for a higher education qualification. These students are expected to adjust to new ways of learning and to learn independently. They often have to make numerous and complex adjustments. These adjustments may include new teaching and learning strategies and mastering new learning skills (Allen *et al.*, 2002:85), coping with academic work while running households and pursuing careers, and mastering the learning outcomes that are required by distance learning (Van Heerden, 1997:78). In addition, ODL students find themselves in a new social setting and are suddenly faced with living in a different culture and language system (Qakisa-Makoe, 2005). ODL students also have some negative experiences that may affect their satisfaction. These experiences encompass insufficient ability to master learning, and poor school preparation, failure to assume responsibility, interference from psychological problems, lack of personal standards of

quality, poor language skills, underestimating the amount of work required, other social activities, and poor distance education delivery systems (De Beer, 2006:40).

Various studies in the literature further refer to many factors that may impact on students' social performance and satisfaction. Previous researchers, such as Bean and Vesper (1994:21), investigated gender differences in student satisfaction and found that social factors such as contact with advisors, having friends, and living on campus, were strongly associated with satisfaction for female students, but not for male students. Other studies focused on analysing the effects of additional social factors such as student-student relationships, student-faculty relationships and students' self evaluations. Gregg (1972:484) found that satisfaction, both academic and non-academic, is positively associated with faculty-student relationships and negatively associated with competitive student relationships. Benjamin and Holdings (1997:220) found that life satisfaction among students was affected by family ties, self-evaluation, academic satisfaction and the impact of recent events. Their study also showed that "on-campus" factors such as academic services and social activities were not directly associated with satisfaction. Many other authors have analysed the role of the faculty or departmental readiness in determining student satisfaction.

Thomas and Galambos (2004:251-261) are of the opinion that, in departments where faculty members focus on research, students reported a high degree of satisfaction. In contrast to this, Grunwald and Peterson (2003:15-31) focused on the role of institutional factors in predicting satisfaction with the faculty. They claim that student evaluations, administrative support and teaching related issues are significant predictors of faculty satisfaction. In addition, Thomas and Galambos (2004:255) as well as other researchers such as Harvey (2001:1), Lee *et al.* (2000:1-10) and Morrison (1999) assume that there are four major groups of factors which seem to affect student satisfaction. These groups of factors are categorized as institutional factors, extracurricular factors, student expectations and student demographics. These institutional factors also include the quality of education; communication with lecturers (in and outside the classroom); the curriculum; textbooks; tutorial letters; student evaluations of lectures and the philosophy and practices of HEI administrators (Aldemir & Gulcan, 2004:111).

As noted earlier, the SCTE offers three ODL programmes to approximately 24,000 in-service teachers throughout South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Lesotho. The academic and professional development of HE students is crucial for the socio-economic development of a country. Both government and the HE sector are therefore concerned with the performance and satisfaction of students (Fraser & Killen, 2005:28). In the current South African context,

many students are not fully prepared for studies at HEIs. They are unable to cope with the academic demands of tertiary education and consequently a significant number never graduate (Nair & Pillay, 2004:303; Paras, 2001:70; Roberts, 2006:220). The Department of Education of South Africa (2005) reported that at that time, of the 120 000 students enrolled in HE, 36 000 (30%) dropped out during their second and third year, and this drop-out rate cost the national treasury R4.5 billion in grants and subsidies to HEI, with no proportionate return on investment. This indicates that one in every six South African students do not complete their studies. According to the previous South African Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, quoted from Roberts (2006:220), “transformation and access, the high dropout rate and the production of African intellectuals are some of the challenges facing South African higher education institutions.” Pandor also ascribes the “high rate of student dropout to the fact that higher education institutions have not placed a high premium on students achieving good results” (Roberts, 2006:220). Pandor here refers to both pre-graduate and post-graduate dropout rates. While exploring the literature, I could not find statistics for the dropout rate of BEd Hons students at South African Higher Education Institutions.

2.5 Summary

The importance of satisfaction among the ODL BEd Hons students cannot be denied, especially when considering the challenges that students face during the completion their studies. This chapter emphasizes what literature has to offer with regard to student satisfaction in ODL. Various theories and models that relate to student satisfaction were described in the context of the adult student. The nature of student satisfaction within the South African HE environment, which includes the SCTE, and also the teacher as an adult student within an ODL framework, form the basis of discussions in this chapter. In addition hereto, client satisfaction with HEIs was also elaborated on and the important role of student retention according to Tinto’s Model was elaborated on as it is viewed as a longitudinal process of integrations between the individual and the academic and social systems within HEIs. Student satisfaction with ODL was also emphasized with four central categories of student satisfaction that relate to learning satisfaction, i.e. academic satisfaction, environmental satisfaction, personal satisfaction and social satisfaction were identified (Figure 2.5). Therefore, the question of how the SCTE can increase student satisfaction and meet student expectations in its ODL programme can now be addressed by means of a structured research process.

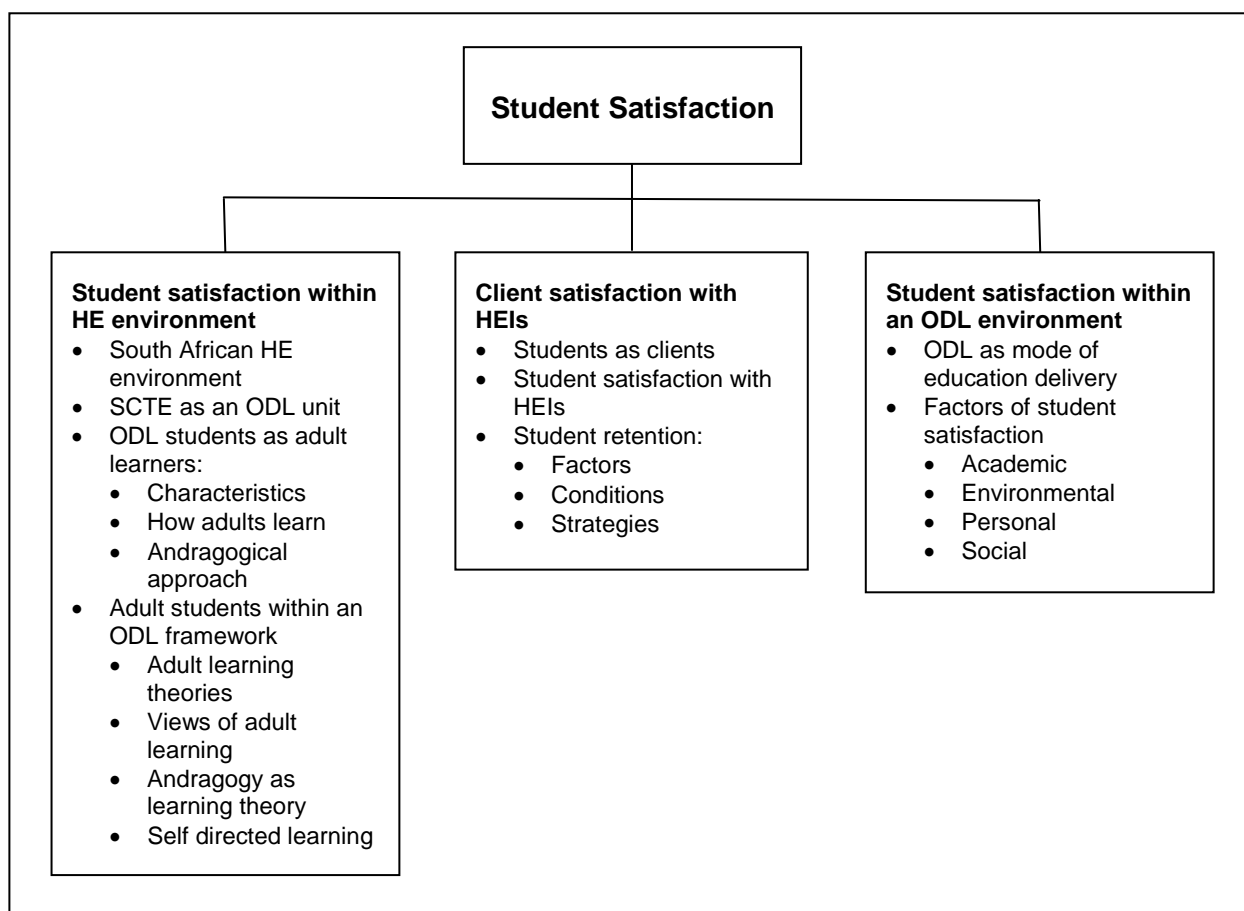


Figure 2.5: Representation of aspects influencing student satisfaction

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research is knowing and understanding; it is also the process of systematic inquiry to design, collect, analyze, interpret, and use data in order to understand, describe, predict or control an educational phenomenon or to empower individuals in such contexts (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003:11). The goal of research is to describe and understand a field, practice or activity (Brown & Dowling, 2001:7). Educational research is essential as it provides valid information, knowledge and principles to guide the decision-making, thinking and discussion process in education (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001: 5).

This chapter describes the choice of my research methodology, research design, qualitative research methodology, selection criteria of participants, procedures followed, ethical considerations, data capturing strategies, and data analyses. It also elucidates on the trustworthiness of the methodologies unfolding during this inquiry.

3.2 Worldview for the study

This study relates to the perceptions of the participants from different cultural-language groups in terms of student satisfaction (§ 1.3) with regard to their needs, expectations and personal experiences. This indicates that the research is exploratory and descriptive in nature (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:79-81; Marshall & Rossman, 1999:33). Exploratory research investigates the under-researched phenomena, and the core purpose is to develop understanding in an area that is not fully understood. This research will identify categories of meaning and generate questions for further research to shape the phenomenon according to plausible relationships (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:33). The study is also descriptive in nature as it documents and describes the complexities of the phenomena, the influence of personalities, the differences of opinions on issues and how the differences influence the results (Merriam, 1998:30). It also describes the process and use of data that were collected (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:33).

The research design is the researcher's plan of enquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006:54; McMillian & Schumacher, 2001:31) that puts paradigms of interpretation into motion (Denzin & Lincon, 2005) on how to proceed to gain understanding of a phenomenon in its natural setting (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002:426). The purpose of a research design is to provide, within an appropriate mode of inquiry, the most valid and accurate responses possible to the research question (Denzin & Lincon, 2005:85; McMillian & Schumacher, 2001:31). An effective research design outlines the defined purpose in which there is coherence between the research questions and the methods or approaches proposed which generate data that are credible and verifiable (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001:74). This research design encourages the process of strategic thinking and reflection (Masson, 2002:25) from the start, and continues doing so throughout the whole research process which calls for constant review of decisions and approaches (Richie & Lewis, 2003:47).

3.2.1 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was the perceptions of BEd Hons students regarding their satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) in terms of their experiences during studying via ODL.

The data captured from interviews, open-ended questionnaires, the teaching and learning policy as well as the researcher's field notes contributed towards the dataset that was analysed with the unit of analysis as focus for the research. The participants were chosen because of their particular features or characteristics that made possible detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes that the researcher wishes to study (Richie & Lewis, 2003:78). The participants encompassed all the elements that could impact on the outcome of the study to provide understanding and insight into the research problem.

3.2.2 Selection of participants

I used a purposive sampling strategy in this qualitative research study. Purposeful sampling is the umbrella term that McMillan and Schumacher (2001:376) refer to as a process of "selecting information rich cases for study in-depth." As I am a lecturer at the NWU, I had ready access to students. This provided me with the opportunity to purposefully identify, select and recruit second year BEd Hons students. Merriam (1998:61) emphasizes that "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in depth study." Merriam (1998:61) further advises that when employing purposeful

sampling, it is important for the researcher to first determine the selection criteria to be used in choosing participants. These criteria must reflect the purpose of the study and guide the process to be followed. In total, 34 educators participated in the study and I selected the participants according to three criteria dimensions: major language groups, gender and number of years teaching experience.

Because the SCTE has very few TshiVenda and XiTsonga students, the researcher decided to include only the two major African language groups in this investigation, namely the Nguni Language Group (isiZulu, isiXhosa, siSwati and isiNdebele speaking) and the Sotho Language Group (Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi speaking) (Els *et al.*, 2011). I also decided to include two language groups from European origin, viz. Afrikaans and English (Tables 3.1 and 3.2). Although most of the participants used English during the interview process, the researcher spoke all the above languages and could converse with participants in their language of choice.

Different gender groups may possibly have different needs and expectations concerning student satisfaction, therefore gender was used as the second criterion dimension. Teaching experience was the third selection criterion because the number of years teaching experience may possibly have an influence on student satisfaction, e.g. teachers who have been practising teachers for more than six years may experience a smaller workload (both in school and academically) due to their experience and may have already compiled study resources, than teachers who are in their first five years of teaching.

For this study, I planned one extensive focus group interview with the selected research participants. However, one participant came late and brought along some friends who all met the selection criteria. They were also NWU students enrolled for the BEd Hons via ODL, and they became part of a second focus group which had not been planned. This changed my sampling strategy as it would not have been ethical to send these students away in view of the fact that they travelled a long distance to attend the focus group interview and were eager to participate. I realised that the issue under discussion was important to them and they may provide significant contributions. By being inclusive, I ended up with two focus groups instead of one! The data of the two focus group interviews formed part of the integrated data analysis. For this study, it was important to consider the students' perceptions and experiences on ODL, rather than the number of participants. In view of the above, Taylor and Bogdan (1998:93) state that during interview, sampling can be used as a guide for selecting people to interview, the actual number of cases studied is relatively unimportant. What is important is the potential of each case to aid the researcher in

developing theoretical insights into the area of research. A summary of the profile of the participants is portrayed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Summary of the profile of the participants of focus group interview

	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2
Gender		
Female	4	7
Male	4	0
Total:	8	7
Age (years)		
20-29	1	0
30-39	1	0
40-49	4	5
50-59	2	2
Language		
Nguni	3	7
Sotho	3	0
English	1	0
Afrikaans	1	0
Teaching experience (years)		
0-9	2	0
10-19	4	0
20-29	2	5
30+	0	2

Table 3.1 presents the data from a biographical questionnaire (Addendum 3.1) with regard to the fifteen teacher-students enrolled for a BEd Hons programme. The information includes age, gender, teaching experience and language group. The table illustrates an inclusive site network in terms of race, gender and work experience.

Although the following statement may seem out of place at this point of the chapter, it is imperative to mention that after analysis of the focus group interviews, the data did not seem to be saturated (Masson, 2002:134; Merriam, 1998:64). I employed a further strategy to collect additional data by means of a structured open-ended questionnaire (Addendum 3.2). The biographical profile of these research participants is listed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Summary of the profile of the participants for open-ended questionnaire

	Participants
Gender	
Female	16
Male	<u>3</u>
Total:	19
Age (years)	
20-29	2
30-39	7
40-49	6
50-59	4
Language	
Nguni	5
Sotho	9
English	2
Afrikaans	3
Teaching experience (years)	
0-9	7
10-19	8
20-29	4
30+	0

Table 3.2 presents the data from a biographical questionnaire (Addendum 3.1) of the nineteen additional teacher-students enrolled for a BEd Hons programme as research participants. The information includes age, gender, teaching experience and language group. The table illustrates an inclusive site network in terms of race, gender and work experience.

3.3 Research design and methodology

Research methodology encompasses the complete research process: the research approaches, procedures and data collection methods used (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001:71). Therefore the aim of research methodology is to understand the processes and not the product of scientific inquiry (Cohen *et al.*, 2007:39). Qualitative research is grounded in a philosophical position that is broadly interpreted, understood, experienced, produced and constituted. Methods of data generation are used that are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced. Emphasis is placed on 'holistic' forms of analysis and explanation (Masson, 2002:3).

As a result this study relates to the interpretive approach because it ascertains the subjective contexts, experiences, beliefs, behaviours, practices, expectations, fears, needs, etc. of a small group of ODL students in their natural setting as teacher-students (Burrell & Morgan, 1979:20). The study followed a phenomenological approach that required the researcher to

identify the “essence of human experience concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study” (Creswell, 2003:15), as well as to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006:50). This enabled me as researcher to attain a better understanding of the needs, expectations and experiences of students, perceptions, attitudes, knowledge, feelings and values from different cultural and language groups concerning student satisfaction from a small group of BEd Hons students at the SCTE.

3.4 Qualitative research approach

Creswell (2008:30) is of the opinion that qualitative research methodology is suitable for research questioning that requires the researcher to explore, while Henning (2004:3) explains that a qualitative approach emphasizes verbal description and explanations of human behaviour. These statements support my decision to make use of the qualitative research methodology as opposed to quantitative research methodologies where the data are more rigid. Researcher decision to choose qualitative research rather than quantitative approach was further inspired by Niewenhuis (2010b:91-123) who asserts that “qualitative data analysis is usually based on an interpretive philosophy that is aimed at examining meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data.”

According to Creswell (2003:14-15) and Merriam (1998:12-15), there are five approaches or designs for qualitative research, viz. ethnographies, grounded theory, case studies, narrative research and phenomenological research. Ethnography refers to research which investigates an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time (Creswell, 2003:14). While cultural differences do have an influence on student perceptions, this research required students to share their unique cultural impressions with regard to student satisfaction. Grounded theory refers to research in which the researcher attempts to derive a general abstract theory of a process, action or integration, grounded in the views of participants, and involves multiple stages of data collection (Creswell, 2003:14; Merriam, 1998:18). The aim of my study is not to derive abstract theory, but to explore the unique experiences of students and provide guidelines in order to possibly improve higher education and student satisfaction within the ODL mode of delivery.

A case study refers to research in which the researcher explores an individual, a programme, event, activity or process in depth (Creswell, 2003:15). Case studies are differentiated from other types of qualitative research in that they are intensive descriptions and analyses of a

single unit or bounded system (Merriam, 1998:19). The intention of the proposed focus-group interviews in my study is not to isolate an individual or special group in order to investigate it as a single unit or bounded system that is unique. Rather, the intention is to reach a general qualitative understanding of student satisfaction amongst BEd Hons students. Narrative research refers to research in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks these individuals to tell their life stories (Creswell, 2003:15). While personal and social aspects contribute to student satisfaction, the aim of my study is not to study the unique life stories of individuals. Phenomenological research refers to research “in which the researcher identifies the ‘essence’ of human experience concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study” (Creswell, 2003:15).

Qualitative research provides rich narrative descriptions of the respondents’ perspectives on the construction of the reality of their social world. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand social phenomena of multiple realities from respondents’ perspective. The interviews took place in natural settings and no attempt was made to manipulate the respondents’ behaviour. The researcher is the primary agent for the gathering and analysis of the data. The general characteristics of qualitative research are summarised in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Characteristics for qualitative research*

Characteristics	Description
Concern for content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human experience takes its meaning from social, historical, political and cultural differences • Reality is socially constructed and constantly changing
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand social phenomena of multiple realities from respondents perspectives
Rich narrative description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data are in the form of words • Subjects experiences and perspectives • Detailed context-bound generalizations • Rich detailed description • In depth
Sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small, non-random and purposeful
Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews
Natural setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes place in natural setting • No attempt to manipulate behaviour • No artificial constraints or controls
Human Instrument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher is the primary agent for the gathering and analysis of data • Studies human experiences and situations, requires an instrument to capture complexity of the human experiences • Becomes immersed in social situation • Relies on fieldwork methods
Emergent design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design emerges as the study proceeds • Self-questioning throughout research in order to think critically • Flexible and evolving • Interaction and developmental
Inductive analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection and data analysis take place simultaneously

Characteristics	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic form of analysis • Identification of recurring patterns • Proceeds from data to hypotheses to theory

* Adapted from Ary *et al.*,(2002); McMillan & Schumacher (2001); Creswell (2008); Fraenkel and Wallen (2003); Richie and Lewis (2003); and Bogdan and Biklen (2006)

3.4.1. Qualitative data collection

Researchers often describe qualitative research as research that attempts to collect rich descriptive data in respect of a particular context with the intention of developing an understanding of what is being observed or studied. While Mills (2003:4) indicates that “qualitative research uses narrative and descriptive approaches for data collection to understand the way things are and what they mean from the perspective of the research respondents,” Masson (2002:3) points out that in order to use above mentioned approaches it “requires a data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting them.” The qualitative research methods used to generate data for this study were in-depth semi-structured focus group interviews.

Interviews are one of the most common forms of qualitative research methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Creswell, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Masson, 2002; Merriam, 1998). An interview is a flexible, interactive and generative tool to explore meaning and language in depth (Richie & Lewis, 2003:142). An interview is a two way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participant questions in order to collect data and learn about the ideas, beliefs, opinions and behaviours of the participant (Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:79). Qualitative interviewing refers to in- depth, semi-structured or loosely structured forms of interviewing (Ary *et al.*, 2002:40; Masson, 2002:8).

I used in-depth interviewing as data collection strategy during this study. “In-depth interview merely extends and formalises conversation and is often characterised as a conversation with a goal” (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001:42). In-depth qualitative interviewing refers to “face to face encounters between the researcher and participants directed toward understanding participants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998:77). The open-ended nature of this research method allows the respondents to answer the questions according to their own frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006:3). The in-depth interview provides an opportunity to address complex experiences, and investigates each student’s personal perspective using a range of probes and other techniques to achieve in-depth understanding of personal context within which the research phenomenon is located. This type of data

collection method generates data that add richness, depth and roundness to a study. The researcher and students interact intensely; allowing for detailed subject coverage, clarification and understanding of motivations and decisions; and also generative in the sense of creating knowledge or thought. Structure was combined with flexibility and data were captured in their natural form. The data were tape-recorded for accurate transcription and analysis.

Richie and Lewis (2003:30), as well as Ary *et al.* (2002:220) indicate various advantages of using in-depth interview:

- providing undiluted focus of the participants
- providing opportunity for detailed investigation of participants' perspectives and experience
- understanding of the personal and research context
- providing detailed subject coverage
- clarifying and detailing understanding of participants' motivations and decisions
- combining interview structure with flexibility
- encouraging participants to talk freely; allowing them to explore impacts and outcomes
- generating information through interaction between the respondent
- achieving depth in responding; opportunity to explore and explain
- generating new knowledge and thoughts
- capturing data in its natural form
- audio recording of data and taking note of changes in the format when transferred to text
- obtaining many data in a short period of time
- providing insight to participant's perspectives
- allowing for immediate follow-up and clarification of participants' responses
- developing personal relationships in interacting with participants.

3.4.2 Field notes

As a qualitative researcher, I compiled a detailed research diary during the research journey which included the taking of notes during the two semi-structured focus group interviews. In this study field notes provided me with the opportunity to record and comment the thoughts about the setting, the participants and activities (Merriam, 1998:106; Richie & Lewis, 2003:133). Specific attention was paid to non-verbal behaviour such as eye contact, posture

and gestures. This could provide extremely supportive information regarding the dispositions and attitudes of the participants towards the topic (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001:444). In this study the field notes were not analysed as part of the study.

3.4.3. Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews can be defined as group discussions in which a small number of participants discuss topics of special relevance to a study (Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:90). The informal group situation and the largely unstructured nature of questions encourage participants to disclose behaviour and attitudes they might not disclose during individual interviews. This happens, since participants tend to feel more comfortable and secure in the company of people who share similar opinions, views and behaviour than in the company of an individual interviewer (Edmunds, 1999:35). The focus group discussion is conducted as an open conversation in which each participant may comment or ask questions from others, including the interviewer (Litosseliti, 2003:56).

I decided to utilise focus group interviews for the following reasons as indicated by Patton (2001:167), which were to:

- gain insight into a relatively unknown research area
- stimulate new ideas and create concepts in order to learn more about peoples ranges and experiences
- facilitate interaction between subjects and uniquely capture the dynamics of group interaction
- diagnose the potential contributions and problems of new social program and services or products to be introduced
- understand the success or failure of a particular social programme in a specific social setting
- learn ways in which people discuss the phenomena of interest.

According to Litosseliti (2003:120), as with any research, focus group interviewing has strengths and limitations. The advantages of focus group interviews are:

- conducting research at a low cost and in a relatively brief span of time
- exposing the researcher to the participants' world views
- shedding light on the phenomena and social processes about which very little is known
- providing a socially orientated research procedure

- providing a format that allows moderators to probe. This makes flexibility possible, which is so important for exploring unanticipated issues
- having high face validity, not only easily understood but their methods are “comfortable”, since they seem credible to those using the information
- providing speedy results. In fact, they have considerable advantage over empirical research data-gathering methods in that they can be conducted, their results analyzed and report written in a very short time.

Although focus group interviews provide many advantages as method to collect qualitative data, shortcomings relate to:

- allowing the participants to influence and interact with each other; as a result group members are able to influence the course of the discussion
- generating empirical research data which are relatively difficult to analyze since participants’ comments must be interpreted within the constructed social setting
- acquiring material from focus groups does not lend itself to generalizing
- containing only a small sample of people
- producing research data which are not typical or projectable information for the whole universe under the study
- training of focus group interviewers
- conducting interviews is not always possible due to shortage of readily available interviewers (Greef, 2002:306-310; Krueger & Casey, 1998:36-38).

Focus group interviews need careful planning with respect to participants, the environment and questions to be asked (Greef, 2002:303). Four basic steps for conducting focus group interviews, viz planning, recruiting and conducting the focus group, as well as analyzing and reporting (Morgan & Krueger, 1998:12). The planning of interviews comprises four aspects, viz. participants, number and size of focus group, group facilitation and designing the interview schedule (Morgan & Krueger, 1998:12).

It is crucial for the researcher to create conducive conditions during a focus group session in order to provide for easy participative and productive discussions and to ensure that participants are comfortable talking to one another. The focus group interviews must also serve the researcher’s goal (Litosseliti, 2003:75). Therefore, it was necessary for the researcher to arrange a suitable group composition. In this case, participants were selected on the basis of their voluntary permission and willingness to take part in the study.

The size of the focus group traditionally ranges from six to twelve participants (Greef, 2002:305). Groups with more than twelve members limit each participant's opportunity to share experiences, while focus groups with four to six participants are popular, since smaller focus groups are easier to recruit and host (Morgan & Krueger, 1998:71). In this study, one focus group was identified with eight students, and a second comprised seven students (Addendum 3.1).

During focus group interviews, the moderator should be an experienced person (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001:149). The moderator should be comfortable and familiar with group processes and also possess curiosity about the topic as well as about the participants. The expression of different opinions should also be encouraged, and group members should be helped to be more specific in their responses to the question items of the interview schedule (Litosseliti, 2003:59). In this study, I acted as moderator during the interview. Although I received intensive in-house training three days ahead of the formal interviews, the first interview was challenging to me because I was a novice to conducting interviews. The interviews that followed (additional focus group) were easier and I managed to handle them with confidence. As a researcher I experienced the interviews as informative and interesting, and learnt much from the experience.

The design of the interview schedule is a critical task since it establishes the agenda for the group discussion and provides the structure within which the group members may interact (Morgan, 2002:145). The first step is to list all possible questions about the research problem to be investigated. In this regard I brainstormed with colleagues. Once the list was complete and no further suggestions were forthcoming, the critical questions (those that capture the intent of the study) were identified (Morgan, 2002:145).

Before I commenced with the interviews, as a facilitator researcher, I prepared myself mentally in an effort to minimize the risk of unexpected pressures that might limit my ability to concentrate (Greef, 2002:310). The "small" talk was also essential to the group discussion and I was able to create an atmosphere of trust, friendliness and openness from the moment the participants arrived for a session. Krueger (1998:37) adds that small talk facilitates a warm and friendly environment and puts the participants at ease. As a facilitator, I also physically arranged the group. I decided to group the participants around a table in order to ensure maximum opportunity for eye contact with both the moderator and other participants.

For the purpose of this study I conducted two semi-structured focus group interviews. Semi-structured focus group interviews in the form of conversations will render thick, rich and in-

depth data to explore and uncover understanding of student satisfaction among ODL BEd Hons students (Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam, 1998:3-25). To gain an in depth understanding of students' satisfaction and experiences with their open learning distance, I fragmented the main question: How can the SCTE improve student satisfaction and quality of education in its BEd Hons programme, by recognising the context sensitive needs, expectations and experiences of students from different cultural-language groups into sub-questions which arise from the conceptual framework.

3.4.4 Document analysis

This study also utilises documentary analysis during which the Teaching and Learning Policy of the NWU was used in order to compare policies and practices, as teaching and learning play an important role in student satisfaction. Document analysis has several attractions. According to Strydom and Delport (2005:333) the true test of a competent qualitative researcher comes in the analysis of the data—a process that requires specific truths. It can enable the researcher to reach inaccessible persons or subjects, as in the case with historical research. Further, like non-participant or indirect observation, there is little or no creativity on the part of the writer, particularly if the document was not written with the intention of being research data. Documentary study is also useful in longitudinal analysis, as it may show how situations have evolved over time.

There are different techniques that a researcher may use to analyse documents. Depending on the goal of the study, the following techniques may be considered:

- content analysis of documents will depend on a systematic and enumerative approach in order to quantify the frequency of elements within documents. This kind of analysis is concerned with the content of document and is usually associated with the positivist tradition
- textual analysis is usually thought of as a being part of the qualitative and interpretivist tradition. Here emphasis is less on the number and frequency of occurrences and more on interpreting the meaning the document might have
- semiology is the study of signs, identifies words and especially images and signs that offer complex meanings or significance beyond the surface of the text
- linguistic analysis explores the use and meaning of words and phrases in a document Jupp (2006:80).

3.4.5 Open-ended questionnaire

After interviewing the fourteen educators and compiling my own field notes and comments, I established a preliminary set of codes for the initial deductive analysis phase. I realised that the data already collected were not saturated and therefore did not sufficiently provide me with adequate information. It is on this basis that I decided to create an open ended questionnaire consisting of three questions which I distributed to BEd Hons students (Addendum 3.3). This latter group of students displayed a similar make-up as the first group of students that I had interviewed. This ensured that the data were saturated which means that no new information came to light (Masson, 2002:134; Merriam, 1998:64)

3.5 Data analysis

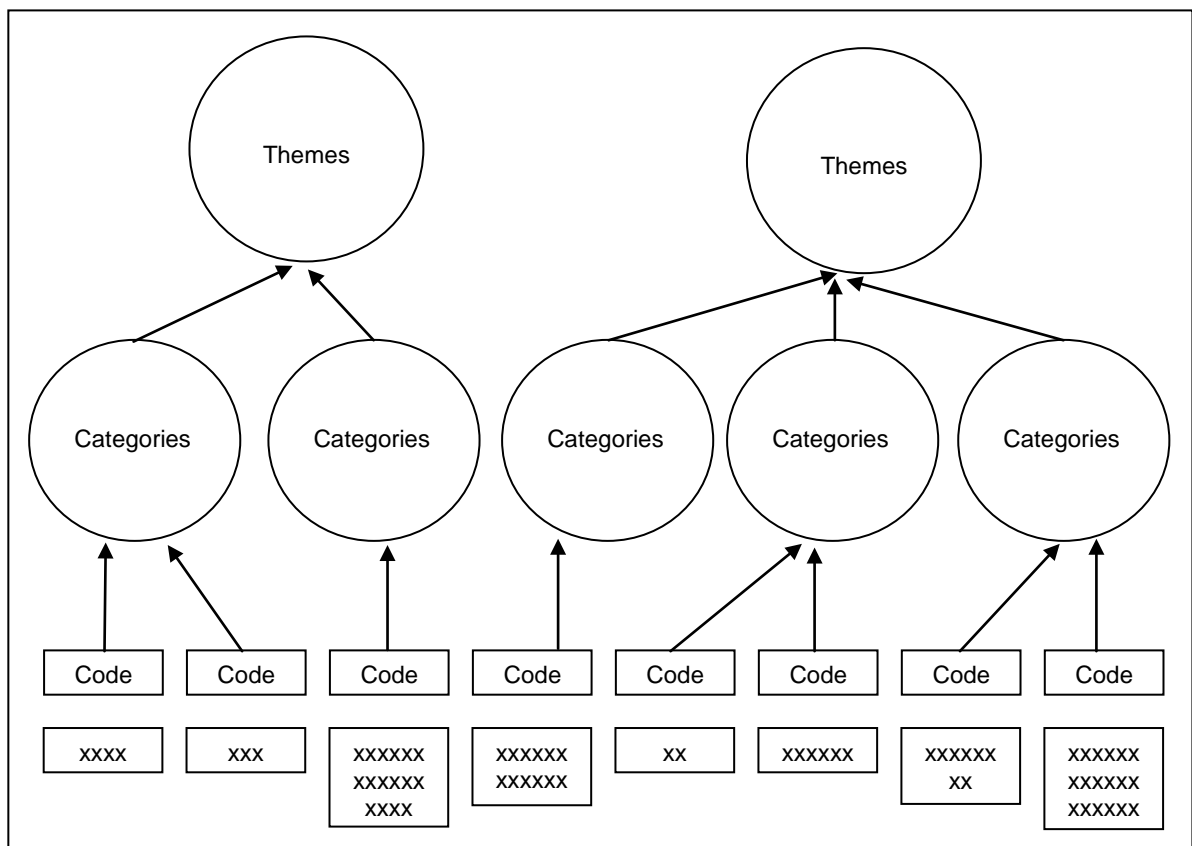
Data analysis “is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data” (Strydom & Delport, 2005:333). Data analysis is the “process of making sense and meaning from the data that constitute the finding of the study” (Merriam, 1998:178). Therefore, data analysis is the process of making the data more manageable by organizing the collected data into categories, and interpreting data, searching for recurring patterns to determine the importance of relevant information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006:153; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In qualitative research data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories. Unlike quantitative procedures, most categories and patterns emerge from the data, rather than being imposed on the data prior to data collection (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001:479). MacMillan and Schumacher (2001:479) add that in qualitative research the collection of data and data analysis take place simultaneously in order to build a coherent interpretation of the data.

The data analysis of this research study starts as soon as the first set of data has been gathered and runs parallel to data collection because each activity (data collection and interim analysis) informs and drives the other activities. It continues by coding each incident into as many categories as possible, and as the research continues the data are then placed in existing categories or existing categories are modified, and new categories emerge (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; McMillian & Schumacher, 2001:482). I transcribed interviews myself. This effort granted me the opportunity to gain experience in transcription and secondly I wanted to get as well-acquainted with the data as possible (Addendum 3.4). The only disadvantage to transcribing the interviews myself is that I could have been biased in

the transcription process. This was controlled by posting and e-mailing the transcribed interviews to the participants who were then involved in member-checking the transcriptions. All the participants indicated that they were satisfied with the transcripts as true reflections of the interviews.

First, I read all the interviews repeatedly to gain a sense of the whole and to facilitate the interpretation of small units of data. I compared and contrasted the text segments to identify context-bearing data segments while naming and classifying categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:464). I used the comparative method to compare one unit of information with another, looking for recurring regularities and patterns in the data to assign the information into categories. The names of the categories reflected the focus and purpose of my study. I double-checked and then refined my own analysis and interpretation to ensure validity and reliability.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the process of pattern seeking, categorising and theory building during qualitative analysis.



* Adapted from McMillan and Schumacher (2001:477)

Figure 3.1: The building patterns of meaning*

3.5.1 Using ATLAS.ti™ for data analysis

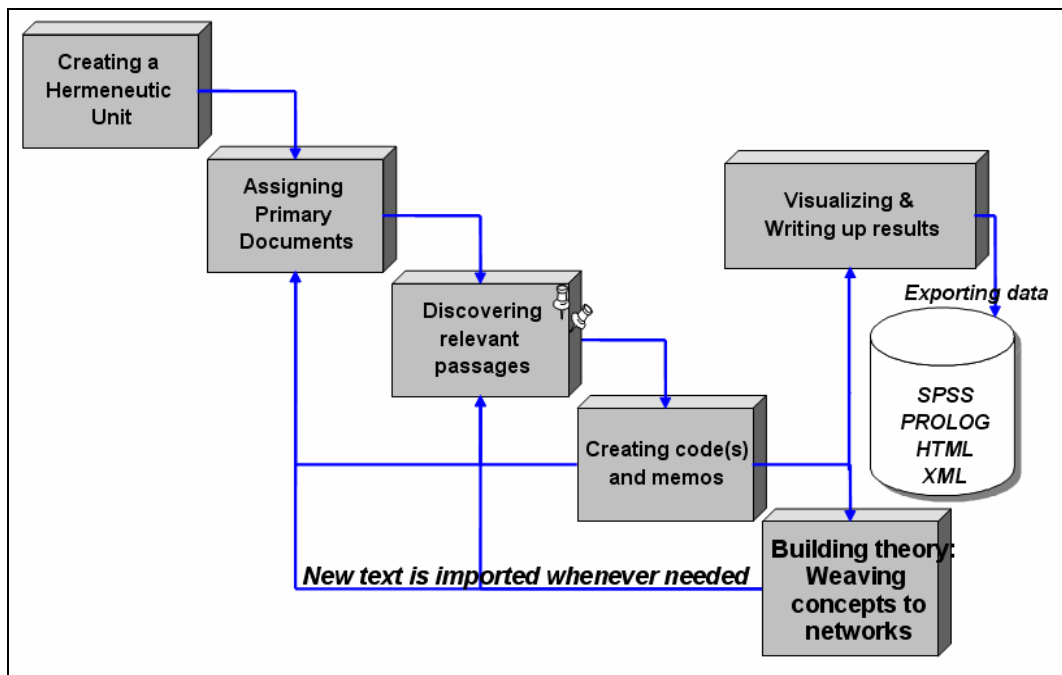
A computer-based qualitative data analysis software program, Atlas.ti™ assisted in the data analysis. Table 3.6 elucidates on the Atlas.ti™ terminology.

Table 3.4: Terminology used in Atlas.ti™

Terminology	Description
Category	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Answers to the question “what?” as a thread throughout certain codes
Code	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used as classification devices at different levels Standard code is directly linked to the quotations
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clusters of primary documents, codes and memos
Hermeneutic Unit (HU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heart of Atlas.ti™ Primary documents are stored in HU by assigning text, graphical, audio
Memo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Captures thoughts regarding the text It is similar to a code but contains longer passages of text
Network view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual diagram connects sets of similar elements together
Primary document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interface between a Hermeneutic unit (HU) and the data Provides access to data source
Quotation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Segment from a primary document that is interesting to the user
Sub-category	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A cluster of codes with common thread Has the same function as the code family
Super code	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Query that consists of several combined codes

* Adapted from Krippendorff (1980:17) and Muhr and Friese (2004)

Figure 3.2 illustrates the steps followed during data analysis with ATLAS.ti™.



* Muhr and Friese (2004:25)

Figure 3.2: The ATLAS.ti™ workflow*

The workflow constitutes six individual, but not necessarily consequential steps:

- **Opening of a new hermeneutic unit:** I named the new hermeneutic unit *Student Satisfaction of Open Distance Learning Students in a BEd Hons Programme* (Addendum 3.4).
- **Assigning of primary documents:** I assigned four primary documents to the hermeneutic unit. They were: two interviews (Addendum 3.5 and Addendum 3.6), the teaching and learning policy (Addendum 3.4) of the NWU and the open ended questionnaire (Addendum 3.3).
- **Discovering of relevant passages:** I highlighted the passages that contained information noteworthy to the study.
- **Creating of codes and memos for the relevant passages:** The key areas listed in Chapter Two guided my selection of codes. The memos related to the theoretical background from Chapter Two. Merriam (1998:183) states that “categories should reflect the purpose of the research. In effect, categories are the answers to your research questions.” Preliminary themes (identified from reviewing the literature (§2.1) and codes (relating to the contents of the four primary documents) were identified. The coding structure consisted of 74 codes (Table 3.5).
- **Creating and using of printing characters:** I used some of the printing characters to remind myself of the meaning and categorising of codes and categories. I used:
 - the asterisk (*) character for the theme student satisfaction with HE environment
 - the caret (^) character for the theme client satisfaction with HEIs
 - the ampersand (&) character for the theme student satisfaction with ODL environment (Figure 4.1).
- **Building theory:** I clustered the codes into sub-categories, from which 12 categories and three themes emerged (Table 3.5).
- **Visualizing and writing-up results:** I created visual networks that guided me during the writing of the findings (Chapter Four).

A code in qualitative inquiry is a word or phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, and essence-capturing description for a portion of language based or visual data. For this study, data consist of interview transcripts, documents and open ended questionnaire (Saldaña, 2009:3). Table 3.5 describes the structure of the code of density of this study.

Table: 3.5 Structure and code density of student satisfaction of ODL students in a BEd Hons programme

Themes	Student satisfaction with the HE environment	Client satisfaction with HEIs	Student satisfaction with ODL environment			
Categories	Programme	8	Work environmental support	2	Support for learning	8
	Communication	5	Course facilitations	7	Learning centres	7
	Environment	4	Culture and values	6	Programme	7
	Support from HEIs	5	Student attribute	14	Support from ODL unit	7
Codes	Cost effective	1	Caring for elders	1	Administrative support at learning centres	8
	Preparation for study	12	Caring for children	2	Class size	5
	Alignment of programme	10	Respect	1	Course workload	8
	Quality of programme	11	Coping abilities	4	Curriculum design	10
	Negative value added	3	Culture	2	Delivery mode	2
	Adds value	25	Dissatisfaction with assignments	4	Dissatisfaction with centres	15
	Adds NO value	1	Fear of failure	30	Dissatisfaction with lecturers/facilitators	8
	Accommodation requirements	1	Financial issues	25	Examinations	2
	Bursaries	1	Independent learning	5	Facilities at learning centres	2
	Distance from campus	9	Influence of own work environment	5	Frequency of attending contact classes	4
	General support	4	Leadership	11	Learning support at centre	2
	Good communication	6	Learning styles	4	Satisfaction with programme	37
	Language barrier	5	Marketable and knowledgeable	17	Satisfaction with examination	4
	Library and other resources	3	Positive attitudes of lecturers	10	Student dropout	1
	Organisational aspects	12	Relevance to work environment	16	Study material	3
	Poor communication	13	Seeking support from lecturers/facilitators	3	Support from time and space	15
	Satisfied with T&L	9	Self motivation	32	Support from colleagues	7
	Distance from learning centre	8	Student challenge	13	Support from family	8
			Student expectations	10	Support from friends	8
			Student frustration	71	Support from learning material	8
			Student isolation	5	Support from lecturers	15
			Student stress	19	Time table	32
			Support from work environment	10	Assignment feedback	7
			Teaching skills	7	Dissatisfaction with exam guidelines	5
			Time wasted	8	Exam centres	3
			Trust	2	Learning material not received	2
			Values	14	Missing assignments	5
			Transport problem	4		
			Fear of a module	4		
	Total:	156	368	255		

3.6 Trustworthiness

According to Moeketsi (2004:125) “validity is used to guarantee that information includes everything.” While Silverman (2004:283) states that “validity and reliability are the two important concepts to keep in mind when doing research, because in them the objectivity and credibility of research are at stake,” validity is more important and comprehensive than reliability, and is harder to evaluate or measure (Ary *et al.*, 2002:267).

3.6.1 Validity

Validity is the important key to effective research as it refers to the truth (or inaccuracy) of presuppositions generated by research (Cohen *et al.*, 2007:133). Babbie and Mouton (2001:648), Denzin and Lincon (2005:302) define validity as a test of whether the collected data accurately gauge what is measured. Bogdan and Biklen (2006:26) and McMillan and Schumacher (2001:393) point to strategies that enhance validity in the conduct of qualitative inquiry and which the qualitative researcher can use as a combination to ensure validity:

- *Lengthy data collection period*: I provided sufficient opportunities for all participants to contribute during interview session; I was patient when they responded to the questions as the lengthy data collection provided me with the opportunity for sound data analysis.
- *Participant’s language*: I obtained verbally exact statements from participants to provide concrete evidence of my findings.
- *Field research and observation*: I conducted the research in a natural setting to promote the reality of life experiences of the participants more accurately than a contrived setting would.
- *Disciplined subjectivity*: I monitored and submitted all phases of the research process to continuous and rigorous questioning.
- *Triangulation*: I used multiple literature resources to confirm and enhance findings.
- *Participant review*: I requested some participants to review the transcribed interviews to check for accuracy of presentation.

3.6.2 Reliability

According to Newman (2007:145), and McMillan and Schumacher (2001:385), reliability refers to the consistency of measurement, the extent to which the results are the same over different forms of the same instrument or occasions of data collection. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:385) add that in qualitative research reliability refers to the consistency of

the researcher's interactive style, data recording, data analysis and interpretation of participant meanings from the data.

Qualitative research is more justifiable when multiple coders are used, and when high inter and intra-coder reliability is obtained. Inter-coder reliability refers to consistency among different coders, while intra-coder reliability refers to consistency within a single theory (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:114). To ensure coding consistency during my analyses, a colleague skilled in qualitative methods, as well as knowledgeable in the field of this research, coded a major section of the primary documents. I thereafter calculated the inter-rater agreement of coding to contribute towards the reliability of the coding consistency. The calculation of the Cohen's Kappa for intra-rater reliability was 0.9 (Randolph, 2008). Although some qualitative researchers (Merriam, 1998:205) do not deem this necessary, it was reassuring for me to check on my coding consistency.

According to Merriam (1998:206), reliability in the traditional sense of repeated measures to obtain similar results is problematic when it comes to qualitative research, because human behaviour is involved. Reliability in qualitative studies should be determined by the results that are consistent with the data collected. I used the following strategies from (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; McMillian & Schumacher, 2001; Merriam, 1998) to ensure that my findings were reliable:

- *Researcher's role*: I explained my position as a researcher and declared my biases relating to the data collection and analysis.
- *Informant selection*: I explained to the participants how they were selected and why I made the decision to use purposeful sampling.
- *Social context*: I arranged and communicated the specific time of the interview, the purpose of group meetings, the people and setting of the events to the participants in order to assist in data analysis.
- *Triangulation*: I used more than one method of data collection and continuously ensured my understanding of what was presented.
- *Member checking*: I asked two of participants in the focus group interviews (one from Limpopo Province and one from North West Province) to review the accuracy of my transcription of the interviews to contribute towards the reliability of this research.
- *Code-recode strategy*: I coded the data over an extended period of time to ensure consistency of coding strategy.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethics are generally considered to deal with beliefs about what is right or wrong, proper or improper, good or bad (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001:182). The following measures were taken while planning and conducting my study to ensure that the rights and welfare of each participant are protected, and that nobody was harmed or hurt in any way during the research (Denzin & Lincon, 2005; McMillian & Schumacher, 2001; Richie & Lewis, 2003):

- Participants were informed, in conversation and by means of an information letter (Addendum 3.7 and Addendum 3.8), about the nature and intention of the study and what their involvement would be
- I was transparent during the entire research process
- Participants were asked to participate voluntarily in focus-group interviews
- Formal consent was obtained from all participants with the understanding that their confidentiality would be respected, and I informed the participants that they would have the right to withdraw at any time during the research process (Addendum 3.9)
- All participants were treated with respect and maintained the right to withdraw from the research at any given point
- To help ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, I was cautious not to influence the data from my own point of view. The researcher ensured students of their anonymity, that they were free to speak their minds, and that their participation in the study would in no way be used to victimize them
- The study adheres to the ethical considerations from the North-West University's Ethical Committee (Addendum 3.10)
- I include a demo version of the Atlas.ti™ program (Addendum 3.11), as well as the backup file of the analyses I performed in Atlas.ti™ (Addendum 3.12). A person skilled in the use of Atlas.ti™ can install the demo, and access the program and project files to view the analyses.

3.8 Limitations of this study

There might have been inhibiting factors that influenced my research. Merriam (1998:20) states: "The human instrument is as fallible as any other research instrument." The researcher as human instrument is limited by being human—mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal bias may cause interferences. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:24) point out that an institution such as a school or HEI is a public enterprise and is

influenced by the external environment. The situations themselves change: legislative mandates and judicial orders change, the structure of schools change and the curriculum also changes.

Participants perceive ideas differently and the situational elements also have to be considered indicating the complexity of the research. The participants unconsciously use particular words to express their ideas, and these are used as an indication of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction towards the specific programme. The cultural diversity of the students, especially those who had to express themselves in their second language such as English, can be an inhibiting factor as words used can have different meanings for the researcher and the participants.

Some of the participants arrived late and there was a delay in the starting time of the interviews. Some participants did not participate at the start of the interviews but comfortably engaged in the discussions at a later stage. The use of English as a medium of instruction posed a problem to some participants.

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter dealt with the research design and methodology of this study. The nature and methodology of this research were indicated, the qualitative data collection method was discussed and substantiations were given for choosing this particular research approach. The strategies implemented to ascertain trustworthiness were also pointed out. The data analysis process and the use of ATLAS.ti™ were outlined, and the preliminary theory and codes were given. The ethical considerations were taken into account and the limitations of this study were outlined. The next chapter gives a comprehensive description of data analysis and findings from the focus interviews the Teaching and Learning Policy analysis, as well as notes and comments I made during the research process.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three justified my choices of the qualitative research design and methodology used in this study, as well as the participant selection and data collection strategies. Chapter Four consequently offers an interpretive and analytical account of the data collected on BEd Hons students' satisfaction with regard to their ODL experiences. It also serves as reduction of the data in order to structure these and to gain understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. As I was categorising the data, clear findings emerged from the utterances of the participants.

Marshall and Rossman (1999:151) indicate that data analysis starts by coding each incident into as many categories as possible, and as the analysis continues, the data are then placed into categories. This enabled me to describe and explain the BEd Hons students' satisfaction with regard to their ODL experiences. From the literature study and a compilation of my field notes, I established a preliminary set of codes for the initial deductive analysis phase. These preliminary codes guided me to reduce the data and to establish emerging patterns. Thereafter, from a grounded-theory approach to coding, more codes emerged as inductive codes. Together they comprised the code list and code density of this investigation (Table 3.5). The following section provides an overview of the three patterns that emerged from the analysis.

4.2 Overview of the pattern of findings on student satisfaction

This section provides an overview of the themes (patterns) (Figure 4.1) that emerged from the integrated dataset comprising (i) two focus group interviews, (ii) nineteen open-ended questionnaires to participants, and (iii) an analysis of the Teaching and Learning Policy of the NWU. Collectively they contributed towards addressing the central research question: *How can the SCTE improve student satisfaction and quality of education in its BEd Hons programme, by recognising the context sensitive needs, expectations and experiences of students from different cultural-language groups?*

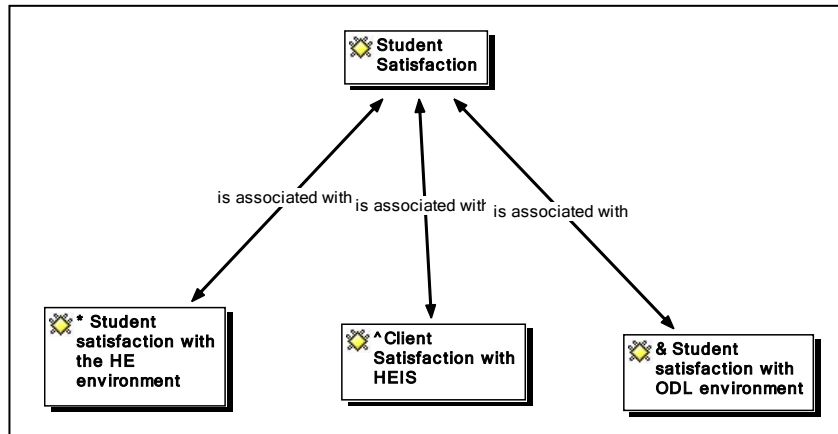


Figure 4.1: The three themes that emerged from the integrated dataset

Figure 4.1 indicates three themes that emerged from the focus group interviews, the open-ended questionnaire, and the analysis of the Teaching and Learning Policy of the NWU.

They are:

- (i) Student satisfaction with and within the HE environment
- (ii) Client satisfaction with HEIs
- (iii) Student satisfaction with ODL.

Accordingly, the following sub-questions arose from the conceptual framework (Figure 2.5 and Figure 4.1):

- *How satisfied are ODL students with the HE environment?*
- *How satisfied are ODL students as clients with HEIs?*
- *How satisfied are ODL students with the learning environment?*

Liegler (1997:357) describes student satisfaction as the degree to which students' needs and expectations are met concerning the curriculum design, course delivery, learning resources, student support, relationships with academic staff, etc. The following sections will address the emerging findings relating to the three patterns of student satisfaction with ODL.

4.2.1 Sub-question 1: How satisfied are students within the HE environment?

This sub-question aims to determine how satisfied students are with HE in general, their local HEI, as well as with their academic programmes. Four categories emerged from the findings relating to student satisfaction with HE. They are (i) the quality of the programmes, (ii) communication between lecturers/facilitators and students, (iii) environment at the learning centres, and (iii) support from the HEI (Figure 4.2). Each category has a relating number of

codes. The following section will address quality of the programme as a category with the codes that emerged.

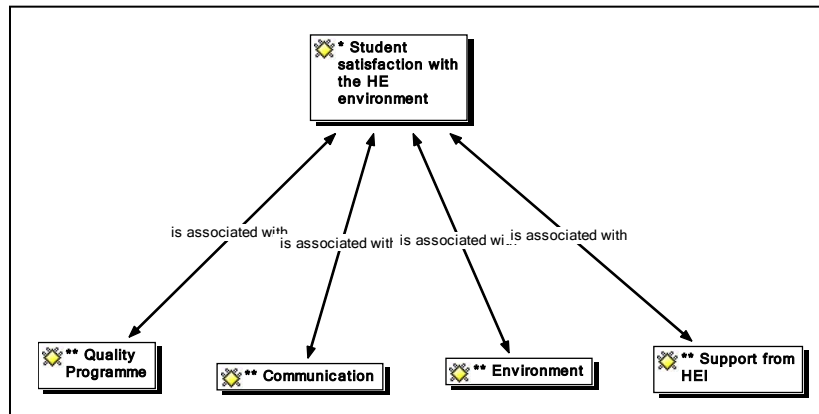


Figure 4.2: Categories relating to student satisfaction with the HE environment

4.2.1.1 Quality of programmes

According to the CHE (2004), a function of HEIs is to promote quality in HE. The Teaching and Learning Policy of the NWU aims to ensure (a) continuous high quality education for its students, and (b) that programmes are cost effective. Danielson (1998) and Belcheir (1999) are of the opinion that academic satisfaction also involves students' perception of quality in their academic programmes.

Seven aspects relating to the category of quality of programmes emanated (Figure 4.3). They are: (i) the cost effectiveness of programmes, (ii) the students' preparation for further study, (iii) the alignment of programme according to the curriculum design, (iv) the students' perceptions of the value of the programme. In general, the participants regarded the quality of the BEd Hons programme as acceptable and they believed that the programme enabled Teacher Professional Development (TPD).

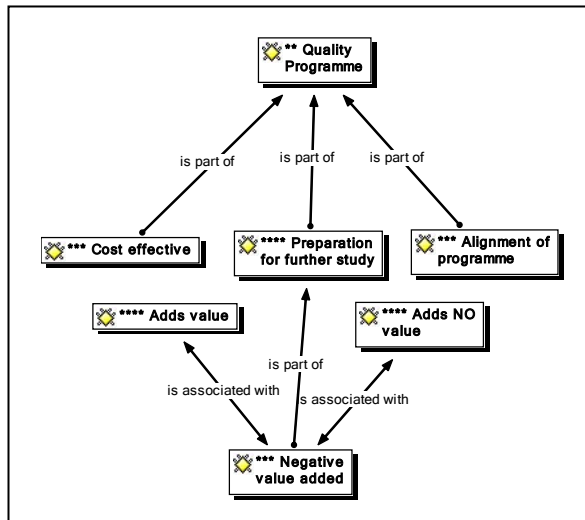


Figure 4.3: Aspects relating to the category: the quality of programmes

Table 4.1 provides an overview of typical evidence from the integrated dataset for the category of quality of programmes. Each of the codes is described in greater detail hereafter.

Table 4.1: Typical codes and quotations for the category of quality of programmes

Codes	Quotations
Cost effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmes are delivered in the most cost-effective and accessible manner possible, without compromising quality and academic standards (P3, 47:47) The institution is good with high quality of work (P6, 42:42)
Preparation for further study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because I'm planning that when I'm done with this, BEd Hons, then the following year, I want masters in this very same University... (P1, 279:279) I wish to continue to study in this institution Masters and PhD as well (P6, 12:12)
Alignment of programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The next thing is that one of many modules which I see it being unfair especially in my case of educational management with thirteen [modules] but on one scale to that one of special needs... (P6, 64:64) If they can combine it in maybe one module, that's makes, it in fact, they fragmented it to make it a number of modules... (P1, 117:117)
Adds no value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We personally have a problem with what I receive because most of the things that are happening here are not useful to my experiences (P4, 10:10)
Add value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My positive experience are that since learning this degree I've gained a lot of educational spheres as to how to manage my learners, colleagues', SGB's, trade unions the finances as well as the how the laws educationally include, the equity, affirmative action and many more. In fact I am so divergent overcoming to school management teachers (P6, 62:62) Broadens our knowledge and equip us with more information in education system of our country (P6, 72:72) Again BEd Hons has equipped me with the management skills e.g., school (and management knowing (how to deal with human resource at school. Knowing some of the education laws that as manager, it is important to know how education... (P1, 70:70)

Codes	Quotations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>It prepares us for acting or has better... We know how the school runs, the structures runs, the structures of education, the responsibilities of the stakeholders of the school i.e. the Principal (Manage), the educators (teach), learners are motivated to learn, the SGB members governs the school (P4, 15:15)</i>
Negative value added	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I am not gaining more (P5, 13:13)</i>

The following section provides evidence of each of the aspects listed in Figure 4.3

4.2.1.1.1 Cost effectiveness

Cost effectiveness of the BEd Hons programme plays a vital role in terms of course delivery for a university. HEIs are constantly developing strategies to keep students, who are their clients, satisfied with the academic service they receive—especially with the knowledge that students drop out for many other reasons that are beyond the control of the HEI (Noel-Levitz, 2009). The Teaching and Learning Policy of the NWU aims to ensure continuous quality education that is also cost effective for the university and encourage increased student enrolment:

- Programmes are delivered in the most cost-effective and accessible manner possible, without compromising quality and academic standards (P3, 47:47).*

4.2.1.1.2 Preparation for future career development

Sahin (2007) and Douglas *et al.* (2006) maintain that student recruitment and throughput rates in distance education are connected to student satisfaction and expectations. In general, the participants were of the opinion that the BEd Hons programme of the NWU was of high quality as it prepared them for further studies. They looked forward to return to enrol for a Master's or a PhD qualification: The participants also gained self-confidence during the course of their BEd Hons studies to the extent that they were elected to management committees at their respective schools. They have also gained valuable knowledge from the various study modules on the operation and management of their schools and they have benefited greatly in applying this knowledge in practice:

- The academic level of this institution is very high compared with others. I never thought I will make it but now I am motivated and developed self confidence. I wish to continue to study in this institution Masters and PhD as well (P6, 12:12)*
- This is the University which we think can help us. Maybe it's up to the international level, we don't know, we are willing to come back to this university... (P1, 305:305)*

- *Most of educators (including myself), I'm motivated we are going to study further to achieve professional title e.g. study Masters, PhD and more (P4, 16:16)*
- *It has a positive impact for my professional development. I was elected to be on disciplinary committee, SDT and SBST because of the good suggestions that I always come with during staff meeting. It helped to have knowledge about lots of things involved in education system and school as an organisation (P4, 23:23).*

Two participants were dubious about the possible benefit they have gained from the material that they have studied, and felt that the study material did not contribute towards TPD:

- *It doesn't contribute much towards my professional development because the information that we receive is always incomplete (P4, 9:9)*
- *We personally have a problem with what I receive because most of the things that are happening here are not useful to my experiences (P4, 10:10).*

4.2.1.1.3 Alignment of modules

Some participants shared their experiences about the programme, and supplied feedback that seemed to contradict the positive responses of other participants. They felt that the programme should be improved, adjusted and better aligned:

- *Many modules which I see it being unfair especially in my case of educational management with thirteen [modules] but on one scale to that one of special needs and that one for Mathematics we are working together with those students but they complete the course... (P6, 64:64)*
- *Somehow they can be tried to be squeezed up and form one module law. But it's all about law, it's all about law. Interpretation of statutes, it's about law, human resource labour law, it's about law, introduction to law... (P1, 115:115).*

Astin (1993:59) supports these students' responses when he maintains that, among other aspects associated with student satisfaction, curriculum and instructional design is important. This indicates that if the instruction is not well designed, students' perceptions of academic programmes can negatively influence their academic satisfaction (Entwistle, 1986:1).

4.2.1.2 Students' experience of communication from HE

As part of curriculum delivery, the SCTE offers various support services to students such as regular SMS communication, a call centre, personal telephonic assistance, email, and access to course material through the Internet (SAIDE, 2011), as well as mobile learning through administrative SMSs, supportive screencasts and mobisite, and through a learning management system (Blignaut, 2010). Five aspects relate to the category of the students' experience of communication from HE (Figure 4.4). They are (i) language barriers, (ii)

information via the Internet, (iii) good communication, (iv) poor communication, and (v) inappropriate communication. Some participants revealed that they grappled with language issues, while others found the communication via Internet extremely helpful and expeditious. Participants display a variety of responses when it comes to communication ranging from positive to negative experiences.

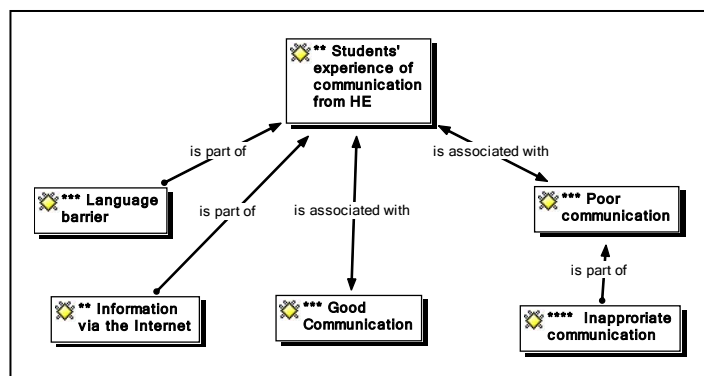


Figure 4.4: Aspects relating to the category of students' experiences of communication from the HE

Table 4.2 provides an overview of the typical evidence from the integrated dataset for the category of students' experiences of communication from the HE. Each of the codes is described in greater detail hereafter.

Table 4.2: Typical codes and quotations for the category of students' experiences of communication with HE

Codes	Quotations
Language barrier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coming to the university now that means the language barriers is also affecting you, because now you are from a foundation phase school then you need to come to University, everything is in English, which is really, at the end of the day can be a problem (P1, 296:296) We are using Tswana for teaching in our school and I sometimes struggle (P5, 27:28)
Information via the internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those of us who has got internet access, the layout on the internet and getting your results, and getting all those, it's so easy, you don't need to go and phone and write to the university and come see someone... (P1, 54:54)
Good communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you phone the, the, the call centre agents in trying to find out about maybe, I mean, results or whatsoever, immediately you dash it over your student number... (P1, 50:50) If maybe you are experiencing a problem in connection with your studies, you are able to phone and make an appointment and see the lecturer, in order to just explain to you what is expected of you... (P1, 117:117)
Poor communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Another thing, when we, when you phone in, the lecturers, some of them don't answer their phones they just ignore us, especially when we are about to write exams (P2, 182:182)

Codes	Quotations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We don't get "feedback" if we send emails (P6, 53:53)</i>
Inappropriate communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The issue of sending students time-table should be watched out sometimes you are given a time-table but after written exams, you are told that your exam book won't be marked... (P6, 67:67)</i> • <i>We are getting SMS that are not correct (P6, 20:20)</i>

The following section provides evidence of each of the aspects listed in Figure 4.4

4.2.1.2.1 Language barriers

The political, social, and economic environments influence the manner in which an adult learns. Adult participation in education is affected by aspects such as socio-economic status, perceived value of participation, readiness to participate, and barriers to participation (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982:35). A few participants mentioned that language was a problem as they taught in their home language in the foundation phase, and when they come to the HE, the language of teaching and learning is English. These changes affect their learning. Sometimes, a facilitator incorrectly used Afrikaans as language of instruction and consequently the contact classes then became inaccessible:

- *Sometimes it becomes difficult, you read, you don't understand what is needed for this assignment, then you have to go to the, eh, internet or to other people (P2, 157:157)*
- *The man that was conducting the contact sessions at Ermelo, he was Afrikaans speaking, he was, he could not elaborate much on English and he put on fears, he told us that he has done researched about the work of the deputy principals (P2, 141:141)*
- *In primary schools we find that books are written in English and then have to be, the, the teacher must teach maybe in Setswana (P1, 293:293).*

4.2.1.2.2 Information via the Internet

A participant described how ODL students', who have Internet access, could download almost anything, including their results. They did not have to call or drive to the University and this saved much time:

- *For those of us who has got Internet access, the layout on the internet and getting your results, and getting all those, it's so easy, you don't need to go and phone and write to the university and come see someone... (P1, 54:54).*

This finding is in agreement with Ko and Rossen (2001:40) who regard ODL as advantageous because it makes learning accessible to students, providing control for students to manage all aspects of their learning.

4.2.1.2.3 Communication between students and the HEI

Findings on communication between students and the HEI encompass to good communication, bad communication and inappropriate communication. Some participants responded positively on the communication they receive from the HEI in general, especially from lecturers and administration. Participants mentioned that even when they call the HEI or the OLG Call Centre agent to obtain results, they were readily assisted. Maushak and Ellis (2003:139) support these students when they state that in South Africa, ODL modes are predominantly used for delivering professional in-service training to practising teachers across geographical distance and socio-economic barriers. Communication via SMS is a good proposition as they receive the information instantaneously:

- *When you call them and ask for clarity, they so understand and responding to any questions asked (P6, 18:18)*
- *Their communication with us via SMS and even when you phone them you also get help (P5, 10:10).*

Contradictory to the above, a participant shared less than satisfactory experiences regarding poor and inappropriate communication received from the HEI. Sometimes they received incorrect SMS information and this confused them. They consequently refrained from attending contact classes when they were not sure that their lecturers/facilitators would really be there. Receiving study material on time remains an issue:

- *I'm not very satisfied, there is poor communication, and they can send message that say "Come and attend contact sessions" but when we come here we find nothing (P5, 32:33)*
- *Most of the time I was contacting the University to send me study material using telephones, faxes. They just agreed to send but do not fulfil their promise... (P6: 14:14).*

4.2.1.3 Environmental satisfaction

Lawton (1985:45) defines environment as the "set of stimulus or context which is seen as having potential demand character for any individual." While, Brown *et al.*, (1998) and Astin (1993) confirm that environmental satisfaction influences student satisfaction and students' experiences during their educational programme. From the above four aspects related to the category of the environment (Figure 4.5): (i) distance from the campus, (ii) satisfaction with teaching and learning, (iii) distance from the learning centres, and (iv) the distance from examination centres.

Some participants maintained that the distance they have to travel to attend classes and write examinations are extreme. They also complained about certain examination centres,

which they found not to be conducive to writing examinations. Other participants are extremely satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning they received.

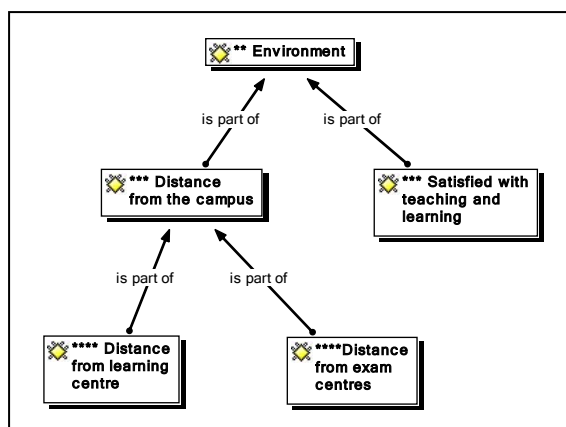


Figure 4.5: Aspects relating to the category of environmental satisfaction

Table 4.3 provides an overview of the typical evidence from the integrated dataset for the category of environmental satisfaction. Each of the codes is described in greater detail hereafter.

Table 4.3: Typical codes and quotations for the category of environmental satisfaction

Codes	Quotations
Distance from campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Contact sessions are, are just hectic in that one, I'm travelling about 140kms single, 140kms back home (P1, 46:46)</i> • <i>I think for us being in class, coming to Potch and so on, we've got advantage on top of the guys who are travelling further and so on (P1, 48:48)</i>
Satisfied with teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Guidance was given on assignments and I managed to complete them with easy. Everything has been going on well in my first semester... (P6, 68:68)</i> • <i>I'm more than happy; the lectures are excellent (P6, 9:9)</i>
Distance from learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The venue for sessions is very far (P6, 37:37)</i> • <i>Spend a lot on travel from Witbank to Pretoria, financially its petrol... (P2, 57:57)</i> • <i>The attending institution is too limited (which means student travel from far places to attend) I think the institution must go through the statistics... (P6, 30:30)</i>
Distance from examination centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Exam centres a problem, we using, ehh, Middelburg exam centre, it's a, it's a high school. And at times we find that's during school hours when learners go to break... (P2, 37:37)</i> • <i>The attending and examination areas are mostly out of town, we struggle to</i>

Codes	Quotations
	<p><i>get there why the institution can't arrange for the comfortable and civilized area for their lovely student (P6, 30:30)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I am living in Hammanskraal and I come to the contact session at Pretoria but... (P5, 5:5)</i>

The following section provides evidence of each of the aspects listed in Figure 4.5

4.2.1.3.1 Distance from the campus

Sahin (2007) states that one of the many advantages of ODL is that it offers instructors and students a flexible learning environment in terms of time and location. Some participants responded negatively to the environment when attending contact classes. They reported that the distance and time they spend on travelling made them late for classes. Due to the distances, some could not attend some of the classes. Meanwhile, students who live near the HEI have an advantage because they do not have to travel far to attend contact sessions:

- *I will just say, aah, so far I am very much satisfied, although I am struggling from travelling because we are far, far from the contact session centres... (P2, 32:32)*
- *I think for us being in class, coming to Potch and so on, we've got advantage on top of the guys who are travelling further and so on (P1, 48:48)*
- *And then sometimes we miss the first class, the first... (P1, 78:78).*

4.2.1.3.2 Satisfied with teaching and learning

Some participants responded positively with regard to teaching and learning presented at the contact classes. They mentioned that they receive guidance for completing their assignments. In general, the teaching and learning environment was conducive to attending contact classes. Another challenge that foregrounded was that some examination centres are not conducive as it is always noisy, and students cannot concentrate while writing examinations. A participant mentioned that due to the extensive distance they travel when they have to write examinations, they arrive late for examinations:

- *The vacation school classes whereby lecturers guide us on how to go about with the learning material such as study guides, text books, how to refer, how to organize your assignments. They also give clarification for understanding the assignments. They also guide us for preparing us for exams (P6, 2:2)*
- *The environment itself, I think, it's conducive (P1, 73:73)*
- *They (lecturers) thoroughly explain the assignments the do's and don'ts but the danger is that if a student did not studied very hard. It becomes difficult to understand them (P6. 11:11)*

- *I am not satisfied about the Venue where we should write our final exam because firstly the place, venue doesn't have a transport...* (P5, 14:14).

4.2.1.4 Support from HEI

In South Africa, the Higher Education Act of 1997 assigns the responsibility of quality assurance of HE to the CHE. This responsibility is discharged through its permanent sub-committee, the HEQC (Council on Higher Education, 2004). HEIs should manage expectations of students, including the perceived benefits associated with attending a particular HEI. For example in ODL, location, facilities, image, curriculum and quality of students will have an influence on the students' decision of which HEI to choose (Gwin & Gwin, 2003:30). Five aspects relate to the theme support from HEIs (Figure 4.6). These are bursaries, general support, accommodation, organisational aspects and library and other resources. The participants responded positively regarding support from the HEI. Some mention that the HEI needs to reorganise the BEd Hons programme and provide them with accommodation during contact classes.

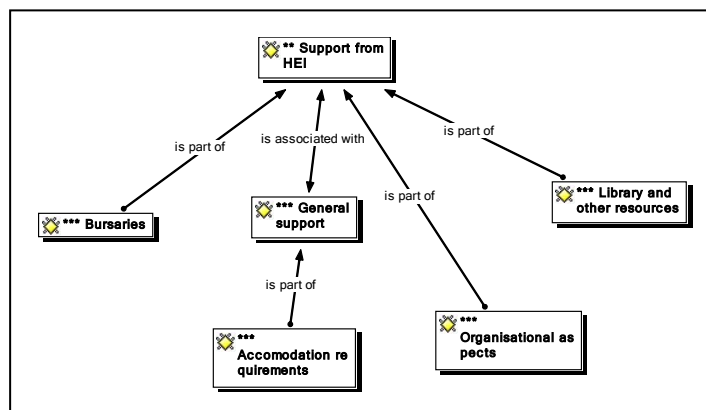


Figure 4.6: Aspects relating to the category of support from HEI

Table 4.4 provides an overview of the typical evidence from the integrated dataset for the category of support from HEI. Each of the codes is described in greater detail hereafter.

Table 4.4: Typical codes and quotations for the category of support from HEI

Codes	Quotations
Bursaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>And I must say the support system we've got here, I had trouble with, uhm, doing my second year, and there was trouble with my bursary...</i> (P1, 48:48)
General support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The support system within is very good. Quite satisfied...</i> (P1, 48:48)
Organisational aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>At least, if they can arrange and give us lectures during school holidays for about a week or two...</i> (P5, 6:6) • <i>The attending institution is too limited (which means student travel from far places to attend) I think the institution must go through the statistics...</i> (P6,

Codes	Quotations
	30:30)
Library and other resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Partly satisfied because we're far from technology and hard to find the information in time (P 5, 12:12)</i>
Accommodation requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think if they maybe can, can they can organise accommodation for us. When you go far, like from Ermelo, then you guys can, if you can organise accommodation, organise accommodation... (P2, 56:56)</i>

The following section provides evidence of each of the aspects listed in Figure 4.6

In South Africa, DL and ODL are modes of delivery predominantly used for delivering professional in-service training to practising teachers across geographical distance and socio-economic barriers (Maushak & Ellis, 2003:139). Factors like infrastructure, quality of support systems, quality of content and assessment, peer support networks, planning and designing of ODL, delivery methods, motivation for enrolling in the course and learning objectives influence ODL experiences (Fraser & Killen, 2005; Trinidad & Pearson, 2004; Wilson, 2001).

4.2.1.4.1 Support from bursaries

One participant responded positively with regard to the support received from the university when there was a problem with the granting of a bursary:

- *And I must say the support system we've got here, I had trouble with, uhm, doing my second year, and there was trouble with my bursary... (P1, 48:48).*

4.2.1.4.2 General support from HEI

Some participants responded positively with regard to the support they receive from the HEI in general, especially from lecturers and administrative personnel. One participant mentioned that they could receive additional support on an aspect such as accommodation when they attend contact classes and during examinations. However, the university's policy states that they have structured support and opportunities for both students:

- *Yes, I could say I strongly feel that, generally, the support system from North-West University it's quite good to me (P1, 50:50)*
- *Structured support and development opportunities are provided to both students and academic staff to ensure the attainment ... (P3, 53:54).*

4.2.1.4.3 Organisational aspects

Some participants mentioned that HEIs should reorganize the BEd Hons programme because many students do not cope with it due to time constraints of completing the programme. A participant mentions that if the university “*does not organize itself, they will be a building without people.*” The university’s policy states that their planning and marketing of learning programmes is at the discretion of School Directors:

- *And then, to me, it tells me, in terms of record keeping, it tells me that something somewhere, somehow is not right and this to a certain extent will make the University to remain the buildings alone, without having employees, because the most targeted are the teachers... (P1, 191:191)*
- *I think they need to give us at least 4yrs not three years to complete the Hons (P5, 2:2)*
- *The planning, development, implementation, evaluation and marketing of teaching-learning programmes of a School are the direct responsibilities of the School Director... (P3, 50:52).*

4.2.1.4.4 Library and other resources

According to the participants who mostly attend their contact classes at the Potchefstroom campus, they did not have problems with access to resources compared to those who attend their classes at distance learning centres. In contradiction to this; some respondents shared the fact that their encounters with insufficient resources lead to non-complying of assignments:

- *When it comes, especially, to resources, it’s much more resourced. You go to library, you are... (P1, 71:71)*
- *My fear is that, I think, I don’t know if I’m going to make it in time, because already my time has gone by and I’m far behind, because, the reason for that being far behind, where I’m staying, my library is very empty. I can’t find resources, the, the main problem (P2, 106:106).*

4.2.1.4.5 Summary of the satisfaction of ODL students with the HE environment

The findings on the first research question, How satisfied are ODL students with the HE environment?, signify that the quality of the programme involves students’ perception of cost effectiveness of programmes, preparation for further study, alignment of programme, and the quality in their academic programme. Preparation for further study and the alignment of the programme were vital attributes to the satisfaction of students as both enhanced their studies. The quality of the programmes is crucial to the success of their studies. Participants offered a wide range of different responses when commenting on communication from HEIs. This suggests that communication from HEI is an area that needs to be addressed and investigated. The participants also provided suggestions on

aspects relating to the learning environment. Most students were satisfied with the teaching and learning when they attended contact classes. Distances from examination and learning centres were regarded as problematic. The research participants indicated that resources provided by the HEI as part of learning support, is vital to ODL students.

4.2.2 Sub question 2: How satisfied are ODL students as clients with HEIs?

This question determined how satisfied students as clients of HEIs were with academic programmes and student retention. This section addresses the emerging data category arising from the findings of ODL students as clients of HEIs. The analysis indicated four emerging categories from the integrated dataset: (i) support from the work environment, (ii) culture and values among students, (iii) course facilitations at the HEIs environment, and (iv) student attribute towards the HEIs (Figure 4.7). Each category has a relating number of codes. The following section will address support from the work environment as a category with codes that emerged.

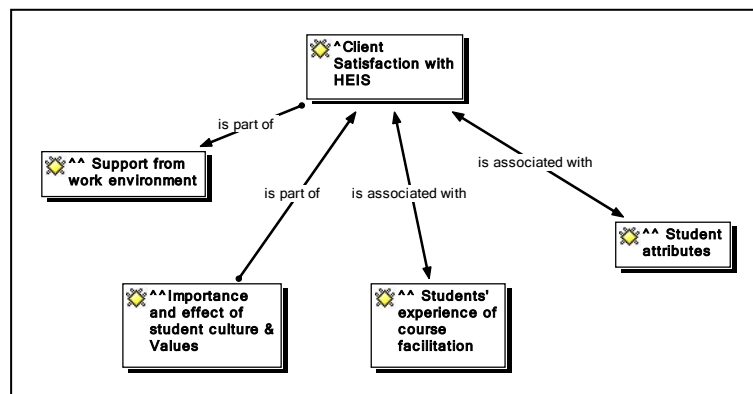


Figure 4.7: Categories related to the student as client with HEIs

4.2.2.1 Support from the work environment

The support students receive from their working environment plays a pivotal part in the success of their studies. Social satisfaction, according to Diaz (2007:45) explains academic performance with three elements that intervene in education, viz. parents (family causal factors), teachers (academic causal factors) and students (personal causal factors). Two aspects relate to the category work environmental support (Figure 4.8). They are support that students require from their work environment and the support that students are seeking from the lecturers/facilitators during their learning. In general, the participants mention that the support from their work environment is not sufficient and there is an overall hesitation from colleagues and management to support their efforts of TPD.

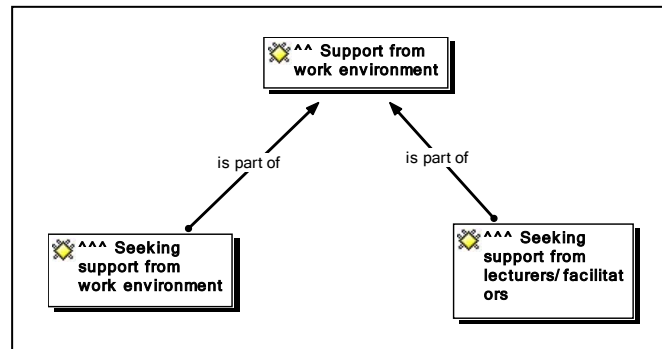


Figure 4.8: Aspects relating to the category of support from work environment

Table 4.5 provides an overview of the typical evidence from the integrated dataset for the category of support from the work environment. Each of the codes is described in greater detail hereafter.

Table 4.5: Typical codes and quotations for the category of support from work environment

Codes	Quotations
Support from work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The only challenge does come at work, because of my age, still being young and studying, I'm working with people much, much older than me. Some of them have a three year qualification; some of them have a four year qualification... (P1, 253:253)</i> <i>In my school, because, the principal is an old lady, she's retiring, next year, she has got her Hons and she is so willing to help and she motivate us... (P1, 274:274)</i> <i>I personally, from where I work, I, well I have no support at all. I'm sorry to say my headmaster is a problem to me (P1, 258:258)</i>
Seeking support from lecturers/ facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>You've got to do it on your own. Don't know what to do, unless you phone the university (P1, 85:85)</i>

The following section provides evidence of each of the aspects listed in Figure 4.8

4.2.2.2.1 Seeking support from work environment

Some participants responded positively with regard to the support they receive from their work environment. They mention that they often received support from their principal. Some participants, however, did not agree with this as since they started with the BEd Hons programme, it seemed that principals have put pressure on the students by increasing their workload and this negatively affected their learning:

- When I started working there, I was under qualified; I had M+2. She motivated me and I did NPDE, I finished, in fact I started and then I left, because of my*

personal problems. And then when I started, she encouraged me to continue...
(P1, 274:274)

- *There is no support at work from having a medium workload, when I started studying, every year my subjects are being changed, and the workload is even more than the others, so pressure is more at work than at home (P1, 253:253).*

4.2.2.2 Seeking support from lecturers/facilitators

Tinto (1997:599-623) highlights several conditions that support retention strategies in HEIs. One condition is that students are more likely to persist and graduate in a setting that involves them as valued members of the institution. The quality of contact with faculty members, staff and other students is an important predictor of student satisfaction. Some participants responded negatively about support from the lecturers/facilitators; they mentioned that they need to seek for the support and they will not always receive sufficient support because at times the facilitators/lecturers are on vacation:

- *When we attend time table changes and you'll be told that the lectures went for vacation when you need (P5, 19:19).*

4.2.2.2 Importance and effect of culture and values

Students come from various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and display a range of different values. These values and cultural differences should be taken into consideration when dealing with client satisfaction. According to Ainley (1993:88), personal satisfaction is predictive of special interests and skills of a student's personality. This means that students' personal satisfaction is determined by the career choice and the right choice of university. Personality greatly influences an individual's behaviours and attitudes (Morris & Maistro, 2005; Paunonen & Ashton, 2001). This indicates that participants' special interest and skills should be considered during their enrolment in the BEd Hons programme. Five aspects relate to the category culture and values (Figure 4.9). They are: (i) caring for the children and elders while they are studying, (ii) students' perceptions of different cultures, (iii) trust, (iv) respect towards other people, and (v) values they gain during their learning. Participants indicated the importance of their culture and values and they requested the HEIs to realise that these are also related to other aspects in their lives such as family responsibilities, the exchange of trust and respect between parties and the diverse values that participants foster.

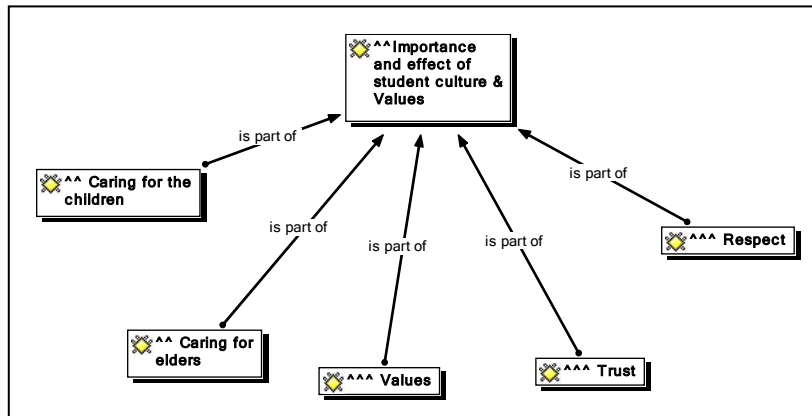


Figure 4.9: Aspects relating to the category of importance and effect of student culture and values

Table 4.6 provides an overview of the typical evidence from the integrated dataset for the category of the importance and effect of culture and values. Each of the codes is described in greater detail hereafter.

Table 4.6: Typical codes and quotations for the category of importance and effect of student culture and values

Codes	Quotations
Caring for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>sometimes with us as women, because, we have to prepare for kids who go to school, after work we have to cook (P1, 248:248)</i>
Caring for elders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>other challenges in the family caring for our parents, they are now old, sometimes you become stressed, when you are doing your assignments, they phone and tell... (P2, 153:153)</i>
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Each and every time I gain more skills and values (P6, 39:39)</i> <i>It promote high rate of motivation and skills application (P6, 43:43)</i>
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Every time I get the timetable, maybe, he said, firstly, go and make copies out of your own pockets and then you go and go to the police station and you stamp it out. I said, principal, how can I get out a copy with an emblem of the University... (P1, 258:258)</i>
Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>You see, being a young person and from an adult, I was taught, I grew up to such an extent that I don't make an argumentative statement with an adult... (P1, 258:258)</i>
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The whole experience of coming to class and so on, uhm, as you've noticed, we one or two or three white people going to the class... (P1, 229:229)</i>

The following section provides evidence of each of the aspects listed in Figure 4.9

4.2.2.2.1 Caring for the children and elders

BEd Hons students are serviced through ODL due to the flexibility it provides in order to balance and accommodate work, family, and academic demands. Some participants

indicated that it is difficult for them to study, as well as care for children and the elderly that are part of their extended families. Due to their social environment and culture they are obliged to do this. Participants also mention that when they work on their assignments, the elderly and sick or the children demand their attention. Various scholars also describe the characteristics of adult students which lecturers and facilitators should consider during teaching and learning. Adult students come from diverse backgrounds and they require a respectful learning environment in which social obligations and traditions are valued (Erasmus *et al.*, 2008; Gravett, 2005; Knowles, 1990; Lasswell, 1990; Smith, 1991):

- *I also feel that with life challenges like family life, work, community involvement studying is quiet tough and an uphill battle (P6, 5:5)*
- *Other challenges in the family are caring for our parents. They are now old, sometimes you become stressed, when you are doing your assignments, they phone and tell... (P2, 153:153).*

4.2.2.2.2 Values

Rokeach (1972), as quoted by Windmiller *et al.* (1980:203), states that values are the priorities that individuals and society attach to certain beliefs, experiences, and objects in deciding how they shall live and what they treasure. Some participants indicated that the BEd Hons programme has changed their attitude towards their careers. They mention that they are more responsible towards their work and they believe that the HEI also needs to do the same. One participant mentions that the principles of “*Batho Pele*” must be implemented. *Batho Pele* means “people first”. These principles are supported by Potts (1999:85) and determine that “*some students regard themselves as clients since they pay for services that are provided to them.*” This means that students should be treated as they are treated in other organisations or businesses. The NWU Teaching and Learning Policy supports the participants as it states that NWU is driven by its knowledge and innovation regarding the culture in which it is based.

- *But this is the point where we say okay, we need to redress, put right what is wrong, as one of the principles of “Batho Pele”, definitely... (P1, 193:193)*
- *BEd Hons Improved knowing my rights my responsibility as an educator knowing how to deal with problems concerning education... (P4, 19:19)*
- *As a pre-eminent University in Africa, driven by its pursuit of knowledge and innovation, with a unique Institutional culture based upon the values the University... (P3, 18:20).*

4.2.2.2.3 Trust

Trust, as a level of confidence, results in valued outcomes, as well as commitment. Students with dedicated institutional relationships display higher levels of trust and commitment which

form a central part of their attitude and belief structures (Morgan & Hunt, 1994:26). This implies that when students experience satisfaction with and loyalty towards the HEI, they will engage in positive word-of-mouth communication about the HEI. This can lower the cost of attracting new students for the university and enhance the HEI's overall reputation (Alves & Raposo, 2007:575). During this study though, some participants indicated that their support service including administrators, colleagues and the lecturers/facilitators at the NWU do not trust them. They mention that when they submit their assignments they do not receive them back. When they phone, the HEI inform them that they did not submit the assignments. The participant felt that he was not treated with the respect that adults deserve:

- *You see, because if you say I have, I don't think, I mean we are adults. You cannot say you have written the assignment, yet you know that you did... (P1, 175:175).*

4.2.2.2.4 Respect

The relationship of students with a HEI varies amongst individuals. Bonding and empathy are important factors in the context of higher education relationships (Olivier & DeSarbo, 1988:497). When the two parties (the HEI and the student) engage in a relationship, they bond with each other and this may result in a unified disposition towards a desired goal. A participant indicated that sometimes they do not receive their assignments back, but because of the culture and values the participant mentions, it is difficult to argue with the person older than them, and then they give up the issue without resolve:

- *You see, being a young person and from an adult, I was taught, I grew up to such an extent that I don't make an argumentative statement with an adult... (P1, 258:258).*

4.2.2.2.5 Culture

According to Masterson *et al.* (1994), culturally diverse classrooms offer communication challenges to lecturers/facilitators and students alike. The participants indicated that the first time they attended a contact session; it was difficult because they experienced the diverse classroom culture as challenging. Participants mentioned that it became easier as they realised that they could also learn from other cultures:

- *But it becomes easier the more times you go and so on and starting to know the cultures and how people react to things and think about things, it becomes easier, for me... (P1, 231:231).*

4.2.2.3 Students' experience of course facilitation

The facilitation of the course or programme forms a crucial part of the level of satisfaction that the student will experience. Service performance in higher education refers to the

implicit quality of lectures and course content (Jurkowitsch *et al.*, 2006:12). At this stage, the SCTE at NWU offers three ODL programmes: the ACE, the NPDE and the BEd Hons. Seven aspects relate to the category of course facilitation of these programmes (Figure 4.10). They are (i) the knowledge students gain while they are studying, (ii) the relevance of the BEd Hons programme to their work environment, (iii) teaching skills they achieved, (iv) learning styles, (v) the positive attitudes that the lecturers have towards them, (vi) the time they wasted when attending the contact classes, (vii) and dissatisfaction with marking of assignments. Some participants strongly indicated that they had benefited from the BEd Hons programme both academically and professionally. They found the programme relevant, practical and experienced the lecturers as being positive and helpful. Certain participants described their dissatisfaction with the marking and feedback they received on their assignments, as well as the fact that they felt the contact sessions did not benefit them.

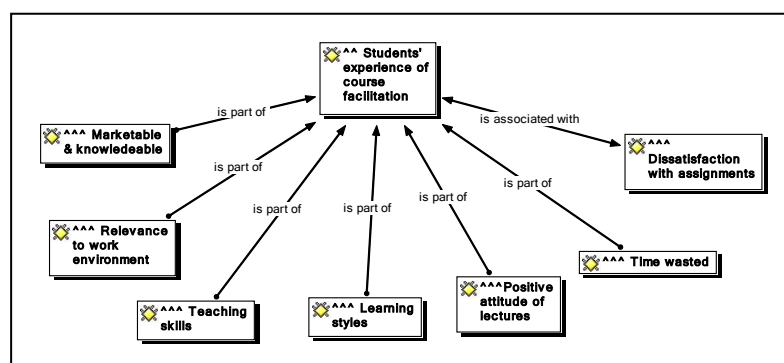


Figure 4.10: Aspects relating to the category of students' experience of course facilitation

Table 4.7 provides an overview of the typical evidence from the integrated dataset for the category of students' experience of course facilitation. Each of the codes is described in greater detail hereafter.

Table 4.7: Typical codes and quotations for the category of course facilitation

Codes	Quotations
Marketable and knowledgeable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I'm developing more towards my profession each and every time when I'm in the (P4, 33:33)</i> <i>At this stage more things are learned and I'm gaining more knowledge (P6, 39:39)</i>
Relevance to work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The matter is relevant to our working (P4, 29:29)</i> <i>The content of the Hons is useful to my future/my development as a teacher (P4, 11:11)</i>
Teaching skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I have learnt a lot from this course e.g. my classroom is conducive to teaching and learning each and every time I gain more skills and values (P6, 81:81)</i>

Codes	Quotations
Learning skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It takes about maybe an entire day or two, just to study two chapters... (P1, 130:130)</i>
Positive attitudes of lecturers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I can see that the Potchefstroom Lecturers want us to achieve our goal (P6, 4:4)</i>
Time wasted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We come for contact sessions whereby some of the modules we are doing are not on (P6, 21:21)</i> • <i>We waste more time coming here without gaining anything (P6, 61:61)</i>
Dissatisfaction with assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I failed the examination only because of the assignment they refused to mark it... (P6, 229:229)</i>

The following section provides evidence of each of the aspects listed in Figure 4.10

4.2.2.3.1 Marketable and knowledgeable

In order to ensure that HEIs are marketable to current and potential clients, they generally follow a business management plan. This plan embraces a client satisfaction perspective within the TQM to survive and retain a competitive advantage within HE (Watjatrakul, 2010:1). Some participants indicated that they have gained knowledge while they were studying in the BEd Hons programme, that they implemented the knowledge and skills at their schools that they have assisted in developing their colleagues, and have assisted in their learners' teaching and learning. They were of the opinion that they are more marketable than before as they now know better:

- *It has helped and transformed my perspective, belief and attitude about teaching. Now I clearly understand why the C2005 was implemented. I enjoy teaching so much... (P4, 6:6)*
- *But when you go out there, I think you become marketable, you become knowledgeable, you are an expertise, you know... (P1, 108:108)*
- *I can also develop my colleagues as I am working in a mainstream school where most of our learners are not achieving well in class... (P4, 12:12).*

4.2.2.3.2 Relevance to work environment

Some participants shared their experiences regarding the BEd Hons programme. They were of the opinion that the programme was relevant to their work environment. They also gained valuable knowledge which equipped them to implement OBE better:

- *It has helped and transformed my perspective, belief and attitude about teaching. Now I clearly understand why the C2005 was implemented... (P4, 6:6)*
- *But now they say they are used to it my style of teaching that I am implementing the C2005 using an OBE approach as a box of tools. I use it properly carefully and intelligently to help learners achieve... (P4, 8:8)*

- Broadens our knowledge and equip us with more information in education system of our country.... (P6, 72:72).

4.2.2.3.3 Students teaching skills

Self-directed learning has the individual student as the primary focus and is primarily directed to a person's abilities (Candy, 1991:7; Pintrich, 1995:10). Some participants gained confidence in their respective classrooms as they learned new knowledge and skills while they engaged in the BEd Hons programme:

- *I am presently doing the BEd Hons in learning support and I have recovered new Styles to help me change my teaching and also help my colleagues... (P6, 7:7).*

4.2.2.3.4 Students' different learning skills

Merriam and Cafferella (1991:132) define adult learning as an orientation in which learners take control over their initiation, planning, implementing and evaluating of learning process. Knowles (1975:18) defines self-directed learning as "a process in which individuals take the initiative with or without the help of others, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify human and material resources for learning, determine and implement appropriate strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes." Each and every student has his or her own study method. The participants indicated that they do not learn the same way. Some made summaries and others indicated they have to read everything at least three times, and also use the DVD before they can begin to make notes:

- *I go through everything and make a summary and then I make a big poster and paste it up and walk past it and I study... (P6, 7:7)*
- *I first read through everything about three times, then I would watch the DVD, then I would make notes... (P1, 128:128).*

4.2.2.3.5 Positive attitudes of lecturers towards students

A person's attitude represents a set of complex cognitions, emotions and behavioural tendencies (Aldemir & Gulcan, 2004:110). Some participants have a positive attitude towards lecturers at the contact classes and when phoning them. They are of the opinion that the lecturers are friendly and willing to assist them:

- *If maybe you are experiencing a problem in connection with your studies, you are able to phone and make an appointment and see the lecturer... (P1, 53:53)*
- *I am also very satisfied so far, ehh, especially with the lecturers, they are friendly when you contact them... (P2, 35:35).*

4.2.2.3.6 Students' time wasted during course facilitation at the learning centres

Participants responded negatively towards the planning and organisation of the contact classes. They mentioned that some learning centres were not well organized as they had to ask around to locate their respective classes. A lot of time was wasted in this way. Some indicated that when they arrived on time at the learning centre, the module they planned to attend was not presented on that particular day:

- *We'd find out that the most students, not some, are moving peter to post in attempting to locate the specific station where they are supposed to attend and if you'd find that it is time-consuming... (P1, 81:81)*
- *You've wasted your time, money and everything, because you drove all the way from Witbank to Pretoria at the end of the day you don't get what you were looking... (P2, 76:76).*

4.2.2.3.7 Dissatisfaction with the facilitation and receiving of assignments back

Some participants were dissatisfied with the marking of their assignments as they and some were even sent back unmarked. They indicated that when they come to contact classes with a problem regarding assignments, they could not obtain assistance:

- *Sometime you come to the contact session, having a problem on understanding assignment at the class the lecturer will read the assignment as it is... (P1, 85:85)*
- *This year I send my assignment for LEON 612, but you returned it back unmarked (P6, 45:45).*

4.2.2.4 The effect of students' attributes

The students' attributes play a significant part in the level of achievement that the students attain. These attributes can have a negative or positive effect on the students' performance and are therefore influential when it comes to measuring academic performance. Personality greatly influences an individual's behaviours and attitudes (Paunonen & Ashton, 2001:527). Many HE students experience low self-esteem. They become passive and negative to such an extent that it affects their academic achievement in HE (Azizi *et al.*, 2009:302). From the above fourteen aspects related to the category student attributes (Figure 4.11), it is shown that students' self-concept is influenced by their family, personal and social backgrounds (Azizi *et al.*, 2009:302). These are: the perceptions of students in learning, the leadership that they achieve while studying, student self motivation, coping abilities during their studies, student perceptions on how the BEd Hons programme influence their work environment, student expectations while they are study, challenges students encounter during their learning, student stress and frustration while they are studying, and the fear of failure. Some

participants indicated that they are self-motivated and able to study independently. They have high expectations of the programme but also face a lack of support from their own working environment. They also face numerous challenges and have to overcome these to be successful. Their fear of failure is intense and they experience a high level of frustration. The latter seems to involve battling with specific modules (especially the modules on research methodology), assignments as well as having to combat academic isolation since in their communities they sometimes do not have fellow students who also study at the NWU. Financial complications featured very strongly and many participants disclosed their ongoing battle with coping financially. They incur additional costs, such as transport costs, and if they do not complete their studies timeously they have to carry the additional financial burden of re-registering.

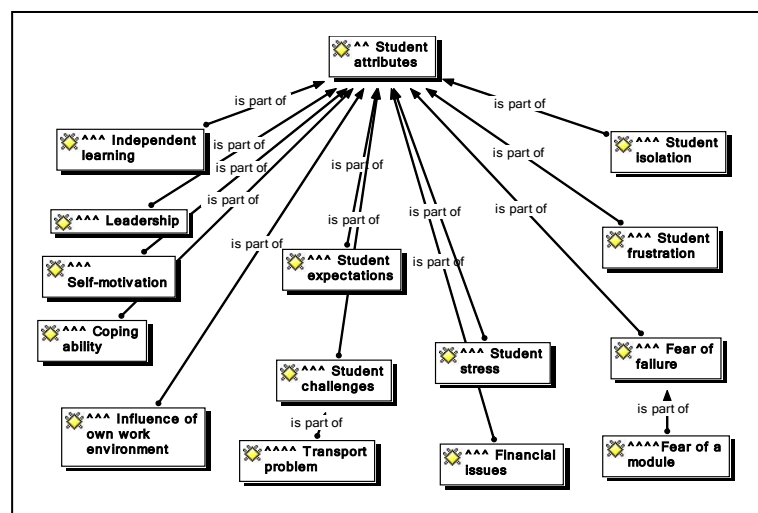


Figure 4.11: Aspects relating to the category of student attributes

Table 4.8 provides an overview of the typical evidence from the integrated dataset for the category of students attributes. Each of the aspects is described in greater detail hereafter.

Table 4.8: Typical codes and quotations for the category of student attributes

Codes	Quotations
Independent learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Studying in my own time (P1, 73:73) Meaning that after I attended contact session I am able to go on studying on my own very easily for examination preparations (P6, 96:96)
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We know how the school runs, the structures runs, the structures of education, the responsibilities of the stakeholders of the school... (P4, 15:15)
Self motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I want to contribute positively towards the situation through study I have learnt a lot from this... (P4, 14:14) I even feeling that I can graduate tomorrow (P4, 30:30)
Coping abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of them they complain to say here you've got a number of modules that,

Codes	Quotations
	<i>guys, we cannot cope... (P1, 111:111)</i>
Influence of own work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The only challenge does come at work, because of my age, still being young and studying, I'm working with people much, much older than me. Some of them have a three year qualification... (P1, 253:253)</i>
Student expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I am satisfied with what I learned but I want to graduate, is the only important (P5, 30:30)</i>
Student challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I do not know what to study I spend more on communication while I have paid my studies (P6, 14:14)</i> <i>Because, being, uhm, being an employee at the same time being a learner, it's quite hectic really (P1, 147:147)</i>
Transport problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>He spent lot of money to register and also our transport money to travel from point A to point B without any help (P5, 20:20)</i>
Student stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Why do they charge us maybe, for keep on rewriting and rewriting and rewriting up until we complete... (P1, 143:143)</i>
Financial issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>And if, if, if two years elapse, shall have faltered in two, four modules, ehh, ehh, will be paying on my own (P1, 100:100)</i> <i>More than hundred percent, they added more than hundred percent (P2, 192:192)</i>
Student isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Unfortunately, in my area, I'm the only one who is enrolled at Potchefstroom (P1, 213:213)</i> <i>So I cannot go about and I don't find people that I study with... (P2, 106:106)</i>
Student frustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I deposited about a certain amount of money that was indicated to me and when I made some follow up on the amount and on the date I have paid it, ehh, some of this people they were saying they're unable to detect whether... (P1, 188:188)</i> <i>By the time, by the time we write exams, they haven't, send the assignment back to us (P2, 180:180)</i> <i>They should also bear in mind that as much as there are barriers for learners there are also barriers for teachers and yet we want to learn and better our knowledge... (P5, 2:2)</i>
Fear of failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>We want the University to sustain for a quite a number of years a lifelong learning from Potchefstroom. But immediately, I mean, students, they tend to view Potch as, as a number of work, they tend to divert... (P1, 115:115)</i> <i>It may affect my life, for instance, my wife at home would not want to take BEd Hons with North-West University... (P1, 100:100)</i> <i>So if you failed first semester you are no more important to Potchefstroom University but money is what counts (P6, 46:46)</i>
Fear of module	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>This research thing, it's an animal (P2, 113:113)</i> <i>Been telling us about research, research, research (P115:115)</i> <i>Too much for us, but we want to go there, we want to achieve, ehh, and the other fear that we have with this, ehh, especially research module NAVR 611 (P2, 100:100)</i>

The following section provides evidence of each of the aspects listed in Figure 4.11

4.2.2.4.1 Students' independent learning

Qakisa-Makoe (2005:45) points out that many South African students come from first generation families to enrol for a HE qualification. These students are expected to adjust to new ways of learning and to learn independently without any tradition or example to follow. They have to make numerous and complex adjustments, including adapting to new teaching and learning strategies and mastering new learning skills (Allen *et al.*, 2002:85), coping with academic work while running households and pursuing careers, and mastering the learning outcomes that are required by distance learning (Van Heerden, 1997:78). The participants echoed this through their statements when they indicated that they are not used to study alone. Some indicated that they made this adjustment:

- *I have learnt to work very hard as I am a single mother, doing extra mural activities at school, and also my part time studies (P5, 25:27)*
- *I am studying on my own, sometimes it's difficult to understand the module without clue (P6, 29:29)*
- *Knowing that before I was just a student, I didn't have to do anything but to study, now I have two things to do. I have to study and to work and... (P1, 93:93).*

4.2.2.4.2 School leadership level

Reliable student satisfaction ratings in HE can be achieved when the students receive a curriculum that meets their expectations and needs, that focuses on high quality instruction, and provides opportunities to develop their skills (Jurkowitsch *et al.*, 2006:13). Some participants responded positively to the BEd Hons programme. They indicated that they have gained self confidence to the extent that they are ready to become the principal of the school. They also mentioned that during their studies they were elected to serve on management committees at their respective schools:

- *I was elected to be on disciplinary committee, SDT and SBST because of the good suggestions that I always come with during staff meeting... (P4, 23:33)*
- *Now I feel like I can have a principal post and I will exactly do what is needed as a principal... (P4, 36:36).*

4.2.2.4.3 Student self motivation

Student satisfaction has a positive influence on student motivation, student retention, recruiting efforts and fundraising (Elliott & Shin, 2002). The participants indicated the difficulty of studying, but they motivated each other. They experienced hardship during their studies, but they did not give up. Some participants added that they were so motivated that they became role models for their learners at their respective schools:

- *I said, I'm a student here and I've got my own confidence, I'm going to fully participate, the same as them and I wanted to give that motivation that even if there are few blacks, it doesn't matter most... (P1, 267:267)*
- *Even to you guys, we are prepared to take the bull by the horns, gentlemen and ladies, so to say; however, we need to be trained to be trained to be like eagles... (P1, 275:275)*
- *I wish I could be a role model of my learners at school in the community and even to my children... (P4, 34:34).*

4.2.2.4.4 Coping abilities

ODL students also suffer negative experiences that may decrease their satisfaction with their studies. These experiences encompass their insufficient ability to master the required learning, poor school preparation, failure to assume responsibility, and interference from psychological problems (De Beer, 2006). Students were affected by factors such as time management, family and work responsibilities, economic barriers and logistical challenges (Kerka, 1989). It is therefore essential for HEIs and course facilitators involved with adult students to be fully aware of the characteristics and factors that influence the academic performance and satisfaction of adult students. Some participants mentioned that it was difficult for them to cope with school work, the demands of studying part time, as well as family responsibilities:

- *But it's difficult, uhm, to cope at home, you've got your schoolwork, you've got your other stuff to do, and so on, and then you have to fit in this as well, it's quite difficult, it's quite hectic (P1, 127:127)*
- *Your family suffers a lot, because you have to concentrate, you have to study, you have to write assignments and the assignments have to be typed and you have to send them... (P2, 100:100).*

4.2.2.4.5 Influence of own work environments

Students in this study were generally older than full-time on-campus students, were married, held a full-time teaching position, and were part-time students (Table 3.1). These aspects relate to the characteristics of an adult learner (Ashby, 2002:12). Some participants indicated that it is difficult for them to study and work. They mentioned that when they come to classes they were exhausted after a week of teaching at their respective schools:

- *We are not going to forget that it is hectic when you come from the classroom having taught those learners for about seven hours when you come to the university being exhausted (P1, 73:73)*
- *When I studied, I was a full time student, for four years and with the BEd Hons, I find it difficult to move from working and studying, it's quite a challenge... (P1, 93:93).*

4.2.2.4.6 Student expectations

Adult students enter the learning environment with “baggage” of diverse past educational learning experiences. It is not always possible for facilitators to accommodate students with individual needs during contact sessions. Many adult students, particularly in South Africa, have little experience of formal education when crossing the borders of HE (McMillian, 1997:19). Facilitators should plan tasks and activities to enable students to attain success. However, some participants indicated that when they come to contact classes, they expected the lecturers/facilitators to inform them what they have to do. They suggested that lecturers should explain the assignments because they all expect to finish the BEd Hons programme successfully and graduate:

- *But it can be very easily when our lectures inform us what to do and what they want. I think we want more time to be explained about the assignment...* (P6, 95:95)
- *Everyone is waiting for the day when are we going to drive from Ermelo to Potchefstroom on the graduation day* (P1, 236:236).

4.2.2.4.7 Student challenges during their studies

There are many challenges that students encounter during their studies. However, adult students bring their own experiences into the educational setting and have definite expectations with regard to what they require from the learning experience. It is essential for the HEIs to be aware of the nature of an adult student and the manner in which adults learn in an effort to evaluate the satisfaction within their learning experience (Knowles, 1990). Adult participation in education is affected by variables such as socio-economic status, perceived value of participation, readiness to participate, and barriers to participation (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982:35). From the above, the participants shared their challenges during their learning process. They indicated that correspondence between themselves and the university needs to be well maintained. Some mentioned that it is difficult to travel to the contact classes as well as to examination centres because they have to make use of taxis. Others indicated that they were not computer literate and this was an obstacle when they had to submit typed assignments:

- *The corresponding concerning the study materials is not good, I am a flexi student; I was not treated like OLG...* (P6, 14:14)
 - *The lecturers are trying but I feel time is limited and we felt much pressured and...* (P6, 5:5)
 - *And then, if you are travelling like in a taxi, is, you'll find yourself being late in an exam room* (P2, 43:43)
 - *When we have to submit the assignments sometimes, you may find that most of us, or some of us are not computer literate, so some assignments have to*
-

be strictly typed (P1, 162:162).

4.2.2.4.8 Student stress during their studies

Balachandran *et al.* (2007:26) state that life satisfaction includes social and personal satisfaction as a general requirement for the overall well-being of adult students. Students encountered stress relating to the financial issues. The participants mention that financial issues impact on their overall well-being and their studies and these lead to hardship:

- *When it comes to, especially financial, uhm, paying for the fees, you see, I'm not on bursary, I'm not, and I'm not studying with bursary for now (P1, 137:137)*
- *I've seen another, a person who was studying from Potchefstroom. He ended up not completing his, his course. He said he's had some financial implications in term of paying the university... (P1, 143:143).*

4.2.2.4.9 Financial issues of students

The participants noticed that the university annually increased their fees. They also noted that when they failed a module, they had to pay again to rewrite the module and sometimes they could not afford this additional payment. This led to stress and negativity because they could then not rewrite the examination:

- *Even the financial implications, that four thousand for two modules, guys, it's too much, specific, specifically for teachers, in most cases, not for teachers per se... (P1, 191:191)*
- *Other thing that also goes with that, from hundred and twenty to three hundred rand, that when you write a subject once, and then you fail... (P1, 196:196)*
- *And the money that we pay for rewriting exams from a hundred and twenty... (P2, 190:190).*

4.2.2.4.10 Student isolation in ODL

Learning experiences are created through sharing of ideas, thoughts and personal interactions between participants (Fraser & Killen, 2005:290). Aspects like infrastructure, quality of support systems, quality of content and assessment, peer support networks, planning and designing of ODL, delivery methods, motivation for enrolling in the course and learning objectives may influence the open distance learning experiences (Fraser & Killen, 2005; Trinidad & Pearson, 2004; Wilson, 2001). The participants indicated that it was difficult to study in isolation. They pointed out that they had to do the assignments alone as they did not have anyone to share ideas and thoughts with:

- *I've got to do the assignment on my own, without discussing it with anyone... (P1, 219:219)*
- *I personally am the only one who studies from Potchefstroom, because other people are from UNISA so to say, so I'm just alone... (P1, 258:258).*

4.2.2.4.11 Student frustration as clients

The intensified value that is placed on student satisfaction may be ascribed to the fact that it has a positive impact on student motivation, recruiting efforts and fundraising (Elliott & Shin, 2002:197). Student satisfaction has become increasingly important to HEIs and their management. The aim of ensuring student satisfaction is to minimize dissatisfaction, retain students and improve the institution's performance (Douglas *et al.*, 2006:252). Many HE students experience a low self-esteem. They are mostly passive and negative to such an extent that it affects their academic achievement in higher institutions (Azizi *et al.*, 2009:302). Student frustration featured as one of the most prominent aspects of students' attributes. Students' frustration levels are high and this has an influence on their performance. Some participants shared their negative experiences as frustrations with the BEd Hons programme. Participants complained that after writing the examinations, they did not receive results and they had to call the university and still received no response. They claimed that most of the time there was no response or the response was negative. Some mentioned that they had to wait long to receive feedback and had to write examinations without knowing their participation marks. It was frustrating when they arrived at the examination centre and were told you they could not write examinations because they were not on the list and they were not admitted to the examination room:

- *I wrote March last year, writing learning perspective for the second time, with another subject. I didn't get any results; I sent a message, no results... (P1, 189:189)*
- *Like myself, I was writing in Ermelo so I moved to, to Middelburg, so it, it was a problem when I was busy with my exams, I had no paper, nothing. But I've, I've organised it earlier on. So I had to wait... (P2, 51:51)*
- *When I started doing BEd Hons I was a bit frustrated, because I wrote the assignments, I submitted the assignments, and then when the results came, the, I didn't got marks, because they said I didn't submitted the assignment, yet, I submitted... (P1, 172:172)*
- *I was taken Peter to post, I was taken Peter to post, and not for one count, for many counts when I wanted to enquire about those outstanding, ehh, outcomes, including the fact that I deposited the, the, the money (P1, 188:188).*

4.2.2.4.12 Fear of failure of BEd Hons programme

Some participants indicated their fear of failure, especially of the module on research methodology (NAVR 611). Participants mentioned that they were also uncertain if they would complete their studies in time, because they were behind schedule and they were not sure if they would pass:

- *My fear is that, I think, I don't know if I'm going to make it in time, because already my time has gone by and I'm far behind, because, the reason for that being far behind (P2, 106:106)*

- *Failing, failing research and it makes you think that maybe something is wrong with you are demotivated, you don't know what the lecturer want... (P2, 100:100)*
- *Even the lecturers, what I don't like about Ermelo, they are discouraging their students, the lecturers there, instead of helping you, they'll say, you are going to fail... (P2, 119:119).*

From the above it is clear that HEIs have to manage a retention process from student entrance to graduation (Astin, 1993; Elliott & Healy, 2001; Fraser & Killen, 2005; Nair & Pillay, 2004), as well as the problems associated with low student persistence and high attrition, i.e. those students leaving university without having achieved their higher education goals (Braxton, 1999-2000:94). However, new students experience a sense of satisfaction and belonging with regard to their initial encounters at any university. This includes contact with the admissions office staff via phone or email, printed material about the university, or any other areas in which students can look for similarities between the university and themselves.

4.2.2.4.13 Summary of student satisfaction as clients with HEIs

The findings of the second research question: *How satisfied are ODL students as clients with HEIs?*, suggested that the students' attributes contribute to their satisfaction as student clients. The participants suggested that the frustration they have in the BEd Hons programme can affect their expectations and have a definite effect on their academic performances. Culture and values need to be regarded as important. The HEIs must realise that these cultural aspects and values, such as family commitments, are central in the lives of the participants and must be taken into consideration. The course facilitation was regarded as important and the participants also responded positively to the BEd Hons programme but they suggested that they need to receive their assignments back in time. Participants highlighted various challenges they face as ODL students. These include experiencing isolation and lack of understanding within their working environment. This adds additional importance to the significance of their work and domestic environment. This in turn reiterates the fact that environmental support is a vital attribute to ensure students' satisfaction as it empowers them to study better. The participants displayed a great degree of fear of failure as well as a constant frustration with financial issues and additional financial burdens in the form of travelling costs.

4.2.3 Sub question 3: How satisfied are ODL students with the learning environment

This sub-question aims to determine how satisfied the students are with ODL as the mode of delivery. The following section will address the emerging category that arises from the findings of student satisfaction with ODL environment.

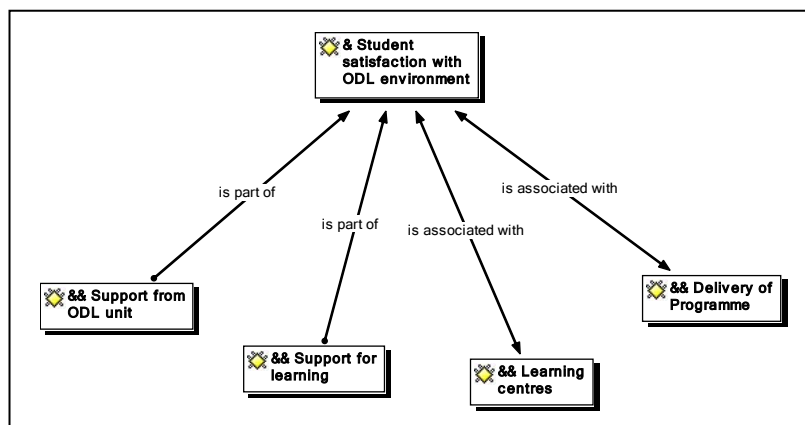


Figure 4.12: Categories relating to the students' satisfaction of the ODL environment

The term ODL is interchangeably used to describe a diverse variety of settings of programme delivery (Sherry, 1995:338). From the analysis four emerging categories from the integrated dataset were indicated which are: (i) support from ODL unit, (ii) support for learning, (iii) learning centres and (iv) the delivery of the programme (Figure 4.12). Each category has specific aspects which arise. The following section will address support from the ODL environment as a category.

4.2.3.1 Support to the students from the ODL unit

The support the students receive from the ODL unit is a vital category that should be considered. If students gain sufficient and adequate support from the ODL unit, it will greatly enhance their learning experience and help to ensure academic progress. In South Africa, distance learning and ODL are often the only available modes of delivering professional in-service training to practising teachers across geographical distance and socio-economic barriers. As part of curriculum delivery, the SCTE offers various support services to students such as contact sessions and vacation schools, student-centred study guides, tutorial letters, textbooks, time tables, information booklets, DVDs, regular SMS communication, telephonic assistance, email and Internet access (SAIDE, 2011). From the integrated dataset, seven aspects relate to the category support that students receive from ODL unit (Figure 4.13).

They are: (i) learning support at the learning centre while they are attending contact classes, (ii) support that students receive before and while writing examination, (iii) administrative support at learning centres during contact classes, (iv) dissatisfaction with lecturers/facilitators at the learning centre and even when they communicate with them, (v) examination centre environment when writing exams, (vi) missing assignments, (vii) and not receiving sufficient assignment feedback. Some of the participants received sufficient academic support while others were frustrated with the lack of support and feedback from lecturers as well as the late return of assignments. Certain participants requested the establishment of an OLG office in their area and others complained about the distances they had to travel to reach their examination centres.

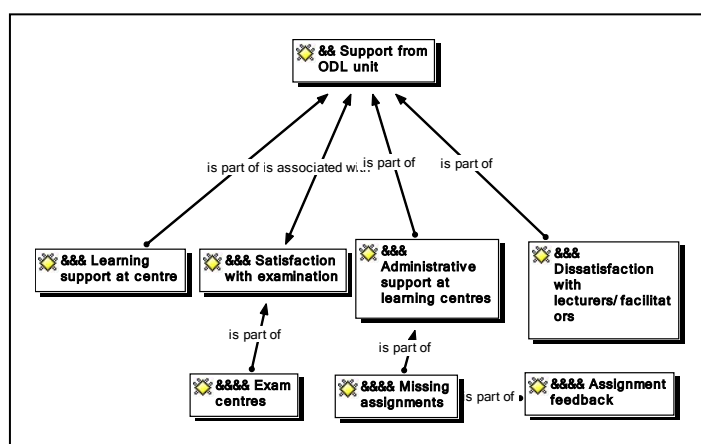


Figure 4.13: Aspects relating to the category of support for the study from ODL unit

Table 4.9 provides an overview of the typical evidence from the integrated dataset for the category of support for the study from the ODL unit. Each of the codes is described in greater detail hereafter.

Table 4.9: Typical codes and quotations for the category of support for the study from ODL unit

Codes	Quotations
Learning support at centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I can see that there is more assistance and I know that when I come to class... (P1, 56:56)</i>
Satisfaction with examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>They first excluded me, I couldn't write exam, and after I've spoken to the guys here, uhm, they did their best and I could wrote (P1, 48:48)</i>
Administrative support at learning centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ja, we need an OLG office, sometimes, 'cause the, the communication, sometimes it's so difficult... (P6, 64:64)</i>
Dissatisfaction with lecturers/facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Other lectures just mark the assignment without any comment (P6, 32:32)</i> <i>You guys are speaking to us in anger and we not treated well (P6, 46:46)</i>

Codes	Quotations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When we, when you phone in, the lecturers, some of them don't answer their phones they just ignore us, especially when we are about to write exams (P2, 182:183)</i>
Examination centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The attending and examination areas are mostly out of town, we struggle to get there why the institution can't arrange for the comfortable and civilized area for their lovely student (P6, 30:30)</i>
Missing assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>But there's something wrong. It must be corrected in the assignment department. Assignments got lost, they get lost... (P2, 190:190)</i>
Assignment feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The assignments should come back in time so that we should do the revision (P6, 68:68)</i>

The following section provides evidence of each of the aspects listed in Figure 4.13.

4.2.3.1.1 Learning support at learner centres

Liegler (1997:357) describes student satisfaction as the degree to which students' needs and expectations are met with regard to aspects of curriculum design such as course delivery mode, resources, student support and relationships with academic staff. Some participants indicated that they received substantial support and guidance at the various centres:

- *They also give clarification for understanding the assignments. They also guide us for preparing us for exams (P6, 2:2).*

4.2.3.1.2 Satisfaction with examination

Students' perceptions of the quality of academic programmes, study requirements, lecturers' treatment and instructions, and positive attitudes toward subject matter are aspects that add to and influence academic satisfaction (Entwistle, 1986:1). At the SCTE, before students start preparing for examinations, they receive examination guidelines which assist them to prepare. Some participants expressed their satisfaction with the examination information, while others felt that the examination information should be more succinct:

- *I am also satisfied about the exam information they are offering (P5, 8:8)*
- *The scope must be just straight to the point. So that we must not go here, there, you know (P2, 172:172).*

4.2.3.1.3 Administrative support at learning centre

Certain participants complained about insufficient administrative support and felt that their queries were not dealt with adequately, while some participants experienced satisfactory administrative support. I agree with many authors that factors like infrastructure, quality of support systems, quality of content and assessment, peer support networks, planning and designing of ODL, delivery methods, motivation for enrolling in the course and learning

objectives may influence the open distance learning experiences (Fraser & Killen, 2005; Trinidad & Pearson, 2004; Wilson, 2001):

- *Under the circumstances when you phone, and ehh, the administration, I don't know ehh, for me it was not good, in terms of how I was handled... (P1, 188:188)*
- *I am having the same problem whereby I wrote by March last year, writing learning perspective for the second time, with another subject. I didn't get any results; I sent a message, no results... (P1, 188:189)*
- *I could say, perhaps, uhm, I could say I used to see there is gentlemen from North-West University in trying to take up the complaints or grievances that students might encounter along their studies (P1, 83:83).*

4.2.3.1.4 Dissatisfaction with lecturers/facilitators

Some participants were dissatisfied with the lecturers'/facilitators' insufficient support and understanding, as well as their inability and failure to properly explain the work during contact classes. In ODL, one important resource—the facilitator—is remote from students. One of the many advantages of ODL is that it offers instructors and students a flexible learning environment in terms of time and location (Sahin, 2007). According to the participants, what Sahin stated is not what is happening in their ODL environment. However, I agree with the participants that they rely on the facilitators/lecturers for support at the centres, and if the support is not sufficient then they will be dissatisfied:

- *Some are just, sometime you come to the contact session, having a problem on understanding assignment at the class the lecturer will read the assignment as it is... (P1, 85:85)*
- *Even the lecturers, what I don't like about Ermelo, they are discouraging their students, the lecturers there, instead of helping you, they'll say, you are going to fail, you are going to fail (P2, 119:119)*
- *The only problem I also had was the, the, the, the contact sessions at Ermelo. I think, uhm, I was not very much happy, the way, ehh, it was conducted and we switched off to Pretoria (P2, 35:35).*

4.2.3.1.5 Examination centres

The SCTE at NWU (2009) has various contact centres as well as examination centres. The participants complained about the accessibility of the examination venues and indicated the difficulty in reaching them. Some also criticized the excessive noise levels at the examination centres:

- *I am not satisfied about the venue where we should write our final exam because firstly the place, venue doesn't have a transport (P5, 14:14)*
- *Exam centres a problem, we using, ehh, Middelburg exam centre, it's a, it's a high school. And at times we find that's during school hours when learners go to break, we are busy writing exams, there is noise, so that is very irritating... (P1, 37:37).*

4.2.3.1.6 Missing assignments

Adult students bring their own experiences into the educational setting and have definite expectations with regard to what they require from the learning experience. Sahin (2007:113) mentions that quality of content and assessment, and peer support networks, may all influence student satisfaction and success in ODL. Students should receive the assignments in reasonable time. Some participants expressed their frustrations with the fact that their assignments were lost or misplaced and consequently they never received them back:

- *And then, the other thing that is a problem, it's the assignments, they get lost. We don't receive ehh... (P2, 35:35)*
- *With assignment, I think the best solution, but sometimes we don't receive all the assignments, you post three, you got only one back (P2, 179:179).*

4.2.3.1.7 Assignment feedback

Although some participants received their assignments timeously, they complained about the insufficient feedback of the assessed assignment. According to this finding, I agree with Akinsolua (2005:65) that course satisfaction is a critical component in improving learning achievement in traditional classrooms, and even more crucial in the ODL environments:

- *Also they were marked and I got a feedback on time (P6, 68:68)*
- *The other problem is when they mark our assignment they failed to explained to us what is wrong. They just gave us the right mark and the total mark will be low (P6, 77:77).*

4.2.3.2. Support for learning from the communities and work environments

The support students receive from their communities and work environments plays a significant role in the achievement of academic success. Castles (2004:168) maintains that there are other factors that could influence student satisfaction and the success rate and satisfaction of adult students. These factors encompass *social and environmental factors* such as the time and space available for study, study methods, support from significant others, accommodation of social activities and friendship. In addition, Thomas and Galambos (2004:255) as well as other researchers such as Harvey (2001:1), Lee *et al.* (2000:1-10) and Morrison (1999) describe four major groups of factors which affect student satisfaction. These groups of factors are categorized as institutional factors, extracurricular factors, student expectations and student demographics. These institutional factors also include the quality of education; communication with lecturers (inside and outside the classroom); the curriculum; textbooks; tutorial letters; student evaluations of lecturers and the philosophy and practices of university administrators (Aldemir & Gulcan, 2004:111). Eight

Codes	Quotations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I wish we could receive sufficient contact lessons before we tackle the assignments (P6, 53:53).</i>
Study material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>My other concern was the material that we received, they were not well printed. Some of the words, they don't appear correctly... (P4, 10:10).</i> • <i>I never received any material... (P6, 46:46)</i>
Support for learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I have manuals that I refer to when I need help (P4, 27:27)</i>
Learning material not received	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sometimes information did not reach us on time e.g. tutorial letters (P6, 41:41)</i>

The following section provides evidence of each of the aspects listed in Figure 4.14

4.2.3.2.1 Support from friends and peers

Von Hippel *et al.* (2008:435) and Jones (2008:373) describe social satisfaction as a life experience that open distance students have, and which may lead to more harmonious social relationships. Qakisa-Makoe (2005) points out that many South African students originate from families where they are the first generation to enrol for a higher education qualification. These students are expected to adjust to new ways of learning and to learn independently. They have to make numerous and complex adjustments, like adapting to new teaching and learning strategies and mastering new learning skills (Allen *et al.*, 2002:85), coping with academic work while running households and pursuing careers, and mastering the learning outcomes that are required by distance learning (Van Heerden, 1997:78). In addition hereto, ODL students find themselves in new social settings and are faced with coping with different cultures and languages (Qakisa-Makoe, 2005). The participants indicated they make many new friendships while supporting each other. Some of these friendships became significant:

- *Like friends, like now, we are friends at home, there's something more that bring us together, like, education and stuff like that... (P2, 165:165)*
- *I mean the assignment is much inclusive, because we share ideas and then support each other (P1, 210:210).*

4.2.3.2.2 Support from family environments

Benjamin and Holdings (1997:220) found that life satisfaction among students was affected by family ties, self-evaluation, academic satisfaction and the impact of recent events. Karemera (2003:310) adds that student satisfaction, with regard to HEIs in general, depend largely on the information and advice they receive from family, friends, administrators, faculty and staff. Family became a pillar of support during learning:

- *At least at home I get a hundred percent support. Even if I have to come to classes, they also accompany me (P1, 223:223)*
- *But I mean, the family support me a lot, they really support me... (P1, 238:238)*
- *Ja, I think, ehh, in the first place must indicate, support at home is fully fledged (P1, 263:263).*

4.2.3.2.3 Support from colleagues at work environments

Although support is regarded as important to students while they are studying, the participants mentioned that they did not receive sufficient support from colleagues at work. Others indicated much support from their schools, especially the school management:

- *From where I work, I, well I have no support at all. I'm sorry to say my headmaster is a problem to me (P1, 258:258)*
- *In my school, because, the principal is an old lady, she's retiring, next year, she has got her Hons and she is so willing to help and she motivates and encourages us... (P1, 274:274)*
- *But at the end of the day at my school, the entire staff is supporting... (P1, 231:231).*

4.2.3.2.4 Support from lecturers/facilitator at learning centres

In ODL the facilitator is remote from the student. Some participants responded positively with regard to the support they received from their lecturers/facilitators at the learning centres during contact classes; they mentioned that the lecturers/facilitators are very helpful:

- *The lectures are very helpful to us when they came for our assistant (P4, 28:28)*
- *Satisfied again about the help they are offering when you ask them for (P5, 9:9)*
- *I enjoy how the lectures are helping us... (P6, 56:56).*

4.2.3.2.5 Support for time and space through ODL

BEd Hons students are serviced through ODL due to the flexibility it provides for balancing work, family, and academic demands. The unique characteristics of adult learners and their learning styles should be taken into account. Around the world ODL has become common practice and is available in a number of formats that reduce the time, cost and space constraints associated with traditional classroom practices (Verduin & Clark, 1991:81). Because most adult students are employed, they are not able to attend on-campus classes and therefore they revert to ODL. On average, distance learners tend to be older than their on-campus counterparts (Ashby, 2002:11). Student satisfaction may be influenced by poor classroom facilities of which the instructor may have limited resources to change as their learning and personal development are affected by environmental elements such as the

quality of relationships between student peers and faculty members, classroom educational research and the characteristics of student involvement or effort such as time spent studying in the faculty library or participating in educational programmes (Elliott & Shin, 2002:200). In addition to the above, the participants showed that the amount of time spent with the facilitators and lecturers during contact classes is too short. It is clear that time spent with the facilitators and lecturers during contact sessions must be considered as important:

- *Our time for lectures is not enough at least if they can arrange and give us lectures during school holidays for about a week...* (P5, 6:6)
- *The time allocated for each module, maybe should be given enough time...* (P5, 7:7).

4.2.3.2.6 Support of study material from ODL

The NWU provides teaching-learning programmes with the study material, including a study guide. The SCTE at NWU (2009) offers distance education programmes through a multi-modal approach (Picciano, 2009:4) that combines the use of printed media, contact sessions, CD-ROMs, mobile devices and inter-active whiteboards as part of curriculum delivery and student support (SAIDE, 2011). Some participants shared their experiences regarding the study material received. They mentioned that the study material was not clear and they could not understand it well:

- *Most of the time they are photocopies, but they are not photocopies. Some of the information is missing there* (P2, 188:189)
- *Each module of a teaching-learning programme is provided with a Study Guide adhering to the principles and criteria stipulated by the Study Guide Policy of the NWU* (P3, 71:72).

4.2.3.2.7 Support for learning material

Castles (2004:168) maintains that there are other factors that could influence student satisfaction and the success rate and satisfaction of adult students. One of the factors is *social factors* which may include study methods. Some participants mentioned that the learning material for BEd Hons programme was sufficient and they could apply the knowledge they have gained to their teaching experiences:

- *The positive learning experience with regard to my BEd Hons is that I learned at lot. I gained more knowledge which helped me to understand the teaching perspective regarding the learning content and teaching including the curriculum* (P6, 26:26).

4.2.3.3. Learning contact centres

It is important to consider different levels within a learning environment when studying

student satisfaction as it varies with the scale and location in the environment (Francescato *et al.*, 1989:2). Brown *et al.* (1998) and Astin (1993) agree that environmental satisfaction influences student satisfaction and students' learning experiences. Masterson *et al.* (1994), mention that culturally diverse classrooms offer communication challenges to teachers and students alike, and therefore the distance education university classroom can include students whose concept and value of time is culturally different from traditional Western time standards; students who have full-time jobs, spouses, children, financial obligations and very little free time and students who have no external responsibilities and a great deal of free time. However, satisfaction also relates to "perceptions of being able to achieve success and positive feelings about the achieved outcomes" (Keller, 1983:388).

Six aspects relate to the category learning centres (Figure 4.15). They are (i) the size of the class, (ii) settings of time tables, (iii) frequency of attending contact classes, (iv) facilities at learning centres, and (v-vi) satisfaction and dissatisfaction with learning centres. In general the participants shared their negative experiences regarding their learning at contact centres. They mentioned that most of the time when they arrived at the learning centres, things were not well organised, as the time table had changed and the classes were overcrowded. Participants also added that they need to attend contact classes more often.

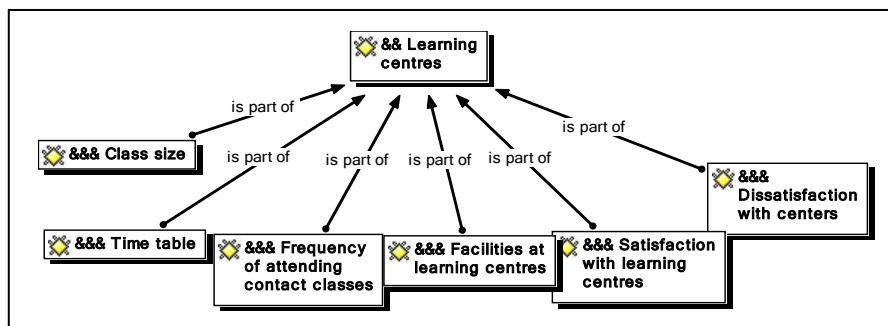


Figure 4.15 Aspects relating to the category of learning contact centres

Table 4.11 provides an overview of the typical evidence from the integrated dataset for the category of learning contact centres. Each of the codes is described in greater detail hereafter.

Table 4.11: Typical codes and quotations for the category of learning contact centres

Codes	Quotations
Class size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The environment is also not okay, because, like I said before, we are too</i>

Codes	Quotations
	<p><i>many</i> (P1, 81:81)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>And in terms of the contact centre, the students, we are too many. In some instances, if you are a little bit late, you are unable to even access the class...</i> (P1, 46:46)
Time table	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I'm attending in Limpopo Polokwane Centre. Ehh, the timing, it's ehh, it's not up to standard....</i> (P1, 81:81) • <i>The time table received with the Study material does not correspond with the time table that we receive...</i> (P3, 6:6). • <i>You can come but you find that there is no contact module</i> (P4, 3:3)
Frequency of attending contact classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you can also have contact sessions in Witbank maybe, ehh, maybe twice a month...</i> (P2, 49:49).
Facilities at learning centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sometimes you have to stand</i> (P2, 72:72)
Satisfaction with learning centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Up to so far I don't have any problem learning through ODL</i> (P5, 16:16)
Dissatisfaction with centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I am totally not satisfied with Open Learning Distance...</i> (P5, 3:3) • <i>Not totally satisfied, concerning other matters such as not being taught...</i> (P5, 42:43)

The following section provides evidence of each of the aspects listed in Figure 4.15

4.2.3.3.1 Class size at learning contact centres

Another challenge that emerged in relation to ODL learning environments was the over crowdedness of classrooms at contact classes. Some classes were so full that some students had to watch through open windows. Elliott and Healy (2001:1-11) identified instructional effectiveness, campus climate and student centredness as practically significant aspects of student satisfaction. Bean and Bradley (1986:400) also identified social life, academic integrity, academic difficulty, class size and membership to student organizations, as aspects of student satisfaction. From the above statement it is important for the infrastructure to be conducive to contribute towards student satisfaction:

- *Ehh, ehh, at some stage, if you are not early, you would attend, while outside, through the window, just to get a glimpse of the information shared by the lecturer. You would find out that the students are packed to capacity...* (P1, 81:81)
- *For example in Pretoria, sometimes the classrooms are so overcrowded...* (P2, 71:71).

4.2.3.3.2 Time table at learning contact centres

During the contact sessions at centres students receive the time table as it will direct about the specific module which will be facilitated. Some participants shared their negative

experiences regarding the setting of the time tables. They described situations where they arrived at the contact centres, only to find that the particular modules were not timetabled on the particular day:

- *I am living in Hammanskraal and I come to the contact session at Pretoria but I come here several times only to find that they have changed the time table (P5, 5:5)*
- *Sometime we spent lot of money rushing to Rustenburg hoping to get information only to find that thing or time table has change without our notice (P5, 18:18)*
- *When we attend time table changes and you'll be told that the lectures went for vacation when you need help (P5, 19:19).*

4.2.3.3.3 Frequency of attending classes

Aspects linking to campus environment like class size, campus climate when communicating or visiting the HEI, time and space available for learning, all constitute a web of connected interactions that influence student satisfaction. However, it is necessary to enhance “the perceived value by providing services or service attributes not provided by the competition” (Glaycomb & Martin, 2001:391). The academic and social integration of adult students has direct and indirect effects on the persistence to achieve success at university (Napoli & Wortman, 1998:425). Lecturers/facilitators should make a concerted and coordinated effort to develop a comprehensive plan to target and assist at-risk students (Heisserer & Parette, 2002:72). From the above some participants felt that the NWU should schedule more frequent contact classes as it will assist them to learn more:

- *If it was possible the university should have visited the contact lesson every fortnight to help... (P6, 74:74)*
- *I am suggesting that NWU visit us at Pretoria regularly because many a times... (P4, 24:24).*

4.2.3.3.4 Provision of facilities at learning centres

Certain participants responded positively with regard to the facilities available at the learning centres, while others mentioned that when they arrived at the learning centres there were no provisions of chairs and they had to stand:

- *So the classes they used to be opened, the lavatories are well opened... (P1, 83:83)*
- *Sometimes you have to stand (P2, 72:72).*

4.2.3.3.5 Satisfaction with learning centres environments

Participants responded positively on the learning environment at the learning centres. Some mentioned that they did not have to travel far to write exams as the centres were close to them:

- *I'm attending in Ermelo, so I could say that the environment is conducive for us (P1, 83:83)*
- *Contact session is brought, uhm, nearer to us, even the examination centres are nearer to us (P1, 41:41).*

4.2.3.3.6 Dissatisfaction with learning centres

HEIs manage their operations, monitor efficiency and produce quality services to meet the current needs and expectations of all students (Watjatrakul, 2010:2). However, students act as passive clients who react (whether they like or dislike services) and respond by expressing their views (either complaint or satisfaction) through teaching and service evaluations. When they are not satisfied with their performance, they may take their business elsewhere and this may lead to the HEI losing clients (Stover, 2005:9). The HEI should avoid losing students due to dissatisfaction. Some participants shared their experiences on the dissatisfaction at the centres which may lead to the university losing clients. They mentioned that the contact sessions were not well organized. Some could not obtain clarification on the content from the lecturers/facilitators:

- *The university is not organized in helping students (P5, 46:46)*
- *Really they are not treating us in good way because without us there won't be Open Distance learning... (P5, 34:35)*
- *Date is set on the programme but when you arrive at centres we are not attended... (P6, 46:46).*

4.2.3.4. Delivery of the ODL programme

“A university’s product is more than its academic program. It is the sum of the student’s academic, social, physical and even spiritual experiences” (Elliott & Shin, 2002:198). Course satisfaction is a critical component in improving learning achievement in traditional classrooms, and even more crucial in the ODL environments (Akinsolua, 2005:65).

Moreover, dissatisfied students may decrease the number of courses or increase the drop-out rate of a university completely (Kara, 2004:1). Seven aspects relate to the category of delivery of the programme (Figure 4.16). They are (i) the delivery mode of the BEd Hons programme, (ii) course workload from the programme, (iii) satisfaction with programme, (iv) curriculum design of the programme, (v) student dropout from the programme, (vi)

examination of the programme, and (vii) dissatisfaction with examination guidelines received. Some of the participants shared their negative experiences regarding the BEd Hons programme. They mentioned that the curriculum design of the BEd Hons programme of the NWU should be reviewed, because of the intensive workload which they cannot manage. Other participants disclosed their positive experiences about the BEd Hons programme, although some maintained that the examination guidelines they received were not of value to them.

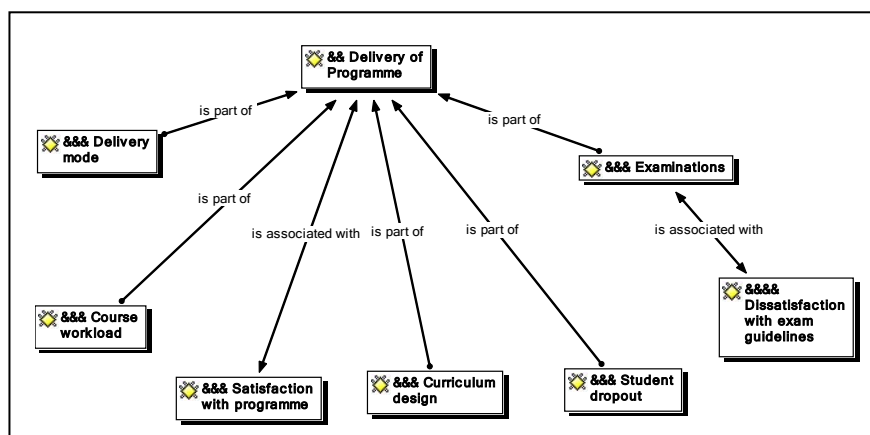


Figure 4.16 Aspects relating to the category of the delivery of the ODL programme

Table 4.12 provides an overview of the typical evidence from the integrated dataset from the category of the delivery of the ODL programme. Each of the codes is described in greater detail hereafter.

Table 4.12: Typical codes and quotations for the category of delivery of ODL programme

Codes	Quotations
Delivery mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The policy applies to all teaching and learning programmes of the NWU, irrespective of delivery mode (P3, 38:38)</i>
Course workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Modules are too many with high number of assignments compared to other institution... (P6, 40:40)</i> <i>I have learned that the course included many aspects which need more time to get them completed especially the assignments... (P6, 63:63)</i>
Satisfaction with programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>BEd Hons is really fruitful in NWU compared to other institution because the standard is high... (P4, 37:37).</i> <i>I have learnt a lot from this course... (P4, 25:25)</i> <i>My teaching became effective since I have started to do my BEd Hons... (P6, 51:51)</i>
Curriculum design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>When you compare it with other universities, I think other university their BEd Hons has about six modules... (P1, 95:95)</i>
Student dropout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>And with all what is happening nowadays, people have problems, like, we</i>

Codes	Quotations
	<i>were two, now the other one withdrew... (P1, 223:223)</i>
Examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I mean, that one, really, you know what, how did you write exam and then you know what you have written, how did you answer your questions, but if I can just take this for a remark, a remarking, or rechecking, I may stay for maybe another five years, doing the same course... (P1, 168:168).</i>
Dissatisfaction with guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>They give you this booklet, enjoy the exams, and then the lecturer would just say ja, just read everything that is there, and you would find that it is the whole textbook... (P2, 175:175)</i> <i>The scope must be just straight to the point. So that we must not go here, there, you know (P2, 172:172)</i>

The following section provides evidence of each of the aspects listed in Figure 4.16

4.2.3.4.1 Delivery mode of ODL programme

In South Africa, distance learning and ODL are the available modes of delivering professional in-service training to practising teachers across geographical distance and socio-economic barriers (SAIDE, 2011). In order to facilitate its ODL delivery, the SCTE currently employs thirty coordinators at the various contact centres, 250 part time facilitators and 56 temporary staff members in charge of resource and computer centres countrywide. However, the teaching and learning policy of the NWU aims to ensure continuous delivery mode of the BEd Hons programme:

- Programmes are delivered by means of a blended mode, which can include a combination of face-to-face contact between lecturer and student, distance learning and/or e-learning... (P3, 60:62).*

4.2.3.4.2 Course workload of the BEd Hons programme

Some participants mentioned that the BEd Hons of the NWU has too many modules and this increases students' workload. They also indicated that they had to finish their BEd Hons programme in two years, which was not fair, because some of them taught at high schools and it was not easy for them to complete their assignments in time due to their workload at school:

- The workload is also not conducive, because it means if you falter, you may not make it in two years... (P1, 97:98)*
- The BEd Hons at Potchefstroom University ehh, workload, in terms of there are many modules when you compare it with other universities... (P1, 95:95)*
- Educators who are working at High school they find it difficult to write assignments to teach at their school... (P6, 75:75).*

4.2.3.4.3 Satisfaction with BEd Hons programmes

Some participants were of the opinion that the BEd Hons programme of the NWU has prepared them to be a better teacher as it was strong in TPD. The participants also mentioned that BEd Hons programme closed the gap that was created by apartheid education, and that they have also gained valuable knowledge from the various modules on Education Management. The above statement is supported by previous South African Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, quoted from Roberts (2006:220), “transformation and access, the high dropout rate and the production of African intellectuals are some of the challenges facing South African higher education institutions.” A few participants commented:

- *I knew I was going to find, ehh, some modules that will be for assisted, the level one stationed, for instance financial management... (P1, 95:95)*
- *They really help in the professional teacher development, BEd Hons can help to bridge or close the gap created by apartheid education by improving the qualification of education (P4, 18:18)*
- *I'm developing more towards my profession each and every time when I'm in the I part the knowledge which I got from my BEd Hons. Since I've registered with NWU there's a lot of improvement in my class (P4, 33:33).*

4.2.3.4.4 Instructional and curriculum design

Responses from the teachers indicated that the curriculum design, including layout of the study guide, and the structure of the programme, made it easier for them to study. One participant was dubious about the instructional and curriculum design. The participant felt that curriculum design is repetitive, and therefore the structure of the modules should be revisited:

- *Well, it's just for the sake that, in terms of, these modules, there is interpretation of statute, it's all about law, and it's all about law... (P1, 115:115)*
- *They've simplified all these modules, like they would say that refer to maybe, action verbs... (P1:39:39).*

Astin (1993:59) supports these students' responses when he maintains that, among other aspects associated with student satisfaction, curriculum and instruction design is important.

4.2.3.4.5 Student dropout

One participant mentioned that they encountered many problems during their studies, and the only solution was that they had to drop out from their programme. Tinto's model (1975:89-125) indicates that during the last phase of the model it illustrates the interplay between the individual's commitment to the goal of completing a HEI programme and

commitment to the institution that determines whether or not the individual decides to drop out from HEI. Students' decision to drop out, or continue (Figure 2.4) their studies is primarily influenced by a prior personal commitment to the goal of HE completion and is not an institutional commitment. Addition to the above, Pandor also ascribes the "high rate of student dropout to the fact that higher education institutions have not placed a high premium on students achieving good results" (Roberts, 2006:220). Moreover, dissatisfied students may decrease the number of courses or increase the drop-out rate of a university completely:

- *And with all what is happening nowadays, people have problems, like, we were two, now the other one withdrew... (P1, 223:223).*

4.2.3.4.6 Examinations

Some participants regarded examinations as difficult, even though they were well-prepared. They wrote as best they could, and then to find that they did not pass. They were afraid to apply for remarking in case they became victimised. They also maintained that the document on the scope of the examination information was irrelevant and it did not serve them well:

- *I mean, that one, really, you know what, how did you write exam and then you know what you have written, how did you answer your questions, but if I can just take this for a remark, a remarking, or rechecking, I may stay for maybe another five years, doing the same course... (P1, 168:168)*
- *The give the scope that is irrelevant to what they are going to set for exam (P6, 59:59).*

4.2.3.4.7 Summary of the ODL student satisfaction with the learning environment

From the findings of the third research question: *How satisfied are ODL students with the learning environment?*, the participants' overall experience of the support from the ODL unit seems to indicate that they were not satisfied with the support provided. They complained in particular about the insufficient administrative support, inadequate examination information, and inadequacy of facilitators and lecturers to provide support and assistance. They indicated that assignments were misplaced, lost, or not returned. They also indicated that the examination venues were inaccessible and not conducive to writing examinations because of excessive noise levels. The participants used different learning styles and unique characteristics that influenced their academic progress. The above mentioned information from the participants provides background to suggestions to consider when designing learning environments. The resources included facilities of the HEI and class size; time and space available for learning were also mentioned as contributing towards their environmental satisfaction. The students expect require satisfaction with the support and guidance offered by the ODL unit.

4.3 Chapter summary

Chapter four comprised an analysis of the data collected from the two focus group interviews, the open ended questionnaire, the analysis of the Teaching and Learning Policy of the NWU, as well as my field notes. Data were discussed accordingly to three sub-questions:

- *How satisfied are ODL students with the HE environments?*
- *How satisfied are ODL students as clients with HEIs?*
- *How satisfied are ODL students with the learning experience?*

These sub-questions allowed me to comprehensively unpack the *perceptions and experiences of BEd Hons students* in an ODL environment.

The first sub-question dealt with determining the students' satisfaction with the HE environment. In general students were satisfied with the quality of the BEd Hons programme, although they indicated that the alignment of the programme should be improved. Students displayed a wide range of responses when it came to commenting on the communication from the HEI. Some students experience major challenges when it comes to dealing with language barriers. This influences negatively on their academic performance. I perceived that communication from the HEI is an area that should be explored and investigated more intensely in order to ensure improved communication from both parties. Many students have limited access to the Internet, which impedes on their progress and improved communication. Most of the students cited excessive travelling distances to contact sessions and examination centres as a major environmental barrier. Students, who attend classes at the HEI at Potchefstroom, were satisfied with the support from the HEI, as well as with the resources supplied. I observed that those students who attend classes outside Potchefstroom, complained about insufficient resources. Certain students felt that HEIs should perform an analysis of the student base and make appropriate adjustments to cater more sufficiently for them, especially when organising contact sessions and vacation schools.

The second sub-question considered the satisfaction of the ODL students in their role as clients with HEIs. The majority of the students indicated insufficient support from their work environment since their colleagues are often ignorant or unsupportive of their needs. This leads to students finding themselves in a situation which is not conducive to meaningful studying. I perceived that many students indicated that there should be more understanding from HEIs when it comes to recognising and accommodating cultural values and personal as

well as domestic circumstances of students. Most students were satisfied with the facilitation of the BEd Hons programme and found the programme relevant and practical. There were students who had concerns with the assignment feedback, as well as inadequate facilitation at contact centres. The effect of the students' attributes offered some thought provoking insights. Most students displayed high expectations of the BEd Hons programme, but were quick to list numerous challenges that they face during their studies. Many experienced difficulty in studying independently, and felt isolated and unsupported in their work and domestic environments. This leads to students relying heavily on their coping abilities, which in turn creates additional stress and frustration. Most students presented an intense fear of failure. I detected a high level of frustration among students. This seems to be linked firstly to financial issues related to payments of studies, as well as additional financial burdens such as travelling costs. Secondly, students experience frustration when they are exposed to poor administrative and logistic services during their studies.

The third sub-question determined the degree of satisfaction that ODL students experienced with the learning environment. The students indicated that they felt that support from the ODL needed reconsideration. They were of the opinion that administrative support was inadequate, and that more meaningful assistance from the facilitators was required. They especially complained about misplaced or lost assignments, or even assignments that were never returned. Some even suggested that an OLG office should be opened in their area to guarantee improved support and assistance. I perceived that ODL students displayed unique learning styles and characteristics and they needed the ODL unit to take this fact into consideration. They struggled with time and space constraints while they felt that the learning centres did not offer conditions that were conducive to effective teaching and learning. Most students sought additional support and guidance, and felt that the ODL unit should strive to offer this. Most students found the BEd Hons programme fruitful, practical and effective, but some considered the programme to be demanding and comprising of too many modules.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Many students in South Africa are not fully prepared and equipped to study at a HEI. The CHE (2011) highlights inefficiencies which result in unsatisfactory student throughput and high dropouts rates. This leads to financial losses for the Government in terms of development funding, HEIs suffer losses in terms of subsidy income dependent on throughput rates (Nair & Pillay, 2004:303), and students become dissatisfied with HEIs because they experience failure. The academic and professional development of HE students is non-negotiable and has a definite influence on the socio-economic development of the country. It is therefore no surprise that both Government and HEIs are concerned with the performance and satisfaction of students (Fraser & Killen, 2005:28).

Student satisfaction relates to various aspects of HE, including student needs, expectations, perceptions, values, learning experience, motivation, academic relationships, programme design, content of study material, resources, infrastructure, student support, etc. (Allen *et al.*, 2002; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Elliott & Healy, 2001; Liegler, 1997; Sahin, 2007). It is essential for HEIs to identify and address student expectations in order to ensure student attraction and retention (Elliott & Healy, 2001:1). It seems that student satisfaction in HE has been neglected in the past (Astin, 1993; DeBourgh, 1999; Navarro & Schoemaker, 2000). It has however, emerged that the relationship between student satisfaction, retention and throughput rates is complex, and more research is required to ensure satisfactory retention and throughput rates.

In South Africa, DE and ODL are predominantly used for delivering professional in-service training to practising teachers across geographical distances and socio-economic barriers. ODL provides for learner-centred flexible learning as it allows learners a great deal of freedom in choosing the content, time frame and pace of learning (Kanuka & Conrad, 2003). DE offers access to a large and diverse student population of adult students and school leavers whose educational needs would otherwise not be met. The South African Institution for Distance Education (SAIDE) (2011:3) reports that in 2004 more than 265,000 HEI students were studying through DE in South Africa. This presents around 36% of all HE

students. Most of these students were studying part time. About 80% were over 23 years of age, more than 50% were women and 76% were African. Sahin (2007) and Douglas *et al.* (2006) maintain that student recruitment and throughput rates in DE are connected to student satisfaction and expectations.

The SCTE offers various ODL programmes of which BEd Hons is but one. The SCTE has introduced several initiatives to evaluate and encourage the active involvement of students and all academic matters and quality-related procedures at the NWU. The SCTE regularly evaluates its programmes through internal and external programme audits. A local quality assurance team ensures that the quality of curricula is in accordance with national and international requirements, and adheres to CHE, DoE and institutional requirements. Audits relate to content that is accessible through a variety of modalities and that it is also practise orientated. The students enrolled at SCTE for the BEd Hons are adults who are working full-time and studying part-time.

Currently, I am the only researcher at the SCTE at the NW (Potchefstroom Campus) investigating the student satisfaction of BEd Hons students. With this study I aimed to qualitatively examine the satisfaction amongst a group of BEd Hons students in order to enhance student satisfaction. The SCTE annually spends much effort and money on the internal and external evaluation of its programmes, but research on student satisfaction is lacking. I am convinced that student satisfaction contributes to the quality of education at the SCTE, and significantly influences student retention and attraction as well. Consequently I believe a study of this nature is imperative. My study focused on an understanding of human experiences, and not on quantitative correlations between satisfaction, retention and throughput rate. This research supplied important insights into student satisfaction beneficial to assisting and improving the overall learning experience of DE students.

This chapter provides a synoptic overview of the inquiry, as well as a summary of the key findings according to different qualitative research categories. The proposed theoretical framework shows the interrelatedness of the inherent patterns emerging from the analyses.

5.2 Overview of the inquiry

Chapter one provides an orientation of the study indicating the importance of ODL student satisfaction within the BEd Hons programme. I provided background information to this study indicating the importance and support of the HEI to ODL students. I provided an

overview of ODL in South Africa including the SCTE and reported on the various theories and models related to student satisfaction.

Liegler (1997:357) describes student satisfaction as the degree to which students' needs and expectations are met through curriculum design, course delivery, resources, student support, relationships with academic staff, etc. Student satisfaction is generally accepted as a short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of students' educational experiences and expectations (Elliott & Healy, 2001:2). It involves students' perception of tertiary education, including the perceived value and learning experiences (Bollinger & Martindale, 2004:44). The aim of the study was to outline the nature of student satisfaction amongst BEd Hons students, and if students were dissatisfied, to construct guidelines to improve student satisfaction and the quality of education in the programme by recognising the context sensitive needs, expectations and experiences of students from different cultural-language groups. The background, theoretical framework and identification of research problems guided me to devise my research question: *How can the SCTE improve student satisfaction and quality of education in its BEd Hons programme by recognising the context sensitive needs, expectations and experiences of students from different cultural-language groups?* I indicated my research approach to this study. A short overview of the research approach was given. I concluded Chapter One by stipulating the ethical aspects of the research.

Chapter Two explored the literature pertaining to this study according to the views and findings of different scholars in the field. I identified the theories and models that related to student satisfaction of adult students (Bollinger & Martindale, 2004:44; Elliott & Healy, 2001:2; Liegler, 1997:357). I integrated the research of scholars in the field to explore the nature of student satisfaction within the South African HE environment, including the SCTE, and also the teacher as an adult student within an ODL framework (Buchler *et al.*, 2002; Erasmus *et al.*, 2008; Gravett, 2005:6; Kerka, 1989; Knowles, 1990:12; Merriam, 2001:4; Smith, 1991; Tight, 1996:13). I also explored client satisfaction with HEIs (Olivier, 1997:120; Stover, 2005:9; Watjatrakul, 2010:1; Willard, 2002:4) and elaborated on the importance of student retention according to Tinto's Model (Bean & Bradley, 1986:395; Nair & Pillay, 2004:303; Napoli & Wortman, 1998:419; Noel-Levitz, 2009; Sharma, 1998:211; Tinto, 1975; Waleri, 1990:24). My review of pertinent literature indicates that there are many factors that could affect the success rate and satisfaction of mature students. These include social and environmental factors, traumatic factors, intrinsic factors, etc. Social and environmental factors include the time and space available for study, study methods, support from significant others, accommodation, inclusion in social activities and friendship. Traumatic factors include illness, bereavement, unemployment, lack of support from family members,

cares for younger children or the elderly, and the level of adaptation of the students to the everyday stresses of life. Intrinsic factors include students' attitudes, motivation and qualities such as persistence, hardiness, coping ability, approaches to study and learning styles (Allen *et al.*, 2002:85; Sahin, 2007:113; Van Heerden, 1997:78). The chapter emphasises the assessment of student satisfaction with ODL by referring to four central categories of student satisfaction that relate to learning satisfaction: academic satisfaction, environmental satisfaction, personal satisfaction and social satisfaction.

Chapter Three explains the research design and methodology. The nature and methodology of this research related to an exploratory and descriptive investigation (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:79-81; Marshall & Rossman, 1999:33). The unit of analysis comprised of the BEd Hons students' perception of the satisfaction of their experiences during studying via ODL. I motivated the utilisation of strategies to identify knowledgeable participants that contributed to an information rich and integrated dataset (Merriam, 1998:61). I selected participants according to three criteria: major language groups, gender and duration of teaching experience. Detail of my research methodology and the theoretical underpinning can be found in Chapter Three. I approached the study according to the interpretivist paradigm as teacher-students, their interpretations, perceptions, the subjective contexts, experiences, beliefs, behaviours, practices, expectations, fears, and needs constituted the primary sources of my data (Burrell & Morgan, 1979:20; Masson, 2002:56). I indicated and explained the rationale for using qualitative research for this study. As qualitative research is based on a philosophical position that is broadly interpretivist, it allowed me to understand how the students experience the BEd Hons programme. I consequently described the qualitative data collection strategies of in-depth semi-structured focus-group interviews (Ary *et al.*, 2002; Richie & Lewis, 2003:220). My field notes provided me with the opportunity to record and comment my thoughts about the research setting, the participants and their responses (Merriam, 1998:106; Richie & Lewis, 2003:133). I explained the steps I took to ensure the study's trustworthiness. I used a computer-based qualitative data analysis system, Atlas.ti™, to code and analyse the data according to themes and categories, and elicit meanings from the data (Merriam, 1998:178). Ethical considerations for this study included all necessary processes in accordance with the guidelines of the Ethics Committee at the NWU.

Chapter Four reports the analyses of the qualitative data captured in the integrated data set. The interpretivist approach allowed me to explore the meanings and interpretations relating to the two focus group interviews, the qualitative data from the nineteen open-ended questionnaires, and the unravelling of the Teaching and Learning Policy of the NWU. I coded the responses from the participants into as many categories as were necessary. As

the analyses continued, I reduced the categories by clustering them into themes as they emerged. The three sub-questions assisted me to explore, explain and describe student satisfaction of the BEd Hons programme.

5.3 Key findings

In the following section I provide an inventory of the initial key findings from the qualitative analysis grouped according to the following sub-questions:

- How satisfied are ODL students with the HE environment?
- How satisfied are ODL students as clients with HEIs?
- How satisfied are ODL students with the learning environment

5.3.1 Students' satisfaction with HE environment

The first sub-question related to student satisfaction with HE in general, their local HEI, as well as their academic programmes. It emerged that students' satisfaction with their HEIs pertains to the quality of the programme, communication between lecturers/facilitators and students, the environment at the learning centres, and the support that students receive from HEI (§ 4.2.1).

The students' perception of the quality of the academic programme plays an integral part in their overall satisfaction. While gauging the quality of the programme, students considered various quality related aspects. The obvious one is the academic quality of the programme, and to which extent the programme contributes towards their TPD. The perceived value of the programme to the development of their careers constituted a powerful consideration. Most students were of the opinion that the specific programme added value to their professional development and their careers. The findings concur with the literature that academic satisfaction also involves students' perception of programme quality, curriculum design, instructional design and programme delivery, study material, quality of relationship with lecturers/facilitators, attitudes of lecturers/facilitators, external motivation, the learning experience, student centredness, support services, academic integrity, academic difficulty, quality assessment, self-directed learning, and expected minimum average for courses (Aitken, 1982; Allen *et al.*, 2002; Astin, 1993; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Belcheir, 1999; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Castles, 2004; Danielson, 1998:1; Elliott & Healy, 2001; Sahin, 2007) (§ 4.2.1.1).

Communication from the HEI emerged as vital importance to student satisfaction. This included aspects like bridging of language barriers and the distribution of information and general communication. Many students were not satisfied with the communication from the HEI and indicated that communication and feedback on their requests were inadequate. The HEI should seriously consider this issue as communication with ODL students is of utmost importance because distance learning is remote and becomes lonely. Good communication contributes towards making learning accessible to students, providing control to students for managing their learning (Ko & Rossen, 2001:40). Therefore, my findings confirm that environmental satisfaction influences student satisfaction and experiences (Astin, 1993; Browne *et al.*, 1998). Many students complained about the distances they travelled to the contact centres and exam venues. However, on the whole, most students seemed satisfied with the learning environment at the contact centres and the guidance they received (§ 4.2.1.3).

Students acknowledged their dependence on the HEI for resources and support. HEIs should not lose sight of the fact that students view them as the ultimate provider of knowledge, communication, interaction, and resources. When students perceive that the HEI succeeds in meeting their needs, their satisfaction with the HE environment is high. This finding concurs with adequate infrastructure, high quality of support systems, high quality of content and assessment, interactive support networks, thoughtful planning and designing of ODL, effective delivery methods, and encouraging motivation (Fraser & Killen, 2005; Trinidad & Pearson, 2004; Wilson, 2001) (§4.2.1.4.4).

5.3.1.1 Students' satisfaction with the HE environment

To create and maintain a high level of student satisfaction with the HEI's environment, I recommend:

- Ensure that the programme adds value to students' TPD and careers
- Create and constantly assess structures and modes of communication by *inter alia* bridging language barriers, and creating Internet access for students
- Continuously extend and expand the range and quality resources
- Strive to improve support to students by assessing their academic needs.

5.3.2 Students as clients with HEIs

The second sub-question addressed how satisfied students were as clients of the HEI. This aspect relates to the retention of students, how students are influenced by the support they

receive from their work environments, as well as the acknowledgment they receive from the HEI regarding their cultural values. Student attributes play a role in their satisfaction with HEIs. By minimizing dissatisfaction, students are retained and the institution's performance is amplified (Douglas *et al.*, 2006:252) (§ 4.2.2).

Students maintain that support from their work environments is not sufficient and that colleagues and school management hesitate to support their TPD efforts. Social satisfaction, as a life experience, leads to harmonious social relationships (Jones, 2008:373; Von Hippel *et al.*, 2008:435). As students grapple to gain support from their work environments, they become disillusioned with their workload and the demands of their studies. Due to insufficient support from their work environments, students turn to their lecturers/facilitators to assist and support them. It is critical that the HEI creates an environment for providing assistance, understanding and guidance to ODL students (§4.2.2.1).

The findings indicated the importance of the acknowledgement of the diversity of cultures and values of ODL students. They demand that HEIs should acknowledge that they, the students, originate from multi-cultural backgrounds and diverse personal and domestic situations. This coincides with the opinion of Dubois (1996:21) that ODL should be concerned with more than just cognitive learning. He also describes the competencies that enable individuals to live and work effectively in a changing era. ODL fosters the development of individuals who are knowledgeable about their own situations, who possess certain skills, values, and commitment which empower them to live productively and harmoniously in the international economic and cultural community of the future. Students' self-concept is established by interaction with their families, as well as personal and social background (Azizi *et al.*, 2009:302). However, academic achievement is often influenced by parents, peers, teachers and the community.

Knowles (1975:18) defines self-directed learning as “a process in which individuals take the initiative with or without the help of others, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify human and material resources for learning, determine and implement appropriate strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes.” Students use different learning styles and unique characteristics to achieve academic progress. The lecturers/facilitators should remember that not all students learn in the same way. The following noteworthy findings emerged from the data, indicating that the HEI should promote the *Batho Pele* principle—people first. Studying involves more than mere academic material, it involves people. The students were mostly positive about the value of the BEd Hons programme and how it contributed towards their acquisition of knowledge and their marketability as

professional teachers. They found the programme relevant to their working environment, they indicated that it improved their teaching skills, and it improved their confidence. Although the majority of the students were satisfied with the support from lecturers, they complained about the amount of time wasted at the learning centres during course facilitation due to poor organisation and communication. They were also not satisfied with the feedback they received from some lecturers.

Students' attributes influence their level of satisfaction with the HEI. This coincides with the opinion of Paunonen and Ashton (2001) that these attributes could have a negative or positive effect on the students' performance during measuring of academic performance. Students' personalities influence their behaviour and attitude. Students experience frustration, stress and effort to cope with the demands of DE. Students are working individuals who have to juggle the responsibilities of a job; studying and family responsibilities and they find it stressful to balance all these responsibilities. Students experience frustration due to insufficient feedback from the HEI and inadequate administrative support from the HEI. Financial constraints inflict additional burden on students who have to cope with travelling and accommodation costs. All of these factors culminate in their fear of failure—an aspect that many students experience during their studies. Students often suffer from low self-esteem, have inadequate support from their communities and HEIs, and feel uncertain about their academic and general coping abilities.

5.3.2.1 Students as clients with the HEIs

To ensure an acceptable level of satisfaction from students when it comes to HEI, I suggest:

- Understand and appreciate the cultures, values and circumstances of students
- Find ways to financially and socially support students
- Improve assignment and administrative feedback to students
- Create measures to assist students to cope with their anxiety, frustration and stress
- Accommodate the unique learning styles and characteristics of ODL students.

5.3.3 ODL Student satisfaction with learning environment

The third sub-question focused on the students' satisfaction with the learning environment. The aspects that emerged from this theme were: the support from the ODL unit, support for learning, the learning centres and the delivery of the programme (§ 4.2.3).

Students were not satisfied with the support they received from the ODL unit. Sufficient and adequate support from the ODL unit would enhance their learning experience and assist their academic progress. In South Africa, DE and ODL are the only flexible modes of delivering professional in-service training to practising teachers across geographical distance and socio-economic barriers. As part of curriculum delivery, the SCTE offers various support services to students such as contact sessions and vacation schools, student-centred study guides, tutorial letters, textbooks, time tables, information booklets, DVDs, regular SMS communication, telephonic assistance, email and Internet access (SAIDE, 2011). Findings showed that students were dissatisfied with insufficient administrative support, inadequate examination information, and inadequate support and assistance from lecturers and facilitators during contact sessions. Students were also not satisfied with the feedback they received on their assignments. They maintained that assignments were not returned in time and some were lost or misplaced. Examination venues were evaluated as inaccessible and not conducive to sitting for examinations.

Although students' families could not assist them in doing their assignments, they acknowledged the general support from their families; however, the support they received from their colleagues was disappointing. Insufficient time and space hampered them during their studies. They felt that the classrooms used during facilitation were often too small or overcrowded, and that the time allocated for facilitation and for completing their programme courses was inadequate. They suggested more contact sessions and more time for facilitation during the contact sessions and vacation schools.

Students were satisfied with the delivery of the ODL programme and felt that it was valuable, and that it contributed positively to their academic and professional careers while studying during employment. Course lecturers/facilitators involved with adult students should take cognisance of the characteristics of their students, as well as of the factors that influence the academic performance and satisfaction of adult students (Erasmus *et al.*, 2008; Gravett, 2005; Knowles, 1990; Lasswell, 1990; Smith, 1991). It is of utmost importance that the HEI realises that ODL students have to overcome many more challenges than full-time students, and that their experiences of their learning environment play an important part in their academic success. The students experienced that the workload of the BEd Hons was excessive and that the HEI should consider this aspect during curriculum design and alignment of the programme. Examination guidelines should also be revisited.

5.3.3.1 ODL Student satisfaction with the learning environment

I recommend the following to create and maintain a high level of student satisfaction with the learning environment:

- Efficient support for students from the ODL unit
- Increase of frequency and length of contact sessions, as well as improved timetabling
- Revisit the BEd Hons programme to improve structure and alignment
- Improve the facilities at the contact sessions
- Improve the academic support services to enhance learning.

Figure 5.1 summarises the main recommendations regarding the three sub-questions according to the responsibilities of HE, the local HE, and the ODL unit.

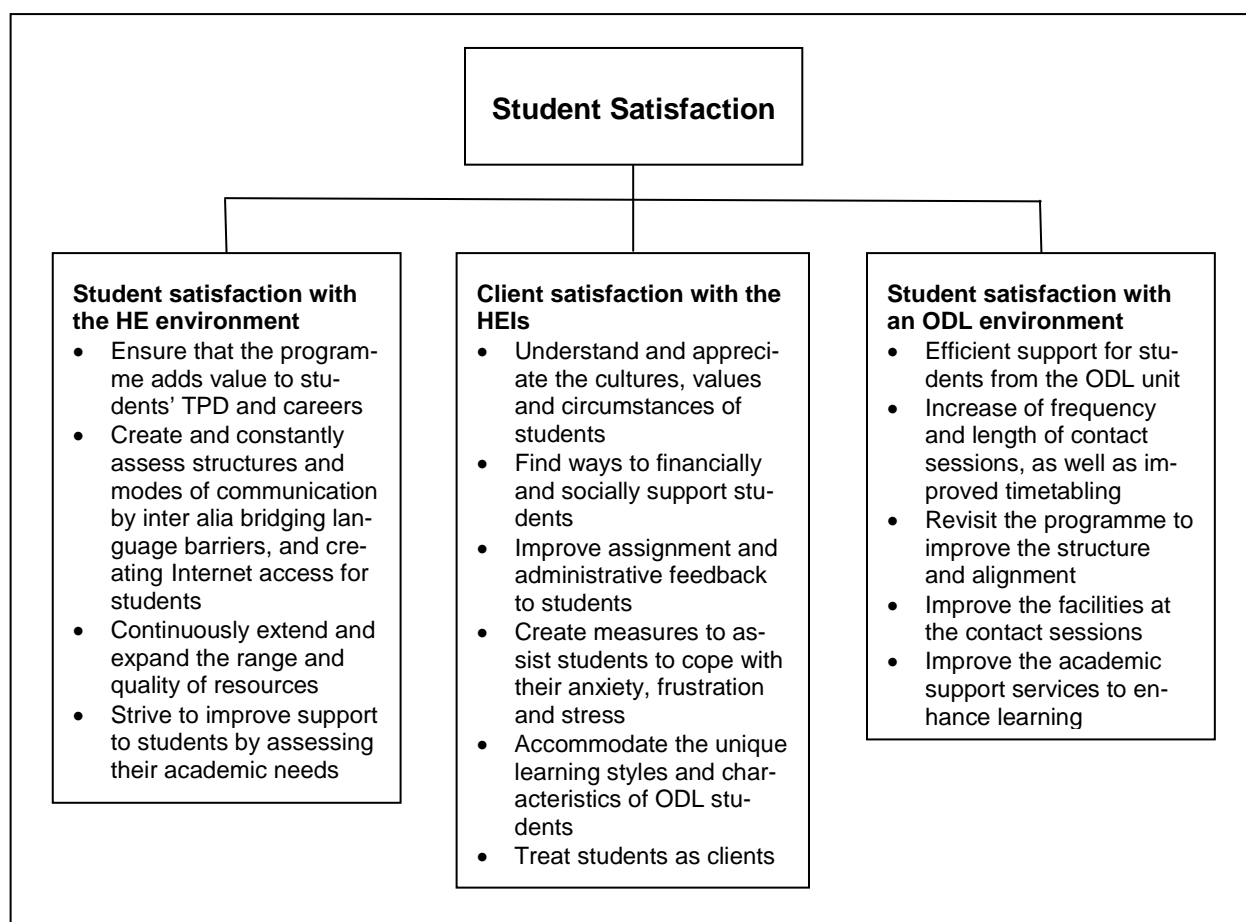


Figure 5.1: Summary of recommendations of this study

5.4 Proposed research framework for student satisfaction in ODL

My research followed a series of consequential steps:

- From the literature, I derived and authenticated preliminary themes (Chapter 2)
- I used qualitative research to interview authentic research participants to obtain their perceptions on their satisfaction with the BEd Hons ODL programme they were enrolled for (Chapter 3)
- I followed a process of crystallisation during data analysis to substantiate the trustworthiness of the data (Chapter 4)
- Interrelated key findings emerged as research themes indicating the issues of student satisfaction with ODL (Chapter 5).

These steps culminated into a research framework for student satisfaction in ODL (Figure 5.2).

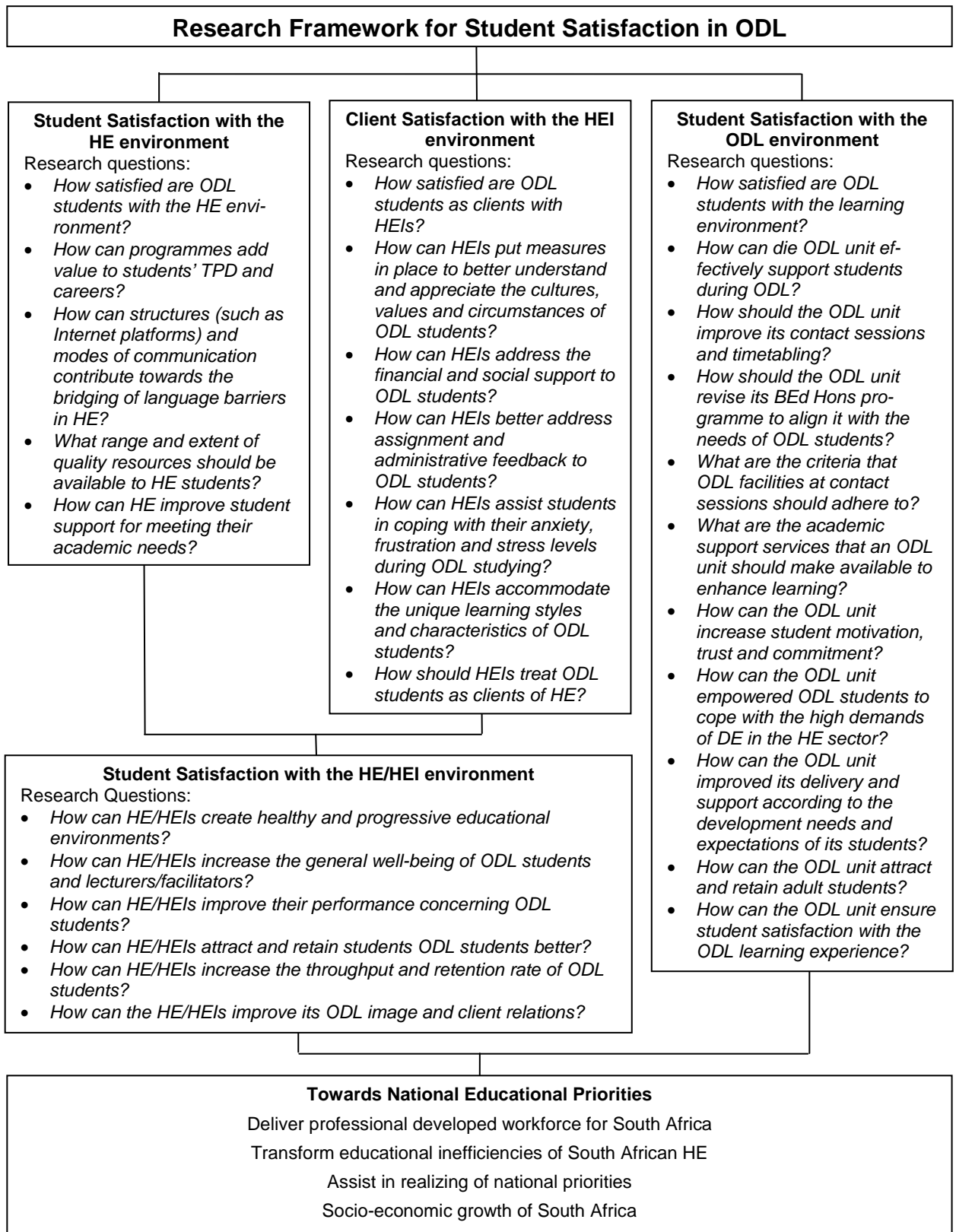


Figure 5.2 Research Framework for Student Satisfaction in ODL

Literature paints the picture that DE and ODL modes are predominantly used for delivering professional in-service training to practising teachers across geographical distance and socio-economic barriers in South Africa. This study indicated that HE, HEIs and ODL units are equally responsible for sustaining student satisfaction, i.e. the degree to which students'

needs and expectations are met. As Figure 5.2 illustrates, the three main components of student satisfaction are (i) Student satisfaction with the HE environment, e.g. structuring of HEIs, registering of qualifications with SAQA, quality assurance of programmes, etc; (ii) client satisfaction with the HEI environment, e.g. student administration, bursaries, accommodation and local programme prerequisites, etc; and (iii) student satisfaction with the ODL environment, e.g. programme delivery through ODL, lecturer/facilitators support, assessment of assignments and examination scripts, support at remote learning, etc. In Figure 5.2 the aspects of HE and HEIs culminate into a single silo as students generally do not perceive the difference between these structures. The research framework provides pertinent research question relating to student satisfaction with HE, HEIs and ODL units that scholars from a variety of disciplines across HE research may use as a starting point for further research, both for qualitative and quantitative, on a topic not yet saturated in the South African context. The realization of the research areas may lead towards addressing South African national educational priorities, e.g. the delivery of a professionally developed workforce, the transformation of educational inefficiencies, the realization of national schooling priorities, and the socio-economic growth within South Africa.

5.5 Limitations of this study

In spite of careful planning and executing of research methods, all studies inherently have limitations which could relate to choices of theoretical limitations, selection of methodological approaches and encountering of constraints during data collection and analysis. In some instance the participants unconsciously use particular words to express their ideas, and these are used as an indication of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction towards the specific programme. The cultural diversity of the students, especially those who had to express themselves in their second language such as English, was an inhibiting factor.

5.5.1 Theoretical limitations

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are valuable. Viewing my research problem from an interpretivist perspective limits the research possibilities not captured from this perspective. Therefore, qualitative research highlights only a subjective perspective, and does not indicate practically significant effects between variables that could provide generalisation from a structuralist perspective, or a problem-solving perspective from a functionalist view, or the human perspective from humanist point of view (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The analyses involved only a few students while the conclusions do not relate to the

entire population of BEd Hons students in South Africa. The function of qualitative research is to provide valid and pertinent questions (Figure 5.2) that could be addressed from the views of the other three perspectives (Merriam, 1998). My literature search indicated that no research frameworks are available and in spite of the confining limitation of no generalization, this study makes a valuable contribution to the field of student satisfaction in HE.

5.5.2 Exclusive limitations

I am a novice researcher at the beginning of my scholarly journey. I embarked on this study with few skills and little experience of qualitative research. In spite of hands-on training on interviewing techniques, I am now of the opinion that I needed more practice. I spent many hours analysing the focus group interviews, and started from the beginning and redid the interview to provide justice to the voices of the participants. When I realised that I had not reached data saturation (Masson, 2002:134; Merriam, 1998:64) I collected additional data through open-ended questionnaires. I was humbled by the opinion of a student who refused to participate as she felt that “it is a waste of time and we won’t get any assistance thereafter.” My role as human research instrument left me feeling inadequate. However, so many students trusted me with their innermost feelings, and I feel privileged to have earned their trust. I also realise how much I have grown academically through this study and I simultaneously have progressed towards achieving my goals.

5.6 Value of this research

This research determined how the SCTE could address student satisfaction and quality of delivery of its BEd Hons programme by recognising the context sensitive needs, expectations and experiences of students from different cultural-language groups. The study provides an authentic research framework (Figure 5.2) that can be widely used in HE, both nationally and internationally across disciplines, to address the complex issues of student satisfaction in a HE environment known for its diversity and highly politicised context.

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**Student Satisfaction of Open Distance Learning Students in a BEd Hons
Programme**

**Focus group Interview Questions:
BEd Hons Students**

- 1 What is your experiences regarding academic satisfaction in your BEd Hons?
- 2 What is your experiences regarding environmental satisfaction in your BEd Hons programme?
- 3 What is your experiences regarding personal satisfaction in your BEd Hons programme?
- 4 What is your experiences regarding social satisfaction in your BEd Hons programme?



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NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT

Dear Sir / Madam

Information letter research participants in a focus group interview

I, Marry Mdakane, am a Phd student enrolled North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. I intend to collect data for my research study on learning and teaching. The title of my proposed thesis is: *Student Satisfaction of Open Distance Learning Students in a BEd Hons Programme.*

I hereby request that you participate in a focus group interview on your experiences as the open distance learning students at North-West-University. The focus group interview will last about an hour. I students hereby kindly request that you also fill-in a short background survey.

I pledge to maintain the professional and research ethical codes. This signifies that:

- Your participation in this research remains voluntary and you may, at any time, withdraw from the research
- Your personal information, at all times, will be treated as confidential
- Should you be interested, the research findings will be made available to you.

I am planning to conduct this research during vacation school. Could you please provide me with your written consent by filling-in the sections on the next page? Please return the consent form to me. Your input and opinions are greatly appreciated!

Yours sincerely

M Mdakane

Phd Candidate, North-West University

Student number: 10911502

Mobile: 084 6976851

Fax number: 018 299 4558

Dear Sir / Madam

**Information letter to research participants in completing open-ended
Questionnaire**

I, Marry Mdakane, am a Phd student enrolled North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. I intend to collect data for my research study on learning and teaching. The title of my proposed thesis is: Student *Satisfaction of Open Distance Learning Students in a BEd Hons Programme*.

I hereby request that you participate in a qualitative research by completing the open-ended questionnaire on your experiences as the open distance learning students at North-West-University. The open ended questionnaire will last about an hour. I students hereby kindly request that you also fill-in a short background survey.

I pledge to maintain the professional and research ethical codes. This signifies that:

- Your participation in this research remains voluntary and you may, at any time, withdraw from the research
- Your personal information, at all times, will be treated as confidential
- Should you be interested, the research findings will be made available to you.

Could you please provide me with your written consent by filling-in the sections on the next page? Please return the consent form to me. Your input and opinions are greatly appreciated!

Yours sincerely

M Mdakane

Phd Candidate, North-West University

Student number: 10911502

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NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
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Consent form for Research participants:

Student Satisfaction of Open Distance Learning Students in a BEd Hons Programme

LETTER OF PERMISSION: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I, _____, (name)

an educator from _____ (name of school)

I hereby give my permission to participate in the above mentioned research project. I am aware that my participation in this study remains voluntary and that I, at any time, may withdraw from the research. I also understand that all personal information will be treated as confidential by the researchers.

Name and signature

Date