Academic hurdles facing undergraduate students at one South African University

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the academic hurdles faced by undergraduate students at one university. Using the qualitative research approach, a sample of 31 participants made up of peer facilitators, undergraduate students and programme co-ordinators was purposefully selected. Data were collected using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The data were coded thematically to make sense of the experiences shared by the participants. The results indicated numerous academic challenges faced by first year students. These include problems of writing, referencing, plagiarism, English as a barrier and inability to use computers. It is concluded that students at the university under study face a myriad of academic challenges, due to poor socio-economic backgrounds and the low level of education which they received from the apartheid influenced system, which some schools still use. The paper recommends commitment on the part of stakeholders of peer academic support programmes.

Keywords: challenges, socio-economic background, academic support, peer support, students

INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, after the democratic election of 1994, some policies were established to redress the educational inequalities that existed at higher education institutions. In doing this, some new policies were formulated by the council for higher education (CHE, 1996). These policies involved the provision of greater access to black students who do not meet the entry requirements for a degree course to be admitted without being prejudiced by their weak matriculation results (Makura, Skead & Nhundu, 2011). The aim of these policies is to increase access to higher education in order to achieve what is now commonly known as the massification of higher education (Cloete & Bunting, 2000). Boughey (2005) stipulates that as a result of relaxed apartheid policies in the early 1980s, historically white universities started admitting small numbers of black students. In an attempt to improve the academic performance of the increased number of students that were admitted, academic support programmes such as Language and writing, supplemental instruction and tutoring programmes were introduced.

The CHE (2014) clearly states that academic support programmes were introduced in South Africa to assist under prepared students at universities to benefit from lectures and tutorials. According to Boughey (2005), this initiative focused on providing historically disadvantaged students equal opportunity by filling the gap between their poor socioeconomic background and university education. These programmes are being implemented at the university under study. However, this objective has not been achieved, despite the number of intervention programmes which have been introduced (CHE, 2014). It could be maintained that making higher education more inclusive requires not only moving historically underrepresented groups into higher education, but also meeting their unique needs. The International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement or IAEEA showed that South Africa ranked lowest in terms of academic performance, with almost seventy-eight percent of students failing to reach the low international benchmark (Mullis, Martin, Micheal, Foy, & Arora, 2011). This state of affairs is characterised by poor academic writing and performance in tests, assignments and examinations, with only twenty-nine percent of students being able to complete their degree courses within the stipulated periods (VitalStats Public Higher Education, 2011).

According to John (2013), the official dropout rate in some universities is the result of a lack of support. Mudzielwana and Maphosa (2013) have pointed out that context has a great influence on the conceptualisation, organisation and academic performance of students. This brings about the different challenges faced by students as stipulated by Hilsdon, (2013). According to this writer, students at higher education institutions are faced with different challenges that affect the retention and throughput rates. They include socioeconomic, financial and academic challenges. This paper seeks to explore the academic hurdles facing undergraduate students at one university in South Africa.

OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The challenges facing students at higher education institutions include poor socio-economic backgrounds and poor academic performance. The National Development Plan acknowledges and summarises the challenges with these words: "Higher education faces major challenges: low participation rates, high attrition rates, a curriculum that does not speak to society and its needs, the absence of an enabling environment that allows every individual to express and reach full potential, and poor knowledge production that often does not translate into innovation" (NPC, 2011:271). It also adds that the massive investments in the higher education system have not, so far, been rewarded in terms of improved academic

performance or graduation rates. (NPC, 2011). In the domain of higher education a great diversity of factors can affect the performance of students, the number of subjects for which a student registers per year being not the least. In addition, cognitive factors, such as language proficiency, and non-cognitive factors, such as the locus of control and study habits, all exert a significant on influence on performance, retention and throughput (De Beer, 2000). Two aspects make up this review of literature and include students' socio-economic backgrounds and poor academic performance.

Poor socio-economic background of students and the need for support

Socio-economic status has been defined as the relative position of a family or individual in a hierarchical social structure, based on their access to or control over wealth, prestige and power (Barry, 2005). Kahlenberg (2001) maintains that a more important resource than the funding provided to schools is the effect of school peers on learners, and their socio-economic background in particular. A large body of research has shown that alongside such variables as culture, ethnicity and general cognitive ability and quality of education, socio-economic status or SES has a significant effect on the intellectual coefficient and IQ scores of children, their academic performance and ultimately, their success at school (Richardson, 2002).

There has been a lack of adequate public funding and initiatives for academic development to support under-prepared students, and this has had negative implications for quality education at the higher level, compromising the educating and training of graduates who possess the knowledge, competencies and skills required by the labour market, in turn affecting economic development adversely (Badat, 2010). The Department of Higher Education and Training or DHET has stressed that there is a pressing need for improving pass rates and graduation rates and also for improving the quality of the graduates leaving many institutions (Cloete, 2009). All of these considerations imply that students are not really coping and need support.

Poor academic performance

In the context of the topic of this study, poor academic performance may be understood as an inability to produce successful results immediately (Johnson, 2002). Tinto (2006) has pointed out; poor academic performance will inevitably result when students in higher education institutions do not respond well to the teaching methods employed. Institutions of higher education present students with a host of academic challenges to overcome in order to succeed and graduate, such as mastering the content of courses cognitively, successfully coping with demanding study material, effectively managing time and so on. Remaining persistent and persevering with these challenges are the attributes which define and express the psychological construct of achievement at higher education institutions (Johnson, Taasoobshirazi, Kestler & Cordova, 2014).

Brown (2010) investigated the phenomenon of dropping out from higher education in a study conducted in rural secondary schools in the Eastern Cape in South Africa, using focus group discussions. The study found that the main cause of dropping out concerned the failure of students to adapt to the demands of higher education. It also found that this was directly related to the school system not preparing students adequately, resulting in some students finding the adjustment to the demands of higher education difficult. The second cause of students dropping out to a large extent involved the institutions themselves. Brown attributed failure of particular students to the admission policies of universities, maintaining that they did not function effectively to exclude those students who lacked the necessary intellectual

capacity and skills. It is also in the light of this orientation that the paper sought to explore students' academic challenges at the university.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research approach

This paper draws from a larger study that made use of qualitative research approach. In accordance with Creswell (2013), qualitative research approach is meant to explore and understand a central phenomenon. It therefore has to do with understanding the process, social and cultural context which are in line with various patterns of behaviour. Qualitative methods ask mostly open ended questions (Danzin & Lincoln, 2011). This enables participants to respond freely using their own words. Qualitative study in this regard gave the participants an opportunity to respond more elaborately and in greater detail without any fear or delay. This is due to the flexible nature of the method that enabled the researcher to ask why and how questions concerning a particular issue (Pop & Mays, 2009).

Research design

The broader study used a case study design, which according to Cohen et al.(2006) has the objective to create interpretations of experiences which are so close that uniqueness, context and reality are richly described to the point that a sense of an account from a direct witness is obtained. A case study proved to be a very appropriate means of making use of the verbal accounts of all of the participants regarding the academic challenges faced by undergraduate students. It is also important to note that case studies adopt multiple perspectives, in the sense that the researcher does not consider the voice and perspective of one range of actors only. In the case of this broader study, the perceptions of not only peer facilitators were sought, but also those of other players, such as coordinators and students, who interact with the main target group. This enabled the study to give voice to the powerless as stipulated by Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg (2010), who in this particular context were the students.

Selection of Participants

The study from which this paper draws its data constituted the population of one university in South Africa offering peer academic support programmes. It also involved all peer facilitators all programme co-ordinators of the programmes and all first year undergraduate students who have been receiving services from the programmes. The sample of the study was limited to some selected peer facilitators, undergraduate students as well as some co-ordinators. Creswell, (2013) believed that purposive sampling is based on the judgement of the researcher that a sample has typical elements that contains the most typical attributes of the population. Therefore purposive sampling was used because the study adopted a qualitative approach. A sample of thirty-one participants made up of ten undergraduate students for focus group discussion, seven programme co-ordinators and fourteen peer facilitators for in-depth interviews were purposively selected from one university in South Africa.

Generation of data

Employing a qualitative approach permitted the use of different kinds of instruments to gather data, such as in-depth interviews for seven programme coordinators and fourteen peer facilitators. Two focus group discussions for ten undergraduate students. Semi-structured interview guide enabled the production of in-depth data for peer academic responses to students' academic challenges at the university under study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were manually processed qualitatively. The general analytical procedure was used to analysed the qualitative data based on the key themes that emerged from the audio-tape recording and field notes. After coding the data and identifying categories and developing themes, a matrix of the main theme was presented to vividly demonstrate the academic challenges faced by undergraduate students and the response of peer academic support programmes.

Ethical consideration

Ethics is defined as a matter of principled sensitivity to the right of others (Cohen et al, 2007). In this case, ethical consideration protects the fundamental right of participants including respect for privacy while maintaining the highest level of confidentiality. Participant in the study were all encouraged to participate voluntarily without any fear. While conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the participants, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout and guaranteed. The participant also had to sign an informed concern letter to participate in the broader study.

FINDINGS

The first section of the results begins with the demographic characteristics of the participants and academic hurdles facing undergraduate students at the sampled university under different themes.

Demographic characteristics of the participants

This section shows the characteristics of the programme coordinators who were sampled for the study in terms of their genders, the departments in which they are employed and their experience and qualifications. The programme coordinators were allocated codes from COD1 to COD7. For example, COD 1 stands for coordinator number 1. Seven coordinators were interviewed and both genders were represented fairly evenly, as the sample consisted of three males and four females. A single coordinator represented each of the faculties in the case of education, science and agriculture, management and commerce. The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities was represented by two coordinators, owing to its large size. The Teaching and Learning Centre or TLC was represented by two coordinators. Only the Faculty of Law was not represented in the sample, owing to the fact that it is not based on the campus on which this study was conducted. The coordinators from the four faculties and the TLC represented those of biochemistry and microbiology, social work, political science, communication, business management, the School of Further and Continuing Education and the TLC.

The findings show that four of the coordinators held master's degrees while the remaining three held PhD degrees. While five of the coordinators were responsible for tutorials in the various different departments, two were TLC coordinators, with one being in charge of the Language and Writing Programme and the other of Supplemental Instruction. In terms of experience, one of the coordinators had two years, while the coordinator with the least experience had only ten months. However, most of the coordinators had a considerable amount of experience, as three had between three and five years, while the remaining two had between six and seven years.

The researchers were guided by the fact that not only were most of the co-ordinators experienced, but they had also been exposed to a great deal of the transformation processes and reforms which the University has undergone, such as the growth in the enrolment of students and in the size of the academic staff, and the numerous changes of policy which have been introduced and implemented. Finding of the next section shows the characteristics of the peer facilitators. The fourteen peer facilitators were allocated codes from PF1 to PF14, with PF1 standing for peer facilitator number 1.

According to this section, the sample of fourteen peer facilitators, made up of nine males, who constituted most of these participants, and five females. As had been the case with the programme coordinators, the fourteen peer facilitators represented the four on the campus from which the samples of participants were drawn. There were four peer facilitators each from the Department of Social Work and the School of Further and Continuing Education, and six others representing the departments of business management, biochemistry, microbiology, public administration, law and geology. Most of the peer facilitators were studying at the PhD level, with two each at the Master's, Honours and third year undergraduate levels. Where the actual programmes were concerned, tutors made up the bulk of the participants, with a total of six, with a further four each working in the Supplemental Instruction or SI programme and the Language and Writing Programme or LWP. Half of the peer facilitators had two years of experience in facilitating teaching and learning, while three had two years, one had five years and one had six years. Of the remaining two, one had one year and one had six months. Codes were allocated to the students who took part in the two focus group discussions as assigned from number 1 to 10. The students were represented by codes SFDG1 to SFDG10, with SFDG1 representing student number 1 in the focus group discussions.

Of the ten participants, six were females and four were males. They were drawn from all four of the faculties on the campus from which data were collected for the study. The departments of social work and business management and the School of Further and Continuing Education were each represented by two participants, while the departments of physics, microbiology, library and information science, and political science were each represented by one. A total of six of the ten participants were receiving both supplemental instruction at the TLC and attending tutorials, which were given in their various different departments. The remaining four participants were attending tutorials in their departments only, and not making use of the peer support services provided by the TLC.

Academic hurdles faced by students

The results show that the most important academic challenges facing students include writing, referencing, plagiarism and computer.

Theme 1: Writing challenges

Undergraduate students were asked to explain the academic challenges they face. All the students reported that writing was a very serious problem, especially at the level of the university, which they expected the programmes to solve. Almost all of the students who participated reported that they could not express themselves well in academic language in their assignments, tests and examinations, without help. One of the participants, during a focus group discussion, said:

> "Writing is very difficult for me. I find it a terrible thing to write or construct good sentences that reflect what is in my mind. Most often, I have the idea, but to put it in a better way becomes problematic and troublesome for me." (SFGD 5)

Peer facilitators were also asked to explain some of the common academic challenges students always bring to them. They maintained that many first year students complained to them that they were facing problems with writing assignments. As a result, most of the students sought help from peer facilitators, especially those at the TLC, in order to obtain guidance on how to write their assignments. They suggested that these problems may be owing to the fact that most of the students who are admitted to first year courses are not familiar with academic writing, as they had only recently left high school. One of the peer facilitators said:

> "Students come from rural secondary schools, especially in the Eastern Cape Province who have studied under Bantu Education, so they need orientation about the university. They are faced with issues of assignment writing academically. This is a huge challenge facing not only first year students, but most students because of their disadvantaged backgrounds." (PF11)

This assessment was echoed by another peer facilitator in these words:

> "The students find it very difficult writing assignments, since they are coming directly from the high school. Also, they have problems in writing even letters and emails or good SMS text messages to their family members, friends and loved ones." (PF7)

Data gathered from the focus group discussions with undergraduate student participants and the in-depth interviews with peer facilitators revealed that there are common academic challenges faced by first year students at the university. It may be assumed that these challenges hindered their academic performance, thereby affecting rates of retention and throughput, making it imperative to conduct a thorough investigation into the academic challenges encountered by students.

Theme 2: Referencing hurdles

Referencing emerged as a sub-theme under the main theme of challenges and deficiencies. Many students, during the focus group discussions, mentioned the fact that they do not know how to cite sources when they write assignments. They also explained that they have great

difficulty arranging the references at the end of their assignments. These problems were explained by one of the students in these words:

> "We have never been taught how to cite sources properly in our assignments that we write and submit to our lecturers. We can't distinguish between the different referencing styles in the assignments, nor do we know how to put all the references together. We hear that there are different styles of citations and referencing, but we are referring to the TLC for help on how to cite and arrange references." (SFGD 6)

In a similar vein, some of the peer facilitators stressed the fact that many students, particularly first year students, could not cite the sources of information which they obtained from a textbook, a book chapter, a journal or an internet source. They maintained that it was even worse when it came to arranging referencing according to the required style prescribed by their teachers. One of the peer facilitators said:

> "In most cases, students don't know how to cite sources they used in their assignments. For example, some students will copy the whole internet website, in most cases very long. They also have problems with coming up with a coherent referencing list at the end of an assignment. If referencing is a challenge to some staff members and senior students, what do you expect from first year students? Their own challenge must be formidable and we are here as the TLC peer facilitators to help them succeed in their academic work." (PF2)

Although the first year students reported that they found referencing very difficult, only some of the peer facilitators agreed that it was difficult. Even though students tend to regard referencing as being very difficult, most of the peer facilitators did not agree. Consequently, the problems experienced with referencing should not be regarded as having a similar magnitude to those concerning deficiencies in academic writing skills. Referencing is clearly not as difficult as students tend to think that it is, and they are able to ask their peer facilitators to show them how to cite references and to compile lists of references at the end of their assignments.

Theme 3: The use of English as the medium of instruction is a barrier

The general view of most of the students who participated in the two focus group discussions regarding this sub-theme was that the use of English, as the medium of instruction in the university, caused them great difficulties. Many of the students explained that owing to their poor socio-economic backgrounds and the fact that they had been taught at school mainly in their first language, IsiXhosa, their ability to understand lectures given in English properly had been severely handicapped. Consequently, these students tended to see the use of English as the language of instruction as a barrier to higher education for them. One of the students in the focus group discussions said:

> "I come from the former Transkei, where we are used to IsiXhosa and here at the university, everything is in the English language: lectures, the writing of tests, assignments,

examinations, group work, discussions, and so on. The language policy of this university needs to be changed so that we are taught in our language like other universities, such as the University of the Free State, North West University, Potchefstroom Campus, Stellenbosch University, amongst others; of course this is reflected in the Bill of Rights." (SFGD10).

 All of the peer facilitators strongly emphasised their perception that the use of English as the medium for instruction constituted a serious challenge for first year students at the university. Some of the peer facilitators maintained that if students experience difficulties understanding the language which is used at the university, other problems will inevitably follow. One of the peer facilitators said:

> "Most of the students are coming from the rural settlement in the Eastern Cape, where they frequently use their mother tongue in schools. So they come to tertiary education in an institution where the language of instruction is English, and it becomes a big problem to them. As we all know, spoken English is a problem, as well as written English, for most of our students. At the time when given an assignment or taking down notes, it becomes a huge challenge to them." (PF8)

That the use of English was perceived as a barrier to communication, for most of the students, emerged during both the focus group discussions and the in-depth interviews. Most of the peer facilitators acknowledged the complexity of the language debate raging at many universities and in student circles in South Africa. One of the lines of reasoning in the debate suggests that the mandatory use of English creates problems for both students and lecturers, as when difficulties are experienced when attempting to communicate in English, a breakdown in the giving and receiving of information inevitably results, giving rise to a host of learning problems.

Theme 4:   Computer Illiteracy

Another challenge which emerged from the data concerned the difficulties which first year students experienced while attempting to acquire the level of computer literacy needed to study effectively. The peer facilitators explained that most of the students come from rural backgrounds and usually had no prior knowledge of computers when they arrived at the university. This made it very difficult for them to search for study materials, type their assignments and submit them online, as they had not been exposed to this technology at high school. The comments of two of the peer facilitators appear below.

> "These days, we have the greatest challenge, which is the use of computers. This is a problem, because we are trying to stop students from submitting hard copies of their work." (PF5).

> "Students who come to the TLC for help bring so many problems, as the idea of Fort Hare is that they cater for rural students. This is because many of them are usually not exposed to the use of computers. This is the major problem when they

just arrive. So in this regard, the use of a computer is usually a
huge problem they bring. This goes back to the schools which
most of them come from." (PF1).

Although many of the peer facilitators agreed that a lack of computer literacy posed
great difficulties for first year students, relatively few of the students in the focus group
discussions acknowledged it as a great problem. Some of the students explained that their
friends usually helped them with the typing of their assignments and checking them for
plagiarism. It is obvious that students, who are not familiar with the use of computers when
they arrive at university, will encounter difficulties of the sort associated with admitting large
numbers of students from rural backgrounds, making it imperative to provide support to these
students in order to enable them to study by making use of the modern technology which is
available.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that there were some academic challenges faced by
undergraduate students in the university under study. The students who participated in the
study explained that while they may have a particular idea or a particular understanding of
what they have been taught, the prospect of trying to express it coherently, in writing, is
always an extremely daunting one. They also explained that they find referencing, in the
form of both in-text citations and compiling lists of references, very difficult. As a result,
their assignments often fall foul of the regulations concerning plagiarism, owing to their
being unable to paraphrase or to acknowledge sources correctly. Most of these students come
from the rural areas of the Transkei in the Eastern Cape Province, where the academic
development of the indigenous people was severely compromised by Bantu Education before
1994 (Tire & Shabalala, 2006). Makura, Skead and Nhundu (2011) point out that most of
these students are from poor socio-economic backgrounds and communities characterised by
high poverty levels, poor performance in matriculation examinations and a lack of basic
infrastructure. These circumstances very often result in students being woefully unprepared
for higher education, with poor academic performance and low rates of retention and
throughput at universities being an inevitable consequence (Matomela, 2010). Academic
writing requires particular skills and an ability to cope with a fairly sophisticated level of
language, in order to avoid copying texts directly, to cite sources and so on.

The South African educational system has been described as being chaotic and
characterised by corruption, poor academic performance, strikes and intimidation,
incompetent teachers and a lack of qualified science teachers (Mohamed, 2012). It seems
plausible that this assessment could explain why the World Economic Forum described the
country's educational system as the worst in the world (Patel, 2012). The Department of
Education has been accused of lacking the insight and the capacity needed to deal with the
crisis in the educational sector (Mohamed, 2012:1). This grim state of affairs can only have
extremely negative implications and consequences for the prospects of many students at
South African universities, with widespread poor academic writing, not only among first year
students, but also among most students, as a dramatic symptom of the malaise which
permeates higher education in South Africa at present. The recognition of the need for
previously disadvantaged students to raise their levels of academic competency, to enable
them to cope with higher education, resulted in the introduction of the Peer Academic
Support Programmes, which have the potential to encourage students to become actively
engaged in their studies, in the manner suggested by Astin (1984).

The findings corroborate those of Cooper and Subotzky (2001), who maintain that historically disadvantaged students in South Africa experience the consequences of apartheid education, which enforced and imposed unjust inequalities upon most of the population, just as the other policies of apartheid did in practically all other aspects of their lives. The findings also coincide with those of McNeil (2005) and Mbabela (2012b), who agree that as a result of the unequal education system, the country faces enormous challenges, such as the ones articulated by the participants in this study.

It emerged from the findings that the participants perceived that the use of English, as the medium of instruction at the university, presents grave challenges to first year students. They maintained that most of the first year students had been taught in their first language, Isi-Xhosa, at their primary and secondary schools. The abrupt change at the tertiary level of education, at which all courses are taught in English, results in most students finding it difficult to understand and communicate effectively. However, the quality of education which most learners are receiving, even in post-apartheid South Africa, leaves a great deal to be desired.

Learners are leaving school ill-equipped for the outside world, because the education system places too little emphasis on schools which are well-staffed by trained, motivated and dedicated teachers (Carelse, 2011). It is widely acknowledged that the poor quality of education, received by most learners who intend to enroll at university, will contribute significantly to their encountering great difficulties during their studies, making it exceedingly unlikely that they will be able to complete their courses within the allotted times (Kaburise, 2010). Mbabela (2012), commenting on the present matriculation pass rate, maintains that the pass rate should be evaluated not in terms of quantity, but rather of the quality of the pass.

The findings of this study are supported by Cillier (2012), who reported that the national average performance in English of grade 6 learners for 2011 was twenty-eight percent. This abysmal level of performance at the secondary or high school level must subsequently be transferred to the university level, leaving the proficiency in English, the language of instruction, of many students sadly lacking. Many studies have shown that the need to use English constitutes an almost insurmountable barrier for most previously disadvantaged students, worldwide (Damaris & College, 2009; Van Dyk, Zybrands, Cillie & Coetzee, 2009; Woolacott, Simelane & Inglis, 2012).

The inability to use computers in order to gain access to the vast array of material, which is stored in computer databases and is available on the internet, constitutes a severe stumbling block for any academic pursuits today. The participants revealed that most first year students have either very little, or no computer literacy and, consequently, are either unable to gain access to materials from the library and other internet sources or else have great difficulty doing so. Like the problems associated with the use of English, the lack of computer literacy also stems from the poor socio-economic backgrounds of the students, which resulted in their having no access to computers during their school years. These findings confirm those of an earlier study conducted by Tangwe (2013), in which she learned that most students, whose socio-economic backgrounds had precluded their being exposed to the use of computers while they were at school, were placed at a particularly serious disadvantage at university, where all students are required to obtain access to materials from the library database and the internet and to type their assignments. As many departments do not offer courses in the use of computers, it becomes the responsibility of the peer facilitators at the TLC to provide assistance to first year students and other students who wish to acquire the skills needed to study effectively. As Tinto (2006) explains, those who do not wish to learn, or refuse to invest their time and energy in their studies, will inevitably drop out.

CONCLUSION

It soon became obvious that the students at this university are faced with significant academic challenges, as a result of the poor socio-economic backgrounds from which most of them come and the low levels of education which they received from Bantu Education or the poorly-equipped system which replaced it in its aftermath. As their schooling had been conducted in their first language, they experience great difficulty being required to write and communicate in English, particularly the level of academic English required by the university at which it is the medium of instruction. As a result of the barrier imposed by a high level of English for which they are ill-prepared, these students encounter great difficulties in writing. The stunted academic performance resulting from these severe handicaps is inevitably reflected in low rates of retention and throughput at the university, making it imperative for these students to receive adequate supplementary support in order to raise their levels of academic performance to the extent that they are able to cope as well as other school-leavers whose first language is English.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the analysis and discussion of the findings, and from the conclusions, some recommendations were offered:

- All departments need to be represented by peer facilitators at the TLC in order to be able to provide Supplemental Instruction to their own students. Full representation at the TLC should serve to ease the frustration felt by some students, who feel discriminated against at present, as a result of their departments not being represented, precluding them from going to the TLC for individual attention.
- All peer facilitators and tutors need to liaise with the lecturers in the courses in which they are conducting tutorials and peer support sessions before attempting to assist students. Doing so would enable them to be guided by the lecturers with respect to the course content to be covered in their tutorials
- Peer facilitators, particularly those acting as tutors in the various departments, need to be adequately monitored and supported in order to ensure the effective implementation of their programmes.
- Any peer academic support programmes need to be informed by the best practices which are employed by universities at which similar programmes have been implemented successfully.

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