OPENNESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

THE PANACEA TO ENDEMIC CHALLENGES WITH STUDENT ACCESS AND SUCCESS AMONG PREVIOUSLY EXCLUDED POPULATIONS

by

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Background

Openness in education has multiple interpretations and remains an elusive concept. This lack of agreement over the conceptualisation and practical application of openness represents a serious problem for both educators and learners alike. Guided by this impetus, the current study examined the multi-dimensionality of openness within the context of comprehensive institutional interventions to support university students from marginalised groups.

Methodology

A sequential exploratory mixed method design was employed to investigate the research questions. Data collection was conducted over three empirical phases, namely, a situational analysis, followed by qualitative, and quantitative phases. Phase one commenced with an overview of discoveries from the situational analysis, phase two involved a qualitative enquiry and centred on staff individual interviews (N=19), and focus group interviews (N=4), with students from identified regional centres. The last of the phases, Phase Three, was based on quantitative self-complete questionnaires by staff and students. It included the application of statistical data, a self complete questionare to reflect numerical comparisons in order to draw correlational inferences.

Findings

The emergent discoveries from all the phases highlighted topical issues relating to teacher and learner openness. Several contributory factors such as the workload of lecturers, emerged as a theme impacting learning and success outcomes. Additionally, collected data identified factors that contributed to student support as inadequate institutional resource allocation models, inadequacy in technology provision, and an ineffective regional model.

Implications for practice

The findings of this study revealed a generalised lack of conceptual orientation and limited application of open education principles. A varied approach to openness across different functional areas within the university was observed. The development of the student multi-context access and success corrective factors framework identified a need for collaborative approaches in student support.

Conclusion

The junction of academic and student support is critical in driving student success outcomes.

KEY TERMS

Key terms:

Openness, Access, Participation, Retention, Student Success, Open Distance Learning, Open Distance and e-Learning, Marginalised Student Populations, Massification, Social Justice, Open admissions.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late paternal and maternal grandparents. To my late Father and Brother, to whom much is owed.

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ACRONYMS

B-Learning	Blended Learning
CAS	College of Accounting Sciences
CAES	College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences
CEDU	College of Education
CEMS	College of Economic and Management Sciences
CGS	Graduate Studies
CHS	College of Human Sciences
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CLAW	College of Law
CSET	College of Science, Engineering and Technology
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DE	Distance Education
DoE	Department of Education
e-Learning	Electronic Learning
EU	European Union
FTA	Framework for a Team Approach
FYE	First Year Student Experience
HEDA	Higher Education Data Analytics
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Council
HRIS	Human Resources Information System
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IoD	Institute of Directors of Southern Africa
IOP	Institutional Operational Plan
LMS	Learning Management Systems
MOOCs	Massive Open Online Courses
NDP	National Development Plan
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NSSE	National Survey of Student Engagement

NWG	National Working Group
ODE	Open and distance education
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
ODeL	Open Distance and E-learning
OE	Open Education
OERs	Open Educational Resources
OL	Open learning
OLS	Open learning Services
OTE	Open Teaching Effort
OU	Open Universities
PSA	Public Servants Association
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SAUVCA	South African Universities Vice Chancellors Association
SBL	Unisa Graduate School of Business Leadership
SET	Science, Engineering and Technology
SMS	Short Message Service
SSF	Student Success Forum
STATS SA	Statistics South Africa
TSA	Technikon Southern Africa
UNISA	University of South Africa
USAF	Universities South Africa
WP 3	White Paper 3 of 1997
WP: PSET	White Paper for Post-school Education and Training

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Access

An institution's initiatives in making the full complement of its academic offerings accessible to a diversity of student profiles, particularly marginalised groups.

Assessment

The process of measuring student learning through a rigorous evaluation processes applying various modes of assessment instruments in either formative or summative assessment of learning outcomes.

Governance

The means by which decision-making structures in institutions for higher education are organised to advance accountability and measure performance with distinctive pathways of academic and institutional operations.

Institutional Culture

The collective patterns of norms, standards, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behaviour of individuals and groups in high education and provide a frame of orientation within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Learning Management System

A software application for the administration, documentation, and delivery of educational material.

Marginalised student populations

In terms of this study, the definition encompasses students from indigent groups of society who are from black and coloured race groups marginalised by politically discriminatory practices of the apartheid regime and colonisation.

Massification

A steering mechanism of countries to eliminate barriers to education representative of the country's national diversity to be accessible to large numbers of their population, irrespective of socio-economic and educational status.

Openness

Openness to education or open education is a mode of education provision at a distance using digital technologies to facilitate teaching and learning. Open education's intention is to widen access and participation to all who qualify to be admitted into higher learning and further to provide multiple access routes to those who do qualify by eradicating barriers and providing accessibility to learning and customisation for society.

Open admissions

There is no broad consensus over the concept of open admissions but is defined for the purposes of this study as the advancement of institutional admission policies to expand entry beyond academic accomplishment as the requirement of merit for entry, towards a broader set of dimension criteria deliberately employed to establish opportunities for access in higher education.

Open Distance Learning

A merger of two concepts: open learning, and distance education. ODL is described as flexible learning and distributed learning focusing on the learner's preferred pace, place, and mode of study. Distance education similarly situated with that of open learning, is a mode of learning in which students and teachers are physically separated from each other.

Open systems

Open and flexible learning systems for the purposes of access, diversification, and expansion of higher education, with institutions adopting organisational cultures through which organisational information is made openly available on institutional websites and via new technologies. This is done for decision-making processes to engage stakeholders and become open to a wider audience and (Liu & He, 2019).

Pedagogy

An educational delivery approach, which provides the rules according to which any learning activity is designed, e.g. instructivism or constructivism.

Retention

The process of retaining students enrolled in higher education institutions in an attempt to improve graduation rates as performance indicator by means of which the university supports its students to succeed in their studies.

Social justice

The advancement of the principles of equality and inclusiveness, foregrounding transformation and social inclusiveness, with the prioritisation of various groups in higher education, particularly people from disadvantaged backgrounds in accessing higher education.

Student Success

Institutional interventions that aim to encourage student engagement, persistence, learning and progress towards achievement, attaining their qualifications and increasing graduation rates.

CHAPTER 1
ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

In society, exclusion may occur on the basis of the excluded's social or financial status however, the possible occurrence may be associated with deep historical and structural links to the history of the individual societies and their structural orientations. In universities, exclusion manifest in social class, ethnicity, and gender and can have a long-term negative effect on the image and history of such institutions. In the past, reports of exclusion especially on social class were common and to be expected given that by their nature, universities were established as elitist institutions (Crew, Tomlinson & Tehmina, 2012). Of late, most universities have expanded and adopted dynamic changes and such has enabled their graduates to benefit labour markets and civil society. Similarly, discussions on access and democritisation of education have been central to many development plans of most governments. Mobilisation of access to higher learning has been a key factor shaping and challenging contemporary higher education (Knight, 2008) and is regarded as one of the most critical pillars to changing and reshaping contemporary higher education (Knight, 2012). The shift to an expanded diversified mass higher education system, owing to globalization, has prioritised the necessity for a competitive work force with advanced skills and a need for greater equity, inclusivity, and social justice. Social justice remains a central principle of higher education mobilisation, policy, and practice at all regional and national governmental levels, as well as globally.

The principle of social justice is founded on addressing inequalities that exist in wide-ranging discourse over access and success of students from differing social backgrounds (Shabani, 2008). While many studies have focused on the widening participation in higher education, there remains a need for in-depth studies that research the learning experiences of students who have benefitted from this expansion; how their experiences shape their engagement with the acquired knowledge; and how their outcomes have affected the higher education landscape (Morrice, 2013). Notwithstanding gaining access to higher education and appearing to have settled into the privileges and a position of being a university student, the experience of being underprivileged and part of a previously marginalised group continues to play a significant role in these students' lives, where learner identities that have been constructed according to a sense of belonging and

inclusion. University education in these marginalised groups is a vehicle for providing the prospect of reliable employment that may end the cycle of poverty in their communities.

It is important to understand the South African higher education system and its unique social and economic contextual factors. The system was built on a history of exclusion and inequality associated with the colonial and apartheid systems of segregation and discrimination on the basis of race. However, since the advent of formal democracy in 1994, it has made huge strides in especially expanding access. In particular, enrolments to institutions of higher learning increased significantly from 495 356 in 1994 [Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), (2015)], to 1 132 422 in 2015. Of this figure, enrolment in public universities in 2015 stood at 985 212. The demographic profile of students in South African universities has also changed, with a marked increase in the number of students from all racial groups, and a larger increase for Black Africans compared to that for other ethnic groups. Furthermore, the South African higher education is now characterised by increased enrolments of many disadvantaged learners who pass through a poor or sub-standard schooling system, and who are challenged in obtaining the necessary financial resources and requisite academic skills to succeed at university (Koen, Cele & Libhaber, 2006). Of the recorded successes, there are growing concerns and one such is with respect to the efficacy of the higher education system. Ramrathan & Pillay (2015) posited that the system experienced a combination of high attrition or dropout rates, low throughput, low success rates, and increased time-to-completion in particular three-year and four-year degree programmes. The DHET (2015) acknowleged the existence of these challenges and revealed that interventions to address some of them including throughput and under-preparedness of students entering higher education, showed negligible evidence of any meaningful improvement. Various interventions and mechanisms by the government have largely focused on opening and widening access to institutions offering contact and distance education, especially for students previously excluded. However, there is rarely evidence to suggest that improved access has resulted in comparable success rates, in particular for open and distance learning (ODL). Although open and distance education has gained much attention in the South African education system, the number of enrolled students, when compared to the countriy's population, is still far less compared to that of other middle-income developing countries. DHET (2015) highlights that the government plans to increase enrolment at universities to 1.5 million by 2030, where open distance e-learning (ODeL) is identified as pivotal to increasing access, while improving quality of the programmes, and reducing costs.

Educational provision through distance learning in South Africa has tended to be offered only at the university level with limited focus at the college level and despite this, it has made a noteworthy

contribution to the total growth in student enrolment. ODL accounts for just under 40 percent of all head-count enrolments and has contributed more than 25 percent of all graduates from the public university sector in South Africa (DHET, 2014). Smidt and Sursock (2011) argue that the rapid increase in participation rates in South Africa has not resulted in improved success rates. Also, that the widening participation to higher education still identifies levels of exclusion in marginalised groups in society. Therefore, they emphasise that it is important to enquire as to who the beneficiaries are if indeed increased and diversified participation has formed an integral part of the education system in the country.

Guided by literature, this study intended to critically explore the challenges of marginalised student populations and investigate dimensions and factors of openness, including responses related to the important issues of access, opportunity, and success in higher education. While there is a proliferation of scholarly research that assessed the aforementioned challenges in-person contact residential institutions in South Africa, there is little evidence that directly speaks to the same challenges in the open and distance education. The politics of access and a diversified higher education have largely been framed by the dimensions of social equity, promoting the inclusion of lower socio-economic groups from marginalised ethnic groups (Williams, 1997; Tapper & Palfreyman, 2005; Marginson, 2011), however, there has been negligible emphasis on what happens to these learners once they are registered.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Lucas and Byrne (2017) identify that educational inequality persist in contemporary higher education systems globally despite massive educational expansion. The massification of higher education in many countries has become representative of national diversity, as governments steer the national education sector to becoming accessible to all who qualify, irrespective of socio-economic and educational status. The higher education systems of many countries have greatly expanded during the past few decades, and universities in particular have transformed from elite to mass higher education institutions, or even universal higher education systems (Trow, 2006). The process of expansion, referred to as massification, has led to significant pressures for graduate employment and upward social mobility, resulting in imbalances of access, success in education outcomes, equity, and quality of education.

As higher education institutions transform into massive systems, governments prioritise distance learning partly to facilitate access to marginalised communities. The contrast in the format of

learning between in-person education which offer a time-limited curricula to self-study, distance study, open-learning and on-line learning offered by through distance education, alters the traditional understanding of existing educational approaches and methodologies. Garrison (2000) optimistically identifies the opportunities presented by distance education and open learning or open education as increased diversity and choice for learning that is facilitated by new information and communication technologies. The growth of open universities that embrace new models to complement the traditional self-paced, independent learning mode is evidenced in many countries. Without a doubt, distance learning has transformed learning into a more flexible and open education model which is driven by technology in an ever-increasingly industrial and knowledge-driven economy.

Open and distance education (ODE) is considered an expedient way for learners to study as they can study in their own space and at their own pace. They are not required to travel to campus or seek accommodation nearer to an institution of education. The aforesaid factors make ODE more affordable in addition to the provision of independence and privacy where students can interact with academics and peers, without feeling discriminated against, such as may occur more readily in classroom environments. Indeed, open education is associated with other advantages and dimensions. Naidu (2017) highlights that distance learning has had an increased usage and impact of new tools of instruction and technology that allow for greater collaborative and independent learning.

Students' access and success in universities is complex and multi-dimensional. It is on this background that this study attempts to examine some of these pertinent dimensions, viewed as part of comprehensive institutional interventions that support students in marginalised student populations.

South Africa's low student success rates have been widely documented as caused partly by systemic challenges rooted in the primary and secondary schooling system which universities have little control over. Badat (2010) and Lewin and Mawoyo (2014) note that no single solution to the challenges of poor university student success rates exists, but that solutions must be understood as multi-dimensional. Several dimensions are acknowledged in institutional imperatives and goals; however, a holistic approach is necessary to addressing learner success outcomes. The statistics of students not succeeding in South African universities warrants attention and ought to be considered as a mainstream issue, but curriculum revisions,

improvement in teaching and learning, and student assessment, are not yet mainstreamed issues in many universities (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014).

This study intends to identify and link issues of access and retention with success in ODeL to explain the impact of the transformation agenda on the outcomes of higher education. It argues that increasing participation rates without the provision of support mechanisms to marginalised student population in ODeL has not yet addressed the relevant challenges experienced by these groups. Also, no meaningful redress has been achieved because throughput and success levels in distance education remain chronically low. Badat (2010) highlights a noteworthy relationship between the social exclusion of disadvantaged or underprivileged social classes and equity of access, opportunity, and outcome in terms of achievement of qualifications in education. Badat (2010) further highlights that 60% of Black African learners in South Africa come from families with gross incomes of less than R800 a month whilst 60% of white learners are from families whose income is more than R6 000 per month.

Disparities in income and inequalities are significant and manifest in academic performance and success of students. The disproportionate imbalance such as that reported in South Africa requires wide-ranging interventions on the part of the State including improved efficacy of the system and outcomes. Such an approach would significantly improve the economic and social circumstances of the millions of marginalised poor and majority Black South Africans. If the impact of income disparities, inequalities, school dropouts, poor retention, and restricted educational opportunities are not addressed, they will likely be principally accepted and normalised by these social classes. Since 1994, South Africa has seen drastically increased participation rates in higher education, where, in 1993, black students constituted only 52% of the student body of 473 000, while 43% of students were women. In 2009, of 837 0000 university students, almost 78% of students were black and 57% were women (USAF, 2016).

The overall increase in access and inclusion in higher education by especially Black South Africans improve their prospects of better-paying jobs and overall, a better social equity. While the increased enrolment of both black, and especially African, and women students is significant, it disguises inequities in their distribution across qualification levels and academic programmes. It is important to identify where these students are located in terms of access to education and fields of study. Universities South Africa (USAF) (2016) highlight that many African students continue to be in distance education, and that both African and women students are still under-represented in subject matters of science, engineering and technology, business, and commerce

programmes. These large concentrations in distance education brings into focus the importance and role of openness and issues of success in ODeL. Distance education has made great strides in opening access however, criticism is, poorer previously excluded populations still suffer the same fate, and graduate throughputs remain very low. Equity of outcomes has also not been realised, as demonstrated by the fact that course success rates are inequitable and continue to mirror the apartheid picture of access and success (DHET, 2015).

The challenges associated with ODeL are varied, and central to these challenges is that the concept of openness is not well understood, that is, its true impact and application in practice are not fully understood; and this picture of uncertainty about its contribution is a long-standing challenge. The lack of understanding renders the uptake of ODeL a serious problem that requires urgent attention, and it is this background that guided this study.

1.2.1 Definition and classification of terms

The terminologies associated with massification such as access, participation, and openness needed clarification in the context of this study as these terms can be used interchangeably. There are pragmatic attempts to define openness (Peter & Deimann, 2018), therefore, clarity on what the term means and what factors are required to facilitate openness still require critical reflection.

The terminology of massification represents mass enrolments, derived in a national system and was first applied by Martin Trow (1978). Trow (2006) defined a mass system as one in which the dominant principle is that access to higher education is a right for those with certain qualifications, and that up to 50% of the population corresponding to that age cohort (18 to 23 years old for tertiary education) participate in higher education. Trow (2006) further identifies that the purpose of higher learning in this mass system involves the development of skills and the preparation of the population for a range of elite technical and economic roles. The massification of higher education does not guarantee more equal opportunities or diversification in higher education admission, though there still exists inequality in student profiles (Raftery & Hout, 1993) and the effectively maintained inequality perspectives.

Dos Santos, Punie and Castaño-Muñoz (2016) identify openness to education or open education as a mode of education provision at a distance, using digital technologies to facilitate teaching and learning. Open education's intention is to widen access and participation to all who qualify to be admitted into higher learning, and further, to provide multiple access routes to those who do

qualify, by eradicating barriers and providing accessibility to learning and customisable education for society. Open education provides multiple alternative pathways of complementing traditional routes of teaching and learning, construction and dissemination of knowledge. Open education provides diversified access pathways to formal and non-formal education and links the approaches to learning (Dos Santos, Punie & Castaño-Muñoz, 2016). For the purposes of this study, the terms openness and open education were used interchangeably.

Participation is defined as the proportion of the total population of the relevant age cohort enrolled for education and is often stratified by different categories of people who access education (Essack, 2013).

Access refers to an institution's initiative in making the full complement of its academic offerings accessible to a diversity of student profiles, particularly marginalised groups (Council for Higher Education (CHE) 2004).

The definition of 'marginalised' and the prioritisation of marginalised student populations varies from country to country, where, in terms of this study, the definition encompasses one or more of the following:

   a) Gender - gender bias against women, especially in certain fields of study;
   b) Geography - students from peri-urban and rural areas;
   c) Education - poor quality of the secondary education experience and the subsequent level of preparedness for higher education;
   d) Economic status - less affluent students with limited ability/inability to self-fund/co-fund higher education; and
   e) Race/ethnicity – black and coloured race groups marginalszed by political regime (Jones, 2013; Waetjen, 2006).

Pertinent to this study, marginalised groups were defined in terms of race, education, geography and economic status.

Open admissions as a concept has not been clearly defined in literature, but is expressed in what is required to facilitate it. Openness ought to consider inborn legacies, statutory and social requirements, the specific vision and mission of the institution, the needs of society,

developmental objectives of society and the achievement of a particular kind of intellectual and educational environment and process.

Open learning, as described by the DHET (2017), is a combination of the principles of learner-centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the elimination of barriers to access learning. Central to these principles are the acknowledgement for credits of prior learning, work experience, and the provision of adequate learner support.

Open Distance Learning (ODL) is defined as a merger of two concepts, namely: open learning and distance education. ODL is described as flexible and distributed learning focusing on the learner's preferred pace, place, and mode of study. Strydom and Kuh Mentz (2010) identify that student success rates in South African higher education institutions are unacceptably high and reports that 35% drop out after their first year (Letseka & Breier, 2008) while 20% drop out after their second or third year. Breier and Mabizela (2007) find that only 15% of the students who enrol, complete their degree in the designated completion time. Student success is a measure of completion and success in higher education and in the context of this study, is focused on several dimensions within an ODL context; academic staff development, curriculum development, assessment as well as quality and academic support programmes for students. Student access and success in universities remains complex and multi-dimensional, where this study examines some of these pertinent dimensions viewed as part of comprehensive institutional interventions to support students in marginalised student populations.

Hagedorn (2006) contends that measuring student retention is complicated and confusing, and is context dependent, as retention rates can vary depending on the perspective and time at which it is measured. Student retention in its simplest definition refers to staying in an institution of higher learning until completion of a degree or qualification (Hagedorn, 2006). In the context of this study, Vincent Tinto's (1987, 1993) Integration Model on student retention was considered in order to guide the understanding of retention and the need for a match between the institutional environment and student commitment and engagement in their studies. Tinto argues that a good match in retention and commitment leads to higher student integration into the academic and social domains of student life, and thus to a greater probability of retention and completion.

Throughput rates are a measure of success and completion of degree programmes in the South African higher education context are used in the subsidy formula of the Department of High

Education and Training in respect of the funding of higher education institutions (Groenewald & Fourie-Malherbe, 2019).

This study identifies dimensions of access in terms of retention with success to explain the impact of the transformation agenda on the outcomes of higher education. Also, it argues that increasing participation rates without support mechanisms to marginalised student populations in ODL has not addressed the pertinent challenges experienced by these groups, and no meaningful redress has been achieved, because throughput and success levels in distance education still remain chronically low.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The concept of openness in higher education and as used in the context of this study, was described through access, teaching, admissions, quality, success, and institutional position of operations. It is used to facilitate conducive environments for learning and student support. These dimensions were deemed central to missions of higher education institutions and reflect on organisational cultures in terms of provision of education to support marginalised group of society to succeed in their learning (Quaye, Harper & Pendakur, 2019). Adoption of openness in higher education has seen successes in improving access in South Africa (DHET, 2015), by contrast, the country has had limited success in completion rates and learner retention of particularly students from previously disadvantaged communities (DHET, 2015). Student success rates in the public higher education system illustrate the dysfunctionality and wasteful patterns of a system with less than one third of students completing a qualification in regulation time. Black students form 75% of the student population, but account for less than 25% of the graduates. Forty-five percent of these enrolled black students are likely to drop out of the higher education system (Badat, 2010). The social inequalities of the system are rooted and reflected in all spheres of social life and education, due to the systemic exclusion of blacks and women under the double-edged sword of colonialism and apartheid. Socio-economic, political discrimination and inequalities of class, race, gender, institution and space have shaped – and continue to shape – South African higher education (Badat, 2010). Since the attainment of democracy, changes to schooling have led to increases and broadened participation in higher education and indeed, such has advanced social equity. Improved participation in tertiary education is critical given the legacy of disadvantaged communities of black and women South Africans, especially of working class and rural poor origins. There has been an extensive de-racialisation of the student body overall, and at many institutions with distance education contributing just under 40% of this student body

(DHET, 2017). In 1993, African students constituted 40% (191 000), and black students 52% of the student body, in 2008 they made up 64.4% (514 370) and over 75% respectively of overall enrolments (CHE, 2004; DoE, 2009). In the recent published statistics of the CHE (2020) in 2018 a total of 1 085 567 students accessed higher education in South Africa (up from 584 713 in 2001, and 938 040 in 2012). Of these, 76% were Black Africans, 6% coloured, 4% Indian, 13% white, and 60% overall were female.

DHET (2017) notes that great strides and achievements have been made in the higher education sector, among others, the promotion of access and the expanded higher education provision but identifies poor success by previously excluded groups and the adoption of openness in higher education. Although this is a policy direction of the South African government, the DHET (2017) identifies that these interventions have had limited success as evidenced by the low success rates by previously disadvantaged population groups. The openness discourse in terms of learner retention and success in higher education has had limited success and by some accounts, has totally failed. Perhaps the concept of openness is not well understood and there is rarely clarity on who ought to explore the challenges of the marginalised groups of student populations and investigate the interfaces of their challenges through the lens of the openness dimensions and institutional responses related to access, opportunity, and success in higher education. This study aimed to clarify whether and how the substantial investments made to opening access in higher education institution in South Africa had translated into facilitating the effective provision of quality and success for marginalised student populations.

1.3.1 Aim and purpose of the study

1.3.1.1 Research aim

The study aimed to critically evaluate openness and its implementation as a vehicle for student access and success in higher education, with particular reference to a comprehensive open and distance learning institution in South Africa. The study considered openness in the context of a public university, and critically assessed whether comprehensive openness as espoused by the institution existed, as well as whether it remained an ambition of its operations. The study further evaluated whether opening access had created equal opportunities for participation and success for previously excluded student populations. Also, the study evaluated openness in order to develop a student access-success framework for universities.

The study intended to identify openness factors by means of which to develop a student success openness-framework model for universities to promote student access and success interfaces after an in-depth exploration of dimensions/factors within an ODL context of access, learner support, curriculum development, assessment, and quality for students in a comprehensive ODL institution.

1.3.1.2 Purpose of the study

The study offers a critical exploration of the concept of openness in higher education in the context of ODL. While focusing on the study pathway of previously disadvantaged or marginalised university students, it identified and described the range of institutional, learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to openness. The study further assessed the nature of contribution the openness factors and their impact on learner access and success patterns.

1.3.1.3 Research objectives

The study had six objectives, to:

a. conduct a situational analysis of access and success patterns within the identified open and distance university in South Africa;
b. identify and describe the range of institutional, learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to openness during the study pathway of university learners;
c. analyse the role each of the identified contributory factors have on student access, teaching and learning and student-success;
d. critically assess the nature of contribution that openness has on learner access and success patterns;
e. evaluate current performance in the implementation of the principles of openness across the chosen study site; and
f. develop a student success "openness-framework" to promote student access and success in universities.

1.3.1.4   Research questions

The study had the following corresponding research questions:

a. How has openness and implementation of the discourse influenced access and success among disadvantaged previously marginalised student populations?

b. What are the emergent patterns of access and success within the identified research setting of an ODL comprehensive public institution?

c. What is the range and nature of institutional, learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to openness during the study pathway of university learners?

d. How do the identified contributory factors impact student access, teaching and learning, and student-success?

e. What is the nature of contribution that openness has on learner access and success patterns?

f. What is the current performance of the implementation of the principles of openness across the chosen study site(s)?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Various studies have failed to identify and critically evaluate significant relationship of openness and its associated dimensions in student success outcomes and there is no best fitting model for openness in universities that serves to integrate these factors. Thus, there exist a gap in extant knowledge about the issues of openness, student access, throughput, retention, success and the evaluation of how universities apply these principles and how successful they are in implementation. This study forwards the argument that thorough understanding of these issues and openness, serves as a key basis for conducting a comprehensive study.

The study's focus is especially noteworthy because the concept of openness represents an interesting dilemma within the context of South Africa, with its history of grave discrimination, colonial legacy, and apartheid. The South African context is particularly important to differentiate because, unlike other countries, the debate about openness does not only focus on one class of learner and another, but it relates to the racially driven segregatory practices that remain a serious social problem. Finally, the study proposed the development of an evidence-based framework that would guide universities on how to best effect openness within their contexts. The framework is the first of its kind within South Africa, and indeed among Africa Open Distance Education institutes. The latter is especially seminal, given the fact that open distance institutions were designed to specifically champion the openness agenda.

Assessing factors concerning openness as related to marginalised learners and expert knowledge from ODeL institutions could offer insight into the relationship between these learners and the willingness of institutions to shift practices in relation to the diverse student intake as facilitated by their access and success discourse.

Furthermore, the process of synthesising and analysing literature related to the factors of openness, student access, throughput, retention, and success assisted the researcher to identify the relevant knowledge gaps. There were several issues that were identified in the literature that required further investigation, such as the quality associated with programmes in ODL.

Therefore, this is the first comprehensive study to evaluate the concept of openness based on these dimensions within a South African context. The use of multiple data collection approaches has rarely been articulated in related literature and relevant research. Most importantly, the collection of data from different academic disciplines and professional groups within the university has not been reported in any single study. This choice in data sources is likely to offer multiple perspectives in ways that have not been possible in previous studies. The decision to collect data from multiple perspectives also presented a rare opportunity for holistic insights to be gained.

The multiple data collection sources further strengthened the findings with in-depth exploration of the influence of the factors for openness and student success. This assisted the researcher in developing an integrated approach in the study area.

1.4.1 Contribution to the body of knowledge

Previous studies related to this topic emphasised that the openness discourse is associated with access and the democratisation of education. Access in higher education has been extensively explored in the literature but the emphasis of openness as a concept and its associations to suucess outcomes has been limitedly studies particularly among marginalised student populations.

This study presents a synthesis of the concept and dimensions of opnessess by testing existing knowledge in an innovative manner and exploring openness from a success lens. The dimensions of openness are presented and assessed as multifaceted applied in a South African context adopting a systems approach and holistically engaging each dimension practically using the developed theoretical framework. The study explored the complex structures of a university and the nexus of access and success to identify existing knowledge gaps in the improvement of

student success outcomes. The research will hopefully heightened awareness and the practical application of the openness concept, its associated dimensions and its imperatives in improving student success.

1.5 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 Research paradigm

Research paradigm refers to a research culture shared by a researcher with a common set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that serves to answer complex research questions. It has four basic components: ontology (the researcher's assumptions are within the domain of nature of reality to answer the research questions); epistemology (researcher assumptions on producing an acceptable knowledge that can be obtained from the observable phenomena); axiology (the role of values in research and researcher's stance); and methodology (the conceptual framework behind the research process) (Neuman, 2014). In this research, the pragmatist paradigm was followed by considering the ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology axioms.

The pragmatist paradigm uses mixed methodologies in a single study to facilitate a complex understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2009). The choice of this paradigm was deemed appropriate because the development of a student's success openness-framework model to promote student access and success has a complex origin that required both positivist and constructivist paradigms.

For this study, using either quantitative or qualitative methodologies alone was not enough to answer the research questions. Therefore, the rationale for using mixed method research was premised on the acceptance that quantitative methodologies were needed in order to ascertain the factors of access and success that could be viewed to promote a discourse of openness. Secondly, qualitative methods were used to conduct an in-depth exploration of the influence of contributory factors, which were explored in terms of what influence they have on student access, teaching and learning, and student success. The factors were used to widen the scope of the study, to highlight facts from different sources, to produce comprehensive insights, and to triangulate findings in order to develop the openness model (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

This study followed a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach guided by existing openness models to identify the factors, and their influence on students' access and success as well as the development of an openness framework. To achieve the study's aim, a sequential explanatory mixed method design was adopted, and as shown in the Creswell and Plano Clark model, the intent of a two phased exploratory is that the results of the first method usually qualitative can help develop or inform the second method (quantitative) (Greene et al., 1989). The explanatory mixed method design was based on the premise that an exploration is needed for one of several reasons, where some or all the variables are unknown (factors), or there is limited or no guiding framework or theory. It is also appropriate when a researcher wants to generalise results to different groups (Morse, 1991) in order to test aspects of an emergent theory or classification (Morgan, 1998). The mixed method approach utilised an unequal weighting of quantitative and qualitative applications, adopting certain tenets of embedding quantitative data gathered during the situational analysis in the qualitative phase of the study.

1.5.2 Assumptions and philosophical views

There are different assumptions and philosophical views regarding the existence and nature of reality (ontology), and how these realities are investigated and known (epistemology). The researcher believed that the research questions asked in this study would be best answered via reliance on the pragmatist paradigm. The pragmatist paradigm is a mixed methods approach that advocates for the integration of various approaches and assumptions into a single study to have broader and in-depth perspectives about a single, complex phenomenon of interest (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann & Hanson, 2003).

In this study, the researcher argued that the research question and the objectives were complex, so as to justify the reliance on both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide detail and depth of understanding about the phenomenon of interest.

For the qualitative phase, the constructivist paradigm was utilised after Phase One, which was the situational and analysis. Pertinent findings of the situational analysis phase were utilised to inform the development of semi-structured open-ended questions utilised for the qualitative phase (Phase Two). The qualitative phase of the study was conducted in order to explore in detail the phenomena of openness in higher education, and the influence of related contributory factors associated with access and student success.

The findings of the first and second phases were then followed by a final quantitative inquiry, applying statistical data to reflect numerical comparisons to draw correlational inferences from the qualitative phase. All three phases were integrated and interpreted to provide detail and depth of information about the factors of access and student success among marginalised students in the study area. Based on the findings generated from the literature, and three phases of the study, an evidence-based framework was developed to guide universities on how to best effect openness within their contexts. This framework is deemed to be the first of its kind within South Africa among Africa Open Distance Education institutions.

1.5.3 Ontological assumptions

The researcher operates from the assumption that the actual world is always the product of structured explanations and inner subjectivity, where, as a researcher, she held a hybrid of realist and nominalist ontological assumptions and this set of assumptions acted as a vehicle to support the identification of the factors of openness. This approach facilitated her exploration of the influence of contributory factors on the development of framework model in the study area.

1.5.4 Epistemological assumptions

Epistemological assumptions refer to methods that the researcher follows to answer the research questions. They assist a researcher to determine the most efficient way of gaining knowledge (Neuman, 2014). The existing models on openness allowed the researcher to integrate the qualitative and quantitative phases to have a comprehensive insight on the study of interest. They provided a framework to identify and critically evaluate the factors associated with openness to identify resonance; to recognise their contributions in the institutional framework/structure under study; and explore the influence of these factors to inform the development of Openness Framework model for universities. This model identifies a crucial role for openness for the marginalised leaners who enter into higher education and how they can be supported as they undergo their training. The model further guides institutions on how to be positioned to accommodate the particular students and develop a deepened understanding of their socio-economic backgrounds to improve their retention. Within these approaches, different research techniques and tools were used to maintain scientific rigour.

1.5.5 Methodological assumptions

In this study, the researcher employed a sequential, explanatory mixed methods approach. First, it involves qualitative inquiry through a situational analysis to describe the demographic profile of students defined as a marginalised cohort of learners in higher education, by race/ethnicity, gender, geography, education. That is, describing the quality of the secondary education experience and the subsequent level of preparedness for higher education and economic status of less-affluent students with the inability to self-fund/co-fund their higher education. Once the situational anlyisis was completed, the researcher proceeded to identify factors associated with openness to ascertain their recognised role and influence on access, retention, and student success data collected from various national and institutional sources via a desktop analysis and the application of statistical package. The second phase of the qualitative approach offered an in-depth exploration of the factors, their influence and the development of an openness model based on the lived experiences of black/coloured students, institutional administrators, academics and professionals, their views of openness, and the state of higher education in its role to promote inclusivity and successful outcomes amongst these marginalised students. The researcher used in-depth interviews and focus groups in this phase of study. The last phase, Phase Three, employed a quantitative approach, which served as a correlational design and confirmatory phase for the outcomes of the first two phases.

1.5.6 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework is a group of statements explaining the relationship between dependent and independent variables thought to have an effect on a phenomenon under study (Anfara & Mertz, 2014).

The first factors are socio-demographic and include: age, gender, race, socio-economic status and educational levels and, in the context of this study, of marginalised students. This conceptual framework diagram helped the researcher to focus on factors that may contribute to the research problem. Moreover, it enabled the linking of observations, facts, and other concerns together into an orderly scheme and supported the development of data collection tools. Finally, the diagram led to the development of a model that can be used by a responsible body of work to comprehensively propose variables that may be considered in the promotion of openness and linking access, retention and success in learner outcomes in an attempt to direct how institutions can respond to the complex challenges in South African higher education. The focus was to explore complexity, and for that reason, more than one theoretical framework was integrated into the study. The study largely focused on the influence that contributory factors have on decision-

making and policy concepts, where a model of openness was introduced in order to have a clear understanding of the research problem.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 Research design

The research design is a logical roadmap of research methods. it shows a philosophical assumption about how a study could be conducted and how data is collected and analysed. Mixed methods research involves combining quantitative and qualitative methods in order to collect, analyse, and interpret data (Neuman, 2014). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) identify research designs as procedures used when gathering, evaluating, interpreting, and reporting data in research studies and they incorporate distinctive methodological and theoretical positions or viewpoints (Tight, 2016). Bryman (2004) identifies five prominent research designs, viz.: experimental, cross-sectional, longitudinal, case study, and comparative. Research methods assist the design in the sense that they provide a particular pathway or structure by means of which the researcher can conduct their research. The method expresses the path through which the researcher formulates a research study's problem and objective(s) and presents the results from the data obtained during the study period. At the end of a study, a research design reveals how research outcomes were obtained in line with meeting a research study's objectives (Sileyew, 2019).

This study was conducted utilising a mixed methodology, and the method was further used as a guideline for data collection and analysis process. In the study, the researcher applied both quantitative and qualitative designs, more explicitly a sequential explanatory mixed methods design was conducted. The qualitative-leaning design focused on student learning experiences in openness, their views and experiences with regards to openness within the research site. The quantitative component of the study was critical to understanding the numerical and statistical patterns that have shaped and continue to shape open education and learning in South Africa.

The research design and methodology for this study is discussed according to the phases of the study.

In the first phase, situational analysis study, analytical study design was employed to:

i. explore the demographic profile of students and performance patterns within the institution over a period of eight years, 2012-2018, in terms of age, gender, race, socio-economic status and educational levels;

ii. identify and describe the range of institutional factors that contribute to the openness discourse associated with study site; and

iii. ascertain the impact of the factors in openness and the contributory role in learner and teacher-related activities that shape the student experience.

The second qualitative phase followed the first phase and utilised open-ended questions to deal with internal and external perspectives and views in higher education. In this phase, the researcher employed a phenomenological approach through in-depth interviews with institutional leaders, academics, university support staff and students on the uptake of the openness within the identified research site, a comprehensive university. The contributory factors that shape the openness both within and outside the institution were explored in-depth so as to generate trustworthy data. The second phase was intended to explore the factors of openness and the influence of these factors on decisions of institutional leaders, academics, and the development of a framework model.

The final and third quantitative phase was employed to determine the factors and patterns associated with openness. This phase was critical in data collection to confirm the variables to guide the development and design of the envisaged openness framework. The situational analysis in phase one was employed to explore and understand the size and shape of the institution and in particular key performance indicator patterns in access and success patterns across different institutional variables. Numerical data provided an understanding of how marginalided student populations had gained access and how policies and practices had shaped the opening of spaces at the university through the provision of distance and adoption of open education. A simple desktop review was conducted in order to collect different numerical data sources from the chosen institution, to then determine the documented status of learner enrolments, retention, attrition, and graduate outputs in open and distance education. The statistical data was further used to deepen the scope, praise facts from different sources, produce comprehensive visions, clarify the sequence of the study process, triangulate data, and encourage outsider and insider views in order to develop a comprehensive access-success student framework (Creswell & Plano, 2011; Anfara & Mertz, 2014).

The proposed critical exploration of openness factors was complex and as such, the phenomena required multiple hermeneutic methodologies. Mixed method research offers the opportunity for a pragmatic exploration of the wide range of contributory issues that relate to the chosen study focus of openness in higher education. The multiple methodologies utilised within this mixed method research represented an appropriate approach to the study, as they offered insight and meaning that might otherwise be missed in mono-method approaches and arguably produced more complete knowledge to inform practice and policy. Data collected via phase one in the empirical study included a combination institutional statistical and document review. Phase Two involved individual interviews and focus group discussions with institutional leaders, administrators, academics and students identified during the situational analysis in Phase One. Collected data from the document review in Phase One assisted in identifying appropriate participants to be invited and questioned as study participants for a richer data gathering exercise. The desktop review of different numerical data sources from the chosen higher education institution determined the documented status of learner enrolments, retention, attrition, and graduate outputs in open and distance education.

Sample sizes for each of the phases (1 and 2) were determined via purposive sampling and data saturation to a maximum of 25 interviewees for the individual interview discussions and of between 8-10 interviewees per the focus groups (n=4), the focus groups were structured per each contributory factor determined as the variables identified in Phase One data collected through a quantitative method. Phase Three, as the last data collection phase, involved quantitative inquiry applying statistical data through the use of surveys to reflect numerical comparisons to draw correlational inferences from the qualitative phase.

The three phases were integrated during the integration phase of the study to allow full descriptions of the research report and to develop an integrated model with the necessary factors that influence openness and institutional conditions in higher education.
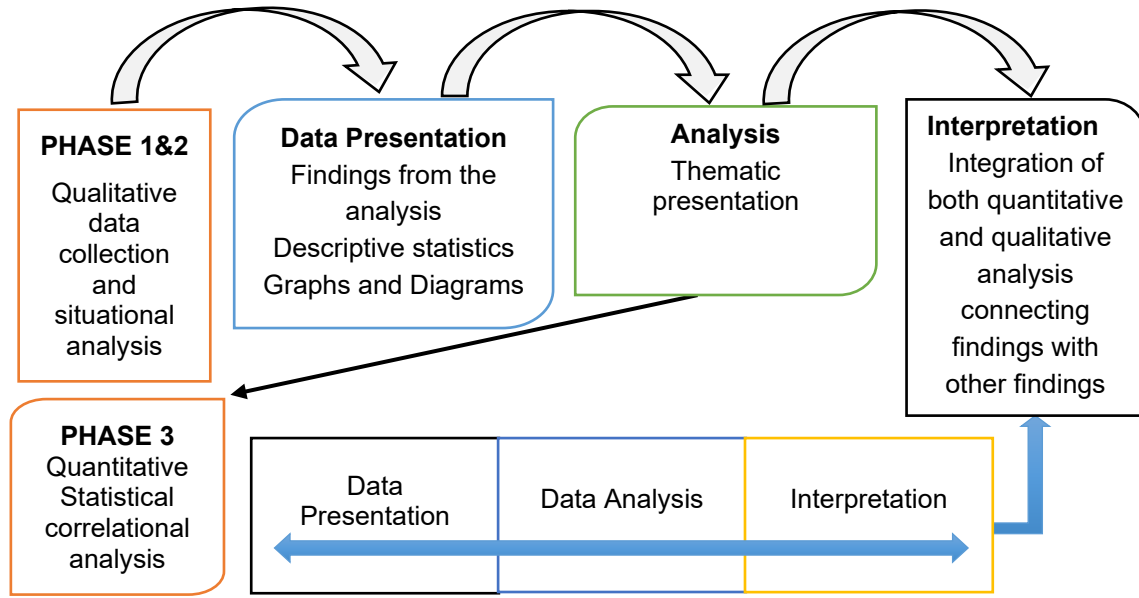
Figure 1.1: Structural overview of the research methodology Phase 1 – 3 (adapted from Belay, 2020).

Phase 4 involved data analysis and validation of integrated data from the first three phases. A combination of data analysis approaches was utilised to facilitate analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative data. To this end, the qualitative data was analysed via thematic and content analysis. The analysis followed a complementarity approach where results from one phase analysis interpreted to enhance, expand, illustrate, or clarify findings derived from the other strand of quantitative data. The formal presentation of the data analysis process is presented below.

Phase 5 concluded with findings and interpretation of the results in an attempt to develop a model /framework of openness and further identify a set of recommendations for the institution. The development and use of the proposed model derived from the results of the study and aims to empower practicing professionals and the institution to integrate issues of student access with success outcomes. The model has the potential to be utilised in the process of addressing challenges identified by this study. As noted, these relate to the increasing demands of access into/within university studies and decreasing quality of education provision associated with distance education. This aligns the openness discourse to retention and success outcomes as pursued by policy ambitions in South Africa.

The figure shown below is a diagrammatic overview of the study's sequence
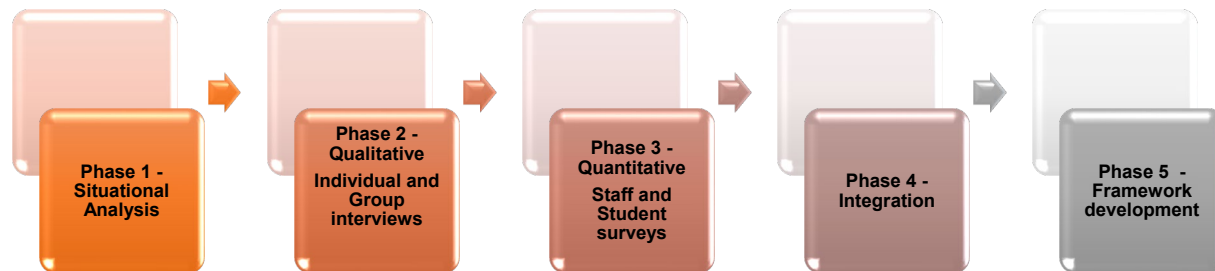
Figure 1.2: Exploratory Sequential Mixed Method (Adapted from Creswell, 2009).

1.6.2 Research methods

As described above, both quantitative and qualitative designs, more specifically a sequential explanatory mixed method design, was employed. The first and second phase involved an institutional-based explanatory study, which provided detailed explorations about the identified factors in openness and the influence of these factors in the lived experiences of marginalised students and expertise knowledge of institutional leaders, administrators, academics, and students. In-depth interviews were conducted with the selected study's participants to generate textual data on the influence of the identified factors and informed the development of the openness model. Focus group interviews were also conducted in order to explore the study's participants' knowledge and understanding. Interviewees were also probed to reflect their views on institutional conditions and the position of the institution under study to gain in-depth insights of the research site.

Phase Three was a quantitative phase, utilising structured, selected quantitative data sets and themes from the qualitative phase to deal with the quantifiable data using surveys. It was mainly utilised to ascertain the associated factors in open education among marginalised.

1.6.3 Research setting

The institution under study is situated in the Pretoria Metropolitan Area and has satellite campuses in all the nine provinces of the country. The institution is a comprehensive open distance learning institution where learning is delivered remotely to students and designed to be flexible and convenient in terms of space, time, and cost. Peters (2003) identifies open learning as access to universities by all who are able to study by removing traditional education barriers. The opportunities and design to learning programmes opens learning to unforeseen developments in the advancement of individual ability in a variety of settings that should be devoid of bureaucratic constraints. The University of South Africa (UNISA) is a traditional distance education institution that introduced open learning in 2008. E-learning was recently introduced as a method of delivering distance learning. Butcher (2009) refers to e-learning as educational applications of technology, and internet techniques to facilitate learning regardless of whether or not they are used in an internet or intranet environment, or simply used within a local or wide area computer network. UNISA transitioned in 2015 from Open Distance Learning (ODL) to an open distance e-learning (ODeL) in terms of its educational and business model. The new model and framework was adopted formally and approved by its Council in 2018, which informed the character of the institution transforming from ODL to ODeL in 2018. As a comprehensive institution, the University offers both formative university qualifications such as generic bachelor's degrees and vocational type qualifications such as diplomas and advance diplomas in vocational fields such as engineering, technology and computing. Its programme offering includes professional type qualifications such as those required by graduates to practice in their respective professions, such as psychology. In 2019, UNISA had a student head count of just over 358 000 enrolled students (Unisa, 2018). The study was conducted at the main campus of the institution, and regional centres were also invited to participate in the study. The respondents however, were sourced from various higher education institutions including those external to the institution, government departments, and quality councils.

1.6.4 Study population

A study population is that group studied either in total, or by selecting a sample of its members (Neuman, 2014). Yin (2003) identifies that sampling refers to an action, procedure, or method of choosing or selecting a required number of study subjects from a population as a representative of that population. The population is the entire group of individuals in which the sample is drawn for measurement. Population does not necessarily mean several people only but can also refer

to total quantity of the things or cases which are the subject of the research (Yin, 2003). The population for this study comprises strategic higher education policy makers, institutional leaders, administrators, academics, and students identified during the situational analysis in Phase 1. The decisions on the population and population size for the study were influenced by the researcher's interpretations, the philosophical assumptions about what constitutes credible data (Ngulube, 2015).

The study population for Phase Two comprised institutional leaders, academics, university support staff, and students that were purposefully selected from the UNISA as a public higher education institution. The target population for Phase Three in terms of quantitative data was all black students, who were enrolled in their final year of study for qualifications at NQF levels 6, 7, 8 and attending different programmes at the institution, with a profile in terms of in terms of age, gender, race, socio economic status, and educational level.

1.6.5 Sampling

Collins, Onwuegbuzie, and Jiao (2007) recognise sample selection as one of the most important steps in mixed methods studies. They argue that mixed methods sampling techniques are useful when it is challenging to obtain a representative sample using only one method. It is important to address sampling issues early on in this study as the design and selection of a technique ensures consistency with research objectives. This study was focused on openness and located within a particular comprehensive institution as a case study, while the sampling approach was primarily informed by the type of institution and its location within the higher education sector.

Purposive sampling technique was identified as appropriate for this study and at times is referred to as judgment sampling because of its deliberate choice of participants based on their specific qualities (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Because purposive sampling involves identification and selection of individuals or groups of individuals that are expert and well-informed with a phenomenon of interest, it was deemed the most appropriate sampling technique. In addition to knowledge and experience, other critical factors include the availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. Each of the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study has their own philosophical assumptions regarding the determination of sample size and sampling methods.

Phase sampling One and Two involved the selection of statistical data, policies and participants across a broad spectrum relating to the study's topic. Numerical data, national and institutional policies and individuals were identified, particularly those who had expertise knowledge on the research topic. Potential participants and key stakeholders were identified with the support of institutional data sources gathered through purposive sampling technique for participation in the focus groups and individual interviews. A maximum of 25 interviewees for the individual interview discussions and between 8 - 10 interviewees partook in each of the focus groups (n=4).

Phase Three, identified as the quantitative enquiry, sought the quantifiable variables as per themes from data collected through the qualitative method. For the third phase of the study, the minimum required sample size was determined by identification of data on the profile of marginalised learners, access rates, retention rates and completion rates of this cohort of student over a period of eight years (2012-2019). The sample size for numerical data construction was filtered by the researcher's utilising various lenses based on her experience, qualifications, beliefs, and motivations for exploring the research topic, all of which are influenced by the context of the institution and surrounding the inquiry (Kelley & Maxwell, 2012). The sample in Phase Two comprised institutional leaders; administrators; academics; and students identified during the situational analysis in Phase One. Focus groups formed a key feature in Phase Two and total of four discussion groups were identified. The different focus groups represented the target population where a more specified sampling plan was developed after a permission to conduct the research was granted by the Institutional Ethics Committee. The researcher was deliberate in the determination of the sample size and was determined at the largest sample possible. Taherdoost (2016) argues that the larger the sample, the more representative of the population is likely to be, and the lesser the degree of sample error.

The first and second phases of the study focused on generating rich textual data from interviews and focus groups on the study of interest. The participants were selected by using a purposive sampling technique. The sample size was determined by the researcher when data saturation was achieved, where consequently, a total of twenty in-depth interviews were employed. Similarly, four focus groups and eight key informant interviews were also conducted. As an overarching principle, maximum variation purposive sampling was applied for both phases and the identification of numerical data sets in Phase Three. Maximum variation sampling in Phase Three was used to select numerical data sets from phase two themes together with institutional reported statistics in higher education. Various statistical data sets were also publicly sourced from various

Government sources such as the Higher Education Ministry and the Quality Council of the CHE to correlate the institutional statistical records.

The final phase of the study involved an integration of the findings from each of the three phases. The integration approach was employed in the sense that the two research designs complemented one another. It was deemed important to ensure that the sample of each phase integrates and complement each other as the results of analyses with individual participant provide a deeper understanding of how the environmental context influences the relationship between the institutional conditions, identity of students, and the success outcomes in the learning journey.

1.6.6 Data collection

In this study, the researcher collected primary data in three phases, utilising different data collection methods. For the situational analysis phase, the researcher identified the data sources from internal institutional repositories, external reports, policies available publicly on the internet, and literature identified during literature searches with the guiding of openness models. Data gathering in Phase One was conducted through desktop research and identification of sources through publicly available and institutionally based management information systems, such as the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) of the Ministry of Higher Education, the CHE Vital Statistics publications, and the institutional Higher Education Data Analytics (HEDA) platforms. Statistical data collection procedures were used to make it possible for the researcher to draw inferences with some confidence that the sample reflects the characteristics of the entire quantitative population. The variables identified from Phase One informed the design and instrument for the data collection in Phase Two.

The qualitatively gathered data in Phase Two provided tangible meaning to the phenomena entailed in the research topic (Creswell, 2009). Here, the results identified from the quantitative phase of the study were explored in-detail in Phase Two. The qualitative data collection process entailed the non-statistical organisation of the views and experiences of the study's participants. Pertinent findings from Phase One enabled the researcher to develop data collection tools for use in the qualitative phase. During this phase, individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with 19 participants and four focus groups by using semi-structured, open-ended questionnaires. The semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups were informed by the outcomes of institutional situational review in Phase One provided more detailed information than that which

was available through quantitative methods (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Further to this, focus groups were utilised to collect additional data. George (2013) argues that in a focus group, participants have an average of ten minutes each to talk but with in-depth interviews participants have more time and opportunity to share feelings, perspectives and attitudes. Focus group discussions were a useful opportunity for the in-depth probing and stimulation of discussion to obtain opinions from participants as they further provided insight into issues that could not be covered with individual interviews. Focus groups were further beneficial in the study as the participants involved in this assessment process provided input on the topic of the study and focus group themes as identified variables from Phase One qualitative method. A set of predetermined questions on an interview protocol instrument was used and the individual interviews were guided rather than dictated by the protocol instrument. English was the preferred language used for data collection since all participants were well versed in it and it is considered the language of study in higher education in South Africa.

With the adverse conditions presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection approaches ensured adherence to regulation pertaining to social distancing and in that respect, individual interviews were facilitated online. The focus group interviews were conducted in-person at two regional centres in Gauteng and Limpopo where social distancing provisions were observed, such as using open spaces where adequate ventilation was available and maintaining room capacities at 50 percent. The researcher provided onsite physical meetings to benefit the student participants. The focus groups were recorded in acknowledgement of the challenges associated with safety assuring social distance in-group engagements.

Phase Three data collection involved the quantitative phase of the study concerned with identifying the facts about different social phenomena. The use of statistical data to reflect numerical comparisons and statistical inferences was required in order to verify or refute the hypothesis as guided by the themes that emerged in Phases One and Two. A correlational design was used to address the study's objectives and a simple approach was applied to identify patterns and correlations within the numbers as the researcher wanted to look for relationships between variables, with the aim of establishing associations or cause and effect relationships within the openness factors and their influence on the identified dimensions.

The quantitative data was gathered once at a point in time based on the learning journey of the profiled students, where a period of eight years from 2012 – 2019 was considered adequate, guided by the completion periods of qualifications. As an example, a four-year degree programme

at a contact institution should be completed within a minimum period of years, whilst a student studying via distance is required to complete in double that period, i.e. eight years. Data collection during the quantitative phase employed a survey instrument. The instrument was designed using the variables identified during the qualitative phase of the study and was designed and launched as a self-complete questionnaire, which was sent out to participants in order that they could respond to the identified quantitative questions.

1.6.7 Data analysis

In the study, the researcher sequentially employed both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods based on the numerical and textual data generated from the participants.

1.6.8 Data analysis of the first and second phase

For the qualitative data, analysis was done by using the *Atlas.ti* software. After coding, the transcribed data, sub-themes and themes were developed to present and analyse the textual data. The qualitative data analysis used a combination of thematic and content analysis approach. Krippendorf's content analysis approach formed the basis of the content analysis aspect and thematic analysis was based on Colliazi's seven step analysis method. Raw data was organised into discrete categories based on the constructs and coded. Data analysis followed follow ten (10) steps outlined as follows:

a. Copy and thorough reading of the recorded transcript – draft notes in the when relevant information is found;
b. Reflect and analyse the notes make to list the different types of information found;
c. Categorise each item in terms of what was found;
d. Identify the categories and link them as major categories (or themes) and / or minor categories (or themes);
e. Relate and contrast the various major and minor categories;
f. Where there is more than one transcript, repeat stages (a-e) for each transcript;
g. Examine in detail stages a-e and consider relevance in line with themes and research objectives;
h. Once all the transcript data is categorised into minor and major categories/themes, review data to ensure correct categorisation of the information;

i.   Review all the categories, and confirm whether there should be a merging process of categories or sub-categorisation required; and

j.   Refer and reflect on the original transcripts to ensure that all the information correlates.

Coding was done by using the open code software by the researcher. After coding, the transcribed data themes and sub-themes were developed.

1.6.9 Data analysis of the third phase

In the third phase, quantitative analysis was utilised to identify the prominent variable during the analysis of the data. The collected data was entered into an excel spreadsheet and thereafter exported to and analysed by using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) (*Windows Version 25.0 Chicago IL, USA*). The descriptive statistical summary that included percentage, mean, and standard deviations was computed and used to assess the relationship between the demographic profile of students affected by the associated factors in open education. The quantitative data collection instrument identified computations of data scores, which provided the main variables and themes among the student profiles guided by the openness dimensions. The quantitative approach in this phase applied observation and analysis of existing data sets collected from the qualitative phase. Muijs (2010) suggest that observations in educational research settings are useful and can give direct access to social interactions. This is advantageous when one wants to find out what actually happens in a setting rather than simply what is reported by participants. The observations in Phase One assessed the relationship between independent and dependent variables of the openness dimensions looking at the responses and themes gathered in phases One and Two. A probability level of 0.05 or less and 95% confidence level was used to indicate the statistical significance.

Thematic content analysis that emerged from the quantitative phase of the study was further employed to analyse the data in phase three to identify possible newly emergent themes. The themes were also incorporated on the findings in order to widen the scope of Phase Three to ensure that all factors are considered during the model development.

Finally, findings from all phases One, Two and Three were integrated to develop the framework model for openness at a university setting.

1.7 VALIDITY/TRUSTWORTHINESS

There are various criteria utilised to know the scientific rigour of the study within mixed methods research.

1.7.1 Validity of the quantitative phase

In the quantitative method, reliability and validity are the two important indicators utilised to generate pertinent findings. Internal and external validity are the two important concepts that the researcher should focus on during planning a quantitative approach (Ranjit, 2011). Internal validity refers to the extent of the relationship between the collected data and the research problem (Ranjit, 2011). Internal validity was achieved by using a homogenous selection criteria of samples, designing accurate measurement tools, and utilising comparison groups. External validity involves generalising the findings outside the study settings or study subjects (Ranjit, 2011). External validity was done by ensuring that the findings could be assured in other similar studies by developing a framework that could be applied in open university settings. Critical to external validity was the selection of the samples that enabled the researcher to draw samples representative of marginalised students and factors contributing to openness and how these factors formed linkages and relationships within the study setting. Hence, the results of the study can be generalised to open and distance universities in South Africa.

Construct validity was applied in the quantitative component of the research and was concern in ensuring that the method of measurement matches the construct identified to be measured. The indicators, variables and factors that influence openness on the numerical data indicators of enrolments and success identified as measurements have been based on relevant existing knowledge and literature on openness. The researcher ensured that the observations and data analysis measured these identified indicators and that the findings reflected the actual components of these measures.

1.7.1.1 Reliability

Reliability involves collecting the same set of data more than once using the same research settings and getting similar results under related conditions (Ranjit, 2011). Research reliability is the consistency of a measure concerned with the extent to which the results can be reproduced when the research is repeated under the same conditions (Thanasegaran, 2009). The reliability

of this study, in particular its quantitative component, was assured by ensuring the consistency of the results when repeated across time and across different observers. The consistency of data was maintained by evaluating and verifying the data sets across various data sources to ensure consistency. Data variances that occurred were maintained at less than 0.5 percentage point and triangulated with the qualitative data during the integration phase.

Reliability was ensured by: i) carefully observing and interpreting the data in the results; (ii) legitimating the data consistency; and (iii) lending credibility to the research report.

1.7.2 Trustworthiness of the qualitative phase

Trustworthiness in the qualitative research has several different indicators to achieve a scientific rigour. Lincoln and Guba's model was applied to this study to ensure trustworthiness of the research findings which included credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability. Anney (2014) identifies that qualitative researchers need to understand and adopt the trustworthiness criteria as this improves the believability of qualitative inquiry. Credibility in the study addressed the question of how consistent the findings were with reality (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of the central factors in establishing trustworthiness. The trustworthiness criteria are described in the following sub-sections:

1.7.2.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the magnitude in which qualitative data that are collected and analysed are believable within the constructed social phenomena by reflecting the precise lived-experiences, opinions, and feelings of the study participants (Ranjit, 2011). Credibility was secured by evaluating the study's methods and recording audios, prolonged engagement and probing, debriefing, continuous evaluation of the transcripts to the study responses and using a logical framework. The true value of this mixed method research involved the discovery of how meaning and interpretation of openness influence and expressed though the views, lenses and interpretations of the participants in higher education provision in order to support, facilitate learning and success in marginalised learners. Their beliefs and understanding of openness in higher education influence decision-making and involvement in the provision of learning and support to learners. Polit and Beck (2008) assert that a qualitative study is credible when it offers confidence and consistency in the truth of its findings. The researcher enhanced credibility of the

study by ensuring, on a continuous basis, that the in-depth interviews were held until data saturation was reached.

1.7.2.2 Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent to which research findings are replicated within similar circumstances (Ranjit, 2011). The researcher is confident that the same findings can be reached if the study is replicated with the same participants in a similar context. The findings of a study should be as consistent and repeatable in open education and learning contexts with the same institutional conditions. The central principle to qualitative research is to acquire feedback and knowledge from the participants themselves, rather than to control them. The researcher secured dependability of the study through having clear research questions, as well as in-depth explanations of the study methodology. The researcher enhanced dependability of the study by keeping copies of the research methods, numerical data, tape recorders, the transcribed data, and the reports containing coded data so as to ensure that the findings are verifiable and consistent with the raw data collected.

1.7.2.3 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the final result of the findings can be repeatedly confirmed by other researchers (Ranjit, 2011). Confirmability as a criterion of trustworthiness of the research was established by ensuring that the research findings espouse the confidence and consistency in that the findings are based on the participants' responses, rather than on the researcher's biases. Confirmability of the research findings was maintained by using representative samples by means of systematic approaches, and reflexivity document reviews. The researcher took additional steps to enhance confirmability of the study and increase the value of the research findings by assuring a relaxed atmosphere that would be created for the participants to feel free to share their experiences and views with the researcher. The participants were never rushed to answer and were allowed to give their honest opinions. The findings were evaluated by the participants and experts in the field of research. Audit trails were kept when writing-up the results from process of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the data. The researcher maintained confirmability of the study through clearly stating all the philosophical assumptions, procedures, methods, values, and biases emerging in the process of the research.

1.7.2.4 Transferability

Transferability refers to the finding of the qualitative research, which can be generalised out of the study settings (Ranjit, 2011). The researcher achieved this criterion through clearly stating all his approaches, assumptions, and all other important information in detail. The transferability of this research was enhanced by conducting data collection until data saturation occurred, and by providing dense description of the research data, including verbatim quotations. The findings of this research will not be applicable to other communities and settings. Therefore, the results cannot be generalised to the broader communities outside of South Africa, or other institutions who are not involved in open and distance education as the context of study. However, the same results may be found when a similar study is undertaken in the same settings (Polit & Beck, 2010).

Detailed information about validity and trustworthiness are described in Chapter Four of the document.

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics in research imply preferences that influence behaviour in human relations, conforming to a code of principles, the rules of conduct, the responsibility of the researcher, and the standards of conduct of a given profession (Van Wijk & Harrison, 2013). Research ethics involve protecting the rights of the participants and the institutions in which the research is conducted, and involves maintaining professional integrity (Babbie, 2013). The following steps were taken by the researcher throughout the study so as to ensure that it complied with the ethics principles.

In order to respect and secure the human rights of the study participants, the researcher proceeded in line with the following steps in relation to ethical clearance, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and the principle of self-determination.

1.8.1 Ethical clearance

A letter of permission was obtained from the Ethics and Higher Degrees Research Committee of University of South Africa (UNISA) and permission to access various source reports. Institutional approval was critical for the use of student data profiles, statistical data and polices prior to

gathering any institutional data. Statistical information of students was further accessed from publicly available sources of the CHE and DHET.

1.8.2 Informed consent

This study's participants were 18 years and older. Informed consent was voluntary without pressure of any kind. The researcher avoided bias and ensured that informed consent was obtained prior to any participation in the study. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their roles in it, and possible risk factors associated with the study. The consent forms were sent to the participants for their signature prior to participation. The participants were afforded the right of self-determination in terms of their perceived safety when it came to risks associated with COVID-19. The researcher ensured adherence to the COVID-19 social distancing regulations and offered options to participation in line with data collection options. Participating in this study was communicated to be absolutely voluntary (see Annexure E).

1.8.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

Participants of this study were assured that their personal information would not be disclosed to a third party. Confidentiality was ensured by using of a code system to protect the identity of the participants. The researcher protected all data gathered during the study from being divulged or shared with other people, without authorisation of the participant. This means that the research data has been kept closed and inaccessible to outsiders. The participants were kept nameless in relation to their participation in the study. Their identities cannot be linked with their individual responses (Burns & Grove, 2009). The interview sessions were conducted in a private place on a one-on-one basis, and the focus groups discussion were also kept confidential to ensure freedom of participation.

1.8.4 Principle of self determination

The participants' personal dignity and human rights as study participants were respected. They were informed that they could refuse or discontinue participation at any time they wanted, and they had the chance to ask anything about the study. They had full right of refusal in responding to any question, and if they did not want to participate, they could opt out at any stage of the study. Participants in this study were guaranteed that their involvement in the study would not be used against them in any way. The researcher ensured that the researcher-participant relationship did

not create room for the participants to be exploited, coerced, or manipulated. The participants were afforded their right of self-determination in terms of their participation in the study and safety when it came to risks associated COVID-19 and the study.

Participants who did not feel ready to participate were immediately withdrawn from the study. Their personal dignity and human rights as study participants was highly respected. They were informed that they could refuse or discontinue participation at any time should they wish and were provided with the chance to ask anything about the study. Participating in this study was voluntary.

1.8.5 Risks

The risks associated with this educational study were minimal or negligible, as it was conducted in a public institution and the information gathered was mainly available in the public domain. The results of the study will be openly published. The topic is deemed not to be of a sensitive nature and the participants were all adults and deemed not to be vulnerable, but it is accepted that institutional information might be revealed, which may in turn be reported in the DHET reports. These are already classified as public documentation and open for public consumption. The institution's right to privacy and confidentiality was observed at all times and only the information that is absolutely a requirement and falls within the public domain was disclosed. No personal information was published on particular student records. The participants were assured that they would not suffer any prejudice, as the level of risks were negligible and the steps were undertaken to address any risks that arose throughout the investigation process. The likely risks that were presented by the COVID-19 pandemic were addressed through the offering of online options and only engaging with participants at venues that have received institutional approved social distancing regulations and provisions.

1.9 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study was to critically evaluate openness and its implementation as a vehicle for student access and success in higher education, with particular reference to a comprehensive open and distance learning institution in South Africa. The study considered openness in the context of a public university and critically assess whether comprehensive openness as espoused by the institution and the extent to which it exists or remains an ambition in many of its operations in support of marginalised students in their learning journey. The final results were confined to the study objectives and the institutional settings only because that was where data collection was

carried out. Before generalising the findings to other settings, the application of the openness framework further study would be necessary.

1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is structured based on the eight chapters of the document as follows:

Chapter One
This chapter provides an overview of the study and the research problem. It covers the background information about the concept of openness in higher education representing an interesting dilemma within the context of South Africa providing proposition for selecting this research problem and rationale for the study.

Chapter Two
Literature review covers a collation of literature from multiple sources related to openness in higher education globally, regionally and locally. The literature sources allow for the detailed explorations about the identified factors in openness and the influence of these factors in the lived experiences of marginalised students.

Chapter Three
The theoretical framework outlines the conceptual models of the study.

Chapter Four
Research design and methodology presents the overall procedures of the study. Ethical considerations and data analysis techniques are also explained in this chapter.

Chapter Five
Data analysis and presentation of the findings from the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study. The chapter provides a presentation of research findings and data analysis of the qualitative and quantitative phase. It also focuses on interpretation of research findings and results. Literature control served to link the data obtained to existing theory.

Chapter Six
This chapter presents the interpretation and model development process.

Chapter Seven

The key discussion points relating to the study are presented in the chapter, the results and recommendations are considered. Conclusion, limitations, and recommendations of the study are drawn.

1.11 CONCLUSION

Student access and success in universities is complex and multi-dimensional, the study attempted to explore some of these pertinent factors viewed as part of comprehensive institutional interventions to support marginalised student populations. The study identified and explored factors associated with open education and the influence of these factors in influencing decision making to develop an openness framework for universities. Therefore, the main aim of this study was to provide an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of openness in higher education whether its intended aspiration in providing access does also promote success in university studies for marginalised students through the introducing different research methods and tools from both the quantitative and qualitative aspects in order to produce a valid body of knowledge.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW:
DIMENSIONS OF OPENNESS AND THE INFLUENCE OF FACTORS IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MARGINALISED STUDENTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided an overview of key elements of the study, chapter two provides an overview or the emergent themes that confront and persist within the higher education system in South Africa, and identifies the efforts made since 1994 by the post-apartheid democratic government. The introductory aspect of the chapter offers an orientation by providing an overview of the literature review as a way of giving context to the literature review strategy guided by the research questions.

A literature review is defined as a comprehensive inquiry which centres on identifying, extracting, appraising, and synthesising evidence and existing knowledge within an area of interest to be investigated (Creswell, 2017). Booth, Sutton and Papaioannou (2016) further elaborate that the process allows for analyses, summarisation, and interpretation of literature in a systematic way where one seeks answers to a research question. Furthermore, the process, which involves gathering existing literature, enables the appraising and synthesising of a topic under study so as to ensure that a particular research study is conducted logically including understanding its strengths and weakness. Also, reviewing literature allows a researcher to discover the most detailed type of sources and guides the collation and systematic selection of all available sources on the topic (Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou, 2016). Neuman (2014) classifies literature review into six types, viz.: a context review, historical review, integrative review, methodological review, self-study review, and theoretical review. Similarly, Cronin, Ryan, and Coughlan (2007) classified literature reviews into four sub-types that include a narrative review, systematic review, meta-analysis, and meta-synthesis. For this study, the researcher conducted literature review through combining features of each of the aforementioned types while organising it through integrating, criticising, and identifying the main findings of previous scholarly works (Creswell, 2017). Literature can be accessed mainly from books, journals, dissertations, newspapers, reports, official documents, policies, professional meetings, and the internet (Neuman, 2014). For the purposes of this study, literature from all sources was accessed from a combination of the internet

search from local and international resources and also via the library system. This enabled the researcher to have access to largely all published and available resources from other academic institutions but also associated institutions to which the university's library was affiliated. This further assisted in obtaining an adequate number of literary sources related to the research topic.

2.1.1 Theoretical background of the literature review

It is deemed important by the researcher to provide a blueprint or guide for the literature review that is underpinned by the study's objectives. The structure that was followed during review of literature reinforced the theoretical approach undertaken and reflects the researcher's synthesis of the literature, explaining a phenomenon under study. The rationale for conducting a literature review was to provide a theoretical background of relevant studies, including contemporary perspectives related to the development of the integrated openness model for the promotion of student success. This also allowed the researcher to consolidate existing evidence-based knowledge on the field of inquiry. It is worth emphasising here again that no previous research has empirically explored the influence of openness in the Southern African context and its contributory factors on student access, throughput, success, and critically evaluated how universities apply these principles. This exploration is the first of its kind within a university setting in South Africa that serves to develop a model that can promote student success in the context of distance and open education. South Africa has a long documented history of discrimination and marginalisation of its black societies, with its associated challenges of racism to deliberately exclude and prevention of its black population from accessing higher education. This chapter locates the research problem in the literature on the discourse of access, opportunity, and the institutional conditions to support student success outcomes.

While avoiding duplication, the purpose of reviewing literature was to stimulate new ideas for further research in the subject area. Such an approach provided an in-depth understanding of the research topic through borrowing from multiple sources that assisted to analyse and distil an approach that suited the research problem being investigated. The blueprint introduced an integrated way of looking at a problem under study. Literature review permits a researcher to define the research questions, develop a conceptual framework, and select appropriate investigative methodologies. In addition, it helps to integrate current research findings into what has already been known. Finally, the objective of the literature search was to critically appraise arguments, theories, and controversies regarding the open and distance education, the influence of openness in the Southern African context and its contributory factors on student access,

throughput, retention, and success (Creswell, 2017; Arora, 2011). In order to answer the research questions, reviewers must follow a strict protocol, by using explicit and rigorous methods (Booth et al., 2016).

Distance and Open education global and in South Africa	Access, widening participation and Massification	Retention, persitence and success in Higher education	The South African Higher Education sector	Universities and institutional Conditions	Principles of openness and existing student success models	Principles of openness and existing student success models	Quality Assurance and programmes	Student engagement and learning

Research Topic

Openness in higher education: The panacea to endemic challenges with student access and success among previously excluded populations

Figure 2.1: Blueprint to organise the Literature review

The identification of key themes provided the basis of ensuring that only the relevant literature was included for review, where key words would then be later applied to narrow or broaden the relationships between keywords. This was conducted first, by utilising individual keywords to narrow search and second, utilising combined keywords to broaden the literature search during the application of the search strategy.

2.1.2 Literature search strategy

Booth et al. (2016) ass well as Polit and Beck (2014) identify that a researcher can develop a comprehensive data search strategy to gather all available relevant sources based on the research questions, which contain the following key components:

a.   the study population, the sample of study subjects;
b.   the institution, the research location, institutional conditions or context where the study is conducted;
c.   the themes of interest in higher education located in distance education, access, retention, success and quality; and

d.   the evaluation of current literature in the implementation of the principles of openness and existing student success models.

The aforementioned assisted the researcher to develop a focused and efficient data search strategy and the sources obtained were then sorted. The initial search for literature sources was conducted in the library of the University of South Africa (UNISA) and involved searching for books, reputable journals, and e-materials. This was an appropriate gateway to gather both primary and secondary sources. First, the UNISA's Librarian was requested to assist search materials related to distance and open education, university access, retention and success, higher education globally, the South African higher education, higher education quality assurance, and student success models. The researcher tried to comprehensively search all available literature databases with the assistance of the Librarian in order to gather important sources and acquire reviewing skills. Further to the library search, an internet search was also conducted by the researcher to search for additional e-materials journal, books, as well as conference papers related to the study themes. The researcher tracked recently published books and journals related higher education, openness student access, massification, retention, and success. The sources search did not identify a criterion in terms of the year of publication as the researcher deemed it necessary that some of the old sources might contain seminal issues related to the study that are still pertinent in higher education. The e-resources were accessed from ERIC, Google Scholar, UNISA Repository, ProQuest and Academia search engines. Key words were used and grouped together ensuring that only the relevant literature could be reviewed, key words were applied to narrow or broaden the relationships between keywords. As the study focus became more narrowed and focused on the research topic, the following keywords were used:

a.   Distance and open education global and in South Africa
b.   Access, widening participation and massification
c.   Access, widening participation and massification
d.   The South African higher education sector
e.   Universities and institutional conditions
f.   Principles of openness and existing student success models
g.   Quality assurance and academic programmes
h.   Student engagement and learning

During the sorting process, literature that was considered irrelevant or not related to the research questions, was excluded and discarded. The pertinent sources that supported the study under

inquiry which provided answers to the research questions were retained and arranged accordingly in a separate folder.

2.1.2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion or exclusion criteria that was applied to all the relevant literature related to the study was reviewed, but with caution, especially given the debates that exists regarding the authenticating of published data that is accessible on the internet. Only literature from validated institutional databases were considered for the review. Thereafter, the researcher developed an appropriate strategy to retrieve and include studies that she considered relevant to the research questions. Subsequently, a high-level criterion was developed and the predetermined criteria was applied to assess the relevance, reliability, and validity of the collected literature. The rationale of using an inclusion and exclusion criteria was to identify pertinent literature to answer the specified research questions.

2.1.2.2 Inclusion Criteria

The initial primary search identified 319 full-text works of literatures and eleven additional works of literatures related to higher education policy frameworks in South Africa. These had been searched from grey literature, cross-references, and official websites. The following inclusion was used to include only literature that were relevant and related to open education and associated dimensions of student access, retention, success, quality assurance, academic programmes and student learning:

- Studies published in the English language;
- Studies published since 1995 to coincide with the advent of a democratic dispensation in South Africa;
- Global and local higher education;
- Higher education studies that focused on student access, retention, and success outcomes;
- Studies on the South African higher education and the history of the South African education system;
- Studies focused on distance and open education;
- Studies focused on higher education quality assurance, programme design, development, and accreditation;

- Studies conducted in quantitative methods, qualitative methods, or mixed methods;
- Studies focused on university operations, systems, and institutional landscape in the 21st Century;
- Studies focused on higher education policy and funding in South Africa; and
- Studies focused on student engagement and learning.

2.1.2.3   *Exclusion Criteria*

Exclusion criteria are criteria used to discard or disqualify literature from inclusion in the prospective review (Booth et al., 2016). The following exclusion criteria were utilised to discard literature from the review process:

- Publications written in a language other than English;
- Articles published before 1994 that did not discuss seminal issues in higher education as they were considered to be outdated and inconsistent with the current higher education system in South Africa;
- Published abstracts; and
- Studies not peer-reviewed and which could not be authenticated.

After applying each of the above inclusion and exclusion criteria, 319 research sources met the inclusion criteria, with eleven seminal literature sources retrieved through manual search and cross-reference analysis. Only eighteen research sources were excluded from the total. The research sources that met the criteria satisfied the academic and scientific rigour expectations for inclusion in the prospective literature review processes. Primary research studies that fully satisfied the inclusion criteria were reviewed, and the table below presents an overview and summary of some of the included sources and a list of national policy documents reviewed.

Table 2.1:   Summary of Sources reviewed

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
Ashwin, P. and Case, J.M., (2018) - African Minds.	Newton Fund project: 'Pathways to Personal and Public Good: understanding access to, student experiences of, and outcomes from South African undergraduate higher education' (ESRC project reference: ES/N009894/1; NRF project reference: UID 98365). The project involved 34 researchers from South Africa, the UK and beyond by reviewing what is currently known about South African undergraduate education.	The examination the relationship between undergraduate education and personal and public goods in South Africa through three interlinked themes: access to higher education; students' experiences whilst studying; and the economic and social contributions made by university graduates.	This study finds two key tensions in the current understanding of South African undergraduate education in its public university system. The first is that there is a tendency to focus on individual universities rather than understanding how the system works. The second tension is between the reproductive and transformative potential of undergraduate education. In South Africa's transition to a democracy, higher education was expected to play a key role in alleviating the inequalities inherited from the apartheid era.
Timmis, S., De Wet, T., Naidoo, K., Trahar, S., Lucas, L., Mgqwashu, E.M., Muhuro, P. and Wisker, G., (2021) - Routledge.	A participatory methodological approach. A Special Issue article from the Newton Fund research project Southern African Rurality in Higher Education (SARiHE) (see https://sarihe.org.za)	To investigate the inequities experienced by students from rural contexts in accessing higher education.	The results reveal the inequalities in access to resources in rural contexts, how economic and social change is differentiated between rural and urban and how colonialism continues to deny or marginalise particular knowledges.

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
Abed, S. and Ackers, B., (2021) - *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education.*	An exploratory qualitative study involving a thematic content analysis of publicly available annual reports using ATLAS.ti software.	To identify the transformation disclosures in the publicly available annual reports of South African public universities and to establish the extent to which universities account to their stakeholders about how they have discharged their transformation obligations.	The study identifies several interventions that universities have introduced to facilitate access to and successful completion of tertiary studies by students. Some of the disclosed mechanisms include the provision of financial aid, student support and counselling, tutoring and mentoring and ICT enhancements and the introduction of language policies. The results also highlighted several challenges to sustainable transformation including funding, social and academic barriers and infrastructural challenges experienced by universities.
Sezonova, O.N., Galchenko, S.A. and Khodirevskaya, V.N., (2016) - *European Journal of Contemporary Education*	The study applied a rating assessment to create a rating of higher education institutions of Central Federal District using the integrated indicator that allowed the consideration of the heterogeneity of the estimated criteria. The used technique allowed to determine seven cluster groups, depending on the specifics of development of higher education institution (leaders, diversifiers, accumulators of scientific research, the international	The purpose of the research was to carry out an efficiency evaluation of the work of higher educational institutions of Central Federal District that are to provide highly qualified and competent personnel that should meet market requirements.	The study revealed how disproportion in development of higher education institutions has an influence on the processes of forming and development of professional and competent personnel for the region and as a result on the level of social and economic development.

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
	orientation, accumulators of financial resources, and conservatives).		
Seabi, J., Seedat, J., Khoza Shangase, K. and Sullivan, L., (2014) - *International Journal of Educational Management*.	A qualitative, explorative, and descriptive survey study design	To investigate students' perceptions of the challenges that they face and the factors that facilitate and impede teaching and learning within the context of transformation at the University of the Witwatersrand.	The study results revealed positive facilitative factors such as quality of teaching, social support, material resources and practical/clinical training; as well as negative hindering factors that included high workload, English as a medium of instruction and limited access to "other" resources which impacted the learning processes. There was a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the current status of the school regarding transformation.
Ding, Y., Wu, Y., Yang, J. and Ye, X., (2021) - *Higher Education*.	N = 113,43, sample size Nationally representative student-level survey data with newly available confidential institution	The study aimed to respond to three research questions: 1. How does enrolment expansion affect access to (elite) college differently between students from high and low SES families? 2. How does enrolment expansion change college production as measured by a college's value-added on students' labour market outcomes?	The study finds evidence of the enlarging unequal access to elite higher education for students from different family backgrounds during the enrolment expansion, which supports the effectively or expanding maintained inequality theory.

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
		3. How do the expansion effects vary between selective and non-selective colleges in a highly institutionally stratified higher education system?	
Lane, L. and Birds, R., (2013) *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*.	An exploratory qualitative study	To critique the value of meritocratic and social reproductive paradigms in explaining contextual admissions as affirmative action and comprehending more fully the current debates concerning contextual admissions.	1. The study revealed that there are complexities associated with implementing the use of contextual information, not least in the selection of appropriate criteria to identify applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds. 2. The practice of contextual admissions must be approached with an understanding of the interrelated nature of the ideological constraints, assumptions, and problems, without an assumption of a 'correct' or universal response.
Mzangwa, S.T., (2018) *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*.	Narrative policy analysis approach	To provide an overview of the conditions resulting from the policy on transformation in the context of higher education. To examine the extent to which policy on higher education in South Africa have has an impact on equity, affirmative action, access and widening participation.	The study concludes that improving access could be achieved through offering equal and standardised educational programmes [curriculum] in all universities. It further suggests that a need to introduce one common or dominant language such as English as the only medium of instruction at HEIs could be helpful in eradicating the

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
			dominance of a language such as Afrikaans, which is replete with traumatising and negative connotation.
Cloete, N., (2014) - *Studies in Higher Education*.	K-means analysis based on standardised scores, the analysis measured knowledge production by a combination of output variables, including indicators for numbers of master's and doctoral graduates, proportion of PhD graduates to permanent staff and overall ISI accredited publication output.	To analyse the South African current higher education system, described as medium knowledge producing and differentiated, with low participation and high attrition.	The analysis claims that the knowledge production system in South Africa is differentiated both in terms of research output and the production of masters and doctoral degrees. While there is a steady increase in publications, master's and doctoral outputs, it is too slow to meet labour market demand, even within the labour market.
Tikly, L., (20100. *Towards a framework for understanding the quality of education*. EdQual RPC.	A mixed-methods approach. The research is an intervention study based on action research methodologies. The areas for research were identified through a series of national consultative workshops with policy makers and practitioners.	To set out EdQual's emerging framework towards researching the quality of education in low-income countries with a focus on theoretical and methodological issues.	The research presents a framework for a quality education consideration for policy makers as well as non-governmental and community organisations to be aware of the processes and mechanisms by which policy relating to education quality is determined and how these reflect different interests within the state and civil society.
Hlalele, D. and Alexander, G., (2012). *South African Journal of Higher Education*	An analysis and critique article of contemporary practices and debates concerning inclusion and university access programmes	To argue that inclusion poses a social justice challenge to university access programmes. To examines university access programmes as social	The article demonstrates that the somewhat unintended consequences of implementing access programmes at universities result in labelling and stigmatisation, which may

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
		structures and institutional contexts or spaces with specified rules and regulations. Employing a social critique lens, the study challenges stereotypes associated with university access programmes in accordance with critical intellectual enterprises.	contribute to exclusionary practices. The article claims that in order to achieve inclusion for fair co-existence, duplication in terms of resources, the attitude of teachers in such programmes, curricula issues, as well as matters relating to the interaction of students as members of learning communities, continue to pose a challenge to create, develop, and maintain learning organisations and programmes that embrace social justice.
Coates, H., (2007). *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education.*	Mixed-methods N = 1,051 sample size. The Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) was used to survey Students; designed to measure the online and general engagement of campus-based university students.	A contribution to the tradition of developing models that can help to investigate, evaluate, manage and teach university students.	The results identify a distinction between the academic and the social dimensions of engagement. They further suggest in particular, that student engagement can be characterised as either intense, collaborative, independent or passive. Students reporting an intense form of engagement are highly involved with their university study. Those with intense online engagement use university learning management systems more than others to enhance and contextualise their study, to communicate and collaborate

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
			with other students, to manage and conduct their learning and to contact staff. They also see that staff use online systems to enhance the learning experiences and supports offered to students.
Hay, J. and Beyers, C., (2011) - *Africa Education Review*	A desktop review of literature, articles included in the desktop review included the published research and writings on social justice and inclusive education. The criterion for these were: - focused on teaching for diversity and social justice; - addressed the issue of quality education for all as well as overcoming barriers to learning and development; and - have been published in peer reviewed journals or edited books.	To provide a critical examination of how the meaning of social justice can be viewed with regard to distributive, retributive and recognitive justice and, finally, how the South African model of nuanced inclusive education weighs up against these forms of social justice.	The South African model of inclusive education is based on relatively sound social justice principles. Until societal inequities have been ameliorated, the South African model of inclusive education should be viewed as a step in the right direction to move towards a more socially just education system.
Agar, D.L. and Knopfmacher, N., (1995) *Higher Education Journal*	N = 500 disadvantaged students. The statistics were performed on the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) and this analysis had three components. The ASP group learning profile was based on the calculation of a mean for each of the 10 dependent variables. Bonferroni T-tests were used to assess the possible significant differences	To provide individual students and their tutors with an awareness of aspects of learning and to obtain a group learning profile of students as well as assessing whether differences exist across language, gender, and faculty on the 10 LASSI variables related to learning.	ASP students as a group presented a picture of learning that fell into the weak and average range, with no apparent areas of strength. There are four areas of weakness, falling below the 50th percentile, two in the area of affect and two in the area of skills. The weakest areas are the affective areas of Anxiety and Motivation.

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
	between the two language groups and between the two gender groups on each of the 10 dependent variables.		
Essack, S.Y., (2012) - *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*	An analysis and critique article of the role and responsibility of individual institutions in matching equity of access to equity of outcome in marginalised groups in African higher education.	To develop and implement a holistic model to translate equity of access into equity of outcome in marginalided groups.	Concludes to identify that institutions require adequate numbers of appropriate human resource cadres including, but not limited to peer mentors, student counsellors and academic staff skilled with the ability to deliver learner-centred teaching and learning programmes.
Naidoo*, R., (2004) *British journal of sociology of education*	The paper provides an analysis of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts applied to the relationship between universities and forces for change in South Africa in the period from 1985 to 1990. The research process was constructed on the field of university education in South Africa. An analysis of the specific capital that was valourised in the field, the historical evolution of the relationship between the political context and the different types of universities, and their own positions.	The application of Bourdieu's framework to develop an analytical understanding of institutional strategies developed by South African universities during a period of political instability.	The paper concludes that the preliminary work on the effects of forces for commodification (see, for example, Naidoo & Jamieson, 2002) indicates that elite universities are more likely to possess the financial and cultural resources to restructure or redeploy forces for commodification in order to re-legitimise academic fields and institutional strategy capital, and so protect their position of dominance in the field. Subordinate universities, on the other hand, which admit students from disadvantaged backgrounds, are more likely to be buffeted by market forces. Bourdieu's framework is therefore likely to

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
			continue to play an important role in contributing to sociological understandings of the extent to which commodification is likely to respectively erode or exacerbate social equity.
Tynan, B. and James, R., (2013) *Open Praxis*	A research paper based on an ICDE-commissioned pilot study on regulatory frameworks concentrated on Southwest Pacific/South East Asia region nations on the implications for openness for that region in particular. A survey of existing literature and regulatory agency material for the ASEAN countries, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, and the Pacific Islands Forum countries of Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and French Polynesia.	The project explored regulatory frameworks for online and distance education within the Asia/Pacific region, limiting this to some key members of the ASEAN and the Pacific Island Forum nations.	The pilot project found that the distance education sector in the pilot region is subject to varying laws, policies, rules, regulations, and practices imposed by government legislators, quality assurance and accreditation agencies, professional associations, academic associations, student bodies, credential evaluation and recognition bodies, regional and international organisations, and educational institutions themselves via their internal strategic and operational planning.
Olcott Jr, D., (2013) *Open Praxis*.	A Conference paper on the gains of open education keeping pace with the growing barriers to university access.	To provide an analysis, the future of open education as an essential human right with a commitment to expanding	The paper concludes by presenting a moral dichotomy for the discourse on Openness, illustrating that if

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
	The article examines selected myths and realities at the centre of this challenge to open education within the context of these emerging political and economic realities.	access and strengthening academic quality. Provides a pragmatic assessment of how open education advocates can position themselves as the future "voices for access and innovation," particularly for the higher education sector.	you cannot keep the primary doors to a university education open, then there is the danger that the open education movement will become part of that closed system with only the illusion of "genuine open access" remaining.
Badat, S., (2005) *Distance education*,	A research paper written on behalf of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and drawing on an extensive investigation into distance education in South African higher education undertaken by the CHE to document and policy analysis in response to a request by the Minister of Education for advice on selected aspects of distance higher education policy and practice. The article addresses the concerns of diversity and equity of access and opportunity for historically disadvantaged social groups, high-quality provision, and social and economic responsiveness in distance higher education though an engagement with critical distance higher education policy issues.	To reflect and critic the implication of increasing diversity of higher education provision in South Africa for equity of access and opportunity for historically disadvantaged social groups, high-quality provision, and social and economic responsiveness in distance higher education.	The article concludes on issues confronting key themes that recur across the various policy documents produced during the past decade of democracy in South Africa (1995 – 2005). It further concludes that unless serious attention is paid to the quality of distance education provision and programmes, equity of opportunity and outcomes for historically disadvantaged South Africans will be compromised, as students graduate with underdeveloped knowledge, competencies, and skills.

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
Bangeni, B. and Kapp, R., (2018) *Canadian Journal of Education*.	Qualitative, longitudinal case studies conducted within the Academic Development Programme in the Centre for Higher Education Development at the University of Cape Town from 2002 to 2005 and from 2009 to 2012. Students who participated in the case studies were part of a generation of young black people who grew up in the new post-Apartheid South African and are mostly bilingual or multilingual and for whom English is an additional language.	To examine the various learning experiences of black, working-class students at the University of Cape Town in South Africa from a range of academic disciplines in order to better understand the challenges faced by black, working-class students.	Findings related to institutional behaviour suggest that in order to enhance the success of black, first-generation students, institutions should continue their focus on psycho-social support beyond the first year and throughout the student experience. The authors further suggest that negotiating meaningful access to learning is inextricably connected to negotiating an intersection of race, class, linguistic, gendered, and religious subject positions in relation to home, school, and university (Bangeni & Kapp, 2018). They further conclude that the students' journeys are not linear; that success often comes following various stops, detours, or adaptations.
CHE (2010) Access and throughput in South African Higher Education: Three case studies	Mixed-methods. A research project undertaken by three research teams which took their institutions University of Pretoria, University of the Witwatersrand, and University of the Western Cape as case studies.	The examination of issues of access, retention, and throughput at three distinctly different universities in the South African higher education landscape.	The analysis of the three case studies concludes that once students enter universities the organisational dynamics of universities across teaching, administrative, and social spaces make a difference in strategies to enhance academic performance and improve success rates. Universities must ensure that the organisation, planning and delivery of teaching is systematic,

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
			accessible, predictable, and well-communicated, to at least ensure that these factors do not become an additional hindrance to undergraduate learning.
CHE (2010) Focusing the Student Experience on Success through Student Engagement	N = 13 600 undergraduate students at seven South African universities. A National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), commissioned research study by the CHE on student engagement	To measure the level of academic challenge, the degree of active and collaborative learning, student–staff interaction, the provision of enriching educational experiences and the extent to which the campus environment is supportive.	The results find in the overall sample that black African students find the campus to be significantly more supportive overall than students from any of the other groups – black African students reported experiencing the most support for student success, whilst white students reported the lowest mean in this regard (significantly lower than coloured and black African students). The study confirms the value of student engagement data in improving the quality of teaching and learning by providing institutions with an additional source of data for quality assurance processes. The SASSE data allowed institutions to analyse the experience of different subgroups of students within an institution providing a more nuanced understanding of how institutional cultures can be gained and effectively utilised to further social

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
			cohesion at an institutional and systemic level.
The CHE - Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide (2014)	Workshops were held at the CHE and involved open and distance learning (ODL) experts, distance education evaluators, CHE accreditation staff, representatives of the National Association of Distance Education and Open Learning in South Africa (Nadeosa), and student representatives.	To assist in the interpretation of existing HEQC criteria for a wide range of distance education programmes offered by higher education institutions in South Africa. It guides programme developers and evaluators in distinguishing distance education from non-distance education programmes and suggests a way to map different modes of educational provision.	The guide advances and advises as an outcome on the choice to adopt a technology-supported distance education approach (i.e. predominantly not campus-based), and the quality implications of this decision for students, staff, and systems. The guide provides access to a wealth of content and a constantly expanding suite of tools that can assist to better to manage information, to communicate and to create interactive, collaborative and enquiry-based learning programmes at a distance.
DHET (2019) - 2000 - 2016 First-time Entering undergraduate cohort Studies for Public Higher Education Institutions.	Data collected through the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS). HEMIS collects unit record data rather than aggregated or tabular data. Universities are required to submit audited data to the Department in a specified format by the 31st of July each ,	Cohort studies are the study of first time entering undergraduate students, who are tracked over a 10-year period to determine the percentage of students that have dropped out from their studies or who have completed their studies.	The study concluded that considering the various fields of study, business studies students have the lowest throughput rates, followed by the humanities (excluding education), which are significantly higher. Education in general (covering all qualifications) has the next highest throughput rate, although lower that the Bachelor of Education on its own. Finally, the science, engineering and technology fields have the highest

Author/ Date/Journal	Sample Size/Design/ Approach/ Study Population	Research Objectives	Results/ Claims
			throughputs of all fields of study.
DHET (2013) White Paper for Post-school Education and Training	N = 200 responses collected from educational institutions, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), employer groupings, trade unions, other organisations and individuals, as well as further reflection within the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) on the challenges facing the sector.	To outline a framework that defines the DHET's focus and priorities that enables government to shape and develop plans for the of the PSET system.	The DHET concludes that it envisages an expanded and more diverse than it is at present, in order to provide for the needs of our people and our society. Although enrolments at both universities and colleges will grow, the main expansion will be at the college level. TVET colleges will cater for the bulk of our post-school youth, as well as for the lower levels of the higher education band (NQF Level 5), a level which could also be offered by universities.

The table provides a summary of some of the primary and secondary research materials searched studies included within this literature review. The summarised review table offers details on the author(s), year of publication, journal, sample size, study design, objectives, and results or claims of the study.

The studies included in the review explored open and distance education, policy framework within the higher education system in South Africa, quality assurance, access, retention, and success outcomes. The included studies focus on a range of dimensions associated with openness and success models at universities and they offer data from a varied perspective including policy perspectives, as well as different scholarly perspectives on open and distance education, student associated dimensions of access, attrition, and success to degree completion. The studies included have focused on a variety of methodologies, including systematic reviews, quantitative surveys, qualitative and mixed method studies.

2.2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE OPENNESS, ACCESS AND SUCCESS DISCOURSE WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA

The South African higher education is not isolated to that across the globe especially concerning trends of massification and expansion and this is where this study locates the discourses, within the global massification contexts. Research on widening participation or equity of access to higher education is extensive. It does not need to be studied further here other than to point to the impact of massification and of the widening of participation to enable equity of access for those who have, historically, been under-represented. Higher education institutions, by their very design and intent, have been historically identified as inequitable for historically marginalised students and staff populations. These people include those who are the first in their family to attend university, those from low-income households, mature students, those with caring responsibilities and those from marginalised groups (Timmis et al., 2021). What this study considers is the impact and the solutions that are being employed in the context of openness and the extent to which marginalised student populations have benefited in the social construct of inclusiveness through multiple dimensional lens of quality, support and success.

The growing demand for higher education as a result of globalisation and the desire to create a knowledge economy has given rise to enrolment increases, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Wangenge-Ouma, 2010), where access to and success in higher education continue to be conditioned by social class and 'race' (Badat, 2016). At the same time, higher education systems are moving from being purely elitist systems to mass universal systems, differentiated at institutional levels. Olcott (2013) identifies that open education introduced into the mainstream was positioned to stand against educational elitism, the growing digital divide, and to support the core values that give education its fundamental credence as a human right. He further argues that an open philosophy is good but must be viewed with measurable impacts. The socio-economic conditions impact on access into higher education institutions are particularly evident in African countries (Dary & James, 2019), with higher education diversity challenges emerging (Abed & Ackers, 2021). There exists a need to better understand the advancement of access and participation to the varied student cohorts who participate in higher education and the experiences in the attainment of success and completion of their qualifications.

Openness has been advanced as the solution to the many barriers in participation and exclusion to learning, for marginalised or disadvantaged students in higher education. Despite the many policy and institutional interventions on openness and transformation interventions, prevailing

socio-economic conditions continue to provide obstacles preventing previously disadvantaged individuals from accessing and successfully completing their higher education studies (Tibbitts & Keet, 2017; Knight, Baume, Tait & Yorke, 2007). These obstacles, although nothing new, illustrate the dissatisfaction of students with the status of transformation and have resulted in the emergence of students' protest against the lack of university access and funding, as well as their subsequent inability to ultimately find employment (Badat, 2016; BusinessTech, 2016; Sezonova et al., 2016; Seabi et al., 2014).

An increase in participation levels means that there are many more first-generation students (those who are first in their families to go to university) in higher education. The terms 'first in family', 'first generation' or 'first black' are contested at times; they are widely used to refer to those whose parents and grandparents were historically excluded from higher education for reasons associated with racial, ethnic, socio-economic and/or linguistic diversity (Bell & Santamaría, 2018). A more nuanced approach acknowledges that first generation students inhabit spaces where the intersection of race, class, and gender impact not only access to higher education, but also their aspirations about their place in the unfamiliar land of higher education (Jehangir, 2010). The notions of exclusion and place that this definition provides are important in considering student access and persistence in higher education.

Existing literature on access and higher education participation advances two competing theories, highlighted by Ding, Wu, Yang and Ye (2021). Some researchers argue that expansion is a diversion process of social imperatives to which middle-income universities are subjected, while elite institutions remain bastions of the privileged (Raftery & Hout, 1993; Lucas, 2001). Despite dramatic higher education expansions as well as various government enrolment policies, large racial and socioeconomic gaps persist over decades of persistent policy reforms (Perna et al., 2008). Another school of thought advances the argument that higher education expansion brings the inclusion of the lower-class marginalised students to obtain higher education opportunities for social mobility (Arum et al., 2007). Literature further supports a second theory, namely that education is a meaningful contributor to improvements in poverty levels of marginalised communities and reduces inequality levels as a great leveller against inequality (HSRC, 2008).

Issues of equity and access are associated with the ideological and philosophical streams that define the values reflected in educational systems. Mkude, Cooksey, and Levey (2003) identify higher education institutions that have in one way or another contributed to the development of society, and thus played a major part in promoting social inclusiveness in the development of the

nation. Mkude et al. (2003) further argue that, amongst other areas of concern regarding nation-building and development played by institutions, is the matter of equity, which forms part of defining or measuring development. In universities, the advocacy of equity as a measure of development entails encouraging wider participation, inclusiveness of previously disadvantaged groups in society, and a shared allocation of resources relating, mainly to access (World Bank, 2010).

As Bourdieu (1977) argues, social class constitutes one of the causes of educational inequality. It needs to be understood that advancing the policy principles of equity and inclusion needs to take into consideration the societal environments in which these policies are applied. Societal backgrounds play a critical role in determining the advancement of education and in who ultimately gets an opportunity to further studies in higher education. Family background can influence choices of young adults to enrol or not to enrol at one of the institutions, the social context in a country is a major influence in the determination to attend or not to attend university, as research reports suggest (Reay, Davies, David & Ball, 2001). Educational policies are key instruments and form distinctions between rich, poor, and middle class (Lane & Birds, 2013). Based on this argument, most students who happen to gain access to HEIs are from the middle class and/or elite group. Most of those from a poor background are unable to reach elite university levels, due to the social class background and/or the types of schools attended in the case of South Africa. These could be of poor quality and lower status.

When considering the debate regarding inequality in HEIs, particularly in developing countries, issues of access and participation take the lead, and are often cited as the main cause of educational inequality (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013). The central point regarding the development and sustainability of HEIs derives from who is admitted or not admitted, and what their social or economic background entails. The latter is heavily linked to equity standards and language used at a given HEI. Thus, the elements of access, equity and participation impose a strong influence on what constitutes the foundation or formulation of policy and its implementation to enhance a diversified and increased student body in higher education.

With the advent of democracy, the South African government moved to transform the higher education section and the principles of social justice, equality, and inclusiveness were central to its policies. Transformation in higher education is considered an indicator of social progress, as it relays a process of an absolute overhaul of social thinking and results in meaningful social transition. Transformation in the South African context refers to the need to ensure that the

barriers to access are completely removed, so that the higher education system becomes more inclusive, achieving widening access, improved throughput rates, and participatory outcomes (Mzangwa, 2019).

Social inclusiveness identifies various groups in higher education, particularly people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Access and widening participation are viewed as the indicators of transformation as they facilitate the means to diversity and facilitate admissions into higher education students from poor and under-represented social backgrounds (Mzangwa, 2019). However, it needs to be recognised that these progressive policies have not been realised, and that some of the ambitions and aspirations regarding higher education have not translated into material benefits for most previously disadvantaged black South Africans in terms of access, equity, and participation in higher education. This is owing to a number of possible reasons, among them, poor implementation of policy as well as a lack of monitoring in respect of student progression and support. Taken together, these are mong factors that result in low success outcomes and completion rates in the sector. Redress and transforming the higher education system need to be addressed at various levels of the sector and HEIs are key as policy implementation and practice lies right at their epicentre.

Therefore, support for these institutions needs to be prioritised by government to realise its policy ambitions. While the higher education system in South Africa experienced some growth after 1994, concerns regarding students' access, participation rates, and issues of equity and inclusion have been at the core of these debates (Cloete, 2014; Mathekga, 2012; Odendaal & Deacon et al., 2009). Morley et al. (2010), cited in Mzangwa (2018), identify that widening participation in higher education is a complex relationship between higher education institutions and issues of equity in developing countries. Equity is connected to the issue of economic growth and standard of living, as argued by Odendaal and Deacon (2009), as well as Mkude, Cooksey, and Levey (2003) and Mkude (2011), who agree that economic growth, development, and equity are the determinant factors for a well-educated and well-governed stable society.

Ding et al. (2021) assert that, expansion in higher education has resulted in unequal access to elite higher education for students from differing family backgrounds, which effectively posits the purpose of this study regarding whether openness in higher education has resulted in meaningful success outcomes for students. This study investigates whether a purposefully selected South African university assists students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds with access and identifies mechanisms through varied dimensions to facilitate the successful completion of their

studies. Given the widely reported opportunities on access to institutions of higher education and widened participation policies, there exist questions on whether conditions in South Africa's institutions of higher learning support marginalised student populations. That is, whether such opportunities in the selected institution were met with the requisite support and conditions so as to facilitate the success for these students. The study is located within an open and distance higher learning institution and seeks to understand how it locates its openness discourse and social justice mandate to respond to these demands as well as the role the institution should be playing, in not only providing, but also securing access to learners, especially from disadvantaged students, by retaining and supporting them to achieve success through their learning journey. The exploration of the social justice in the context of the institution needs to be deepened and probed further as it is a principle that anchors the response of an institution to openness and support to the student body.

2.3 EMERGING THEMES IN OPENNESS AND REQUISITE SUPPORT TO THE MARGINALISED STUDENT POPULATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Thematic presentation of the findings extracted from the previous section of the literature review process helped to organise the information in a way that makes the writing process simpler and focused. The themes are identified based on the research questions discussed in Chapter One. The next sections consist of a brief discussion of the following categorised considerations, access and challenges associated with access, the perennial discriminatory nature of the South African higher education, open but still closed distance education, unsatisfactory institutional settings and undesirable outcomes related to student experience, retention, and success.

2.3.1 Lack of access and challenges related to inequitable inclusion

The concept of social justice is concerned with equal justice, not just in the courts, but in all aspects of society. This concept demands that people have equal rights and opportunities; where everyone, from the poorest on the margins of society to the wealthiest, deserves an even playing field. Theories of social justice advocate that adequate mechanisms be used to regulate social arrangements in the fairest way for the benefit of all. In this study, the conceptualisation of social justice is anchored by Fraser and Bedford (2008), who view justice as 'parity of participation' (Tikly, 2010). Fraser and Bedford (2008) illuminate that overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others as full partners in social interaction. Hlalele (2012) maintains that social justice is premised on the discourse of disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalisation and exclusionary processes and further identifies that social justice supports a process built on respect, care, recognition, and empathy. Social justice can be conceived of as the exercise of altering institutional and organisational arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002). Hlalele and Alexander (2012), however, contend that social justice by its very nature can elicit revolutionary overtones. Frey, Pearce, Pollock, Artz and Murphy (1996) raise a concern about sensibility toward social justice. Frey et al. (1996) claim that sensibility ought to forego ethical concerns, commit to structural analyses of ethical concerns, adopt an activist orientation, and seek identification with others. Vally (2018) further contends that, although the ambitions of social justice are laudable, these goals remain unattainable and elusive yet this is particularly important as the conditions where principles of social justice interface ought to be informed by context. The principles of social justice must be reconciled with the environmental conditions that give expression on the amenability of the environment to acknowledge the disparities within its social spaces and intentional adoption of strategies to socialise the spaces to more equitable access and socialisation. Universities, by their very nature, are designed as social structures and institutional contexts or spaces with specified rules and regulations. Some of these rules are clearly known and well-articulated in policies, strategy documents, and some missions of these institutions; others are not so clear, whilst some are largely invisible. O'Shea (2016) highlights that institutional rules govern students' behaviour, their thoughts, and the shape of their lives. Universities do avail various resources and services to students in order to bridge the gap between secondary education and tertiary education. These services have generally been targeted at the perceived

disadvantaged students, and their apparent need to complete something additional in order to catch up with other students, who enter university better matched to institutional expectations (O'Shea, 2016). These services, at times, assume a posture that students enter institutions with pre-conditionalities of inadequacy that need to be remedied in order for students to successfully integrate to their new learning environments.

The perceptions that are informed by undertones of deficiency, positions students into categories of privileged or under-privileged. The notion of a 'deficit' or under-privilege and the provision of additional resources and services to remedy a perceived lack for targeted groups of students with a focus on what the students lack can be problematic (Smit, 2012; O'Shea et al., 2016; O'Shea et al., 2015; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013). Devos (2003) and O'Shea (2015) meanwhile argue that being identified as belonging to a particular demographic may lead to the student being stereotyped in a negative way (Devos, 2003; O'Shea et al., 2016). Therefore, universities need to construct spaces that balance social aspirations of inclusiveness, equity and support, with those student populations that come into higher education with inadequate preparation from the secondary school system.

Sapon-Shevin (2003) state that inclusion is not about deficit or disability, but instead concerns social justice, and that by embracing inclusion as a model of social justice, institutions can create a world fit for the entire student body. Inclusion, at all levels of education, implies no discrimination in terms of disability, culture, gender, or other aspects of learners or staff that are assigned significance by society (Department of Education (DBE), 2001). Inclusion involves all learners in a community, with no exception and irrespective of their intellectual, physical, sensory, or other differences, and should provide equal access to the mainstream curriculum and classroom for all learners. Inclusion has been described by Mundy and Madden (2010) as an approach that examines how to transform educational endeavours in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It is contended though by the researcher that inclusion requires a move away and eradication of past practices in institutions and that government policies in South Africa although good in intent, have dismally failed in execution and implementation to achieve an ambition of inclusiveness in the higher education system. Vally (2018) identifies that true inclusion must address a complete move away from the spatial apartheid location of institutions that perpetuate racial and class divisions and the unequal allocation of resources, the inadequate professional development of teachers, and the issues associated with language policy in institutions.

Universities need to drive inclusiveness as inclusion emphasises diversity over assimilation and is based on the notion of human rights, equity, social justice, respect, and care (Ballard, 1997; Dunbar-Krige & Van der Merwe, 2010; Landsberg, Kruger & Nel, 2005). Every level of a university's education system needs to be developed through promoting active participation of all students. Inclusion should not be determined according to whether a student gained access via alternative pathways or through the mainstream admission route, rather, all students should be encouraged and supported at all levels. This view is upheld by Donald, Lazurus and Lolwana (2010), who further highlight two approaches detrimental to the issue of inclusion as it relates to access, namely:

a. Prevention – focus should be on transforming education institutions and curricula to facilitate access to appropriate education for all students. Prevention elements of social transformation need to assist in preventing the occurrence of barriers to learning and development.

b. Support – focus should be on providing education support to lecturing staff and students not only students require this kind of support, but the entire university community must be afforded this critical support to cope with dispositions and socialisation into new environments the institutions want to inculcate.

Boulton & Lucas (2008) assert that one of the functions of universities is to be agents of social justice and mobility and ought to tackle widening access and inclusion. Two principal ways to do this have often been used by higher education institutions: one approach is to provide financial support through bursaries or state funding to students from families of lower economic status; the second approach is to employ favourable admissions policies and selection criteria, that is, to be sensitive to a student's socio-economic background. Mathekga (2012) contends that the shift in educational policy refers to inclusion and access as widening participation beyond mere entry to higher education by increasing the spread of enrolments across the spectrum of different academic programmes, particularly those lacking a diversified student population. Mathekga (2012) further asserts that widening participation is therefore about attainment and support to marginalised student populations, especially those from low socioeconomic groups, to participate successfully in higher education. Such a diversified student body admitted on the strength of diverse programme offerings provides for opportunities to students in fields that were historically reserved for the white privileged society, such as that in Engineering and Science disciplines, in this regard, equity is associated with equality (Mzangwa, 2019).

There ought to be caution however on how promotion of access and inclusion are achieved through student funding and favourable admission policies because these approaches fail to recognise that they may result in unintended consequences in their interpretation and effort, due to nuanced interpretations associated with social class that continue to exist in institutions.

The question of how a student is admitted at a university does earmark social class, which tends to stigmatise marginalised students once they are admitted. Mzangwa (2019) further contends that there are disparities in how the principles of access and widening participation are implemented in the South African higher education system, where the concept of meritocracy is advanced in the admissions and selection into university studies. Mzangwa (2019) elucidates that the idea of a meritocracy has served as a manner of ideology, through the argument that social inequality results from unequal merit, rather than from prejudice or discrimination. Meritocracy further perpetuates past discriminatory practices that are inherent in the basic school level associated with social class, where learners from affluent schools who received private education achieve better outcomes and are more seamlessly admitted into mainstream university programmes. This unequal merit can further be demonstrated by the subject choices learners take at basic levels of schooling. Learners from poor communities produced by the public education system are usually admitted through the alternative admission pathway into extended or access programmes due to their education background, such further promote segregation on social class and prior education outcomes achieved.

The selection criteria for admission at institutions of higher learning are mainly based on meritocratic principle. In South Africa, the criteria for admission differs from one university to another. This is mainly informed by apartheid legacy, where former white universities used meritocracy and historically disadvantaged institutions applied black empowerment approaches such as affirmative action, the latter perform relatively poorly while the former have far better performance rates, which can be attributed to the quality of student accepted and the level of preparedness from secondary schooling further argues Mzangwa (2019). Historically disadvantaged institutions employed a form of access and participation that was driven by social background and aspirations.

The issue at stake for higher education institutions is not only the support of students admitted through alternative pathways in an attempt to widen access, but in creating avenues for maintaining and sustaining academic success for prospective students who participate in higher education, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Although there appears to

be agreement on the application of meritocracy as a principle by which to make a selection of those qualifying to be placed at a certain level in terms of high or low performance, as dictated by certain disciplines, institutions need to weigh these requirements against deleterious past practices that deliberately discriminated against particularly class, race, or social background. The present practice continues to lend itself to privileging certain social classes. What then becomes of those students who are admitted through the widening of participation principles anchored on social justice ideals? Waghid (2004) asserts that the question to be asked should in fact be: What is the role of higher education institutions in availing their expertise, their human resources and physical infrastructure as a means of demonstrating a commitment to the development of contextually disadvantaged communities in South Africa? Tikly (2010) argues that social justice demands a recognition of the past and the present to create a more inclusive and relevant educational learning space.

The South African higher education sector has been struggling to move beyond its colonial past and many including students themselves question the relevance of curricula that tend to have remained fixed, despite massive demographic change. It is therefore crucial for institutions to be aware of the realities confronting its students and take a balanced view in implementing widening participation programmes that promote equal treatment, as failure can perpetuate inequitable outcomes by social class, economic status, ethnicity/race, geographic origin, gender, and other factors of disadvantage. Many institutions, if not all, have attempted to introduce interventions to address the challenges of access and inclusion in aspiring to social justice ideals and a case discussed below is one that is explored from an access perspective.

2.3.1.1 Inadequacy of university access programmes

The introduction of access programmes and foundation programmes have been viewed as promoting and closing the gaps of education for those students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many South African universities have developed access programmes as an alternative route to university admission into mainstream academic programmes. Kapp (1994) highlights that access programmes were conceived of so as to increase access in particular for black students who were disadvantaged by apartheid system, and to empower these students for the rigour of higher-level study at universities. Access programmes in their design and purpose generally place more emphasis on academic development, and in so doing, seem to undermine the importance of inclusivity, and how students are socialised to interact with the university environment in their learning journey. Chickering's theory (as cited in Hadley, 2006) addresses

the concept of student access to higher education settings and focuses on students' ability to acquire the necessary academic skills for higher education, develop the capacity to respond appropriately to challenging demands of the curriculum, but seems to focus less on situations and how students accrue a new level of independence. He further argues that first-year students are typically challenged by the directions of the following aspects:

a. Competence – which defines developing competence as the student's ability to acquire the intellectual skills necessary for the higher education environment.
b. Emotions – which refers to students' self-control and appropriate behaviour in relation to challenging situations.
c. Autonomy – which involves the students' experimentation with achieving independence and being able to cope in a new environment.

Hlalele and Alexander (2012) identify that university access programmes inherently and inevitably provide students with a 'label', where firstly, students are generally segregated and discriminated against, as they are treated as a separate group that accessed university somewhat 'illegitimately'. An unintended consequence of a university intervention in improving the levels of underprepared learners produced by the basic and lower education systems. Access programmes generally place more emphasis on academic development, and in so doing, seem to undermine the importance of inclusivity. The practice of access programmes falls somewhat short of observing heterogeneity, and does, to some extent, not seem to employ inclusive practices. Hlalele and Alexander (2012) therefore argue that inclusion poses a social justice challenge to university access programmes. Shandler and Steenekamp (2005), however, assert the benefits of access programmes, and argue in their qualitative study with group interviews conducted with Engineering students, that these students attribute their success programmes to the way in which participation in an access programme had integrated them academically into the university, and exposed them to discipline related experiences in a non-threatening environment. The findings of their study recommend that institutions that offer access programmes should not only be aware of the reciprocal influence of the cognitive factors but must be intentional in the non-cognitive factors that affect students' success and purposefully combine these factors (cognitive and non-cognitive) in the design of their access programmes during their very development (Shandler & Steenekamp, 2005).

Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler and Sonu (2010) indicate that social justice has proliferated in education in recent years and is an umbrella term encompassing a large range of practices and

perspectives. It has become apparent that students in some quarters of the education system frequently experience negative and inequitable treatment due to the inherent past of universities and their legacy of exclusion and elitism (Lauder, Brown, Dillabough & Halsey, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Inclusion calls for students and institutions never to be seen in isolation from the broader societal changes and constitutional imperatives (Coates, 2007; Alexander & Gardner, 2009), but what is central to the understanding of inclusion is the notion of participation and equitable participation (Hay & Beyers, 2011). This understanding allows for institution to reflect and create safe spaces for students to interact and different experiences to interface in a cohesive manner that recognises individuals as equal.

South Africa's democratic government has seen growing student numbers and improved access to higher education, especially for disadvantaged black students, as a key to overcoming past inequities, thus creating a stable democracy and society, as well as producing the high-level skills essential to drive forward economic growth and development (Pityana, 2006). The intentions of universities in employing various strategies to create access opportunities to the previously marginalised or disadvantaged cohorts of students are not probed in this study in terms of intent, but rather questioned in terms their current design and inclusivity of those that are targeted to attend such programmes, as well as considering the stigma associated with the programmes. Hlalele and Alexander (2012) question the authenticity of these types of initiatives, though, in creating conducive and inclusive spaces as well, thereby allowing opportunities for student ownership, participation and consultation in determining their own success. This study advances the argument that opportunities provided by access alternative models in opening up spaces for marginalised students should empower and emancipate and contribute to creating independent learners and the one element of social justice that seems to have been overlooked in these intervention programmes is the voice of the students concerned, and their lived realities.
Hlalele and Alexander (2012) further argue the principle of fairness, as one of the indispensable elements of social justice and the need for continuous reflection in advocating for the student voice. They identify that these reflections should consider:

a.   what the students get out of the experience, particularly their achievements;
b.   the opportunity to learn effectively without interference or disruption; and
c.   the respect and individual help they receive from their lecturers/tutors, and their access to all aspects of the curriculum.

A question that may arise from the ensuing debates above is whether or not and to what extent providers of the university access programmes (lecturer and support staff) are aware of practices, processes, rules, and regulations that perpetrate and perpetuate acts of social injustice and consider themselves not to be culpable. The challenge with regard to university access programmes is the balance that needs to be provided in relation to widening access and creating opportunities for ensuring success (Grussendorf, Liebenberg & Houston, 2004). On the other hand, Goduka (1996) is of the opinion that students originating from a range of social and cultural backgrounds portray different life experiences, educational opportunities, various expectations, needs, as well as academic potential. In line with the views of the latter, this study argues that the need for expansive access needs to be balanced with the most appropriate opportunities and choices available to support and guarantee the success of admitted students in higher education. It is acknowledged that admission authorities at higher education institutions are faced with daunting challenges such as increasing throughput rates and securing subsidies, however, this is argued here from a social justice perspective, and taking into account socio-political considerations (democratic principles as embedded in the South African Constitution). It is therefore necessary that students from historically and educationally disadvantaged contexts be incrementally admitted to institutions of higher learning. Furthermore, cognisance needs to be taken of the fact that these students' educational backgrounds might not have adequately prepared them for the demands of university life. The key question then is how higher learning respond to these demands, as well as what the role of these institutions should be, in not only providing, but also securing success to learners, especially from contextually disadvantaged communities. Hlalele and Alexander (2012), therefore; argue that increased access without increasing the chances of students succeeding academically might, in itself, be regarded as an effectively exclusionary practice. Shandler and Steenkamp (2009) highlight that the benefits of the access programmes should not be discarded, but rather, be counteracted, in a way that addresses the articulation gap between the students' prior learning and higher education's expectations. This ought to be done in order to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning and to exert a positive influence on the structure of mainstream curricula.

Access programmes have academic merit. Furthermore, the intent of universities to engage with the challenges associated with access and the creation of opportunities for success, are indeed encouraging. However, institutions need to be conscious of how they present the materials in relation to access and student in particular to previously disadvantaged students, how they use different racial demographics. That is, they should not allow for the impression that black students are the only individuals who seemingly do not qualify for full admission into university studies or

that have greater need for access than other groups (Hlalele & Alexander, 2012). The study by Hlalele and Alexander, though relevant, was limited to one institution. The study has its own strengths such as providing a representative sample and adopting standardised questionnaires and qualitative interview questions for data collection. The limitations of the study are its applicability in other institutional environments on current successes and limitations of access programmes, which may not be accurately represented, and the dataset likely itself limited to only to a black group of students.

The results from their longitudinal study (Wood & Lithauer, 2005) at the University of the Witwatersrand show that students who completed the programme tend to perform better in later degree studies than those who were directly admitted to them, suggesting that there is merit in the adoption of access programmes, but that certain practices in these programmes must be continuously reflected on and improved.

Pavlich, Orkin and Richardson (1995) assessed the effectiveness of access programmes and suggested that they depend substantially on:

a. Intra- and inter- programme management structures;
b. The development of sensitive alternative selection procedures, i.e. identifying the more capable students regardless of their grade twelve results;
c. Ensuring that disadvantaged students are catered for in non-academic ways (in terms of financial aid; counselling services, etc.); and
d. The extent to which faculties administration and student body perceive the programme as 'legitimate'.

It should be appreciated that, even though access programmes are intended to ameliorate deficiencies, they are not without flaws and may be deserving of certain criticism. Mabokela (1997) as well as Akoojee and Nkomo (2007) assert that access programmes unidirectional from a race perspective and are underpinned by the assumption that black students are somehow inherently deficient. Mabokela (2000) further argues that the deficiency model of labelling black students has the potential not only to stigmatise black students as inferior but also to impede the ability of universities to critically interrogate the relevance of their academic programmes.

Wilson-Strydom identify that individual conversion factors, such as physical condition (e.g. blind or sighted), academic ability, language ability, motivation to learn, life skills needed, etc. tend to

be over-emphasised by university bureaucracies in their attempt to support students, especially those from disadvantaged contexts, in gaining admission. On the other hand, social and environment conversion factors such as economic inequalities, rural versus urban, the national education system and policy framework, school contexts (financial resources, access to learning support material, quality educators, food and nutritional needs), the university context (availability of bursaries for certain study fields, marketing, etc.) tend to be misunderstood. This misunderstanding needs to be actively interrogated by universities when applying admission requirements. There are likewise non-academic factors that are critical in the success outcomes of students, where it cannot necessarily be guaranteed that students who perform well in alternative support programmes such as access programmes will perform better in subsequent degree programmes. This fact calls for the need for on-going student development and support. Essack (2012) suggests that universities need to be aware in terms of their admissions policies student placements that academic merit not only consider academic results but must identify all other considerations or dimensions in providing opportunities of entry when it comes to admissions. This is due to the disparities that still exists in the privileged and disadvantaged student profiles at university level as these institutions are still structured along lines of class, race and gender. Merit-based admissions policy tend to facilitate and reproduce historical and prevailing social inequalities (Essack, 2012).

2.3.2 The paradox of access, quality assurance and programmes

Increased enrolments and opening opportunities for access into higher education have implications for university quality of programmes, operations, and service delivery (Souto-Otero, dos Santos, Shields, Lažetić, Muñoz, Oberheidt & Puniea, 2016). Such challenges are confirmed in relation to the quality and standards of teaching and learning, and learner assessments, also in the quality of the full range of student services, technology support, counselling and career advice. It is within this access to education discourse that quality assurance has become one of the essential characteristics in open and distance learning (ODL) provision (DHET, 2014). Effah (2011) argues that, when aiming to address inequalities in higher education systems by allowing widening participation, this could be challenging for institutions because elements of compromised quality could emerge. In this regard, an expansion of academic infrastructure, experienced and well-qualified academic staff, including appropriate facilities, ought to be supplied. The situation therefore requires the role and involvement of the government to intervene for the supply and demand of additional resources and additional required funding.

Ding et al. (2021) identify that the dramatic expansion in enrolment without sufficient complementary input in teaching resources and finance negatively affects quality from various input factors. Faculty-student ratio, a key indicator of higher education quality indicating class size and faculty availability (Black & Smith, 2006), has led to decreases due to the shortage of the supply of high-quality professors in the short and medium term. The authors contend that decisions to expand enrollment must be met with the requisite investment to ensure that institutions and faculty can keep up with the pace of increased enrolments. However, access mechanisms cannot be considered effective if they are detrimental to quality standards, where universities, therefore, should introduce quality assurance frameworks (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007).

Swanzy (2018) citing Mohamedbhai, cautions institutions and governments that in their pursuit for increased enrolment at universities, these ambitions lead to "institutional massification" and results in a significant deterioration of quality, if the higher education institutions enrol a far greater number of students than their carrying capacity allows.

Swanzy further argues that, although these aspirations of redress, widening participations must be commended they need to be balanced with a commensurate increase in faculty to circumvent a deterioration in the quality of teaching and learning. Heavy teaching loads leave no time for research, lead to low staff morale, with poor salaries, making it difficult to attract or retain qualified faculty, where existing ones are either about to retire, or are heavily involved in university administration.

Central to quality assurance is the development of programmes that are responsive to students and societal needs, pegged against appropriate educational standards. The student-centredness principles in curricula positions curriculum design and development to be relevant and contextual to the students' expectations and experiences, the use of appropriate teaching, learning and assessment methodologies (Kuh, 2001; Koch et al., 2014). Openness centres as one of their principles of social justice rely on opening up spaces for those who would ordinarily or could not gain higher education admission. In such a space, it becomes critical to reflect on the curricula and associated dimensions to ensure that institutions upkeep the standards of programmes. It is argued by the authors that the interfaces of programme quality and students in open and distance education need to be alleviated to reach higher levels of engagement within the current discourse of open learning. Curriculum dimensions in open education ought to focus on curriculum design, content, pedagogy, and assessment strategies that are responsive to all student populations and their context, especially taking into consideration that the provision of teaching and interaction

with learning happens remotely. Therefore, the design and development of appropriate learning materials becomes central to and pivotal in the teaching missions of open and distance education institutions.

Curriculum factors ought to be designed so as to ensure curricula is focused to develop a student holistically in terms of general academic and cognitive skills, language proficiency, and capacity for self-directed learning (CHE, 2004) by providing contextualised, relevant learning outcomes commensurate with international benchmarks in terms of the institutional environment is central. Curricula and institutional quality dimension should further take into consideration the socio-economic conditions of student populations. A primary measure of quality in higher education is student learning (Tam, 2001) and the key question to consider in the context of this study is how ODL is espoused by higher education institutions, and the role of teaching, student learning environments, the outcomes, and impact of open education in promoting success.

Included in this responsibility of quality educational provision is a requirement to further equip students with knowledge and skills that are not only relevant locally, but also at global levels (Grau et al., 2017), modelled on the "glocal" higher education framework (Francois, 2015). This reaffirms that curriculum transformation is considered the main driver for solving challenges in higher education in particular, not only within the South African context but also globally (Grau et al., 2017; Abed & Ackers, 2020).

Across the world, the quality of distance education varies enormously. A similar situation of variance and unevenness almost certainly prevails within and across South African higher education institutions, with some institutions exemplifying good practice in every detail (from planning and materials development to one-on-one, work-based support in mother tongue), and others reflecting a range of poor practices, from weak learning materials to lack of appropriate student support. More specifically, Badat (2005) has identified the prevailing problem areas and worrying features of distance education practice that can be observed in South Africa include:

a. inadequate time spent on materials development. International literature in this area suggests a benchmark of a minimum of 10 hours of development time should be allocated for every one hour of learner material to ensure quality distance education materials;

b. teacher/materials-centred approaches that do not foster critical and analytical thinking skills;

c. little or no optional contact support sessions;

d. poor student support, and little or no formative assessment; and

e. inappropriate (low) levels of exit outcomes of programmes.

Badat (2005) further identified area of improvement that could be considered by the Quality Council for Higher Education, the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC):

a. a comprehensive set of quality criteria for distance education be developed and applied by the distance education community in South Africa;

b. distance education factors to be infused into the HEQC's audit and accreditation criteria and processes;

c. all distance education programmes, whether offered by dedicated distance education institutions or predominantly face-to-face providers, should be required to meet a set of minimum targets, and the HEQC should undertake periodic checks to ensure that this is happening;

d. the HEQC should select for review large-scale existing distance programmes with a particular programme focus, reach consensus on minimum targets through a collaborative process with relevant providers, and then apply the agreed minimum targets rigorously to all selected programmes; and

e. Distance education institutions wishing to offer new distance education and online programmes should be required to meet a set of criteria related to institutional readiness, especially in regard to the necessary systems such as technology support, and there should be a quality literacy initiative directed at prospective and current distance education students and the general public on what constitutes an acceptable standard of distance education provision. Such an initiative would work closely with student organisations and representative bodies and the media.

Reflecting on Badat (2005) who lists areas of consideration for quality standards in distance education, there seems to be minimal progress made to address the issue of poor quality in distance education in South Africa. The White Paper for post-school education and training (WP-PSET) released by DHET in 2013 identifies the long-standing goal of attaining meaningful support to institutions on the development and sharing of well-designed, quality learning resources that build on the expertise and experience of top-quality scholars and educators. The WP-PSET (2013) identifies the need to improve curriculum design the quality of distance teaching. The WP-PSET (2013) further identified a key area that needs immediate attention as the improvement of

the sector, and its ability to take forward the current transformation of distance education in South Africa rapidly in several ways:

a. by enhancing the course and materials design and development process, by ensuring that students are properly engaged in and supported during the learning process, taking into account the challenges that many of them will experience in coping with distance education studies, and by ensuring meaningful chances of successful graduation.
b. by the use of digital technology where appropriate to enhance access, improve communication and generally optimise student engagement.
   offer a limited range of programmes in order to ensure that economies of scale enable them to be delivered at significantly lower cost than face-to-face alternatives, but without compromising quality.
c. by expanding distance education provision by and encourage existing institutions and new providers that offer distance education programmes in the professional development of educators (such as for Maths educators at intermediate and senior phase) and lecturers (including lecturers for community colleges, TVET colleges and universities).

There exists an argument that most higher education provision in South Africa has converged to open and distance learning (SAUVCA, 2005) or towards the centre of the continuum of distance education or contact learning. This convergence is not however reflected in current practice as most educational provision still tends clearly towards only one of these two poles. Indeed, the nature of programme provision in distance education is still distinctly clustered near the distance education pole of the continuum. The impact of COVID-19 has, however, provided some impetus, and has obligated most of the education provision to apply multi-modal strategies in the delivery of programmes and move to online learning.

Quality curriculum design and teaching has continuously challenged distance education, in particular, the quality of the programmes and delivery thereof. Badat (2005) identifies that, since the promulgation of education reforms in South Africa, distance education still needs to confront the widespread perception of poor quality of programmes, learning materials and support, and low throughput and success rates relative to the face-to-face institutions.

The challenges confronting distance education seem to be long-standing, and it is now the case that multiple modalities of openness which have been accepted widely as the solution to the issues of access and participation, seem to ignore the long-standing challenges. The question

that needs to be confronted is, whether widening participation into an education provision that seems to produce quality standards in its provision and outcomes would be adequate for students who already enter higher education disadvantaged by their socio-economic status. Meaningful access to higher education cannot be achieved if the question of programme quality, teaching all its associated dimensions are addressed.

2.3.2.1 Why expansion if programme quality is poor?

Distance higher education needs to provide well-conceptualised, designed, and implemented academic programmes. This is to enable students to graduate as intellectuals, professionals, and critical citizens, who can think theoretically, analyse with rigour, gather and process empirical data, and do all this with a deep social conscience and sensitivity to the development challenges and needs of especially the developing countries of the world, largely found in the African continent. If distance learning is considered as a model of provision in advancing openness, then the method for delivery and its learning materials must be reconfigured, where course materials are made available online to students attending lectures, either on or off campus, followed by the employment of ICT, used optimally to support education provision. The use of ICT should become the primary vehicle through which the curriculum is communicated and reflect the practice of open and distance education. Unfortunately, all too often, there is a short line from institutions adopting a strategy of making its academic materials available online, to delivering any given programme through distance education when the opportunity presents itself, without much careful consideration and preparation related to distance programme design and delivery, quality assurance, student support, and cost of delivery (Badat, 2005). The use of ICT in the delivery of education programmes cannot be assumed to be a panacea for some of the problems that beset higher education. They would also not likely produce quality education per se, especially if little thought is given to the underpinning principles of learning and teaching particularly at a distance. New technologies can make poor-quality materials look better than they are, and in some circumstances online education can be a new form of correspondence education. While the promise of ICT for improving the quality and flexibility provision should be harnessed, it is important that the costs of the new technologies are not underestimated, and that their educational and pedagogic values are not overstated. Further to this consideration, Mahlangu (2018) argues that institutions need to realise that the lack of appropriate business models and educational models, make the delivery of quality study material or open contents developed, difficult to follow, and as a result, reduce the enthusiasm of students in their respective studies, thereby lessening engagement. In their model, Beblavý, Teteryatnikova & Thum (2015)

demonstrate the argument that an expansion model in higher education gravitates towards more low-ability students entering higher education, due to university admission requirements being decreased. This necessitates setting requirements that would maximise the pool of students to attract. They argue that expansion models come with the condition of a lower grade required for entry, but this condition does not necessarily act as a mechanism to make weaker students study to catch-up with more able students, without the required institutional interventions. Beblavý, Teteryatnikova & Thum (2015) in fact argue against a lowering of admission requirements, as they identify that it decreases the standard of the programmes in institutions and that in order to re-establish a quality guarantee mechanism in programmes, the entry requirements ought to be set at a higher level. This ensures that students enter into programmes with the requisite cognitive abilities to progress and succeed.

From the perspective of the regulation of quality, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the CHE, as the national quality-assurance agency to strengthen the criteria and standards that oblige close attention to be paid to programme design and pedagogic strategies in ICT-based provision. The CHE (2014) argues that if an online repository of course materials is simply a means of making lecture notes available (and students are expected to attend these lectures), the requirements for high-quality instructional design are reduced. In distance and online provision, this condition become pivotal to observe, especially when it is the only structured vehicle for learners to engage with the curriculum and the investment required to produce high-quality, distance education materials increase dramatically. Thus, slippage into distance education can be a problem when programmes and courses are offered without attention to issues of programme design and delivery, student support, cost of delivery, and quality assurance.

In order to facilitate learning, particularly at a distance, the role of appropriate pedagogical design of the course is considered crucial. Programme and pedagogical design provide guidance and lead to use of appropriate Instructional Design (ID) aspects in designing distance or online courses (Teo & Gay, 2006). Symons (2006) argues that intensive rigour in design and deliver of courses that better serves the needs of quality enhancement processes and provides a more thorough scrutiny, evaluation and reporting processes, and allows for the inclusion of historical knowledge of those in academic governance and course administration, particularly in programme approvals. Shah, Nair and Wilson (2011) assert that the student experience should be shaped by student judgment rather than the institution's summaries of teaching. They conclude that

institutions need a framework to understand student experience, not only across cohorts, but also across study modes and location.

Concerns with student learning and performance have led to issues associated with quality as the primary consideration for learning is expressed in terms of the quality of curricula (McBrayer et al., 2018). In order to understand the factors that influence decisions regarding course materials, it is important to consider systemic factors including cultural, social, technical, programmatic, and pedagogical infrastructures within higher education. Systematically addressing instructional design features is essential in course design, since it promotes an efficient and effective learning experience, while engaging and inspiring acquisition of knowledge (Obizoba, 2015). Students are able to experience learner-centred, self-directed, peer-to-peer and social/informal learning approaches (Bliss et al., 2013) on the appropriate standards. The principles of diversity and inclusion are valued across the higher education sector, but the ways in which these principles are translated into pedagogic practice reveals that the way in which programmes are designed and delivered is not always evident. This is particularly the case when it comes to the way in which these principles interplay with the challenges confronting marginalised students who enter higher education underprepared, due to poor schooling backgrounds (Forsyth, Hamshire, Fontaine-Rainen & Soldaat, 2021). Forsyth et al. (2021) further identify that students from disadvantage backgrounds may achieve admission to university without gaining full "epistemological access". Morrow (2009) supports this view and asserts that, without having full access to the implicit expectations and hidden curricula needed to succeed in a university, students are set up for failure. In South Africa, many universities recommend opportunities to students to transfer onto extended degree programmes that gives them more time to complete their degree, and to adapt to the expectations and environment of the university, thus providing extended curriculum time and completion time as means to assist students from poor education backgrounds. Therefore, relevance of such programmes as is the case for access programmes, content and adequacy are crucial, and these have been identified as information design features for any programme (Brady & Bates, 2016; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2013; Murray, 2013). "Learning Objectives", "Lesson Structure", "Flexibility" and "comprehensibility" are being identified as information design features for any programme. Adequate and commensurate instruction and delivery for any programme is vital for education as it supports the transfer of learning from one person to another. Students need to be provided with clear and concise instructions for them to adopt for the purposes of open distance learning (Weime, 2012). Clarity of instruction has consistently been linked with increases in student achievement, as well as the instructional clarity (Rodger et al., 2007). Therefore, the research has identified instructional

clarity, navigation structure of the curriculum, explanation and illustration, responsiveness, and knowledge construction as key instruction design features in curriculum of programmes. Well-designed programmes and assessments are arguably an aspect of course content and structure. However, a lack of clarity in design and assessment expectations and the need for clear and prompt assessment feedback are areas that continuously require improvement particular for students who study remotely. Deely et al. (2019) identify students' lack of satisfaction is association with assessment matters, noting that this is not a new theme in higher education, described by as some as a 'wicked' problem (Deeley, Fischbacher-Smith, Karadzhov, & Koristashevskaya, 2019). The development of high-quality distance education programmes requires the following central activities:

a. It involves thorough situational analysis before embarking on programme design and development;
b. It entails research on the student profile to inform development of the programme in order to also develop well-structured recognition of prior learning process for admission and accreditation of prior experience and skills;
c. It involves the acknowledgement and centrality of learning materials in distance education by providing well-developed resources for independent study, with carefully scaffolded conceptual knowledge and skills, that is learner centred, relevant and accessible;
d. It engages students, where necessary, in practical, work-based activities integrating theory into applied contexts;
e. It creates enough flexible opportunities for students to develop their conceptual understanding and reflexive skills;
f. It offers ongoing academic support, especially through a network of decentralised learning centres; and
g. It implements continuous, formative assessment strategies that may include a range of continuous, formative assessment processes including self- and peer-assessment and portfolio evidence of cumulative study activity and work-based tasks that have been undertaken and includes collaboration with key stakeholders in design and delivery, thus ensuring congruency with specific needs.

Institutions who accept and drive access and inclusion as a reform strategy should support and welcome all student quality expectations and learning as central to their activities. Moreover, access, retention and success are among principles that place more emphasis on the educational

programme meeting the needs of and supporting students as normally and as inclusively as possible, rather than the students being separated, excluded, or in any manner discriminated against by the needs of the programme (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2002). Petlane (2009) asserts that, instead of the student adapting to the programme, the programme should be ready to serve every student, regardless of what makes him/her unique. Bangeni and Kapp (2018) identify that student learning and retention is, at times, impeded by limitations of design within degree programmes, and by a lack of explicit intended purpose, pedagogy, and context of the programmes.

The lack of knowledge and understanding by academics and the way in which knowledge construction within the varied disciplines are connected to language, literacy, and numeracy practices (and in coherence within and between courses), further discriminates against the very same student whom institutions purport to support and advance in society. Deeley et al. (2019) further identify that students tend to experience courses within disciplines as discrete entities and struggle to articulate connection and cohesiveness in the programmes. Therefore, curriculum coherence needs to be espoused in content and design requirements in order for programmes to provide flexible degree pathways. The CHE (2013) supports greater explicitness, alignment between pedagogy as well as assessment within and across curricula.

The WP- PSET (2013) asserts that the provision for university studies at a distance is poised to expand, and that policy proposals are being considered regarding how this may be achieved in a planned and systematic manner that combines access with success. Likewise, proposal are being considered regarding how the growth of both ICT infrastructure and learning support centres can be utilised. The WP-PSET, however, locates the onus of quality and curriculum on the institutions themselves, where each institution must justify a particular programme offering in terms of its mission, quality standards, and assurance frameworks, including overall profile as well as the nature of the programme concerned. Issues of programme quality cannot be simply put at the doorstep of institutions without the requisite support. Programme quality seems to be viewed as isolated to challenges of access and widened participation, along with the policy frameworks as set by the South African government, which needs to recognise the interfaces of programme quality, student quality, and access, if the issues of success are to be meaningfully addressed.

The policy propositions of the PW-PSET (2013) encourages all universities to expand online and blended learning as a way to offer niche programmes, especially at postgraduate level, to those who are unable to attend full-time programmes, either due to their employment status or their

geographical distance from a campus. If this policy ambition is to be realised, and enable students to can progress up to postgraduate studies, support for institutions must be prioritised.

2.3.3 Discriminatory higher education system in South Africa

It is important to understand the South African higher education system and its contextual factors, especially the country's economy and society. The South African higher education sector, post-1994, when the country attained its independence, was built on a history of exclusion and inequality established by the colonial and apartheid system and promoted segregation and discrimination based primarily on race. The democratic government has, since 1994, made huge strides in the higher education especially through using policy that advocated for reform and in expanding access to the marginalised or poorest in society. There is, however, still perennial challenges confronting the system and in the South Africa's education system, these are part of a broader package of problems. These challenges, not disconnected from that reported across the world with capitalist imperative, have led to the Fallist student movements, involving protest and unrest, the anti-outsourcing movement, discontent over language policy in historically Afrikaans universities, and the decolonisation project driven by both academics and students (PSA, 2016). Addressing the challenges of the higher education system is a daunting proposition, as they are complex, and closely associated with South Africa's history that gave rise to its current state of localised neoliberalism.

The South African higher education sector includes 26 public universities, categorised as traditional universities (11), universities of technology (6) and comprehensive universities (9) (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2019). These universities are further classified into historically advantaged universities (HAU) or historically disadvantaged universities (HDU), reflecting the funding and infrastructure gaps provided under the apartheid regime. Since 1994, the need for social transformation along with the need to redress apartheid's inequalities was an integral component of broader social sustainability, which not only entails providing previously disadvantaged individuals with opportunities to improve their own circumstances, but also serves the overall benefit of society (Institute of Directors of Southern Africa (IoD), 2009), including at universities (Mouton et al., 2013). This process was given effect through various forms of legislation and regulation that stem from provisions of the South African Constitution, which followed numerous legislation reforms, including higher education.

Apartheid was founded on repressive legislation, a characteristic of the history of South Africa until its formal demise in 1994. The apartheid system's main thrust was to as permanently as possible, ensure the rightlessness of workers in particular, and the black population generally. Most importantly, these repressive measures provided a basis for understanding issues about the quality, levels, and possibilities for educational advancement of that majority, since it was an unequivocal policy of successive governments at the time to deny basic educational rights and opportunities to the black population. As a result, the legislation called Extension of University Education Act was passed in 1959. The act legislated the control over matters relating to the admission of students to the various types of universities established especially with a view to preventing access of blacks to the so called 'whites only' institutions and strictly directing students to institutions defined in terms of the particular racial categories conceived by the increasingly strident and racist apartheid government. The exclusionary educational policies were not merely the function of differential funding, but also in the racist cast of the curriculum, the poor training of teachers, and the absence of opportunities for acquiring knowledge in the science and technological fields in particular. The acquisition of skills in the sciences was regarded by the architect of apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd, as of no value for black people, who were regarded as no more than hewers of wood and drawers of water'. The effects of these policies are clear to see to this day and have had enduring consequences for the advancement of the levels of literacy and numeracy in general and science and technology in particular.

Apartheid created the conditions of servitude and destitution necessary for lowering the cost of working-class labour. Combined with this was the fragmentation and uneven development which as expected, failed to address the aspirations of the vast majority of South Africans. It was these among other complexities that involved institutions of higher learning that perverted reasoning of the apartheid regime that the post-1994 government set out to transform, required not in the least by the will-to-permanence that characterised the various mechanisms of the apartheid system.

Literature identifies South Africa as a diverse and stratified society with mainly four racial groups (white, black, Indian, and coloured people), which are diverse in their socio-economic status (Bunting & Cloete, 2004; Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Kubler & Sayers, 2010; Naidoo, 2004). As a response to the country's divisive history, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) was assigned in 1999 in order to assess and restructure the higher education institutions according to a more just and accurate representation of the majority of South Africans (Mzangwa, 2019). Following the reforms in higher education, the White Paper 3 of 1997 argues the purposes of higher education in the context of social transformation and the government's Reconstruction and

Development Programme (RDP) declaring that one of its critical purposes would be to meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and to make the best use of their talents and of the opportunities offered by society for self-fulfilment. It therefore identified education as a key allocator of life chances and an important vehicle for achieving equity in the distribution of opportunity and achievement among South African citizens. WP 3 of 1997 further elaborated on the contribution of education to the development and socialisation of enlightened, responsible to constructively develop critical citizens.

The context for the government post-1994 was to reform policies and introduce interventions shaped not only by the legacy it had inherited from apartheid, but also by the constitutional aspirations to transform the social system as a whole in ways that enhance the possibilities for social justice, human rights, and democracy. Legislation and the associated policies relating to both basic pre-primary education and higher education from early childhood to adult had to be reviewed to advance the aspirations of the democratic, developmental state envisaged by government.

The Higher Education Act of 1997 gave legislative authority to the intentions of the White Paper 3. It confirmed in particular the intentions of the White Paper with regards to the need to:

a. Establish a single co-ordinated higher education system that would promote co-operative governance and provides for programme-based higher education;
b. Redress past discrimination and ensure representivity and equal access to learning;
c. Provide optimal opportunities for learning and the creation of knowledge;
d. Promote the values which underlie an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom; and
e. Respect and encourage democracy, academic freedom, freedom of speech and expression, creativity, scholarship and research.

The Higher Education Act concerns itself with the establishment, governance, funding and merger of public higher education institutions, also established the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and its permanent subcommittee the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The CHE was given a wide range of functions which included:

a. Promoting quality assurance in higher education; through its permanent committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC);

b. Auditing the quality mechanisms and systems of higher education institutions;

c. Accrediting programmes of higher education;

d. Publishing information regarding developments in higher education, including an annual report on the state of higher education, on a regular basis; and

e. Promoting the access of students to higher education institutions.

In its initial proposal to determine the shape and size of the South African higher education system, the CHE recognised that the system should provide ever greater levels of access to learning, opportunities across a range of programmes, and entry points in a way that forms the critical basis for social justice and economic revitalisation. Its point of departure was its intention not to be paralysed by the legacy of the past. The CHE (2000) further recognised that all higher education institutions were products of segregation and apartheid, of the geo-political imagination of apartheid planners and questions of quality and standards, excellence, efficiency and effectiveness could not be left answered if the ambitions of higher education reforms are to be achieved. A significant part of the CHE's 2000 report argued the case for differentiation and diversity in the higher education landscape and noted that such was required in order to meet the wide-ranging challenges facing the system as a whole. It argued that this differentiation and diversity was necessary for a number of reasons. The CHE report identified that a homogenous and uniform system was undesirable in which all institutions would have exactly the same mandates and missions and seek to be the same in all respects. It further recognised that homogeneity and aspirations to sameness would not result in institutional equality. Second, a differentiated and diverse system would enable certain critical outcomes that are strongly related to achieving quality higher education, ensuring more meaningful equity for historically disadvantaged students, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the system, and meeting the development needs of society.

The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) published in 1997 outlined the framework and mechanisms for implementing and realising the policy goals of the Higher Education Act of 1997. The Plan was a critical document as it signalled for the first time the concrete measures to be undertaken towards achieving the goal of reconfiguring the higher education system, such as the:

i. establishing of the indicative targets for the size and shape of the higher education system, which included reference to the overall growth and participation rates, the institutional and programme mixes and the equity and efficiency goals of the system;

ii.   instituting the three-year rolling plan as a mechanism for the restructuring of the institutional landscape – referred today as six-year institutional enrolment plans;

iii.   emphasising of the importance of equity of access, particularly in respect of black and women students in certain fields of study, as well as in postgraduate programmes in general;

iv.   reflecting on the problem of throughput and graduation rates;

v.   emphasising the establishment of equity targets with respect especially to programmes in which black and women students are under-represented, and the development of strategies to ensure equity of outcomes;

vi.   proposing an increase in enrolments and participation rates to address both the imperative for equity, as well as changing human resource and labour needs;

vii.   identifying the need for increase in the efficiency of the system through increasing graduate outputs and established graduation rate benchmarks that institutions would have to meet;

viii.   recognising the need for academic development programmes to be funded as an integral component of a new funding formula and accepted the need to review the National Student Financial Aid Scheme;

ix.   linking redress in historically black institutions to agreed missions and programme profiles, including developmental strategies to build capacity, in particular, administrative, management, governance and academic structures;

x.   proposing the establishment of a single dedicated distance education institution to address the opportunities presented by distance education for increasing access both locally and in the rest of Africa. This was to be achieved through the merger of the University of South Africa and Technikon South Africa and the incorporation the distance; and Education centre of Vista University into the merged institution.

In 2001, a National Working Group (NWG) was established to advise the then Minister of Education on appropriate arrangements for restructuring the provision of higher education on a regional basis through the development of new institutional and organisational forms, including institutional mergers and rationalisation of programme development and delivery. In its final report, the NWG (2001) made two main recommendations:

a.   Universities and technikons should continue to operate as higher education institutions with distinct programmes and mission foci; 'comprehensive' institutions, the college and distance education sector and 'satellite' campuses; and

b. The consolidation of higher education provision on a regional basis through establishing new institutional and organisational forms, including a reduction in the number of higher education institutions from 36 to 21 through mergers and incorporations.

The NWG (2001) argued that the implementation of the recommendations would result in the fundamental restructuring of the higher education system and transform the apartheid structure of the system to lay the foundation for a higher education system that is consistent with the vision, values, and principles of a young democratic order. The Report also reiterated the National Plan's five policy goals and the strategic objectives, which are critical for the transformation and reconstruction of the higher education system, including the need to build new institutional identities and organisational forms through restructuring the institutional landscape of the higher education system and transcending the fragmentation, inequalities, and inefficiencies of the apartheid past, enabling the establishment of South African institutions consistent with the vision and values of a non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic society. Statistics released by the Department of Education (DoE) in 2004 identify the total number of students enrolled at institutions at the time as 737 472. Of these, the majority (482 595) were contact students, while some had registered mainly for courses in contact mode also 252 877 distance students, of whom 207 293 were at the UNISA alone. Black students constituted 74% and 76% of the contact and distance student population, respectively. Female students constituted 53% and 57% respectively of these categories, while the distribution of students between Science, Engineering and Technology (SET), Business and the Humanities was 29%, 29% and 42%, respectively. Institutional sizes ranged from almost 49000 students at the Tshwane University of Technology to 6045 at Rhodes University.

Table 2.2:   Higher Education System in South Africa

	Higher Education Institutions		Technical and Vocational Colleges		Adult Education and Training Colleges Community	
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
Number of Institutions	26	123	50	307	2795	150
Student Enrolments	975 837 188	97,487	705 397	115,586	273431	8,690

Source: DHET (2019) & PSA (2016)

Although the history of the system was well articulated in the various reports that later informed legislation, there is, however, much contestation about the value and quality of the system especially that national legislation should drive and play a significant role in producing the skills and knowledge that the country needs to drive its economic and social development. Table 2.2 above represents a skewed system that seems to contradict the ambitions of a developmental country that is proportionally slanted towards theoretical and formative studies at universities, as opposed to much needed concentrations at the college level, in particular skills development at technical and vocational colleges. It should be noted though that the statistical data available seems inconsistent in the various sources and reliability of these quantitative figures can be challenged. There are varying figures available that seem to suggest that data collection methods varied across the reports, and which suggest inadequate information management systems. The lack of accurate epidemiological data in this regard hinders the development of strategies and appropriate intervention action plans.

Further to the post-secondary education, skills training seems to be mostly a service provided by the public sector and is a major concern for all stakeholders involved. The National Development Plan (NDP) (2012) articulates the national goals of the country, highlighting that government ought to provide support for the higher education system by building a strong and coherent set of institutions for delivering quality education, by expanding the production of highly skilled professionals, by enhancing the innovative capacity of the nation, and by creating an educational and science system that serves the needs of society. Further to these distortions, zooming in on terms of graduate success rates and qualification types reported by Statistics South Africa, Stats SA (2017), the system continues to benefit the privileged and further marginalise those from the poorest societies in the country. STATS SA (2017) identifies that close to 47% of youth aged 20–24 years, who held bachelors' degrees or qualifications equivalent to NQF level 7, belonged to the wealthiest household income quintile. In comparison, only 7.4% of youth who held qualifications equivalent to NQF level 7 came from the poorest household income quintile. Furthermore, close to 36% of youth holding postgraduate degrees or qualifications equivalent to NQF levels 8–10 belonged to the wealthiest household income quintile.

Mathekga (2012) contends that the strategy by national government to absorb technikons and the technical colleges into the university system of the country meant that a lot of South African black matriculants, especially those who had an interest in studying vocational and skills-related courses as opposed to enrolling at universities, were left stranded and had to conform to the

environment designed for theoretical led studies. Against this backdrop and reform history of the higher education system in South Africa, Mathekga (2012) further argues that it appears that the democratic government has failed to determine the actual problem of students access and success in higher education and limited the diversification and differentiated of the sector, where students could have multiple options or pathways to advance access and participation. Instead, the government confused the matter of student access with the disparities in the manner in which higher education institutions were structured and managed previously.

The reformed higher education system continues to discriminate against those it seeks to advance its interest. This challenge is glaring and is among the most significant of challenges confronting the sector today, particularly the college system. So far, the college system in South Africa is inefficient and the quality of the provision and programmes remain undesirable in terms of standards and programme design and development. The White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (WP:PSET) of 2013 acknowledges this challenge, and locates the challenges of college system, as the DHET's highest priority is to strengthen and expand the public technical and vocational colleges and turn them into attractive institutions of choice for school leavers. The WP:PSET (2013) identifies that the total head-count enrolments at college level increased from just over 345 000 in 2010 to an estimated 650 000 in 2013; and plan to increase them further to one million by 2015 and 2.5 million by 2030. Key objectives of the DHET in the College sector include strengthening it, particularly improving institutional management and governance structures, developing the quality of teaching and learning, increasing college responsiveness to local labour markets, improving student support services, and developing their infrastructure. In 1997, government authorities seem not to have seen the danger of limiting choices for students who would have preferred to study at the former technical colleges and former technikons when they merged these institutions with universities (Mathekga, 2012). The likelihood is that, with the existence of a variety of higher education institutions, such as technical colleges and technikons, as was the case in the South African higher education system before 2002, students would have had chosen skills careers at their competency level, where better access to higher education would have been achieved overall, as opposed to the current situation, which relies heavily on university structured education (Mzangwa, 2019). The development of a responsive and accessible college system will allow for a greater reach especially for marginalised students from poorly serviced and disadvantaged societies, such as those in the rural parts of the country.

South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies in the world, with uneven distributions of social, economic, and cultural resources, that impact student access to higher education and their subsequent career choices. Higher education in South Africa continue to see disparities in access, and particularly whether the students are localised in terms of previous education backgrounds and whether they reside in urban or rural locations. With regards to residential areas of students, Timmis et al. (2021) assert that there are inequalities in access to resources in rural contexts, therefore, the contrast on economic and social change between rural and urban settings continue to deny especially students from marginalised rural settings access to knowledge. According to their qualitative study, Timmis et al. (2021) observe that rural students identify feelings of marginalisation, the lack of recognition of the importance of their knowledge acquirement, skills developed in rural communities, and their relevance to higher education, limited resources, including access to technology and the challenges faced by rural students in engaging with the curriculum, as a huge impediment to their educational development. They further confirm that in South Africa, inequalities in education are historically and spatially produced, and that, given that strategic policy location, potential and importance, open and distance education should be both designed and given the impetus to serve such students, who experience social and educational divides due to where the live.

2.3.4 An 'open' but closed distance education system

The meaning of 'open' has varied across global contexts, where its definition has moved away from that describing open for access (commonly used for open universities) towards that of open that relate more broadly to open education practices. Olcott (2013) asserts that today, the rhetoric is pervasive, and includes open educational resources (OER), open source, open systems, open content, open universities, openness, open entry and open access and that all purport to lead to the promise land of access and opportunity. Dos Santos, Punie and Castaño-Muñoz (2016) identify openness to education or open education as a mode of education provision at a distance using digital technologies to facilitate teaching and learning. Open education's intention is to widen access and participation to all who qualify to be admitted into higher learning, and further, to provide multiple access routes to those who do qualify, by eradicating barriers and providing accessibility to learning customisable for society. Open education provides multiple alternative pathways of complementing traditional routes of teaching and learning, construction, and dissemination of knowledge. Open education provides diversified access pathways to formal and non-formal education and links the approaches to learning (Dos Santos, Punie & Castaño-Muñoz, 2016). The growth of the open universities across the world and their embracing of new models

to complement the traditional self-paced, independent learning mode is evidenced in many countries, where distance learning has transformed learning into more flexible open education models driven by technology during the industrial and knowledge driven economy era.

Open education is considered an essential instrument to widen participation in higher education and central to its principles is social justice, a concern to which most open universities have attempted to respond. Badat (2005) argues that increasing diversity in student cohort is not characterised only by the student population, but is also by a variety of modes of delivery and learning/teaching methods, and the use of various terms to depict these: "contact education", "face-to-face education", "distance learning/education", "correspondence education", "open learning", "flexible learning", "mixed-mode", "telematic learning", "online learning" and "e-learning". It is evident likewise that the growth of technology has accelerated the infinite potential for expanding open education. Indeed, the progress and the potential for open education are undeniable, but Olcott (2013) asks if we are fast approaching a crossroads where the gains of open distance education are being outpaced by the realities of a highly complex, economically and politically diverse higher education landscape (McGreal, 2012; Olcott, 2012). At the heart of the open education is a synergy of core values that reflect the human embodiment of the educational enterprise access, including equity, equality, human rights, self-determination, diversity, tolerance, and the pursuit of knowledge (Cape Town Open Education Declaration, 2007; Peters, 2008).

2.3.4.1 The sustainability question of open distance education

Openness is viewed as a sustainable way for education provision as it operates through a model of cost reduction and the efficient use of resources. The open education model benefits institutions according to the use of open education resources, from sharing of resources, infrastructure, and technologies for promoting visibility of open and distance education institutions, who aspire to social justice in their mission, and to become committed to the discourse of inclusion as this aligns with the goals of opening access to as many people as possible. Primarily, these universities' missions aim to target the unreached and marginalised segments of society. Naidu (2017) identifies a growing convergence between open and distance learning (ODL) methodologies in their approaches to the provision of education. Open Distance Learning is defined as a merger of two concepts, viz. open learning and distance education. ODL is described as flexible learning and distributed learning focusing on the learner's preferred pace, place, and mode of study. Distance education is similarly situated with that of open learning, is a mode of

learning in which students and teachers are physically separated from one another. The flexibility of these modes of learning aims to overcome barriers in the delivery of educational services such as age, time constraints, geographical location, and economic situation in particular ODL promotes and enhances a more student-centred learning approach.

Despite the progress of open education over the past four decades, the recent trends that are re-shaping education place the values of social justice at risk, argues Olcott (2013). He goes on to point out that politicians and policymakers alike are driving economic and social agendas that, whilst politically expedient, are slowly eroding the essence of these values. Paradoxically, many of these public servants are the politically correct voices for open and distance learning as the panacea for resolving the immense challenges facing education.

The use of open and distance learning to expand access to underserved populations has been critical to growth of open education in both developing and developed nations, and OER access and use has been accelerated, because ODL systems afford ready access to information, knowledge, and education. At the same time, open education continues to open doors to higher education for many, competing economic and political priorities are closing these doors for others. Access, equity, and equality to higher education are being left at the doorstep (Olcott Jr., 2013).

2.3.4.1.1 *Open Distance Education in South Africa*

Open and distance education has gained much attention in the South African education system, where the number of students in the national education system in relation to the population size (59 million) is still far smaller compared to that of other middle-income developing countries. Distance education represents a major component of higher education provision in South Africa. DHET (2015) highlights that the government plans to increase university enrolment to 1.5 million by 2030 and ODL is identified pivotal to increase access, improve quality of the programmes, and reduce costs. Since 1994, the democratic government anticipated that there would be massification of the higher education system, and indeed sought to encourage this trend. This, together with international trends towards lifelong learning, resulted in high expectations in policy on the role that distance education might play across the system in increasing access and cost-effectiveness. The benefits of open distance education are well-documented and vastly studied, but the challenges and limitations seem not to be prioritised as matters in need of attention. Issues such as increased cost associated with infrastructure for provision; student access to devices and

connectivity; reduced budget from government, who is primarily the funder for higher education, inefficient administration and ICTs, unabated increments in student enrolment in certain fields of study, compounded by the impact of COVID-19.

Badat (2005) asserts that distance higher education has major implications for equity of access and opportunity for historically disadvantaged social groups, as well as for the quality of the provision, and its responsiveness to the social and economic issues that face society at this time. The ambitions of government to increase access appear to have discounted or downplayed the cost associate with such provision, where the quality and concerted efforts that it will require to ensure that this modality of education provision is maintained at parity with contact residential provision to assure parity of outcomes when students graduate. Du Plessis (2008) asserts that the financial logic of open distance education has, in many ways, been a response to education systems that are in crisis, because they are pushing against their speaking academic's ceiling capacity to manage the learning of incoming students. Such a posture to disregard not only the financial implications of delivery but the requisite capacities to carry large enrolment numbers ought to be contrasted against the quality of provision and success outcomes. If these requirements are disregarded, it renders the provision unjust, with weak success outcomes. The quality of open distance education can be the result of a variety of factors, both internal and external to an open distance learning organisation, for example, the levels of skills and expertise of staff, the resources available, weak or strong leadership, efficiency of its administration systems, and communication infrastructure in an institution and country (Du Plessis, 2008). Kim and Bonk (2006), however, argue for the benefits of this provision, and the way in which technology has played, and continues to play an important role in the development and expansion of online education. They assert that the use technology for teaching and learning has enhanced education provision and has had a positive impact on the education process. The adoption of technology has enriched the popularity for ODL among learners, as well as offering flexibility and accessibility. Similarly, ODL lecturers also found the usage the technology to have improved the interaction, as well as collaboration among learners (Kim & Bonk, 2006).

The adoption of flexible learning and teaching through infused technology has its benefit, but Badat (2006) argues that the greatest cause for concern in distance education are student retention rates, as well as a large proportion of students not completing their studies. In the 2001 National Plan, targets had to be reconsidered for participation rates and set for the first time for graduation rates and ratios for enrolment among different fields of study, thereby dramatically refining the notion of increased participation. With regard to access for groups previously

marginalised, the national plan emphasises broadening the social base of students, enrolments of previously marginalised populations, mature learners, and the disabled (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007). The role of open and distance education and its associated concerns about the quality of its education provision and programmes remains areas needing attention to this day. High-quality distance higher education is desirable, as it can be an immensely valuable tool for public and social good. It can contribute powerfully to economic development, to positioning South Africa to engage proactively and critically with globalisation, to social equity and justice, and to the building and consolidation of the developing democracy. In common with all higher education, the purposes of South African distance higher education is threefold, viz. higher learning and teaching, research, and community engagement. The challenge of unmanageable enrolment number requires serious consideration, which must balance the institutional skills and expertise of staff, the resources available, and the efficiency of the administration with adequate provision of technology support.

Further considerations which were glaringly exposed during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic were the social divides on access to technology and internet to facilitate learning. Letseka, Letseka & Pitsoe (2018) identify that these inequalities are cause for consideration of the role of e-learning for the poorest section of society, in a country where modern technological devises in the form of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and access to the Internet are perceived to be pervasive exposes these risks of this provision with increased enrolment numbers anticipated as a solution to access by government. Such a position is unsustainable and requires substantive reflection.

Formally, distance education provision in South African public higher education began in 1946, with the declaration of the University of South Africa (UNISA), as one of the world's earlierst correspondence universities. Distance education in the technikon sector developed from 1980 with the founding of Technikon Southern Africa (TSA), as a dedicated distance education technikon. Soon afterwards, in 1981, the newly founded Vista University opened a distance education "campus" targeting, in particular, in-service teachers (Badat, 2005). In addition, colleges of education in three of the four provinces in South Africa at the time began offering distance education programmes. The dedicated distance education institutions, UNISA, TSA, and Vista merged in 2004 to form a single, dedicated distance education institution dominated distance education provision. At the time, the three institutions comprised diverse enrolment numbers in 2001, with UNISA (58 833) and Vista (5 144) together formeing 73% of the declared distance education university with the combined FTE enrolments. Distance education constitutes

an undergraduate heavy programme profile, as the enrolments are concentrated principally at the first qualification level. Over 80% of FTE students in distance education are to be found at degree or lower undergraduate level at universities, with a larger concentration on lower undergraduate provision in distance education. Much of this lower undergraduate level of provision is in the field of education (65%) and is provided by the traditional face-to-face institutions. As a dedicated distance education institution, UNISA had to ensure that it offers provision that is affordable and cost-effective. Further to this, distance education is required in relation to reduce inequitable access to higher education and improve low participation by black South Africans in higher education, distance higher education expected to contribute towards enhancing access and equity and realising the government's participation rate target of 20% beyond 2011 at the time.

In terms of education provision and programme mix, open distance education is unfortunately concentrated in the social sciences and humanities, economics, and management sciences, as well as education and science. In the field of education, distance education enrolments are substantially larger than FTE students in face-to-face contact provision, where provision is poorly represented in science and technology and health fields (DHET, 2019). As a result, it is more difficult for distance education programmes to organise the practical work placements necessary for study in the sciences, where it is to be expected that enrolment proportions would be lower than in face-to-face programmes. Nevertheless, the current proportion of science enrolments in distance education is unacceptably low. The classification of UNISA as a comprehensive university, therefore, centres the provision of vocational and skills programmes as central to its mission, thus highlighting that if its comprehensive mission is to be achieved, students must be encouraged to enrol into the fields of Science, Engineering and Technology, with the requisite support to ensure that these students can be retained and succeed. A diversified student body is desirable if open distance education is to achieve its policy ambitions of the country as a developmental state.

In terms of the policy provisions in 2001, distance education is also required to engage with the government's commitment to shift the current predominance of students in the arts, humanities, and social sciences towards proportions of 40% of students in science, engineering, and technology, 30% in business and commerce, and only 30% in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. In order to achieve the ambitions of government over a period of time, distance education must confront the widespread perception of poor quality of programmes, learning materials, and support, along with low throughput and success rates. The WP:PSET (2013) asserts that one of its priorities borrowed from the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) in

1997 was that distance education ought to engage with Government's notion of creating a network of centres of innovation in course design and development, so as to enable the development of well-designed, high quality, and cost-effective learning resources and courses that build economies of scale. Badat (2005) argues that South African open and distance higher education should be oriented towards:

a. Providing access to individuals who either because of work commitments, personal social circumstances, geographical distance, or poor quality or inadequate prior learning experiences, traditional, full-time contact education opportunities are either inappropriate or inaccessible to them;

b. Seeking to expand access to higher education to significantly larger numbers of learners, and providing, in particular, opportunities for social advancement for historically and socially disadvantaged social groups through equity of access, opportunity, and outcome;

c. Concentrating mainly on large-enrolment courses so as to benefit from economies of scale, especially those contributing to formative degrees;

d. Developing capacity in distance education delivery through reflective practice;

e. Engaging in research and development of distance education practices and contributing extensively to the national debate in this area; and

f. Developing expertise and experience of highly regarded quality scholars and educators.

Badat (2005) identified these orientations 10 years after the country achieve its democracy, and yet, 15 years after his publication the challenges remain perennial. Letseka, Letseka & Pitsoe (2018) assert that, in almost three decades after the transition from apartheid to democracy, South Africa remains a vastly unequal society, in terms that cut across race, class, gender and socioeconomic status.

Distance education has observed major shifts in its provision and the employment of ICTs have been a major contributor in these shifts since the policy ambitions of 1997. The application of ICT in the teaching and learning process, otherwise known as e-learning, is described as an expanded digitalised, multimedia online learning environment that supports conventional face-to-face teaching and learning (Biehl & Prescott, 2013). Through e-learning, course content and knowledge sharing is made possible among individuals or groups of learners and their instructors, irrespective of their location or distance from one another. In other words, it is argued by Biehl & Prescott (2013) that e-learning has the potential to address educational inequalities and provide

a more inclusive educational environment (Maphalala & Adigun, 2020). In the context of South Africa, e-learning remains an important tool for the facilitation of virtual learning engagements that are self-directed and self-regulated. Interestingly, e-learning also enhances the motivation and active participation of students in the learning process (Sá & Serpa, 2020; Millham et al., 2014). Among other things, e-learning increases access to education via flexible and cost-effective approaches. While e-learning activities involve academics (teachers, tutors or lecturers) and learners, much effort is required by academics across the various institutions in terms of the learning objectives, learning content, processes, evaluations, and the assessment of the knowledge gained during the virtual teaching and learning processes. The implementation, usage, management and sustenance of e-learning approaches to education and learning in HEIs depend largely on the institutions themselves, on the infrastructure and teaching and support resources. Institutions need to frame themselves in the understanding that such a transition they ensure that no student is left behind, and adequate support provision are sustained as informed by the contextual conditions of the day. It is, however, ever unfortunate that access to technology still mirrors the disparities of the past, where previously privileged white minority populations continue to enjoy living standards comparable to those of the 'First World', while the previously marginalised majority of the African people continue to live in abject poverty (Letseka, Letseka & Pitsoe, 2018).

The CHE's *Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide* (2014) asserts that distance education is an evolving construct guided by the needs of students for more flexible provision of learning opportunities that allow lifelong learning to take place alongside other life commitments, such as work, family, and community engagements. Indeed, distance provision has greatly evolved over the past 18 months, due to the impact of the COVID-19, but the disparities of inequality were laid bare and the perpetual divides that remain require urgent attention. A sustainable model is desirable where students can be included in all spheres that require support provision for a sustainable ODeL model, as informed by the lived realities of the majority student cohorts. Prinsloo (2016) contends that, when provision by distance is considered, we often forget the impact of the low level of resources invested in distance education provisions. These include shoestring budgets by governments, the absence of training and staff development, and minimal investment in course development, technological infrastructure, study centres and support systems (Dhanarajan, 2001).

From the context presented by Prinsloo (2016) and Dhanarajan (2001) above, consideration of growing capacities requires a re-assessment of original intentions and value contributions, where,

likewise, consideration is required of the impact of perceptions and factors outside the locus of control of distance education institutions, along with changes in the educational landscape. The lived realities of many students are informed and impacted upon by South Africa's political landscape, which is marked by instability, uncertainty, and unpredictability. South Africa's adult unemployment rates, especially amongst its African people, who were previously excluded from socio-economic opportunities and privileges, remain at a record high of 40% in 2021.

In considering the sustainability of open distance education provision against these conditions, Prinsloo (2016) asserts that the political desire to increase the provision of learning to the marginalised masses, the economic desire to cut the cost of education while increasing participation levels, the social desire towards classlessness to ensure equity and equality of opportunity and educational desire to improve the relevance and quality of the curriculum should be continuously reflected and improvements explored for a sustainable future.

The DHET (2005) and CHE (2014) recognised that distance education requires continuous policy provision in order to guide its improvement and proceeded to introduce policy guidelines in 2012 and 2014 respectively to devote entirely to the use of distance education in higher education programmes. The DHET (2005) further recognised that distance education has been given expression generally in higher education policies, plans, legislation, and executive decisions, but not explicitly, and that its importance and complexity warrant an additional separate policy statement. It therefore should follow that policy is met by adequate execution and institutional conditions must be met with the requisite tools, so as to sustain student support, retention, and success. Failure to do so, and a one-dimensional policy that focuses to widen access and increasing enrolments without support provided to the staff, improved administrative efficiencies, access to technology, and strong leadership, does not meet the conditions to provide this necessary support. To remain relevant open distance education in South Africa, institutions must focus on delivering a more personalised student experience, while at the same time, giving each student the best possible educational and cultural experience mediated through technology. Universities must strengthen their blended online and offline learning capabilities, which enable them to cater to a broader range of students, and these students be provisioned with the requisite access to technology, devices, and better internet connectivity as the slow-paced uptake of ICTs, where inefficient administration services will render this education provision unjust and dissonant to its social justice ideals.

2.3.4.1.2 The case of the University of South Africa (UNISA)

UNISA is a dedicated, comprehensive, open distance learning higher education institution in South Africa, identified as one of the world's largest open and distance learning universities, it plays a significant role in contributing towards the pool of academic offerings in South Africa, and to a large extent in other SADC countries (UNISA Strategic Plan: 2016-2030, 2015).

UNISA accepted and approved an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Policy in 2008, which provides the rationale and parameters of ODL, where it further refined its online offering and aspirations and approved an ODeL Policy in 2019, giving prominence to its intent in moving to distance and online provision. The institution's open distance learning character results in many students registering, who would not have had an opportunity to enrol in higher education otherwise. Its student profile is therefore different from that of student profiles of contact and residential higher education institutions, and its ODeL character implies that curricula should be carefully planned and structured so as to ensure a reasonable chance of success for students, ranging from those that are under-prepared, but with potential to become sufficiently prepared. UNISA's ODeL policy states that the institution places the student at the centre of the entire learning process from the moment the student enters the university, by registering, through to graduation. In its Curriculum Policy (2020), the institution identifies unique qualities in its statement on 'graduateness' for students who study in an ODeL context. It subscribes to student-centredness and requires that students are seen as the main foci of the educational process, and that they are supported to take progressive responsibility for their learning and research. The pedagogy employed should enable successful learning through rich environments for active learning, and ought to establish links between students' current meanings and contexts, and the new knowledge to be constructed, as well as encourage independent and critical thinking. One of these qualities, as articulated in the policy, is that students ought to be critically aware of their own learning and developmental needs and future potential, thereby highlighting that students should take ownership of their studies, and be independent, affirming that engagement in their studies ought to be driven by the student, where the university will endeavour to provide an enabling environment for them throughout their learning process.

UNISA, as an ODeL institution, uses interaction to promote student success and motivation, mainly through its online platforms, such as MyUnisa, which is the name of the university's learning management system. In its 2011-2013 Institutional Plan (IOP), UNISA asserts that listening to the "student voice" is central to its commitment to a student-centred approach. The

IOP further articulates that the important element of this approach is the notion of the student as an active participant in his or her learning, rather than a passive recipient. As an institution, it recognises that the understanding of learning experience from the perspective of the student is therefore a critical component of the student-centred learning approach and enables a more nuanced insight into both the inhibiting and enabling factors to student success and satisfaction. UNISA, according to its curriculum policy, commits itself to being responsible for identifying students at risk who may need additional support, where each of its colleges must determine the needs for extended curriculum and/or other academic support as appropriate. This serves students who, after proper pre-registration assessment, require extra support and additional modules.

The ODeL model at UNISA subscribes to a social-constructivist learning philosophy, which sees learning as the outcome of several situated and dynamic connections between students and the curriculum; the resources which support the curriculum; lecturers and tutors; administrative and professional support functions offered by the institution; student peers who are also studying for the same degrees; as well as other peers, community members, and the broader society beyond (UNISA ODL Policy, 2008).

The policy prescribes that all modules at UNISA should be designed to include:

- student-content interaction
- student-student interaction
- student-instructor/tutor interaction

Student-content interaction is built into the design of study materials through the Framework for a Team Approach (FTA) Policy. Student-student interaction is built into the design of the Learning Management System (MyUnisa), through discussion forums, amongst others. Social media can also be used to promote student-student interaction, as determined by the Social Media Policy. Structured student-instructor/tutor interaction is facilitated at UNISA through the tutor model that is available to all students.

At institutional level, UNISA promotes student engagement through approaches suitable for distance learning. Optimally engaging students is, however, a challenge, due to inadequate reach of students in some of the rural arears of the country, access to technology and connectivity, where the institution continues to seek alternatives to ensure that students are provided with

necessary support and an enabling environment appropriate to their learning requirements. Two projects in particular have been implemented since 2012 to support students and increasing student success rates. These projects are the Unisa Tutor Model and the Shadowmatch Project, discussed briefly below. In 2017, the university further launched the First Year Student Experience Project. The projects will be discussed briefly below to give high level insights in the institutional conditions that support and track students.

2.3.4.1.3 The Tutor Model

The Student Support Framework of UNISA recognises tutorials as a necessary element of student support. Oversight of the student support framework is vested with the Student Success Forum (SSF), which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Tutor Model. The SSF oversees the implementation of the student success and support frameworks and monitors impact and:

a. ensures the cross-functional, institution-wide integration and coordination of all initiatives to enhance student success at undergraduate and postgraduate levels;

b. develops detailed procedures for student support and ensures compliance with these; and

c. monitors the dissemination of student and institutional intelligence to all relevant student support role-players.

This approach provides a working forum for in-depth engagement with reports, analyses and tracking system information and alerts, as well as the sharing of information and best practices across the institution and identifies possible new student support measures.

The UNISA tutor model has the following design features:

Essential interaction (student-content; student-student; student-tutor) is built into:

a. The tutor interaction specifications are developed by the Department of Tuition and Facilitation of Learning, in collaboration with the colleges, bearing in mind factors such as NQF level, tutor capacity, viability, and learning outcomes. The development of these tutor materials is integrated with curriculum and learning development, using the Senate-approved framework for a team approach. Modules in which face-to-face tutorials are held are selected, based on a number of variables, such as the number of students in a particular geographic area, and availability of appropriate venues.

b. Modules at UNISA are designed using various ODL pedagogies, aimed at achieving a variety of outcomes and purposes. Tutor and student interaction thus have different emphases in modules, and this results in a variety of tutorial formats, such face-to-face tutorials in selected modules, tutorials targeted at developing practical skills, and tutorials aimed at supporting academically under-prepared science students, and various forms of e-tutoring.

The implementation of the model was approved in 2012. The design of the model allows the level of flexibility associated with the requirements of academic discipline, where academic departments, through their colleges, can design appropriate implementation models that are aligned to their disciplinary requirements.

Every student enrolled in each module of UNISA is provided with a tutor. The tutor's tasks include the promotion of student interaction with the study materials, as determined by the module requirements and academic department. The tutors are required to facilitate the construction and building of knowledge and the testing of this knowledge through interaction with students. They are, further to this, required to assist students in improving the quality of interaction that is prescribed for each learning unit, to assess student interaction in determining and enhanced student experience by liaising with the academic support coordinators and academic department in addressing students' concerns.

The model prescribes that the student and tutor ratio be determined, from time-to-time, by the university, taking into consideration factors such as the tutor capacity, viability, and learning outcomes. The tutoring format is online (e-tutoring), supported by a range of asynchronous and synchronous technology platforms. The university provides students with access to technology and connectivity at all its regional learning centres, and UNISA campuses. Students are allowed to choose the type of tutoring they prefer, for example, should they choose face-to-face tutoring, they must be able to attend the prescheduled classes.

2.3.4.1.4 The Shadowmatch Project

In 2010, a comprehensive framework for enhancing student success was approved at UNISA. The aim of the framework has been to integrate and implement the student success framework,

in alignment with UNISA's emerging Student Support Framework. A key component of the student success framework is to assess students' academic and non-academic readiness and risk.

The Student Success Forum (SSF) considered the shadowmatch instrument at length and approved its usage for a limited pilot period. Shadowmatch is a sophisticated, user-friendly, internet-based worksheet, originally designed to enable companies to precision-recruit new students or employees, and to develop new and current students or employees optimally for that specific environment. The instrument aims to establish why certain skilled people failed in particular contexts, while being highly successful in others. A further aim is to predict an individual's propensity to succeed in performing a specific task, under specific conditions. If a student's habits and behaviours do not match the benchmark of top performers in their area of study, they are at risk of not performing to their full potential, resulting in possible failure. The instrument can also be used in the academic environment, to increase the probability of student success, retention, and throughput. Shadowmatch research indicates that there exists a high correlation between student marks and top performers when it comes to habits and behaviours.

All processes in the Shadowmatch system are automated. Once the student numbers and e-mail addresses are entered into the system, students automatically receive the e-mail link for the assessment, after which, upon completion, reports are automatically generated and sent to the students. Links are provided to the support material the students can use in self-study or may be facilitated through the tutor system. The system also uses role-based access-control, which allows several levels of access. This allows academic departments to access reports about student completion of the assessments, students identified as at risk, as well as student participation in the intervention programmes in real time. The departments and faculty can monitor students throughout the year and provide additional support where necessary. The student can thus work independently in order to improve his/her chances to succeed in his/her chosen field of study; this is a key requirement for distance learning with minimal supervision.

The university found the instrument to be unsuitable for all UNISA programmes, where it can only be applied to certain programmes. This is because the shadow match instrument is based on a behaviourist model. There were further concerns that the instrument alleges that there are different habits for each qualification type, whereas the SSF members do not think that study habits across fields are as diverse as they are alleged to be, where the extent to which this diversity exists could not be ascertained (SSF Report, 2011). The instrument includes an optional component that identifies the habits students need for different fields, and match these with

individual student scores. This data is then used to advise students as to which fields would be suitable for them. The SSF found this approach particularly problematic for a number of reasons, with one pertinent issue being that students may be advised away from the science disciplines, which are a strategic focus of the university. The report further found that psychometric testing might not be valid enough to make such predictions, where the test used might, furthermore, not be sensitive enough to the variety of students enrolled in UNISA programmes. It was agreed that this component would be utilised for the purposes of the pilot. UNISA thus approved the instrument to be used as a pilot amongst fifty-thousand students.

The two projects highlighted above provide an indication of UNISA's commitment to the engagement of its students in support of the student support framework. Engaging students in distance learning context can be rather challenging, since they are located remotely and engage in their academic activities at different times, due to flexibility of the tuition model. In this context, students are encouraged to evaluate their learning content and provide feedback to their lectures and tutors, but the rate of response may not always be consistent and differs from module to module. The tutor model is proving to be, by far, the most successful project according to the university reports in terms of academic engagement and feedback through tutors. The institution, however, still seems to struggle with high volumes and appropriate lecturer-to-student ratios in terms of high student numbers. In this regard, allocation of tutors in certain disciplines has been a serious concern, due to a dire shortage of qualified tutors meeting each discipline criteria.

2.3.4.1.5 The First Year Student Experience (FYE) Project

The FYE projects was launched in 2017 to provide support for students entering ODeL for the first time for the duration of their first-year at the institution by increasing communication between the institution and students during crucial points in the student learning journey. The project focuses on integrating the broad range of support services so as to ensure timely and relevant support for students during their first-year of study, supporting collaboration efforts between various departments, across both academic and support staff, to ensure effective support within the FYE programme.

At the core of the project is the optimisation of retention and success strategies among first-year students by providing support that takes cognisance of the unique profile of Unisa's first-year students and tailoring support accordingly. The project plays a critical role in the sense that it was strategically set up and commissioned to conduct data-informed research that reveals the nature

and extent of retention and dropout and design, implementing research-based remediation interventions. The project further monitors the status and wellbeing of the first-year student cohorts and facilitate the dialogue between students and institution.

In terms of its reports, UNISA further struggles with low success rates, and high attrition rates particularly at first-year level, where a more focused approach to student support initiatives is required through student engagement. There appear to be some successful projects, such as the Tutor Support model that are still being strengthened, but certain project failures are noted as well. A proposal in 2011 to provide and strengthened student voice into academic modules was unsuccessfully implemented. This was reported to be due largely to a lack of awareness in some academic disciplines regarding the importance of involvement, not only in academic matters, but also in the provision of platforms by means of which to allow students to voice their perceptions of their own learning from a social and societal backdrop.

There is significant recognition that innovation is required if the institution is to achieve its objectives of the student success framework. As Gale & Tranter (2011) assert, any framework for action by change agents ought to be both theoretically and conceptually robust, as well as informed by data or 'evidence'. Such frameworks should stimulate the reflective practitioner to think about their own context, about the nature of the innovation being considered, and about how these aspects fit together. The key finding, as reported in the student evaluation project, is that very few student module evaluations are undertaken, and the practice is uneven across colleges. Furthermore, the survey found that there was a general absence of analyses, records, and reports, and a repository of evaluation data. This prevents the integration and synthesis of results from various evaluations, to achieve a more coherent and comprehensive one, in support of the student support framework of UNISA. The institutional context is pivotal to this study in order to better understand the conditions at institutional level of interventions aimed at supporting, retaining and promoting student success. Higher education institutions need to continuously evaluate their learning environments, and how they are constructed, in engaging and supporting students, in particular those marginalised student populations.

2.3.5 Unsatisfactory university settings and conditions

Societies have changed dramatically over recent decades and, as a result, universities are facing new challenges, such as eradicating exclusionary practices and eliminating barriers to learning by promoting more inclusive paces and practices. César & Santos (2013) assert that learning

environments ought to endeavour to experience diversity as a celebration instead of a hindrance and recognise that this is not as straightforward, leading some educational actors to face fear, frustration, conflict, and doubt. They contend that it is relatively easy to articulate the ideals associated with inclusive education, where it is much more difficult to turn these into institutional practices (César & Santos, 2013). Inclusion in university setting must be conceived of as a never-ending process and as a way of living, not only in universities, but at a macro-societal scale, including interpersonal relations. In their quest to provide personalised student experiences, universities continue to face a myriad of challenges in the pursuit of social justice, equity, and provision of learning opportunities to marginalised student communities. There are a number of factors that are closely related to studying that influence students' success, like the quality of lecture attendance, course attendance, and pass rates attending preliminary, student engagement and responsibility, time spent on studying examinations, and how university settings can respectively promote or hinder student success (Dragičević, Bach & Šimičević, 2014). Carolan, Davies, Crookes and Carolan et al. (2020) contend that there are certain limitations at universities, in the sense that traditional student success metrics are not properly considering institutional settings and dynamics confronting of the student populations. Carolan et al. (2020) identify examples of these dynamics, to include students not being academically prepared, part-time versus full-time learning, student desires, and the academic goals of students, who just want to complete a degree, further assert that learning environments need to consider additional lived realties of their students, whether on or off campus.

High levels of poverty in South Africa, increasing student debt, and zero per cent fee increases imposed on universities due to the Fees Must Fall movements and inadequate NSFAS support, present certain funding challenges (Sengupta, Blessinger, Hoffman & Makhanya, 2019; Barac, 2015). Infrastructural limitations, such as limited facilities and high student-to-lecturer ratios, further inhibit access to and the successful completion of university studies.

Access to certain courses based on stringent entry requirements further limit access to many, particularly those from disadvantaged and rural community areas in South Africa. Institutional conditions are pivotal to the enablement of provision and the aspirations of a diversified student population. Badat (2005) posits a number of considerations from policy perspective to consider in providing education provision, particularly provision at a distance. These include institutional differentiation and roles, the institutional location of distance education provision, the development of expertise and resources, the financing of provision, its quality assurance, and the monitoring and evaluation of the performance of distance education institutions. Badat (2005) further

identifies a wide range of dimensions of institutional characteristics, including directional differences with respect to missions; functional diversity relating to the relative emphasis on teaching, research, innovation, continuing education and other services; student profile in terms of socio-economic, ethnic, international, gender, religious, full-time/part-time learners balance; staff profile; governance structures, institutional target groups, subject and programme range, funding sources, internal reward structures, and quality assurance systems.

It is important for institutions to position themselves structurally to facilitate and delivery programmes, especially taking into consideration the varied student body in institutions. According to McGregor (2004), the way in which institutions organise spaces in educational settings produce particular social relations, perpetuating inherent past legacies. Spaces constructed through social interactions are enacted and continually created and recreated (McGregor, 2004). Abed and Ackers (2020) identify the adoption of several mechanisms and policies to achieve successful institutional transformation. These include a change in the institutional culture at universities; diversifying the mode of delivery, including the introduction of distance education, as well as the establishment of transformation offices and charters at each university; proactive leadership; providing additional access and success opportunities to students from previously disadvantaged communities; Africanisation and decolonisation of the curriculum; the use of quota policies; changes to language policies to represent South Africa's eleven official languages; increased dialogue on transformation using institutional forums; university collaborations for funding and tutoring; as well as new funding models and research on the effective use of state funding and improved accountability.

An exploratory qualitative study by Abed and Ackers (2020) involved a thematic content analysis of publicly available annual reports in order to identify and categorise transformation interventions disclosed by South African public universities. It has its particular strengths and limitations and nationally representative materials, analysed from a wide sample of universities who are required by law to produce these reports annually and the use of the *ATLAS.ti* software to identify and categorise transformation interventions disclosed by the public universities. In contrast, the limitations include absence of views of the actual inhabitants of these students, staff and academe, where the study presents a weak relationship and one-dimensional institutional view on its achievements and intervention. The study does, however, provide useful insights overall on the transformation.

North (2006) argues that poorly designed social structures enable material inequality, thereby sustaining the inequality distributions by race, class, and access. Fraser (1997) asserts that the increasingly sustained inequities undermine redistributive efforts that seek to improve the well-being of marginalised student populations. Fraser's perspectival dualist framework views recognition and redistribution as co-fundamentally and mutually irreducible dimensions of justice. Institutions need to consider several factors in their structural settings, but further reflect in their interactions with student cohorts who enter their institutions in pursuit of learning and attainment of degrees. Race plays a role in internalised and institutionalised inequities. Prejudices and stereotypes in teaching students of colour are well documented. Irvine (1990) for example, reviewed a vast body of literature on the issue and concluded that teachers generally believe that black students have less potential for academic achievement than white students. Owing to low expectations, black students tend to receive less attention, encouragement, praise, time to respond, positive response after a correct reply, eye-contact, and more verbal and non-verbal criticism. Irvine (1990) further argues that these actions constitute favourable ingredients for learned helplessness, as students subject to this academic milieu are excessively devoid of affirming attitudes and tacitly condone deficit overtones. According to Villegas (2007), challenging deficit perspectives and promoting affirming views of diversity is a precursor to building teachers' disposition to teach all students equitably. The attitudes of lecturers in their bias contribute to university settings that are not equal and result in different student experiences in learning. Mataka, Bhila & Mukurunge (2020) draws on Fraser's (2016) notion of misrecognition in relation to social justice, recognising the importance of inclusion practices, values, and norms, as well as students' prior experiences and histories in university teaching and learning. They further highlight the ways in which students' prior experiences and their cultural worlds inform their learning and the relationships they forge in higher education. Caetano, Freire & Machado (2020) further identify awareness and agency of teachers in universities is needed to enact conducive environments, change as well as the need for structural and institutional change.

The PSA (2016), however, recognised the achievement in some respects in the current configurations at universities, where they identify some positive aspects to transformation, in particular, the shifting patterns of gender. They identify that universities, in general, have been vital engines of gender empowerment and that in the 23 out of the 26 universities in 2013 all but three enrolled more women than men in 2013, leading to a gender imbalance in favour of women. Walker and Mathebula (2020) identify those ways in which family and community influence students' identities, agency, and sense of belonging, as they transition into and through higher education. Mataka et al. (2020) conclude that, in order to foster a relational approach to success

and retention through students' agency and sense of belonging, universities cannot conceptualise students as coming from decontextualised, ahistorical contexts (Timmis et al., 2021). The point here is that students are not passive spectators, or indeed deficient in any way, but they have assets that they might mobilise if the conditions of possibility at universities allow (Walker & Mathebula, 2020). The recognition of diversity necessitates responsive education institutions. Critical elements of such education provision, include, inter alia, self-reflective analysis of one's attitudes and beliefs (Novick, 1996); caring, trusting and inclusive learning environments; and respect for diversity. Fraser (1997) suggests the existence of diversity panels or committees in the creation of democratic social institutions. According to Lauder, Brown, Dillabough and Halsey (2006), Fraser's diversity committees can challenge the presumption of entitlement and highlight the reality of institutionalised oppression. By engaging in informed constructive discourse with people who are different from diverse backgrounds, where students are forced to examine how power, privilege and dominance are manifested and reinforced. Such discourse communities can provide the context in which students learn about the origins of stereotypes and prejudices, thereby recognising and experiencing the need for change (Lauder, Brown, Dillabough & Halsey, 2006). The realisation of academic achievement and preparing students to live as critical citizens requires learning environments that embrace heterogeneity and inclusion. Heterogeneity provides all students with access to a rich and engaging curriculum (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan & Lipton, 2000).

How students traverse through institutional structures and discourse can enable or hinder their progress and retention (Bangeni & Kapp, 2018). The transition from secondary to higher education is complex for most young people, particularly in South Africa, as it demands a reconstruction of their belonging and forging new identities in urban spaces, due to the lack of local educational institutions and employment opportunities (Cuervo, 2016). Cuervo (2016) maintains that uncertainty and barriers are harder to negotiate for some people from marginalised or from rural backgrounds (Timmis et al., 2021) and university learning becomes a negotiated space. By their very nature universities are negotiated spaces, from academia negotiating the existence of their disciplines to administration negotiating the use and distribution of scarce resources, compliance to legislation from government, upkeeping infrastructure, maintenance in an era of declining funding, and allocation of subsidies from government. Social justice has also been characterised as fighting against and altering institutionalised inequities, discrimination and injustices that benefit few students and harm many more (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002). This characterisation portrays education as a vehicle that is amenable to perpetuating both exclusionary practices. Therefore, careful consideration must be given to alternative admission pathways for access purpose as these interventions pose a challenge in respect of legitimacy of

already marginalised students from poorer communities and available resources, they have access to in pursuant of their studies. Further to this, such interventions can create perceptions of acceptance to mainstream programmes irrespective of performance/merit and achievement of academic standards required for progression, particularly in previously only black institutions where the environment can be highly politicised to advance the interests of a few. Questions relating to the proper distribution of benefits and burdens at universities have always posed a challenge for education institutions.

2.3.5.1 Inadequate ODL University Settings

Open and distance education delivery methods require due consideration as the key premise behind distance education provision in order to expand access by combining methods of educational delivery that can lead to economies of scale when applied to large numbers of learners (Badat, 2005). Universities need to continuously reflect on the operational and structural models that facilitate educational delivery reflecting on imperatives of access, retention, support and success outcomes. Institutional models need to consider the South African social structural conditions, including the imperatives of social equity and redress, the necessity to erode the racially class defined high-level occupational structure, and the realities of basic schooling, which result in considerable numbers of students entering higher education with underdeveloped content knowledge, academic competencies, and skills. Open and distance learning is premised on promoting low-cost higher education and whilst having many "open" characteristics, where ODL has never really been viewed in the context of "free" or even low-cost education options often associated with some components of the open education movement. Badat (2005) identifies that providing education at a distance can become a catalyst to spark awareness of the centrality of remote and open quality learning and curriculum delivery, as well as the importance of integrated student support, advance planning, preparation of all aspects of programme delivery, and the importance of having good administrative infrastructure and systems in place. All these aspects are necessary conditions to an institution that aspires to be open, and to provide distance education.

Information technology has also become a key catalyst in providing education at a distance mediated through technology. The digital economy has challenged universities in teaching and learning processes, based on the reconfiguration of technological and digital skills demanded by the labour market (Brynjolfsson & Kahin, 2000). As the digital economy moves forward,

universities are increasingly affected by adapting to the rapid teaching and learning advances in technology such as e-learning programmes, massive online open courses (MOOCs), digital campuses that connect devices and virtual reality, telepresence education using artificial intelligence, as well as other technological experiments developed at university level (PWC, 2018). Information communications technology (ICT) is currently a highly sought-after component of every higher learning institution. E-Learning encompass multiple technology and internet-based learning platforms that require computer literacy from both learners and instructors. eLearning has been upgraded such that it offers more flexibility and comfort as instruction and learning occurs any time, and in the users' preferred environment. However, for most African universities, the challenge in the use of e-Learning is exasperated by excess number of students, poor infrastructural development, and poor access to the internet off-campus. The urgency to address difficulties was exposed further by the pressures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Institutions had to move rapidly to provide resources and technology tools to students to enable them to proceed with learning activities, while lectures can proceed to teach and interact with the students remotely. The COVID-19 pandemic forced faculties and students into a sudden transition to emergency online education, without prior preparation or guidelines. Faculties rushed to convert their curricula to an online environment, and online pedagogy had to be overlooked. Institutional readiness for remote, online provision was thus exposed and placed central in how universities would adapt urgently to online teaching and learning in response to the challenges of the pandemic.

Howlett (2009) defines online learning as the use of electronic technology and media to deliver, support, and enhance both learning and teaching and involves communication between learners and teachers utilizing online content. The advantages of using online learning in medical education include improved accessibility of information, ease of standardising and updating content, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and enhancement of the learning process, wherein students are motivated to be active learners.

The transition to online learning has been particularly challenging and frustrating for students and teachers in developing countries who have access to limited resources. Indeed, low internet connectivity, limited access to technology, low resources, and lack of financial support creates major barriers that inhibit synchronous interactions and learners' engagement in online education. Fricker (2017) argues for universities to be aware of curriculum injustice and embrace curricular justice (Connell, 1992) as well as epistemic reciprocity (Fricker, 2017), through bringing different forms of knowledge into dialogue with each other, particularly crucial for decolonial rethinking and

redesigning of curricula. Access to technology resources can be great barrier to optimal learning conditions, thus further entrenching social injustices in how students engage curriculum. Students in the interventions of access programmes are not immune to issues of curriculum injustice and institutional practices that hinder their progress relating to their poor academic achievement. This serves to cultivate individual and institutionalised practices, rooted in low expectations, deficit thinking, marginalisation, and cultural imperialism, against a diverse spectrum of students (Kose 2009), particularly those from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. Kose (2009) further calls for those in authority to embrace social justice by facilitating a moral dialogue that strives for high academic achievement and affirming relationships with students from all backgrounds and ability levels (Shields & Edwards, 2010), as well as deepening one's epistemological awareness, value orientation, and practice toward social justice (Brown, 2004).

The somewhat unintended consequences, such as labelling and stigmatisation that students may face contribute to exclusionary practices. In order to achieve inclusion for fair co-existence, duplication in terms of resources, the attitude of teachers in such programmes, curricula issues, as well as matters relating to the interaction of students as members of learning communities, continue to pose a challenge to create, develop, and maintain learning organisations and programmes that embrace social justice.

2.3.5.2 The ignored value proposition of students in university settings

Institutions need to engage with the lived realities of students and construct learning spaces that embrace diversity and promote learning environments that seek to meet the expectations of students in reflecting their structural configurations, operational efficiencies, and adequate provision of learning support. Institutions need to make the effort, as it is usually the students who are making all the effort to adapt, yet there are many opportunities for the learning environments, curriculum (learning, teaching assessment) and content to be both revised and adapted. This process must involve the on-going interrogation of those knowledges that are privileged and those that continue to be ignored and marginalised.

Students from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds bring prior knowledge to university systems that be harnessed to create more equitable paths to walk along with those who come from varied backgrounds and need to be included in these systems such that they are not disadvantaged in gaining access to university, and that the knowledges gained from their

communities can be integrated into and enrich the experiences of all those who study and work in higher education.

Higher education institutions need to ensure that groups are not disadvantaged and to promote their participation and success. Bangeni and Kapp (2018) advocate for strategies promoting good relationships and managing behaviour; where conscious and unconscious discrimination are not tolerated; where raising achievement for all is the motivating and driving force, as well as where students are treated fairly with dignity and respect (inclusive and socially just practices). The longitudinal study by Bangeni and Kapp (2018) involving over 100 students, 10 collaborators and five research assistant locates meaningful synergies in university students' experiences across disciplines. The study provides solid research outcomes in terms the method of observation, which entails that a researcher does not have to interfere with the subjects. The study delivers authentic lived experiences of the student over a timeline of eight years that is entirely dependent on the respondents. The strength of the study is its effectiveness in determining variable patterns over time and that it used a sample of a diverse cohort of students. The one limitation, however, is the propensity of respondents who would unknowingly at times change their qualitative responses over time due to the period for data collection. Bangeni and Kapp's study provides useful findings for universities to ponder and the use of longitudinal data sets for supplementary institutional context.

Mountford-Zimdars et al. (2017) suggests that universities with an embedded, institution-wide approach that engaged senior managers, academic staff, professional service staff, and students as stakeholders and agents in the differential outcomes agenda, were most promising in decreasing progression gaps, thereby strengthening student retention. Mountford-Zimdars et al. (2017) identify student–staff partnership, also known as students as partners/co-creators/co-producers, as a way of thinking, doing, and working in higher education that places value on the diverse expertise that staff and students bring to the co-creation of teaching and learning, governance, and quality assurance (Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten, 2014). Common examples of partnership within curricula include students partnering with teaching staff and peers to co-create assessment criteria or learning resources.

Bangeni and Kapp (2018) contend that the need for individual recognition, albeit within social interactions and the resultant relations of diversity as a social justice imperative, ought to permeate learning environments, programmes, and practices. The value of partnership for historically marginalised groups can be made, given the evidenced benefits of partnership for both

students and staff, including increases in confidence and sense of belonging; development of leadership skills and critical awareness of power; as well as capacity to navigate conflict and develop psychological resilience; and empowerment (Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard & Moore-Cherry, 2016; Mercer-Mapstone, Dvorakova, Matthews, et al. 2017). They further identify that emerging research indicates that partnership can create spaces for exclusionary practices to be countered by working in ways that can redress disparities and that despite partnership benefits, there are several inclusion issues in partnership spaces.

Evidence shows that students most likely to engage in partnership are the elite, and those from privileged social locations and identities, who have the prior confidence or networks to self-select or be selected for involvement (Mercer-Mapstone, Marquis & McConnell, 2018). Partnership, then, faces similar challenges to other active learning and engagement strategies such as 'high impact practices', which present disproportionate barriers to engagement for those students who arguably benefit most (Kuh, O'Donnell & Schneider 2017). One of the most common negative outcomes of partnership is the reinforcement of power asymmetries between students and staff, indicating that without careful attention to power, the practices used to address power imbalances may achieve the opposite (Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017). Research shows that the majority of institutionally-supported student–staff partnership schemes are mostly administered externally to the assessed curriculum (Lewis 2017). Extracurricular engagement activities are key to developing self-identity, social networks and career prospects/pathways and yet students from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to engage, due to external demands such as commuting, employment, or care responsibilities (Stuart et al., 2011). This can be particularly true for students who study through distance and who are remotely located. These barriers have implications in increasing differential outcome gaps as well as for deepening socioeconomic societal divides. Understanding how and why such disproportionate barriers to engagement arise and potential ways to overcome them, therefore, becomes critical.

By exploring the relationships within university learning spaces and student engagement, universities can continuously reflect on factors that promote learning, retention, and success. These factors include:

a. capabilities that are necessary to achieve the university's core strategies (i.e., teaching quality, research quality, and administrative quality);

b.   sensing and identifying opportunities and transforming routines to become more innovative and proactive);

c.   the expected university outcomes from these strategies (i.e., prestige in teaching/research, attraction of local/international students, and diversification).

Understanding whether all students and staff have equal access to and outcomes from such priorities are important in ensuring that well-intended initiatives are fostering the success of all, rather than reinforcing patterns of systemic oppression.

Bangeni and Kapp (2018) assert that learning and identity are intertwined and that negotiating access to higher education for students in South Africa means negotiating at the intersection of race, class, linguistic and gender positions in relation to home and basic schooling. This confirms that the socio-economic status of a student entering higher education identifies a predisposition of whether a student will succeed and persist in learning.

Universities need to engage with their student populations and promote the student voice as their operational fabric as a lack of an inclusionary culture of rigorous in their operations and strategic planning will perpetuate the existing patterns of social injustice. This suggests the need for a consulted policy with their students that promotes adequate information and decision management systems connected to reporting of outcomes, particularly the management of distance education in their student enrolments, retention strategies, and success rates. Tyrrell & Varnham (2015) assert that the term student voice, by its very nature, incorporates a rich diversity of perspective, and should be expanded to include more meaningful engagements in university decision making systems, as opposed to just being limited to quality assurance and curricula activities. Students as a key stakeholder in higher education deserve the affordance of self-determination in their education as well as a serious level of input and influence across the fabric of the institution. The spread of representation should begin at a faculty level and filter up to the highest of governance within an institution to successfully develop a culture (Tyrrell & Varnham, 2015).

2.3.6 The negative outcomes related to student experience, retention, and success

The student experience locates the existence of a relationship between students and academics, institutions and academics, and higher education institutions and government. The term student experience homogenises students and deprives them of agency at the same time as apparently

giving them 'voice', as it describes the comprehensive study body experience without apportioning the contextual student experiences and their experiences as they negotiate the learning journey through higher education. The currency of 'the student experience' has long been prevalent in higher education and can be traced to its establishment within institutional discourses, through a range of quality assurance and enhancement policy initiatives relating to teaching. The 'student experience' is inextricably connected to the assumption that all students have the capacity for free rational choice, unimpeded by the limitations of social and cultural background or financial resources. Student experience is, instead, a broad and complex variable, argues Coates (2005). Sometimes discussions about quality higher education provision overlooks the holistic student experience by primarily focusing on learning and teaching, and at other times, the student experience is too abridged (Sabri, 2011), especially within league tables and public policy, where students are seen as a homogenous group (Darwin, 2020). The literature on attrition and completion also recognises that the factors influencing student retention are as unique as the students themselves, their exo-experiences, and the institutions to which they belong (Astin, 1998; Naylor et al., 2018).

2.3.6.1 Lack of agency in student experience of marginalised student populations

The experiences of marginalised student populations who are mainly black and come from disadvantaged communities that are poorly resourced are well-documented, but their journey and lived experiences are minimally understood by higher education institutions, as most universities are still configured around inherited legacies, with connotations of elitism mainly resembling cultures in which they were established. Heinisch (2017) identifies that marginalised students are more likely than other students to choose less academically selective institutions, far removed from campus, complete fewer credit hours, work more hours, have lower grades, and participate in fewer university sponsored extracurricular activities (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Forbus et al., 2001; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella & Nora, 1996; Thering, 2012). These students often experienced lower levels of engagement on campus, leading to reduced feelings of belonging, higher levels of depression and stress, and resistance to using campus services (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Lowery-Hart & Pecheco, 2011; Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman Jr., 2014). Unfortunately, marginalised students are particularly intimidated by the idea of seeking out faculty members for support. As a result, their ability to respond to faculty expectations is lower (Collier & Morgan, 2008). This student status often means that students have a lack of information, information technology resources, fail to recognise the importance of relationship-building with professors, and are continuously surprised at the rigour required from

them in their selected courses (Schultz, 2004). Lack of role models reduced the ability of these students to decode the jargon used at universities (Ardoin, 2013). The fact that some of these students are located in rural areas means that they have a lack of experience with large towns, large campuses, and the diversity that occurs on large campuses. Students are unaware of the need to build relationships to cope with their new surroundings, and support systems were slow to develop (Schultz, 2004).

These issues affecting a student's level of engagement, contribute to the unique experiences of rural first-generation students, who are described in the South African context as previously disadvantage, but it is argued in this study they continue being disadvantaged and marginalised in the higher education system, from the institutions they study, into policy frameworks that are poorly executed or poorly designed in their intent and purpose.

Universities do face the pressure to expand enrolments and provide access to diverse students but find it difficult to recruit and retain marginalised student populations, mainly black and coloured students (Ishler, 2005). These marginalised black students are significantly less likely to graduate due to lack of family support, financial strains, poor academic preparation, and other barriers (Orbe, 2004, 2008; Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006). These obstacles make it difficult to negotiate learning at college or university level and affect how they transition into graduation.

Institutional legacies of discrimination have meant that societal systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, and homophobia are replicated within higher education (Bhopal, 2018). Curricula have also been known to be disproportionately white, heteronormative, and patriarchal, sending the message to some students that only certain ways of knowing are valid (Jester, 2018). The result of this lack of diverse representation in curricula can be alienation, marginalisation, and differential outcomes for students from marginalised backgrounds (Abou Elmagd, Tiwari, Mossa & Tiwari, 2018), and may also provide explanation as to why marginalised groups (e.g. Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students) report lower levels of academic satisfaction in national student surveys (Mountford-Zimdars, Sanders, Jones, Sabri & Moore, 2015). Mercer-Mapstone, Islam & Reid, 2021). The academic barriers experience by student from poor socio-economic backgrounds mainly relate to the institutional culture of universities, which allows for policies to be disregarded and transformation to be inconsistently applied, significantly impacting the ability to consistently achieve, monitor, and report on student progression and success outcomes (Abed & Ackers, 2020). Tibbitts & Keet (2017) and Veltri & Silvestri (2015) found that despite funding being considered a major tool to achieve social transformation, decreasing

government funding to universities, together with a concurrent increase in student demand has presented a serious challenge. Notwithstanding this financial dependence on state subsidies, public universities remain one of the main vehicles for addressing student access and success, by combatting dropout rates and promoting throughput levels (Manik, 2015).

Students from poor backgrounds and rural contexts in South Africa, the majority of whom are black, continue to be marginalised, despite post 1994 democratisation policies designed to address equity, access, and retention in higher education. Moreover, their lack of academic achievement continues to cause consternation. Kirst (2008) strongly argues that socio-economic background is a determining factor in students' access and participation in higher education. Students from a poor social background in African countries such as South Africa are mainly black and find it difficult to gain access to higher education. The few students who manage to gain access find it difficult to participate up to an acceptable level, since they are usually ill-prepared as the result of poor basic primary and secondary school education, and the less-resourced background from which they come. This then raises the question of the quality of education received by students from poor social backgrounds, when compared to those who are from a well-resourced social background. Naidoo (1998), therefore, citing the (National Commission on Higher Education [NCHE] 1996), is of the view that the pursuit of quality relies on maintaining and applying academic and educational standards. These standards are critical in determining the success outcomes of marginalised students, as they allow for parity of both opportunity and outcome, but the question of student experience and support is then central to how these students are assisted in realising success from these opportunities. Understanding the students' experiences in terms of their learning can be quite complex, however. This is because students come from different social backgrounds, while both their approaches to learning and the way in which they interact with academic activities differ. Strydom and Mentz (2010), writing on *Focusing the Student Experience on Success through Student Engagement*, argue that higher education institutions need to focus their perspective of the student experience through particular lenses that would assist not only the institutions, but also the sector, in order to maximise students' chances of success, with one such lens being student engagement. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) conducts periodical cohort study analysis to better understand the South African higher education sector in terms of quantitative indicators of drop-out and throughput rates. In 2019, the DHET released a report on the 2000-2016 First-time Entering undergraduate cohort Studies for Public Higher Education Institutions. The DHET (2019) identifies that, in comparing the dropouts and throughputs between contact and distance modes of tuition

of students in the four-year degrees, students studying through distance tuition have a starkly low throughput rate over 10 years of study. The report notes that 42.2% of students entering in the 2008 cohort in contact mode had graduated after four years of study, 69.3% after six years of study, and 78.2% after 10 years of study. In comparison, 22.2% of students entering in the 2007 cohort in distance mode had graduated after six years of study, and 40.0% after 10 years of study. Of the 2000 first time entering cohort after the first year of study, 23.6% of the students undertaking their programmes by contact mode of tuition drop out and after 10 years 42% have dropped out. In comparison, the study finds that the dropout rates for students undertaking their tuition by distance mode is extremely high, with 56.8% having dropped out after the first year and 80.1% after year ten. For the 2008 cohort entering for the first time, there is an improvement that is identified in the dropout rates after the first year of study, as well as year 10, with 16.6% of the students in contact programmes having dropped out and 46.5% of the distance students in their first year of study and 27.7% and 70.4% of contact and distance students having dropped out respectively after year ten. The 2019 cohort study report reveals in unambiguous terms that students entering into distance higher education, while gaining access to higher education, have a very low chance of success.

2.3.6.2 Barriers to student engagement

There are various social and academic factors identified as barriers to student engaging and succeeding in higher education. Supporting curriculum is but one academic factor that may be positively or negatively contribute to attracting students closely aligned with institutional mission and hence disposed to feeling higher levels of belonging and overall satisfaction when their learning experiences affirm their personal faith (Van Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020). This is consistent with Tinto's (1998) view that student learning and persistence occurs where there is an alignment of values between student and provider. O'Keeffe (2013) observes that institutions must create a welcoming environment and foster interaction between students and faculty to achieve positive student experiences. These institutions would benefit from suggestions in the literature to maximise opportunities to create community amongst students and lecturers, regardless of learning mode, by availing themselves of the unique opportunities of online learning spaces, as suggested by Arasaratnam-Smith and Northcote (2017). Recommendations by Garrison & Anderson (2005) Akyol & Garrison (2008), Garrison, Anderson, & Archer (2001) Garrison & Cleveland-Innes (2005) about how to design humanised learning environments, characterised by teacher presence, cognitive presence and social presence, may also be enacted in future iterations of online and blended courses at institutions.

Positive student experiences are vital to maintaining high levels of retention and completion. Hamshire et al. (2017) encourage providers to use student narratives in addition to numerical performance indicators to better understand the complex expectations and experiences of a diverse student population. However, while investigation into the student experience is frequently recommended (Krause & Reid, 2013), there is limited research on qualitative analyses (Grebennikov & Shah, 2013) and much of the qualitative data gathered in past decades still requires an understanding of the nuances of the higher education student experience.

All students should experience meaningful, relevant learning experiences and development of skills; all of which are characteristics that support retention (Styron, 2010; Thomas, 2012). Although the present analysis cannot establish a causal link between challenges of student engagement, it is reasonable to surmise that the content of programmes, structure of the courses, the quality of lecturers and support staff are likely contributors to students' sense of persistence and development. Students' feedback regarding development in their personal engagement through studies goes some way to explain students' overall satisfaction with their educational experience and their contexts above the national view above the average retention statistics. Institutions must ensure their unique mission is integrated into their course structure and content, and factor expectations of the students in their learning journey. If students feel their personal values are being recognised and developing through studies, institutions may potentially see an increase in students' overall satisfaction with their educational experience (Hamshire et al., 2017).

Grebennikov and Shah (2013) identify that institutional administration, facilities and technology infrastructure do influence students' sense of satisfaction and they further identify that the students' learning experience is not disembodied from the institution, regardless of learning mode even in distance education. Baron & Corbin (2012) assert that as much as institutions invest in the quality of lecturers and academic support, the results from their study indicate that student-centred investment in administrative, technology support, facilities and overall infrastructure cannot be discounted, and it needs to be emphasised that lack of support in these institutional imperative students identify as socio-economic barriers to their learning. One of the most significant impediments to learning that students identify is the barrier to accessing financial support and the high financial dependence of universities on state subsidies. Additionally, social barriers including disproportionally high levels of poverty hamper the ability of students from previously disadvantaged communities to access, remain and be successful at university. These include difficulties in travelling to and from universities; limited access to quality primary and

secondary school education, affecting their ability to cope with the academic standards at universities; poor mathematics literacy among both teachers and learners; limited access to computers and the internet; lack of "black" mentors; as well as differences between mother tongue languages and the language used for tuition (Matsolo et al., 2018; Crous, 2017; Tibbitts & Keet, 2017; Barac, 2015; Nongwa and Carelse, 2014; Rensburg and Botha, 2014; Mdepa and Tshiwula, 2012).

Academic performance appraisal criteria need to include performance indicators that are not only related to the quality of lecture delivery, but also the quality of on-going follow-up and support these are dimensions further cited by students in the study by Hamshire et al. (2017). Secondly, if performance in assessments is the indicator by which students are evaluated, then assessment clarity, quality and timeliness of feedback must be the indicators by which lecturers are evaluated as well. Based on the pervasiveness of assessments as a 'needs improvement' theme in their study, this point cannot be overstated. The responsiveness of administrative staff and appropriateness of student learning spaces must be considered in any institutional plan to improve the overall student experience. Institutions need to understand the expectations of the students and their lived experiences to appropriately respond to and understand the needs of the students as a critical stakeholder. A critical factor to consider as identified by Heinisch (2017) is that the parents of most marginalised student populations first lack the knowledge of academia and their support is crucial. The socio-economic and family setup from where these students originate identifies that these students came to university because their family had always expected them to attend, in part, because their parents wanted more opportunities for their children than they had themselves (Heinisch, 2017). These expectations place a lot of demand on the student, and the anxieties associated with such failure can put severe strain in their learning journey. Institutions must prioritise the experiences of students and conditions under which they learn, as these students' insights provide for a wider conversation on increasing retention through improved student experiences. In their interview-based study, Heizenrader (2013) posit relationships in retention strategies and student conversation in their self-determination in learning and advance an argument that institutions must embrace the complexities that result from bringing unfamiliar voices and diverse perspectives together in the discussions of retention.

2.4 POOR STUDENT RETENTION AND HIGH ATTRITION (DROP-OUT) - CONTINUING CHALLENGES FOR HEIs

Complex societal issues continue to lead a trend of inequity and differential outcomes for higher education students from marginalised backgrounds in terms of academic success and retention (Singh 2011). Students who are the first in their family to attend university mostly who come from disadvantages backgrounds identify barriers to full participation in university life. Forsyth, Hamshire, Fontaine-Rainen and Soldaat (2021) identify that students who are first in their families in higher education are more likely to drop-out and achieve lower grades in their final qualifications than students whose families have previous experience of higher education. There is widespread recognition that higher education institutions must actively support commencing students to ensure equity in access to the opportunities afforded by higher education. This role is particularly critical for students who, because of educational, cultural, or financial disadvantage, or because they are members of social groups currently under-represented in higher education, may require additional transitional support to 'level the playing field'.

2.4.1 Failure to implement transitional support programmes

The challenge faced by institutions to provide meaningful support in a way that is integrated into regular teaching and learning practices and reaches all commencing students is critical (Nelson, Quinn, Marrington & Clarke, 2012).

There is a high level of recognition of the fact that institutions of higher learning are obliged to actively support students and ensure equity in access to the opportunities afforded by higher education. This role is particularly critical for students who are members of social groups currently marginalised in higher education and require additional transitional support (CHE, 2010). Transitional support is not viewed by institutions separated from other institutional support dimensions and this must be considered by institutions in terms how such support is differentiated from the normal support measures currently employed for all students. Transitional support can be designed to cater for different student demographics, and in particular, those who are identified as being at risk of drop out, such as those marginalised, as well as students from poor backgrounds. In their study, Berumen, Zerquera, and Smith (2015) identify transitional support though diverse in nature and scope is critical in retention strategies as support for underserved students those from low-income and first generation in college backgrounds to transition through higher education. Student retention programmes must recognise the varied support needs of the student body and this can be achieved in the better understanding of student's lived realities and not assumed or perceived realities.

Student retention strategies must also be foregrounded in issues of institutional governance both nationally and internationally because of its associated dimensions to student success that enable government funding to be shaped through the optic of access and success outcomes as understood by the students in their participation in such institutional structures. Institutional decisions systems shape the operationalisation of a number of access dimensions such as admission policies and selection criteria, where such dimensions can benefit from well-considered voices from the students. There exists a correlation between openness, access, and stricter enrollment conditions, as identified by Curran (2017), Jones, Bonnano, and Scouller (2005), and Lau (2003). Coley & Coley (2010) stress the importance for institutions of implementing carefully designed monitoring and preventative procedures that can track student progress, identifying at risk students, and putting in place conditions which may support and inspire student success. Tinto (2006) identifies the attributes of good practice and effective retention performance, and Coley & Coley (2010) defined these attributes as successful campus-wide involving retention programs where the institutions have determined a clear methodology to define and identify 'at-risk' students, to reach out to students with inappropriate resources and support, and to track and monitor student engagement.

A critical component of student retention is student support and engagement on how the institution deploys its resources and organises the curriculum and other learning opportunities, including support services, so as to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and desired outcomes of persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation.

Tinto (2006) indicates, however, that while student tracking and retention has become big business for researchers and educators alike, there has been no major change, upwards or downwards, in student retention rates internationally over the past 20 years. This implies that either student attrition has always, or always will be, a reality for higher education institutions, due to their nature as unique learning environments (Tinto, 2006).

The discourse of student retention needs to be explored so as to understand better the dimension of student success, the unique needs of students and influences of targeted student support as they transition through their learning journey. Weuffen, Fotinatos and Andrews (2021) argue that students are overarchingly viewed through deficit discourses, yet at the same time, are constructed as consumers of a particular product, in the form of academic programmes (Rumble, 2000). They contend that this view or posture creates a contested space, where students' personal circumstances and academic abilities are understood as fixed concepts, preventing

retention, whereas at the same time, ideas of consumerism position them as active agents in their own academic journeys. These ideologies reduce institutional responsibility in order to address student retention/attrition but position the success or failure of a student to transition/integrate into the higher education culture. There is a consensus that learning in higher education environments is a unique experience of higher order thinking, where integration into the social and academic culture is essential for student transition (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013; Gale & Parker, 2014; Zepke, 2015). In such discourses, student success is considered dependent on the individual's ability to navigate personal circumstance, so they can assimilate successfully into expected practices of the university; these being attendance at lectures/tutorials/workshops, familiarisation with learning management systems, and content-specific courses of knowledge.

The literature indicates strongly, however, that factors relating to attrition are multifaceted; they involve both personal circumstances and university culture (Bettinger et al., 2013; Lau, 2003; Mellor, Brooks, Gray, & Jordan, 2015). While some students exit higher education due to personal circumstances beyond institutional control, such as finances, poor student-institution fit, or changing goals, others withdraw because the institution has failed to create an environment conducive to the learning and educational needs (Lau, 2003). Such factors of attrition continue to be supported by current literature (see Bowles, Fisher, McPhail, Rosenstreich, & Dobson, 2014; Jury et al., 2019; Mellor et al., 2015).

Understanding the pressures a student has in their life, including university, as a critical factor influencing student engagement is critical (Kahu, 2014), where, from the student's perspective it is particularly pertinent to speak back to neoliberal discourses that seek to shift concepts of success at university as the sole responsibility of students. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (2010) provides a lens by means of which an institution can look in how to improve retention and success. This is an instrument through which data was collected from more than 1,450,000 undergraduates at nearly 1,200 colleges and universities since 2000. The instrument, though somewhat old, being released in 2011, was constructed around five benchmarks of effective educational practice. These are: the level of academic challenge; active and collaborative learning; student and faculty interaction; enriching educational experiences; and a supportive campus environment, giving a well-rounded lens by means of which to identify mechanism to improve student support and engagement, and improve retention. Universities across the globe have implemented retention programmes as means to support marginalised students and students identified to be at risk.

The well-being of students as this pertains to students' self-concept and confidence in their academic abilities is identified as the main tenet upon which university retention programmes are focused (Weuffen, Andrews & Roberts, 2020). This is because, as Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali, and Pohlert (2003) emphasise, students with high levels of self-esteem are better able to adjust to university life, both socially and academically, which are factors identified as important for university commitment. However, the bulk of literature in this field calls for further research of retention and attrition to be conducted from the student perspective. The importance of facilitating students' academic and social development simultaneously is evidenced by Mellor et al. (2015), who argues that high-level cognitive awareness leads to an increase in self-regulated learning activities, with a reported 10 percent lower attrition rate across the cohort study of their research. Gale and Parker (2014) identify that institutions continue to construct the challenges of student retention and attrition at the doorstep of the students, without instead creating meaningful transitional support programmes, and that institutions further locate the solutions on the part of the students themselves. This posture enables institutions to negate responsibility for addressing student attrition by legitimising provision of remedial forms of support in order to address student deficits (Bettinger et al., 2013; Kift & Nelson, 2005), ignore impacts of ideological inequalities embedded within institutional culture (Jury et al., 2019; Rumble, 2000; Zepke, 2015), and withdraw long-term funding identified as essential (Jones et al., 2005; Walther-Thomas et al., 1999; Tinto, 2006).

2.4.2 Institutional failures to transform inherited legacies

Universities need to be interested in genuinely improving their own pedagogical and institution-wide practices for student success outcomes, but institutional funding restrictions and increased workload pressures continue to act as barriers to engagement (Curran, 2017; Jones et al., 2005; Wingate, 2007; Zepke, 2015). This is despite the fact that Curran (2017) highlights that staff commitment to ensuring student-centred partnerships of learning acts as a dual support framework for personal development and enhanced learning experiences.

Institutions continue to be configured along their inherited legacies, but yet expect improved success outcomes, even though their study profiles continue to change. The recognition of the student voice and the student as primary stakeholder still evade the recognition of many institutions. Curran (2017) asserts that developing partnerships of learning is inhibited further by technological advancements outstripping academic teachers' knowledge, competence, and capacity, to integrate multimedia technology in ways that enrich and complement classroom

teaching and learning (Lau, 2003). However, Hnat, Mahony, Fitzgerald and Crawford (2015) argue that such barriers of student recognition, as well as the slow pace of institutional transformation and slow technology adoption, should not be accepted as legitimate reasons for situating the responsibility of attrition and retention with the student cohort. Students cannot remedy this alone.

Masika and Jones (2016) identify that, whether students study face-to-face, in a blended mode, or fully online, their facilitated membership to a peer community of practice is closely associated with increased and sustained academic engagement, because social participation is the bedrock of learning. How then does a student who studies remotely through an open and distance system get supported, retained, and achieve successful outcomes? In its concept document, the Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation (2010) has highlighted that understanding the learning experiences of different students, providing support for academic success, and the way in which the 'student experience' relates to what are high dropout rates (low retention rates) and low throughput rates in South African universities. The CHE (2010) argues that to control outcomes, where institutions require the implementation of stringent admission and selection policies, bringing into question the concept of student quality, where the quality of student must be considered for admission for university study? I argue here that this argument needs to be contrasted against the ideals and principles of social justice and inclusion. These are the very same principles that open education systems embody in their fabric in recognising education as a public good. In the context of the South African education sector, this approach is not viable, considering the legacies of apartheid. These legacies mean having to assist underprepared students from a schooling system that includes many schools historically controlled under the destructive auspices of the 'Bantu education' system, who will still remain excluded from higher education into the future. The failure of institutions to understand the lived realities of many black students in South Africa are glaring, exacerbated by the slow pace of transformation and poor policy implementation. Recognising a black student's lived realities and their transition through higher education can afford institutions a lens by means of which institutions can better construct their spaces to recognise these students, who still are marginalised, and continue to be poor, due to their education experiences.

Kuh et al. (2007) assert that student engagement lies at heart of students' education experiences, as supported by the student success framework. This framework, developed by Kuh (2007), assists in clarifying what matters to student success, and positions student engagement at the centre of the interaction between various variables. The framework highlights an understanding

of student success as a wide path with many twists, turns, detours, roundabouts, and occasional dead-ends (Kuh et al., 2008); instead of the usual 'pipeline' understanding of students, which characterises their entry into and exit from the higher education system. Students can register at a specific time, but as is often enough the case, may dropout due to financial pressure, or employment opportunities, and return later in order to study further. The framework identifies some of the pre-university experiences with which students enter into higher education, such as family background, academic preparation, attitudes to university readiness, family and peer support, and motivation to learn. Within the South African context, these can be expanded to include the preparation of the schooling experience and its outcomes, such as language and numeracy competency. Student engagement, at the intersection of these behaviours and conditions, represents aspects of student behaviour, and institutional conditions or environments over which universities have influence.

There exists a need to create a more supportive mainstream environment for students, which focuses on academic performance balance with the socio-economic and psycho-social intervention, such approaches as access programmes (Letseka et al., 2009). Most residential universities in South Africa also offer first-year orientation programmes to new students, which can be expanded to include other dimensions of student support. ICT usage to increase student success included extending Wi-Fi coverage on university campuses, providing local area network connections, as well as tablets and computer labs. Flipped classrooms, blended learning, laptop ownership opportunities, and recording of lectures and publishing online content represented additional ICT mechanisms introduced by universities to improve student success. These are mechanisms adopted to improve the classroom engagement for students, but the question then needs to be asked as to what then happens when the student exits the classroom.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated an emergency online learning environment for many institutions, referred to in the literature as education by emergency remote teaching, which is, according to Hodges et al. (2020), a "temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis". Accordingly, the objective of teachers providing emergency online teaching is to temporarily instruct in a quick and reliable way, rather than recreate a robust educational ecosystem. These shift in delivery fail to recognise the spaces marginalised students find themselves in having to transition back home, many having had an opportunity to stay in a big city at university residences now having to travel back home to the rural outskirts of the country without internet connectivity, or prohibitive data costs.

The term 'low-resource' contexts refer to those contexts where the costs of hardware and infrastructure limit access to, and effective use of technology, along with an institution's management, instructors, and students, who may have little or no information technology training or expertise. This can be due to a lack of financial resources, a lack of affiliation with larger organisations that could provide such expertise, the geographic location where such expertise is scarce or absent, or a combination of these factors. Kift, Nelson and Clarke (2010), reporting in an Australian tertiary context, concluded that there is perhaps no greater challenge facing the sector than that of identifying and monitoring the students who are 'at risk' of attrition or poor academic progress, but simultaneously noted that limited inroads have been made into this problem. Similar concerns continue to be expressed globally. In spite of the attention paid to retaining students there has been very little progress, and James (2007) concedes that efforts have been less than successful. Coley and Coley (2010) agree, though that there is scope for some further improvement.

The author argues that students should not be only responsible for their own engagement with their studies, but instead ought to examine how institutions and educators can foster the conditions that enable marginalised student populations to be able to become engaged. This should be central in their student support interventions. Conditions that enable student engagement in promoting retention and success do not simply occur by themselves, but they have to be proactively created by institutions with the aim for student support, success, and the provision of adequate learning environments. It is the responsibility of each and every institution to be aware of where these conditions do not exist, and to ensure that these conditions exist towards the betterment of their students.

2.4.3 Challenges in the delivery of quality student services and support

Openness has been embraced by many higher education institutions to include new tools of learning, but Kelly, Wilson, and Metcalfe (2007) caution that the best solution for any individual institution's needs is the balancing of its willingness with its own internal constraints and long-term commitments. HEIs are expected to deliver quality and inclusive higher education services to the most vulnerable individuals in society (EU, 2017). The students are considered as the primary customers of tertiary education institutions (Quinn et al., 2009; Lomas, 2007; Snipes et al., 2005) and their expectations on the institutional service performance plays a key role on their quality perceptions (Raaper, 2017; Brochado, 2009; Abdullah, 2006b; Hill, 1995). Kuh (2001) suggest student support and engagement as a measure of institutional quality. That is, the more

engaged its students are in educationally purposeful activities, the better the institution's performance outcomes. There are certain properties and conditions that enable student retention and engagement to flourish and help to create institutional cultures that promote student success (Kuh et al., 2005). These are identified as follows:

a. A 'living' mission and 'lived' educational philosophy, the mission of an institution should be lived out by its staff and students. The mission should be used to explain the behaviour of staff and students and should provide insight into where the institution is heading.

b. An intentional and deliberate focus on student learning. Student learning must become the rationale for the daily activities of everyone in the institution. Sustaining this focus is labour-intensive, i.e. staff members and others must 'make time' for students, and in order to improve student success, the whole institution ought to prioritise innovation and performance around student learning (Kuh et al., 2005).

c. Creating learning environments that promote educational enrichment. Physical and psychological environments within an institution should support learning and must reinforce its educational mission and values.

d. Clarifying the pathways that maximise student success. Students, especially first-generation students, need to be taught what the institution's values are, what successful students do, and where to find necessary resources. These messages can be clearly and effectively communicated through first-year experience programmes and/or formal orientation programmes. In order to effectively achieve the clarification of pathways to success, the appropriate investment of resources needs to be made, taking into account the institutional mission, and student characteristics and habits in their learning preferences.

e. Facilitating an improvement-orientated institutional culture and ethos. Institutions that are effective at engaging and nurturing success are characterised by a manner of 'positive relentlessness' (Kuh et al., 2005). These institutions are confident about what they are, and where they are going, and they believe that they can always improve.

Given the concerns about the quality of teaching and learning in South Africa, an emphasis on these conditions could attract new emphasis to the importance of focusing attention and

resources on student learning (CHE, 2009). Making sure that the quality of learning and student success is owned by everyone in the institution, Kuh (2005) argues that everyone working for the institution is an educator, and that as such, everyone accepts responsibility for students' learning so as to create a culture that nurtures and promotes student success.

The importance of student success has to be also endorsed by the university council, driven and championed by top and middle management, facilitated by academic staff, and complemented by support staff. Therefore, an institutional network is essential to impacting on success and throughput rates. Such support from the top down further embodies the institution with a duty of care for its students. The Fees Must Fall movements have often accused institutions of learning of a lack of care for black students and their lived realities. Marginalised black students in particular expressed in their student demonstration that are not attuned to their hardships. Institutions must be seen to care and expressed that care in their interactions with students and demonstrate this care in their institutional culture. Trust is critical in these interactions.

Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1988) contend that consumers evaluate service providers in terms of their reliability or capability to deliver the service; ability to inspire confidence; empathy (i.e. sensibility towards the consumers' feelings); responsiveness (i.e. prompt positive reactions); and tangibles (i.e. the appearance of the physical facilities, personnel and communication materials). The consumers are continuously comparing their expectations with the service providers' actual performance (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), as service quality comprises both the process, as well as the outcome of the service delivery (Clemes et al., 2008; Tan & Kek, 2004; Parasuraman et al., 1988). The evaluation of service quality is based upon the customer and employee interaction (i.e., the process aspect), the service environment, and the service outcomes (Quinn, Lemay, Larsen & Johnson, 2009; Snipes, Oswald, LaTour & Armenakis, 2005; Brady & Cronin, 2001). Consumers' perceived service quality defined as the degree and direction of discrepancy between their perceptions and expectations (Quinn et al., 2009; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Students are the primary stakeholder at any university and their perceptions and voice should be valued and heeded.

Quality is distinguished from satisfaction, in that it is assumed to involve specific transactions, where expectations are viewed as desires or wants of consumers (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1988). Zeithaml et al. (1988) measure the individuals' perceptions and expectations about service quality. Service quality is measured in terms of tangibility, reliability,

responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Brochado, 2009; Tan & Kek, 2004) and they assert that service quality comprises three significant dimensions:

a. service processes;

b. interpersonal factors; and

c. physical evidence (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis & Fitsilis, 2010; Angell, Heffernan & Megicks, 2008; Oldfield & Baron, 2000).

It is important to consider the expectations, experience, and evaluation of the students from within the context of them being consumers of education within a higher education setting to explore conditions and gaps in terms of the conditions that open education institutions could foster to better serve their student populations. It is important to explore the concept of service quality in the context of this study, as the research seeks to understand which aspects of the higher education experience are important to marginalised student populations. Dakowska (2019) identifies that higher education institutions ought to focus on:

a. addressing the social dimensions confronting students;

b. fostering innovation and regional engagement; and

c. reviewing performance management systems in order to incentivise and reward good practice.

The university environment provides distinct service provision aligned to their institution's mission, namely, teaching, research, and community engagement, where certain service characters can be deduced from the mission of the institution. Clewes (2003) identifies that teaching is classified as highly intangible asset, because services are performances or actions at a university rather than objects: they cannot be seen, felt, or tasted in the same way that one can sense a tangible good. Many services such as education provision are difficult for consumers to comprehend (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2002). Therefore, managers need to be managed via physical evidence, so as to provide tangible cues to service quality and reduce service complexity, where possible, and encourage word-of-mouth recommendations from other students. A second distinctive service characteristic is inseparability. Services very often have simultaneous production and consumption, as with lectures, which emphasise the importance of the service provider. In addition, Langeard et al. (1981), in their 'servuction' system model, highlight that consumption of a service often takes place in the presence of other consumers, as in the case of a seminar. Therefore, satisfaction is not only dependent on the inanimate service environment and the service provider, but also on other consumers as well (Clewes, 2003). This notwithstanding, the

higher education institutions' physical evidence that can also influence the students' satisfaction levels (Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013; Ford, Joseph & Joseph, 1999). Clewes (2003) further identifies a third service characteristic, namely heterogeneity, which it is very difficult to standardise in terms of the service that consumers receive. In a service-driven industry such as education, many different employees will be in contact with an individual student. This emphasises the need for rigorous selection, appointment, training and rewarding of staff. There is also a need for evaluation systems that give the student the opportunity to report on their experiences with staff, processes, as monitoring reliability becomes very important in maintaining quality levels. Harper (2009) maintain that the students' perceived satisfaction with higher education operations, where such technologies employed are dependent on the quality of the instructors, the quality of the systems, information (content) quality, and supportive issues. Hence, institutions have to ensure that the tangible aspects of their higher educational systems and services ought to be in good working order for the benefit of their users, as a critical character for distance education, and the provision of online offerings (Harper, 2009). In their study, Wei & Ramalu (2011) considered 100 undergraduate students to assess the relationship between service quality and the level of student satisfaction, where the students identified the three most important dimensions of service quality that affect them to be responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

Harper and Quaye (2009) contend, however, that providing services for students is not sufficient to enrich their educational experiences, but rather, that more meaningful strategies would enable institutions to realise the optimal benefits of service quality and student satisfaction are to engage diverse populations that promote constructive and conducive learning climates. Institutions must be deliberate in involving diversity in such strategy to foreground the principles of empathy and responsiveness to the needs of students. Both academic and administrative employees' ability and willingness to understand and be empathic to the student's need deliver appropriate service will determine the students' overall satisfaction with their higher education services (Tsinidou et al., 2010). Oldfield and Baron (2000) identify that students rely on the non-academic employees as well for meaningful experience, including administrators and support staff, over whom the course management teams have no direct control. The higher education institutions must be aware that their employees' interactions with their students will have an effect on their sense of satisfaction during their learning journey (Quinn et al., 2009). The members of staff represent their employer whenever they engage with students and other stakeholders (Voss et al., 2007).

It is, therefore, important that institutions foster an organisational culture that represents the institutions' shared values, beliefs, assumptions, attitudes and norms of behaviour that bind employees to deliver appropriate service quality and the desired performance outcomes (Kollenscher, Popper & Ronen, 2018; Pedro, Mendes & Lourenço, 2018; Trivellas & Dargenidou, 2009; O'Neill & Palmer, 2004). The measurables that institutions generally employ to measure the service quality of their provision and Camilleri (2021) identifies student quantitative metrics in terms of institutional performance should include:

a.   enrolment ratios;
b.   graduate rates;
c.   student drop-out rates;
d.   student progression (the students' continuation of studies at the next academic level); and
e.   employability index of graduates.

Qualitative indicators also provide insightful data to institutions on the students' opinions and perceptions about their learning environment. Universities can evaluate the students' satisfaction with teaching; satisfaction with research opportunities and training; perceptions of international and public engagement opportunities, ease of taking courses across varied programmes and disciplines; and may also determine whether there are administrative and/or bureaucratic barriers for them (Lyytinen et al., 2017). The institutions qualitative measurement should include:

a.   governance and consultation processes;
b.   levels of autonomy in particular government regulation and involvement in university systems;
c.   accountability;
d.   system structures;
e.   resourcing and funding;
f.   digitalisation;
g.   admission processes;
h.   student centered education provision,
i.   internationalisation;
j.   regional development; continuing education;
k.   lifelong learning opportunities and qualifications;
l.   research, innovation and technology transfer; high impact publications,
m.   stakeholder engagement with business and industry; labour market relevance;

n.   collaborations with other HEIs and researcher centres; and

o.   quality assurance, among other issues (OECD, 2019; EU, 2017; Lagrosen et al., 2004; O'Neill & Palmer, 2004; Cheng & Tam, 1997; Owlia & Aspinwall, 1996).

Souto-Otero, Dos Santos, Shields, Lažetić, Muñoz, Oberheidt and Puniea (2016) suggest that widening and increasing participation requires exceptional leadership and management, strong commitment of staff, strong working relationships, and active communication between different university units, schools, faculties, and other stakeholders. Souto-Otero et al. (2016) further identify that to address widening participation is not only an activity that can be done simply by implementing national legislation alone, but that it must be integrated into the fabric of the institution, supported by a culture change and attitudes from all staff towards a culture of inclusiveness (Souto-Otero, Dos Santos, Shields, Lažetić, Muñoz, Oberheidt & Puniea, 2016).

The DHET (2012) asserts that institutions must provide optimal learning environments and operational systems to ensure provision of an appropriate learning environment for those students who have been accepted into higher education programmes in order to guarantee they have a reasonable chance to complete their studies. However, there persist many challenges with access and the quality of participation in higher education, due to decreased or shrinking funding and poor policy implementation, where institutions are left to fend for themselves in order to find alternative means of provision of conducive and appropriate learning spaces. The global models of higher education and opening of the system are not enjoyed equally by students, and this is demonstrated by how governments and institutions responded to addressing the increases in enrolments. The approaches to tackle increased enrolments in higher education still represents discriminating factors between students from different social classes (Arum, Gamoran & Shavit, 2007). The question this study explores is whether and how this expansion of higher education benefits individuals from poor families of marginalised backgrounds (Blanden & Machin, 2004) and what quality of education are these student populations receiving. Universities in their traditional form have been established as centres of elite education, where only a select few gain access (Trow, 2000).

The questions that must be addressed by the university system leads to the pivotal question raised by Crew, Tomlinson & Tehmina (2012) as to why widening access and participation have not improved success outcomes, despite the noticeable growth in the numbers of students entering higher education. Are university spaces constructed adequately to provide the requisite support and service quality levels to promote a reasonable chance for students to succeed? Barnett (2014) argues that the university is in a constant process of reflection and assuming new

defined missions and roles for the future society. Barnett (2014) advocates for the development of an ecosystem within the university that is anchored in interconnectedness, and its social and developmental aspirations of a sustainable future. Internal processes related to the transformation of higher education institutions into open learning should draw sharp focus in transforming university spaces into spaces of conducive learning of any modality of education provision. Institutions prove critical as enablers to promote openness to education support and success to students.

2.5 IS THERE A NEED FOR POLICY RE-CONSIDERATIONS FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE PROVISION?

Weber (2005) enunciates that policies are formulated and implemented mainly to provide some level of benefit to society, particularly to redress inequalities in the disadvantaged group and to avoid further discrimination. In the context of this study, it is imperative to understand how regulatory frameworks impact on institutional factors that promote access and openness to learning, particularly in the context of the history of South African higher education, as well as its perennial challenges. Barriers to the development of a satisfactory open distance education system were considered in terms of quality, equity, and access were explored through the review of legislation, quality assurance, institutional conditions, and management of the system itself.

Equity and transforming of higher education are firmly established by government policies to address the issue of access, widening participation, and equity of opportunity in higher education. Commissions and statutory bodies in South Africa such as the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) as articulated by Odendaal and Deacon (2009) were established to closely monitor and oversee implementation of policy priorities. The South African government employs a 'steering from a distance' mechanism that allows for some level of autonomy at institutional level. The challenge with this approach is that the steering mechanism is still fuelled by empty rhetoric in the policy arena (Le Roux & Breier, 2007). They assert that it is essential to answer the more technocratic question of what mechanisms are needed to advance the ambitions and principles of these policies, so as to ensure that this steering from a distance will be effective, given the goals that has been set as a priority for higher education (Le Roux & Breier, 2007).

Further questions that must be answered in more technical terms invovle what kind of open and distance higher education policies can advance access and equity of opportunity, high-quality

provision, and social and economic responsiveness in a context of the diversity of provision. From a policy perspective, the Government's determination to transform the institutional landscape includes its declaration that the three distance institutions inherited were combined to give rise to a single, comprehensive dedicated distance institution of over 200,000 in 2004 to just over 370 000 students in 2019. This institution continues to offer qualifications that range from undergraduate certificates, to diplomas and degrees, to doctorate level.

Progress in the policy in distance education needs to be commended, with the enaction of two policy instruments from the both the CHE and the DHET. The DHET released the Policy Framework for the *Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities* in 2012, whilst the CHE followed with its *Framework Guide the Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide* in 2014. These two policies appreciate the work and immense contribution distance education has placed, and the DHET (2012) acknowledges the pioneering role of distance education in its initial deployment of correspondence education, but contends though that much improvement is needed in order to ensure that distance higher education programmes fully exploit the advantages of the mode and deliver learning opportunities with the required quality, rigour, coherence, and effective student support. A further cause for concern for distance education are continuous low retention rates, as well as a large proportion of students not completing their studies. At the heart of the aspirations advancing distance education to fully acquire the openness status and achieve the requisite success outcomes is that the sector needs to confront the realities of the South African higher education and the role of politics and its associated rhetoric. Olcott (2013) identifies that the paradox for open education is recognising that the advocacy and implementation of open systems, open universities, open content, open courseware, and open sources, is not synonymous with equitable and equal access and success in higher education. He further asserts that, despite the expansion of open education to provide greater access to higher education, these gains are being undermined and neutralised, where the field is unable to keep pace with the economic and political barriers impeding access to the academy. Olcott (2013) further contends that open education is under siege, because the front doors to accessible and affordable higher education are slowly closing and innovation in decision making systems form policy to implementation is urgently required.

The perceived lack of policy interventions and incongruence with the aspirations of institutions have been identified to some extent in the previous sections. Reflecting on one key example, the 2001 National Plan involved targets that were revised for participation rates and set for the first time for graduation rates and ratios for enrolment among different fields of study, thereby

dramatically refining the notion of increased participation. This revision outlines the aspirations of the national government, where institutions themselves had or have the requisite carrying capacities to deliver on these targets, and where the DHET remains silent on the achieved outcomes do date. There is, further, acknowledgement in the policy frameworks in the value of open and distance education, and its contributions in terms of enrolments, identifying that distance education has made a significant contribution to the overall growth in student enrolment, accounting for just below 37% of all headcount enrolments (DHET, 2019).

The challenge confronting the country is more complex though than just the number of students enrolling in higher education. The key policy challenge is to establish enabling frameworks, policies, mechanisms, and instruments to enhance the vast and transformative potential of open distance higher education, and to facilitate purposeful, yet considered and sensitive government steering of distance higher education in a way that enables it to fulfil its defined roles. The complexity of this challenge ought to to consider the various dimension confronting distance education, and institutional dynamics as it transitions to open education, or the convergence thereof.

Distance education places emphasis on providing flexible learning opportunities for students, particularly for adults, at a time and place that is convenient to them, and with a heavy emphasis on self-study. The rationale and focus of distance education provision is different from that of face-to-face provision. Furthermore, national policy is opposed to a higher education system that comprises identical institutions or institutions that strive towards homogeneity, and instead seeks differentiated and diverse institutions that serve the intellectual, cultural, and general social and economic needs of South Africa in diverse ways in terms of missions, programme offerings, modes of delivery, methods used, and so forth. Therefore, the key mechanisms for policy and steering distance higher education include national and institutional planning, institutional and programme funding arrangements, and quality promotion and assurance. The provision of quality designed and developed programmes still presents challenges. In the use of ICT to mediate teaching and learning the concomitant challenge is that students still do not have access to ICT or appropriate devices, where bringing on board ICT as appropriate to context and available resources is key. Decentralised student support systems that can reach the far flung rural areas of the country, and support in mother tongue languages across the country, is especially crucial for providing equity of opportunity for black and mainly rural students.

Policy, therefore, must ensure the development and reproduction of the institutional and individual expertise and capabilities that are required for the effective provision of high-quality open and distance higher education. The DHET (2012) seems to agree with such an approach, where it identifies that the investments are required in the quality of appropriate inputs and processes, but also ongoing monitoring of outputs and impact. DHET asserts that distance education provision needs to rise to the double challenge of providing greater access but doing so in ways that offer a reasonable expectation of turning access into success (DHET, 2012).

It is necessary for national policy, through the mechanism of funding, to facilitate both the transition to new modalities to learning and move from distance education programmes and make provision for a higher level of financial support. However, it is critical that institutions be required to provide proposals and plans on how they will transition to distance programmes to open and online programmes as a condition of additional funding. Otherwise, old and ineffective practices could be perpetuated without any improved quality of delivery. Such an approach provides clear incentives to invest in improving the quality of distance education practices and is an effective policy lever for improving quality of delivery that focuses spending on institutions and programmes committed to improving quality.

This study argues that the objectives of higher education should not simply be equity of access to higher education, but also equity of opportunity and outcome, and genuine prospects for social advancement for historically and socially disadvantaged social groups, along with monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of objectives is crucial. Unless serious attention is paid to the quality of distance education provision and programmes, equity of opportunity and outcomes for historically disadvantaged South Africans will continue to be compromised, as students graduate with underdeveloped knowledge, competencies, and skills. Moreover, while some private benefits may accrue to graduates, the public benefits for society at large may be limited.

The impression observed in the policy documents in terms of administration of higher institutions was that a transformed higher education environment would effectively displace social disparities in the South African socio-economic and educational system (Badsha & Cloete, 2011). An assumption was made by a number of individuals and communities that the triple challenges of inequality, poverty, and unemployment could be reduced by eradicating sub-standard institutions that were perceived to be offering poor education programmes. To this end, investing on a merged institutional profile and structural configurations that merges previously all black institutions with previously all white institutions, along with a redistribution of resources on a better and equal

footing, without any meaningful measure of outcomes expected from these institutions, will lead to improved standards in higher education system (Subotzky, 2005). However, this has been demonstrated as not being the case, as a lot more pragmatic action still needs to take place to overcome imbalances in terms of access, wider participation, student support, and success (Lundall, 1998; Muller, 2005).

2.6 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE FINDINGS

In summary, differing viewpoints have been noted here in relation to openness in higher education. Some authors recommend the strengthening of the social justice dimension in this provision, pursuant to inclusion and a diversified study body. However, some other authors recommended a more cautious approach in the expansion of the provision, arguing the possible diminishing academic standards and the continued perennial challenges of retention and student success. The constraint of many researchers related to their inability to determine which factors are critical to consider forming a distance education context, and the varied studies conducted focused on face-to-face methods of education delivery offered by residential universities. The key to openness factors was identified as being predictive factors in student success and satisfaction, with limited focus on the factors associated with distance education pedagogy and programme quality.

The varied resources however provided a base to which this study the focus on in terms of the openness factor such access, student admissions and selection, thereby providing allowance for the researcher to logically develop a social sensitive openness model that can be used for the assessment and examination of the conditions that confront and impact on marginalised student populations.

The primary aim of this study is to develop a model that can be used to critically identify the challenges of the marginalised student populations and investigate dimensions/factors of openness including the institutional responses related to the important issues of access, opportunity, and success in higher education. The main purpose of the model is to support the eradication, elimination or minimisation of these factors, and its impact on the identified student cohort, and to solicit better response mechanisms at institutional and policy levels that can be considered in order to improve the lived experiences of these students to succeed in higher education.

Researchers have been unable to identify adequate approaches to support optimally the marginalised student cohorts in higher education, particularly those who study at a distance. To the researcher's knowledge, no study exists to explore the factors of openness in open distance education to develop a socio-economic sensitive openness model. This study targets those factors that are the sturdiest predictors of inclusion, quality, retention, and success. Accordingly, a conceptual framework guided by a mixed method exploration of the academic social factors, will be implemented. This chapter enabled the researcher to identify evidence on pre-determined dimensions/factors and influence of these factors to develop a sensitive model can be used to open and distance education in the specific South African context. South Africa is undergoing an era of epidemiological transition from the democratisation of education to non-elitist neo-liberal systems inherited from the apartheid system. These transition challenges the higher education system to prioritise critical policy dimension affecting open distance higher education. The purpose of this study is to develop a model by exploring the dimensions/factors of openness including the institutional responses related to the important issues of access, opportunity and success in higher education, based on factors for openness and the influence of these social factors in promoting inclusion and social justice imperatives. The findings from this study will add knowledge of existing empirical evidence on the existing research, with greater nuance given to context of South Africa. This aim serves to address the country's social challenges, which were inherited from a system that was exclusionary, depriving a large majority of mostly black students the chance to thrive in higher education.

2.7 SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In summary, different viewpoints were expressed in relation to the open and distance education discourse and the exploration of openness in higher education seems to identify nuances in student learning and institutional approaches that must be reconsidered.

There exists a dichotomy in the openness discourse in terms of its benefits to access, its aspirations for social justice in education, and the support required for student to successfully complete their studies, where some authors tried to recommend solutions to the persisting challenges in open and distance education. Olcott (2013) asserts that open education is at a crossroads and must be driven by the values that define education as an essential human right with a commitment to expanding access in pursuit of success outcomes for those who have

gained opportunities in higher education, where there needs to be a continuous pursuit of strengthening academic quality and programmes.

The pandemic has further sharpened digital divides, as higher education has moved online, at least temporarily, inequalities for those living in rural areas, in terms of digital access including internet connectivity, social support, and access to resources have become even more stark (Timmis, 2020; Mohamedbhai, 2020). Aspiration and efforts towards equity have driven open education into the mainstream to stand against educational elitism, the growing digital divide, and to support the core values that give education its fundamental credence as a human right.

Additionally, the student who learns remotely and is located in rural areas in the country continues to pay a high price, particularly for the amount of data necessary to participate in online learning. This rural surcharge for online participation comes all too often at the expense of sustenance itself. Although many universities have come on board with assistance to students in the provision of data and devices for learning. The powerful idea of knowledge as a global public good suggests that those without technology access will join the ranks of the growing "digital divide community of non-users", whilst others will be excluded from the same opportunities, due to their incapacity to pay the exponential cost increases for a university degree (Timmis, 2020; Mohamedbhai, 2020).

Disparities in the provision of access and the attainment of success outcomes still remain elusive to many in South Africans. This can be attributed to the widening gaps of those that used to and still have, and those who continue not to have. DHET (2014) has imposed on universities to contribute to transformation of the student body, in order to provide access to opportunities, and enhanced employability. These demands have resulted in un-serviced students at many institutions who are struggling to cope with numbers such as those in open and distance education, leading to feelings of frustrations by the student body itself, resulting in protests. From the views of many televised footage of these students, the dominant race is black, signalling the continued disparities. These protests are concerning to all parties including government, universities, and their stakeholders (including students themselves). This study intervenes to argue that open education presents itself as one of the great equalisers for higher education access, which are currently being eroded (Olcott, 2013). The author further emphasise in this regard that potential without access is fruitless (Olcott, 2013).

Timmis et al. (2021), writing on rurality in higher education, make a timely and important contribution to current debates about key issues in higher education, that include greater equity,

social justice, and decolonial approaches. Their study illustrates how students from rural areas are far from 'deficient', and have assets that can be mobilised, as higher education reconfigures itself to a post-pandemic future, one in which there is a danger of inequalities being amplified. The barriers that have been identified and encountered by many students from rural contexts in accessing higher education need to be removed.

Students need to be supported to participate actively in the institution through enhanced curricula and teaching and learning strategies that are inclusive of and that value their experiences and aspirations. Their experiences and understandings can be mobilised to honour and embrace a plurality of knowledges and to move more swiftly towards what Mbembe (2016) refers to as the 'pluriversity', that is, a higher education context that is celebratory of epistemic diversity, striving to be epistemologically reciprocal and, therefore, more equitable (Timmis et al., 2021). Abed and Ackers (2021) identify several interventions that South African universities have introduced to facilitate access to and successful completion of tertiary studies by students. Some of the disclosed mechanisms include the provision of financial aid, student support and counselling, tutoring, and mentoring, along with ICT enhancements and the introduction of language policies.

Olcott (2013) argues however that it is human nature to preserve what is most comfortable and that what is needed is a focus on the attributes of ODL associated with effective teaching and learning, through the learning experience of the student body, and the access for underserved and working populations. McGreal (2012) identifies that there are many parameters and concerns that will ultimately define the shape of open education but, on the horizon, there are two which prove essential for the sector to address. First, there is the responsibility to stand against the fundamental denial of access to higher education as it presents a moral dichotomy. Secondly, if you can't keep the primary doors to a university education open, then there is the danger that the open education movement will become part of that closed system with only the illusion of genuine open access remaining (McGreal, 2012). Open education is about open access for the masses, women and men, rich and poor, black and white, young and old. If this is lost, higher education will face immense challenges in the future. We must embrace this commitment to access and equity for open education to open and transverse new boundaries for higher education. Indeed, it is not just the right choice for our future students, it is the only choice (Vincent-Lancrin & Pfotenhauer, 2012). The future of open education is well positioned to enhance educational access to aspiring students worldwide. Olcott (2013) notes in this regard that indeed, open education is the most important contribution to education as an essential human right embedded

in equity, access, and quality and that these ambitions still lie ahead as they still have not been achieved particularly for poor, black students who continue to remain marginalised.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING AND FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed literature related to the different concepts, factors, and consequences of open and distance education. The chapter also explained the principles of social justice, open education, and associations with issues of inclusivity in higher education. In this chapter, the researcher mainly focused on the theoretical frameworks that the study considered relevant to the research objectives. This chapter focuses on the discussion of the definition and purpose of theoretical framework of openness and associated open education models and conceptual openness models. It further discusses the application of these theories on the development of an openness model within the context of this study, and how the identified theoretical models helped to guide the research processes. Shikalepo (2020) identifies that once a literature is completed it is important for the researcher to move on the related study topics reviewed and proceed to review the theories underpinning the study.

The term theoretical framework consists of two separate words, which are theory and framework. According to Kerlinger (1986), a theory is a set of interrelated constructs, definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomena. Abrahams, Reiss & Sharpe (2013) further elaborate that a theory can guide research, practice, curriculum development, and evaluation, and help develop effective instructional tactics and strategies. A theory shapes current understanding of a specific phenomenon and may be methodically verified in the physical domain by research. It guides researchers to ask appropriate research questions, and to predict and explain the results of the research. It initiates, directs, and produce thoughts for research, where research measures the value of existing theory and delivers a groundwork for novel theory (Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009).

3.2 MODELS, THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS – DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

A framework is defined as a collection of ideas that are used when someone is interested to form decisions or judgements (Bedworth, 2010). It assists the researcher to organise the specific study and delivers a perspective in the topic under study and collects and analyses data (Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009). The framework gives structure within which the interactions between variables of the various findings from the literature sources that have been reviewed about the research, setting out the research agenda for increased understanding of the research intentions.

A model is defined as a diagrammatic representation of realism. It provides a symbolic depiction of certain associations of variables and organisation of central ideas and central concepts from theories, key findings from research, policy statements and other professional sources that guide the research project and it uses diagrams or symbols to denote an idea. It may help the researcher to define and guide specific research tasks or deliver a structured framework (Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009).

The theoretical framework is defined as a theory that describes the relationship between key variables for explaining a proposition or predicting future consequences. Grant and Osanloo (2014) have defined theoretical framework as a lens offering the organisational methods of the study in a philosophical, epistemological, methodological, and analytical way. The selection of a theoretical framework requires a deep and thoughtful understanding of proposition statements, its purpose, significance, and research questions. It is vital that all theories are firmly attached and interact with each other so that the framework can serve as the foundation for the work and guide the choice of research design and the data analysis (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

The difference between a theoretical and conceptual framework is that the theoretical framework is based on the propositional statements developing from a prevailing theory. The conceptual framework is, meanwhile, the consolidating the multiplicity of key literature findings relevant to the research into a whole single unit, with one standpoint underpinned by the relevant theories revealing the strategic literature direction for the research. It is a process of what the researcher has established through finding and defining thoughts and suggesting relationships between these concepts. A conceptual framework provides the end result of bringing together a number of related concepts to explain and give a broader understanding of the phenomenon under research (Imenda, 2014).

Both the theoretical and conceptual frameworks interconnect to generate a specific way of observing a specific phenomenon. By developing a framework within which ideas are organised, the researcher is able to demonstrate that the planned study is a reasonable extension of existing knowledge (Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009). In mixed methods, a conceptual framework can be

used as deductively in quantitative theory testing and inductively in an emerging qualitative theory (Creswell, 2014). The researcher should move back and forth between deductive and inductive reasoning if his intention is to develop a model. A theoretical framework has a number of purposes, which improves the quality of research (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). According to Grant & Osanloo (2014), theoretical frameworks can be used to:

a.   link the researcher to the current literatures;

b.   provide expectations that direct the research;

c.   support the researcher to select appropriate enquiries for the study;

d.   guide the researcher to choose the research design with highest quality; and

e.   guide the researcher towards suitable data collection approaches.

Support the researcher to make predictions, analysis, interpretations, and results of the research founded on the existing literatures.

3.2.1 Foundational theories guiding the conceptualization and implementation of   the study

For this study, three theories were incorporated to collect, analyse, and integrate the data. The three theoretical frameworks integrated in this study were the Open Education Framework (2016), E-Learning Theoretical Framework (2016), and the Mulder & Janssen Model on Open and Distance Learning (2013). These frameworks have been taken from the behavioural and social sciences to have a clear understanding of the research questions.

The Mulder & Janssen (2013) model on Open Education (OE) elaborates the complex interaction of the social, cultural, and environmental factors within the individual's perspectives in openness. In addition, the model identifies the fundamentals of Open Universities (OU) model which is six-fold in Classical Openness:

- Open Access
- Freedom of Time
- Freedom of Pace
- Freedom of Place

- Open Programming
- Open to People (LLL)

The use of theoretical frameworks and associated theories explains the complex phenomenon of openness and the dimensions in open education. Similarly, the open education (OE) model explores in-depth, the influences of some of these dimensions as factors on the development of openness from a classical, established Open and Distance Learning (ODL) dimensions, to the innovative and emerging Open Educational Resources (OERs), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and dimensions of Lifelong Open Flexible learning. All the information gathered formed the basis for the researcher to develop a theoretical framework of the study. Consequently, the questions in the study were based on the combination of the open education models looking into specific contexts of South Africa. Theoretical frameworks assist the researcher to design data collection tools and analyse the collected data. The researcher integrated these concepts from these theories as a way of supporting the development of data collection instruments and as a basis for the areas to be used to focus on data analysis. The role of integration of concepts from the theories in mixed methods can be quantitative, where theory is verified (deductive), and qualitatively, where patterns are emerging (inductive), depending on the research question.

Table 3.1   Theoretical applications of the stated theories in the study

Deductive application of the theories	Inductive application of the theories
The theory is well established, and the researcher used it to provide an explanation or prediction about the relationship between dimensions in the study. In this type of the theoretical framework, the researcher used deductive-objective-generalising approach for answering questions such as "What?"	More pertinent in the qualitative phase of the study. In this type of the theoretical framework, the researcher used inductive-subjective-contextual approach for answering questions like "How?"
Application in Phase 3 of the study	**Application in phases 1 and 2 of the study**

The theory assists the researcher in constructing of variables to be measured when investigating dimensions of openness and the associated factors that contribute to the patterns that emerged in the quantitative analysis of the study.

The integration of the open education theories formed the foundation for the quantitative analysis phase of the study.

In this study, the researcher is answering the question asking: what are factors that influence openness and its associated dimension in access, retention and success outcomes?

The study started gathering information from the situational analysis and proceeded with study respondents through individual interviews and focus groups that allowed the process of objective analysis of the openness factors.

This information was next formed into codes, sub-themes, and themes, which developed into broader patterns, theories, or generalisations.

In this study, the researcher answered the question relating to how the factors identified influence the institutional degree of openness and how the institution interfaces with the marginalised student populations in supporting them in their learning experiences.

Integration in mixed methods: Based on the quantitative and qualitative orientation of this exploratory sequential study, the open education theories drive the study with an element of deductive theory embedded in it.

3.3 THE MULDER OPEN EDUCATION MODEL

The Mulder and Janssen model of openness is anchored to the principles of Wiley (2010), which identify the general mainstreaming of openness as a four-fold digital openness structure, as follows:

a. Open Source (software)
b. Open Access (scientific output)
c. Open Content (creative output)
d. Open Educational Resources (OERs) (learning materials)

Wiley (2010) contends that the actions that operationalise the concept of openness are the same, and that they are acts of generosity, sharing, and giving. Openness is the sole means by which education is realised, where, if a teacher is not sharing what he or she knows, there is no education happening. Education is sharing. Education is about being open. Wiley (2010) further

elaborates and expresses the true meaning of knowledge sharing as the ability to give expressions of knowledge without giving them away, providing us with an unprecedented capacity to share, and thus an unprecedented ability to educate. In order to open up education various strategies and approaches are adopted, but there needs to be an awareness by higher education institutions regarding the consistencies required in the various factors and dimensions that influence openness. Biggs (1999) describes the task of good pedagogical design as one of ensuring that there are absolutely no inconsistencies between the curriculum taught, the teaching methods used, the learning environment chosen, and the assessment procedures adopted.

Over the years, there has been some conflation of terms that equate OERs to openness and the model clearly demonstrates variance in the two concepts. The model demonstrates and contends that OER ≠ (Open) education, and elaborates that the two concepts are complementary, and include a variety of online and virtual facilities for tutoring, advice, meetings, communities, teamwork, presentations, testing, examination, consulting sources, internet navigation etc. the model identifies three nodes of openness in a pyramid format, (OERs), open learning services (OLS) and open teaching effort (OTE).
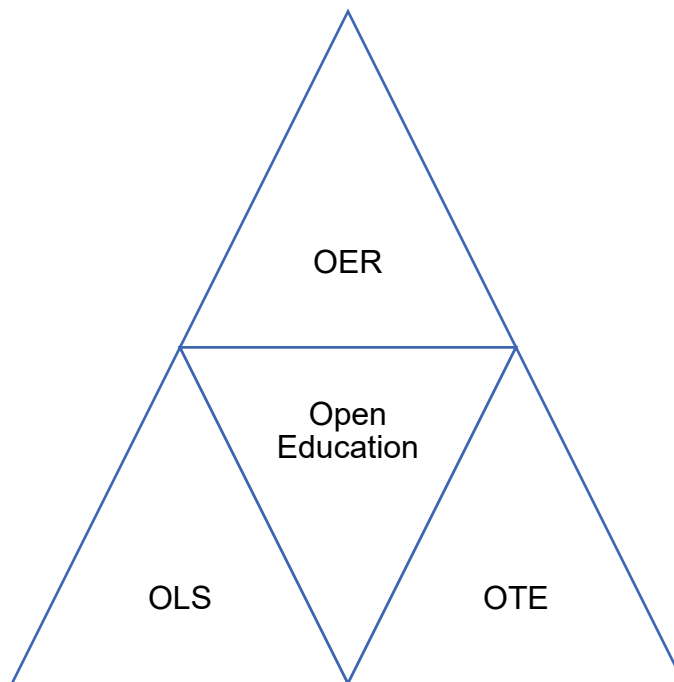
Figure 3.1: Model of Openness (Adapted from Mulder & Janssen 2013)

The model demonstrates that all three angles are complementary to each other and complementary to OER complements OLS referring to the human effort in different roles of developing, presenting, explaining, assessing, communicating, interacting, intervening, and mediating. The interfaces seem equitable from the varied roles of teachers and educators and with the learners in their specific roles in a professional, open, and flexible learning environment and culture.

3.3.1 Principles of the model

The model hinges on Wiley's (2010) principle and asserts that the more open we are, the better education will be. Mulder & Janssen's model asserts that opening up education through the concept of openness facilitates performance improvement along three dimensions simultaneously, namely:

a. **Accessibility** by freeing up online availability of learning materials
b. **Quality** by the involvement of many experts and users in various roles
c. **Efficiency** in that improvement on existing open education strategies by not replicating other's efforts

The model further identifies that openness is multi-pronged in its approach and strategies from which institutions can benefit by opening up education on a number of levels:

a. Mission-driven: institutions can embrace openness as a fundamental natural review of the institution's position and profile;
b. Implementation-driven: institutions advance the practice of openness in a pragmatic explorative way, therefore changing the institution's business model in a controlled mode.
c. Policy-driven: institutions must and should accommodate an alignment to national policy implying all educational to (ultimately) convert innovations of openness such to OERs into mainstream educational provision.
d. Demand-driven: institutions must respond to a changing demand of (potential) students in the digital era and recognise that they are the most relevant stakeholders with influence and power.

The model does, however, caution against being competition-driven, in the sense that institutions should guard against competing in a defensive reaction to emerging initiatives such MOOCs, edX, Coursera, OERu etc.

3.3.2 Application of the model

The OE model provides an openness conceptual framework underpinned by Wiley (2010) principles and the Mulder & Janssen open education model, following the same approach for the development of the model. The Mulder & Janssen model provides and clarifies the main contribution of openness from a teaching and learning perspective, whilst the other similar models try to identify the interaction of different factors and expanded the main themes to include research and community engagement as mission critical objectives for any university. The study was designed based on the theoretical grounding theory, which forwards that socio-economic and psychosocial factors can influence the education environments and performance outcomes of marginalised students, where the conditions of the university impact these outcomes of retention and success in particular.

If those factors are not identified and addressed, they can end up limiting the learning activity and restrict students from being fully socialised with the conditions of the institution to provide a holistic learning experience. Below, the researcher further explained three areas of the model for the purpose of this study. These are:

a. socio-economic factors, viz. financial support, living conditions, educational level in terms of quality of pre-university learning upon admission, home dynamics and expectations on the student;

b. work-related factors that include occupation, workload and career ambitions for employed students;

c. Psychosocial factors that consist of poor social support, poor institutional environments, anxiety, and depression.

In summary, this conceptual framework and the theoretical underpinning helped the researcher to understand the associated openness factors that might contribute to the development and identification of influence of openness dimensions such as access, student support on the success outcomes of marginalised student populations, whilst identifying the need to embrace emerging innovations of OERs and MOOCs. By using this framework, the researcher was able analyse the issues related to openness and the associated factors and influence. Moreover, it

allowed the researcher to link interfaces in education provision, identify critical roles and varied stakeholders.

3.3.3 Critique of the model

Despite its usefulness, some have offered a critique of the model by suggesting that it takes a limited view of openness and is centralised on the teaching and learning dimensions of openness (Dos Santos, Punie & Muñoz, 2016). The dimensions of openness are not adequately identified in terms of their associations to some of the key university missions, such as research and lifelong learning, as key pillars of open education. The model is best understood at a meta-level teaching and learning system and advances the argument on the adoption of openness through the lens of OERs and the benefits associated with these emergent innovations of open education. It leaves no room within its framework for the integrated approach, integrating teaching, learning as well as research and community engagement. Thus, the model embraces openness and its complementary interfaces with OERs and identifies an equitable distribution as a priority in Open learning Services OLS and Open Teaching Effort (OTE).

The philosophical paradigm is derived from the primary principle of education as public good, and the doctrine that education should be open, flexible, and lifelong. The historical underpinning of the model recognises the classical openness model from the ODL model, mostly adopted by open universities. This study is designed based on the grounding theory associated with social justice and equality and identifies the factors that can determine equity in provision, support, and success in open education. The focus of the study is on a range of complex issues of openness and for that reason, more than one theoretical framework is integrated into the study. The next section discusses the OpenEdu Framework and its applications here.

3.4 THE OpenEdu FRAMEWORK

The Open Education (OpenEdu) Framework was grounded in the classical open education model by Mulder & Janssen (2013), but the conceptualisation of the model according to Dos Santos, Punie & Muñoz (2016) the Mulder & Janssen model did not cover all the aspects that openness covers today but remains premised on the classical views of free of charge access, choice of start times, global availability, and flexibility. The OpenEdu framework was designed as a critical resource to assist as a support resource for European HEIs in their endeavours to open up education. The framework assumes a eurocentric approach, proposing a broad definition of the term open education, while accommodating different interpretations and use, in order to promote

a holistic approach to openness and its practice. The framework expands from the Mulder & Janssen model from open access, OERs, MOOCs, and identifies ten dimensions of open education.

3.4.1 Conceptualisation of the OpenEdu framework

The framework elaborates the importance of open education and defines it. It identifies benefits that institutions achieve in a properly constructed strategy of open education and the benefits the strategy can bring to an institution, its students, and to other stakeholders. The approach to the development of the framework seems to have taken a wider view of openness and associated key stakeholders and was based on the results from four studies designed by IPTS on open education. These studies included desk research, reviews of academic and grey literature (websites, blogs, newspapers, reports), consultations, and validation with experts both in-house to the project and online. The main data inputs to the framework emanate from qualitative data gathering and this, according to Dos Santos et al. (2016) is because the framework describes possible open education practices, and as such, provides evidence from the field. The qualitative methods included desk research, case studies, interviews, focus groups (workshops) and asynchronous online focus groups.

The framework is centralised along ten dimensions providing a rationale and descriptors for each dimension. The following dimensions are identified in the framework:

a. Access
b. Content
c. Pedagogy
d. Recognition
e. Collaboration
f. Research
g. Strategy
h. Technology
i. Quality
j. Leadership

The OpenEdu framework for opening up education was designed to contribute to the objective that Europe ought to provide the right policy framework and a stimulus to introduce innovation in

learning and teaching practices in schools, universities, vocational education, and training. The objectives of the frameworks are further identified as follows:

a.   to reduce or remove barriers to education (e.g. cost, geography, time, entry requirements);

b.   to gives learners the opportunity to up skill or re-skill at a lower or nearly no cost, and in a flexible way;

c.   to supports the modernisation of higher education in Europe, since contemporary open education is largely carried out via digital technologies; and finally,

d.   to open up the possibility of bridging non-formal and formal education.

The dimensions are categorised into two groups, namely the core dimensions of open education and the transversal dimensions of open education. The core dimensions of open education centre around the core practices of openness and present the 'what' of openness i.e. access, content, pedagogy, recognition, collaboration, and research. The transversal dimensions of open education provide the pillars for the realisation of the core dimensions, these are the 'how' of opening up educational practices. They continuously interface with the core dimensions and these dimensions are leadership, strategy, quality, and technology. Together, these dimensions enable open education practices to be shaped in different ways in HEIs.

The framework is significant, and its usage is multifaceted in openness presents unlimited use, with many expanded permutations and additional dimensions. It can be functional to any individual institution in any part of the world and be modified to suit the contextual conditions of that institution without having to lose its core elements and principles. The Mulder and Janssen model restrict itself according to specific factors and influences openness, whereas the OpenEdu framework explores multiple aspects of open education in a holistic manner.

3.4.2 The 10 dimensions of open education

The framework contends that the practice of open education consists of the various ways in which educational institutions operationalise it. The dimensions focus on a given area and interact together to shape the practices of open education.

3.4.2.1 The core dimensions

The 'what' question in openness can be explained in terms of mission critical activities of universities teaching, research, and community engagement and the OpenEdu framework core dimensions. This provides a lens by means of which to understand what it means when it is said that a university is open in relation to the dominant university missions. The framework assumes a critical posture that allows an understanding of openness by identifying dimensions that can be linked to either academic or support strategic pillars of universitiesm such as the university opening up its registration process, by allowing anyone to study, irrespectively of having previous qualifications or be open in its content or pedagogical practices. The sections below briefly discuss the core dimensions of the OpenEdu Framework.

3.4.2.1.1 Access

The access dimension of the OpenEdu framework has three interrelated levels, viz. access to programmes, access to courses, access to educational content (free of charge content or OER), and access to their related communities of practices and networks. The framework recognises access as a core value in open education, and as the removal or lowering of economic, technological, geographical, and institutional barriers, which obstruct the pathway to knowledge. It asserts that access should be an enabler for informal and independent learners to seek and gain recognition of their learning. The recognition of informal learners is recognised by the researcher as key driver of access, particularly in developing or poor countries, as such contexts tend to have a larger proposition of their citizens with low or no educational backgrounds. Such an interface of informal and formal learning advance societies. Sclater (2016) argues that access to learning benefits these communities with a university education, by furthering the interaction and debate with experts and peers and opening up the possibility for the co-creation of knowledge.

3.4.2.1.2 Content

Content in open education refers to materials for teaching and learning, and research outputs, which are free of charge and available to all. Content in open education encompasses texts of all kinds, textbooks, course materials, pictures, games, podcasts, video-lectures, software, data, research papers and outputs, and any other type of educational material that conveys information and can be used for teaching and learning. It can be open licensed. One of the benefits of using an OER for teaching and learning is that it reduces the possibilities of users infringing copyright.

At the same time, it grants greater permissions in the use of content, such as adaptation, translation, remix, reuse, and redistribution, depending on the type of license applied to the content.

3.4.2.1.3 Pedagogy

Openness in pedagogy according to the framework refers to the use of technologies to broaden pedagogical approaches and make the range of teaching and learning practices transparent, sharable and visible. Opening up pedagogical practices is about developing the design for learning, so that it widens participation and collaboration between all stakeholders involved. Pedagogical approaches with an emphasis on the learner are highly suitable for open education, and by making these practices openly available, it further promotes the strengthening of communities of practice in these areas of learning design, the assessments and learning outcomes, while enabling the learners to design their own learning path by offering them a wide choice of learning resources.

3.4.2.1.4 Recognition

Recognition enables open education learners to make the transition from non-formal to formal education, to complete a programme of tertiary education in a more flexible way, and to get recruited/ promoted at the workplace. Recognition in open education has two meanings: a) it is the process, usually carried out by an accredited institution, of issuing a certificate, diploma or title which has formal value; and b) it is the process of formally acknowledging and accepting credentials, such as a badge, a certificate, a diploma, or a title issued by a third-party institution. These credentials should attest that a given set of learning outcomes (e.g. knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences) achieved by an individual have been assessed by a competent body against a predefined standard. When submitting their credentials for recognition, learners expect to gain valid credits, which will help them to move ahead professionally as well as in their personal lives.

Credentialisation also plays an important role in the recognition of open learning. It can be done in a variety of formal or informal ways, and the institution can choose whether or not to recognise the credentials given, and under what circumstances.

3.4.2.1.5 Collaboration

Collaboration involvesconnecting individuals and institutions by facilitating the exchange of practices and resources with a view to improving education. By collaborating around and through open educational practices, universities can move beyond the typical institutional collaboration patterns and engage individuals and communities to build a bridge between informal, nonformal, and formal learning. It is a live and evolving practice, which is shaped by individuals according to context, goals, resources, and possibilities, contributing to the lowering of barriers to education. It is therefore a concept that must be as dynamic as its practice.

Collaboration removes barriers to education via the networks of individuals and institutions. Learners must be empowered to collaborate with each other and with the institution and community in order to produce knowledge, define their unique learning paths and achieve their goals. More specifically, it has to do with any practice or policy that promotes, for example:

- agreements to support open educational practices. These can take place at different levels: between individuals (formally or informally), intra-institutionally, inter-institutionally, nationally at policy level or cross-border;
- the co-development of OER and free-of-charge content;
- the co-development and exchange of open educational practices with respect to pedagogies, learning designs, technologies, guidelines, training, accessibility, and usage of repositories;
- the empowerment of learners to follow their lifelong learning paths;
- the co-development of open, innovative, and digital learning environments;
- practices that cultivate values of equality, non-discrimination, and active citizenship; and
- respect for socio-cultural differences.

3.4.2.1.6 Research

Openness in research implies a paradigm shift in the approach of research and science which affects the entire scientific process. Openness in research is about removing barriers to access to data and research outputs, and also about broadening participation in research. The underlying idea is to advance science as quickly as possible by sharing and collaborating, rather than trying to publish first in order to secure intellectual property rights and novelty. Researchers can gain

from open science activities, both as project participants and as commentators on research ideas and progress, where extended networks provide a larger pool of expertise.

3.4.3 The transversal dimensions

The transversal dimensions of open education cover the means by which educational practices are opened up, providing the construction for the realisation of the core dimensions. As an example, the OpenEdu framework identifies technology and associated platforms in support to facilitating access or the release of content, research data, or MOOCs to the general public. Other dimensions that provide the how strategies of opening up education include an openness strategy for a university requiring leadership at various levels, where without an opening up education strategy, it is difficult to plan or to measure results. Further to these dimensions, the framework identifies the quality dimension requiring the quality monitoring, evaluation, and assurance of content, pedagogy, and the programme offerings. The four transversal dimensions, technology, leadership, strategy, and quality of the framework interact and interface with one another and with the core dimensions at various points of the university system. They are recognizsed in the framework as not being static, but as evolving concepts, and are not operationalised in isolation.

3.4.3.1 Strategy

Strategy in open education is the creation of a unique and valuable position on openness, involving different sets of activities. Strategy, in the context of the OpenEdu framework is defined in the context of institutional values, commitments, opportunities, resources and the capabilities of a HE institution with respect to open education. It further recognises that openness is a vital component of an institution's policy and strategy, and openness must be integral to the institution's mission. The strategy must recognise openness with its relationships and inter-dependence with other aspects of the institution's wider policy and be clearly articulated and developed by a strategy. The OpenEdu framework argues that an institution's strategy on openness can enhance and enrich the conceptual, operational, and financial aspects of the educational offer.

3.4.3.2 Technology

The framework advances a critical pillar in that technological choices within an institution have a direct impact on how openness is configured, where institutions should consider technology when

planning their strategies in order to align themsleves and their priorities with open education via the ICT investments they make. Dos Santos et al. (2016) assert that the degree to which the technology is applied by an institution reflects its openness culture.

Technology in open education refers to technological infrastructures and software which facilitate opening up education in its different dimensions. Technological infrastructures and software, either open or closed, work as transversal enablers of different dimensions. The technology platforms allow learners to interact with one another, upload and share content, download, peer-review and modify existing content.

3.4.3.3 Quality

The OpenEdu framework identifies quality in open education as referring to a convergence of five concepts, namely: efficacy, impact, availability, accuracy, and excellence, with an institution's open education offering and opportunities. The framework identifies the confluence of the five concepts, where, the more reliable and trustworthy the interface of these concepts, the greater the offer will be for open learners. In terms of the framework, the concepts are defined within the widely accepted definitions that are consistent with quality definitions and measurements.

- Efficacy - fitness for purpose of the concept being assessed.
- Impact - a measure of the extent to which a concept proves effectiveness. It is dependent on the nature of the concept itself, the context in which it is applied, and the use to which it is put by the user.
- Availability - is defined as a pre-condition for efficacy and impact to be achieved, and thus also forms part of the element of quality. Availability includes concepts such as transparency and ease-of-access.
- Accuracy - is a measure of precision and absence of errors, of a particular process or object.
- Excellence - compares the quality of a concept to its peers, and to its quality-potential, the maximum theoretical quality potential it can reach.

The degree of quality of an open education offer/opportunity can be measured by different actors, such as the institution itself, its learners, or the government in relation to its legislative frameworks. Government measures compliance with a given country's legislation and the recommendations of the object being offered (e.g., a course, a certificate, a degree). It can also be measured against

the standards of a competent body, which can issue credentials, such as a quality assurance agency or an association/community recognised by its members.

The framework recognises that the granularity with which quality is measured in open education may vary, ranging from an institution's overall reputation to the quality of a particular offer such as an OER. Quality in open education also relates to the environment and conditions in which an open education culture is built in an institution. Staff members involved in producing and supporting open education often require time and deserve incentives. An institution that identifies these needs and recognises these as fair by acting responsibly towards them is respecting a fundamental principle of excellence, namely the promotion of the best conditions for individuals to tap into their greatness. The figure below adapted from OpenEdu framework by Dos Santos et al. (2016) presents the interfaces of the core and transversal dimensions of openness.

Figure 3.2: Opening Up Education: A Support Framework for Higher Education Institutions (Adapted from Dos Santos, Punie, Castaño-Muñoz, 2016)

Figure 3.2 above represents the 10 dimensions of the OpenEdu model, and an attempt to integrate the core dimensions, which focus on the integral of the academic component of open education. The transversal dimensions are the support component, which provide the support architecture of the principal functions of any HEIs. The model can be interpreted according to the primary and secondary disposition of core functions and the secondary functions being the support dimensions. The primary constituent of the core dimensions of the model seem to anchor the primary institutional architecture.

The secondary dimensions as a support architecture of the model present an integrated position of the transversal dimensions, as all four dimensions can interface with a single core dimension at any given point of the model, presenting a rich and a holistic view of the critical function of the transversal dimensions.

3.4.4 Application of the OpenEdu Framework

The theory of the OpenEdu framework posits that each one of these dimensions is not sufficient alone to bring about meaningful benefits to open education, but that interaction between them is what determines outcomes. Literatures in openness suggest that it is the combination of openness dimensions such as access, quality content and institutional practices that influence the likelihood of the degree of openness that an institution can achieve, where the stronger the interfaces and interactions are the more effective the outcomes will be. Failure to integrate each of these dimensions leads to an incomplete understanding of the influence of openness and the development of an appropriate strategy of adopting and promoting opportunities for openness, thus limiting the optimal engagements with the various actors that can benefit on the opportunities that open education presents in higher education.

From this perspective, openness requires a broader strategy and understanding of these dimensions and further, the additional dimensions associated with student engagement than those based on the two models presented thus far. Students' conditions in higher education are affected by multiple aspects and factors that range from their learning experiences, as well as living and social environmental conditions. The researcher's assumption is that long-term plans and strategies that drive meaningful adoption of openness can be achieved only if individual institutions can learn to attribute success outcomes to an integrate efforts of students, institutions, and the various actors in open education. Hence, the OpenEdu model elaborates the complex

interactions of the dimensions internal to institutions. However, it may be beneficial to look beyond the institutional boundaries to include the legislative dimension and State as a key influence in the determination of the social, cultural, and environmental conditions that students have to navigate in their learning journey.

3.4.5 Critique of the OpenEdu Framework

There needs to be a strategic opening up of education by HEIs if they are to address some of the social issues that are important for higher education, such as access to opportunities and the development of societies. The model identifies the basic fundamental logical constructs and central interfaces that lead to the recommendations of intergraded approach to foster openness and its associated dimensions. It also provides the theoretical framework used to categorise and measure outcome prospects of understanding the fundamental degrees of how institutions can adopt and support measures that can assist students in an open education framework. The model can be used as a blueprint that institutions can build on and adopt to suit their respective environments. However, the relationship between these constructs is still not well understood in certain contexts, as the adoption of openness varies from one institution to another. The model has 10 dimensions and standards to assess the key constructs of openness. In addition to this, the model relies only on the internal settings of institutional dimensions and does not consider the external constructs of openness, such as national policy, which prove central in laying the legislative framework of a given country's higher education system. The student interaction or dimension is also not considered. These are however critical factors in higher education, particularly in consideration of governance factors, such as compliance and regulation. By considering these limitations, the researcher presents the application of this model in the study as:
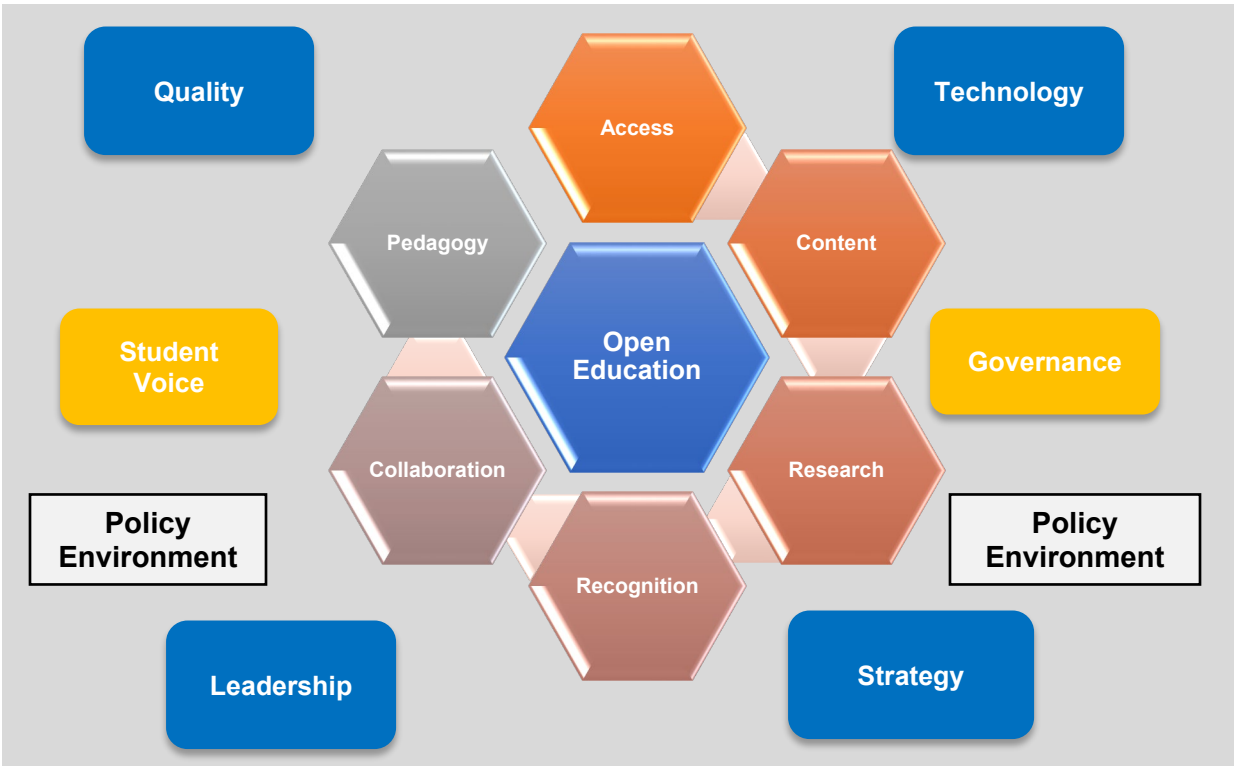
Figure 3.3: Opening Up Education: A Support Framework for Higher Education Institutions (Adapted from Dos Santos, Punie, & Castaño-Muñoz, 2016)

3.5 E-LEARNING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Aparicio, Bacao and Oliveira (2016) presents an e-Learning Theoretical Framework and view e-learning concepts an apart of an ecosystem in institutions. The framework summarises the various dimensions of e-learning studies. The theory framework is based upon three principal dimensions:

a.   users;
b.   technology; and
c.   services related to e-learning.

The theoretical framework is a contribution for guiding e-learning and classifies the stakeholder groups and their relationship with e-learning systems. The framework shows a typology of e-learning systems and services. This theoretical approach integrates learning strategies, technologies and stakeholders. The model identifies e-learning as a construction of two main areas, namely learning and technology. Learning is a cognitive process for achieving knowledge, and technology is an enabler of the learning process, meaning that technology is used like any other tool in the education praxis. E-learning systems aggregate various tools, such as writing technologies, communication technologies, visualisation, and storage. For these reasons, researchers and scientists have sought to transform e-learning systems into technically transparent tools. For the purposes of this study, it is important identify the definitions applied to e-learning to ensure consistency in the understanding of the e-learning framework being considered, but also in the meaning of practice and the terms applied. The following definitions from Mayes and De Freitas (2004) are applied:

a.   E-learning, or 'technology enhanced learning' - describes the use of technology to support and enhance learning practice;

b.   Theories of learning - provide empirically based accounts of the variables that influence the learning process and provide explanations of the ways in which that influence occurs;

c.   Pedagogical frameworks - describe the broad principles through which theory is applied to learning and teaching practice; and

d.   Models of e-learning - describe where technology plays a specific role in supporting learning. These can be described both at the level of pedagogical principles and at the level of detailed practice in implementing those principles.

e.   Taxonomy in this context proposes a mapping of theories of learning, pedagogical frameworks, and models of e-learning.

The framework identifies dimensions of e-learning systems such as stakeholders, pedagogical models, instructional strategies, and learning technologies. Furthermore, the model provides key concepts in e-learning systems with associated applications in the modalities of teaching and learning.

Aparicio et al. (2016) recognises that e-Learning systems are an evolving concept, rooted in the concept of Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) (Zinn, 2000). The research that informed the framework identifies 23 concepts that belong to the use of computers in learning activities, used especially for learning purposes. For this study, the only concepts related to open and distance

learning are of interest and the associated applicability to the topic of the study. The concepts that resonate with the study include:

a. Learning Management Systems (LMS) - supports registering services, tracks and delivering content to learners. It also reports learner progress and assesses results. LMS focuses on contents and teacher/student interaction (Ismail, 2001; Kim & Lee, 2008).

b. Electronic Learning (e-Learning) - refers to learning via electronic sources, providing interactive distance learning. Use of a Web System as a way to access information available, disregarding time and space (White, 1983; Morri, 1997; Dorai, Kermani, & Stewart, 2001)

c. Mega University – a concept that combines distance learning, higher education, size, and use of technology (Daniel, 1996).

d. Blended Learning (B-Learning) - blended learning combines multimedia for learning purposes. This form of learning mixes different learning environments (face-to-face and distance). The aim is to complement distance learning with face-to-face classes (Singh, 2021).

In addition to these concepts, the e-learning framework recognises the dimensions and the disruptive conditions brought about by a massive diffusion of online learning through various formats, from closed to open learning, and the massification of open online courses (MOOCs). McAuley et al. (2010) define massive online open courses as an online phenomenon that gathered momentum over the past few years; a MOOC integrates the connectivity of social networking, the facilitation of an acknowledged expert in the field of study, and a collection of freely accessible online resources. Allison et al. (2012) further state that MOOCs are currently disrupting the learning environment, due to the global free adoption and use of these open courses.

3.5.1 Dimensions of the E-Learning framework

E-Learning theory comprises three elements, namely: people, technology and services. Further to this, it comprises of the components, which according to Dabbagh (2005) are identified and defined through a theory-based framework that relates learning technologies, instructional strategies, and pedagogical models or constructs. E-Learning theory is grounded by the Dabbagh's framework (2005), which includes multiple dimensions, such as the way people learn (open/flexible way), the learning strategy (collaboration, exploration, problem-solving) and via the

use of technology. Dabbagh's framework (2005) is a pedagogical model, and theoretical constructs of such models are derived from knowledge acquisition models or views about cognition and knowledge, which form the basis for learning theory (Aparicio et al., 2016). Pedagogical models refer to the mechanism by which to link theory to practice (Mehlenbacher, 2010), where instructional strategies are derived from these models and facilitate learning, such as collaboration, articulation, reflection, and role-playing, among others. The dimensions that are identified by the framework are framed within the information systems context and are identified below.

3.5.1.1 E-learning systems stakeholders

This dimension entails the identification of internal and external groups or individuals that can directly and indirectly interact and interfaces with the organisation at various points and how they affect an organisation (He & Freeman, 2010; Stoner, Freeman, & Gilbert, 1995). Stakeholders' analysis has been used in information studies to identify the systems' users and their direct or indirect interaction (Papazafeiropoulou, Pouloudi, & Currie, 2001; Wagner, Hassanein, & Head, 2008). Users of the system for learning are students, and e-learning systems form an important communication channel between learners and instructors. Learners might be individual students, or company employees who are using these systems according to the development policies of their employees. In the latter case, they are external users but interact directly with the system. Suppliers can be universities, or educational institutions in general; this stakeholder group is an internal group of users, who interact directly with the system. Accreditation bodies are external and interact directly with the system for auditing purposes. Teachers are part of the supplier group; as internal users and interact directly with the e-learning platforms. Content providers can be internal or external users. Other external stakeholders that interact directly with the e-learning systems are the Education Ministry, teachers' associations, students' commissions such as the SRC, and technology providers. The Education Ministry, in terms of this framework, is considered to be a shareholder as a central funder of public institutions.

3.5.1.2 Pedagogical models in e-learning

Pedagogical models are the basis of learning theory, as they derive from knowledge acquisition. From a pedagogical point of view, the models are mechanisms that link e-learning theory to e-learning practice (Dabbagh, 2005). The pedagogical models in e-learning are models adopted by institutions in the delivery of progammes and course content and these can be open learning,

distributed learning, learning communities, communities of practice, and knowledge building communities. The open learning model can take several forms, for example, it can be a workshop, a seminar, a night course, or a distance course. Some examples on the Web are knowledge networks, knowledge portals, asynchronous learning networks, virtual classrooms, and telelearning (Dabbagh, 2005). Distributed learning is focused on the learning distribution resulting in a combined channels situation that allows learners to access education through technology or in a way that cannot be obtained synchronously or asynchronously anywhere else (Dabbagh, 2005).

Mayes & De Freitas (2004) identify that to start with the design of and pedagogical model for programme delivery for online learning, the model needs to start with carefully defined intended learning outcomes, after which it ought to identify learning and teaching activities that stand a good chance of allowing the students to achieve that learning and design assessment tasks, which will genuinely test whether or not the outcomes have been achieved. They further contend that an appropriate approach to a pedagogical model for e-learning is one that maps learning theory onto pedagogical approaches, where mapping is the logical and necessary precursor to any attempt to examine an e-learning implementation and position it in a pedagogical design framework. Mayes & De Freitas (2004) provide a diagram of the curriculum design cycle that guide the appropriate approach to guide instructional design for e-learning.

Design Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)

Define Intended Learning Outcomes

Design Assessments to Measure Learning Outcomes

Evaluate achievement of outcomes and alignment of stages

167
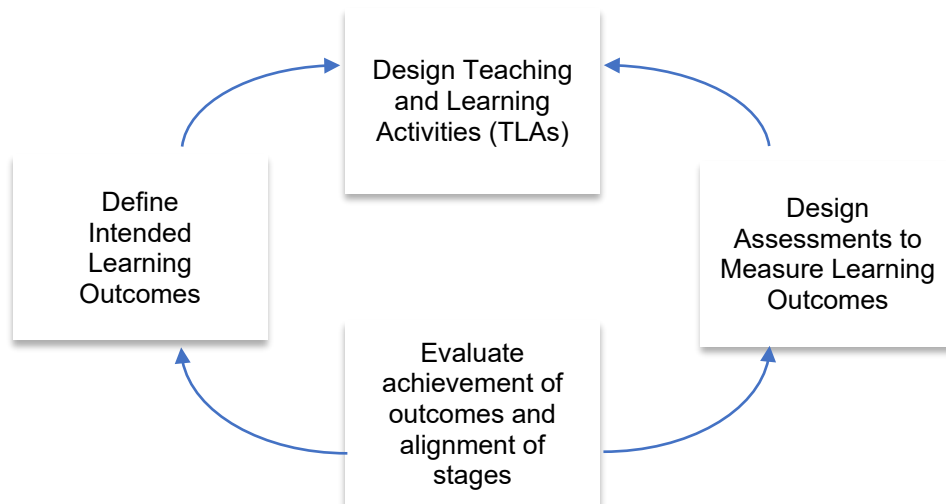
Figure 3.4: Diagram of the Curriculum Design adapted from Mayes & De Freitas (2004)

The pedagogical model identifies further the learning communities that are composed of students in universities who can feel through their interactions supported by peers, by instructors, and by the college (Patterson & O'Brien, 2021). Communities of practice (CoP) are defined by Wenger (1999) as informal groups of people, who share the same interests on a given subject matter. Communities of practice share interests and best practices and collaborate not only in academia but also for example in industry.

3.5.1.3 Instructional strategies

Instructional strategies operationalise the pedagogical models and can also be described as programme delivery strategies since strategies consist of general approaches to a learning model. Jonassen et al. (1991) identifies five instructional strategies that are recognised in terms of this e-learning framework, these include plans and techniques that the instructor uses in order to engage the learners; instructional strategies are enablers to learning. Aparicio et al. (2016) state that instructional strategies differ from learning strategies, as learning strategies constitute mental tools that students use to understand and learn more (Jonassen et al., 1991). Aparicio et al. (2016) further elaborate that each instructional condition should meet a different instructional strategy. Mayes & De Freitas (2004) assert that the 'e' in e-learning allows remote learners to interact with each other and with the representations of the subject matter in a form that could simply not be achieved for those learners without this technology. In this way, we have a genuine example of added value. The caution though that the role of the technology is primarily to get remote learners into a position to learn favourably as though they were campus-based, rather than offering a new teaching method.

3.5.1.4 Learning technologies

From a constructivist epistemological point of view (Hannafin, Hannafin, Land & Oliver, 1997), leaning technologies require integrated strategies, aligning several foundations and environments: psychological, pedagogical, cultural, pragmatic, and technological, since according to the characteristics of this vision in that knowledge depends on the knower's frame of reference (Dabbagh, 2005). Oliver & Herrigton (2003) construct an e-learning framework composed of

technological elements grouped into three main learning areas, namely: resources, supports, and activities. Aparicio et al. (2016) note that e-learning frameworks seem to be underpinned by Herrington's framework.

3.5.1.5 Principles of the model

In terms of the e-learning framework, a framework constitutes that which classifies the important factors in information systems development. By this definition, it implies that factors are causally connected with successful systems development (Gregor, Martin, Fernandez, Stern & Vitale, 2006). In this framework Aparicio et al. (2016) present the main information systems dimensions adapted to e-learning systems. Their framework is a theoretical generalisation (Carroll & Swatman, 2000; Lee & Baskerville, 2003) resulting from a literature review on e-learning dimensions. The e-learning systems' theoretical framework contains the three main components of information systems. These components are people, technologies, and services. People interact with e-learning systems; e-learning technologies enable the direct or indirect interaction of the different groups of users; and technologies provide support to integrate content, enable communication, and provide collaboration tools. E-learning services integrate all the activities corresponding to pedagogical models and to instructional strategies. The complex interaction combination is the direct or indirect action with e-learning systems.

The e-learning systems theory framework is constructed upon three main components of an information system mentioned above, that is: people, technology, and services provided by technology itself. The framework primarily identifies the interfaces of these three components but is limited to the interfaces themselves, without interrogating at a philosophical level the nature of the interface. The framework identifies the stakeholder groups and their interaction with e-learning systems at a high level. The classification of the technological considerations to these kinds of system, focusing more on the contents type and ways of communication is presented. This is identified by Aparicio et al. (2016) as the important feature of the framework because they argue that, apart from the commercial platforms the framework identifies the technological specifications that can be applied to any technological artifact. The third pillar of the framework links to services provided by an e-learning system. Services are the main output, as they operationalizse instructional strategies and several pedagogical models. Services are critical to any HEI and in particular when it comes to openness as they provide a measure or degree of support for students to interact with in their learning experiences. The framework provides a theoretical structure for multiple studies in e-learning systems, and is adaptable to suit varied contexts, which allows for

applicability to a specific modality of teaching and learning in higher education. The framework is considered critical to this study particularly through the lenses of online learning and the increase in use of technology to mediate teaching and learning in an open context.

E- Learning Theoretical Framework

Customers
Suppliers,Teachers, Accreditors Bodies,
Content providers, Board, Shareholders

Professional associations, regulators
Student Councils
Council and Education Ministries

E-Learning systems stakeholders

Content: Documents, Digital Audio and Video, Authoring tools, visualisation tools, knowledge repositories, learner online journals, search engines etc.
Communication: Discussion area, forums, chat, social network, email and synchronous communication
Collaboration: multi-user dialogue, sharing tools, problem/ solution area, one-on-one mentoring

Pedagogical Models: Open learning, distributed learning, learning communities, communities of practice, and knowledge building communities.
Instructional Strategies: Contextualising instruction and presenting, activating learning processes, activating and assessing learning outcomes. Instructional lessons, promoting and supporting authentic learning activities, facilitating problem solving. Promoting collaboration and supporting multiple perspectives.

People

E-Learning Systems

Technologies

Services

E-Learning Technologies

E-Learning Activities

Figure 3.5: E-Learning Theoretical Framework (Adapted from Aparicio, Bacao, & Oliveira 2016)

The overall goal of the framework is to identify the participants, technology, and services related to e-learning. As mentioned previously, the resulting framework for e-learning has three dimensions, namely: people, technology, and services. These dimensions provide the theoretical framework with a more holistic view. The main contribution of the framework is to provide the theoretical background for e-learning strategies. The framework is developed and presented by Aparicio, Bacao and Oliveira (2016) as foundational framework and a cornerstone to guide e-

learning systems research, where these authors intend in future studies to propose models for assessing the success of e-learning systems. This would then provide varied degrees of measure in terms of the variables in e-learning that transcend beyond these interfaces. For any e-learning system to be effective, the interfaces need to consider both teacher's and students' experiences. Shetu et al. (2021) considers these interfaces critical to any learning systems success. Given the context of this study, the model falls short in providing a variety of ways in which to consider offline and online interaction methods, particularly if one considers network issues given the divides in education provision impacting on urban and rural environments. Derntl & Calvo (2010) identify that traditional approaches to designing and delivering education are too rigid and inflexible. When it comes to adapting to new trends in technology and adopting to new tools, e-learning frameworks tend to be limited in supporting the sustained impact of technology on education practice and instructional design. The authors further argue that the use and usability of educational design for technology-enhanced learning can be increased by complementing with ready-to-use tools as part of an e-learning framework approach. The e-learning framework takes a holistic view in interacting with the various aspects necessary for e-learning but its adaptability to suite varied context is rather limited, especially taking into consideration the context of this study.

3.6 KEY CONCEPTS OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The foundational theoretical frameworks of the study provided the basis for the development of data collection instruments. The OpenEdu framework in particular assisted in the construction for an openness model and guided some key elements in the development of the interview instruments for the study. Access, recognition, pedagogy and collaboration components of the OpenEdu model identified factors of Openness as some of the core dimensions supported by the transversal dimensions. The transversal dimensions considered the components of the open education model to be influences in supporting and operationalising the core dimension. These dimensions are pivotal in the cultural socialisation of students and social factors in institutions, particularly when it comes to the degree of adoption and use of technology, and the quality culture and strategies adopted within a particular institution in opening up of education to marginalised populations of students. The Mulder and Janssen model assisted the researcher to explore the anchoring concepts of open education, together with the OpenEdu Framework and associated factors of openness. The e-learning framework expanded on the technology aspects of the Mulder & Janssen Model and the OpenEdu to explain the rationale for the need of understanding the role of technology and its interfaces among the varied interactions of stakeholders using the available

technologies in institutions. The ten dimensions of the OpenEdu framework offer an in-depth exploration of openness and the influence of dimensions in opening up education. A summary of an application process for the theoretical framework of the study is provided in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: **Summary of An Application Process for the Theoretical Framework of the Study**

Models	Component of Models	Application of the Data Collection Instruments
The OpenEdu Framework	Core Dimensions of Open Education: Access, Content, Pedagogy, Recognition, Collaboration and Research	Provide an optic of what it means when it is said that a university is open in relation to the central university mission.
	Transversal Dimensions of Open Education: Technology, Leadership, Strategy and Quality	Provides the construction for the realisation of the core dimensions.
The Mulder & Janssen open education model	Identifies the general mainstreaming of openness as a four-fold digital openness structure, viz.: Open Source (software), Open Access (scientific output), Open Content (creative output), Open Educational Resources (OERs) (learning materials). The model identifies and is constructed on three nodes of openness in a pyramid format, OERs, Open learning Services OLS and Open Teaching Effort (OTE)	Provides the classical open education conceptualisation. Provides a philosophical paradigm that is derived from the primary principle of education as public good, and the doctrine that education should be open, flexible, and lifelong.
The E-Learning Framework	Three dimensions: people, technology and services and the dimensions provide the theoretical framework with a holistic view for e-learning.	To identify the participants, technology, and services related to e-learning.

3.7 A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The foundational theories provided a base for the conceptual framework of this study. The conceptual framework proposes a visualised expected relationship between dimensions of openness and the influence these factors as variables, and how these variables interact with each other to influence an institutional landscape and provide a response in addressing issues of social justice and inequality experienced by the marginalised populations in the student body. It is critical to note that in this study, openness is viewed as a broader a discourse in higher education integrating many other factors in the support of learning and teaching, as opposed to a rather narrow view focused on free and open access to educational resources. Openness in the context of this study is approached through multiple dimensions of access, teaching, admissions, quality, success and institutional position of operations, to facilitate conducive environments for learning and student support. These dimensions are central to mission of higher education institutions and reflect on organisational cultures in terms of provision of education to support marginalised group of society to succeed in their learning (Quaye, Harper & Pendakur, 2019). The objective of this study was to:

a. identify and describe the range of institutional, learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to openness during the study pathway of university learners;
b. analyse the role each of the identified contributory factors have on student access, teaching and learning and student-success; and
c. critically assess the nature of contribution that openness has on learner access and success patterns.

The capabilities students need for success during and beyond higher education transcend beyond specific discipline or academic skills but include: the development of productive mindsets; optimal social construct of agency in their learning journey; the management of life circumstances; and the way they relate to others and identify with their agency as learners and partners in universities (Lane et al., 2019). Nelson, Clarke, Kift and Creagh (2011) further contend that the provision of support for learning across all stages of the student lifecycle is widespread, and an accepted university priority that aims to optimise learning outcomes and prioritise student retention. The OpenEdu Framework resonates with these principles and expands to all spheres of the university

174

mission in terms of its ten dimensions. To construct a conceptual framework of the study the OpenEdu framework provides a useful lens to develop and frame the factors of openness.

The OpenEdu framework provided an integrated framework across its dimensions which informed the development of the framework in this study, expanding and reflecting the desire within the university system for a shared approach to student support, which facilitates collective engagement and collaboration with students across and between university initiatives in the attainment of retention and success outcomes in order to foster open education ambitions of expansion met with success.

Markiewicz & Patrick (2015) posit that a framework for evaluation provides a systematic means of design, collating and analysing evidence, while interpreting the results. It can be used to create both initiative specific as well as multi-initiative designs. The existence of a framework applies consistency and rigour to measurement and allows the outcomes achieved to be communicated and readily understood (NSW Government, 2014). The development of the Openness Framework is primarily informed by social science perspective (Denzin, 2008) involving an examination of how relationships, collaborations, and knowledge-sharing occur, while understanding how a situation comes to be and how it might be improved. This underpinning of social sciences provides a practical, thoughtful praxis, that informs thought through an implementation process concerned with the competence, sensibility, and sensitivity demanded in knowing what is right to do, and good to be, in a particular context, given the situation's unique circumstances, peculiarities, contingencies, and demands (Carr & Kemmis, 2003).

The effort to develop a set of dimensions of the framework is informed by the examination of the literature the identified dimensions of theoretical framework discussed in this chapter. This process involved the conceptualisation of initial propositions, followed by further investigation of the contextual conditions of the study and refinement in terms of the focus and objectives of the study.

Table 3.3:   Dimensions and Definitions of the Emergent Openness Framework

DIMENSION	DEFINITION
Access and Admissions	The access and admissions dimension are viewed by OpenEdu framework but limited to access at programme level. This dimension lends itself to the definition that access in open education involves the removal of economic, technological, geographical, and institutional barriers, which obstruct the entrance to knowledge. The openness framework expands on the access dimension and includes the admissions aspect. The admissions policy of an institutions needs to recognise the principles of widening access and the operationalisation of these core principles, transcending beyond programme levels to open up progression pathways for students to accumulate credits across courses. The openness framework includes the facilitation of access and admissions to learning and that institutions should not only be responsible for providing continuous education or preparation to learning, but ought to do this in a manner in which it can open opportunities for students to gain access with flexible pathways to succeed. Essack (2012) asserts that universities need to be aware in terms of their admissions policies that academic merit not only considers academic results but further identifies all other dimensions in providing opportunities of entry when it comes to admissions.
Pedagogy	This dimension remains consistent with the OpenEdu framework in that pedagogical approaches must make the range of teaching and learning practices transparent, sharable, and visible. Opening up pedagogical practices involves developing the design for learning so that it widens participation and collaboration between all stakeholders involved. The definition is expanded to include programmes design and learning outcomes as defined by the E-learning theoretical framework, in the sense that the programme design must first define the intended learning outcomes, and then choose learning and teaching activities that stand a good chance of allowing the students to achieve that learning and design assessment tasks that will genuinely test whether the outcomes have been achieved.
Assessment	This dimension is not recognised by all the studied dimensions but is viewed in this study as a critical factor that measures the success outcomes of learners in the attainment of their qualifications. The adoption of appropriate assessment modalities and institutional assessment framework aligns to the pedagogy dimension in the sense that it facilitates the activation and assessment of learning outcomes, thereby promoting and supporting authentic learning activities, while facilitating problem-solving.

Student experience and engagement	The dimension advances the proposition of recognising the need of students in a particular setting, such as the settings of this research study. Central to the principles of social justice and equity is the provision of appropriate learning opportunities and settings to marginalised students, where these settings influence student retention, persistence, and success. This dimension as with the assessment dimension, is not recognised by all the studied dimensions due to the eurocentric approaches to open education. Carolan, Davies, Crookes, Carolan et al. (2020) contend that there are limitations at universities in that traditional student success measurements that do not properly consider institutional settings and dynamics confronting of the student populations. Therefore, the dimension is defined from this context, and a student engagement approach that engages with the lived realities of students. It speaks to the way in which institutions construct learning spaces that embrace diversity and promote learning environments that seek to meet the expectations of students in reflecting on their structural configurations, operational efficiencies, and adequate provision of learning support.
Policy and Governance	None of the three frameworks recognises this dimension, but the openness framework views the dimension as critical in terms of the institutional decision-making systems. This dimension focuses the institutional aspects that integrate national policy and institutional settings in governance, inclusion of various stakeholders and their participation in decision-making system of the institution. The dimension further considers the external construct of openness policy, which is central in laying the legislative framework of higher education particularly in developing countries. Students are critical stakeholders in this dimension and align with the e-learning theoretical framework on the recognition of stakeholders in the decision-making processes, and how the internal and external groups or individuals that can directly and indirectly interact and interface with the organisation at various levels, as shaped by their respective roles.
Institutional Culture	All three frameworks identify that that there exist a lack of clarity and consistent understanding of what in fact constitutes openness in education. The OpenEdu framework identifies that this lack of clarity prevents universities from thinking about open education with purpose and strategy and remain unclear on how it can be put into practice. The institutional culture dimension lends itself towards the strategy dimension of the OpenEdu framework but is extended to include institutional internal dynamics. These dynamics are a key factor for institutional involvement or non-involvement in open education or the positioning of the institution in its openness trajectory. The institutional culture dimension defines the values, the commitments, the opportunities, the resources and the capabilities of an institution with respect to openness and the operationalisation of its planning to influence the culture of openness and

	a shared value culture promotes a value proposition, actions and activities that enable the take up of openness across a university by all stakeholders, including learners.
Quality	The OpenEdu framework views quality in open education as referring to a convergence of five concepts, namely: efficacy, impact, availability, accuracy and excellence with an institution's open education offering. This view is consistent with the openness framework, except in that quality should be a core dimension. Quality in open education also relates to the varied core dimension and transversal dimension, the environment, and conditions in which an open education culture is built upon within an institution.
Technology	The OpenEdu frameworks advances the recognition of the institutional settings and contexts in that contextual changes enable participation in open education. For example, in the uptake and availability of new technological solutions, such as new types of learning platforms and repositories and the expectations of an increasingly digitally-literate population.
	This dimension remains consistent with the OpenEdu Framework in that technological choices within an institution have a direct impact on how openness is configured, and institutions should consider technology when planning their strategies in order to align themselves and their priorities with regards to open education with the ICT investment they make. Dos Santos et. al. (2016) asserts that the degree to which the technology is applied by an institution reflects its openness culture.
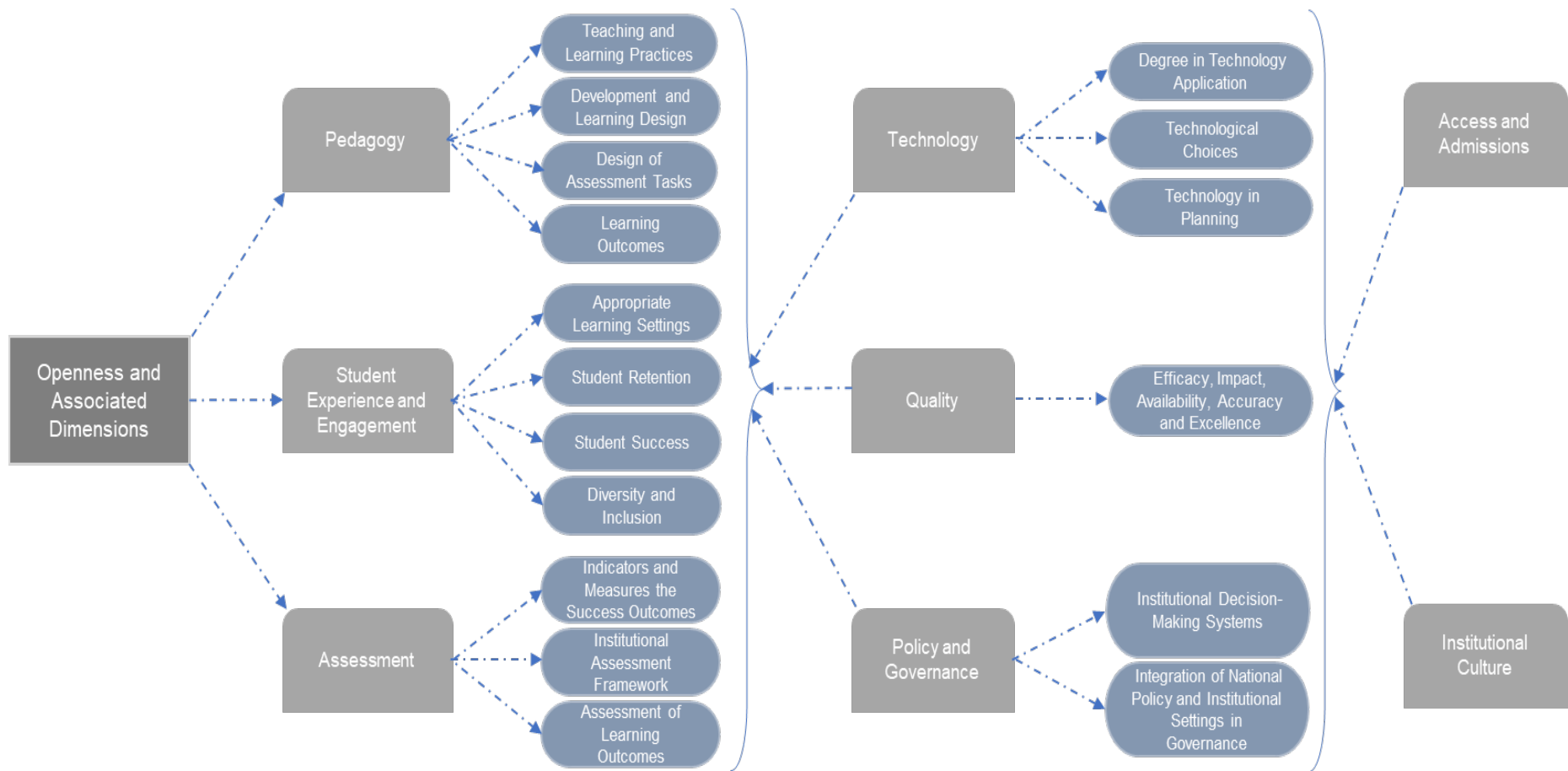
Figure 3.6: Diagrammatic Representation of the Conceptual Openness Framework

Possible data collection questions were also developed, which directly align with the objectives of the emergent openness dimensions. The questions give a structure and direction to the creation of the most appropriate data collection questions and help to frame the reporting of results.

Table 3.4: **Emergent Dimensions of the Openness Framework and Alignment to Conceivable Data Collection Questions**

DIMENSION	OBJECTIVE	INDICATORS	CONCEIVABLE DATA COLLECTION QUESTION
Access and Admissions	To conduct a situational analysis of access and success patterns within the identified open and distance university in South Africa	Enrolment patterns Student Profile Retention rates	How has openness and implementation of the discourse influenced access and success among disadvantaged previously marginalised student populations? What are the emergent patterns of access and success within the identified research setting of an ODL comprehensive public institution?
Pedagogy	To identify and describe the range of institutional, learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to openness during the study pathway of university learners.	Interactions students and faculty Measure and usage on the LMS and interactions	Are there instruments or interventions within the institution specifically developed to guide the development of productive relationships with staff, students, industry professionals, and others relevant to the student's learning process?
Assessments	To identify the contributory factors that impact student engagement, support, teaching and learning and student-success	Student progression: Course success rates	How do the identified contributory factors impact student access, teaching and learning and student-success?

Quality	To identify and describe the range of institutional, learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to openness during the study pathway of university learners.	Measure and usage on the LMS and interactions programme design and learning outcomes Student feedback Programme reviews Appropriate technological and pedagogical support	What are the institutional provisions on appropriate technological and pedagogical support
Student Support and engagement	To identify and describe the range of institutional, learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to openness during the study pathway of university learners. To what extent do the identified contributory factors have an impact on student access, teaching and learning and student-success.	First Year Experience programmes Collaboration between Faculty, student councils, Registrar's Office, and Student Affairs Office Institutional data on assessment outcomes (course and programme throughput), student enrolments, persistence indicators, progression and retention	To what extent does the student support initiative improve the socialisation and of students and improve academic performance
Policy and Governance	To what extent does the institution reflect on its defined mission and role for the future society as envisage by the Higher Education Act of 1997 (as amended). Advocates for the development of an ecosystem within the	Participation in the roles of the varied stakeholders in the governance instruments and protocols of the institution in the decision-making processes of the university	What is the current performance measure of the institution relating to the identified implementation indicators on the principles of openness? Does the university advocate for the development of an ecosystem within the institution that is anchored in interconnectedness and its developmental aspirations of a sustainable future?

	university that is anchored in interconnectedness and its developmental aspirations of a sustainable future.		
Institutional Culture	To identify and describe the range of institutional, learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to openness during the study pathway of university learners.	Inclusivity and race demographics The roles and involvement of key stakeholders in the various institutional decision-making processes of the university	What is the current performance measure of the institution in the identified implementation indicators on the principles of openness? Does the institution espouse values of open information sharing where information is openly available through institutional websites and new technologies are used for decision-making processes to become open to a wider audience and engagement of all stakeholders (Liu & He, 2019)? Are there any institutional interventions that integrate and guide the vision of the institutional leadership into the fabric of the institution supported by a change the culture and attitudes from all staff towards a culture of inclusiveness?
Technology	To evaluate current institutional technology performance in the implementation of the principles of openness in all core factors. To create a sense of online community and encouraging students to become independent learners.	A sense of online community, Initiatives encouraging students to become independent learners	Does the institution provide optimal learning environments and operational systems integrating technology in the provision of services and support to students? What is the technology strategy and the degree to which technology is adopted by the institution in in its openness provision and support to students?

The objectives of the emergent openness dimensions were developed to align to the objectives of the study. Each objective begins with a 'to' statement, highlighting the intended outcome, and is built to be followed by the identification of indicators as a measure of the outcomes and possible questions to guide the data collection process. This approach establishes both a purposeful and well-reasoned data collection method. A set of possible questions identify and directly align with the objectives, dimensions, and indicators to measure the various support for learning processes from the student perspective. Each data collection question takes the form of a statement to which the respondent is asked to apply their thoughts, reflections, and experiences in terms of their institution and available interventions, in order to measure the degree of openness in each dimension.

Overall, the evaluation questions give the critical structure and direction of the assessment, lead to the creation of the most appropriate data collection questions and help to frame the reporting of results. The indicators provide a quantitative measure by means of which to align to the overall study objectives to measure, for example, student progression, course throughput, subjects, and course retention. The information was drawn directly from the institutional database to provide a comparative measure to an otherwise qualitative study approach.

The emergent openness framework takes on an evolving construct that was guided by the responses and analysis of the data collection process in order to ensure harmonious report writing process that aligns all the openness dimensions.

3.7.1 Application of the Conceptual Framework to the study

The emergent conceptual framework assumes a posture that is oriented more towards the core business of teaching and learning for the purposes of this study. It is constructed on accessible learning support in the distance and open education system in South Africa mediated in large part by technology in its core dimensions of pedagogy, assessment, student experience, and engagement. The secondary dimensions of technology, quality, policy, and governance are central in the realisation of the core dimensions with their associated activities. The institutional culture, access, and admissions are considered secondary dimensions as well, but lend themselves more towards the mission, policy principles and implementation of the secondary dimension principles in order to deliver a strong support architecture for the university system.

The limited interaction with students in open and distance education in terms of teaching, learning, and student experience needs to be overcome by providing meaningful learning support to students, and the support architecture must be robust and reliable, facilitated by technology in order to achieve the aspiration and principles of open education. The identified dimensions, associated activities, and concepts of the conceptual framework represent the areas of knowledge that will be sought from the participants by means of the interview protocol.

3.8 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the theoretical models on which the study was founded. All the important models and theories that were utilised within the study process were outlined in detail. In order to develop an appropriate openness model, it explored the influence of openness dimensions in terms of how institutions respond to the needs of marginalised student populations in the contexts of access, retention, and success. This process was guided by the theoretical frameworks discussed above. Mayes & Freitas (2016) assert that a theory-based framework is necessary for understanding, where a particular implementation of is positioned in in a complex landscape of technology-enhanced teaching and learning. Since open education is increasingly embracing and using technology to achieve better learning outcomes, effective assessment of these outcomes is desirable, and a more cost-efficient way of bringing the learning environment to students. Theory-driven research provides a consistent ground for valid and rigorous development of the appropriate openness model to consider, and the model can be developed based on the constructs of three models discussed above. The OpenEdu framework and e-learning models are filled with different constructs in order to guide the development of the data collection instruments for this study. The dimensions of the OpenEdu framework explain the rationale for the need for different approaches in the adoption of open education, and the consideration of critical factors in the form of dimension that are critical in openness. These models enabled the researcher to present a comprehensive understanding of openness, as well as to compare findings with other similar studies.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter dealt with the general concepts of theoretical frameworks and expanded on the chosen openness models to guide the emergent conceptual framework model for the study. Chapter Three provided an in-depth overview of three models, namely, the OpenEdu Framework, the Mulder & Janssen open education model and the e-learning framework, and within this overview, the key concepts central to each of the models were discussed in order to illustrate how each model offered opportunities for operationalising the researcher's understanding of the phenomena of openness. As part of the process of operationalising the specified phenomena, the most pertinent concepts/ dimensions from each of the model is specifically highlighted as part of the process of developing a conceptual framework for use within the study. As such, the emerging framework for the study is presented as a diagrammatic summary of the relationship between dimensions of openness, their influence as variables, and how these variables interact with each other to influence institutional responses to student support issues and inequality experienced by the marginalised populations in the student body.

Following on from Chapter Three, the current chapter (Chapter Four) presents a comprehensive overview of all issues related to research methodology, from the researcher's ontological considerations, the study's epistemology, the chosen paradigm, research design, and the adopted data collection methods. The sequential exploratory mixed method research design adopted within the study is specifically articulated. To this end, the chapter provides a detailed account of the researcher's philosophical assumptions, stances, and the methods adopted in pursuit of answers to the research questions. A complete account of the way in which the study was planned, structured, and carried out is discussed (Tsekoa, 2013). In addition, the chapter describes measures taken to ensure trustworthiness of the results, ending with a thorough exploration of ethical considerations that were taken into account in the study.

In the interest of ensuring an easy-to-follow presentation, the description of methodological aspects is organised according to the sequencing of the different phases of the study. The decision was made in accordance with Kumar's (2018) assertion that research should be

accurately reflected as an organised inquiry that employs suitable systematic methodology to solve problems and generate new, relevant knowledge.

From the previous chapter's conceptual foundation, this chapter articulates all of the researcher's methodological considerations with respect to the research design; ontological and epistemological stances and assumptions; identification and selection of study sites and participants. Similarly, it details those methods and techniques used within the study and ethical considerations that were taken into account in ensuring the protection of participants who took part in the study.

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method designs are examined in terms of research design concerns, as well as sample procedures and techniques, data collection processes, ethical issues, data quality management protocols, and a description of the data analysis methodologies used in the study. For ease of reference, the empirical phases of the study are diagrammatically summarised in Figure 4.1 below.

Phase 1 - Situational Analysis

• **Retrospective review and analysis of Policy & Documents**

Phase 2 - Qualitative Enquiry and analysis

individual and Focus group interviews & data analysis

Phase 3 - Quantitative Phase - Self complete questionnaires and data analysis

Phase 4 - Theory Development
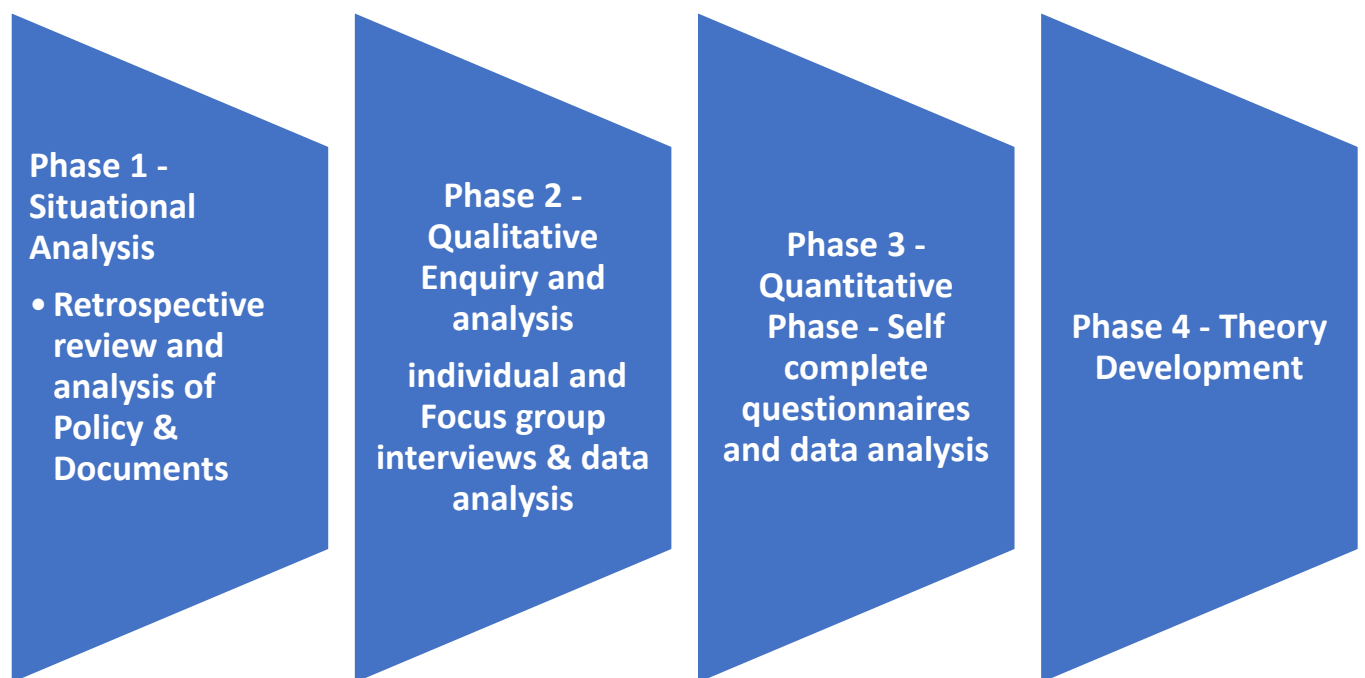
Figure 4.1: Diagrammatic summation of the Empirical Phases and Methodology Adopted within the Study - An Exploratory Sequential Mixed Method [Adapted from Creswell, 2009]

The following empirical objectives served as the blueprint guide for developing the data collection and methodological foci for the study:

a. Conducting a situational analysis of access and success patterns within the identified open and distance university in South Africa.

b. Identifying and describing the range of institutional, learner, and teacher-related factors that contribute to openness during the study pathway of university learners.

c. Analysing the role each of the identified contributory factors have on student access, teaching and learning and student-success.

d. Critically assessing the nature of contribution that openness has on learner access and success patterns.

e. Evaluating current performance in the implementation of the principles of openness across the chosen study site.

f. Developing a student success "openness-framework" to promote student access and success in universities.

The chapter presents the research paradigm, followed by ontological assumptions, epistemological assumptions, methodological assumptions, research design issues, data collection and ethical considerations.

4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Kuhn (1962) famously coined the word "paradigm" to mean a philosophical way of thinking. The word has its philosophical foundations in Greek where it means "pattern" (Mertens, 2012). Neuman (2014) defines a paradigm as a research philosophy shared by a researcher with common beliefs, values, and assumptions. A paradigm is used to conduct a research inquiry in response to complex research questions. Research paradigms consist of four basic components, namely (i) ontology - the researcher assumptions as they relate to their understanding of the nature of reality; (ii) epistemology - researcher assumptions on producing an acceptable knowledge that could be obtained from the observable phenomena; (iii) axiology - the role of values in research and in guiding the researcher's stance; and (iv) methodology - the conceptual framework behind the research process (Neuman, 2014).

The complex and multi-dimensional nature of the research question central to the current study guided the researcher toward the pragmatist paradigm. Creswell (2009) offers an apt summation of the pragmatist paradigm understanding it as a philosophical view, which advocates for the use of mixed methods in a single study, so as to have a complex

understanding of a research problem. Pragmatists follow both positivist and constructivist paradigms. Howe (2012), Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) argue and support the pragmatist paradigm, and within this, they identify synergies between quantitative and qualitative methodologies. They identify that both approaches use observations to address research questions and adoption of pragmatism as a paradigm provides researchers with a framework built to safeguard the research process, and to minimise bias. Howe (2012), Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2005) further argue that quantitative and qualitative methodologies can and should be joined as the two approaches that complement one another especially in providing answers to complex research problems (Feilzer, 2010).

4.2.1 Ontological assumptions

Ontological assumptions refer to philosophical viewpoints that address the fundamentals of reality's nature or questions about what exists. Within this assumption, there are two basic positions: realism, and nominalism. The realist considers the world to be about what exists. It is presumptively true that the real world exists, regardless of people's conceptions of it. Between the researcher and the problem under scrutiny, there is a definite distinction. The nominalist, on the other hand, believes that people never directly encounter natural reality. The researcher's encounters with what he or she refers to as the real world are always filtered via a lens of explanations and inner subjectivity (Neuman 2014). For this study, the researcher's stance specifically aligns itself with realist and nominalist ontological positions. This stance alludes to the fact that the researcher is of the view that the openness dimensions and associated factors greatly shape the experiences within the physical, social, and cultural world of the institution under study.
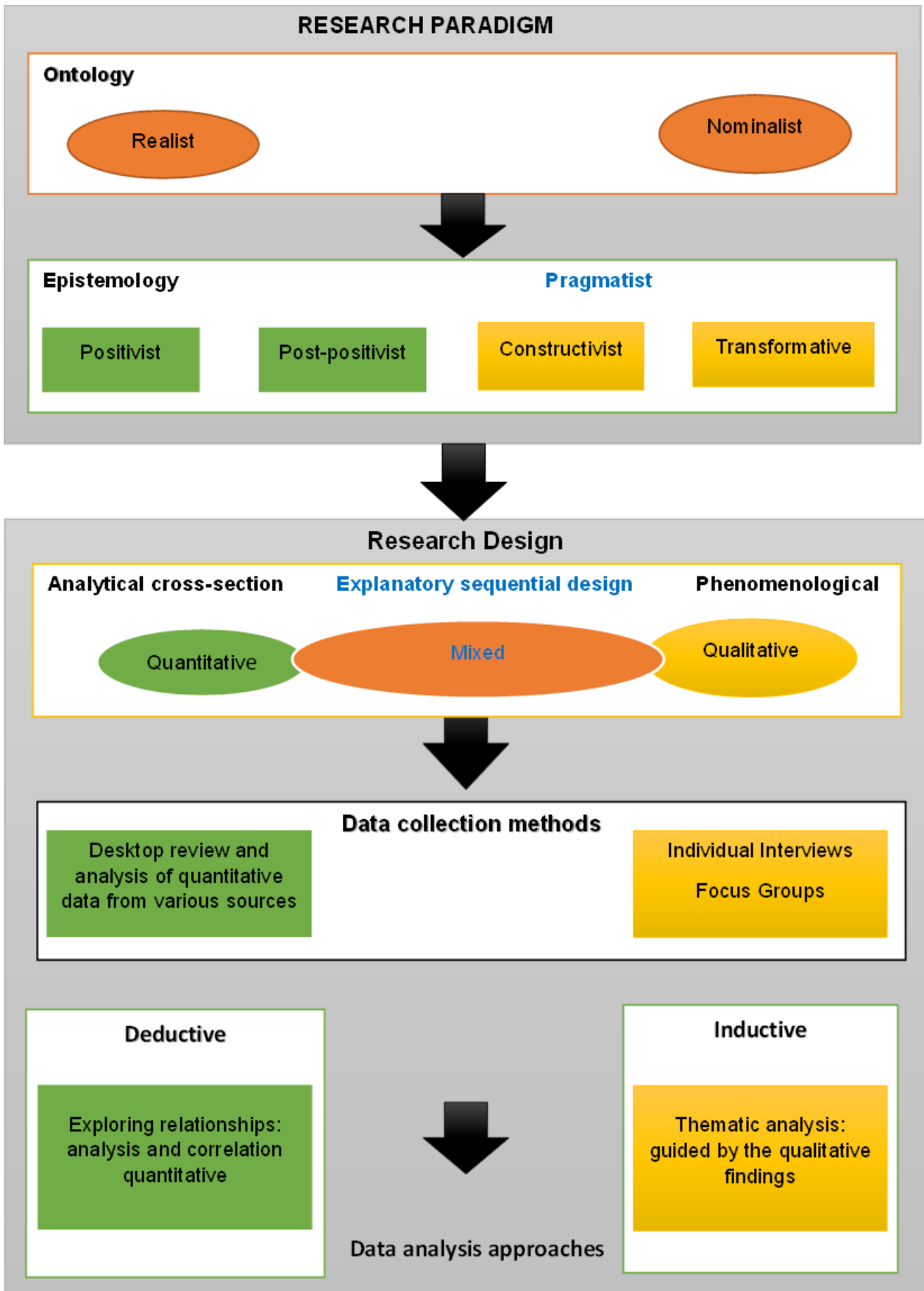
Figure 4.2: Diagrammatic Presentation of the Research Methodology adapted from Belay (2020)

4.2.2 Epistemological assumptions

Epistemological assumptions relate to issues of how the researcher knows the world around his/her surrounding or how he/she knows about what is true. Epistemology includes what the researcher needs to do to produce knowledge and what scientific knowledge looks like once learned, produced and communicated. A researcher can produce new knowledge deductively by testing pre-existing ideas and conjecture about reality against empirical data. They can also work inductively to gather and organise empirical evidence into higher order generalisations. Working inductively and deductively over time can distinguish true from false ideas with respect to the broad areas of reality (Neuman, 2014).

In this study, the researcher incorporated the elements of different epistemological paradigms to observe, measure, and understand the reality about the evolution of distance and open education. To this end, the concept of openness in education is influenced by positivist, post-positivist and constructivism paradigms (Neuman, 2014). The next subsections discuss the paradigms utilised within the study, along with the philosophical assumptions and the researcher's stance on these approaches.

4.2.2.1 Positivist research paradigm

Rahi (2017) views the positivist paradigm as the only way to establish truth and objective reality. In keeping with this absolute determination, positivism is founded on the view that science is the single basis for real knowledge. Positivist researchers conclude that if scientific methods do not yield any visible outcomes on the nature of reality, then reality does not exit. Knowledge can be generated only by using scientific methods. A deductive approach is undertaken with the focus being on testing a hypothesis. Positivism asserts view that there is no single and tangible reality, which is relatively constant across time and space (Kamal, 2019).

Positivists argue that research relies solely on observations and measurements (Rahi, 2017). They assume that the methods, techniques, and procedures followed in the research world offer the best framework for investigating any identified research problem. This typically involves random samples, controlled variables, closed-ended questions, standardised sampling tests, and data analysis procedures. Observations are generated through the senses of sight, smell, taste, touch, and sound. This gives little credence, however, to more abstracted attitudes and thoughts, which are not considered as valid evidence and knowledge. The

intellectual rigour of the positivistic paradigm is measured by means of reliability and validity (McGregor & Murnane, 2010), which are the quality standards of this paradigm (Stathi et al., 2018).

In this study, the research questions that were answered originated from both qualitative and quantitative domains. To this end, the researcher within the study had to embrace both the tenets of qualitative and quantitative research i.e., both positivist and constructivist epistemologies.

4.2.2.2 Post-positivist research paradigm

The post-positivism paradigm started in the 1960s as a way of knowing that extended beyond a systematic method. Post-positivism generates knowledge using an inductive reasoning approach. It denies the perspectives of positivism and serves to understand why people behave in the manner that they do. In this context there is a position for the voice and role of the researcher and participants in the study. Within this critical realist paradigm, research should be conducted in natural settings, rather than in experimental laboratories. The paradigm focuses its search for implications on definitive social and cultural contexts rather than on general settings. For this purpose, neither the participants nor the researcher can remain neutral (McGregor & Murnane, 2010). In this study, the researcher used focus groups and interviews to collect the data in the qualitative phase of the data collection. The conclusion and measure of the paradigm is the trustworthiness of the results because the researcher justified her perspectives and findings for the reader.

4.2.2.3 Constructivist research paradigm

The constructivist paradigm is related to concepts that address an understanding of the world as others experience it. They believe that reality is a socially constructed phenomena and there are many intangible realities as there are people constructing them. Statements regarding what is true and false are bound by culture, history, and context (Creswell, 2014). Realism may be individual, or group-shared. When utilising this construct, the researcher's interest should be focused on how these assumptions about the nature of realism is constructed in the research process. The researcher is inevitably influenced by their values, which inform the paradigm they choose for the inquiry. Central to this paradigm is that reality is a social construct, where the research questions may not be well-known before the study begins, but rather developed as the study progresses. The questions are open-ended, where the researcher and respondents can add to and reshape their mental models of reality through

social collaboration, building new understandings as they actively engage in learning experiences.

The current study followed best practice according to the constructivist research paradigm. The researcher understands that the participants are the best narrators of their lived experiences. Further, she is of the view that the deep knowledge about openness in education could be obtained by deeply investigating the experiences of the participants.

4.2.2.4 Interpretivist research paradigm

Interpretive paradigm is also called the phenomenological approach, that is, an approach that aims to understand people. This approach maintains that all human beings are engaged in the process of making sense of their worlds and continuously interpreting, creating, giving meaning, defining, justifying and rationalising daily actions (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Also referred as the humanistic paradigm, Taylor & Medina (2018) identify that the paradigm arrived in educational research during the late 1970s, and aims to understand other cultures from within, that is, to understand the cultural of another by learning to stand in their shoes, look through their eyes, and feel their pleasure or pain. They further assert that the epistemology of this paradigm is an inter-subjective form of knowledge construction.

A researcher conducts a reading to discover meaning embedded within text. Each reader brings his or her subjective experience to a text (De Vos et al., 2011). When studying the text, the researcher or reader tries to absorb or get inside the viewpoint it presents as a whole and then to develop a deep understanding of how its parts relate to the whole. In other words, true meaning is rarely simple or obvious on the surface, one reaches it only through a detailed study of the text, contemplating its many messages and seeking connections among its parts (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). In this paradigm, the researcher often uses participant observation and field research, which are techniques in which many hours and days are spent in direct contact with participants. Transcripts, conversations, and video tapes may be studied in detail in order to gain a sense of subtle non-verbal communication, or to understand the interaction in its real context (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). The quality standards that regulate interpretive knowledge construction are varied but remain consistent and coherent with standards of trustworthiness as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1989, cited in Stathi et al., 2018).

Interpretivism is suitable as a choice for the current study due to its focus on hermeneutics. This project seeks to interpret and construct the same particular phenomenon, as lived

experience of the participants (Speziale, Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). The researcher holds the view that participants are the best narrators of their lived experiences.

4.2.2.5 Transformative research paradigm

The transformative research paradigm refers to a group of research designs influenced by different scholars and theories, with a common theme of transforming societies through group action. This is where scholars criticise the positivist, post-positivist, and constructivist theoretical stances. The paradigm also helps to explain in-detail the supremacy of Western research paradigms and marginalisation of knowledge created in other cultures (Creswell, 2014). In this paradigm, true knowledge is collected from the participants' frame of reference. The relationship between the researcher and participants involves a transformation and relief in understanding. The researchers must answer the research questions self-reflexively by reflecting on and examining their own principles in the process (Kamal, 2019).

For this study, the main objective of the inquiry utilised this worldview to address the principles of openness, and the construction of and aptitude in higher education to support students to succeed in their studies. The quantitative phase of the study was used to investigate the surface realities about the factors and dimensions of openness; and the qualitative phase was used to explore in greater depth the influence of these dimensions and associated factors in the lived realities of participants within a comprehensive open university setting.

4.2.2.6 Pragmatist research paradigm

Taylor and Medina (2018) argue that methods and quality standards may be drawn from two or more paradigms. The pragmatist research paradigm is a worldview that arises out of situations, actions, and consequences, rather from precursory conditions. The authors explain that reality does not exist only as natural and physical reality, but also as a psychological and social reality. The nature of reality is not exposed by using either a quantitative or qualitative research approach based on the philosophical assumptions or stances as the researcher has followed (Rahi, 2017). Instead of concentrating on methods, the researcher underlines the research problem and use of all available methods to understand it (Creswell, 2014). Pragmatists link their selected methods directly to the objectives of and the nature of questions posed.

The pragmatist paradigm is a spontaneous application, implementing methods that are suitable, permission to study settings, and interpreting findings acquired by positive means in

congruence with the nature of reality held by the researcher (Armitage, 2007). The main aim of utilising this paradigm is to determine the weaknesses of one method and to strengthen it by mixing different approaches (Rahi, 2017). The transferability of knowledge is more vital than the production of knowledge. From Creswell (2014), pragmatist offers a philosophical foundation for the research as follows:

a. Pragmatists are not only dedicated to one system of philosophical assumptions and reality;

b. Individual researchers have the freedom to choose the methodology of research that best fit for their objectives and research questions;

c. Pragmatist researchers utilise both quantitative and qualitative data to deliver the best answers for the research questions;

d. Pragmatist researcher should have established justification for reasons why quantitative and qualitative data need to be mixed in the first place;

e. Pragmatists agreed that research should be always conducted in social, cultural, political, and other contexts;

f. Pragmatists believed that an external world is independent from the mind as well as that lodged in the mind; and

g. Therefore, pragmatism opens the door for different worldviews, assumptions, and multiple forms of data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

In this study, the pragmatist paradigm created an opportunity to transform the tensions behind openness into new knowledge, through a path of discovery. The researcher used this paradigm in the mixed method approaches at three phases of the research. Indeed, this enabled the researcher to view the problem as centrally as the methods to be followed in addressing it. The type of chosen paradigms in relation to reality, knowledge, research design and tools used to collect data are summarised in the table below.

Table 4.1   Summary of Research Paradigms

Paradigms	Reality	Knowledge	Research Designs	Data Collection Tools
Positivism	There is one observable truth.	Knowledge is gained through hypothesis testing (deductive).	Quantitative	Desktop review of secondary data obtained from various national and institutional reports
Post-positivism	There is one unobservable truth.	Knowledge is gained by testing of hypotheses (deductive).	Quantitative balanced Qualitative	Focus groups
Constructivism	There are multiple truths.	Knowledge is gained through dialogue with people (inductive).	Qualitative	Interviews
Interpretivism	True meaning is rarely simple or obvious on the surface, making sense of multiple truths continuously	Knowledge is gain by interpretation, give meaning, define, justify, and rationalise (deductive)	Quantitative	Desktop review of secondary data
Transformative	Reality is historical and changing.	Knowledge is gained by empowering respondents (inductive).	Qualitative	Interviews
Pragmatic	Reality is complex.	Generation of knowledge is shared by individual and environment.	Mixed (both Quantitative and Qualitative methods)	Combining quantitative (numerical) and Qualitative (interviews and focus groups)

Source: Belay, 2020

4.2.3   Methodological assumptions

Methodological assumptions are strategies or plans of action that lie behind the choice and use of a particular method (Scotland, 2012). A methodology refers to a branch of knowledge that deals with the general principles of generation of new knowledge. It determines the theoretical framework, sampling method, data collection, data analysis, and result reporting. It is also used to carry out the study in a scientific approach (McGregor & Murnane, 2010). Thus, it is concerned with what, why, where, when, and how data is collected and analysed. It involves intersecting assumptions about the nature of realism and knowledge, values, concept, and practice on a particular research topic. The methodology articulates the logic and flow of the systematic processes followed in conducting a research project in order to gain knowledge about a research problem. It includes assumptions made, limitations encountered, and how these are either mitigated or minimised. It focuses on the aspects we come to know the world or gain knowledge about part of it (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Research methods refer to the specific techniques used to collect and analyse quantitative or qualitative data about the study of interest (Scotland, 2012). The study followed a practical strategy to collect valid and reliable data that enables inference to the study population. After identifying the researchable problem and offering reasonable methodological approaches, the researcher needs to decide on the philosophical assumptions that underlie any research (McGregor & Murnane, 2010). The philosophical stances considered by the researcher for this study are discussed below.

4.2.4   Philosophical postures considered for the study

These categories of the research paradigm were considered ideal for this study because they could be utilised to conveniently place the philosophical assumptions and the dimensions of openness together. Furthermore, these stated philosophical assumptions constitute popular paradigms in the knowledge about social patterns, seeking to affirm the presence of universal properties in relationships amongst pre-defined variables and social educational researchers (Stathi et al., 2018). There is no agreement over whether these paradigms are contrasting or whether they can be seen as contributing differently to the study. However, selection of the research paradigm is influenced by the identified literature, theoretical framework, assumptions about the nature of reality, and ethical principles. In this study, the researcher believed that nature of reality is complex and cannot be understood by utilising only a single research paradigm. For this reason, the researcher adapted different assumptions from each

paradigm to have a full understanding of the research questions. A positivist paradigm has been used in the first phase of the study.

This worldview helps the researcher to describe the demographic profile of students from marginalised backgrounds affected by socio-economic factors when accessing higher education. They are less affluent students, with limited ability to self-fund their higher education, interviewed in order to identify factors associated with their learning journey, and to ascertain those factors that promote or impede their success outcomes in higher education. Furthermore, the paradigm tries to reduce the complexity of variables by classifying the openness dimensions and associated factors. Within this context, the inquiry was used to gain a deeper understanding of openness within the chosen context.

Although positivism may lead to a holistic inquiry, some factors of openness might be unobservable from the perspective of the researcher, and only become recognised when the impact is evident through lived experience. Here, the researcher is forced to rely on other paradigms to further explore in depth the dimensions and the factors of openness. The post-positivist research paradigm was presented in order to understand and expose the reality behind the development of emergent openness framework. This claim is achieved through the combination of the positivist paradigm and quantitative methods, in order to gather information about the influences of openness and measurable impacts in student enrolments, attrition, retention, and success.

Furthermore, a constructivist research paradigm was introduced to provide greater scope to explore openness dimensions. This claim is achieved through using qualitative methods to gather broader information beyond readily measurable variables. In addition to this, the transformative paradigm assisted the researcher to explain in-detail the experiences, impact and implications of these openness dimension and marginalisation of knowledge through the lived realities of these students. For these purposes, the openness model was developed as a tool to advance the evolution of openness through a lens of a developing country such as South Africa.

Finally, the pragmatist paradigm assisted the researcher to mix different research methods for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data. This provided a broader understanding of the research problem by exploring the development of distance and open education. As a philosophical approach to education, openness is a complex, mass education system, which requires the utilisation of multiple enquiries to lend insight. Pragmatism was introduced in order to emphasise the generation of inter-subjective knowledge from the perspectives of

marginalised students for whom this mass education system promises the most benefit. Pragmatists argue that research questions should drive the methods used. These lived experiences of marginalised students were explored in terms of how the higher education policy on open education has shaped their learning trajectory. Together with the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, these paradigms were applied in order to interpret and construct the lived experience of the participants.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

4.3.1 Definition

The research design is a logical roadmap of research methods. It shows philosophical assumptions made regarding how the study ought to be conducted, and defines the procedures of how data is collected, analysed, and interpreted (Neuman, 2014). It is considered as a strategy that the researcher ought to follow to answer the research questions. In addition to this, it should be stated clearly with great care as any error in it might distorted the entire study. Thus, a design that provides maximal explanation and opportunity for observing many different features of problem is considered most suitable and capable. Good design is related to the objectives of the study and nature of the problem under investigation. One single design cannot be suitable for all types of research problem. There is no perfect or superior research design (Kothari, 2004). In considering a research design, particularly a mixed methods design, Schoonenboom & Johnson (2017) identifies primary design dimensions that must be considered:

    a.   purpose of mixing
    b.   theoretical drive
    c.   timing
    d.   point of integration
    e.   typological use
    f.   degree of complexity

The researcher decided on the most appropriate research methods in order to answer the research questions. As noted in the previous sections, the researcher preferred a sequential, exploratory mixed method design to address the research objectives and questions specified at the point of study conceptualisation. The first phase of the empirical aspect of the study was based on the situational analysis, qualitative and quantitative phases as Phase One, Two, and Three, respectively.

The researcher opted to consider multiple designs in order to adequately address the research questions of this study, as briefly described below.

4.3.2 Exploratory sequential mixed method design

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2010) identify one key design issue in developing and implementing mixed methods research is the decision on whether data collection is to be parallel or sequential. The major categories of sequential design are either explanatory, exploratory, or transformative (Johnson et al., 2007). Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) explain the sequential, exploratory mixed method design as one phase followed by another phase, the first phase of which is normally qualitative, where the two phases are then connected by the development of an instrument based on the results of the first phase. The research design for this study was an exploratory, sequential mixed method design. The sequential approach makes the study relatively simpler and facilitates its implementation, description, and reporting (Creswell, 2003). Creswell (2009) further indicates that the overall advantage of this design is that the qualitative data helps to explain the follow-on quantitative findings in more detail. Priority within this design is placed on the qualitative phase, due to its possible influence on identifying those factors that should be subjected to quantitative exploration. To this end, the initial qualitative phase provided a platform through which the researcher was able to explore the perceptions of representatives of universities, students ,and staff on dimensions and factors associated with openness in higher education in South Africa, as well as how these factors, institutional settings, and processes associated with openness impact on marginalised students and the development design and development of an openness framework for universities with special reference to a comprehensive university.

Below is a summative overview of the different empirical phases that were contained within the study.

4.3.2.1 Situational analysis

According to Rahi (2017), situational analysis is an approach to research using a grounded theorising methodology to identify and describe social worlds and arenas of action and by representing complexity through map-making. Rahi (2017) further argues that the primary intention of situational analyses is to define ontologically different types of elements, both human (individuals and collectives) and non-human (objects, discourses, etc.), that are in the situation, and to succinctly note them in a systematic form of a brainstorming exercise.

With respect to the current study, the first phase of data collection involved conducting a retrospective review of relevant documents, and policies to get a basis for understanding openness as it relates to higher education. This analysis of retrospective documents served to give initial impetus to the process of problem identification, where, in this process, the researcher was interested in offering initial clarification of a number of questions that included:

i. What is the problem?
ii. Why is there a problem?
iii. What are the probable causes of the problem?
iv. How serious is the problem?
v. Who are affected by the problem?
vi. What has been done to solve the problem?

The situational analysis involved reviewing a wide ranging information types that included the review of both quantitative and qualitative data, specifically secondary data sources from institutional records, DHET published statistics, and CHE statistics for the period 2012-2019.

4.3.2.2 Phase 2 – Qualitative phenomenological approach

The second phase of the study was anticipated to explore the influence of the factors on the identified dimensions of openness and the development of the openness framework. The researcher selected the phenomenological approach as it allows an exploration of the influence of the factors and the impact of these on the openness dimensions based on the lived experiences of the study participants. The researcher believed that the phenomenological approach provided the ideal opportunity for this study. The researcher gathered data from the profiled marginalised students, academic, administrative staff professional staff and university management, who had experience and expertise in the management of open and distance learning and the research site of a comprehensive university, with the aim of preparing complete descriptions of how an openness framework with the dimensions and associated factors can be developed. The detailed descriptions from the qualitative phase of the study added meaning to the data collected during the situational analysis (Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark & Smith, 2011). Furthermore, the qualitative data collection process entailed the non-statistical organisation of the lived experiences of students and expert knowledge of the other study participants (Cornwell & Waite, 2009).

In order to address the challenges faced during utilisation of this design, the researcher invited staff and appropriate respondents who are experienced in the distance and open education. Other stakeholders, and the national regulators, such as the CHE and the government officials were considered for the interviewed in order to establish their constituency's role in the development and evolution of distance and open education in South Africa, but later the researcher, through the review of national policy and CHE secondary data records, identified that in-depth knowledge of ODE largely resided within the institution, and the lived experiences of its staff and students.

Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research in which the researcher attempts to explore their lived experience. The aim of this approach was to deepen understanding of the meaning or nature of human daily lives. The collected data gave rich descriptions of the development of the openness framework from different perspectives. The students and other research participants were selected based on their prior knowledge and their experiences of open and distance education. The researcher selected a phenomenological approach for five reasons. First, the development of the openness framework is complex, and has multifactorial origin. Second, the topic requires further deeper exploration, because the factors may vary depending on the context, are not easily identified, limited theories are available in terms of the context of the study site, and theories need to be developed based on their lived experiences. Third, the researcher anticipated a detailed view of the influence of factors on the development of the openness framework due to the situational analysis and quantitative aspect of the study alone will not be sufficient to present answers to the research questions. Fourth, the researcher wanted to study the participants in their natural environment. Finally, the researcher was interested in writing in a literary style, acting as an active learner and wanted to present the findings from the participants' view in a diagramme form (Creswell, 1998).

4.3.2.3 Phase 3 – Correlational research design

The third phase i.e., the quantitative phase of the study was concerned with identifying the facts about different social phenomena. The use of statistical data to reflect numerical comparisons and statistical inferences was made in an attempt to verify or refute the hypothesis of the study. The correlational design was used to address the study objectives. This design is relatively less time consuming and involves a simple approach to identify patterns and correlations within the numbers. The quantitative data was gathered once at a point in time based on the learning journey of the profiled students and a period of eight years 2012-2019 was considered adequate. Consequently, the data collection instrument was

developed so as to gather information on both the factors and dimensions associated with openness. Certainly, it is difficult to establish a cause and effect-relationship between the identified variables (Creswell, 2009). A study questionnaire with descriptive research questions was deemed appropriate to gather information about openness factors and dimensions that they study attempted to quantify and measure. The descriptive research questions assisted in deepening the respondent's opinion collected during the qualitative phase of the study about the openness dimensions that the researcher attempted to measure.

The correlational design was chosen because the researcher wanted to look for relationships between variables, with the aim of establishing associations or cause and effect relationships within the openness factors and their influence on the identified dimensions. The situational analysis of the study was used to describe the demographic profile of students, who are described as marginalised. This profile was informed by the following variables, race, socio-economic status and funded by the Government. They were studying through distance and open education. Further to this profile, factors associated with challenges in studying at a distance, such as enrolment patterns, attrition rates among these students, retention rates, course success rates, and programme success rates over a period from 2012 to 2019 were considered to identify variable associated with their challenges in their learning journey through open and distance learning so as to ascertain the prevalence and impact of these factors and to assess the influence of such factors on the development of the emergent openness framework among marginalised students. A period of eight years was deemed appropriate as it considered that students who normally study at a distance in South Africa take double the designated time to complete a qualification. If one considers a four-year qualification, such as a four-year Bachelors' degree, then it will take a student a minimum of eight years to complete their qualification. Only students for undergraduate studies NQF level six to eight were considered, as these are students who would be eligible for government funding through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

On completion of the empirical data collection aspects, the pertinent findings from the three phases of the study were integrated so as to guide the theory development process that served as the foundation to the emergent openness integrated model.

Below are some discussions on the specific features of the study. Some aspects and related issues were included and discussed in detail, and these were: the research setting, the study population, sampling techniques, sample size determination for both the qualitative and quantitative aspects, inclusion and exclusion criteria, accessible population, data collection methods, and data analysis.

4.3.3 The research setting

The institution under study is situated in the Pretoria Metro and has satellite campuses in all nine (9) provinces of the country. It is a comprehensive, open distance learning institution where the learning is delivered remotely to students and designed to be flexible and convenient in terms of space, time, and cost. Peters (2003) identifies open learning as access to universities by all who are able to study, by removing traditional education barriers; and by designing learning programmes open to unforeseen developments in the advancement of individual ability in a variety of settings that are devoid of bureaucratic constraint. The University of South Africa (UNISA) is a traditional distance education institution that introduced open learning in its description in 2008. E-learning was recently introduced as a method of delivering distance learning. Glennie, Harley, Butcher and Van Wyk (2012) refer to e-learning as educational applications of technology, and internet techniques to facilitate learning, regardless of whether they are used in an internet or intranet environment or simply used within a local or wide area computer network. UNISA transitioned in 2015 from Open Distance Learning (ODL) to an open distance e-learning (ODeL) in terms of its educational and business model. The new model and framework were adopted formally and approved by its University Council in 2018, which informed the character of the institution transforming from ODL to ODeL in 2018. As a comprehensive institution, the University offers both formative university qualifications, such as generic bachelors' degrees, and vocational type qualifications such as diplomas and advance diplomas in vocational fields such as engineering, technology and computing. Its programme offering includes professional type qualifications such as those required by graduates to practice in their respective professions, such as psychology. In 2019, UNISA had a student head count of just over 358 000 enrolled students (Unisa, 2018). The sites for data collection included a number of campuses of the university, however participants were sourced from various higher education institutions, government departments, and quality councils.

4.3.4 The study population

Population refers to all individuals of interest to the researcher. The target population is a set of members of participants about whom generalisations are made (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). A study population is a group that is studied either in total or by selecting a sample of its members. The study population are those about whom the data collection was conducted in order to gather information to seek out answers to the research questions. Within the current

study, the target population was comprised of Unisa staff and students although various stakeholder groups, i.e. strategic higher education policy makers, higher education institutional leaders, administrators were originally considered from the above distinct groups, it was necessary to specify the sample sizes for each of the participant groups and also to indicate the tentative sample sizes for both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the study. Sample refers to a smaller collection of units from a target population, used to determine truths about it (Neuman, 2014). In this study, the target population included all students who were attending the public comprehensive open and distance education institution, academics, support staff, and academic leaders within the institution.

4.3.5 Sampling techniques

Sampling refers to procedures of selecting a required number of participants from a known population as a representative of that population (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). The researcher used sampling to develop inferential conclusion about the population from a sample. The current study utilised purposive sampling approaches for the qualitative phase and probability-based options were utilised for the quantitative aspect of the study. In recognition of the fact that the study was a mixed method study, it was necessary to develop sampling plans for both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study i.e., the individual and group interviews and the quantitative questionnaires. With each phase, it was important that the sample should be adequate in size, selected by a well-stated sampling procedure, and must offer full responses (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Inappropriately selected sampling procedures may negatively affect the quality of the study.

4.3.6 Sampling procedures for the qualitative phase of the study

The target population for Phase Two, the qualitative aspect was guided by the concept of data saturation, and to this end, the numbers of participants was determined by the point at which, the researcher believed that no other new themes from the data could be obtained. Purposive sampling technique was identified as appropriate for this study as it allowed for the deliberate selection participants due to the qualities they possessed (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Because purposive sampling involves identification and selection of individuals or groups of individuals that are expert and well-informed regarding the phenomenon of interest, it was deemed the most appropriate sampling technique. To ensure that all the different stakeholder groups were included within the participant groups, a specific subtype of purposive sampling i.e. maximum variation sampling, was selected as the specific sampling approach. Within maximum variation sampling, the researcher makes an explicit commitment to ensuring that

each of the stakeholder groups are deemed to be relevant to the study. A total of 25 interviews were planned, and included within the group of participants that were identified as key providers of data for the study. Guided by this, the individual interviews resulted in nineteen (19) interviewees for the individual interview discussions. The respondents were classified into three categories, namley institutional and academic management, academic staff, administrative, and middle management. From this group of interviewed individuals, five (6) respondents were from the category institutional and academic management. A total of eight (9) respondents were in the category of academic staff and four (4) were from the category professional and support staff and management. The number of participants per category of stakeholder group was determined by data saturation in the case of academics particularly in the categories of institutional management and academic leadership. The category of professional, support staff and management were underrepresented and this representation was limited by the participant available for the interviews.

In addition to the individual interviews, four focus groups with student discussants were conducted. The groups were heterogenous and included students studying various degree programmes and diplomas in different fields of study. There was, however, an overrepresentation of students in the fields of Education and Law, and under-representation of students in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields. The first two focus groups in Limpopo, Polokwane had 18 students participating and the second focus groups in Gauteng, Pretoria has only 14 students participating. The two regional locations were intentionally identified to give expression to the geographical location of students and access they have. This approach further attempted to compare the concepts of rurality and urbanisation. A total of 32 students participated in the focus groups which included regional SRC leaders.

4.3.7 Sampling procedures for the quantitative phase of the study

With respect to sampling for the quantitative phase of the study, the researcher employed a stratified random sampling technique in order to select the participants. Iliyasu and Etikan (2021) offers definitional insights into stratified sampling and views it as a method of probability-based sampling that involves the division of a population into smaller sub-groups known as strata. In stratified random sampling, or stratification, the strata are formed based on members' shared attributes or characteristics that the researcher has identified as key and needing to be represented within the sample. With respect to the current study, the strata of

importance were active registration in 2022, final year study, racial differentiation and inclusion of those students who were funded through a government bursary scheme.

Steps in the selection of participants in the quantitative phase

These steps used to follow to select the study subjects were:

a. Dividing the students initially by race and qualification under study during the period 2012 to 2019. Based on this, all students who did not meet the criteria were excluded from the list.

b. Employing stratified random sampling techniques to identify the students that study in an open and distance education institution. The selected students were differentiated on the basis of four categories in terms of the qualification they studied, diploma or bachelors' degree, while the bachelor's degree was further stratified into three-year degree and four year-degree.

c. Employing random sampling technique to identify all NSFAS funded students who were attending at UNISA. The researcher used these classifications for stratification and accessing the black students to ensure representativeness of the sample.

d. The total sample size required was allocated equitable proportionally to each of the selected student.

4.3.8 Sample size determination

In keeping with the stratified random sampling approach that was selected by the researcher, a standardised sample determination formula obtained from Raosoft© was used to calculate the sample size of students and staff, to whom questionnaires would be sent.

4.3.8.1 Sample size determination for students

To ensure appropriate representation of students within the sample size, the researcher applied the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Inclusion criteria

a. Students had to be in their final year of study for a three-year and four-year qualification at NQF levels 6, 7 and 8.

b. Students had to be currently registered at the university for the 2022 academic year.

Exclusion criteria

    a.   Students who were NOT currently registered for their final year on their specified programme of study.

    b.   Students who were studying for a one year or two year qualification at NQF level 5 and 6.

    c.   Students not currently registered for study at the university.

    d.   Students who were studying for a postgraduate qualification.

According to the DHET, in 2020, the UNISA enrolled a total of 392 162 students and of these, 322 043 were Black. A significant gender disparity is observed for enrolment through the distance mode of learning, where more than two thirds of students were females (69.6%) compared to 30.4% of males (DHET, 2020). In 2020, the highest proportion of students at UNISA enrolled students were recorded mostly in the Humanities (133 148), followed by Business and Management (110 414), Education (103 737), and SET (44 753).

On applying the above stated inclusion and exclusion criteria, 35 589 students were deemed to be illegible for inclusion in the study by virtue of being actively registered and currently in their final year of study at NQF levels 6,7 and 8. By that definition, 35589 was the source population of students. The following sample size formula was used to calculate the sample size. This calculator uses the following formula for the sample size n and margin of error E are given by:

$$x = Z(c/100)^2 r(100-r)$$

$$n = \frac{N\,x}{((N-1)E^2 + x)}$$

$$E = \text{Sqrt}\left[\frac{(N-n)x}{n(N-1)}\right]$$

where N is the population size, r is the fraction of responses that you are interested in, and $Z(c/100)$ is the critical value for the confidence level c.

The sample size for eligible student respondents was determined to be 381 students in the final year of their NQF Level 6, 7 and 8 study (assuming 5% margin of error, 95% confidence level, with a response distribution of 50%). In anticipation of likely challenges associated with respondent response rates, a further 10% buffer has been introduced to result in an upward revision of the sample size 381 respondents plus 39 to account for non-responses, resulting in a final sample size of **420** respondents.

4.3.8.2 Sample size determination for staff respondents

Much like the process employed to determine the sample size of all students who took part in the study, the identification of staff respondents involved an initial determination of the source population from which eligible respondents could be drawn. To ensure an appropriate representation of the different ranks of staff, the calculation of sample sizes was divided out into teaching staff, and those academics who were in administrative or managerial positions. For both these categories of potential respondents, a number of inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, as detailed below:

Inclusion criteria
    a.   Staff respondents had to either be existing teaching staff at the University or be in administrative/managerial positions within the teaching and learning portfolio of the university.
    b.   Staff respondents had to be currently involved or had prior teaching experience in frontline teaching of undergraduate students.
    c.   Staff had to be in the employment of the university for five years or more.
    d.   Respondents had to have some experience as facilitators of learning and/or administrators/managers within higher education Institutes in South Africa.

Exclusion criteria
    a.   Employees of the University with no prior experience of teaching undergraduate students.
    b.   Employees employed in the university for four years or less.
    c.   Teaching personnel at the University who had not taught undergraduate students.

On investigating current employment numbers at the university, the following numbers were determined. According to the institutional human resources data, a total of 1298 academic teaching staff were employed to teach undergraduate students at the university (UNISA HRIS, 2022) and in addition to this, 92 employees were in academic management roles. In determining samples sizes for both these categories, the Raosoft[©] sample size calculator was used. This calculation uses the following formula.

The sample size n and margin of error E are given by:

    x   =   Z(c/100)2r(100-r)
    n   =   N x/((N-1)E2 + x)

$$E \quad = \quad Sqrt[(N - n)x/n(N-1)]$$

where N is the population size, r is the fraction of responses that you are interested in, and Z(c/100) is the critical value for the confidence level c.

Teaching staff/academics sample was determined to be **236 teaching staff** (assuming 5% margin of error, 95% confidence level, with a response distribution of 25%). This takes account of the potential that only 25% of the identified sample may respond.

For staff in managerial positions, the sample was **determined to be 70** (assuming 5% margin of error, 95% confidence level, with a response distribution of 25%). This takes account of the possibility that only 25% of the identified sample may respond.

4.3.9 Data collection methods

The data collection processes used for this study involved a combination of: document reviews, interviews, focus group discussions and self-complete questionnaires. Openness has been a subject of many interpretations and presupposes the availability of education to anyone, anyway, anywhere and anytime without social, physical and geographical restrictions (Sarkhel & Mukherjee, 2014). The situational analysis via document review of the data collection stage was critical in drawing from these various interpretations and policy positions to better understand this concept of openness from a particular context. The situational analysis was followed by the qualitative data collection (phase 2), the semi-structured individual interviews, focus groups and document review were all part of the qualitative data collection and were able provide detailed information than what is at times available through quantitative methods (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The combined reliance on focus groups and individual interviews for the data collection offered rare opportunities for greater depth of exploration than would have been possible with one approach. George (2013) argues that, in a focus group, participants have an average of ten minutes each to talk but with in-depth interviews participants have more time and opportunity to share feelings, perspectives and attitudes. Focus group discussions were a useful opportunity for in-depth and stimulating discussion to obtain opinions from students on their lived experiences in their learning journeys.

Data gathering for the situational analysis, data was collected through desktop research and identification of sources through publicly available and institutional based management information systems, such as the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS)

of the Ministry of Higher Education, the CHE Vital Statistics publications and the institutional Higher Education Data Analytics (HEDA) platforms.

With semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to utilise a set of predetermined questions on an interview protocol instrument. The interviews were guided rather than dictated by the protocol instrument. English was used as the language for data collection since all participants were well versed in the language and English is considered the language of study in higher education in South Africa and most participants could reasonably be expected to speak English well.

An interview protocol adapted from Judith & Bull, (2016) was developed by the researcher to gain more in-depth insights into openness. This interview protocol was designed to explore the participants' perceptions of openness in higher education, including the factors that they saw as critical in facilitating openness. Furthermore, participants were asked to provide insights into the strategies adopted to facilitate openness, in order to differentiate the varying degrees of learner support and requirements involved in openness implementation. In addition, participants were asked to provide their views and opinions about strategies and practice-based approaches appropriate for adoption and integration of openness in learning and practice. The interview protocol had broad primary questions and probes were used to obtain more information and examples from participants' experiences. Polit and Beck (2008) suggest probing as a technique used by researchers to prompt more useful and detailed information from participants than is normally volunteered in the initial replies.

With the adverse conditions presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection approaches were modified to ensure adherence to guidelines recommended to minimize the spread of the COVID-19. In particular, interviews were all facilitated online via Microsoft TEAMS. The focus groups with students were held in person in two provinces Limpopo and Gauteng. The researcher ensured that where interactions were indoors, there was observance of the COVID-19 protocols and social distancing provisions were applied. The focus groups were facilitated by the researcher and discussions were recorded. The Limpopo discussions were held in the city of the province, Polokwane. The Gauteng sessions were held in Pretoria with the minimum requisite number of participants in attendance.

Phase 3, the quantitative phase data collection involved a self-developed research questionnaire. To achieve the research objectives comprehensively, statistical evidence from a sample of Unisa staff and students was gathered. For data collection during the quantitative phase, the instrument was designed using the variables identified during the qualitative phase

of the study (see Annexure H and I). The questionnaire tools were designed and launched as self-complete questionnaires which were sent out to participants in order that they could respond to the identified quantitative questions. During the literature review and the qualitative phase data collection to understand the open education discourse from the respondents, it was noted that the openness is understood and is evaluated using very broad measurements that are not tailored to measure the requisite context specific dimensions of openness in support institutional functions, services and student learning. It was further discovered that objective measurements that are appropriate to evaluate the range of openness factors and their influence on the dimensions a quantitative measure is required to support the qualitative variables instead of a sole reliance on perceptions and expectations.

Therefore, appropriate scale measurements, tailored to the context of open education within the ODE institution, are needed. An eight-step process was followed in the development of a questionnaire: The involved the following:

a.   Decision on the information required.
b.   Definition the target respondents.
c.   Choice of the method(s) of reaching the target respondents.
d.   Decision on question content.
e.   Development of the question wording.
f.   Putting the questions into a meaningful order and format.
g.   Checking of the length of the questionnaire.
h.   Development of the final survey form.

To correlate the process followed above a further step was undertaken to foreground and address the development of a questionnaire developed specifically to measure the factors and their influence. In this study, the process of the questionnaire development was guided by the work of several researchers who describe the process of developing questionnaires in sequential steps or procedures, ranging from the University of Wisconsin Survey's (2010) four steps to Parasuraman et al's (1988) 11 steps. The procedures covered in the work of these researchers (University of Wisconsin Survey, 2010; Anderson & Morgan, 2008; Radhakrishna, 2007; Parasuraman et al., 1988) have been summarised into themes as depicted below:

a.   Examine the study purpose, objectives and hypothesis.
b.   Map the conceptual foundations (literature, theoretical frameworks).
c.   Determine the population.

d.   Generate the questionnaire items (statements).

e.   Review questionnaire in preparation for piloting.

f.   Establish the validity and reliability of the questionnaire.

g.   Revise the questionnaire (proofread).

h.   Questionnaire is ready for administration.

After identifying the themes necessary for questionnaire development, the following potentially relevant steps to guide the development of the study's questionnaire were drawn up:

Step 1: The conceptual foundations of the questionnaire

Step 2: Generating items for the questionnaire

Step 3: Testing the construct validity of the questionnaire

Step 4: Testing the reliability of the questionnaire

Step 5: Refining the questionnaire items

A context-specific questionnaire was deemed appropriate hence it was self-developed following and guided by the broad steps identified above. This questionnaire was tailored to address the context within the institution as an open and distance learning environment. The questionnaire development was also based on the literature on questionnaire design. The items of the questionnaire were mostly based on dimensions dealing with and the interactions between students and staff. Most of the information on these openness dimensions was derived from student support frameworks and dimensions of openness developed by scholars identified during the literature review and the openness frameworks. In addition, the results from the situational analysis and of the interviews conducted in the first phase of this study were also used to guide the process of generating item statements for the questionnaire. The themes that emerged from the data confirmed the relevance of the proposed dimensions. Two questionnaires were developed, one targeted specially to students and the second to the university staff.

The structure of each of the questionnaires was divided into 5 sections. Section A comprised the respondents' demographic details. The questions in this section were based on gender, age, occupation, highest qualification, study programme and year of study for the students. In Section B to E, the respondents were asked to assess their institution's perceptions and give their views on their expectations of the institutional support and the degree of uptake and implementation of openness principles as informed and defined by the dimensions and variables already defined by the conceptual framework and the responses received during the qualitative phase. The students' interaction with the institution is deemed critical to inform their

understanding of open education, functions and services they received. The staff questionnaire followed the same structure with five sections. What is critical with the staff is to measure the degree of uptake and understanding of the openness principles in their academic activities and how they interact with the institutional support architecture of the university in response to the student support, teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the questionnaire items were ranked from lower order to higher order. According to Creswell (2009) and Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011), ranking Likert-type scale item values from low to high helps respondents make a wise selection. Each item was to be measured using a 1: 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1: "Strongly Disagree"; 2: "Disagree"; 3: "Partially Agree"; 4: "Agree"; to 5: "Strongly Agree".

After the development of the questionnaire, a validity test had to be carried out and face validity using Johns and Lee-Ross's (1998) checklist was applied. The checklist included:

  ✓   Check whether all questions are relevant to members of the particular sample.
  ✓   Check whether respondents understand the questions.
  ✓   Check the logic of the question order.
  ✓   Check whether any questions have double meanings or lead or confuse respondents.
  ✓   Show how long it takes to complete the questionnaire.

The researcher adapted some of the steps that were deemed relevant for assessing the face validity of the study's questionnaire.

The process of testing validity involved assessing whether the questionnaire was relevant to the respondents' variables as stated expectations and perceptions of their experiences as identified during the qualitative phase. First, each item of the questionnaire was assessed against the findings of the exploratory qualitative phase research to determine whether the views were well captured. Second, the items were assessed against the openness dimensions and factors found in the literature. Third, a pilot study that was conducted thereafter added to the predictive validity of the questionnaire. The researcher carefully followed the processes to ensure that validity had been adequately established for our questionnaire.

Following the development of the questionnaires, data were collected from students who at the time of data collection were enrolled for the period of the study 2012 – 2019 and were into their final year of study at NQF levels 6, 7 and 8. The target population for this study included male and females students aged 20 years old and above, registered with Unisa for

undergraduate qualification at NQF levels, 6, 7 and 8 studying and residing in all regions. The study excluded students who had registered for postgraduate studies as well as that registered for non-degree modules, for example bridging courses. Students who were enrolled for NQF level 5 qualifications were also excluded as the duration of these qualifications is a year and students would have completed their studies shortly and outside period under study. Students who were self-funded or whose fees were paid privately were also excluded.

Data on staff was collected from academic staff members who were active employees and had been employed for a period of five years or more. The target population for this study included academic staff members in all academic ranks, employed by the Unisa who partook in teaching and learning activities at undergraduate level with modules NQF levels 6, 7 and 8. Furthermore, academic staff teaching postgraduate modules were included. Staff members involved in the management section of the colleges were also included.

A population source of 35 589 undergraduate students was used while 1298 staff members partook.

Data were collected from a sample of 35 589 students of all ages and gender groups within the identified NQF levels (6 - 8) qualifications in their final year of study. A total of 1298 staff members were sampled, and 1390 questionnaires were administered to the research respondents by e-mail. These were self-completion questionnaires to students and staff members.

The study employed purposive sampling for the qualitative phase and a nonprobability sampling technique was used for the quantitative phase. It has to be emphasised that although quota sampling is a non-probability sampling, it is regarded by researchers as equivalent to stratified sampling, which is a probability sampling technique (Yang & Banamah, 2014). Kangai and Bukaliya (2011) used stratified sampling for their research. Purposive sampling was used to sample students from different strata who voluntarily participated in the study.

Another sampling technique which was considered in the study was quota sampling, which is a method of stratified sampling in which the selection of research participants within strata (groups) is non-random. According to Schmidt and Brown (2014), the difference between quota sampling and stratified random sampling is that in quota sampling, research participants are conveniently selected from each stratum rather than randomly selected. The choice of quota sampling was motivated by the fact that a probability random sampling technique was

not feasible to determine the sample for this study because of privacy regulations at the Unisa. At the UNISA, access to students' records – names, addresses and telephone numbers – is restricted by the Protection of Personal Information Policy of the university. So, a sampling frame from which a random sample could be drawn was not accessible to the researcher. This restriction therefore invalidated the process of random sampling. Smith & Dawber (2019) point out that quota sampling is used in "predominantly" quantitative studies where it is difficult to determine a sampling frame due to the absence of a list from which to draw a sample. Thus, the availability and unavailability of the sampling frame will determine the choice of the sampling technique – probability sampling or non-probability sampling.

Creswell et al. (2003) identifies that sample size is often a problem in a mega-university because the final size is dictated by factors such as the number of participants who volunteer to participate in the research and the number available to the researcher. Quota sampling, as posited by Henry, 2009; Guest, 2014; Smith & Dawber, (2019) is equivalent to stratified sampling, which is a probability sampling technique. According to Henry (2009), quota sampling, like stratified sampling, addresses the issue of representativeness in research, although the two techniques approach the issue differently. The difference is that whereas stratified sampling uses random sampling to fill the groups (strata), quota sampling uses judgement/purposive sampling to assemble a representative sample. For example, in quota sampling, subjects who bear suitable characteristics that represent the population are handpicked on a volunteering basis to form a representative sample. Henry (2009) further highlights that these subjects are selected into a sample on the basis of pre-specified characteristics, so that the same sample will have the same distribution of characteristics assumed to exist in the population studied.

This study rests therefore on quota sampling's premise that if the sample effectively represents the characteristics of the population being studied, the population will be "correctly" represented. The ability to generalise research results to the target population depends "heavily on the appropriateness of the sampling method used" (Smith & Dawber, 2019).

4.3.10 Administering the data collection instruments

4.3.10.1 The qualitative data collection phase

After the interview protocol was developed, it was piloted with two participants first to check if respondents understood the questions. The pilot respondents had not been counted into the actual participant numbers, but responses showed that the tool was well understood and no

revisions of it were required. All the online interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams were recorded and the recording was stopped immediately after the interviews. The researcher proceeded to review the recordings after the interviews and transcribed audio recordings into "verbatim" reports. This approach was also used for the focus groups.

4.3.10.2 The quantitative data collection phase

A pilot study was conducted to pre-test the questionnaire in order to stablish its reliability and validity. This is supported by Blessing & Chikrabarti (2009), who point out that the aim of a pilot study is to try out the research approach; "to identify potential problems that may affect the quality and validity of the results".

To pre-test the instrument, the questionnaire was sent to a group of those that had participated in the qualitative study but also included new respondents who were not part of the pre-test. This process was to assist and validate whether the aspects of the openness construct and variables discussed in the interviews had been captured in the questionnaire. One of the methods of checking the trustworthiness of results generated through research is the use of stakeholder checks, which is a research procedure in which participants are asked to evaluate the interpretation drawn from the research data. The students and staff were asked to give their views on expectations and perceptions of their experiences of university operations and student support offered by filling in the questionnaire. They were also asked to comment on the language used in the questionnaire and on whether the aspects discussed during the interviews were covered. When the context is too diverse and segmented, as is the case with most ODE institutions, it is worthy to consider different methods of questionnaire administration to ensure a good response rate. Initially, the researcher had planned to use as many methods of administering the questionnaire as possible; for example, e-mailing questionnaires to students; using a website (MyUnisa) and the student myLife UNISA email accounts; distributing questionnaires to study regional centres and the regional SRC Offices. Staff members would be reached via their email addresses and the Unisa Intranet. However, the researcher was confined to using two methods of administering the questionnaire due to policy restrictions. Due to these policy limitations, only the emailing collection method was eventually used, and the questionnaire was disseminated centrally via our ICT Helpdesk to students and staff.

4.4 MAINTENANCE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY DURING THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The scientific integrity of the research was maintained by self-critical judgment and ethical sound work based on realistic objectives and scientific relevance of expectation. A combination of Lincoln and Guba's research integrity considerations along with traditional validity and reliability checking were undertaken as required for a mixed methods study. A summarised overview of each is provided below:

4.4.1 Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba's model was applied to this study to ensure trustworthiness of the qualitative research findings. Qualitative research considers dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability as trustworthiness criteria that can assure the rigour of qualitative findings (Guba, 1981; Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Anney (2014) highlights that qualitative researchers need to understand and adopt the trustworthiness criteria as this will improve the believability of qualitative inquiry. Credibility considerations in the study, addressed the question of how consistent the findings were with reality (Shenton, 2004) and in doing this, ensuring credibility served as a cornerstone aspiration for the researcher, in their quest to establish trustworthiness.

4.4.2 Credibility

The true value of this mixed method research will be the discovery of how meaning and interpretation of openness influence and expressed though the views, lenses and interpretations of the participants in higher education provision to support, facilitate learning and success in marginalised learners. Their beliefs and understanding of openness in higher education influence decision making and involvement in the provision of learning and support to learners. Polit and Beck (2008) assert that a qualitative study is credible when it offers confidence and consistency in the truth of the findings. The researcher was able to enhance credibility of the study by ensuring continuously the in-depth interviews were held until data saturation was reached and during these engagements, participants were given enough time to share their experiences and care was taken to ensure accurate recording of responses.

4.4.3 Confirmability

Confirmability as a criterion of trustworthiness of the research was established by ensuring that the research findings espouse the confidence and consistency in that the findings were based on the participants' responses rather than the researcher's biases. The researcher took a number of steps to enhance confirmability of the study and increase worth of the research findings by ensuring that a relaxed atmosphere was created for the participants to feel free and share their experiences and views with the researcher. Enough time was provided for each participant during the in-depth interviews and to this end, participants were not rushed to answer and at every point, the importance of giving honest opinions, was encouraged additionally, Audit trails were kept when writing up the results from the process of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the data.

4.4.4 Transferability

The transferability of data from the study was enhanced by conducting data collection until data saturation occurred within the qualitative phase and by providing dense description of the research data, including verbatim quotations. The findings of this research will not be applicable to other communities and settings. Therefore, the results cannot be generalised to the broader communities outside of South Africa and other institutions who are not involved in open and distance education as the study is context based. However, the same results may be found when a similar study is undertaken in the same settings (Polit & Beck, 2010).

4.4.5 Validity

Research validity determines the accuracy of the actual components of a measure (Middleton, 2020). Construct validity was applied in the quantitative component of the research and was primarily concerned with ensuring that the method of measurement matched the construct and concepts that were identified to be measured. For the current study, the indicators, variables and factors that influence openness included numerical data indicators of enrolments, retention, and success. In facilitating this, these discipline-standardised measurements, as regularly utilised within academic planning, were referred to as forming the basis for relevant existing knowledge and literature on openness. The researcher ensured that the observations and data analysis approaches were indeed what was utilised within the discipline as reflecting the actual components of these measures.

4.4.6 Reliability

Research reliability is the consistency of a measure and is concerned with the extent to which the results can be reproduced when the research is repeated under the same conditions (Thanasegaran, 2009). The reliability of the research with particular reference to the quantitative component of the study was achieved by ensuring the consistency of findings when repeated across time and across different observers. In the current study, consistency of data was maintained by evaluating and verification of the data sets across various data sources to ensure consistency. Data variances were consistently maintained at less than 0.5 percentage point and triangulated with the qualitative data during the integration phase.

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process of converting questions into meaningful and statistical reports (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Data analysis within the study relied on both qualitative and quantitative data analysis approaches. For the interviews and the focus group discussions, analysis was based on a combination of thematic and content analysis approach. An adaptation of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach and Colliazi's seven step analysis method was used to guide thematic analysis.

A 10-step summary of the modified data analysis is presented below:

a. Copy and thorough reading of the recorded transcript – draft notes in the when relevant information is found.

b. Reflect and analyze the notes to list the different types of information found.

c. Categorize each item as per description, in line of what it is found.

d. Identify the categories and link them as major categories (or themes) and / or minor categories (or themes).

e. Relate and contrast the various major and minor categories.

f. Where there is more than one transcript repeat stages (a-e) for each transcript.

g. Examine in detail stages, a-e and consider relevance in line with themes and research objectives.

h. Once all the transcript data is categorised into minor and major categories/themes, review data to ensure correct categorization of the information.

i. Review all the categories, ascertain and confirm whether there should be a merging process of categories or sub-categorization required.

j. Refer and reflect on the original transcripts to ensure that all the information that needs to be categorised has been done correctly.

This 10-step adaptation included six phases of data familiarisation, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report assembly. In addition to thematic analysis, Krippendorf's content analysis approach guided the content analysis aspect.

Content analysis enables the researcher to sort through large volumes of data in a systematic way. The purpose of content analysis is to provide knowledge, new insights and a representation of facts (Oosthuizen, 2012). Stemler (2001) adds that qualitative content analysis is a meaningful technique that goes far beyond simple word counts, it allows the researcher to construct and understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) identify three approaches or types of qualitative content analysis, namely, conventional, directed or summative. All these three approaches were relied upon within the study to interpret meaning from the content of text data, without compromising adherence to the naturalistic paradigm.

In applying the above theoretical blueprints, the researcher employed a systematic approach to understanding the essence of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). This involved reviewing the interview transcripts in depth and compiling a comprehensive list of participant's responses under each interview question. Significant statements were the identified and listed with equal importance placed on each. This provided a balanced and equal value to each participant perspective (Merriam, 2009). Considering their individual meanings and thematic qualities, the researcher was able to distill the responses down to 118 "meaning units" or theme statements. These were reorganized as theme statements into a semi chronological outline under three main categories relating to access and success issues i.e. (i) planning for university, (ii) coming to university, and (iii) being in university. The categories were broken down into a total of 22 sub-categories, and these were synthesized into theme statement paragraphs to produce the essence of the experience.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, member-checking, a commonly used intervention to demonstrate the quality of qualitative research, was used (Guba, 1981; Lincoln, 1995; Shenton, 2004). Each dataset was independently coded by the researcher, identifying common themes. Each analysis event followed an iterative process of coding for content similarity. After the researcher had finalised the themes, time was taken to highlight overlapping themes. Throughout the data analysis process, care was taken to ensure that potential biases were mitigated such as, (i) by promoting coding and recoding procedures, and (ii) taking account of inevitable variations in human judgement.

For the quantitative data, analysis of Phase 3 data was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences statistical (SPSS).

The descriptive statistical summary that includes percentage, mean, standard deviations ratio was computed. This data analysis approach relied on applying observation and analysis of existing data sets collected from various sources i.e. the participants questionnaire responses and the quantitative data collated during the situational analysis. The joint use of both questionnaire data and situational analysis material was especially helpful. Muijs (2010) suggest that observations in educational research settings are useful and can give direct access to social interactions. This is advantageous when one wants to find out what actually happens in a setting rather than what is reported to us by participants. The observations in the quantitative aspects of the study offered a possibility for assessing the relationship between independent and dependent variables after adjusting for age, gender, race, enrolments, access patterns, retention and graduation outputs to control possible confounders and rank the factors as defined. A probability level of 0.5 or less and 95% confidence level was used to indicate statistical significance. This was confirmed and validated for internal consistency and generalisability by using external benchmarks.

4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics within research represents one of the most primal moral obligations that the researcher has to adhere to with respect to ensuring the protection, respect, dignity and autonomy of participants throughout any research study. Ethics in research imply preferences that influence behaviour in human relations, conforming to a code of principles, the rules of conduct, the responsibility of the researcher and the standards of conduct of a given profession (Van Wijk & Harrison, 2013). Research ethics involve protecting the rights of the participants and the institutions in which the research is conducted and in maintaining professional integrity (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021). The following steps below were taken by the researcher throughout the study to ensure that it complied with key ethics principles.

Participation within a study represents a core research process which requires unwavering adherence to research principles. To achieve this, very detailed consent-seeking processes were followed as detailed below:

a.   Information disclosure: The researcher provided all participants with sufficient and understandable information regarding their participation in the study. Essential information was presented in written and verbal form to the participants.

b. Understanding: The information on the consent form was specified in simple English to facilitate understanding. Even so, some introductory professional technical language was used since most of the participants were practitioners and administrators in higher education.

c. Voluntary decision: The researcher provided all essential information about the study and gave participants a chance to decide whether to take part in the study or not without coercion or any undue influence. The researcher also assured participants that participating in this study was voluntary and that they were at liberty to decline or withdraw their participation at any point if they so wished and that nobody would be sanctioned for participating or refusing to participate in the study.

d. Confidentiality: The researcher protected all data gathered during the study from being divulged or shared with other people without authorization of the participant. This means that the research data was kept closed and inaccessible to outsiders. The interview sessions were conducted in a private place on a one-on-one interview basis and the focus groups discussion were kept confidential to ensure freedom of participation.

e. Anonymity: The participants were kept nameless in relation to their participation in the study. Numbers were used to code participants so that their identities could not be linked with their individual responses (Grove, Burns & Gray, 2012).

f. The principle of justice: (O'Grady, 2016) affirms that justice entails being fair to participants by not giving preferential treatment to some and depriving others of the care and attention they deserve. To this end, the researcher treated all participants equally. The researcher ensured that justice was exercised by selecting participants based on research requirements. The researcher also honored all agreements entered into and more importantly the participants' requirements to ensure that they felt comfortable in their participation.

As detailed above, all research participants were provided with an informed consent form to sign before participation in the study. Informed consent was voluntary without pressure of any kind. As part of this process, participants were provided with an information sheet that informed them about the purpose of the study, the roles that they would play, and possible risk factors associated with the study. The consent form was designed and sent to the participants for their signature prior to participation. To allow for unpressurised decision-making, participants were afforded the right of self-determination in terms of their perceived safety when it came to risks associated with infection from COVID-19 i.e., they could choose whether they felt most comfortable taking part in an online interview or in a COVID-19

compliant face-to-face interview. For those participants who opted for face-to-face interviews, the researcher ensured adherence to the COVID-19 social distancing regulations.

Participants in this study were guaranteed that their involvement in the study would not be used against them in any way. The researcher also ensured that the researcher-participant relationship did not create room for the participants to be exploited, coerced or manipulated. The ethical principles require that participants in the research must be able to give informed consent to being part of the research, the identity of informants be protected unless they give written permission to be identified and stored data and research reports, must be retained as secured data for a period of at least five years (Polit & Beck, 2010).

4.7 RISKS

The risks associated with study were judged to be minimal or negligible as the study involved discussing non-sensitive issues and none of the responses that we anticipated from participants indicated any single individual but rather referred to the higher education system as a whole. Additionally, the study was conducted in a public institution and the information gathered was mainly available in the public domain and results from the study would be openly published. The topic is deemed not to be of a sensitive nature and the prospective participants are all adults and deemed not to be vulnerable. The institution's right to privacy and confidentiality was observed at all times and only information that is absolutely a requirement and falls within the public domain will be disclosed. No personal information would be published on particular learner records. The participants did not suffer any prejudice at the level of this or these risks and corrective provision was made in the unlikely chance that these risks should arise throughout the investigation process. The likely risks that are presented by the COVID-19 pandemic were addressed through the offering of online options and only engaging with participants at venues that had received government approved social distancing regulations and provisions.

4.7.1 Beneficence

The principle of beneficence involves multiple principles which are freedom from harm, freedom from exploitation, benefits of research and risk/benefit ratio (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021). These principles were implemented in this study by ensuring that participants were informed about the study, the benefits and the risks associated with participation in the study. The researcher followed ethical standards by ensuring that she did not put participants into a situation where they might be at risk of getting harmed, either physically or psychologically

(Polit & Beck, 2010). This study sought to gather information that would help formulate policies and a framework for openness in higher education with recommendations for use in the higher education settings. Furthermore, the researcher gave participants freedom to choose not to answer some questions which they felt were uncomfortable or terminate the interview if they believed that continuation would result in anxieties or undue stress to the participants.

4.7.2 Institutional Permission and Approval

Ethical Clearance was sought and obtained via the Research Ethics committee of the University of South Africa (UNISA), Institutional approval for the use of information and statistical data and polices was also be applied for and obtained prior to gathering any institutional data. Statistical information of students was accessed from within the institution and from public sources of the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa, the Council on Higher Education, the South African Qualifications Authority and any other relevant organization identified during the course of the study.

4.8 UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION TO THE KNOWLEDGE-BASE WITHIN THE STUDY AREA

Curry, Nembhard and Bradley (2009) assert the view that the single most important identifying mark of a doctoral study is its ability to make a unique contribution to the related study area. In this assertion, the proposed study arguably made a number of seminal contributions in terms of both the methodologies utilised within the study and with respect to its likely knowledge production contribution. In terms of the former, the proposed study's intended use of multiple data collection approaches has rarely been articulated in related literature and relevant research. Most importantly, the collection of data from different academic disciplines and professional groups within the university has not been reported in any single study. This choice in data sources offers multiple perspectives in ways that have not been possible from single predecessor studies. The decision to collect data from multiple perspectives also presents a rare opportunity for holistic insights to be gained.

As noted earlier, the study's emphasis was on exploring and reviewing issues of openness, student access, throughput and dropout and critically evaluating how universities apply these principles and how successful they are in implementation. This exploration is the first of its kind within a university in South Africa and also within an open distance learning University in Africa.

The study focus is especially noteworthy because the concept of openness represents an interesting dilemma within the context of South Africa, with its history of grave discrimination, colonial legacy and apartheid. The South African context is particularly important to differentiate because, unlike other countries, the debate about openness is not only about one class of learner and another but it relates to the racially driven segregatory practices that remain a serious social problem. Finally, the study's development of an evidence-based framework that guides universities on how to best effect openness within their contexts, is the first of its kind within South Africa and indeed among Africa Open distance education institutes. The latter is especially seminal given the fact that open distance institutions were designed to specifically champion the openness agenda.

4.9 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Experienced researchers acknowledge that all research studies have inherent weaknesses and these limitations could cast some doubt on the results and conclusions of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The study was conducted in South Africa and the main aim of the study was to critically evaluate openness and its implementation as a vehicle for student access and success in higher education studies, with particular reference to a comprehensive open and distance learning institution. The final results must be confined to the South African context only because it is where the data collection was carried out. Additionally, the study was restricted to categories of students and participants who all had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied. The limitations posed by the generalizability is that if the inclusion criteria applied to the identified marginalised student cohorts that fit this specified population, the results may be skewed and impractical for the study. Before generalising the findings to other higher education settings further replica research will be necessary.

4.10 SUMMATIVE CONCLUSION

The preceding chapter offers a detailed account of the methodology for the study and in so doing, it articulates the ontological, epistemological and methodological philosophies that informed the conceptualization of this research. Guided by this, the researcher provides rationale for identifying pragmatism and mixed methods research as the basis for data collection and analysis. Additionally, the ethical provisions that were made in relation to the study and identified participant groups are discussed. The specification of the methodological considerations acts as an appropriate precursor to the presentation of the findings which are presented in the upcoming chapter five.

CHAPTER 5
DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter i.e., Chapter four, provided a detailed overview of the methodology and methodological considerations, along with the research design aspects of the study. To this end, the chapter provided a detailed overview of the multi-phase and exploratory mixed-method design that served as the basis for data collection. Data collection occurred in three sequential phases namely, via (i) a situational analysis; (ii) in-depth individual and group interviews and (iii) a quantitative self-complete questionnaire, all of which were directed at achieving the study's specified objectives as indicated below:

a. Conducting a situational analysis of access and success patterns within the identified open and distance university in South Africa.

b. Identifying and describing the range of institutional, learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to openness during the study pathway of university learners.

c. Analysing the role each of the identified contributory factors have on student access, teaching and learning and student-success.

d. Critically assessing the nature of contribution that openness has on learner access and success patterns.

e. Evaluating current performance in the implementation of the principles of openness across the chosen study site.

f. Developing a student success "openness-framework" to promote student access and success in universities.

In this regard, successful completion of the study meant acquiring the necessary data to be able to fulfill the informational requirements that ensured that all the above stated objectives and research questions were satisfactorily answered.

Guided by this, chapter five focuses on the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data elicited from the primary data sources, most specifically, the repository data; strategic higher Education institutional leaders; administrators, academics, and students. The fact that the presentation of findings involves providing insights into discoveries made from multiple data collection approaches requires that a clear and well rationalized data roadmap be provided to

the reader to ensure that the presentation of findings is easy to follow and adhered to standardised principles. As such, a number of intentional decisions were made by the researcher. Of the decisions, the research adopted the guidance provided by Creswell & Creswell (2017); Whitehead, LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2012) and Flick (2017) in that, all the different phases of the study are presented in a single chapter. This "consolidated" approach allows for the successive discoveries from one phase of data collection to be more naturally interrelated to the next, in a way that is more representative of the naturalistic occurrence of the phenomena under study. Others, including Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) and Fetters, Curry and Creswell (2013) acknowledge the benefits of the consolidated presentation of results over differentiated approaches but in so doing, they indicate a need for caution to guard against the dilution of the different principles of the individual paradigms and research designs. To minimise the risk of this challenge, the current chapter presents the findings from the different phases separately, in the order in which each aspect was conducted within the fieldwork. Figure 5.1 below presents the organization of the three phases that informed the data collection.

| Phase 1: Situational Analysis | Phase 2: Qualitative: Interviews and Focus groups | Phase 3: Quantitative - Staff and Student surveys |
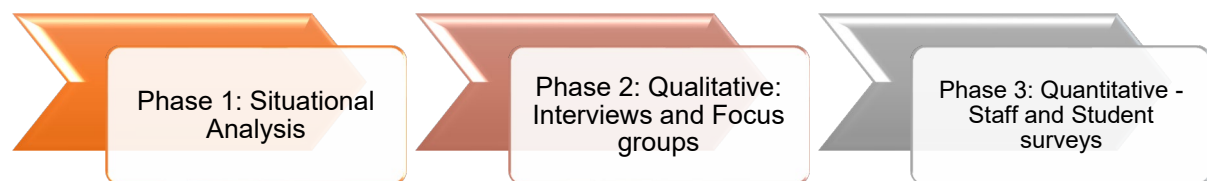
Figure 5.1: Three phases of the sequential exploratory data collection method

To that end, the presentation of findings starts with an overview of discoveries from the situational analysis; followed by the findings and analysis from the qualitative data collection approaches (the individual and group interviews). The capstone overview of findings related to the outcomes from the quantitative self-complete questionnaires. After presenting the findings from each of the data collection phases, a summative discussion of key emergent findings from the different phases was conducted with the primary intention of contextualizing the findings from this study with prevailing discourses within the study area.

5.2 PHASE 1 – DISCOVERIES FROM THE SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

A multi-approach exploratory mixed-method design served as the primary research template for obtaining data. Phase 1, the situational analysis was conducted via a retrospective review of secondary data, during which the researcher reviewed relevant higher education policy

documents; university data on student access and success outcomes; institutional policy documents, all of which related to informational domains that were relevant to access and student success issues at the index university and across the national higher education legislative domain.

5.2.1 Overview of quantitative discoveries from the situational analysis

The situational analysis provided an opportunity for the researcher to retrieve and analyse institutional data and as noted above, this included reviewing important access and student success quantitative data over an eight-year period (2012 – 2019) held by the institution. Further analysis with a critical appraisal of institutional qualitative decision documents from the governance structures and policy documents. With regard to the former, key data on important access and success indicators was collected for the index ODeL institution over a five-year period covering 2014 - 2018, both years inclusive.

5.2.1.1 Cohort Enrolment patterns (institutional versus college-level enrolments)

A key access measure relates to the number of registrants as a comparison to the headcount of those students that graduate. This is an often-quoted proxy measure of student success and broadly illustrates the level of success of any institution in terms of the rates of admission to graduation conversions that it can achieve. Figure 5.2 below provides a year-on-year comparison (from 2012 to 2019).

OVERALL

Total Headcount   Total Graduates

Year	Total Headcount	Total Graduates
2019	342 797	48906
2018	373 979	56 633
2017	344 015	44 842
2016	299 324	43 287
2015	337 944	40 046
2014	328 492	37 896
2013	355 240	34 934
2012	336 286	26 210

VALUES
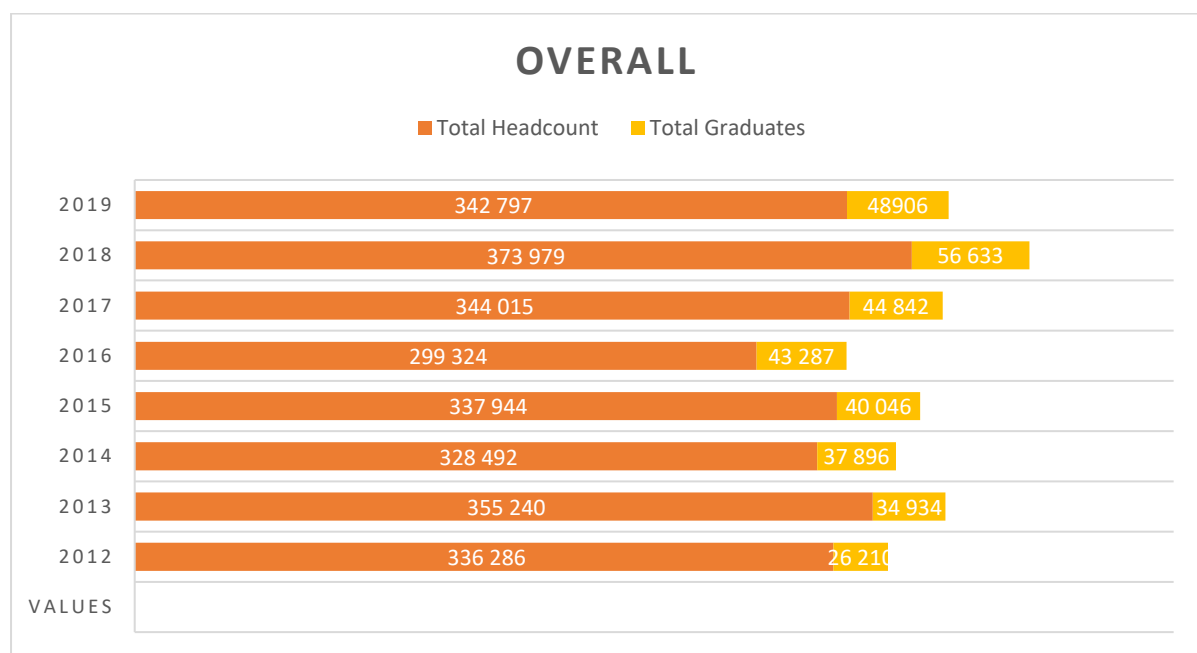
Figure 5.2: Year on year comparison of Total Headcount and Graduate output

As indicated by the above-noted statistics, year on year registrations to the university showed an upward trajectory which appears to be matched by similar proportional rates of graduation. The impact of increasing admissions is best understood by assessing the date of graduation i.e., the extent to which access performance is matched by success outcomes. In this regard, the substantial increases in student enrolments were undermined by an institutional baseline rate of graduation rate of only 7.8%. This is an extremely low rate of conversion from registration to graduation. Mode detailed insights into this were elicited via a more specific consideration of year-on-year graduation rates. Table 5.1 below provides a synoptic overview of the graduation rates per college within the university.

Table 5.1:   College graduation rate breakdown

College Name	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Average
College of Accounting Sciences	8,0%	9,9%	12,2%	13,6%	12,9%	11,2%	13,5%	12,8%	11,8%
College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences	6,3%	9,8%	11,2%	12,0%	15,3%	13,6%	15,3%	15,3%	12,3%
College of Economic and Management Sciences	6,0%	8,2%	9,4%	11,1%	15,1%	11,2%	12,0%	11,6%	10,6%
College of Education Sciences	14,2%	16,8%	18,7%	17,4%	20,0%	19,7%	22,9%	20,9%	18,9%
College of Graduate Studies					0,0%	6,3%	3,2%	5,6%	3,8%
College of Human Sciences	7,2%	9,6%	12,4%	11,6%	15,6%	14,2%	14,9%	14,6%	12,5%
College of Law Sciences	4,9%	5,2%	6,3%	6,0%	8,3%	7,9%	9,8%	8,6%	7,2%
College of Sciences, Engineering and Technology	4,5%	5,8%	7,2%	7,5%	8,1%	7,6%	8,4%	8,5%	7,2%
Graduate School of Business Leadership	24,8%	19,6%	22,8%	26,7%	29,9%	37,0%	42,2%	39,1%	30,3%

Within the colleges (between 2012 to 2019), the headcount of registered students in comparison to the number of learners that graduated was extremely low, ranging from a low of 3,8% to an upper rate of graduation of 30,3% from the Graduate School of leadership. The Graduate School of Business Leadership (SBL) had an 30,3% average graduation rate which is by far the highest average rate of graduation over the 8 years when compared to the other colleges. The lowest graduate rate reported was from the College of Graduate Studies (CGS) whose data only starts from 2016 to 2019. Both these colleges were included as the data included provides for both undergraduate and postgraduate graduation output. The GGS and SBL to not provision undergraduate programmes.

The college of Law and the college of science, engineering and technology also have very low average rates of graduation, averaging 7,2% over the 8 years.

a.   Combined graduation rates

The retrospective review of data facilitated the identification and reporting on combined graduations for the institution over the index study period, particularly across the different ethnic and racial groups that were represented within the university. Figure 5.3 below provides a summative of combined graduation rates by ethnic/ racial category.
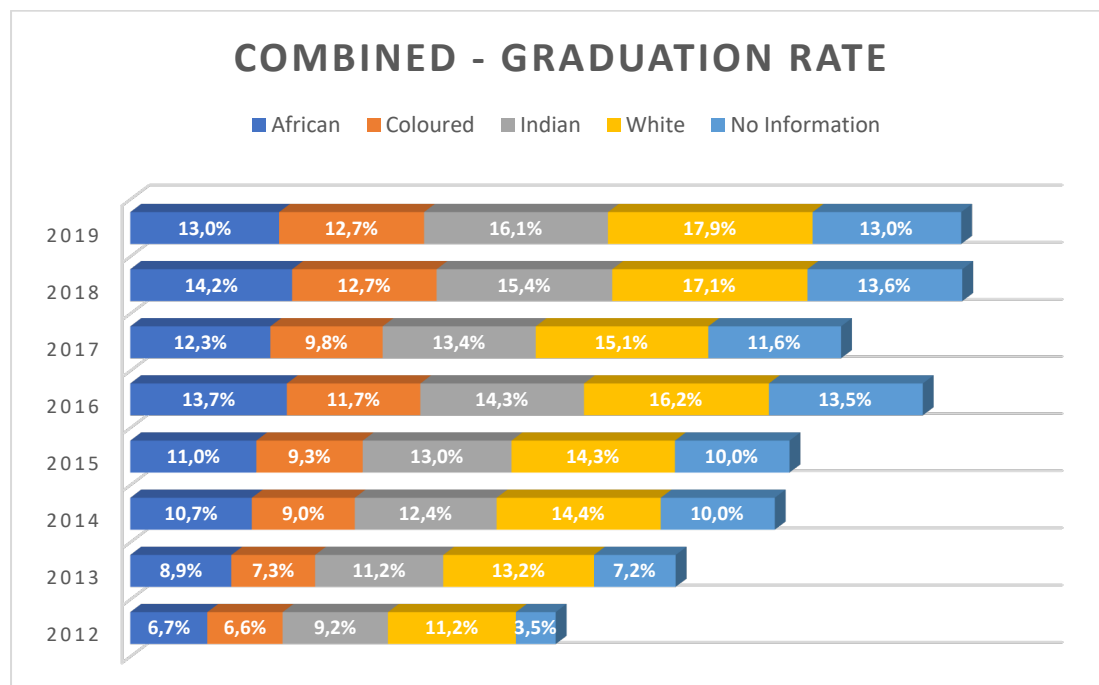
Figure 5.3: Race distribution of graduation rates

Proportional graduation rates across race and ethnic groups appear to have remained static from 2012 to 2019. By proportion, white students headed the highest proportional rates of graduation ranging from 11.2% and 17.9%, figures which represent nearly one third more the rates of graduations that can be found in coloured and black-African students. This important observation highlights the fact that minimal corrective outcomes were evident over the eight-year index. Despite the university and country initiating a plethora of transformation and funding interventions to address this intractable challenge.

The combined graduation rate by race and ethnicity was also assessed specifically across the different genders and as depicted in figure 5.4 and 5.5 below.

Figure 5.4 and 5.5: Graduation rate by Race and Gender
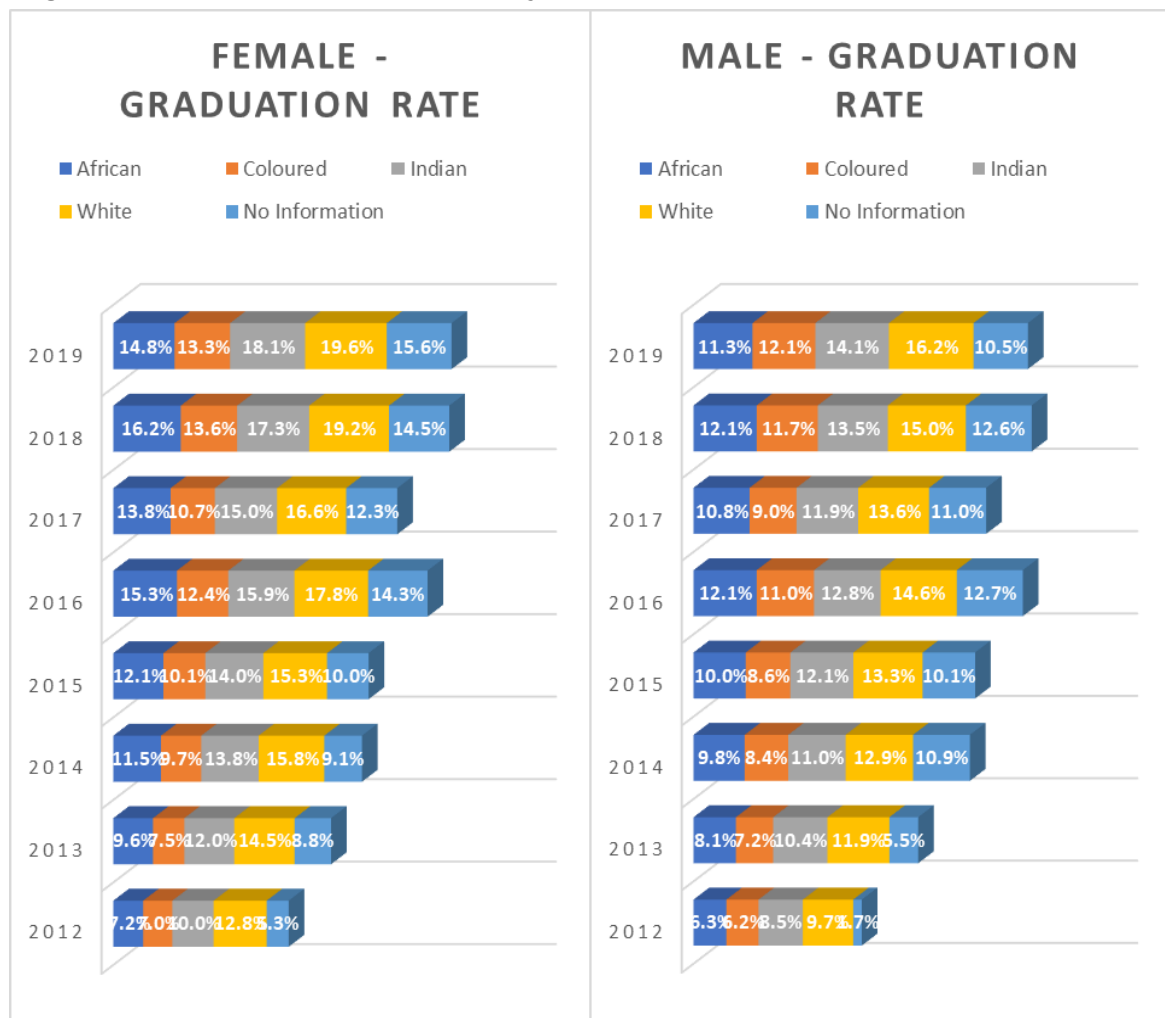
The data confirms that, from 2012 to 2019 and with respect to both genders, white students consistently exhibited the highest graduation rates proportional to the population registered. Module pass rates improved over the years across both genders, but the racial / ethnic incongruities remain unchanged. Overall, females appear to have had a better pass rate over

the 8-year period. Across both gender groups, the Indian population consistently had higher pass rates than their African and Coloured counterparts.

b. Graduation cross-matched with rates of enrolments

More detailed insights into graduation patterns were obtained by assessing graduation rates across the different academic colleges. A college level analysis provides an alternative but yet important perspective to consider, in terms of whether different discipline areas predict differing challenges for students enrolled within the specific college. Figures 5.6 – 5.13, supported by their respective tables 5.2 - 5.9 provide college overviews.

Figure 5.6: CAS Enrolment Headcount vs. Graduation outputs

Table 5.2: CAS Headcount vs Graduation outputs

Values	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Headcount	34 209	36 751	33 394	33 147	31 880	37 414	38 653	33 297
Graduates	2 734	3 632	4 073	4 504	4 125	4 199	5 211	4266
Graduation Rate	8,0%	9,9%	12,2%	13,6%	12,9%	11,2%	13,5%	12,8%

In the College of Accounting Sciences (CAS), the highest graduation rate in comparison to the headcount in the college was 13,6% in 2015, the lowest being 8% in 2012. The average over the 8 years is 11,8%. Statistical tracking of pass rates over the index period revealed a significant improvement from 2012 to 2019 in which graduation rates have nearly doubled from 2734 in 2012 the lowest number, to 5211 the highest number in 2018.

AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

■ COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES Headcount
■ COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES Graduates

Year	Headcount	Graduates
2019	10 032	1537
2018	11 098	1,693
2017	9 762	1,323
2016	8 555	1,310
2015	9 662	1,159
2014	9 710	1,092
2013	9 834	962
2012	8 798	555

Figure 5.7: **CAES Enrolment Headcount vs. Graduation outputs**

Table 5.3: CAES Headcount vs Graduation outputs

Values	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Headcount	8 798	9 834	9 710	9 662	8 555	9 762	11 098	10 032
Graduates	555	962	1 092	1 159	1 310	1 323	1 693	1537
Graduation Rate	6,3%	9,8%	11,2%	12,0%	15,3%	13,6%	15,3%	15,3%

In the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES), the highest graduation rates in comparison to the headcount in the college were 15,3% in 2016, 2018 and 2019, the lowest being 6,3% in 2012. Rates of graduation have remained relatively stable over the period under study, at an average of 12,3% over the eight-year period.

Additional data relating to the other colleges was also presented. Details of the rate of graduation for the College of economic and management sciences are provided below: -

ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

■ COLLEGE OF ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES Headcount
■ COLLEGE OF ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES Graduates

Year	Headcount	Graduates
2019	58 041	6752
2018	69 753	8 374
2017	66 823	7 497
2016	62 496	9 467
2015	80 057	8 895
2014	82 652	7 776
2013	91 402	7 467
2012	96 592	5 782
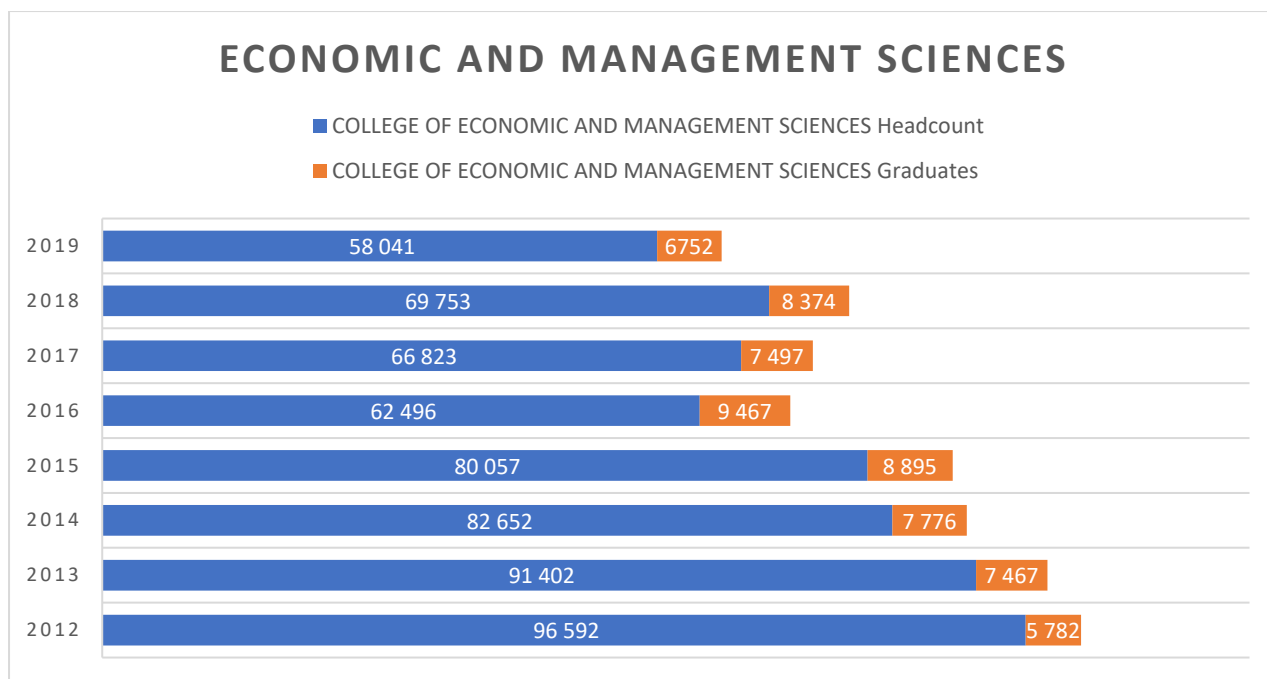
Figure 5.8: CEMS Enrolment Headcount vs. Graduation outputs

Table 5.4: CEMS Headcount vs Graduation outputs

Values	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Headcount	96 592	91 402	82 652	80 057	62 496	66 823	69 753	58 041
Graduates	5 782	7 467	7 776	8 895	9 467	7 497	8 374	6752
Graduation Rate	6,0%	8,2%	9,4%	11,1%	15,1%	11,2%	12,0%	11,6%

In the College of Economic and Management Sciences (CEMS), the highest graduation rate in comparison to the headcount in the college was 15,1% during the 2016 academic year. The lowest graduation rate reported during the index study period was 6,0% in 2012, within the context of an 8- year average of 10,6%. A considerable decrease of 22% (N=17 561) in headcount enrolments is observed from 2016 with a maintained upward trajectory in graduation outputs.

The College of Education (CEDU) reported relatively better graduation rates over the index period, as depicted below.

EDUCATION

■ COLLEGE OF EDUCATION Headcount ■ COLLEGE OF EDUCATION Graduates

Year	Headcount	Graduates
2019	106 166	22190
2018	114 002	26 104
2017	95 266	18 791
2016	78 088	15 835
2015	84 273	14 669
2014	75 384	14 133
2013	81 695	13 761
2012	72 615	10 286
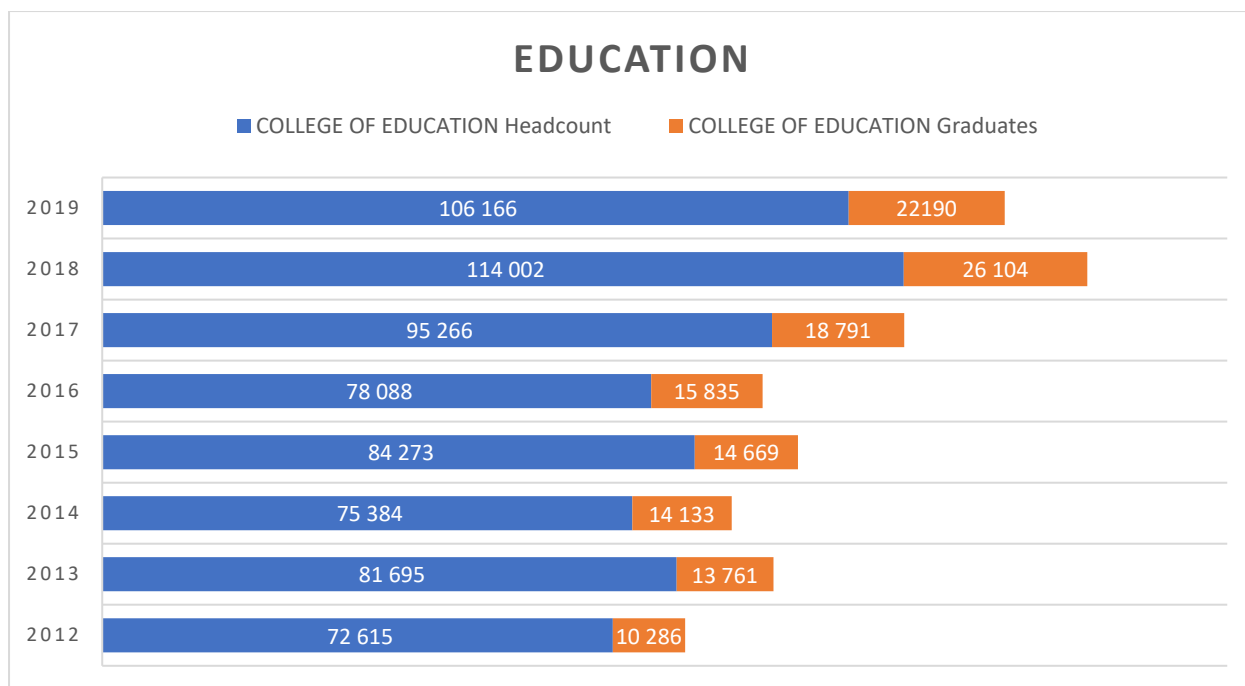
Figure 5.9: CEDU Enrolment Headcount vs. Graduation outputs

Table 5.5: CEDU Headcount vs Graduation outputs

Values	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Headcount	72 615	81 695	75 384	84 273	78 088	95 266	114 002	106 166
Graduates	10 286	13 761	14 133	14 669	15 835	18 791	26 104	22190
Graduation Rate	14,2%	16,8%	18,7%	17,4%	20,3%	19,7%	22,9%	20,9%

In the College of Education (CEDU), the highest graduation rates in comparison to the headcount in the college was 22,9%, as obtained in 2018. By contrast, in 2012, the college recorded the lowest graduation rate of 14,2%. The average over the 8 years is 18,9%.

The performance of the College of Education over the eight-year period appears to have been substantially higher than most of the other colleges. This was especially notable given the student headcount which ranged from 72 615 to 114 002 over the period under study. The high student numbers and relatively high graduation rates found at the College of education are similar to those that can be found within the College of Human Sciences, and for that reason, the latter represents an interesting comparison to College of Education outcomes. To this end, figure 5.23 below, provides a summative overview of the graduations by headcount for CHS.
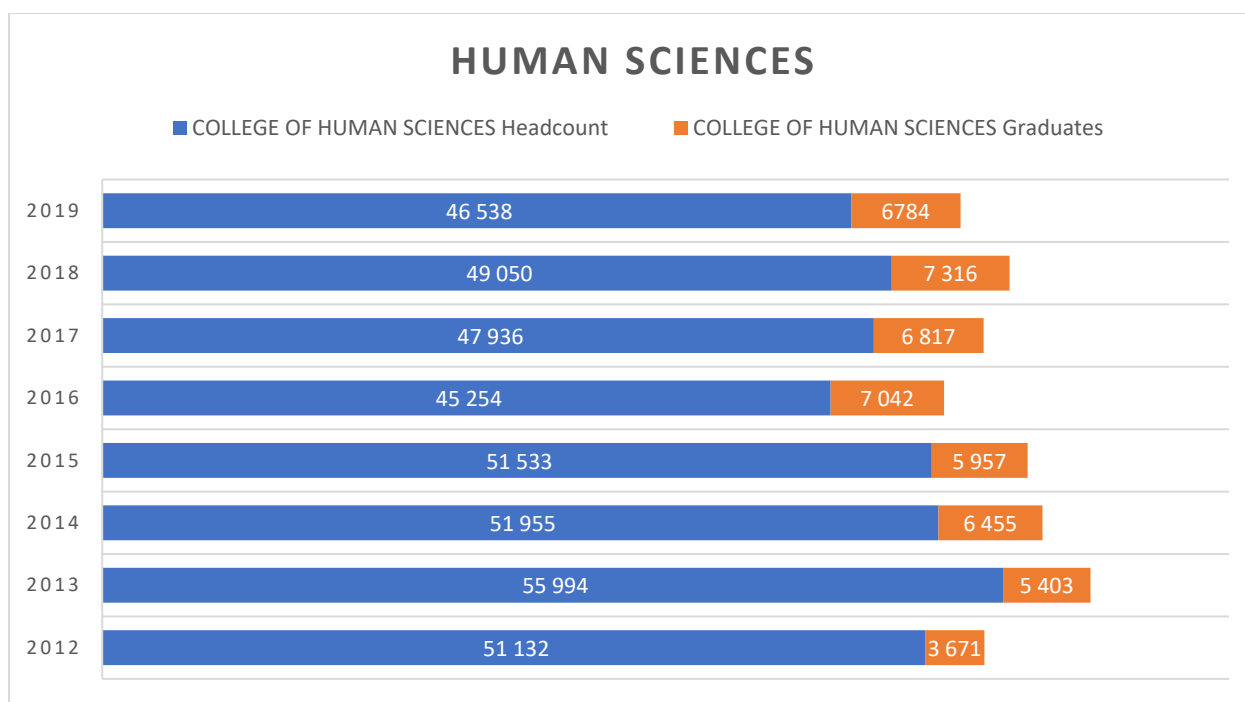
Figure 5.10: CHS Enrolment Headcount vs. Graduation outputs

Table 5.6: CHS Headcount vs Graduation outputs

Values	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Headcount	51 132	55 994	51 955	51 533	45 254	47 936	49 050	46 538
Graduates	3 671	5 403	6 455	5 957	7 042	6 817	7 316	6 784
Graduation Rate	7,2%	9,6%	12,4%	11,6%	15,6%	14,2%	14,9%	14,6%

In the College of Human Sciences (CHS), the highest graduation rate in comparison to the headcount in the college was 15,6% during the 2016 academic year, whilst the lowest recorded rate of 7,2% was seen in 2012. The average graduation rate over the 8-year index period was 12,5%. Notably, the college shows an inconsistent year on year trajectory on graduation rates and downward enrolment headcount from 2016.

The university's College of Law (CLAW) recorded a headcount increase from 35 454 to 61 763 students from 2012 to 2019, an increase of 43% in the numbers of students undertaking undergraduate studies. Over the same period, the college registered an increase of 4.1% in its graduation rate. The year-on-year performance between 2012 and 2019 is diagrammatically represented in Figure 5.24 below.

COLLEGE OF LAW

■ COLLEGE OF LAW Headcount   ■ COLLEGE OF LAW Graduates

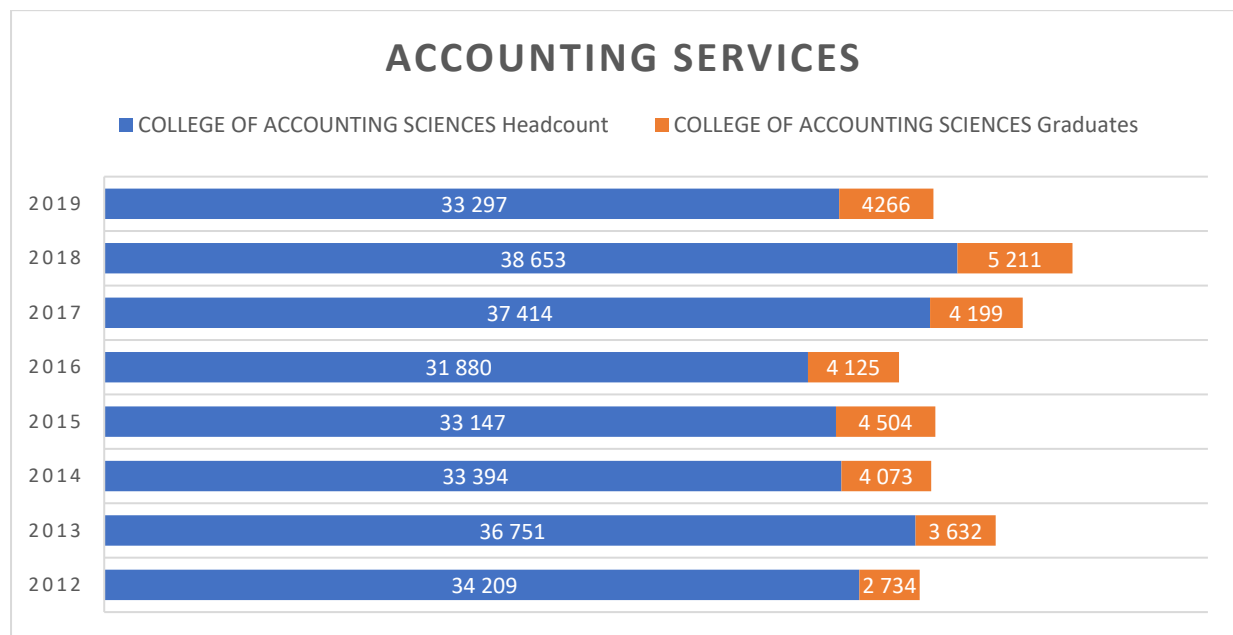| Year	Headcount	Graduates
2019	61 763	5302
2018	55 989	5 508
2017	49 893	3 927
2016	39 684	3 275
2015	41 121	2 731
2014	37 309	2 34
2013	38 921	2 01
2012	35 454	1 73
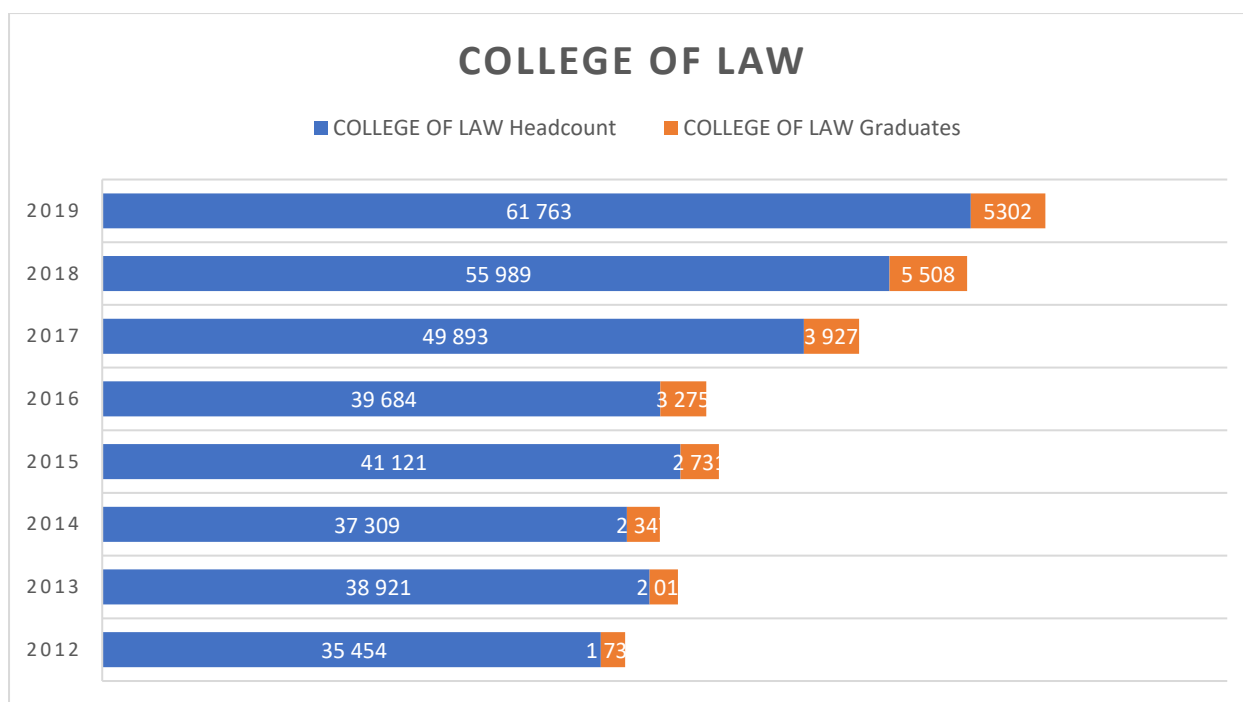
Figure 5.11: CLAW Enrolment Headcount vs. Graduation outputs

Table 5.7:   CHS Headcount vs Graduation outputs

Values	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Headcount	35 454	38 921	37 309	41 121	39 684	49 893	55 989	61 763
Graduates	1 735	2 017	2 347	2 731	3 275	3 927	5 508	5302
Graduation Rate	4,9%	5,2%	6,3%	6,6%	8,3%	7,9%	9,8%	8,6%

As indicated above, the College of Law's highest graduation rate in comparison to the college's student headcount was 9,8% in 2018, the lowest being 4,9% in 2012. The average over the 8 years is 7,2%. The college's performance reveals a year-on-year increase in the graduation rate over the index period.

The college of Science, Engineering & Technology's rate of graduation from 2012 to 2019 was also reviewed from the access and student success data held by the university. In terms of magnitude, The College of Science, Engineering & Technology (CSET) recorded the smallest student number increase over the 8-year period, but its year-on-year graduation rates increased by similar proportions to the other colleges. Figure 5.25 below provides a more detailed account of the college's performance in this regard.

SCIENCE, ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY

■ COLLEGE OF SCIENCE ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY Headcount
■ COLLEGE OF SCIENCE ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY Graduates

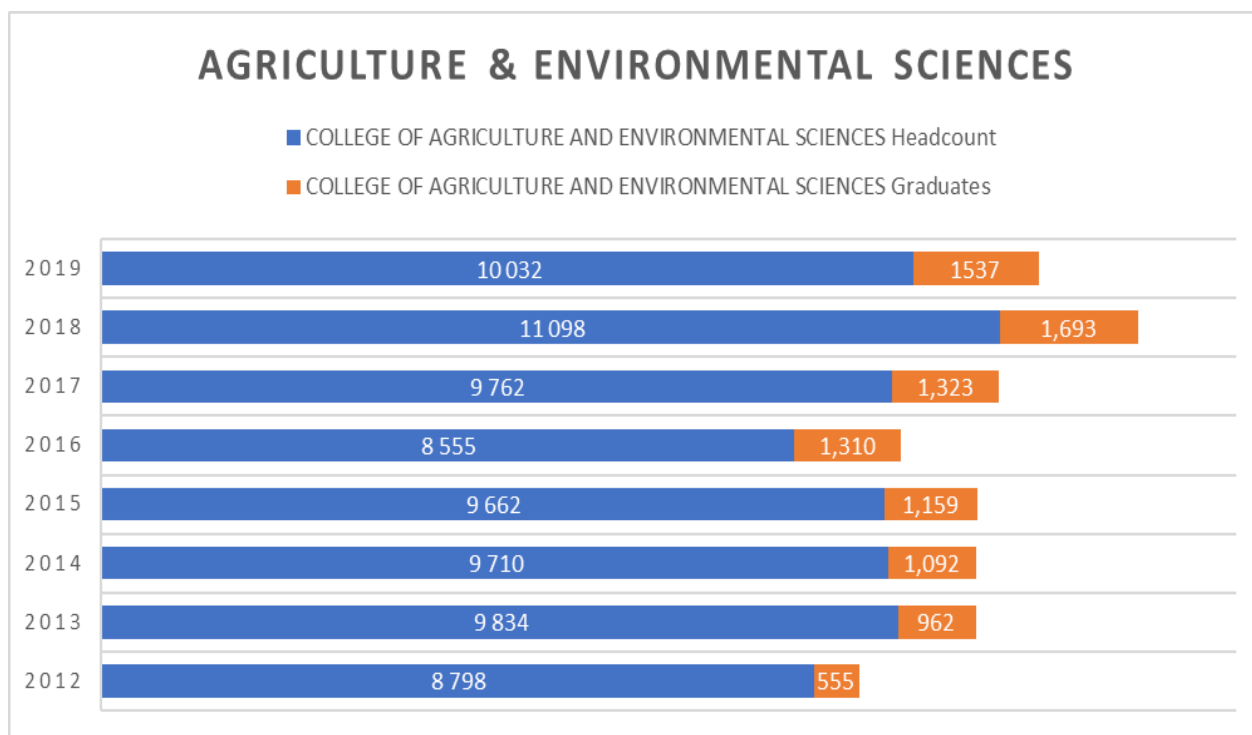| Year	Headcount	Graduates
2019	17 991	1523
2018	21 886	1 839
2017	21 777	1 662
2016	20 580	1 674
2015	21 853	1 633
2014	21 801	1 560
2013	22 900	1 320
2012	21 232	965
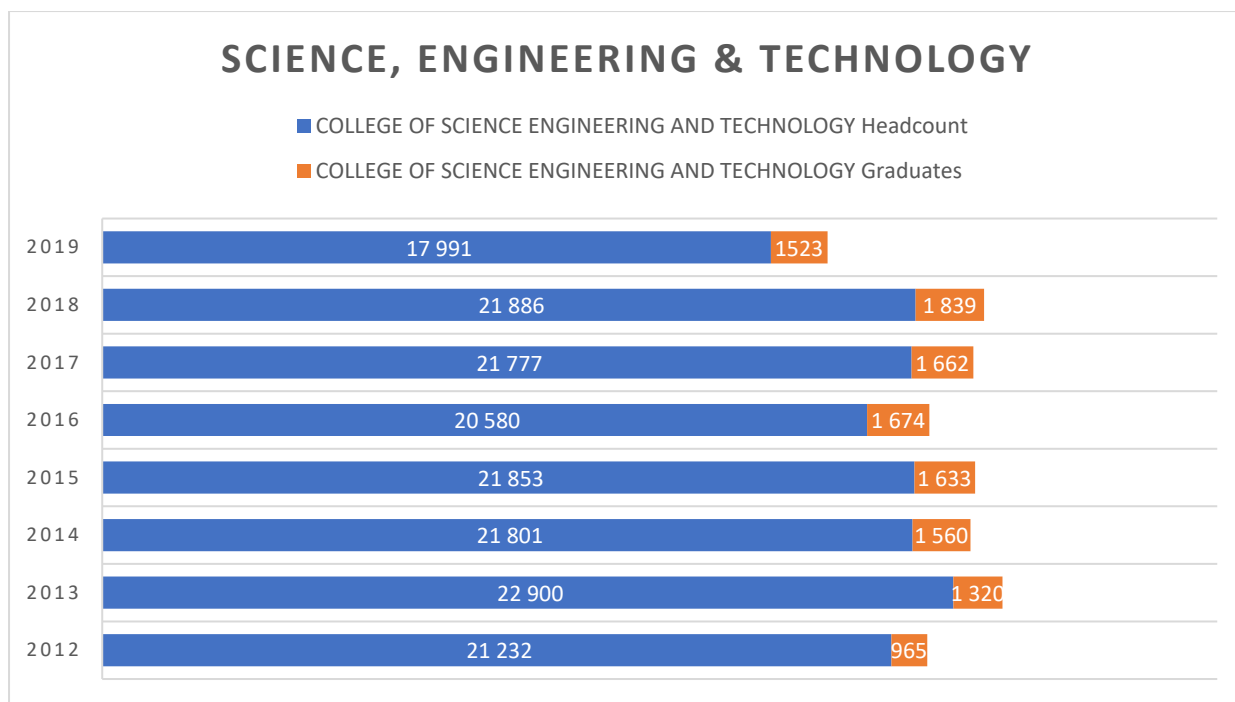
Figure 5.12: CSET Enrolment Headcount vs. Graduation outputs

Table 5.8:   CSET Headcount vs Graduation outputs

Values	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Headcount	21 232	22 900	21 801	21 853	20 580	21 777	21 886	17 991
Graduates	965	1 320	1 560	1 633	1 674	1 662	1 839	1523
Graduation Rate	4,5%	5,8%	7,2%	7,5%	8,1%	7,6%	8,4%	8,5%

For the College of Science, Engineering and Technology, the highest graduation rate per registered student was 8.5%, recorded in 2019, whilst by contrast, the lowest graduation rate was 4.5% in 2012. The average graduation rate over the 8 years was 7,2%.

Despite it being treated in similar ways to the above-cited colleges, the School of Business Leadership (SBL) is not a college and primarily offers a Masters and Doctorate in business leadership as its two flagship offerings. The limited range of course offerings accounts for the comparatively low student numbers. Figure 5.26 below provides a detailed overview of its performance during 2012 to 2019.
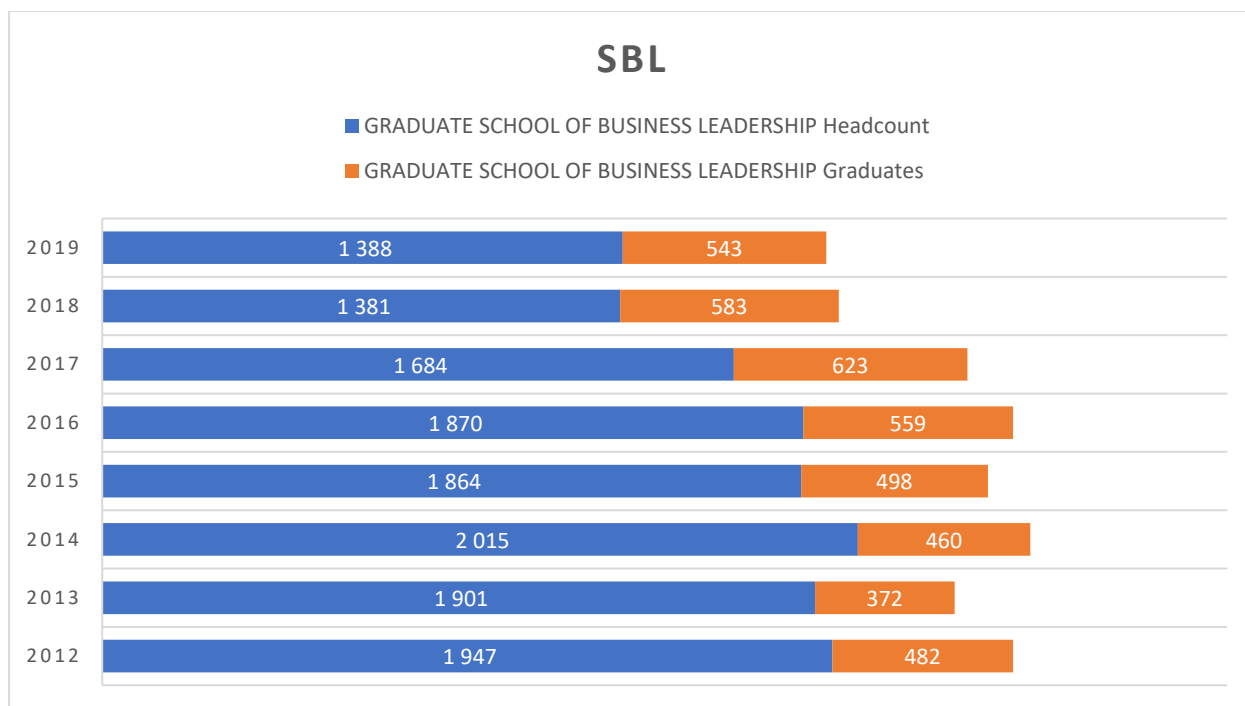
Figure 5.13: SBL Enrolment Headcount vs. Graduation outputs

Table 5.9:   SBL Headcount vs Graduation outputs

Values	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Headcount	1 947	1 901	2 015	1 864	1 870	1 684	1 381	1 388
Graduates	482	372	460	498	559	623	583	543
Graduation Rate	24,8%	19,6%	22,8%	26,7%	29,9%	37,0%	42,2%	39,1%

By comparison, the Graduate School of Business Leadership reflected the highest graduation rate when compared to other colleges at the university under study. For example, the data obtained revealed a graduation rate of 42,2% in 2018, while its lowest recorded rate during the index period was 19,6% in 2013. The average maintained over the 8 years is 30,3%. The relatively high graduation rates seen within the school have been rationalized as resulting from the fact that, one of the entity's primary offerings i.e., the Master's in Business Leadership was offered as a taught programme and students' progression has limited reliance on students' self-directed research activity. Success rates for research only versus taught postgraduate programmes differed significantly, with the latter programme type being viewed as significantly much easier because students received step-by-step tuition through many of the programme assessments.

It should be noted the strategic decisions must be directed by enrolment headcounts and success outcomes informed by university future direction and strategies. Expansion in

enrollment without sufficient complementary inputs in teaching resources and finance negatively affect quality from various input factors. Thus, faculty-student ratio is a key indicator of higher education quality indicating standards of workload size and faculty availability to teach and deliver academic programmes. As noted by Black and Smith (2006), decisions to expand enrollments must be met with the requisite investments to ensure that institutions and faculty can keep up with the pace of increased enrolments.

5.2.1.2   *Qualification Type*

Domain related data has shown that different types of qualifications have historically had differing access levels for the varied student groups. This observation is at the core of long-held contentions about how some professions appear to have disproportionate levels of gender or race representations when compared to others e.g., as noted by the DHET (2019) and the PSA (2016) reports, the South African higher education system is a skewed system that seems to contradict the ambitions of a developmental country that is proportionally slanted towards theoretical and formative studies at universities as opposed to much needed concentrations in particular skills technical and vocational studies. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subject areas have historically had lower representation of women and/or individuals from marginalised groups. Guided by this sensitivity, data related to access by qualification was collated and presented in figure 5.14 below.

QUALIFICATION GROUPING
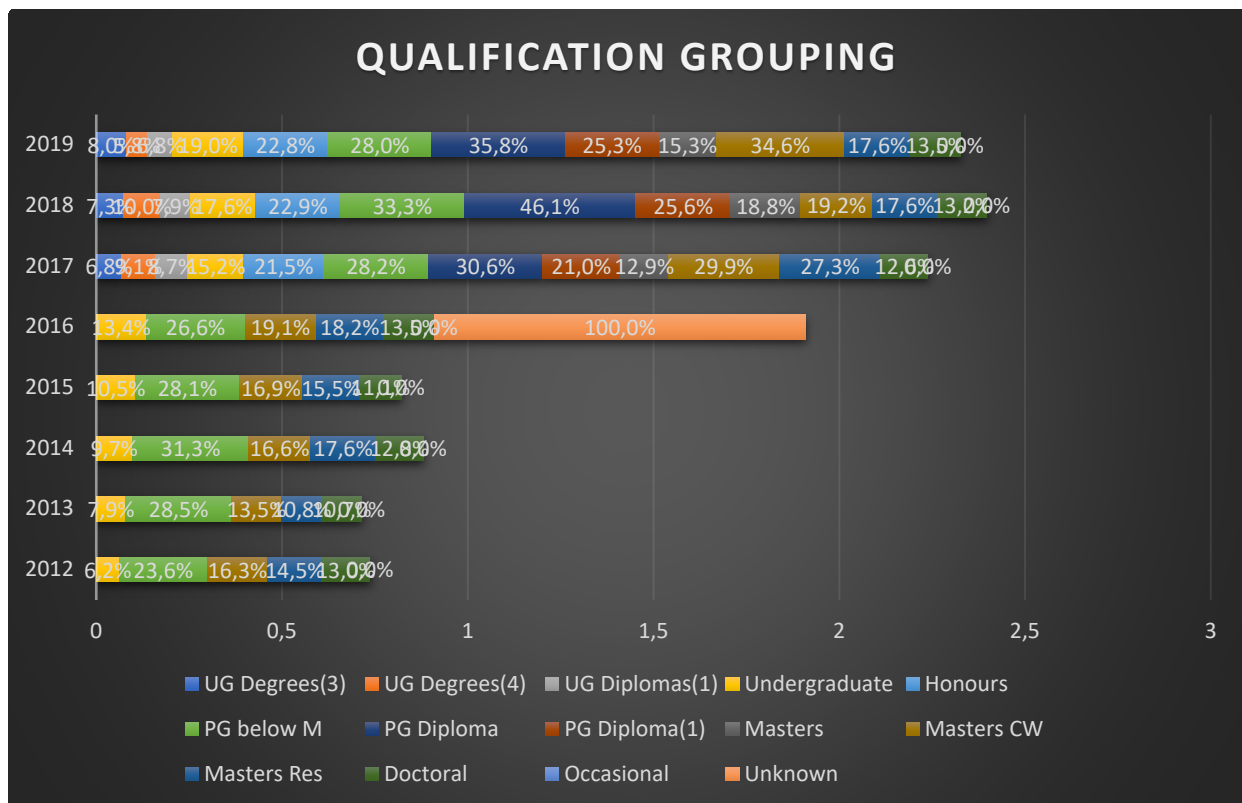
Figure 5.14: Total enrolments per qualification grouping

Figure 5.14 above depicts the university's total enrollments in terms of the qualification level. With the 14 different qualification groupings, the above graph shows the graduation rate per grouping over the 8-year period between 2012 to 2019. From the present the data depicted above undergraduate degrees, and postgraduate diplomas appear to have the most consistent rates of graduation by comparison to the other qualification groupings. The bar graph representation also confirms that the highest pass rates at all the qualification groupings that are at postgraduate diploma level and below. A notable common feature amongst the groupings with the highest pass rates is that they are predominantly coursework rather than research-based courses. Of note is the fact that, the records did not have data from 2012 to 2016 for UG Degrees(3), UG Degrees(4), Ug Diplomas(1), Honours, PG Diploma, PG Diploma(1), and Masters. PG Diplomas in 2017 and 2018 show a graduation rate of 30,6% and 46,1% respectively which are the highest graduation rates recorded throughout the index period. Such a data depiction confirms the PSA (2016) observations at national levels and strongly assert that the statistical data available in the higher education sector is inconsistent in the various sources and reliability of quantitative figures can be challenged. The PSA further contends that the varying national figures available suggest that data collection methods vary across various national reports suggests inadequate information management systems at institutional level.

5.2.1.3   Cohort analysis – Baseline Enrolments

Deciphering the opportunities and challenges related to accessing university level study considers a number of previous published gatekeeper and pathway variables and at the centre of this, economic factors have been cited. Broadly speaking, apart from issues to do with academic competence and eligibility, a substantial proportion of students face access challenges due to their inability to afford study fees and implicated costs associated with engaging in university study. In South Africa, this challenge is ameliorated through the availability of a national student fund assistance programme by the National Student Funding Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Evidence suggests that access to NSFAS serves as an important access factor and in basic terms, the status of whether or not students receive this funding act as determining factors in whether or not, they can study. Guided by this, data on access to NSFAS funding among prospective and existing students was accessed and depicted in figures 5.15, 5.16, 5.17 and 5.18.

a.   Cohort Statistics on Access to financial study support

Figure 5.15 below provides a statistical overview of the outcomes related to eligible students who applied for NSFAS funding but were not awarded for unspecified reasons.

NSFAS - APPLIED FOR & ELIGIBLE BUT NOT AWARDED

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Applied for & eligible but not awarded Graduates	204	778	749	364	366	1 559	850	
Applied for & eligible but not awarded Headcount	6 864	13 127	4 095	2 064	1 981	10 933	3 746	
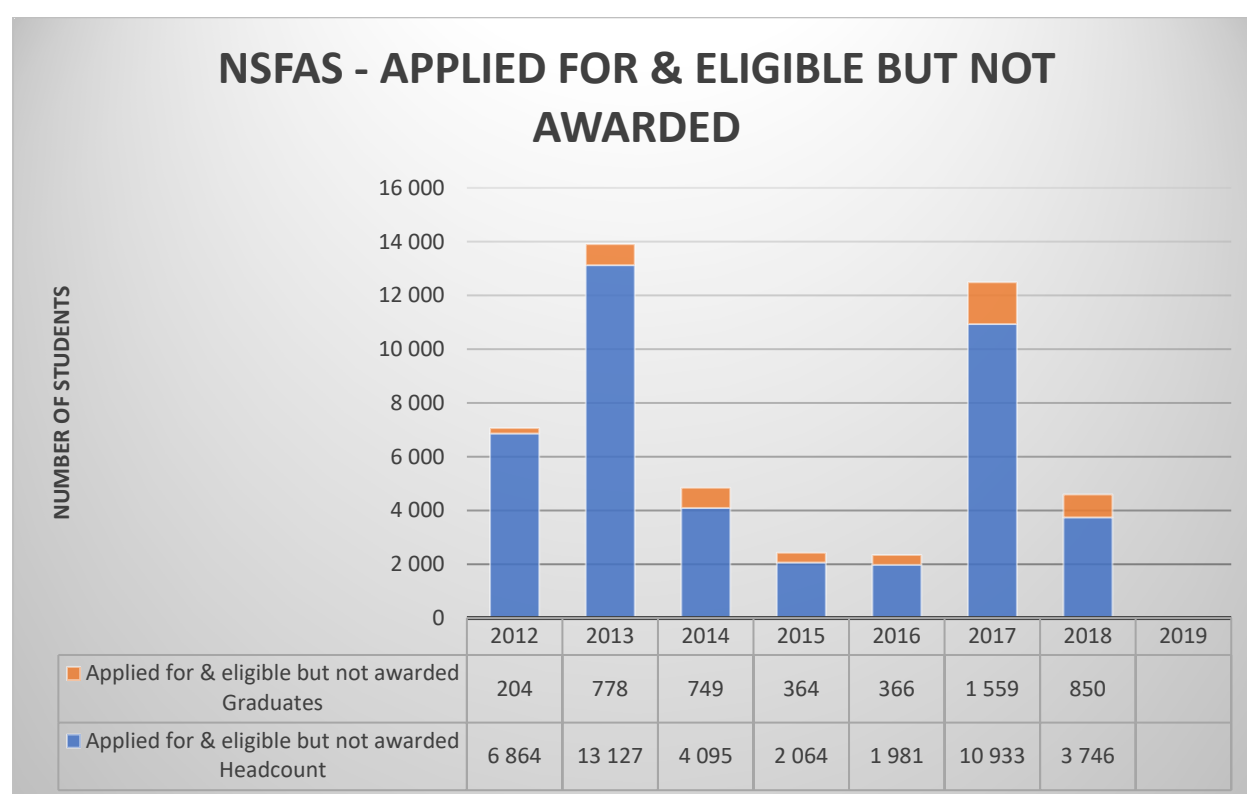
Figure 5.15: NSFAS Applications and eligible

By headcount, 2013 and 2017 had the highest number of students whose applications for NSFAS funding were rejected in spite of being eligible. Over the eight-year index. The range of non-successful but eligible applicants was between 1981 rejected applicants in 2015 to 13127 in 2013. Apart from indicating the magnitude of rejections per individual year, the above statistics the best understood within the context of the year in question and other access defining factors that were prevalent during that period. Even so, the numbers of rejected but eligible applications indicate the magnitude of the student population that would have been denied access due to affordability. Although, it is important to note that eligibility does not translate to award due to the number of selection processes that are applied evaluated against each application. The data depicts the strained government fiscus on demand for education and capacities available to fund eligible students.

Data on successful applications was also elicited and is diagrammatically summarized in figure 5.16 below.

NSFAS – APPLIED FOR & HAS NSFAS AWARD

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
■ Applied for & has NSFAS award Graduates	932	2 235	3 197	4 617	4 916	6 839	3 412	
■ Applied for & has NSFAS award Headcount	33 680	36 657	27 653	27 806	22 087	41 725	16 147	
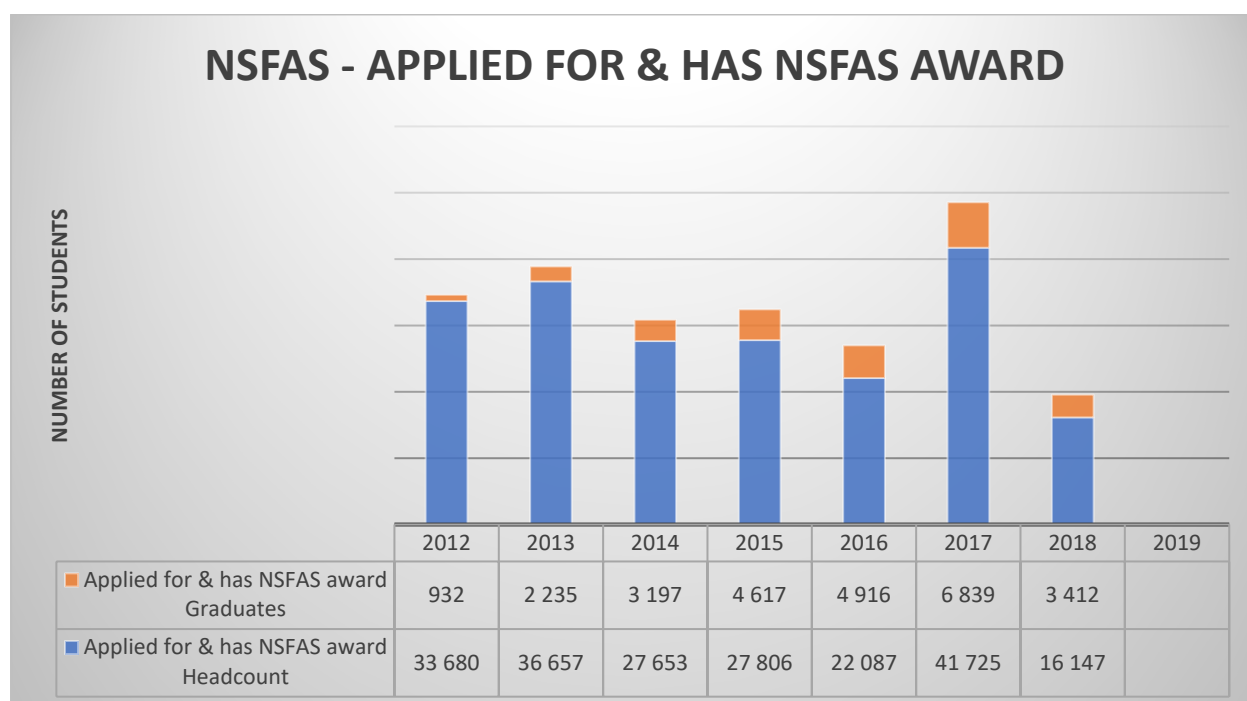
Figure 5.16: NSFAS Applications awarded funding

Figure 5.16 above shows the numbers of successful funding applications between 2012 and 2018 and in this, 2017 (41725) and 2018 (16147) had the highest and lowest success rates respectively. It is notable to the rates of graduation amongst successful NSFAS applicants were significantly higher than those depicted amongst non-successful applicants. This

concurs with the widely held view about lack of financial support and the likely resulting negative implications on graduation. Given this, the attainment of NSFAS funding represents a noteworthy contributing factor in determining whether or not students gained access to and endured in their studies which confirms high levels of persistence in marginalised students who access funding. By that account, non-attainment of this funding increased risk of dropout and failure. Within this group of students who did receive the NSFAS awards, there were those that Applied for the NSFAS award but were deemed ineligible (see figure 5.17) and those that simply did not apply (figure 5.18).

Figures 5.17 and 5.18 below provide headcount detail about those that Applied for the NSFAS award but were deemed ineligible (see figure 5.17) and those that simply did not apply (Figure 5.18).

NSFAS - APPLIED FOR BUT WAS NOT ELIGIBLE

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
■ Applied for but was not eligible Graduates	60	285	49	7	9	58	18	
■ Applied for but was not eligible Headcount	1 829	4 855	946	265	159	1 177	305	
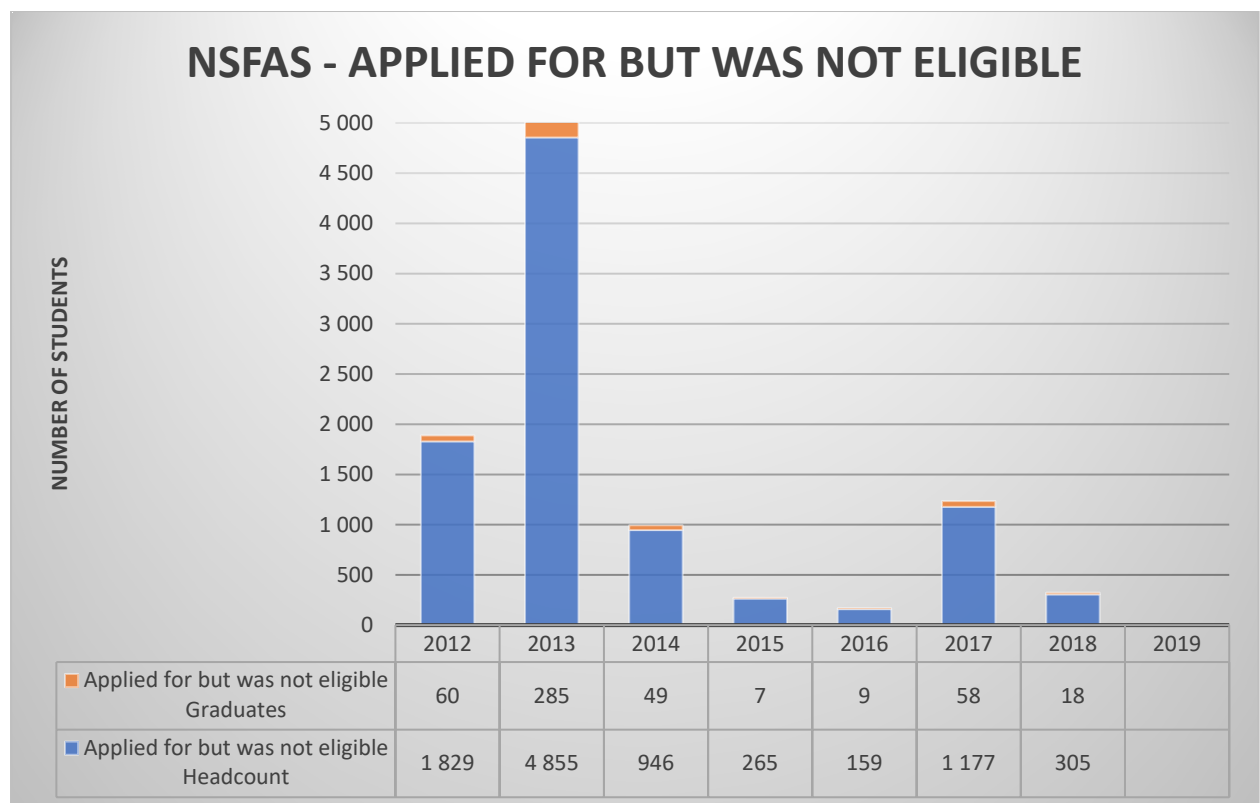
Figure 5.17: NSFAS Applications but not eligible

NSFAS - DID NOT APPLY OR NO INFORMATION

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
■ Did not apply or no information Graduates	25 014	31 636	33 901	35 058	37 996	36 386	52 353	48906
■ Did not apply or no information Headcount	293 913	300 601	295 798	307 809	275 097	290 180	353 781	342 797
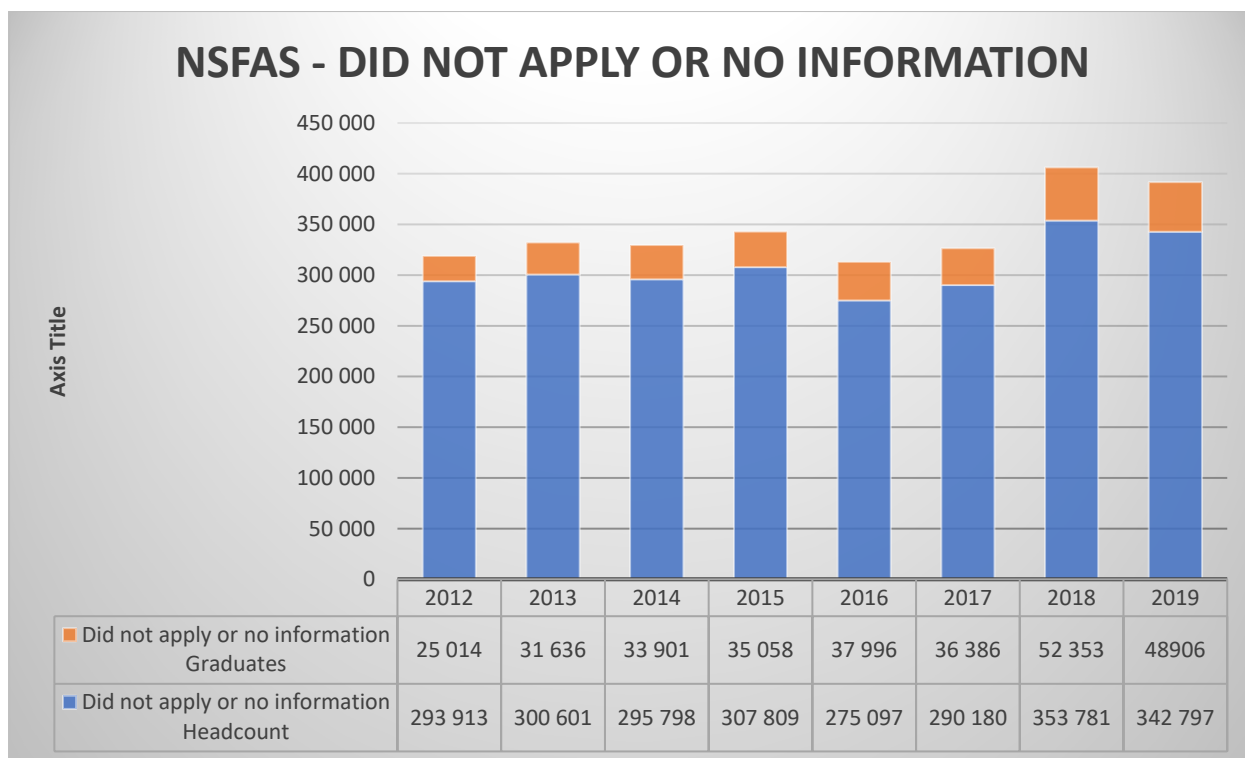
Figure 5.18: Did not apply for NSFAS

The data provided in figures 5.17 and 5.18 above, confirms disproportionately low graduation rates among those students that applied for NSFAS funding, were eligible but were not awarded. Within this, there was a slight increase in proportion in 2017 and 2018 where (1559/10933) 14,3% and (850/3746) 22,7% graduated respectively. Proportionately, during the eight-year index period 2012 - 2019, there were very few students that applied but were not eligible. The numbers that graduated from this proportion were also very low and were consistently below 5,9%. It is notable that a significant proportion of the students either did not apply for funding or no information about them applying was available. i.e., in 2017 and 2018, this made up 84.4% and 94,6% of the total headcount, respectively.

5.2.2 Overview of qualitative discoveries from the situational analysis

Apart from the review of quantitative data, the situational analysis involved review of locally held data including policy documents. In reviewing the locally held data, the researcher reviewed key access and success-enhancing documents that were used to institutional strategic directions and educational practice as it related the access and success imperatives of the university. Table 5.10 below provides a summary overview of the key documents that were reviewed, including the specific focus and intended influence on the access and success discourse.

Table 5.10:   Institutional policy documents

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
Council approved, 2013 Business Model	The document provides the process and pathway to the development of organisational architecture which leveraged on opportunities provided by ICT-based teaching and learning tools, methods, and resources, including OERs. The Model aimed to advance a system-wide understanding of the comprehensive institutional landscape and to create robust, agile systems that can assist the University to be a learning organization, able to take responsive and proactive action in a coherent and sustainable way. The options were presented for a transition from ODL model with systematic movement towards an ODeL Business Model.	The Business Model proposed an overhaul of the operational model to transform the student experience for the better, ensuring that students get a consistently high-quality education, comparable to the best anywhere, while all our systems and processes are technology driven and enhanced for maximum service orientation, efficiency and productivity. Such an overhaul in the model confirms the shortcomings of the current model and systems of the institution and negative impact to the student experience. The proposals further recognized the burden of costs that might be imposed on students to pay for all of the planned technology implementation and advancement. The recognition of underprepared students was noted, and the challenges posed by this cohort of learners. It was argued that caution should be exercised to avoid compounding the problem by placing new demands on students.	Business model provides a detailed outline of the university's investments in facilities and interventions to promote wider student access primarily through digitization. The proposed model further recognized the digital divides amongst the university student body but fell short on how these challenges will be mitigated other than the provision of data to students. The institution did not take account of contextual limitation factors such as lack of access to gadgets for majority university students, resistance of staff towards new technologies and transition of pedagogies at course level as it did not prescribe how the transitions should be managed at this level.
Baseline Study on Open Educational Resources, 2014	An exploratory study to gain a better understanding of current OER climate at Unisa.	The survey covered five notable areas in respect of OER, such as Knowledge of OER, Participation in OER (including the predisposition to sharing),	Provides a comprehensive outline of the range of educational resources that students have unrestricted access to

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
		OER in the Unisa Context, Barriers to OER, and Intellectual Property Rights and Licensing. Other than these levels of awareness of OER and accessing OER, all other activities in respect of OER and integration of into mainstream courses, teaching and learning strategies seems to be carried out rarely at Unisa and that participation in the re-use of OER is quite low leading to reduced benefits to students.	and can utilise to develop content mastery. Primary limitations associated with a lack of contextualisation of the study with a multi-lingual student population such as is the case with UNISA. The limitations in the use of OERs is attributed to several barriers lack of adequate technology infrastructure to support the creation and/or use of OER is identified as the highest, further lack of training, support and skills development for academics.
Framework for Student Support, 2014	The Framework highlights the nature of the student support services offered by the university and further recognizes that the university subscribes to a **social-constructivist learning philosophy** that sees learning as a result of several situated and dynamic connections between students and the curriculum, the resources which support the curriculum, lecturers and tutors, administrative and professional support functions offered by the institution.	As a guiding document the framework forms the basis for the menu of services that are provided to students in the university The framework recognizes the need to support students for success through orientation, academic development programmes and an enabling environment for students to access all required study materials Articulates that student support is achieved through a coherent programme design accompanied by defensible teaching and learning strategies and assessment processes	The framework provides several support interventions for students from point of entry into the university but is limited in terms of how these interventions will be achieved and the breath of these intervention are further not stipulated. It recognizes the needs of underprepared students but falls short on meaningful insights in terms of the needs to of this student cohort. The framework assumes the administrative service efficiencies at its urban

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
			centres and the skills deficits at regional centres limiting its focus on materials provision to students in terms of awareness and orientation programmes.
Academic Teaching and Learning Strategy, 2015	Provides a comprehensive and technology enhanced teaching & learning and student support strategy. Articulates strategic goals and targets on a range of areas that promote quality teaching and associated curriculum standards in curricula, programme provision, resourcing plans and the ICT, Teaching and Learning strategy and implementation plan.	Advances the need to improve the teacher-student interactions and increase student participation in tutorials for retention purposes. Prioritizes the implementation of the student success framework strategy to increase module pass rate per exam sitting and a students' tracking system.	Positively identifies priority provisions that are needed to promote access and success for students to be able to maximally utilise teaching and learning provision within the university. Limitation in that it treats the student population as a homogenous population with similar needs.
UNISA ODeL Business Model Implementation, 2015	A phased approach implementation plan towards migration to ODeL business model between 2013 and 2020	Identify options available to ensure that ICT, broadband Internet are accessible and affordable for all students, so that the shift to ODeL does not occur at the expense of Unisa's social transformation charter and create a cost burden to students. Advocates for an improved quality for the student experience and meaningful prospects of success through the provision of effective administrative and academic support systems	The implementation plan is still vague on some of the contextual limitation factors such as lack of access to gadgets for majority university students, resistance of staff towards new technologies and transition of pedagogies at course level as it did not prescribe how the transitions should be managed at this level. Provides good progress on a number of strategic priorities, associated risks and identifies the lack of

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
			requisite skills but not specific enough to facilitate roles for these skills in streamlining business planning and transitional support mechanisms. Implementation plan is inward looking with limited acknowledgements on the impact the transition poses to students.
HE Transformation Summit, 2015	To reflect on progress of the transformation in the HE and development of transformation indicators to assist in steering transformation goals to support effective implementation of transformation imperatives.	Recognises the inadequate levels of funding to match the growth and access rates in the higher education system of the country. That the HE system still grapples with unacceptably low throughput rates of students, despite achievements in greater access and success.	Specifies ground - breaking and forward - looking provision requirements and recognizes that transformation of universities is multi-dimensional and complex. Limited in that it does not specifically differentiate the transformation needs that support student access/ success from those that are related to generic transformation.
ICT Key systems in support of Teaching and Learning, 2015	Provides the ICT architecture and its support to the business strategy and the business model adequate capability and capacity to provide acceptable ICT levels	Focuses on the technology platforms and transactional processing of university systems, examination, sittings, student assignment submissions and registration processing and associated volumes. Outlines if measures taken to provide access to students are effective and if usage gives an indication of the load carried by the system in terms of	The focus is on the volumes of transactions performed by staff and students on business systems that support teaching and learning. Provides useful insights on technology usage and non-usage by both students and academic staff but limitations are noted in non-reporting on the teacher-student interactions and tutor-

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
		processing capacity required on the LMS system. Measures usage of the LMS by academic staff, students and interactions with technology as a support function to students.	student interactions on the LMS.
OER Strategy_2014_2016	Advances the implementation and integration of OERs into mainstream institutional processes in order to harness the true potential of OERs in the curriculum and institutional transformation processes.	Student centeredness as a principle is recognised as systematically recognizing students' worldviews and lived experiences, as well as their prior learning, in the development of curricula that will allow them to achieve their learning objectives and aspirations. The role of student in self-determining and as knowledge co-creators is recognized.	Outlines the multiplicity of open education principles to guide the decisions and institutional direction that optimally align to the approved business institutional model ensuring the need to include the OER strategy. Provides limited insights on some critical matters such as control for academics to retain their own work ie. intellectual property rights, quality assurances and accreditation arrangements and recognition.
Roadmap to support ODeL and 2030 Strategy, 2017	Outlines the implementation of the ODeL transition in a systematic manner, targets set for the first five years 2016 – 2020 and recommendations such as the pricing model for the digital mode of provision of study materials from 2018.	Student support infrastructure identified centrally to enable students to the access university but to also support to succeed in terms of obtaining the necessary qualifications. The provision of a menu of high-quality technology-enhanced services to students and provide mechanisms for students who may not have access to newer technologies and outlines plans for	Aligns comprehensively the ODeL business model to the strategies of digitalization at undergraduate, transforming teaching and learning pedagogies with a particular emphasis on utilizing active and collaborative pedagogies, the centrality of delivery model to blended learning.

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
		negotiating cheaper devices for students. The provision of student support programmes such as Teaching Assistants, eTutors, eCounselling and generic Academic Literacy programmes aimed at addressing the requirement of blended learning and recommendation to approve the provision of a laptop to all students receiving government funding and those funded by the institution.	Recognises the support of indigent students and the required steady support increments over the period leading up to 2020. Sets constricted timelines to the achievement of the goals
Senate report from Council on SRC Submissions to Council, 2017	Outlines a motion introduced by student representatives proposing the removal of the Vice Chancellor of the university due to several challenges confronting students, lack of provision of study materials, ICT infrastructure is not meeting the increased service demands from students, poor programme curriculum and lack of competent staff and understaffing within critical departments of the University.	Students have emphasized the apparent systemic character of these issues and therefore sought accountability at the level of the VC. The report provides several institutional failures perceived by students impacting on their learning experiences, access issues in terms of registrations, technology support, quality of curriculum and learning materials.	As Senate representatives on Council, a university governance body, the SRC provides a student voice on matters that impact their learning journey. Detail of issues demonstrates a good understanding of what students expect in terms of institutional support. The recognition of the student issues at Senate and Council strengthens the student voice in institutional and academic governance matters. Lacks institutional response on corrective guidance and measures the university can do to address the concerns raised.
UNISA Student Experience on ICTs, 2017	Outlines ICTs research conducted over a period of five years (2011 –	Provides and institutional understanding on students' access and use of ICT's.	Recognition of ODL success drivers such as access to and the

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
	2015) and the associated links to student success.	Outlines the need for low-cost Internet services and improvements in infrastructural challenges as this has an impact on cost as a result of poor infrastructure and location. Study findings suggests that the lack of ownership of technology devices reduce the chances of success. Study finds that students are cost sensitive and often have to make arrangements for regular connectivity and device access for study purposes, therefore device ownership and broadband access is essential.	effective utilisation of ICTs by the institution and the ability of learners to engage with such ICTs to enhance learning. Good representation of student profiles. Advances adequate insights on the challenges of access to technology and the transitions required for students to study in ODeL. Relationship factors between the access to devices and success outcomes are not sufficiently explored.
First Year Experience (FYE) Programme Framework, 2018	An extended support programme for students entering ODL for the first time in their first year of study. The plan details planning relating to the service standards of the programme under the guidance of the FYE forum in the institution.	The plan Identifies key indicators of risk for First Year students to ensure effective tracking throughout the program. Outlines various phases of student support such as entry point student support and orientation interventions on what highlighting what is Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) and how the institution works. Teaching and learning support involve academic support and assessments.

Students who have failed or dropped out of are flagged and tracked for referred to the relevant regional or online support activities to ensure greater success outcomes | Identifies the activities deemed to be crucial to First Year student success from entry point; teaching and learning phases of the first year of study toto the student exit point. Offers plans for online resources within the myUnisa LMS for the online support of the FYE programme includes tools for assessing ODL Readiness and Qualification Mapping for curriculum advise. Plan is limited in terms of integration to other support mechanisms available and interaction with students at regional centres. |

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
Revised UNISA Business Model, 2018	Outlines a shift from previous business model in approach and provides a centred a pedagogically sound ODeL delivery model combining elements of e-learning with traditional pint-based learning.	Recognises the student body as heterogenous with diverse population backgrounds, needs and competencies. Affirms the establishment of relationships with students that lead to exemplary student experiences as a student retention strategy.	Recognises the centrality of the academic programme and advances a shift from a one-size fits all approach to learning and introduces flexibility and variation in terms of substance and pace between disciplines. The revised model seems does not cohere with previous developed plans and disregards previous work on the transition from ODL to ODeL. The model assumes that the institution does not offer a number of services which were actually founded implemented by the ODL implementation frameworks. The plan is articulate on what should be done but limited on tangible timelines and how these areas will be achieved.
CAES ODeL Plan, 2018	The 2016-2020 plan is intended to shape and provide direction on how college programmes, curricula and student support should be transformed to align to institutional ODeL transition timelines and objectives. Outlines how fifty percent of its offerings at undergraduate level will be transitioned by 2020.	Advances support to provide underprivileged students with end user devices (EUD).	Outlines plans to strengthen teaching processes in terms of implementation of OERs plan; engage with external stakeholders (industry, advisory board, Unisa regional learning centres) and support to a holistic approach to teaching and learning model. Commits that most module content would be electronic provisioned as

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
			multimedia content on disc and online lessons inclusive of using online platforms such as videoconferencing, skype, teleconferencing etc. Limited on hoe the college plans to deal with the impact to students and what mitigative strategies will be employed to transition students along with these pedagogical transition plans.
CLAW Intervention Strategy for Supporting at-risk students, 2018	To provide a framework for identifying at-risk and high-risk students within the College of Law (CLAW).	Attends to retention and student progression challenges in three identified student cohorts, First Year Experience (FYE), students repeating modules and students who have registered for more than the maximum period allowed for the qualification.	Proposes the development of student risk profile that integrates student performance at the institution based on their interaction with the institution at key areas. The criteria are limited to quantitative indicator and less elaboration of qualitative aspects on student readiness for ODeL and how students are socialized and supported within the institution. The strengths are limited to the identification indicators.
Task Team Report: Academic Calendar and Student Registrations, 2018	Task team was commissioned to address and report on the challenges faced by the university relating to the extension of registration and examination dates, the academic calendar whether the semester	Advocates for better distributions in the workloads of students and staff. Balancing the student numbers and the lack of preparedness for higher education.	Presents an elaborate and balanced view of university's tuition and service delivery challenges to students. Advances the challenges on the interconnectedness and interfaces of the academic calendar, in

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
	system was working and forward proposals on alternatives, including mitigating strategies to the identified challenges.		terms of academic and administration support.
ODeL Implementation Model Progress Report, 2020	Outlines the implementation plan with dates of key ODeL transitional administrative support activities for students.	Support to students mainly on access and admissions. Student support initiatives on improvement for formative assessments and provision of study material.	Offers a detailed attempt at highlighting challenges to positive student participation and within this, provides some corrective guidance on what the university can do to maximise participation of students from marginalised groups.
ODeL Strategy Benchmarking Report, 2020	Provides a comparable insight on other institutions provision Open Education in terms of their strategies, policies and practices.	Highlights the value and importance of access to internet and bandwidth as a key determinant for the success of a full-blown ODeL institution. Dematerialising i.e. reduction of the quantities of print-based materials must be given a priority in terms of becoming a true ODeL.	Advocates caution in implementing a "pure" ODeL that follows a theoretical model advances sensitivities and adoption of flexible and sensitive approaches to align to contextual needs. Advises that the institution should remain a hybrid between a support and enabling function. Limited on the strategic needs and burden of costs on the strategic propositions to the institution.
Revised UNISA Strategy 2030, 2020	Outlines the need of the separation of strategy from the implementation plan and the operationalisation of Institutional values, addressing staff retention, develop portfolio business	Advocates the need to improve the understanding of who is the student and the impact of the digital and electronic world they live in. Strategic focus to provide access to underserviced communities and cutting-edge scholarship and	Strong focus on a series of new adoptions to be made by the institution as to how it will respond to its operating environment, an inward-looking strategy. Balanced with the external

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
	improvement plans and designing a strategy that promotes a high-performance culture.	innovations to rural communities.	environment, national and international contexts in terms of T&L strategies and scholarship. It takes a top-down approach as apposed to an inclusive and self-determined institutional approach.
Policy on Financial Assistance to Students, 2016	Sets principles on the provision of financial assistance to students on the basis of academic merit, financial need and any other requirements as set by university donors.	Intended to support and contribute towards access to education and academic success for students enrolled.	Outlines parameters for eligibility and covers a wide range of funding based on academic performance/merit. Has a strong focus to support indigent students?
Policy on Provision of e-Devices for e-Learning, 2018	Affirms the support students with access to digital technology devices such as laptops and assistive devices for learning.	Articulates the parameters for student support and access to technology devices and data.	Defines the modalities for the provision of access to and use of such devices, with data and support. The institution does not provide the devices but rather facilitate channels for students to have access to the electronic devices and puts in place processes and procedures to ensure connectivity and support to students.
Tuition Policy, 2013	Sets principles for the provision of curriculum and the teaching approach take into account the different needs and abilities of students.	Centres students on its commitment to good quality provision and improve student through-put rates and graduate capability.	Advances a flexible approach to teaching and learning and comprehensiveness in programme delivery models for a more diverse range of academic programmes available to students, vocational and general formative types of learning.

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
UNISA Assessment Policy, 2019	To guide all assessment practices of the institution and ensure that assessment is an integrated process within the learning experience.	Is focused to improve the quality of student learning experiences. Centres formative assessment in ODeL as a key lever of support to the learning experiences of students often unfamiliar with and alienated by the distance learning experience.	Outlines sound, well balanced assessment principles and its strengths with best practices that ensures a holistic academic judgement is made related to diagnostics, placements competence, progression and qualification completion; and as a feedback mechanism to improve curricula. Seems to distinguish continuous assessment away from formative and developmental assessment practices.
UNISA ODeL Policy, 2018	Provides principles and guidelines on ODeL processes, practices, systems and direct ODeL implementation within a blended model of learning and teaching.	The policy is student-centred and assures supporting students, constructing learning programmes with the expectation that students can succeed. Recognises the support in that students must succeed, acknowledging that students bring their own knowledges and experiences to learning and knowledge production.	Associates the principles of student-centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision with the social justice principles for the removal of barriers to access learning.
UNISA QA Policy, 2018	Provides the principles quality assurance, quality promotion and enhancement activities to create and strengthen a culture of quality and excellence in the institution.	No direct focus on students, policy outlines the support on student access, support and success.	Outlines sound, well balanced quality principles its strengths with best practices aligned to the CHE criteria on quality assurance. Lacks details on how the QA practices of the institution are framed in term of practice, coherence and holistic

Document Name	Objectives and goals	Observed attendance to access, student success and support	Strengths or limitations
			approach across the spheres of the university.
UNISA Admissions Policy, 2021	Sets out the principles and guidelines for admission to study at the university. Enforces the principles of making higher education available to and inclusive to all.	Policy advances access and redress in terms of opening up spaces and the creation of spaces for learning and	Strong alignment to national legislative frameworks and transformation imperatives. The policy is limited in terms of focus on issues of support for students to complete qualifications within minimum prescribed periods.

5.2.2.1   *Summary of the documentary review of secondary data for the situational analysis.*

The above-cited documents formed the basis of the review of secondary data and were identified via a desktop review. In summary, the documents represent the majority of documents and policy guidance that the university utilises to guide wide ranging interventions and activities and fell into two categories of data.

a.   Policies and practice guidance that specifically focused on increasing university inclusivity and access to specified vulnerable groups.

b.   Documents that related to ancillary policies and guidance that do not specifically relate to openness, access and success issue, but may positively impact student success.

5.2.2.2   *Highlights of key access and success promoting documentary evidence*

The documentary evidence reviewed as outlined in Table 5.11 provides a sufficient overview of the key directions of the institution including its focus and influence on the access and success discourse. The review of the documents saw an emergence of deliberate and intentional approaches by the institution on advancing access, student support, and success. Whether these emergent themes found expression in practice is another consideration. The institutional framing is sound and advances a well understood concept of openness from an

access and creation of opportunities to learning and an appreciation of challenges to its student body. The business model and transition of the institution from ODL to ODeL provision provides a sound consideration of the developments of technology in the mediation of learning and value the proposition it presents to both the students and the academy in teaching and learning. The 2013 Business Model provided a substantive understanding of ODL and the value of ODeL proposing the development of organisational architecture which leveraged on opportunities provided by ICT-based teaching and learning tools. It further demonstrated the attitude and commitment by the institution in its financial investments to overhaul the operational model both administratively and in the academic programme to transform the student experience for the better, ensuring that students get a consistently high-quality education.

The admissions policy (2021) of the institution is central to access and the provision of opportunities to learning. The principles of inclusion, transformation and the advancement of those who need special admission pathways in their mature age. Comprehensively, all documents demonstrated the value of appropriate student support and centrality of student centric approaches to teaching and learning. Student centricity is a strong emergence in all documents, suggesting an appreciation of the challenges confronting the student body. Strong evidence is observed in this regard in the business model and digitilisation strategies of ODeL in transforming teaching and learning pedagogies with a particular emphasis on utilizing active and collaborative pedagogies, the centrality of delivery model to blended learning recognising the support of indigent students and the required steady support increments over the period of time. The UNISA Revised Strategy (2020) foregrounds the need for inward-looking approaches in improving the operational framework of the institution and proposes a series of new adoptions to be made by the institution in respond to the demands of the operating environment. This observance underscores the understanding that the institution is aware of some institutional shortcomings in the provision of optimal learning spaces for students and a need for better supporting frameworks in both the academic and administrative environments. The researcher further observed a strong focus in student support initiatives, the Integrated Student Support Framework (2018) and First Year Experience FYE (2018) programme subscribes to a social-constructivist learning philosophy which advances the understanding of how students are socialized in their learning spaces and considerations of their social constructs as they progress their learning journey, thus providing considered institutional approaches to teaching, learning and support to students. The reviewed strategic and policy documentation demonstrates an overwhelming intention to student support with programmes such as the appointment of Teaching Assistants, eTutors, eCounselling and generic Academic Literacy support programmes aimed at addressing the requirement of blended learning. The

success outcomes in terms of student progression and qualification completion as a feedback mechanism to improve throughput in curricula is demonstrated by the quantitative data on graduation outcomes. Figure 5.15 observations highlight minimal impact outcomes were evident over the eight-year index. This is in spite of the university increasing enrolments implementing these identified student support programmes at college level as interventions to address this perpetual challenge of student success.

5.2.2.3 *Typical areas of challenge that current policy continues to address but with limited success.*

The review of the policy and strategic documents demonstrates a balanced approach by the institution to align its policies national policy frameworks and imperatives taking into consideration the positioning of open distance education in the South African higher education landscape. There is however the challenge in understanding how access in admissions is balanced with the eligible students who are not admitted in terms of the Admission Policy (2021) due to the enrolment planning and qualification target setting instrument, compounded by the government's inability to fund qualifying students due to fiscal constraints. The issue of enrolment numbers and ability of the institution to provide support to students is further established in the Senate report from Council on SRC Submissions to Council (2017) and the Task Team Report on the Academic Calendar and Student Registrations (2018). The institutional policy frameworks seem deliberate in ensuring optimal learning and support conditions for students but the enrolment volumes, lack of adequate government funding resources both on the part of the student and institution thwarts the ability of an optimal delivery model and support infrastructure for students. With all the policy provisions pointing in the right direction, student support and an optimal functional programme delivery model remain challenged.

The ODeL policy (2018) sets the conditions to which learning should be delivered and articulates how the varies factors of programme design, development and curriculum delivery should be undertaken. The policy is student centric and assures support to students in constructing learning programmes with the expectation that students can succeed but the resources seem constricted by optimal human resource allocation models that can improve the success outcomes. The Revised UNISA Strategy 2030 (2020) advances a need to address the human resources of the institution and a need for deliberate choices to be made to address how the institution allocates is workforce in support of the academic programme.

The policies that were reviewed are not clear on the institution's e-learning trajectory on whether it advances a blended learning strategy or there is a sustained commitment to e-learning pedagogy adoption, whether the institution adopts both, placing priority to blended learning is not clear. The ODeL policy advances both equitability but other policies such as the Tuition Policy (2013) and the Academic Teaching and Learning Strategy (2015) align more towards the blended learning strategies. Policy coherence needs attention in advancing the institution towards a cohered learning strategy trajectory.

The technology infrastructure seems to have not made much progress and all the investments outlined in the 2013 business model indicate not much success has not been achieved. The trajectory from 2013 through to ODeL implementation model progress report (2020) provides insights of an operational model that is volatile with undependable technology platforms.

5.2.2.4 Limitations and areas that need to be developed further within the current policy provision

The assessment policy (2019) requires some reflections on the provisions of the formative assessment strategy and the location of the continuous assessment in curricula. The policy needs to be clear on where and how such an assessment modality can be applied in either a year model provision or in semester modules due to the limitations of time in tuition provision in a semester system. Continuous assessment modalities need to complement formative assessment strategies and the overall developmental assessment practices as the rationale for continuous assessment is to ensure that students work consistently with measures of optimal and timeous feedback and support for students to master module content. Therefore, continuous assessment requires strengthening in the assessment policy and coherence with the ODeL and Tuition Policies. Clear distinction must further be outlined in terms of the learning approaches and related policy provisions. The institution needs to articulate explicitly its learning strategies and priorities in terms of blended learning and e-learning strategy approaches. These learning approaches must be differentiated as forms of teaching provisions and policy articulations must be clear on principles, academic standards and the requisite technology support. The blend of pedagogy approaches needs to be reflected and strategised by the institution in ways that would allow adequate policy articulations in terms of the highest achievement of learning outcomes, which would most satisfy students or have the highest rate of course completion rates.

The quality assurance policy needs further development to reflect the expected standards in the delivery of programmes. There are no reflected standards to guide student support

imperatives such as quality standards on lecture to student ratios, work allocations and standards on the provision of technology support. The QA Policy detail on standards as prescribed by the CHE and how practices of the institution are framed in term of practice, coherence and holistic approach across the spheres of the university.

5.2.2.5 What issues remain unaddressed in spite of the policy and documentary provisions

Despite policy provision to assist students with accessibility to broadband and technology devices for teaching and learning activities, it seems the provisions have not gone long enough to assist students. Accessibility met with poor and unstable technology platforms suggests that the policy principles have not yet been realized in practice. The identified challenges confronting students still remain, such as the technology platforms not meeting the increased service demand to students, continued disruptions and system breakdowns to the Learning Management System (LMS) platform and WiFi which is perceived as being consistently being unavailable. The ICT Strategy (2015) assured that by 2019, a streamlined, integrated implementation plan of all systems in line with the new Organizational Architecture, would be in full swing and thus ensuring a stabilized academic and administrative technology environment. This stability has not been realized as observed instead in terms of the ODeL Academic Model Task Team Report (2020) a proliferation of task teams, all attempting to find operational solutions to the operational disruptions during the academic periods demonstrates incoherence and fragmentation in implementation of much needed solutions.

The academic delivery models as envisaged by the Tuition and ODeL policies remains challenging requiring a review of the academic calendar and the tuition model with regard to the openness and the semester delivery model flagged by task team report. The academic delivery model needs to be underpinned by an imperative understanding of Open Distance and e-Learning (ODeL), the ODeL policy (2018) provides a meaningful understanding, guidelines on ODeL processes, practices and systems and direct its implementation within a blended model of learning and teaching. However, in terms of the ODeL Task Team (2020) there seems to be a fragmented understanding of ODeL and what exactly it implies, as presented in The Deans' report of 2015 description of ODeL tuition, the Senate task team of 2018, and the ODeL Master Plan (2019) all contribute to some form of understanding in terms of their contextual environment. A coherent institutional understanding of ODeL is a requisite to give expression to openness and the ODeL policy provisions must permeate across all institutional spheres and interfaces in the operational frameworks.

The principles of openness, access and admissions underpinned by the imperative of social justice seem to be challenged by the enrolment strategy of the institution. The Admissions Policy (2021) outlines the imperatives of openness, the institutional enrolment strategy needs to align to the principles in the Admissions Policy.

The student support frameworks and intervention programmes and the provision of support for e-devices in terms of the Policy on Provision of e-Devices for e-Learning (2018) and the Policy on Financial Assistance to Students (2016) address meaningful attempts to address issues of student support and promotion of success outcomes in learning through this support, however there still remains some reflections on whys such policies are not achieving these success outcomes when the graduation rate on average remains chronically low at 7.8%.

5.3   PHASE TWO – QUALITATIVE PHASE (STAFF INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS AND STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS)

5.3.1   Sample characteristics of phase two

Phase two data collection involved individual interviews (N=19) that were carried out with wide-ranging categories of interviewees as diagrammatically represented below:

Table 5.12:   List of individual and group interviews

ROLE OR DESIGNATION	CATEGORY
Vice Principal: Teaching, Learning, Community Engagement and Student Support	**Management**
Deputy Registrar: Academic and Student Administration	
Executive: ODeL Delivery Model	
College Deans	
College Deputy Deans	
School Directors	**Academic Staff**
Chairs of Departments	
Professors and Associate Professors	
Dean of Students	

Directors - Student Support and facilitation of learning, Institutional Advancement, and Primary academic support	**Administrative Middle Management**
National SRC Leaders	
Regional SRC Chairperson	**Student Representation**
Students from various fields of study	

The respondents by category are represented in the table above and a total of nineteen respondents (N=19) were interviewed. Initially a total of 25 interviews were scheduled but qualitative data saturation was reached at interview 19. Interactions with such a sample size allowed for more in-depth questions, and the qualitative nature of the engagements allowed for deeply illuminating responses and detail, i.e. answers to the "why", "how'' and "what" questions. Trotter (2012) suggests that there is no ideal standard sample size in qualitative research methods and contends that the depth of exploration dictates how much must be gleaned from the sample group. Purposive sampling was selected as a sampling method since the study did not aim to generalise the findings. This method of sampling was deliberate to include a range and diversity in the selection of participants, their experience and background in open and distance learning as this was critical. Trotter (2012) further identifies that the selection of an expert group provides a study with an in-depth investigation of a topic that is qualitatively valid and reliable. The selected participants were then categorised into three main groups and the student category was solely designated to the focus group discussions.

A notable proportion of respondents n=9 (47%) fell within the category of academic staff management followed by n=6 (32%), Management and only n=4 (21%) represented the Administrative Middle Management category which also include staff in the professional designations such as quality assurance practitioners and educational technologists.

Individual Interview Categories

- Management
- Academic
- Administrative and Middle Management
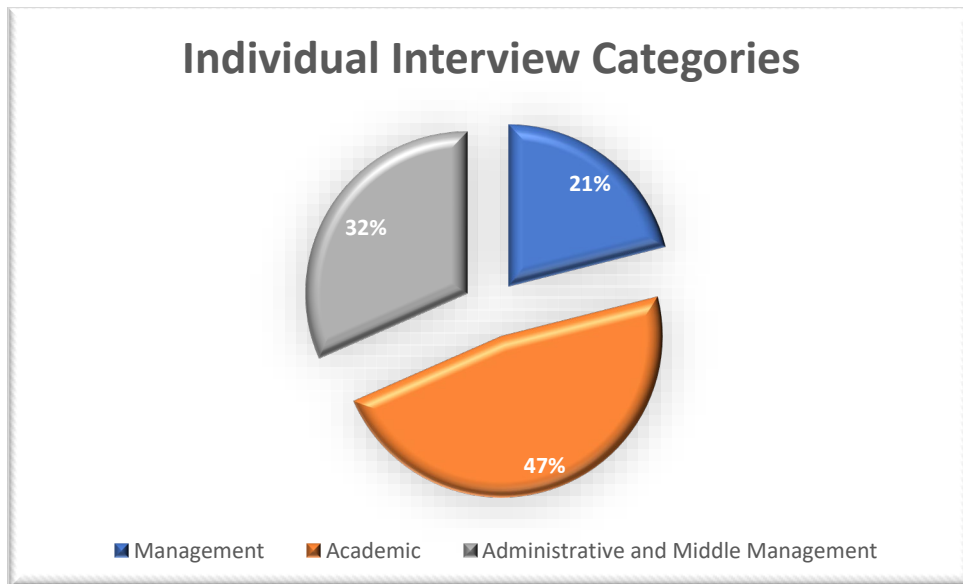
Figure 5.19: Individual interview categories

As part of phase two data collection, focus group discussions (N=4) were conducted with the students. During this aspect of data collection, the researcher visited multiple sites across the different regions in which the university had provincial offices and campuses. There was deliberate and intent to ensure that the mix of regions represented both urban and rural centres of the university. Multi-site data collection was opted for as a means of promoting variability in the responses elicited by the researcher. The focus group comprised of a total of N=32 students split into 4 groups, two in Limpopo (n=12 & 6) and two groups in Gauteng (n=8 & 6). The sessions comprised of smaller groups with a maximum of 12 students in Limpopo whilst Gauteng had a maximum of 8 students in a group. The two groups comprised of undergraduate students mainly in their 2nd year and final year of study who had given their informed consent to be part of the study. In terms of demographic differentiation, focus group was comprised of only African students, 58% female and 42% males. Out of the 32 students, only 2 were studying a postgraduate NQF level 8 qualification and were not funded through the Government Bursary Scheme NSFAS. In terms of the distribution by field of study, a notable 47% was from Law, 41%, Education, 3% Accounting, 6% Environmental Sciences and 3 % Engineering and Technology. A graphical representation of the Limpopo student group's profile is presented below.
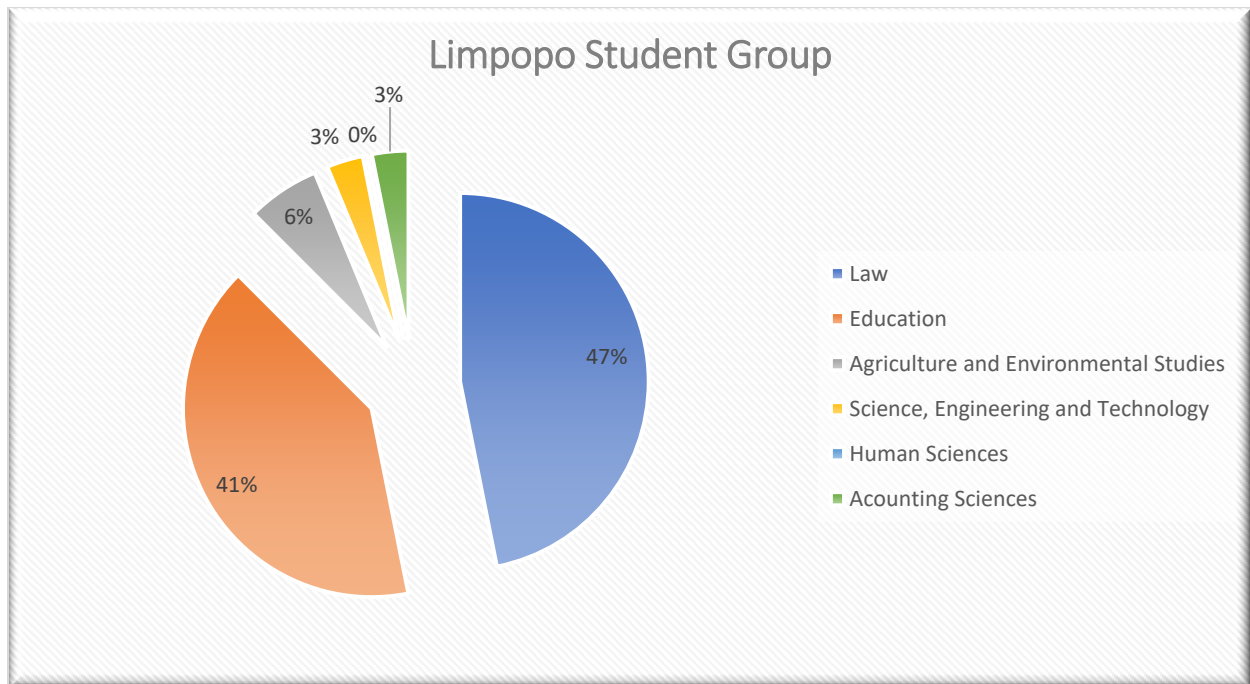
Figure 5.20: Limpopo student profile

A note needs to be made that there was zero representation from students in the Commerce and Human Sciences. The selection processes used in the quantitative phase involved the selection of final year student participants which were identified in preference over students at other stages of the study journey in acknowledgment of the fact that they were more likely to have a whole-continuum appreciation of the study journey and therefore, were more likely to have the informational insights related to the concepts and phenomena of interest.

For Phase two, open-ended questions were used in the interview schedules. The questions required respondents to elaborate without limitation on certain about openness in higher education, factions and dimensions of openness and learner support systems. In open-ended questions, the respondents could give any response they wished to give to the questions asked. These questions were streamlined in accordance with the objectives of the study and openness dimensions, but the quality of the content depended on the respondent's articulation response to the questions. The responses provided a rich pool of statements in both the individual and focus group interviews. These narrative statements and participant feedback in response to the questions posed, were used to identify emerging themes, trends and patterns relevant to the study.

With each of the data collection processes in Phase two, interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed for subsequent coding, categorization and

theme generation. Thematic and content analysis were applied as the bases for analysing the data collected from the study participants in both the individual and group interviews. Combining both thematic and content analysis approaches was informed by methodological guidance from some, including Creswell (2014) and Bradbury (2019) who concur that, the use of multiple data analysis approaches enhances the scope of interpretation for the researcher. Critically, they identify that the most important, is for the researcher to have key foundational competencies that include:

- Pattern Recognition
- Openness and flexibility to be able to recognise "codable moments".

Phase two thematic analysis was applied for the individual participants' feedback. Thematic analysis was best suited to phase two to come up with themes that best answer the research questions, given the data reported by participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This encompassed the following steps:

a. Familiarisation with data – This step involved reading and re-reading of the data to become immersed and familiar with the content. Thus, the researcher read the notes, transcribed interviews and field notes at least three times as well as listened to the meeting recordings several times just to get a general impression, familiarity and basic understanding of the information provided by the participants.

b. Coding of data – This involved highlighting emergent themes and generating codes that identify important features of the data relevant to the research objectives. As data was being read and re-read, the researcher focused on key questions and how participants responded to these questions. Subsequently, data was organised and categorised according to each question, and this was done simultaneously with theme identification.

c. Review of themes – This phase entailed refining themes against the data set in order to determine if they answer the research questions. Themes were finally re-assessed to ensure that they responded to the research topic and objectives of the overall study. The researcher revisited literature and the conceptual framework dimension identified in Chapter 3 to establish the refinement of the themes that would satisfy the research objectives set out at the beginning of the study.

d. Producing key themes and findings - A determination was made on themes that made meaningful contributions to answer the research question. The researcher presented the dialogue connected with each theme through a thick description of the results.

267

The researcher used extracts that capture the full meaning of the point of analysis to ensure that there is enough evidence to support the themes (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

The identified themes were organized coherently to draw meaningful statements that were then used to develop the quantitative aspects of the final phase of data collection.

The study respondents were asked to respond according to their own personal experiences using a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The demographic distribution of the study participants is demonstrated in the following section.

5.3.2 Qualitative results from the individual interviews and student focus groups.

5.3.2.1 Staff individual interviews

This section discusses key thematic areas that emerged during the interviews with the respondents and the subsequent analyses of the transcripts. The section is organized in two subsections for greater clarity. The themes that emerged from the data are identified and interpreted to draw the findings and the conclusion of Phase Two. This phase aligns mainly to two critical objectives of the research study in order to:

a. Identify and describe the range of institutional, learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to openness during the study pathway of university learners.
b. Analyse the role each of the identified contributory factors have on student access, teaching and learning and student-success.

The themes that emerged during the interviews demonstrate learner support and the relational nexus with access is crucial in ensuring learner success. The emergent themes were coded to comprehensively analyse the data. Several codes were then converged and clustered into code families. Each of the themes and related openness factors have been analysed to demonstrate their relevance to the research questions.

The situational analysis provided rich data that were analysed to give a better understanding of the institutional landscape and the conditions that could be assumed and gave rise to the emergent openness factors which were categorized into three main themes:

a.   Institutional factors

b.   Teacher and learner contributory factors

c.   Environmental and geographical factors

The factors were then grouped to align to the openness dimensions which was discussed at the end of the next chapter.

5.3.2.2   *Institutional factors*

The data collected from the interviews provided a rich comprehension from the respondents on the institutional factors that contribute to the openness discourse of UNISA. All respondents seemed familiar with the social justice imperatives in terms of equitable access, redress of past exclusionary practices that denied entry to education for the majority of black South Africans and the diversity aspirations of the institution in its student body.

a.   Understanding of openness as a concept and drivers of open education

The University of South Africa (Unisa) is a mega ODeL institution that offers academic provision across all nine provinces of South Africa. The current Unisa policies encourage educational expansion and widening of participation to all corners of the country even beyond its borders and remote geographical areas. Thus, the institution caters for a diverse student population located in both urban, semi-urban and rural areas.

The understanding of openness by most respondents found expression in the access and provision of learning opportunities to the most marginalised sectors of society. The respondents gave different views to the understanding of openness and several definitions were presented:

> *"My understanding of openness is where systems should allow anybody, without judging their past experiences, to come in and learn. That is openness in its purest. You are not excluding anybody, but you are saying that if you are willing to learn, grasp and understand the concepts in the way that is required, we are willing to open for you" (*Participant 6, individual interviews). *"Openness deals with pedagogy, social issues, cultural issues, political and technological issues, which cut across governance and our operations and systems and practices. We need to see the big picture to first to operationalize it."* (Respondent 8, individual interviews).

> *"The first time I got exposed to this openness, it was when people were talking about OERs. I wish people started with grounding the issue of openness, instead of looking at OERs."* (Respondent 3, individual interviews).

Additional access definitions by some of the respondents expanded to issues of technology access, internet, data and learning materials. In summation, the overall understanding openness found its expression by most respondents in the removal of entry barriers to learning.

> *"The concept of openness in my view has to do with the accessibility of the institution by students who should be serviced. This of course from the point of view of being able receive a service for example access to lecturers, staff, and resources."* (Respondent 4, individual interviews).

The respondents gave different views on the concept of openness. The varied responses overall demonstrated a coherent view on the understanding of open education and its associated systems for provision. Most participants though limited the concept of openness to access and entry to learning opportunities.

The question was posed to respondents on what they consider as the drivers of openness in their localities within the institution and a multiplicity of views was also received. One respondent elucidated several considerations:

> *"When you see a concept, you think of how it applies to you and your working environment. It is about looking at the mantras of Open-distance learning and their meaning. These include openness, flexibility, and affordability and student centeredness. Openness is about opening all systems."* (Respondent 17, individual interviews).

> *"In our environment, how much access is available? How open is our open education? In terms of access, spaces in education and content, how open and, free and available is our content to students? It is equitable to all students? There is also the technology gap that says not all students are getting the same access to content that is necessary."* (Respondent 17, individual interviews).

The concept of time was identified as a driver for openness, the driver in its application within the institution was found to be inconsistent to the principles of open education. The respondents acknowledged the factor of time to be a positive contributory factor and that it

should be considered a central factor in the purest form of openness, but the institution seems to limit this driver in how it is operationalized within the university systems.

The comments shared by respondents are:

> *"Openness has a dimension of time. If we are running an open system, we should not be limiting students by time. We should allow students to self-pace and they should be able to complete in whatever timeframe they so wish."* (Respondent 8, individual interviews).

> *"We work in a kind of a Contact University, where students apply at a certain time, are responded to at a certain time and register at a certain time. This defeats the purpose of being an open distance institution."* (Respondent 17, individual interviews).

> *"It should be openness in terms of them student being able to signal whenever they're ready for an assessment."* (Respondent 5, individual interviews).

The question asked in terms of understanding of the concept of openness and the responses received provided a meaningful grasp that some of the respondents did not have a comprehensive understanding of describing what openness is but rather articulated openness from the concept of access and the provision of opportunities to learning. One respondent advocated for induction and training for the institution to achieve a common and cohesive understanding of openness.

> *"For each of the staff members, let us have induction sessions, where we unpack openness, so that they understand. Even top management should be included, because if top management does not understand what openness means, then they will become a barrier to what needs to be achieved. Therefore, there is supposed to be ongoing workshopping and conversations on openness. We are bringing all other things, but not the main mantra, which is openness."* (Respondent 16, individual interviews).

One participant expanded on the implication of this lack of common understanding of openness particularly on the part of the decision makers and management of the university and he said:

> *"That is why we support decisions that do not speak to our mandate, because sometimes people in higher spaces fail to understand the same principles, and that is why they sometimes support very weak arguments on moving from a semester system to a year system."* (Respondent 6, individual interviews).

Another respondent contended that UNISA needed to take the principles of open education seriously.

He said:

> *"We attract very good scholars, but we sometimes do not initiate them on the principles of openness and any other principles that speak to us as an institution."* (Participant 7, individual interviews).

The identification of drivers demonstrated a fair understanding amongst the respondents on what factors contribute to the implementation of openness within the institution. The institutional approaches to openness seem to be driven from the factors of access (admissions, technology and content), affordability and open systems.

b.   Policy awareness

All nineteen (N=19) respondents were asked a question on their awareness of policies and legislative instruments internal to the institution and in the South African higher education that drive the openness discourse. Only five (N=5) identified being aware of some policies and expressed a need for a policy shift in formulation and implementation.
One responded asserted,

> *"We really need to engage on the Policy Framework, to which studies like these would assist in reconsidering policy formulation to cater for everyone. Policy change needs to influence, by saying that we cannot continue to deny the situation we are in and things have changed."* (Respondent 4, individual interviews).

Two respondents singled out the importance of the Language Policy in facilitating access to learning.

> *"The Language Policy, the policy talks about access in the perspective of language."* (Respondent 2, individual interviews).

Two other respondents stressed a need for a shift in policy to better serve the institution and the students.

> *"The government policy must shift. A good example is students who have enrolled at Unisa and are funded by NSFAS, the allowance they receive its annual calculated at a standard rate without considering inflation and other related factors. The buying power of their annual*

allowance is not aligned with the realities. The funding policy for students must be flexible enough to protect their needs." (Respondent 9, individual interviews).

"We have drivers in policy, especially in all our teaching and learning policies, where they advocate for openness through admission, assessment practices which are open. The Curriculum policy speaks to openness and our learning character when it comes to ODel and OERS but are not visible in practice. We espouse the openness issues at policy level, it is often difficult to give them full expression at operational level, how do we close that gap?" (Respondent 5, individual interviews).

"Enforcement of policies that guide the academics. For example, the policies on expected pass rate or student performance at the first level, such is hardly being complied with. Academics need to be reorientated or educated on the reasons for their existence within the higher learning." (Respondent 17, individual interviews).

The respondents provided a fair view on the awareness and policy provisions available to drive openness both locally within the institution and externally, but the lack of adequate implementation was singled out as impeding the operationalization of the principles in open education. There was an agreement from the participants that policy provisions required a shift to reflect the institutional realities that would confront themselves and students. An alignment and full expression of policy principles was identified as a gap, in that openness is not operationalized in practice.

c.   Student readiness for ODeL

Nine respondents (N=9) identified the readiness to study in open distance and e-learning systems as a driver for success in openness. These participants articulated this driver from a collaborative learning system in that students should be co-creators of knowledge and that learning systems should promote flexible, open, collaborative learning beyond time, personality, and place constraints as asserted by Lytras et al. (2015). One respondents expanded the concept of collaboration beyond the classroom and asserts that:

"Collaboration and relationship with the Department of Basic Education is important as part of grooming a cohort of students preparing them for higher learning." (Respondent 3, Individual student interviews).

Another Respondent noted the importance of collaboration and that it should be internally located and pursued as a driver to promote openness and support institutional programmes.

He said:

> "At Institutional level, internal Departments should work in cooperation and not in silos. In collaboration, we can create something that is useful not something that is fragmented, like currently. The reason why the current situation is noted is because our products are not developed holistically, due to me only understanding my area of knowledge and expertise." (Respondent 4, Individual student interviews).

Student readiness as driver for success in open education was also premised on the challenges of under preparedness of learners from foundational learning in primary and secondary schooling. Learner under-preparedness was highlighted as a contributory factor to high attrition rates in ODeL. Two respondents asserted that the learners must understand their roles and responsibility in an open learning system.

They shared these views:

> "What is the responsibility of the learner? and this should be seen as a retention factor If the openness means one is ready anytime to undertake exam or assessment, then they need to be responsible and accountable." (Respondent 1, Individual student interviews).

> "Student preparedness should be central as an institutional based discourse in the sense that we are aware of the type of students that come to us. We should also be open and upfront in terms of the requirements to enroll in the programmes within the university." (Respondent 2, Individual student interviews).

This discourse of learner preparedness for ODeL was further expressed through the profile of the student body at UNISA. One participant expressed a view that ODeL was for matured learners and asserted:

> "Distance learning is for students who are matured and understand what they are studying and why they are studying." (Respondent 4, Individual student interviews).

The respondents lodged mostly on the issue of maturity in ODeL and one Respondent expanded the need for self-directed learners, she said:

"The challenges experienced having younger students who have come from classroom background are immense and adapting to self-directedness. Not all students have self-directedness and there is no bridging mechanism which is available to manage that transition." (Respondent 4, Individual student interviews).

Another respondet recognized the diverse and dynamism of the current profile of students and that the institution needed to recognize this and move to address the diverse needs of its student cohort:

"UNISA used to cater vastly for the working-class cohort of people. But what UNISA did not consider was that the world is dynamic. We have been defeated on the purpose of concentrating on this cohort of the working class, but we include now a new cohort consisting of students coming from matric, something we never thought of or considered. That needs us to bring in a new way of doing things and it must be a catalyst in helping the University to plan on how they are about to do their core business." (Respondent 7, Individual student interviews).

The convergence on the issues associated with learner preparedness as driver for openness and student success resonated widely with the participants. Most Respondent expressed concerns on assumptions that the institution made, in that first entering students were already equipped with the skills they needed to adjust comfortably to the university environment. Qakisa-Makoe (2005) reveals that most of Unisa's African students come from homes where they are first-generation learners in higher education. Furthermore, they come from schools that are poorly resourced and are not adequately prepared for higher education. Yet when these students enter higher education, they are expected to learn complex new material independently and to adjust to new ways of learning in a distance learning environment (Baloyi, 2012).

Students can only be supported if the institution and academics understand where these students are located in terms of the social constructs, backgrounds and learning needs. This view is supported by Van Heerden (1997) and he shares that the social, cultural, economic and political environment in which learners grow up contributes considerably to their approach and performance in their academic arena. Two responded summed it up, and said:

"Our students are entering the space already defeated, by the notion that they have entered an institution that never catered for them. They enter this space from a poverty driven background, and this is affecting them negatively. That is why we need a high levels of student support, especially moral support, as this affects other students. This because   students   start   off with this low self-esteem, where they have to know the system and how it works, which takes time that is about a year or so. Just for students to start settling, they first have to start knowing how UNISA works, and this affects how they succeed in their student career." (Respondent 6, Individual student interviews).

"Having the students at heart (student centric) will better the institution and it's also important to tailor make the approach to learning for the marginalised students." (Respondent 1, Individual student interviews).

The institution needs to invest on understanding the needs of the learners and provide an environment where learners can easily adapt to ODeL.

d.   Technological support

From the situational analysis and documentary evidence, Unisa seems not to provide adequate investments to technology and support infrastructure. The strategies and investments to technology infrastructure seems to have not made much progress since 2013 and not much success had not been achieved. All nineteen respondents (N=19) interviewed identified and agreed on the centrality of optimal technology platforms to drive open and e-learning. All participants agreed that Unisa was challenged with technology provision. The challenges with technology expanded to the provision of devices, data and support.
The responded shared and said:

"Technology, internet and connectivity are considered to be the most prevalent challenges." (Respondent 3, Individual student interviews).

"Access to Technology can be a challenge if students are said to being provided gadgets, some students do not have computers and gadgets to do their work, students are not trained to navigate it." (Respondent 2, Individual student interviews).

"ICT challenges should be looked into, as ICT platforms should be seamless in terms of operations." (Respondent 8, Individual student interviews)

Another responded provided a nexus between this lack of technology provision and the impact of COVID-19 in terms of the inadequateness of the technology platforms and how the institution had to be advanced in order to provision e-learning and student drop-out within a short period of time.

"Technology support and Covid-19 brought about technological changes and open distance e-learning but then with no resources. This led to a high level of student drop-out, more especially for the marginalised. Simple things such as submitting assignments on time became a hard reality for those with no resources or support." (Respondent 1, Individual student interviews).

Technology provision and support was highlighted as being disproportional in that students in the urban centres benefited more as the institution provides more investments to urban areas as opposed to its rural regional centres. A respondent raised this observation:

"Technological advancements seem to be concentrated in the urban centers to the detriment of the marginalised students. The fact that rural students may not have access to internet, it means when we are teaching online, they become the worst impacted. It also cost them more to travel to centers (which are in urban areas) because they come from remote areas." (Respondent 7, Individual student interviews).

Optimal student support in ODeL is dependent on ICTs and an equitable reach to students. There was agreement among all respondents on the critical drivers associated with technology provision. The technology provision reduces the distance between the students and the institution. There is a strong awareness about this central mediation to learning but the respondents stressed that the institution must narrow the gap and the inequitable distribution of technology support particularly the lack of support on students who are located in the most rural outskirts of the country.

e.   Flexibility in learning

Flexibility in the context of learning and delivery of programmes was raised as a matter that require institutional exploration. Butcher and Marr (2020) identify flexible pedagogies to widen participation and deliver on social justice an attribute if developed in learners through democratic and emancipatory approaches to technology-enhanced environments remains fundamental. However, they suggest relating flexibility and pedagogy to modes of delivery,

learner engagement the application of pedagogic ideas around learners' empowerment with the needs of students who had begun their learning opportunities. Further, they offer some insights that to widen participation and flexibility in learning by providing a bridge to aid progression, and to inform every pedagogic decision made, especially around assessment.

The participants in this study raised the issue of flexibility in curriculum praxis, programme delivery models and administrative systems and identified this driver as key in achieving openness. One respondent identified that the definition of being open means flexibility across both the academic and administrative processes and said:

> *"Students must be allowed to start the course anytime they wish. So, summarily, openness means issues of access and flexibility to learning."* (Respondent 2, Individual student interviews).

Another respondent attributed flexibility to issues of programme design and delivery.

> *"The way our qualifications are designed, and their intended period of completions is problematic. The period being problematic, that is designed for an institution of which is of the type of UNISA. For example, a qualification of three years in a close contact university would take a region of seven years to complete in UNISA. Most students would work towards the seven years, especially with the issues they are face with, such as admission, registration, obtaining funding, internal support, and ICT issues."* (Respondent 6, Individual student interviews).

The issues of flexibility are expressed in the lack thereof and that the rigidity of institutional approaches to learning confines students. A participant highlighted flexibility as a barrier to student progression.

> *"The regulations of perquisite and core requisite should not exist in openness in its purest form. An example is that it would be assumed that if I do not pass Maths two, then I would not pass Maths three. Whilst there are those people who pass Maths three but did not have Maths two. The assumption that knowledge is gained from one source is not true, especially now in the 21st Century. There are certain things that we have to redefine and certain things that we have to rethink, if we were really going to apply the principle of open education."* (Respondent 6, Individual student interviews).

The university systems were also perceived to be rigid by the participants and one respondent said:

"University's systems, they are opposite to what open education is about. There is no flexibility from the process of admissions, registrations to the classroom. We seem to be stuck on the previous life of time, such as ''submit by today, or otherwise I am not marking.'' (Respondent 6, Individual student interviews).

The respondents overwhelmingly agreed on the rigidness of the current systems of provision and learning and that flexibility should be advanced if the institution would achieve optimal standards of openness. Further, one respondent noted a confusion within the institution on issues of flexibility on pedagogy and systems of delivery. He said:

"We were arguing about the semester vs year study periods. Here, we are attempting to solve a system problem by trying to fix things that have to do with pedagogy, which is wrong. Let us rather fix the system if the problem is system related. If we move from the semester to year system, we would be literally taking away a number opportunities these students should have, which goes against the principle of openness." (Respondent 11, Individual student interviews).

Another participant supported the challenges associated with the semester system and its rigidness.

She said:
"Programme delivery models, the semester system often does not give a 1st year long distance students time to familiarise themselves with the content of the module. The semester challenge is often observed amongst 1st year students, it has been noted that 2nd and 3rd year students have adapted to the system. It should be explored if 1st year students conduct year long modules, whilst 2nd and 3rd year students continue to study their modules on a semester timeframe." (Respondent 2, Individual student interviews).

All respondents agreed that institutionally, there must be an understanding of openness and institutional processes must take time to factor in the principles of openness. Flexibility as a contributory factor to openness found resonance mostly in the dimensions of assessments, pedagogy and university admissions.

f.   Affordability

As a contributory factor affordability was identified by ten respondents (53%) from a student funding and access to education perspectives. One respondent identified and said:

"Financial support to students as one of the key challenges to openness, financial access, will be able to enroll. Ideally, the provision of financial support should start from basic degree however limited government support." NSFAS being a national government's responsibility and we need a system where we encourage and support students to grow from a basic level, but maybe due to economic status of the country we are unable to provide this support." (Respondent 8, Individual student interviews).

The respondents agreed that they worked in environments with limited financial resources and that meaning full participation in ODeL was driven by affordability to access learning. They concurred that more needed to be done to facilitate access to learning and that financial affordability should be a crucial driver in open education not only from a government funding perspective but also institutionally.

g.   Open systems

A total of eight respondents (42%) raised the contributory factor of open systems in ODeL and opportunities it presents in widening access and increased participation. Two participants identified and defined open systems as:

"In an open system, you would want students to have as many opportunities." (Respondent 1, Individual student interviews).

"Openness is about opening all systems." (Participant 6, Individual student interviews).

The respondents contend that current approaches to openness were limited by the rigidity of systems, inflexibility and this negatively impacted learning and the promotion of positive student experiences. One respondent raised a number of questions to highlight such challenges:

"In our environment, how much access is available? How open is our open education? In terms of access, spaces in education and content, how open and, free and available is our content to students? It is equitable to all students?" (Respondent 7, Individual student interviews).

Another asserted that the institutional delivery design mirrored that of a contact institution and he said:

"Where students apply at a certain time, are responded to at a certain time and register at a certain time. This defeats the purpose of being an open distance institution. I constantly have to deal with systems being so closed, especially when it comes to assessment methods for students living with disabilities." (Respondent 17, Individual student interviews)

Another responded said:

"When we are not informed by the mantra of being open as a university. It even goes further to the way we admit and conduct ourselves with Masters' and Doctoral students, where it seems like they are undergrads with the deadlines imposed, to which I ask myself the question, when do we become open?" (Respondent 12, Individual student interviews).

As a driver, open systems must permeate and advance student support to promote positive student experience but the rigidity of the systems in delivery are experienced and operationalized in a restrictive manner and one participant noted and indicated that:

"Access, open systems are some of the drivers. Even our policies can be drivers as well. When you question or challenge something, you are often referred back to a certain policy. When will we have open and flexible policies that allow student centeredness?" (Respondent 9, Individual student interviews)

Respondents voiced several inefficient practices and the limitations they presented in the day-to-day experiences of students; these challenges were mainly directed to administrative inefficiencies and the need to orientate open principles in the institutional support environments. They further noted a culture of compliance and that this had resulted to the institution being a tick-box environment with not meaning reflection and engagement in these statutory requirements to improving institutional efficiencies. A respondent noted this culture and she said:

"Monitoring and evaluation in the institution is crucial, we need to ensure that strategic frameworks are always attended to and not only for compliance purposes but for meaningful implementation." (Respondent 18, Individual student interviews).

Another participant summed up this view and asserted:

"*We need to change the culture of the institution, as it is so relaxed, that everyone is their own boss and authority is not respected. This is noted when we work with our interdependencies,*

to which there is no efficiency, with some coming on board and others not." (Respondent 5, Individual student interviews).

5.3.2.1.1 *Teacher and learner contributory factors*

The situational analysis provided meaning engagement with the institutional student data for the period 2012 – 2019 where the emergent patterns of access and success observed from a number of data variables. Centrally located to the analysis was the attainment of learning outcomes measured against the access, retention, throughput and graduation variables obtained from the student data tables. The observations are critical as a quantitative measure but what is key to this understanding is the role of teacher and learner related factors that contribute to the discourse of openness at UNISA.

The teacher and learner contributory factors were the second category of contributory factors flowing from the institutional factors that informed the conditions observed by the participants in their lived experiences as they interacted with lecturers and students in their learning journey. Of course, some of the participants interviewed were teachers themselves with more than 5 years' minimum experience in teaching. A question was posed to all respondents to identify the range and nature of learner and teacher-related factors that contributed to the discourse of openness and if whether these factors espoused the principles of openness and are adequately supported in terms of these relational interactions and delivery of the learning. These two questions were deemed pivotal in the learning experiences of students as supported by Sundani & Mamokhere, (2021) who argue that the student-lecturer relationship has a significant impact on student academic performance and student-lecturer relationship is key to students' academic, social and emotional development.

The research respondents provided several factors they perceived to be critical in the openness discourse at UNISA and these factors are discussed below:

a. **Lecturer availability**

The availability of lecturers as module teachers was viewed as inadequate and overwhelmingly the respondents highlighted that availability of lecturers should be at the onset with orientation sessions for modules they taught. Coupled to this lack of availability was lack of online presence to teach and monitor student progress with their learning. One respondent

stressed that this is where the challenge of relations with student and low success outcomes is suggested to commence and he said:

> *"Success is low because students are put on autopilot by academics. In looking at the Learner Management System, lecturers have never taught a single class. Being a comprehensive e-learning distance education institution, it does not mean that we must not teach. But lecturers do not teach and students are there on their own. If a lecturer can prepare lessons, they can even post them on OERs for students to access materials."* (Respondent 3, Individual student interviews)

Another respondent located the challenge to the lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the learner and the teacher in their interactions.

She highlighted:

> *"The responsibility of both the learner and the teacher within the higher education space falls within both parties. What is the responsibility of the learner, and this should be seen as a retention factor? Students were not happy with the noted unavailability of the lecturer. This was often due to students not learning to making appointments with their lecturers."* (Respondent 3, Individual student interviews).

A third respondent observed that:

> *"Students start off with this low self-esteem, where they have to know the system and how it works, which takes time. Academics must be in the forefront. Academics should start engaging students, making sure that they are well received, and are involved in the system. This should be the duty of the academic."* (Respondent 8, Individual student interviews).

A fourth participants highlighted:

> *"We then have lecturers, who do not respond to student queries, in which there is a lack of consequence management. As much as you have systems that aim towards openness and accessibility, the foot soldiers being the staff are not carrying that principle and it clouds all the success we have achieved."* (Respondent 14, Individual student interviews)

The respondents agreed that the availability of the academics from the onset was a critical component of engagement that anchors student support and that this should be an apex requirement for teaching and planning of teaching lessons.

Some respondents highlighted that:

"Before teaching and learning takes place, there must be interactions with students, and this does not happen quite often. Students even find themselves having to submit assignments and that has never happened. Introduction orientations of some sort have never happened   but is what is needed. What is also needed is the increasing of the lecturer's responsibilities." (Respondent 8, Individual student interviews).

Another respondent highlighted that from the onset, the boundaries and protocols of communication must be set because a failure to do so strains the relation and result in protocols of communication being circumvented by students.

She said:

"The relations can be improved, especially with students in each qualification, from module level. It often seems to be the new pattern that the student seems to bypass the lecturer and go straight to the top. That is where I think the gap, where our lecturer student relationship needs to be more visible and more accessible." (Respondent 7, Individual student interviews)

Sundani & Mamokhere, (2021) define the relationship between a lecturer and a student as a formalised interpersonal association between an authority figure and a subordinate who interact continuously on a day-to-day day basis. Varga (2017) and Camp (2011) explains that positive student-lecturer relationships are characterised by mutual acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation and that these characteristics must be recognized right from the onset as the first step to helping settle in their learning spaces to become more motivated and engaged, and thus academically successful. Learning as a process involves cognitive and social psychological dimensions, these are pre-requisites highlights Hallinan (2008) if academic achievement is to be maximized. A summation was provided by one responded and he said:

"If we understand the same principles, it would better relations between the lecturer and the student, as will result in enough time given for module work and will influence the type of teaching and assessments initiated." (Respondent 1, Individual student interviews).

b.   Lecturer workload

The contributory factor of lecturer workload reverberated with most of the respondents. The workload factor was compounded with issues associated with teaching skills and competencies required in ODeL. The linkage of lecturer teaching ability, competencies and workload demonstrate a considerable demand that impacts directly on the students. The respondents articulated these factors as the contributors that impede optimal student learning support and that the challenge has been long observed within the institution. One respondent asserted:

> *"It must be understood that the workload of lecturers often contributes to their unavailability, especially in the context of UNISA."* (Respondent 9, Individual student interviews).

Another respondent observed a direct nexus to the social mandate mission of the university, and she said:

> *"Competency of the academics, the readiness, and the passion to support the students should be given a priority, more needs to be done in strengthening our social justice mandate."* (Respondent 2, Individual student interviews).

Of the nineteen respondents interviewed, all felt that an urgent need exists in addressing the academic workloads and the institutional workload and resource allocation models were desperately needed to manage the work demands confronting academics. This inadequacy on the part of the institution to address the matter was reported that even students had observed it as well. A responded identified that:

> *"It has been observed that some students view that lecturers are overwhelmed by the workload and the number of students they have to teach, thus affecting their learner experience."* (Respondent 16, Individual student interviews).

Another respondent highlighted:

> *"The workload allocation framework of lecturers or academics because, its results in our academics complaining a lot about the workload. The academics often find themselves in situations where they have to balance between teaching and conducting research."* (Respondent 9, Individual student interviews).

The issue of skills was expressed by some respondents in the context of transitioning the institution fully to e-learning and the mediation of technology in closing the distance gap between the lecturer and the student.

A respondent noted:

> *"There is a need for a skills audit to understand, if the institution has the necessary skills to implement the openness mandate in the University. This would be through assessing if we need to reskill our staff, as the morale of some staff is low due to their functions becoming redundant after 2019."* (Participant 17, Individual student interviews).

Optimal resourcing of the academy was highlighted as central by all respondents and that this was a critical contributory factor and lecturers were overwhelmed by large student numbers in their modules, thus, impacting the quality of the teaching. The issue of student to lecturer ratios were deemed not to be prioritized by the management of the institution and that this must be addressed. As a contributory factor of openness resourcing, competencies further required a conducive working environment to optimally support students and one respondent indicated:

> *"A critical driver is Human Resources - the resources in the form of staff competency and conducive environment of those expected to deliver the content to students."* (Respondent 2, Individual student interviews).

Another respondent raised the challenge of management not hearing the voices of both the lecturers and students:

> *"We need to listen to our students and academics. We do not listen to our students and make decisions on their behalf. We also do not listen to our academics and make decisions on their behalf. We need to make decision in line with what people are saying and identify what is suitable for supporting the academic programme."* (Respondent 5, Individual student interviews)

Lecturer workloads need to be managed and in the context of the unmanaged academic workloads as highlighted by the respondents, results in undesirable consequences both for the lecturer and the student. Bezuidenhout (2015) and Shaw & Ward (2014) identify that the increased workloads and uncaring academic environment play a significant role in the difficulties academics experience to distance themselves from their work and the feelings of

guilt they experience, resulting in further isolation and loss of work-life balance. The lack of clarity in academic workloads in particular the lecturer to student ratios results in unclear job expectations as highlighted by Mashile (2014) and he further identifies the workload of academic staff as a key prerequisite for improving quality assurance and student support. He contends that the workload of academics needs to be reduced to allow time to reflect and pay attention to students and support them academically (Mashile, 2014). Bezuidenthout (2015) further contends that an understanding of the workload of distance educators could inform policy on workload allocation and facilitate a fair and equitable work allocation that would improve acceptance of these models by distance educators.

c.   Lecturer support and engagement

UNISA in its student communication packages and Tutorial letters to students does provide meaning communication on the role that students have and the requirements in being self-directed to their learning journey. The communication offers advice on ways to cope with open distance e-learning and that the student ought to take full responsibility for their own learning experience and environments. Students are advised that they would learn from a distance and connect to the university mostly via the internet or online. Support is highlighted as being provided though in several ways from tutorial support and counselling services to online tools.

The respondents highlighted a significant challenge in the engagement and support to students, both online and in physical interactions. The respondents noted that physical interaction was in fact no longer an option as lecturers did not avail themselves even if students would request their support.

A respondent stressed:

> *"More needs to be done in the institution to ensure that more support is provided. Currently, there is a fraction of academics dedicated to the support of the students. There are very few academics who are committed in supporting the students. As an institution, we need to ask as to how we instill the culture of student support."* (Respondent 8, Individual student interviews).

Issues of student support permeated beyond the classroom but were institutionally located to include support and administrative departments.

The same respondent further identified that:

"Having the students at heart (student centric) will better the institution and it's also important to tailor make the approach for the marginalised students. It is important to provide extra support, even to the highflyers. We need to connect and network students even with the regions." (Respondent 4, Individual student interviews).

The UNISA Tutor support system was highlighted as effective in some disciplines but in others, it was deemed challenging due to student volumes in online sessions. One respondent noted:

"UNISA tutoring system. It was also noted that the tutoring system had built confidence amongst students (CHS). Whilst it is yet to be seen on the throughput success rate." (Respondent 1, Individual student interviews).

"The availability of TEAMS has made it easy for students to access these sessions from anywhere. Whilst there might be noted challenges of sessions have limited participation sizes, several sessions can be organised, in which they can accommodate 250 participants per session." (Respondent 1, Individual student interviews).

Two other respondents supported that the most affected students who did not receive adequate support were those located in the rural areas and regional centres. They identified that their observations had noted that marginalised students in the regions were further left in the margins due to their locations and asserted that:

"Students articulate that ''I know I come from a poverty-stricken background from the onset, and secondly, I am going to an institution that never aimed or intended to fulfil my needs''. With those two notions, the student enters the Institution as a defeated student. This is due to how the Institution renders it education." (Respondent 5, Individual student interviews).

The other respondent noted:

"Ideally, we should be servicing and supporting students in the far flung of the continent or country without expecting them to sweat for education, but then apparently, we are investing so heavily at the urban centers at the neglect of the very people who are marginalised economically, politically and socially." (Respondent 8, Individual student interviews).

Physical engagements with students were deemed seriously inadequate by one responded and he raised an observation by students:

"It was even noted while engagements were physical, students saw the value of attending these group discussions." (Respondent 1, Individual student interviews).

Another respondent raised the issue of partnerships with communities:

"On the side of support, we should be partnering with rural chiefs and headsmen so that they become our points of access. They have the welfare of their communities at heart." (Respondent 8, Individual student interviews).

The view that academics do not know nor understand the socio-economic hardships of marginalised student was overwhelmingly shared and that lecturers needed to engage with students to improve their learning and retention. One respondent concluded:

"We are not doing enough as our strategies are western focused. Some of the academics have grown up in the rural areas and the system must open for engagements to solicit their experiences. Even in terms of the content, there is a lot that can also be learnt from the village students themselves in terms of teaching strategies and packaging of content." (Respondent 8, Individual student interviews).

"The students either swim or drown at Unisa. Even if they relay their hardships and challenges to the lecturers, it's up to the academics to believe them. Our system was designed in the manner that an academic does not see behind the tree. There is nowhere for academic staff at Unisa to know that half of the cohort in the module are marginalised or NSFAS funded. In other words, these students are thrown in the same basket and treated just like any other students." (Respondent 5, Individual student interviews).

The respondents agreed that support to students was a one size fits all and some respondents recommended tutorials and support of e-Tutors as an excellent medium for learner support. Some disciplines even provided minimum standards for teaching and tutorial support and incorporated these as part of the quality management framework.

There was however a noted concern by some participants that there were grave challenges of learner support in tutorial classes and that some lecturers in other disciplines were not even sure whether their modules were tutor-linked modules indicating an absence in relationship between the Tutor and the Lecturer, signaling lack of knowledge of what the tutors were helping their students with tutorial classes.

d.   Content delivery

A view was expressed by the researcher as informed the documentary evidence analysed above, UNISA had not adequately expressed a clear and unambiguous distinction between, on the one hand, blended learning being provision of education from a distance and minimal online provision and on the other hand, 'e-learning' and it is necessary given that the two are not the same thing argues Ngubane-Mokiwa and Letseka (2015). Such a distinction is necessary to inform the appropriation of content delivery for learning and setting of standards to better deliver pedagogy and understanding of the views on teaching and learning. Openness requires this requisite understanding to ensure the appropriate adoption of strategies for design and delivery of content as this sets how lecturers can operationalize those principles in practice.

A respondent highlighted:

> *"Quality of academics and content delivery are a challenge lecturers are sometimes employed with no education teaching background. They will teach the way they have been taught. This can be solved through the induction of lecturers, where they are taken through on what they have to do. They also need to attend assessor courses. Open access should not be limited to the marginalised, but also be accessible to everyone, including lecturers."* (Respondent 3, Individual student interviews).

Another respondent noted the issues of curriculum praxis as a driver for openness.

She said:

> *"The aspect of curriculum, designing qualifications and curricula, I also think about students' choices in learning, in terms of their co-construction of knowledge. I'm not sure that we achieve that openness in that. So, openness is not the one element but many elements   throughout that needs to be considered."* (Respondent 7, Individual student interviews).

Another respondent noted the challenges associated with such an understanding:

> *"We are battling due to several reasons. Sometimes we as academics do not understand what we do in our space, and what we get as a raw material, which in this case is our experience. There is no strategy that speaks to openness especially on how these students can be*

assessed and taught, there is still a long way to go.” (Respondent 5, Individual student interviews).

A further view was expressed that there were fears observed in exploring alternatives and new approaches to teaching, assessing and learning.

She highlighted:

“There is a fear of doing things differently, fearing that the new approach would affect quality, which is not true. Using alternative assessment methods does not reduce quality, unless you do not know how to do it. Therefore, constant research on how the University actually responds to the aspirations of an Open University, need to be conducted.” (Respondent 17, Individual student interviews).

Coupled with content delivery was the design and quality of the learning materials. A 2020 study conducted by Farrel and Bunton indicate that successful online student engagement was influenced by a number of psychosocial factors such as peer community, an engaging online teacher, and confidence and by structural factors such as course design and student course loads. One respondent stressed and asserted instructional design is critical.

She said:

“Instructional design - the quality of material is paramount in distance learning, because the material is the primary engagement source for the student on the module.” (Respondent 1, Individual student interviews).

Other respondents agreed that learning materials needed to improve and aid better content delivery and highlighted that in their respective environments, this was receiving attention. One respondent highlighted that some complaints had been received from students and said:

“Students were complaining about the quality of study materials, in terms of content not being challenging in terms of its compilation.” (Respondent 2, Individual student interviews).

Unisa needs to locate an understanding in ODeL as pronounced in its ODeL Policy (2018) and ensure that the principles in such a policy find expression in practice to minimise the ambiguities that persists amongst teaching and approaches to how content is delivered. Benson and Samarawickrema (2009) contend that learning designers in ODeL should consider the impact of context on the student's learning journey, Laurillard (2002) further

posits that technology-based learning would be more effective if its design is based on the conversational framework. Therefore, Ngubane-Mokiwa and Letseka (2015) contend that the bridge and spatial distance that existed between the lecturers and the students; the students and the learning content, and amongst the students themselves had been minimised by the use of technology which impact directly on how learning content is delivered in ODeL, therefore online presence, engagement and meaning content delivery become central factors for student retention.

e.   Communication and Feedback

Pityana (2009) contends that though ODeL was a cost-effective learning model that endeavours to bridge the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication distance between the institutions and the students, the academics and the students, the learning materials and the students and amongst the students themselves, he asserts the imperative should be to guarantee quality of delivery of teaching and learning. Ngubane-Mokiwa and Letseka (2015) locates the centrality of functional and optimal student support systems, particularly communication systems. Good and strong relationships are foregrounded by good communication between lecturers-students. Student disengagement, disorganised lecturers and lack of communication were identified as areas needing attention by respondents.

> *"Feedback is important, we as human being appreciate feedback. It is important for lecturers, support staff, even everyone in the University, to be open and accessible to everyone."* (*Respondent 1, Individual student interviews).*

Another respondent located the communication challenges with academics:

> *"The other challenge relates to the academic's responses to the queries of students. I have noted that we are still failing to address the same queries received. Whilst there are some challenges in this aspect, we are not going to overcome them overnight."* (Respondent 11, Individual student interviews).

The issues associated with communication and feedback were identified as cutting across all spheres of the institution. A respondent asserted:

> *"The most of queries that come to us often relate our interdependencies, to which uses of advanced technology such as self-help robots will assist in the addressing student queries. The use of technology would relieve the huge challenges we face. We have got the benchmarks,*

but we don't use them, because we are comfortable with in our space and we deny reality. I should be getting assistance in which the robotics could help, but we do have that. How could we be equal to the demands of the 4IR, if we fail with the basics." (Respondent 5, Individual student interviews).

Communication was agreed by all respondents that it was a contributory factor of openness that required urgent attention in the university.

One respondent summed up the challenges and said:

"We are a University that does not have contact with students, the only time the students feel they are from UNISA is when they graduate, now that is taken away from them since 2020, It needs to be emphasised to staff, the importance of the academic project. If they understood communication, there would have not interfered with such process, because it is not about Management, it is about the Student." (Respondent 18, Individual student interviews).

5.3.2.1.2   Environmental and geographical factors

South Africa is a country with a composition of urban cosmopolitan districts, major cities in urban areas are cities such as Johannesburg, and Cape Town. The country includes larger spatial spread semi-urban and rural, communal poor regional villages with limited benefits of modern technologies. The semi-urban areas that fall in this category are Durban in the KwaZulu-Natal province, Rustenburg and Polokwane which are cities with substantial rural villages surrounding the province. This spatial separation results in what is known as the "digital divide", resulting in inequitable access and opportunities to learning. The majority of these regional villages locates poor and previously marginalised African students some even do not have this marginal access and remain in these margins due to their geographical location.

Unisa provides learning opportunities to both urban and rural communities of South Africa and by enlarge all the respondents in the study agreed that the institutional landscape had opened-up and the national policy provisions of the country provided a coherent system that created a fertile environment for flexibility, articulation and student mobility but the system still required some calibration for meaningful access and success outcomes. The institution needed a heightened level of awareness in terms of systemic structural configurations and impact of environmental factors both internally and externally and how these factors impact the student learning experiences. A respondent highlighted:

> *"The typical challenges or liabilities are the environmental factors. Universities need take the responsibility to shield students from environmental impacts. This could include student funding, poverty, and desired support by the students."* (Respondent 8, Individual student interviews).

Another respondent directly located an environmental factor to government funding challenges and the lack of synergies operationally:

He said:

> *"The external stakeholders such as Funders (Government mainly) also contribute and present a challenge to the openness agenda. Funders often pay late in the semester or the academic period. For instance, the month of March is when students get their funding, due to the Government financial period running for March to March. We don't synergise on this area, because our academic year starts from January to June and from June to the end of the year. So, there is a lack of synergy between the Funders and as an institution and we rely on the Funder."* (Respondent 5, Individual student interviews).

Arbona and Nora (2007) highlight the challenges with disparity of initial enrollments and subsequent graduation rates suggests that the gap in educational attainment by students in marginalised groupings is largely attributed to environmental factors related to these students' socio-economic experiences. Environmental factors and how students are socialized together with other considerations in their socio-economic factors are largely ignored in open education institutions due to the perception that students' study remotely with minimal interactions to the institution.

One responded identified that:

> *"There are students who come into the system but struggle with financial support, they cannot buy books, they cannot make photocopies, they cannot even secure nutritional needs. You then cannot be able to retain those because psychologically they're juggling multiple activities. And then they consequently drop out of the system. While other factors play a role in access, success and retention, finance becomes a big driver. These factors are also interlinked, for example you cannot separate poverty from finance."* (Respondent 14, Individual student interviews).

What institutions need to understand is that these contributing factors exert an influence in learning experiences of students. Kotze and Du Plessis (2003) assert that students "co-

produce" their education and at the same time, they also contribute directly to their own levels of satisfaction, quality and value perceptions. Institutions need a better understanding of such environmental contributory factors such as funding, geographical locations, socio-economic status and be pro-active in insulating the extent of impact as these factors have a direct implication in their learning journeys.

a. Regional Model

Unisa is divided into six regional centres across South Africa, its main support and administrative functions are based in the province of Gauteng, at the main Campus in Pretoria.
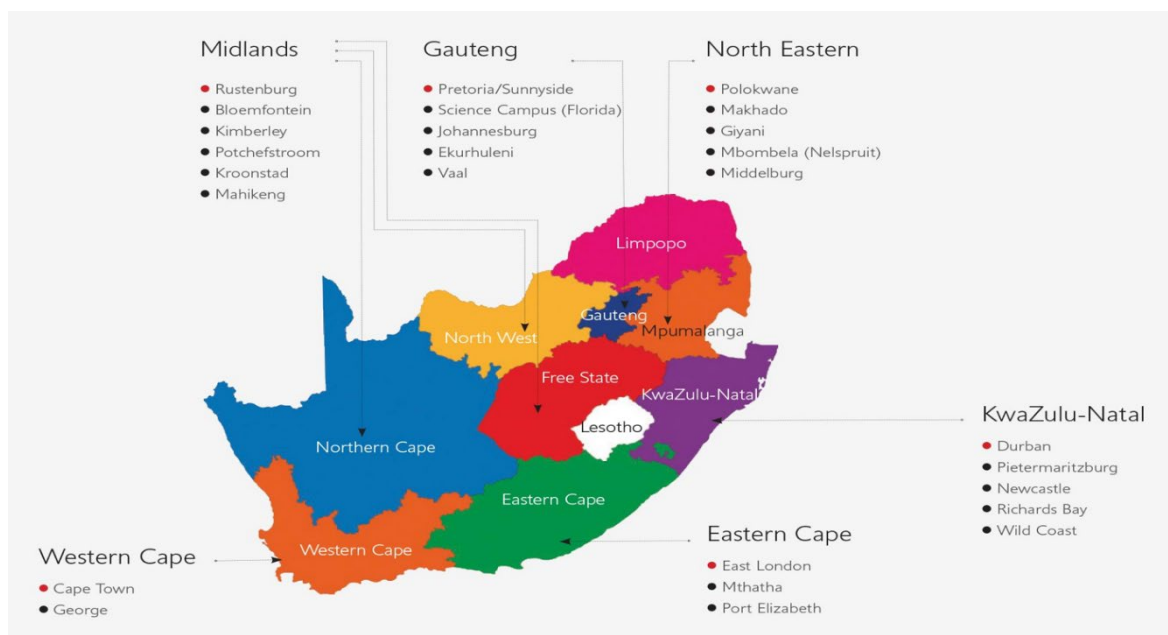
Figure 5.21: Unisa Regional Centres (Source: UNISA 2019)

Ndlovu (2008) identifies a need for institutions to focus on appropriate regional models to serve societies in SADC regions and asserts that these models require an understanding and management of three factors, which are environmental factors, capacity factors, and regional organisational factors. He further identifies that these three classes of factors together affect the participation rate of societies in economic, education and other contributions for optimal development and the lack of appropriate regional models results in the existence of fundamental incongruencies between the assumptions and requirements resulting in disproportionalities of services for these communities.

There was a convergence in agreement among the research participants that the institution had a critical social justice responsibility and all respondents appreciated and understood this responsibility. One respondent asserted:

> *"Our admission systems, our support systems, our engagements with students are supposed to mirror the social justice component."* (Respondent 15, Individual student interviews).

The respondents highlighted that the institution needed to reimagine its role for regional education provision in support and student learning needs. All participants agreed that the current regional model was incoherent working to the disadvantage of Unisa students, and these were the very marginalised students the institution should prioritise in its strategies.

One responded said:

> *"Ideally; we should be servicing students in the far flung of the continent or country without expecting them to sweat for education, but then apparently we are investing so heavily in the urban centres."* (Respondent 8, Individual student interviews).

Another participant said:

> *"There should be more done at regional level points, where we should tell potential students what UNISA is about, and what it means to study through distance."* (Respondent 5, Individual student interviews).

The regional localities were identified as ineffective due to the institutional approaches of centralizing services and support. The respondents' view was that students were better serviced and supported if they went to the main campus in Pretoria and rural students in the regions were left further marginalised by an ineffective regional framework.

A respondent asserted:

> *"The cost of education for these people in the rural spaces becomes so expensive and unaffordable. Even if they receive material, they will not have devices, where there is a device, there is no network connectivity. They do not have access to internet, it means when we are teaching online, they become the worst impacted. It also cost them more to travel to centers (which are in urban areas) because they come from remote areas."* (Respondent 10, Individual student interviews).

One participant further identified:

"If we have mobile clinics, and libraries, why lecturers can't have mobile projectors and move to rural villages to teach. The current model unfortunately is too focused on urban areas." (Respondent 8, Individual student interviews).

The respondents agreed that the university needed to improve its support and services provided to students at regional centres and shared some views on what could be considered by the university to improve the current model.

One respondent said:

"One of the strategies I would canvass for is to visit areas where our students are concentrated. The academics need to visit villages and offer services in a church or under the tree so that those in the villages (marginalised) have the benefits of this education. It's about mobilising all corners of the Universities." (Respondent 9, Individual student interviews).

He further asserted:

"On the side of support, we should be partnering with rural chiefs and headsmen so that they become our points of access. They have the welfare of their communities at heart." (Respondent 10, Individual student interviews)

"There is a lot of loss by the state due to high drop out. Dreams are being differed and others are never realized. If we go to rural areas and be able to reach the students where they are, we will also become the institution of choice. If we manage to get at least ten PhDs completed, several benefits will be realized. This includes bringing back the students into the sector and achieve the national development goals in terms of PhD production." (Respondent 12, Individual student interviews).

All participants concluded that the regional model of the institution required urgent improvements. Coupled to the ineffective regional services and support, the research participants identified the issue of the institutional approach in centralising support services. A participant expressed this view and said:

"We also need to decentralise services, so that academic colleges own the project. It has been observed, that certain processes are delayed when housed at head office, often delaying events such as the issuing of certificates to graduate students. When a student   enters   the

institution, they must not be delayed by us, but by themselves." (Respondent 17 Individual student interviews).

The respondents advanced views of decentralization of services and support where in particular, Colleges could self-determine their own approaches to better support in the delivery of programmes and mitigate against the inequitable distributions of academic provision.

Another participant said:

"It is not equitable if you have somebody who sits in an urban area, with connectivity, where they can go through the qualification, but if you go to the deep dark rural areas, life is just much more challenging. Are our system serving them well?" (Respondent 9, Individual student interviews).

"We also work with the SRCs in the regions on qualification related matters. If anything is changing, happening or new somewhere, we always alert them first, so that we can have a shared understanding to which they support us." (Respondent 7, Individual student interviews).

Student localisations should not impede their opportunities to learning particularly in ODeL. Institutions need to understand the diverse student body and the needs of these cohorts of students to appropriate support in accordance with the needs of these students. A fit for purpose regional model is desirable, Trahar et al. (2020) assert that elements on inequitable distributions in the South Africa remain and the feelings of marginalisation, the lack of recognition of the importance of the knowledge and skills developed in rural communities are glaring in these communities. These rural communities question their relevance to higher education due to limited resources, including access to technology and the challenges faced by rural students in engaging with the curriculum (Trahar et al., 2020).

5.3.2.3   *Summation of the individual interviews*

The findings from the interviews offered an extensive orientation of the openness principles and the varied approaches the respondents deemed to influence the various institutional orientations and adaptions in their experiences. Key themes from the three categorised levels of openness factors are presented below as key take ways from the interviews. From the identified themes on the institutional factors of openness, the respondents agreed on the values of social justice and the recognition of its principles across the institution. A shared understanding of openness however was identified as an impediment to the operationalization

of openness. The participants recognized the principles of openness were adequately expressed at policy level and that policy provisions required to provide meaningful understanding of openness in accordance with the mission of the institution. A shift to reflect the institutional realities is advanced by the respondents in the implementation of openness factors and an alignment of policy principles the operationalized in practice was identified as needing attention. Student readiness was identified by the respondents as barrier to success as students entered the university with poor learning backgrounds. Learner under-preparedness was highlighted as a contributory factor to high attrition rates in ODeL.

Staff workloads emerged as topical and a factor that required urgent attention. As a learner-teacher relational factor, the respondents centrally located this factor impacting the academy by all respondents and that this was a critical contributory factor in that lecturers were overwhelmed by the large student numbers in their modules, thus, impacting the quality of the teaching. The staff workload factor was deepened with issues associated with teaching skills and competencies required in ODeL.

The regional model as an environmental and geographical factor was identified as a barrier of access to learning and an impediment to optimal student learning conditions. The regional localities were identified as very ineffective, and the institutional approaches of centralizing services and support further inhibited the relations between the lecturers and students. Inequitable distribution of services further located the localization divide of students, those in urban centre seemed to benefit from the institutional resources and support comparative to those located in the rural centres. Therefore, confirmation of lack of equality between rural and urban students

5.3.2.4　Focus groups

Two student focus groups sessions were held in two provinces, Limpopo and Gauteng with two group per province. The first focus group sessions in Limpopo were held in the capital city of the province in Polokwane, the venue was deemed appropriate due to its centrality in the province and as regional centre of the institution. The Gauteng groups were hosted in Pretoria as the main campus of the institution.

The themes that emerged during the group discussions converged with the outcomes and views expressed by respondents during the individual interviews but there were a few divergent themes that student raised. This demonstrates correlation in understanding of the

contributory factors that impacted on student and staff experiences. The same Interlinking themes in terms of the contributory factors were identified and discussed in the focus groups.

5.3.2.4.1 Institutional factors

a.   Understanding of Open Education

Students were asked questions on their understanding of open education and the factors they deemed challenging in their learning experiences. The understanding of open education was limited to most students and was mainly located in context of distance education and studying remotely with minimal interactions with lecturers. Some of the responses on the understanding of open education were:

> *"Distance learning is flexible, for example it allows one to work and provide/cater for our families while studying. But this is both benefit and disadvantage at the sometime in the sense that you think it would be easy to work while studying only to be frustrated by balancing the two. You get tired and miss your academic deadlines."*

> *"I think the open distance learning works better for those working and pursuing postgraduate qualification as part of self-development. I don't think open distance works better for undergraduate students. Essentially, undergraduate studies are difficult at the open distance institution. Discipline is crucial but then again, the strain is a challenge."*

Students identified some contradictory benefits of studying in such a system and highlighted:

> *"One studies conveniently from home, it's also a challenge that we study from home as our parents have the expectation that we still need to perform house chores. The idea that one is home is problematic."*

Overall, students were appreciative of the opportunity afforded to learning in such a system and one student raised an appreciation to UNISA.

She said:

> *"On the positive side, I would like to thank Unisa for the educational opportunity through its sound content material."*

The students identified challenges that impeded their learning that the institution should focus on and identified the following factors as presented below:

b.   Information security

Information security was deemed critical by students and an area that required an urgent institutional attention. The views expressed by the students was that their private information was made available to private providers immediately after they had registered and these providers solicited institutional information and sold support services such as tutorials, assignments, and exam information/packs. They also sold study guides and books.
One student said:

> *"When assignments are closer to due dates, they actually communicate all sorts of assistance, including writing for you. They also do this during the exam period. Their information and offerings are also available on the on the internet, you search, and you find question papers."*

Another student highlighted:

> *"They also appear to entice most of us the with relevant exam information. Students are paying for such things and these private providers have established a market. Unfortunately, most first year students who are not familiar with the Unisa system fall victims of this as they get attempted."*

The overall view from students was that their information was mishandled by the institution and being used without their consent. Further, that such acts compromised the quality of their qualification because the examination process was then questioned on its credibility and integrity.

c.   Communication

The students viewed communication between themselves and the institution had substantially broken down and that communication was such a critical instrument for them to be kept informed about a number of activities in their modules.

One student said:

"Few weeks ago, we were told we will be writing on Friday and on Thursday we were then informed that we are no longer writing and then again, we were informed that we will be writing. All this happens within a short space of time and some students did not receive the latest and late communication because of access issues."

Another student highlighted:

"I think Unisa has a general communication problem. There is communication breakdown- at all levels, be it Colleges and Module level. When Unisa removed the SMS system, things became problematic because now we have to rely on emails and there is a challenge when students do not have data to access emails."

Another view expressed was that:

"The new Moodle system requires that you access a whole lot of module content, so the students without data find it difficult to access the material and announcements. So, the SMS systems was pivotal in bridging the communication gap between students who had challenges with connectivity and those who able to receive SMSs."

There was agreement that the institution's discontinuation of the SMS service system had put them at a disadvantage and that the reliance by the institution in communicating via emails has impacted negatively in their learning and progress. Timeous communication was also a challenge, if the communication was received, it was received late.

A student articulated an example and said:

"When lecturers are rendering training on Moodle, they notify us late and then say tomorrow we are doing a training, they need to inform us upfront/timeously."

Another student further highlighted that some of their peers who were in the student representative councils were actually the ones who compromised them by leaking information and communicating outside the allowable protocols of the institution.

He said:

"Social media groups are at the center of information leak to private groups. These social media groups such as WhatsApp are mainly linked with student movements."

The overall agreement was that communication was not optimal at all levels, being with academics, or support departments and that as students they remained compromised in their studies.

d.   Technology and support systems

Technology access and data was raised as a grave concern by the students. Students identified that data provided by the institution was only received during the examination periods and during the tuition periods they were not provided any access to broadband and relied on learning centres to access WiFi on campuses.

Students further agreed that the university technology systems were not operating optimally.

One student said:

"The system is so frustrating that they sometimes seek psychological counseling freely offered by the University. Support service on campus is frustrating that we have to seek medical help."

Another student shared that:

"This issue of online platform boils down to the issue of data. Online classes are a good initiative, but it all depends on data accessibility. The students in the rural areas don't have access to data. Back in the days we used to have lecturer coming and that made a huge different."

Another student highlighted that:

"Devices given to us don't have cameras and that made it difficult to interact or interface and we require devices with cameras in order to write our exams."

Another view shared was that new technology platforms introduced in the institution were good, but the implementation and induction of students was a challenge.

One student said:

"The Moodle system is a good system but the fact that it is being done online to students who don't have data access or connectivity, that renders it less useful. The introduction of technology to deliver online learning is actually not a problem, the issue is implementation and how it is being introduced to students. The quality, reliability and accessibility of the Moodle platform is a challenge. Capacity is also an issue as the system can't handle traffic."

The views on the contributory factor of technology found reverberation with views expressed by the individual respondents during the interview phase. Students felt further marginalised by the inadequate and standard of technology platforms employed in their learning by the institution.

5.3.2.4.2   Teacher and learner contributory factors

The student focus groups highlighted that the profile of a typical Unisa student has changed, and the academics needed to understand the emerging profiles of new students being admitted by the institution. They further identified a lack of understanding by academics on the challenges impacting on students and the minimal time afforded to learning and support during the semester periods.

Students also noted the issue of constrained semester periods and limited opportunities to learn before tackling module assignments. Students shared the following views that impacted on their learning:

"We understand the shared responsibility between the University and students in moving the University forward, this is crucial. The university must assist as well."

"We constantly have to play catch up with our learning, the time we access the system, the assignments are already due. The need to submit assignments urgently doesn't give us an ample opportunity to learn."

One student further indicated that:

"Availability of support services is indeed critical. We actually wish if the staff did not rotate but rather return to the Campus on a fulltime basis because sometimes when we need to access support service, we are told they're not available due to rotation."

Issues in accessing online materials or classes were also raised as a contributory factor to the lack of support.

Another sad said:

> "The online classes are also so large that some students are unable to connect and access them due to online limitations. The lecturers would then resort to uploading videos on You Tube and this ultimately removes the element of interaction. Some uploaded videos are however not fully accessible."

One of the students raised the challenge of relations amongst the students and lecturers. He said:

> "The relationship between lecturers and students is poor because of arrogance of lecturers and their lack of appreciation of our hardships."

Another student raised issues of lecturers' workload and highlighted that:

> "The frustrations amongst the lecturers appear to arise from lecturers being overloaded or overworked. The lecturers also appear to be frustrated and struggling with the Moodle system."

Workload of lecturers was attributed as major contributory factor in the lack of availability and support during the tuition periods.

Students expressed these views:

> "The workload of lecturers also appears to be compromising the quality of work or output."

> "We have seen this in the comments as they provide to us. The comments are shallow and not enough to assist us improving. The workload for both students and the lecturers' results into student-lecturer relationship challenge".

The students agreed that harmonious and positive student-lecturer relationships were required to improve their learning and student experiences and that the institution needed urgent investments in increasing teaching capacities as lecturers seemed not to be coping.

5.3.2.4.3 Environmental and geographical factors

Students in Limpopo shared the similar views about the challenges at regional centres. They highlighted access to services was limited, one student shared an example and said:

> "At one point in Limpopo, I went to region to look for a service where I wanted my qualification to be closed on the system in order to enroll for the second qualification. The lady who was assisting me in Limpopo had to contact the head office in Pretoria for that to happen instead of her easily doing it in the region. Regional offices have been given limited functions or access to the system and that disadvantages students in the rural regions."

Another student shared the same sentiment and hindrances in accessing academics. Students further highlighted that some had to relocate for example, from the Eastern Cape province in order to get support in Pretoria as the regional office in Umthata was insufficiently resourced, and they had to pay additional money for rent. They agreed that they would rather pay this money than to struggle with the frustrations of ineffective regional centres.

One student said:

> "We need the full service in regional offices. Students must be able to access academics from the regions and not only at main campus in Pretoria."

Insufficient support materials were also raised particularly at regional library centres. One student noted this challenge and said:

> "The issue of access to Library and the University procuring more library books for easy accessibility to learning materials. There are limited books and other resources to share as some of the books are not available on the e-resources."

Decentralization of Unisa services was raised by the students as well.

> "Unisa needs to seriously consider decentralizing all its services, both academic and administrative. The regions need to be empowered and be given more responsibilities."

In addition, another student added the issue of staff not being adequately capacitated to service and support students.

> "Some staff members are simply not familiar with the systems. Some finance functions must also be decentralized."

The impact of COVID-19 has accelerated and has re-organised interactions between lecturers and students in them in teaching and learning interfaces and support. Student support is at the centre of teaching and learning, and a critical instrument of delivering learning in a diverse student body.

In an attempt to strengthen its student support mechanisms, Unisa introduced the online learning management system (LMS) to help academics, students and support staff to use the various platforms and to enhance student support practices online. The views expressed by students demonstrate a need for reflection by the institution and an intervention of optimal quality technology platforms that can cope with the volumes and learning demands. The appreciation of these platforms was highlighted and shared by the students but a need for improvement and enhance reverberated in both student focus groups. Decentralisation as a contributory factor in regional models found resonance with both individual interviews and student views, this is an area for immediate consideration in institutional prioritizations for openness strategies.

5.3.2.5   *Summation of the Student focus groups*

The key findings from the student focus groups offered an in-depth understanding, orientation of the distance education environment and the institution they are studying at. As with the summation of the staff interviews, the key findings are summarized into the three categories of institutional, learner-teacher relational, environmental, and geographical factors.

All the study groups reverberated a theme of Information security which was deemed critical and an area that required urgent institutional attention. The students voiced a need to strengthen security and that their information was being compromised by university staff and dated technology platforms that needed to be upgraded. Strong views were expressed on how the institution communicated with students, overall, the students expressed that communication systems with students had broken down and that communication is such a critical instrument for them. There was agreement that the institution's discontinuation of the SMS service system a disadvantaged them and that the reliance by the institution in communicating via emails had impacted negatively in their learning and progress.

Concurrence emerged on theme of staff and that the workload of lecturers was impacting their learning and module success outcomes. This was expressed by students as major contributory factor in that the lack of availability and support during the tuition periods impacted

them negatively. Findings from the focus groups further revealed that students had difficulty in accessing services in the regional centres and they attributed this lack of service to deficiency of skills in staff and the centralization of functions in the Pretoria campus, Gauteng. Students identified that access to services was limited and hindrances in accessing academics at the regions was at a minimal of nonexistent.

5.4 PHASE THREE – ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE QUANTITATIVE PHASE (STAFF AND STUDENT SURVEYS)

Phase three applied statistical data to reflect numerical comparisons to draw correlational inferences in an attempt to verify or refute the hypothesis of the study. The correlational design was used to reflect of the findings of phase two to give expressions of the research objectives. This design utilised a simple approach to identify patterns and correlations within the numbers from the survey instruments.

Phase three of the study involved data collection through the use of surveys for staff and students. The self-complete questionnaire of the survey drew from the themes analysed from qualitative phase. The self-complete questionnaires were emailed to randomly identified staff members and students, broken into two population samples, staff = 1981 and students had a sample size of 35 300 who met the eligibility criteria. The purpose of the quantitative phase was to survey the respondents to solicit views of the study participants with regards to the openness discourse at UNISA and the implementation of the principles of openness in their interactions with staff and students, their experiences regarding access and whether access has resulted in improved success rates. Phase three of the quantitative phase is divided into two sections, first the staff survey followed by the student survey outcomes. The following section (5.4.1) outlines the staff survey outcomes.

5.4.1 Analysis and discussion of the quantitative study results for staff

The demographic data for the staff survey was obtained by conducting a content analysis and indicated that 1981 of survey respondents' staff had been in the employment the university for more than 5 years. For the purposes of this study, the researcher was first interested in determining the demographic distribution and patterns of the staff study participants specifically, their level of education, level of occupation, post position grade, and the NQF level of the module being taught together with the specific college. The study recruited 174

study participants. The questionnaire was written in English and all the study participants consented on the use of English for the questionnaire.

5.4.1.1　　Staff Demographics of the sample

a.　　Highest Level of Education

Figure 5.22 below is a graphical illustration of the distribution of the sample with respect to their level of education.

● Bachelor's Degree	0	
● Bachelors' Honour Degree	2	
● Master's Degree	49	
● Doctorate Degree	123	
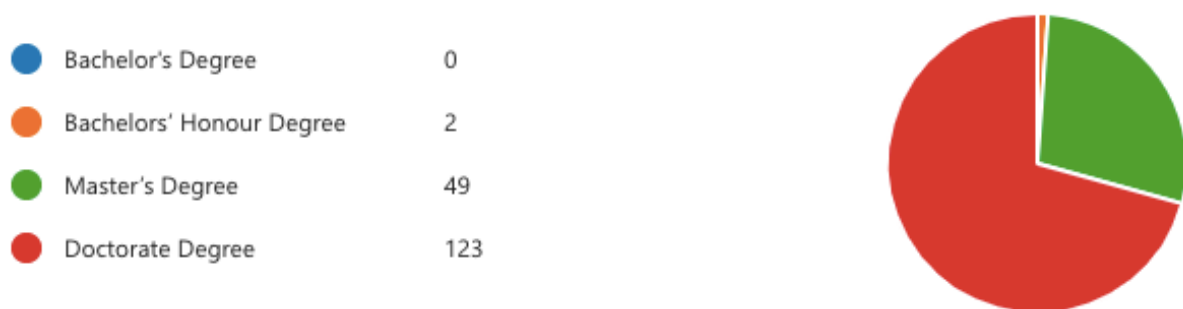
Figure 5.22: Staff Qualification distributions

71% (n=123) of the study Respondent held a doctorate degree at the time the survey was done. There were no respondents who had less than a Bachelors' Honour degree. The entire sample consisted of 174 respondents.

b.　　Level of Occupation

Figure 5.23 below is a graphical illustration of the study sample in relation to their level of occupation within the university.

Institutional Management	9
College Management	4
Professor	32
Associate Professor	12
Senior Lecturer	66
Junior lecturer	13
Professional	16
Academic support	22
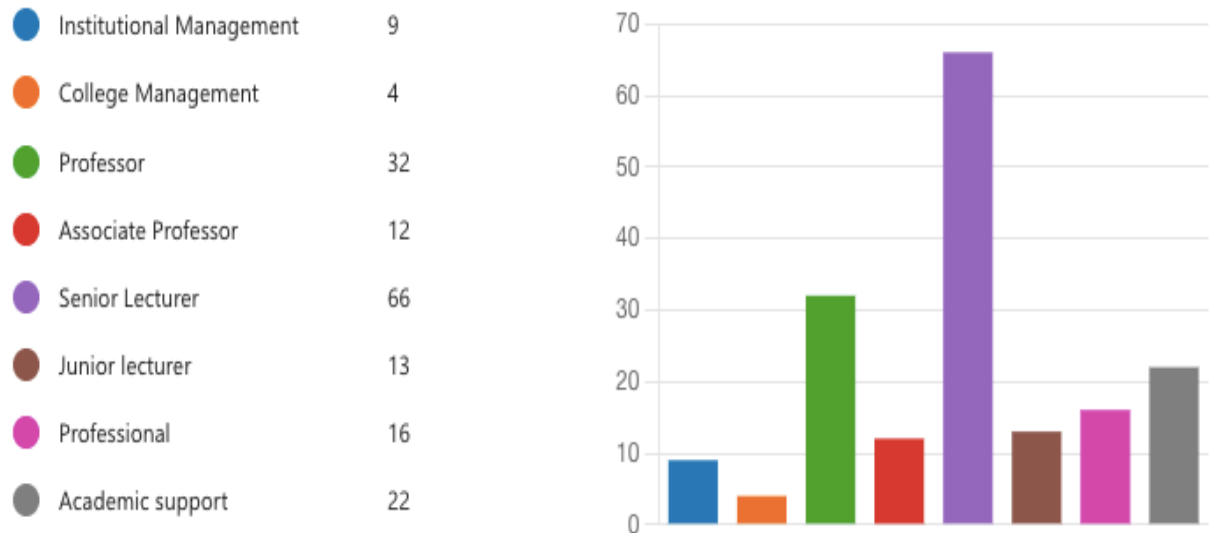
Figure 5.23: Staff occupation distribution

38% (n=66) of the study respondents were senior lecturers while 18% (n=32) were Professors. Only 2% (n=4) were involved in college management.

c. **Post Position Grade**

Figure 5.24 below graphically illustrates the position grade distribution of the sample. 29% (n=51) of the study respondents had a position of 7. 17% (n=29) were on grade 5. The highest grade was 9 while the lowest was grade 2.

Peromnes Grade 2 (P2)	11
Peromnes Grade 3 (P3)	4
Peromnes Grade 4 (P4)	7
Peromnes Grade 5 (P5)	29
Peromnes Grade 6 (P6)	25
Peromnes Grade 7 (P7)	51
Peromnes Grade 8 (P8)	27
Peromnes Grade 9 (P9)	15
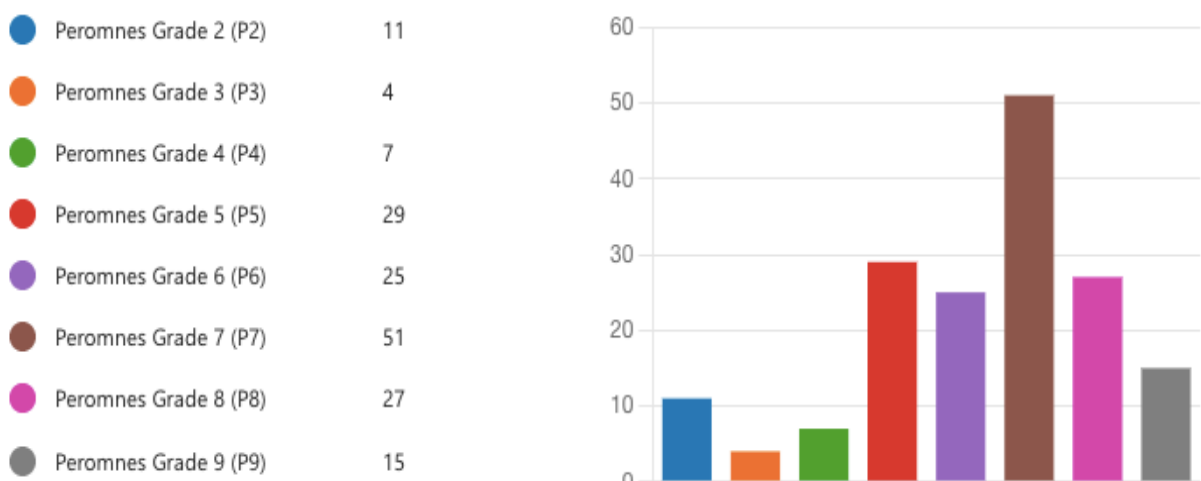
Figure 5.24: Staff post grade distribution

d. NQF level of module being taught

Figure 5.25 below illustrates the NQF levels of the modules being taught by the study participants within the sample.

● NQF level 8	84
● NQF level 7	50
● NQF level 6	40
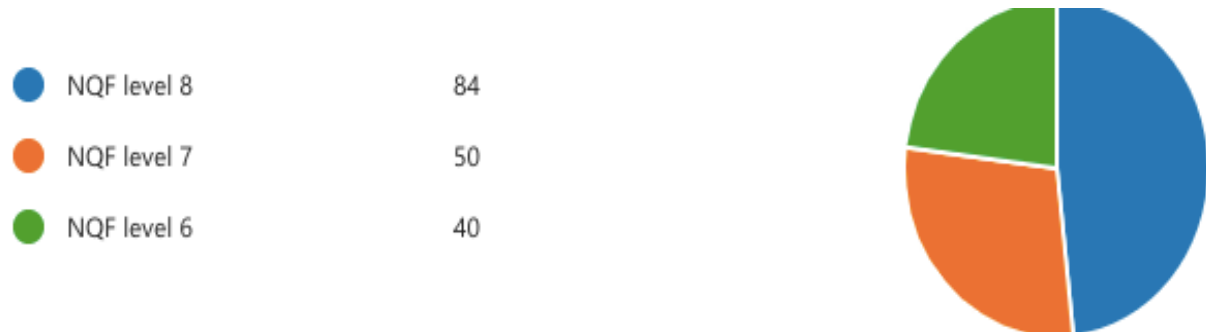
Figure 5.25: Module distribution

48% (n=84) of the study respondents were lecturing modules that were at NQF level 8. The other study participants were evenly distributed between lecturing NQF level 7 and level 6 with a slight variation between the 2 of 10 study participants.

e. College

Figure 5.26 below shows the distribution of the study respondent according to the college which they were employed.

● Law (CLAW)	17
● Education (CEDU)	34
● Accounting Sciences (CAS)	9
● Economic and Management Sci...	31
● Human Sciences (CHS)	50
● Agriculture and Environmental S...	17
● Science, Engineering and Techn...	7
● Other	9

Figure 5.26: College distribution

29% (n=50) of the study respondents were employed within the College of Human Sciences, while 20% were under the College of Education. 5% (n=9) of the study's participants were employed outside of the specified colleges and therefore depicted as other.

5.5   QUANTITATIVE STUDY RESULTS FOR STAFF

This section provides an overview of the views of the staff survey respondents with regards to the openness discourse at UNISA and the implementation of the principles of openness in their interactions with students and their experiences regarding access, and whether access had resulted in improved success rates.

The descriptive statistics on the responses to each question according to the five sections are reflected as presented in the sections below of the results. The results provide responses to each section that elicited the most agreement or disagreement. All the questions in the five sections were considered and formulated to align with the themes that emerged from the individual interview questions and responses in phase one of the qualitative section. These questions provided the opportunity for the respondent to express their views further and common themes readily emerged from those responses, thus providing meaningful data for content analysis.

Section A of the survey instrument dealt with respondents' profile where the study was interested in identifying their level of occupation, education, position grade and the level of modules they taught. Further in the section, the identification of the College was required to determine the fields of study or disciplines. Section 5.4.1.1 above provides the detail and Figure 5.26 outlines the college distribution. Most of the respondents were located in the College of Human Sciences with 29% (n=50) but an evenly spread distribution was observed with all colleges represented with the College of Accounting Sciences 5% (n=9) and Co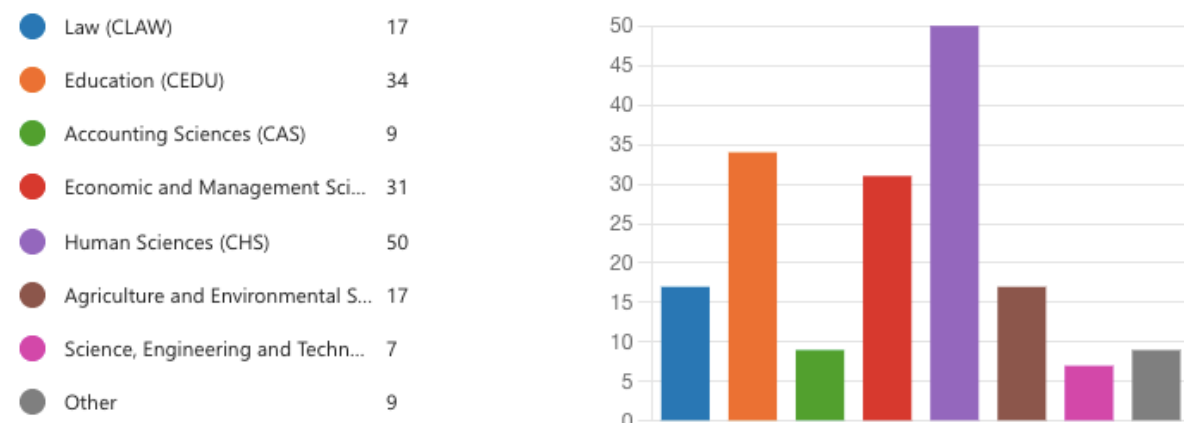llege of Science, Engineering and Technology 4% (n=7). Figure 5.6 presents the course/module distributions, 48% (n=84) of the study participants teaching modules at NQF level 8. The other study participants were evenly distributed between lecturing NQF level 7 with 29% (n=50) and level 6 with 23% (n=40). The module distribution was significant and affirms that most of the student population was located at undergraduate level undertaking Bachelors' and Diploma qualifications.

The questionnaire was purely a quantitative enquiry that was facilitated using a 5-point Likert-scale. Table 5.13 below shows what the 5 points on the scale represented. The interval limits as set forth in the table were used to interpret the level of agreement or disagreement for each aspect once an aggregated view was presented.

Table 5.13:   Likert-Scale Interval Limits

LEVEL	SCALE	INTERVAL LENGTH	LOWER LIMIT	UPPER LIMIT
Strongly Disagree	1	0,8	1	1,8
Somewhat Disagree	2	0,8	1,81	2,6
Neutral	3	0,8	2,61	3,4
Somewhat Agree	4	0,8	3,41	4,2
Strongly Agree	5	0,8	4,21	5

The themes that were considered in the study were Institutional culture, policy and governance, access and admissions, technology and support and lastly pedagogy, assessment, quality and student engagement. The results of the survey questionnaire are presented below.

a. Institutional culture, Policy and Governance

The researcher sought to assess if UNISA took cognizance of its social justice mandate and mission. The results of the responses are depicted below on Figure 5.27
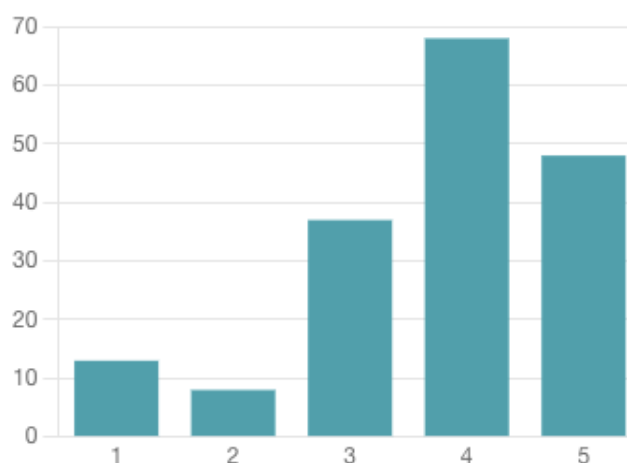
Figure 5.27: Social justice mandate and mission of the university

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.75 and 67% (N=116) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the study's participants Somewhat Agree that UNISA took cognizance of its social justice mandate and mission. Furthermore, the researcher assessed if the participant Staff at UNISA had adequate understanding of the open education (Openness) discourse. The results of this assessment were as shown on Figure 5.28 below.

3.68
Average Rating
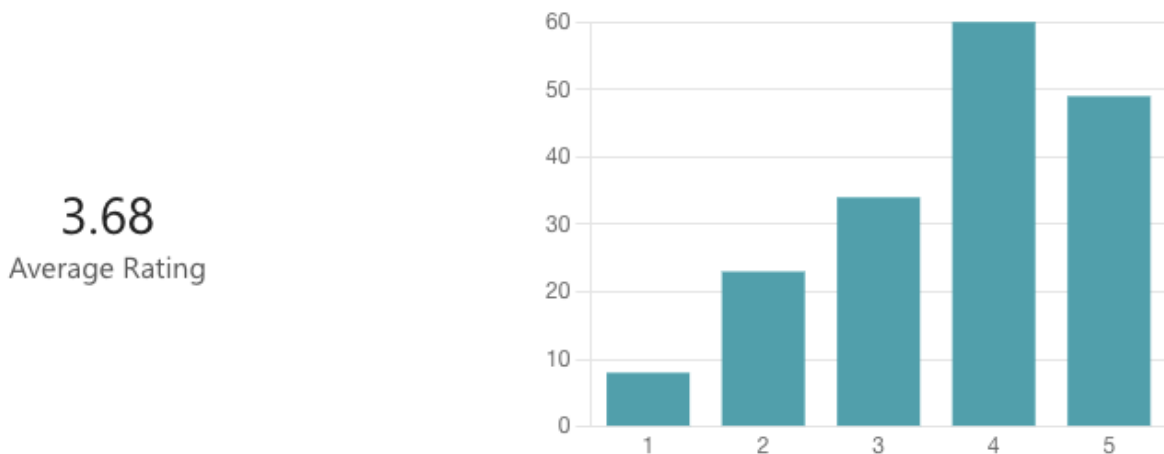
Figure 5.28: Understanding of the open education (Openness) discourse.

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.68 and 63% (N=109) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average the UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that they had an adequate understanding of the open education discourse.

Over and above understanding of its social justice mandate and the open education discourse, the researcher sort to establish if the study respondents understood that the principles of openness such as access, flexibility, and affordability and student centeredness. Openness is about opening all university systems to advance learning. The results are as shown below on Figure 5.29.

4.03
Average Rating
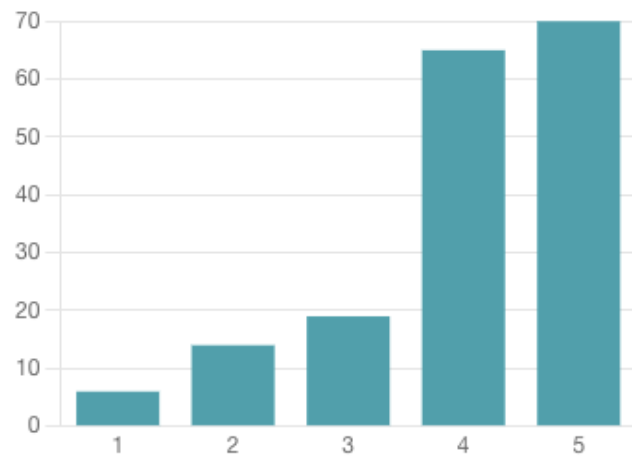
Figure 5.29: Principles of openness as access, flexibility, and affordability and student centeredness.

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.03 and 78% (N=135) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, this study's respondents Somewhat Agree that the principles of openness are access, flexibility, affordability and student centeredness; therefore, openness is about opening all university systems to advance learning.

To further understand the principles of openness and the universities current state, the researcher sort to establish if the principles of openness were adequately reflected in all operations and services of the university. Figure 5.30 below shows the responses that were elicited.

3.37
Average Rating
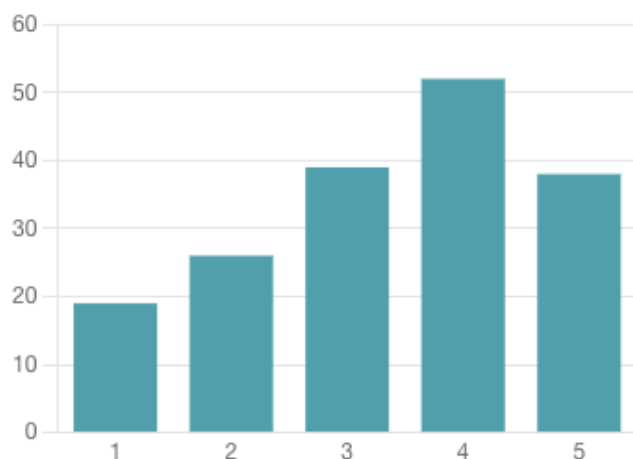
Figure 5.30: Principles of openness adequately reflected in all operations and services of the university.

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.37 and 52% (N=90) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the study respondents were undecisive as to whether the principles of openness were adequately reflected in all operations and services of the university or not.

On the subject of openness, it was important to determine if UNISA actively advanced the principles of open education and whether it provided the necessary capacity and support to staff to succeed in their roles and functions. The results are as shown in Figure 5.31 below.

3.41
Average Rating
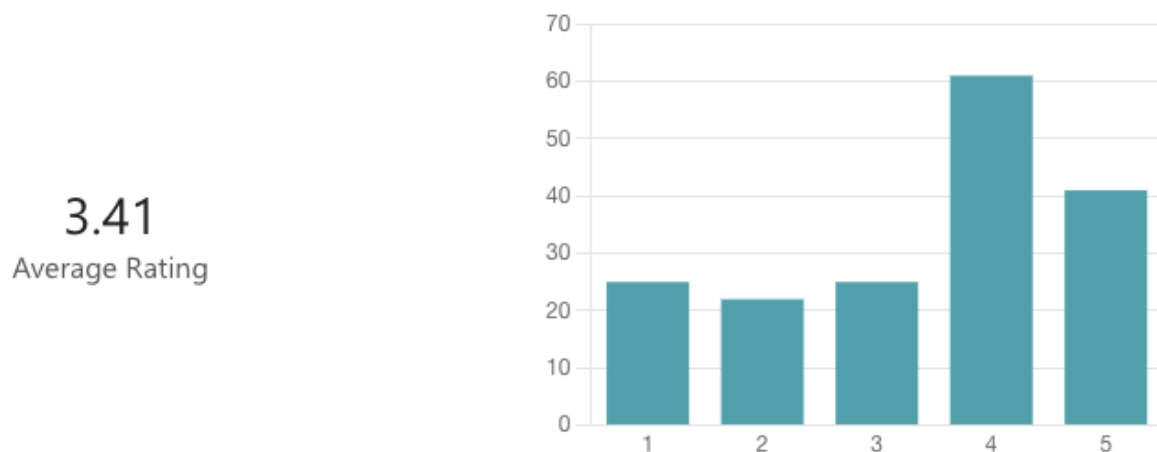
Figure 5.31: UNISA advances the principles of open education and provide the necessary capacity and support to staff

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.41 and 59% (N=102) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that UNISA actively advanced the principles of open education and provided the necessary capacity and support to staff to succeed in their roles and functions.

Furthermore, the researcher wanted to understand if Openness had a dimension of time. It was understood that running an open system, students should not be limited by the qualification completion periods enforced. The opinions expressed with regards to this are depicted below in Figure 5.32.

3.22
Average Rating
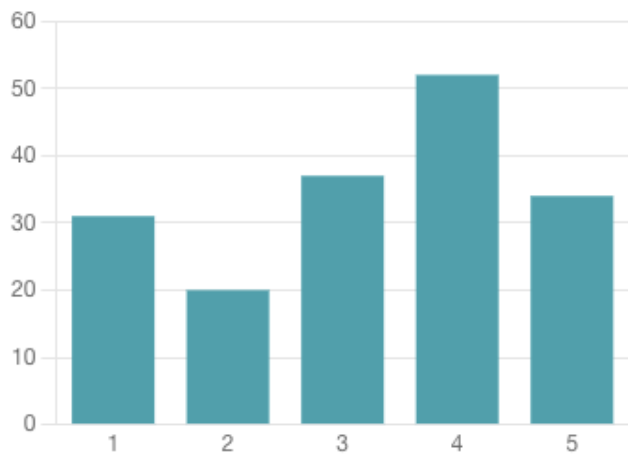
Figure 5.32: Openness and the dimension of time

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.22 and 49% (N=86) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they were undecisive as to whether UNISA should run an open system that should not be limiting students with completion time for qualifications.

To further understand the current openness environment, the researcher asked the following question. "Do the University systems support the openness agenda and are flexible from the process of admissions, registrations to the classroom and graduation?" The responses solicited are as illustrated in Figure 5.33 below.

3.33
Average Rating
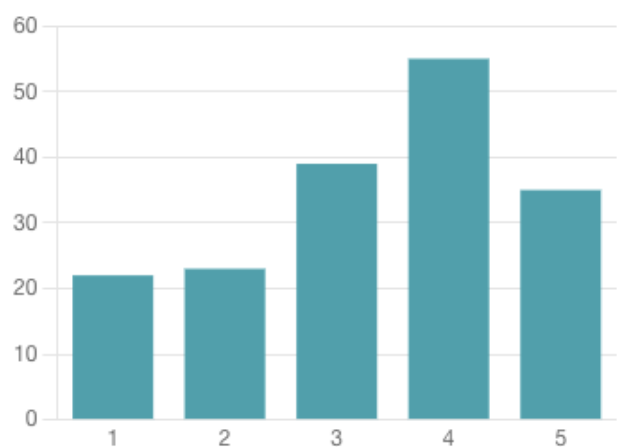
Figure 5.33: University support systems, flexibility and the openness agenda

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.33 and 52% (N=90) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the study's respondents were undecisive as to whether the UNISA systems supported the openness agenda and were flexible from the process of admissions, registrations to the classroom and graduation or not.

While the issue of openness was seen to be of paramount importance, it was beneficial to understand if UNISA's Academics and support staff were committed to supporting students. Figure 5.34 below shows the results.
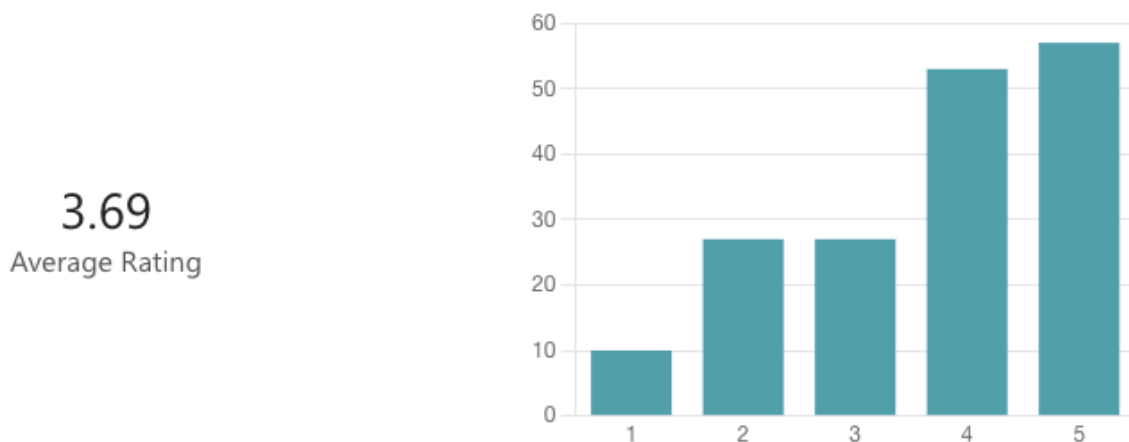
Figure 5.34: Commitment to student support

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.69 and 63% (N=110) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that UNISA's Academics and support staff were committed to supporting students.

Further to this, the researcher wanted to understand whether UNISA as an institution, had a strong culture of student support across its functions, both academic and support. Figure 5.35 below depicts the results as disclosed by the study's participants.

3.47
Average Rating
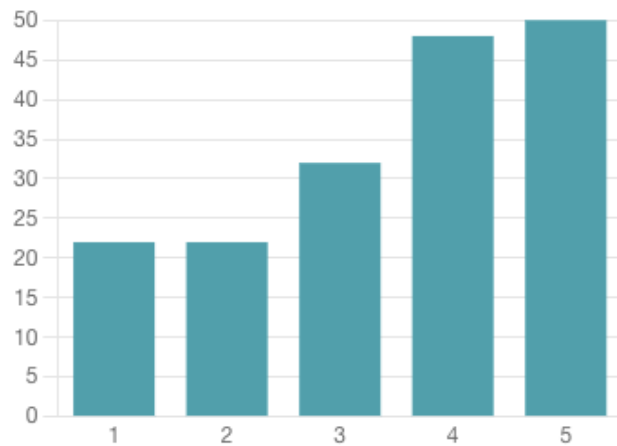
Figure 5.35: A strong culture of student support across academic and support functions

The participants had an average rating of 3.47 and 56% (N=98) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that UNISA had a strong culture of student support across its functions, both academic and support.

With respect to governance issues supporting openness of the university, the researcher asked the study's respondents to comment as to whether the University lacked capacity in its decision-making structures of governance to support the openness agenda or not. Figure 5.36 below represents their opinions.

3.09
Average Rating
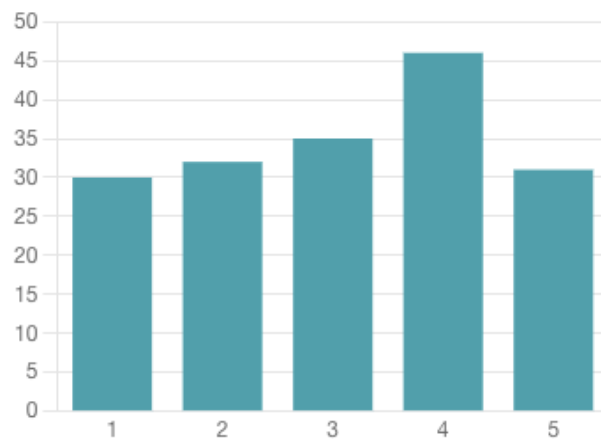
Figure 5.36: Capacity in decision-making structures of governance to support the openness

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.09 and 44% (N=77) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the study's respondents were neutral in relation to the University lacking capacity in its decision-making structures of governance to support the openness agenda.

It was also important to test if the university had good relations with students and were engaged adequately in decision making on matters that impacted them. The responses by the participants are shown on Figure 5.37 below.

3.25
Average Rating
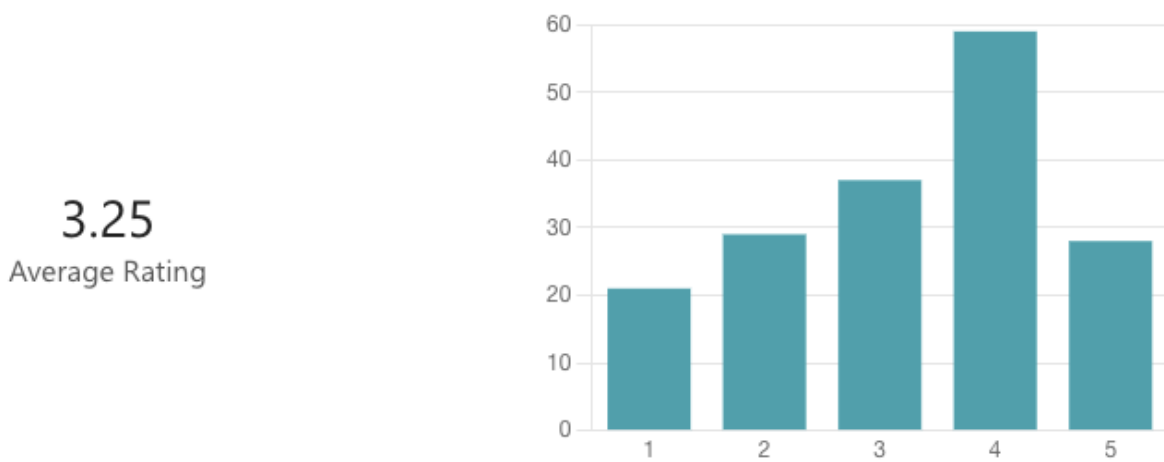
Figure 5.37: Student engagement and relations

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.25 and 50% (N=87) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they were undecisive as to whether the university had good relations with students and were engaged adequately in decision making on matters that impacted them or not.

Furthermore, this researcher wanted to determine whether the UNISA's regional model was ineffective. This was crucial because responses would clarify whether the university's large investments in its urban centres were to the detriment of support to students in the regions or not. Figure 5.38 represents the responses from the study's participants.

3.24
Average Rating
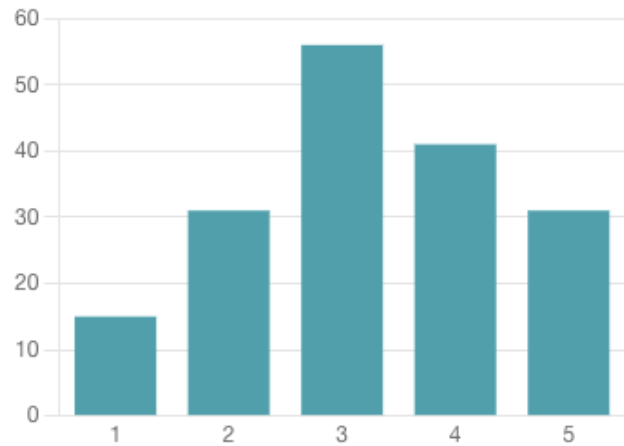
Figure 5.38: University regional model is ineffective

The respondents had an average rating of 3.24 and 41% (N=72) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they were undecisive as to whether the UNISA's regional model was ineffective, and the university's increased investments in its urban centres was to the detriment of support to students in the regions or not.

b.   Access and admissions

The researcher wanted to understand the status quo of access to higher education in the university. Does UNISA provide meaningful access into higher education as an institution was the question posed to the study participants? The responses are depicted below in Figure 5.39.

3.90
Average Rating
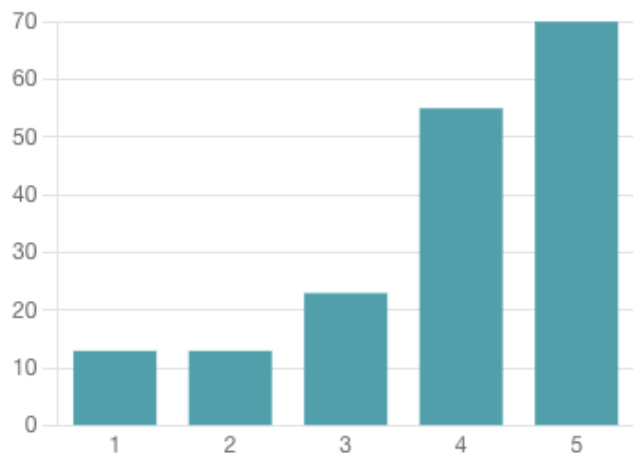
Figure 5.39: UNISA provides meaningful access into higher education

The selected respondents had an average rating of 3.90 and 72% (N=125) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that UNISA provided meaningful access into higher education as an institution.

Furthermore, to have a deeper understanding of access at UNISA, the researcher needed to know whether access remained a challenge from an open education context, in that it was limited to the traditional ways of admitting students and prescribed enrolment numbers. Figure 5.40 below shows the results.

3.10
Average Rating
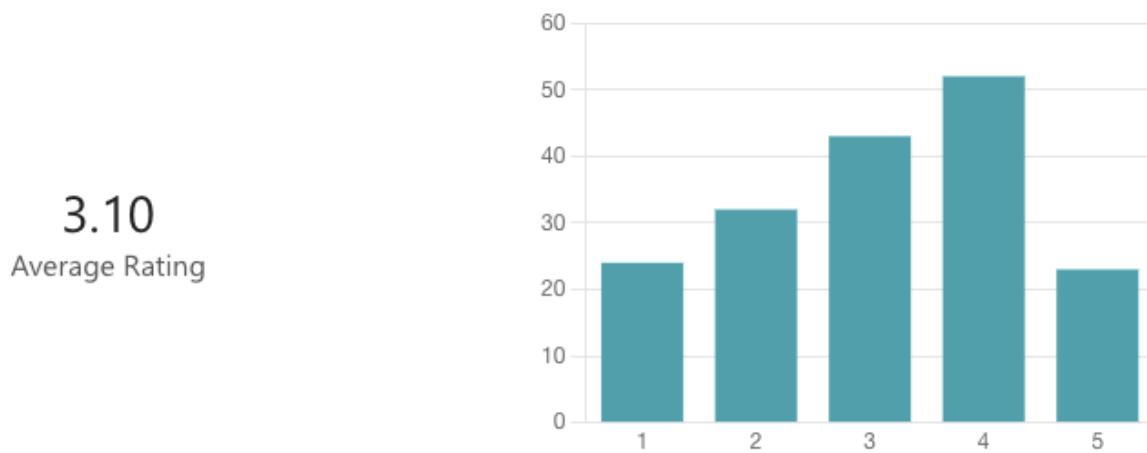
Figure 5.40: Admissions challenges from an open education context

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.10 and 43% (N=75) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they were undecisive as to whether access at UNISA remained a challenge from an open education context, in that it was limited to the traditional ways of admitting students and prescribed enrolment numbers or not.

Access at UNISA did not yield the high levels of quality in students admitted, especially younger students who had come directly from a classroom background, adapting to self-directed learning with no bridging mechanism available to manage their transition was a question posed to the study participants. The figure below shows a graphical representation of the responses.

3.51
Average Rating
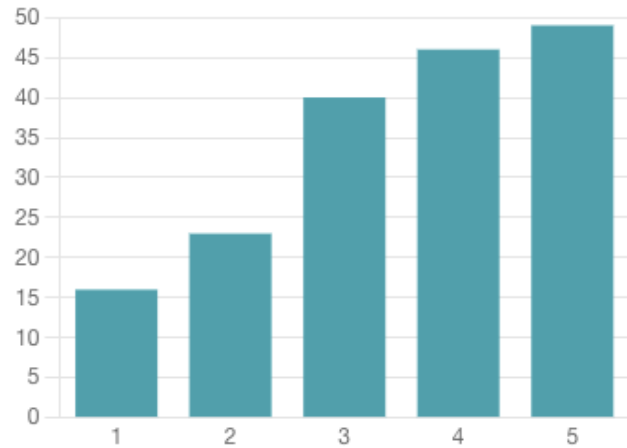
Figure 5.41: Access and student quality

The respondents had an average rating of 3.51 and 55% (N=95) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that access at UNISA did not yield the high levels of quality in students admitted, especially younger students who had come directly from a classroom background, adapting to self-directed learning with no bridging mechanism available to manage their transition.

UNISA needs to recognize that most of the students enter its doors already defeated in terms of their socio-economic status, they come from poverty driven backgrounds and the institution does not optimally cater for them. This is affecting them negatively. Once the researcher posed the question to the study participants, their responses are depicted in Figure 5.42 below.

3.43
Average Rating
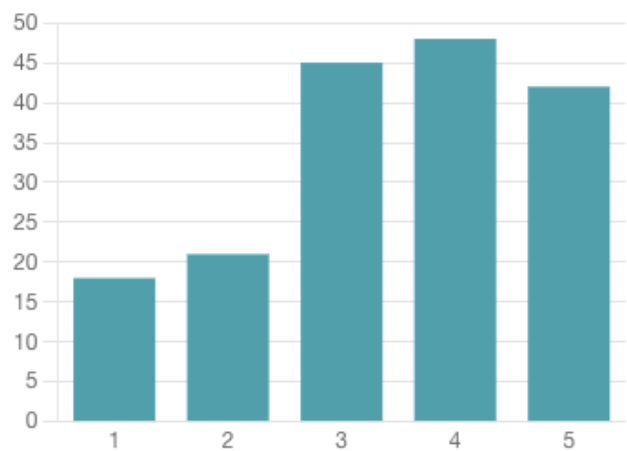
Figure 5.42: Access and student socio-economic conditions

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.43 and 52% (N=90) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average they Somewhat Agree that UNISA needed to recognize that most of the students who got enrolled were already defeated in terms of their socio-economic status, that is, they came from poverty driven backgrounds and the institution did not optimally cater for them and that this was affecting them negatively in their learning journey.

Furthermore, the researcher ascertained as to whether student preparedness was one of the key drivers for open education, if learners must enter UNISA ready and must be self-directed to proceed to the next level of their academic learning journey or not. The responses are shown in Figure 5.43 below.

4.00
Average Rating
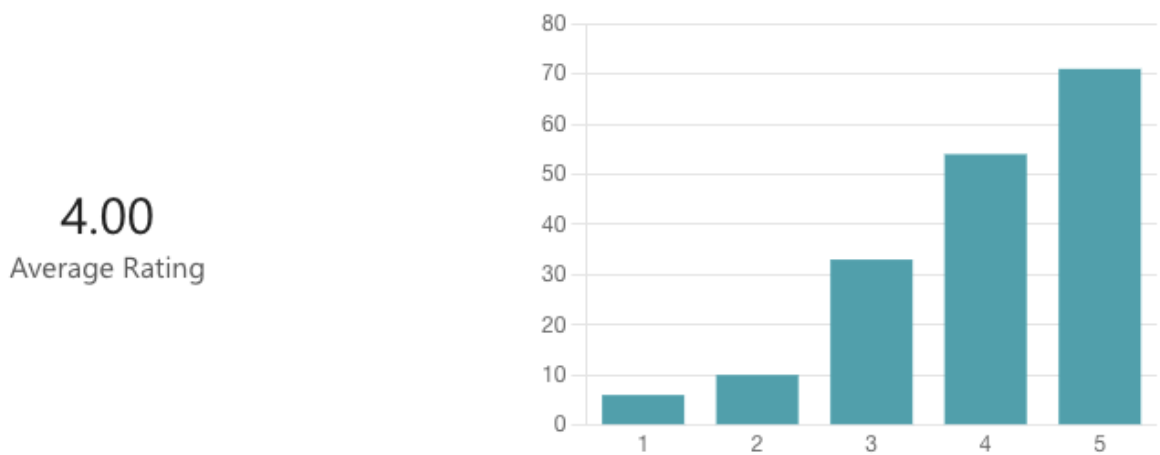
Figure 5.43: Student preparedness in Open Education contexts

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.00 and 72% (N=125) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the study's participants Somewhat Agree that student preparedness was one of the key drivers for open education. Learners must enter UNISA ready and must be self-directed to proceed to the next level of their academic learning journey.

The researcher further asked if UNISA didnot go deep during the admission process of students. They tended to focus on numbers or quantities instead of envisaging quality outputs was the leading question posed. The responses are shown in Figure 5.44 below.

3.57
Average Rating
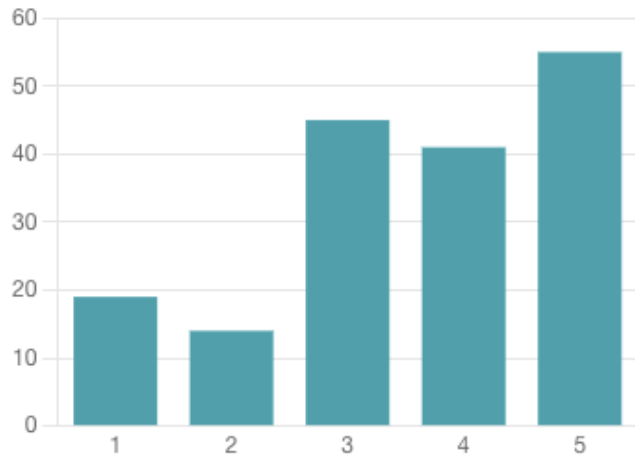
Figure 5.44: Enrolment management practices

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.57 and 55% (N=96) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that UNISA did not go deep during the admission process of students. They tended to focus on numbers or quantities instead of envisaging quality outputs.

A further question was posed to the respondents if the University systems opposed the principles of openness and that there was no flexibility from the process of admissions and registrations. In that students applied at a certain time, were responded to at a certain time and registered at a certain time, if this process defeated the purpose of being an open institution. After the above questions were posed to the participants, their responses are as per depiction on Figure 5.45 below.

3.10
Average Rating
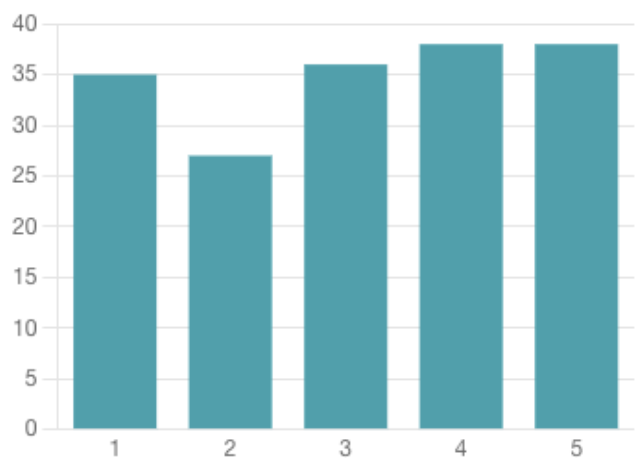
Figure 5.45: Flexibility in admissions practices

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.10 and 44% (N=76) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the study respondents were undecisive as to whether there was flexibility from the process of admissions and registrations or not. Students applied at a certain time, were responded to at a certain time and registered at a certain time. This process defeated the purpose of being an open institution. The respondents remained neutral with respect to these assertions.

While investigating openness at the university, the researcher asked the participants on their opinion regarding UNISA's Admissions Policy needing to be a driver of openness and its principles.

4.04
Average Rating
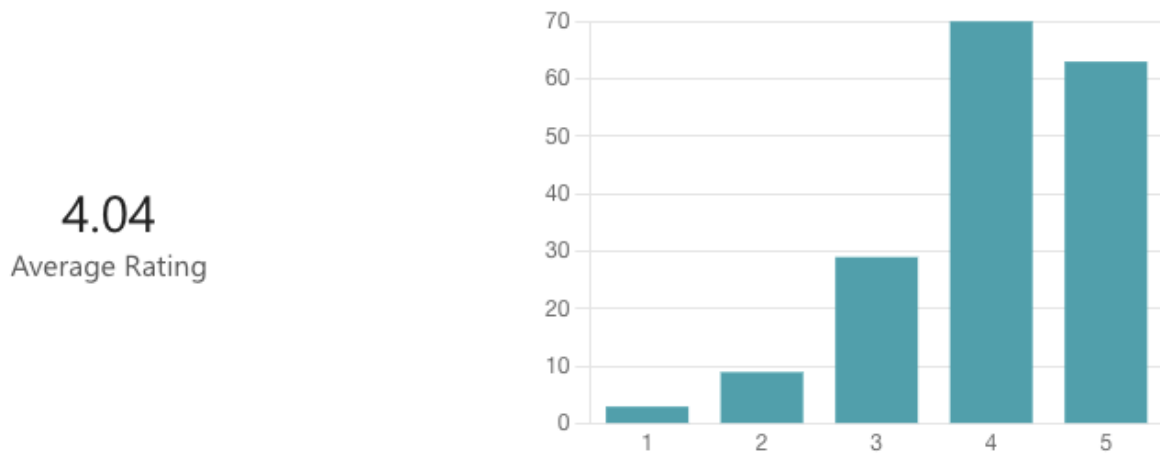
Figure 5.46: Admissions policy as a driver of openness

The respondents had an average rating of 4.04 and 76% (N=133) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that UNISA Admissions Policy needed to be a driver of openness and its principles.

The UNISA environment had advanced the openness and access discourse, but the decision makers were still locked in their own predispositions of student admissions that created barriers of entry into learning. The thoughts of the participants regarding the above question are shown on Figure 5.47.

3.48
Average Rating
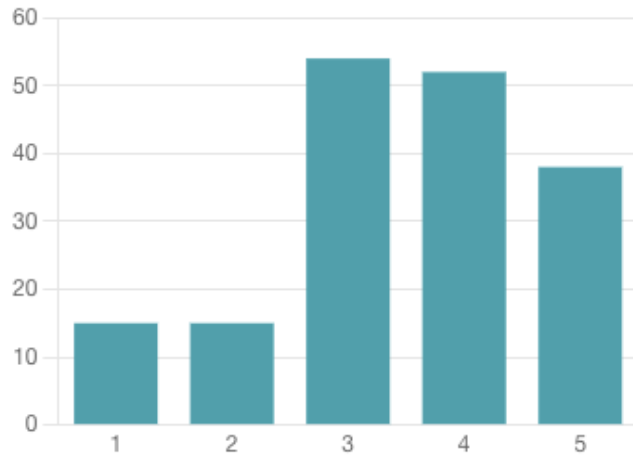
Figure 5.47: Advancement of openness and state of decision making

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.48 and 90% (N=52) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that the UNISA environment had advanced the openness and access discourse, but the decision makers were still locked in their own predispositions of student admissions that created barriers of entry into learning.

c.   Technology and support

Technology planning and implementation is fundamental to advance open education for optimal teaching and learning. The study's participants responded as depicted in Figure 5.48 below.

4.59
Average Rating
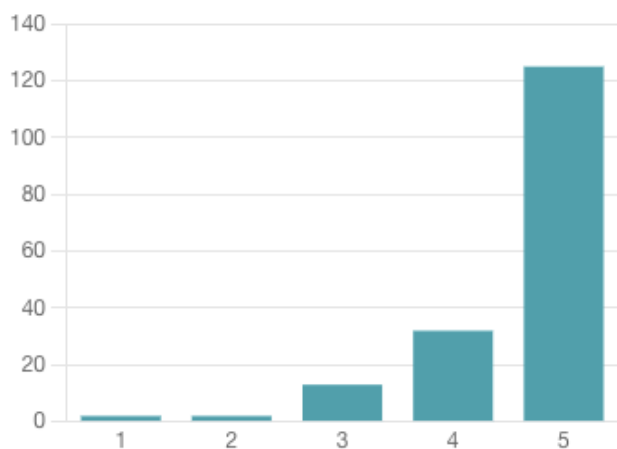
Figure 5.48: Technology planning and implementation

The selected respondents had an average rating of 4.59 and 90% (N=157) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Strongly Agree that technology planning and implementation was fundamental to advance open education for optimal teaching and learning.

The implementation and how technology is introduced remains challenging, the reliability and accessibility of the technology platforms is a challenge. The responses from the study's participants are shown in Figure 5.49 below.

4.09
Average Rating
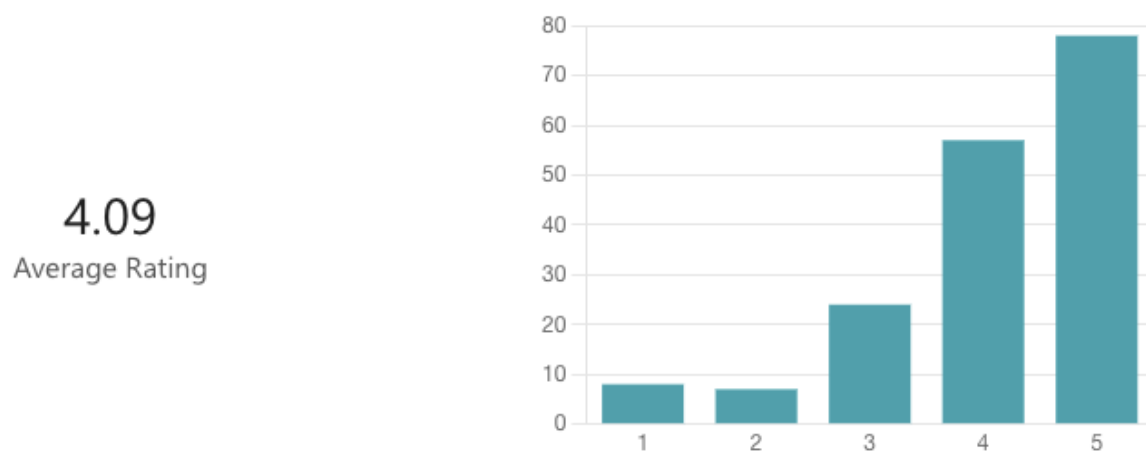
Figure 5.49: Reliability and accessibility of technology platforms

The respondents had an average rating of 4.09 and 78% (N=135) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that the implementation and how technology was introduced remained challenging, and the reliability and accessibility of the technology platforms was a challenge.

Technology, internet, and connectivity are the most prevalent challenges at UNISA. The thoughts and comments of the respondents are shown in Figure 5.50 below.

3.95
Average Rating
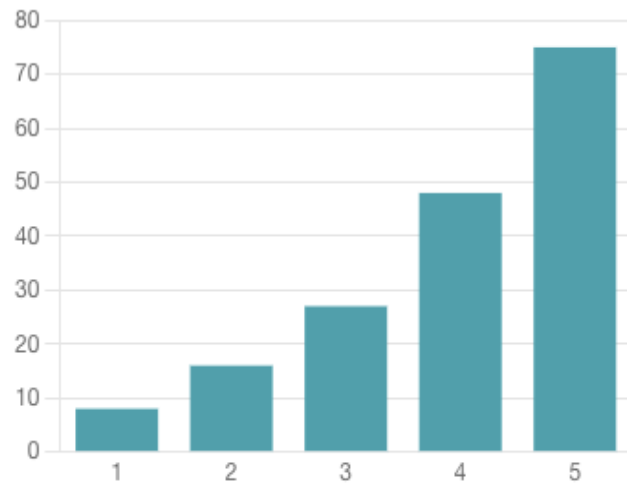
Figure 5.50: Technology, internet, and connectivity as prevalent challenges at UNISA

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.95 and 71% (N=123) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that technology, internet, and connectivity were the most prevalent challenges at UNISA.

E-learning continues to lag in advancing openness. Open education should benefit from e-Learning, and it must be balanced with pedagogy, communication between the teacher and student. The study respondents suggested the following as shown in Figure 5.51.

3.98
Average Rating
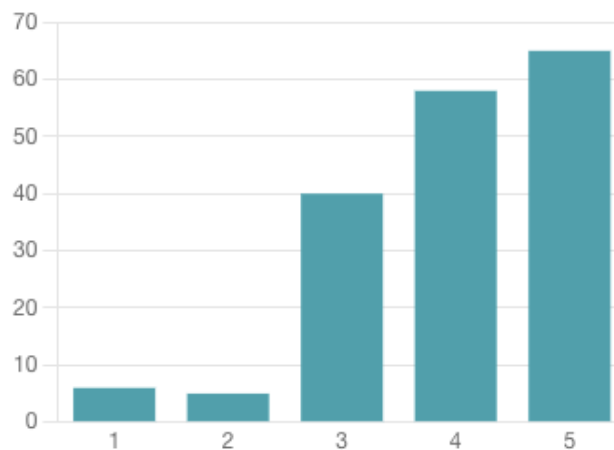
Figure 5.51: E-learning lags in advancing openness

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.98 and 71% (N=123) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that

e-learning continued to lag in advancing openness. Open education should benefit from e-Learning, and it must be balanced with pedagogy, communication between the teacher and student.

ICT platforms at UNISA should be seamless and support the university operations optimally. The capacity of current technology platforms remains a challenge as the systems are unable to handle traffic and student volumes. The figure below shows the responses as per the participants.
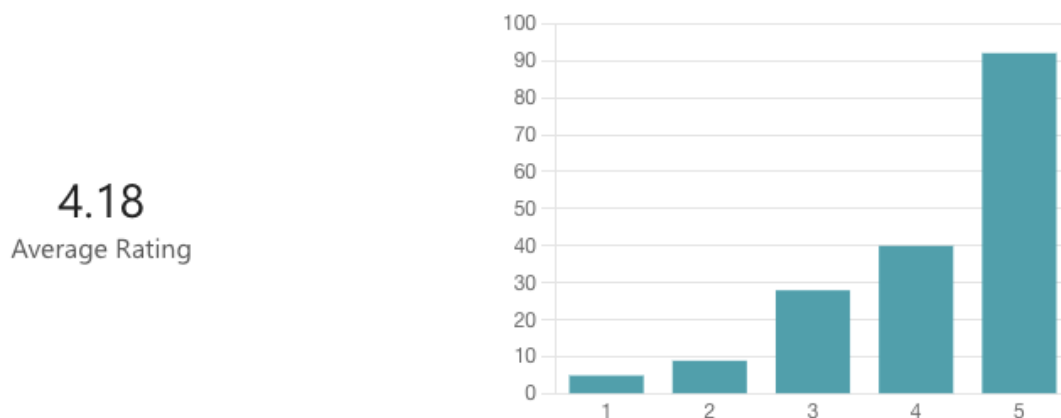
Figure 5.52: ICT platforms must be seamless and support the university operations optimally

The selected respondents had an average rating of 4.18 and 76% (N=132) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that ICT platforms at UNISA should be seamless and support the university operations optimally. The capacity of current technology platforms remained a challenge as the systems were unable to handle traffic and student volumes.

The main issues contributing towards support of UNISA students is data. Online classes are a good initiative, but it all depends on data accessibility but students particularly in the rural areas did not have access to data. The opinions relating to this are expressed below in Figure 5.53.

4.18
Average Rating
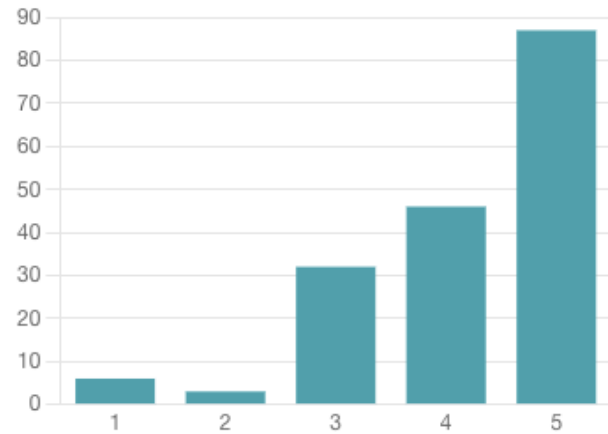
Figure 5.53: Provision of data to students

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.18 and 76% (N=132) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that the main issues contributing towards support of UNISA students was data. Online classes are a good initiative, but it all depends on data accessibility but students particularly in the rural areas did not have access to data.

The impact of COVID-19 brought immense technological fluctuations to open distance e-learning with limited to no resources provided by the University. Students who had no access, connectivity and data dropped out. Students struggled with simple tasks such as submitting assignments on time, this became a hard reality for those with no resources. The opinions regarding these questions are depicted below in Figure 5.54.

3.95
Average Rating
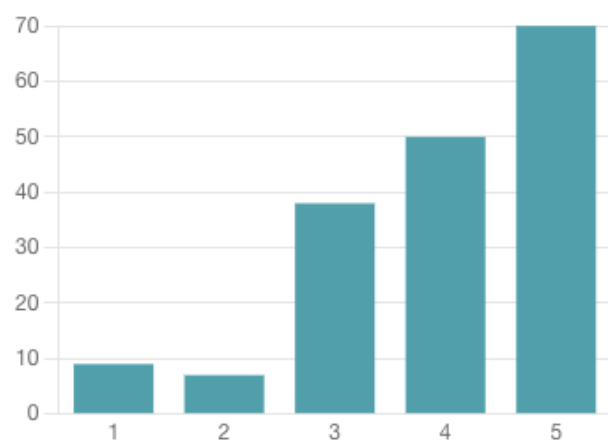
Figure 5.54: Impact of COVID-19 and technology access

The respondents had an average rating of 3.95 and 69% (N=120) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that the impact of COVID-19 brought immense technological fluctuations to open distance e-learning with limited to no resources provided by the University. Students who had no access, connectivity and data dropped out. Students struggled with simple tasks such as submitting assignments on time, this became a hard reality for those with no resources.

d.   Pedagogy, assessment, quality and student engagement

Openness deals with pedagogy, social issues, cultural issues, political and technological issues, which cut across governance, university operations, systems and practices. This comprehensive picture ought to be realised first in order for the UNISA to effectively operationalize open education. This was a topical issue where the participants expressed their opinions as shown graphically below in Figure 5.55.

4.33
Average Rating
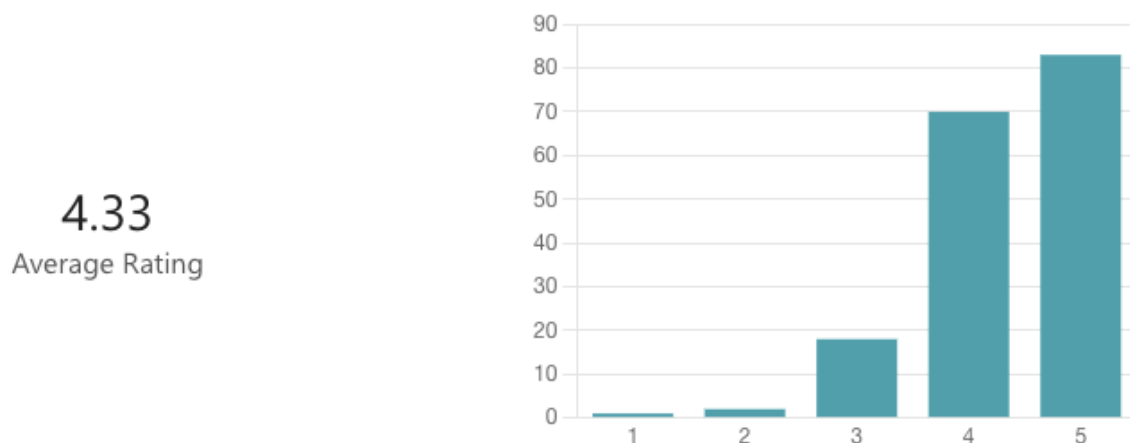
Figure 5.55: Openness as a comprehensive concept involves pedagogy, social issues, cultural issues, political and technological issues and cuts across governance, university operations, systems and practices

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.33 and 88% (N=153) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Strongly Agree that openness dealt with pedagogy, social issues, cultural issues, political and technological issues, which cut across governance, university operations, systems and practices. Such a

comprehensive picture ought to be realised first in order to effectively operationalize open education.

In curriculum design, execution, and the pedagogy, openness is about being available to anybody who wishes to and needs a qualifications and knowledge. Curriculum praxis is a critical driver to openness. The study's participants responded as per Figure 5.56 below.

4.18
Average Rating
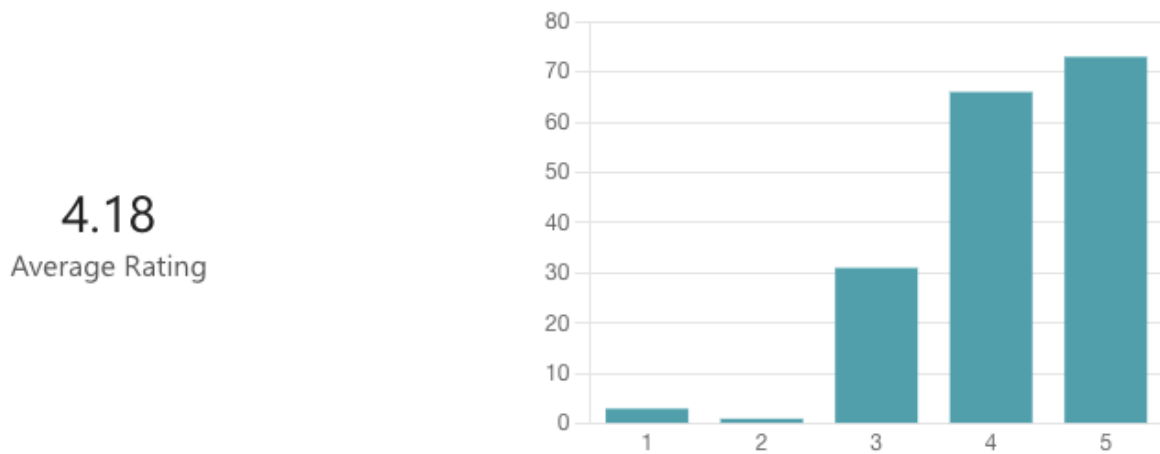
Figure 5.56: Openness in curriculum design, execution, and pedagogy

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.18 and 80% (N=139) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the selected UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that in the institution's curriculum design, execution, and the pedagogy, openness was about being available to anybody who wished to and needed a qualification and knowledge. Curriculum praxis is a critical driver to openness.

The programme delivery model of UNISA adheres to the principles of openness but has a dimension of time. If the institution operated an open system, it should not be limiting students. The opinions of the participants are expressed below in Figure 5.57.
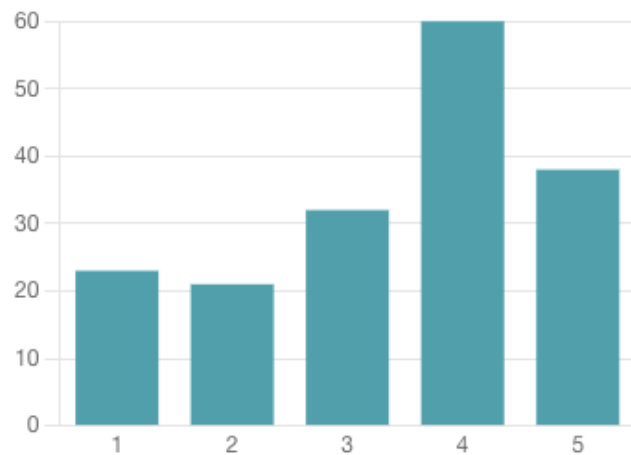
Figure 5.57: Openness in programme delivery models

The respondents had an average rating of 3.40 and 56% (N=98) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they were neutral to the fact that the programme delivery model of UNISA adhered to the principles of openness but had a dimension of time which should not be a limitation imposed on students.

The researcher wanted to understand as to whether the semester system was a challenge often observed amongst 1st year students or not. UNISA should have explored if 1st year students could only undertake their learning with year modules, whilst 2nd and 3rd year students continud their studies on a semester delivery model. Their opinions are expressed in Figure 5.58 below.
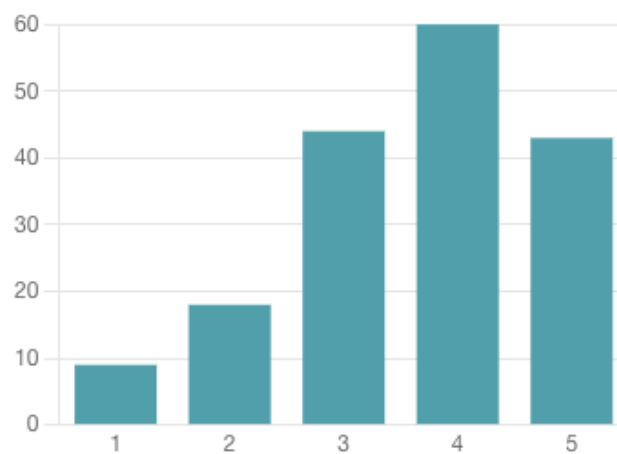
Figure 5.58: Openness and the semester system

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.63 and 59% (N=103) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that the semester system was a challenge often observed amongst 1st year students. UNISA should explore if 1st year students could only undertake their learning with year modules, whilst 2nd and 3rd year students continued their studies on a semester delivery model.

The workload of lecturers compromises the quality of work and outputs. The workload of both students and the lecturers result in an inadequate student-lecturer relationship. The opinions of the study respondents suggested the following as shown on Figure 5.59 below.

4.20
Average Rating
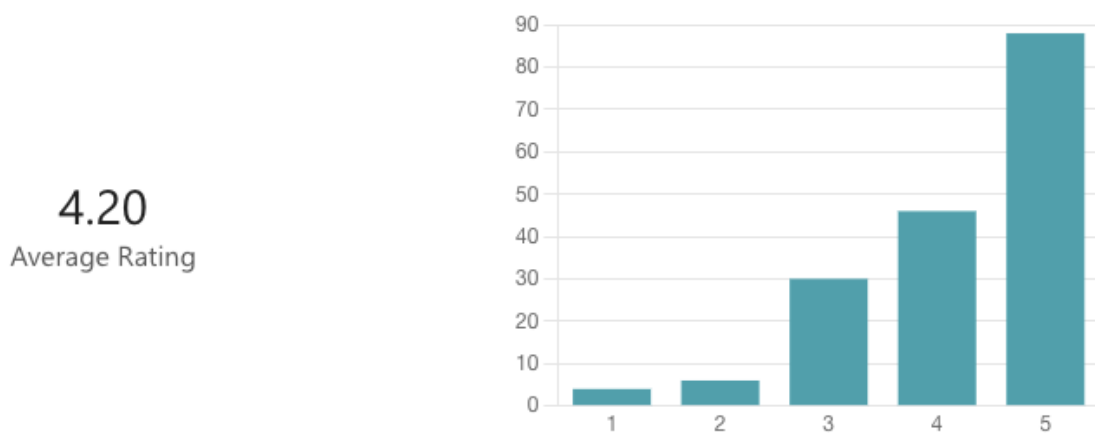
Figure 5.59: Staff workloads and the student-lecturer relationship

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.20 and 77% (N=134) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Strongly Agree that the workload of lecturers compromised the quality of work and outputs. The workload of both students and the lecturers resulted in an inadequate student-lecturer relationship.

The competency of teaching staff and a conducive environment are critical drivers of openness. There is a need for a skills audit to better understand if the institution has the necessary skills to implement the openness mandate. The opinions expressed regarding the above question are as shown below.

3.98
Average Rating
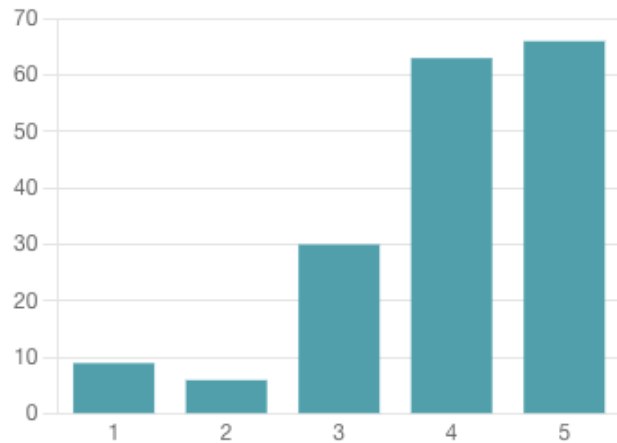
Figure 5.60: Staff competencies and conducive environments as drivers of openness

The respondents had an average rating of 3.98 and 74% (N=129) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that Teaching staff competency and a conducive environment were critical drivers of openness. There is a need for a skills audit to better understand if the institution has the necessary skills to implement its openness mandate.

Competency of the academics, student readiness, and the passion to support the students should be given a priority, more needs to be done in strengthening the social justice mandate in pedagogy. The opinions expressed were as follows.

4.12
Average Rating
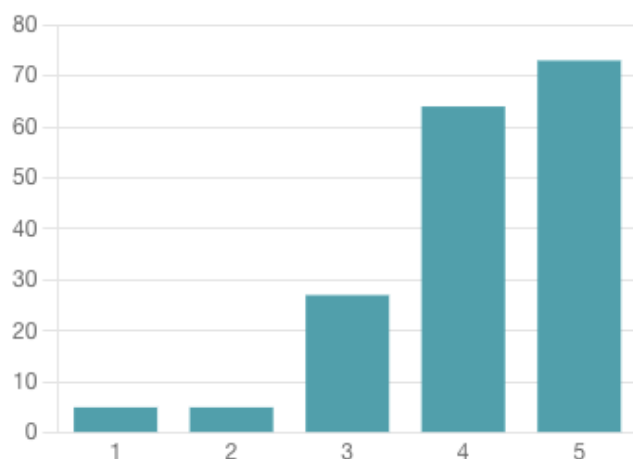
Figure 5.61: Strengthening the social justice mandate in pedagogy

This study's respondents had an average rating of 4.12 and 79% (N=137) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that the competency of the academics, student readiness, and the passion to support the students should be given a priority, and more needs to be done in strengthening the social justice mandate in pedagogy.

If the UNISA opened up in getting student views, it would understand the needs of its students, lecturers would make an effort to know who they were teaching. The institution's decision makers need to make decisions in line with what students say and identify what is suitable for supporting the academic programme. The responses are shown graphically in Figure 5.62.
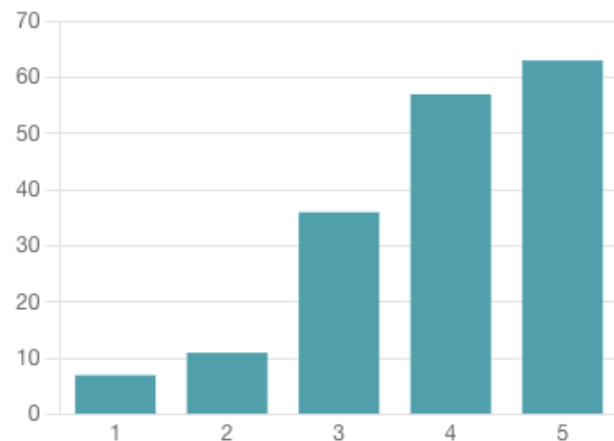
Figure 5.62: Student views and understanding of their needs in learning

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.91 and 69% (N=120) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that if the university opens itself up to getting student views, they would understand the needs of its students. Lecturers should play a role in knowing who they were teaching. Decisions must be made in line with what students were saying and the university must identify what was suitable for supporting the academic programme.

Marginalised students were thrown in the same basket and treated just like any other students. There should be a way to look differently at these students. The UNISA kept on providing generic support without intelligence to segregate the needs of support for students. The opinions expressed relating to this are shown below in Figure 5.63.

3.57
Average Rating
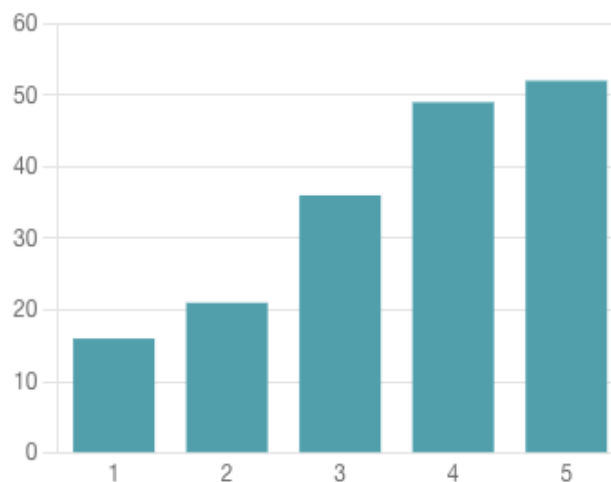
Figure 5.63: Student engaged as homogeneous groups and provision of generalised support

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.57 and 58% (N=101) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the UNISA staff Somewhat Agree that marginalised students were thrown in the same basket and treated just like any other students. There should be a way to look differently at these students. The university kept providing generic support for all students whether previously marginalised or not.

5.4.1.2 Summative overview of staff survey results

The purpose of this study was to seek and explore effective strategies and approaches to understand the concept of openness and its associated factors for better learning support to marginalised students and the achievement of improved success outcomes. It is important to note that the literature and the themes from qualitative results anchored the questions of the staff questionnaire. The structured individual interviews were informed by the arguments in the literature. Thus, presentation of the results was two-fold, the qualitative results and the quantitative results provide a confirmatory lens to the qualitative phase of the individual interviews. The survey instrument contained several questions grouped into five sections expressing dimensions of openness, institutional culture, policy, governance, access and admissions, technology and support, pedagogy, assessment, quality and student engagement totaling to sixty-nine (69) questions. From the individual staff interviews, strong views were expressed on inadequate management of staff workloads, inappropriate provision of the technology platforms and its planned implementations. Alignment of policy principles and how they were operationalized in practice, was expressed during the staff interviews. These

338

themes were expected to emerge during the staff surveys as topical issues found in the institutional and learner-teacher relational factors. The inadequacy of the institution's regional model was also expected to feature as a confirmatory theme during the staff survey.

The findings and responses of the staff survey strongly demonstrate a concurrence that openness discourse at Unisa was not coherently understood and applied across the identified dimensions and further suggested that there existed a relationship distance or deficit at times between students and the university, the students and the lecturers should be abridged to ensure support for students. The finding further highlights a strong agreement that openness deals with pedagogy, social issues, cultural issues, political and technological issues, which cut across governance, university operations, systems and practices and not only issue of access to study at the university. Although from a perspective of access and opportunity to learning, the respondents were undecisive as to whether the factor of flexibility from the process of admissions and registrations should be advanced as a critical driver for the university's systems, operations and services if the current practices oppose the principles of openness. The respondents further highlighted inconclusiveness on whether the university should run an open system that does not limit students with completion times for qualifications.

Factors of openness dealing with the dimensions of pedagogy, assessment, quality, technology, and student engagement were observed as topical issues where the participants expressed noteworthy opinions. The results demonstrated an acknowledgement the competency of the academics in open education discourse, student readiness for open and distance learning and the passion to support the students should be given a priority. Also, that more needed to be done in strengthening the social justice mandate in pedagogy, however, the respondents were rather neutral on the expression that the programme delivery model of UNISA adhered to the principles of openness and whether the institution had a dimension of time which should not be a limitation imposed on students. An inference can be drawn that differing delivery approaches should be applied at course levels hence the neutrality of the respondents.

The respondents were in rapport with the challenges of staff workloads as was expected from the individual interviews that the workload of lecturers compromised the quality of work and outputs, and it resulted in an inadequate student-lecturer relationship. Teaching staff's competency and conducive environment were critical drivers of openness and unanimity was highlighted in that technology planning and implementation of technology applications was fundamental to advance openness for optimal teaching and learning. A subdue accord to ICT platforms at UNISA being seamless to support the university operations optimally was noted

and that the capacity of current technology platforms remained a challenge as these systems were unable to handle traffic and student volumes.

Literature has already foregrounded the importance of the geographical and background of the students and that this might have an impact on the achievement levels and the performance of lecturers. Therefore, it was necessary to determine as to the particular areas where the institutional regional model could be considered from an open education context. This study's participants were rather undecisive as to whether the UNISA regional model was ineffective, and if the university was investing more in its urban centres to the detriment of support to students in the regions or not.

The results analysis demonstrated that students could only be supported if lecturers understood the variables and factors that students interacted with within the institution, who and where they came from. Such an understanding is paramount in open learning discourse. Research has shown that teachers need to have up-to-date knowledge of three areas of education: curriculum, instruction and assessment (Jenkins, 2009). This study argues a fourth dimension of learner situational conditions.

Finally, to promote institution-wide understanding of openness, the university must engage in intentional promotion and knowledge of the openness discourse throughout the institution through training, support, and research in open educational practices, as well as in building relationships for such practices institutionally to cohere its operations across all spheres and students (Ives & Pringle, 2013).

5.6   QUANTITATIVE STUDY RESULTS FOR STUDENTS

The demographic data for the student survey was obtained by conducting a content analysis and indicated that 35 589 of survey respondents. The student eligibility was determined by virtue of being actively registered for the current academic year and currently in their final year of study at NQF levels 6, 7 and 8. By that definition, 35 589 was the source population of students. From this group and the purposes of this study, the researcher was first interested in determining the demographic distribution and patterns of the student study participants.

5.6.1   Student demographics of the sample

The student profile identified characteristics that are broken into the following tables outlined below. The sample of questionnaire respondents for students included n= 538 respondents who were randomly selected to participate in the final phase of the study. Figures 5.64, 5.65, 5.66, 5.67, 5.68, 5.69 and 5.70 presented below offer an overview of the student demographic profile i.e. the age, gender, race, regional location, qualification under study and government funding bursary status.

a.   Age distribution of respondents

The distribution, by age, of survey respondents is presented below.

🔵 18 - 25 years old	77	
🟠 26 - 35 years old	214	
🟢 36 - 45 years old	141	
🔴 45+	100	
🟣 Prefer not to say	6	

Figure 5.64: **Age distribution of sample**

40% (n=214) of the study respondents were between the ages of 26 to 35 while 26% (N=141) were between the ages of 36 to 45. The age distribution was fairly normal given the demographic profile of the study participants.

Figure 5.64 above, the mean age of the survey sample was 538, with an age range falling between 18 years and 45 years of age. The above noted standard deviation was minimal, an observation which suggests a near-normal distribution in terms of age, across the respondent population. The observed mode and the frequency of z and y respectively show that the ages of 26 to 35 and the ages of 36 to 45 were the most represented across the study population and accounted for up to 66% (N=355) of the study sample. By contrast, only 14% (n=77) of the sample were aged between18 - 25 years old. The university that was being studied has a historically atypical student population characterized by students who are assumed or already in employment and/or are studying to further existing career prospects. Given this background, data on age distribution suggest that the student population is in pursuance of their first qualification.

b. Ethnic distribution of respondents

Figure 5.64 below is a graphical presentation of the ethnic/racial distribution of the study participants.
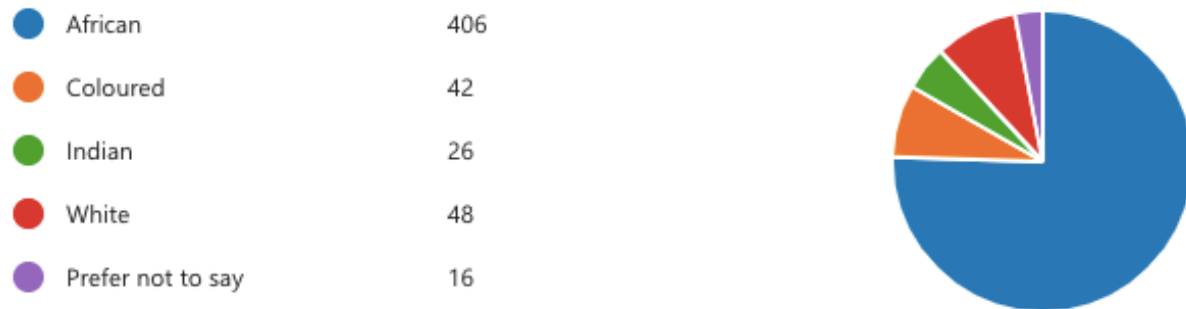
Figure 5.64: Ethnicity distribution of sample

75% (N=406) of the study respondents were African while the remaining 25% was distributed between Coloured, Indian, White and a few that did not want to disclose their ethnicity. The ethnic distribution is fully representative of the institution and the South African racial distribution as a whole.

Ethnic categorization of respondents revealed that, more than three quarters of the respondents (n=406; 75%) identified themselves as being of black south African origin, whilst other categories such as coloured and white, all had lower representation within the study group.
As predicated by the fact that the university under study had a population of 90 percent black African students, it can be reasonably expected that a significant proportion of respondents would be of black-African descent.

c. Regional Location in Terms of Studies

Figure 5.65 below is a graphical representation of the regional locations of the study participants.
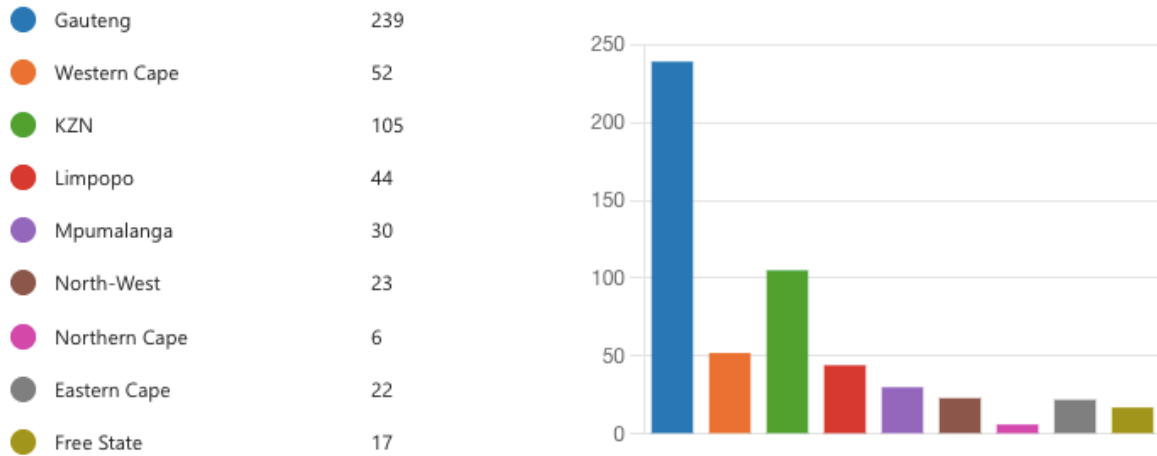
Figure 5.65: Regional Location in Terms of Studies

44% (N=239) of the study's respondents were studying in the Gauteng province while 20% (n=105) were in Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN). The distribution of the sample was representative of student population that was centrally located in the urban parts of the country and semi-rural geographical location of the South African commercial and study distribution as a whole.

d. Qualification Currently Studying Towards

Figure 5.66 below is a graphical illustration of the distribution of the qualification level that the study participants were studying towards during the survey.

Figure 5.66: Qualification Being Studied

48% (N=259) and 38% (N=207) of the study respondents were studying towards a four and a three- year bachelor's degree respectively. Very few (13%; n=72) study participants were studying towards a three-year diploma. Given this background, data on qualification distribution suggest that the student population was in pursuance of their first formative qualification in contrast to 13%, (y = 72) a vocational type qualification such as a Diploma.

Such a data distribution suggests a skewed segregation the comprehensive character of the institution and its aspirant of a 70%/30% split between vocational and formative qualifications at undergraduate level.

e.   College of Study

Figure 5.67 depicts the distribution of the colleges the study participants are studying under.
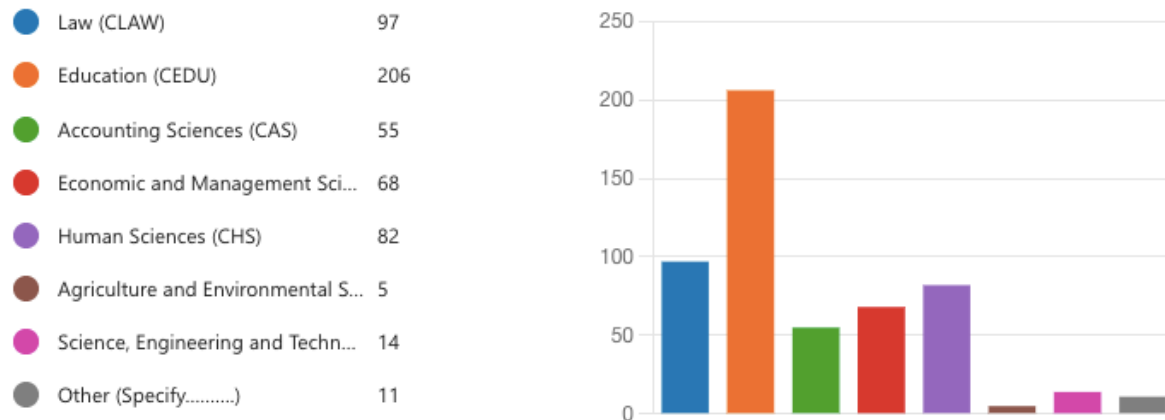
Figure 5.67: College of Study

38% (N=206) of the study's respondents were registered for their studies in the college of Education. Only 1% of the participants were registered under the college of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. The data is consistent with the observations of figure 5.14 of the qualification type distribution, given that the field Education pre-dominantly offers formative 4-year Bachelor of Education Degree and the CLAW represented by 18% (n=97) participants which offers a 4-year Bachelor of Laws qualification.

f.   Device used for Learning

Figure 5.68 below shows the distribution of the different devices used for learning by the study participants.

● Laptop	326
● Desktop	22
● Tablet	11
● Smartphone	179
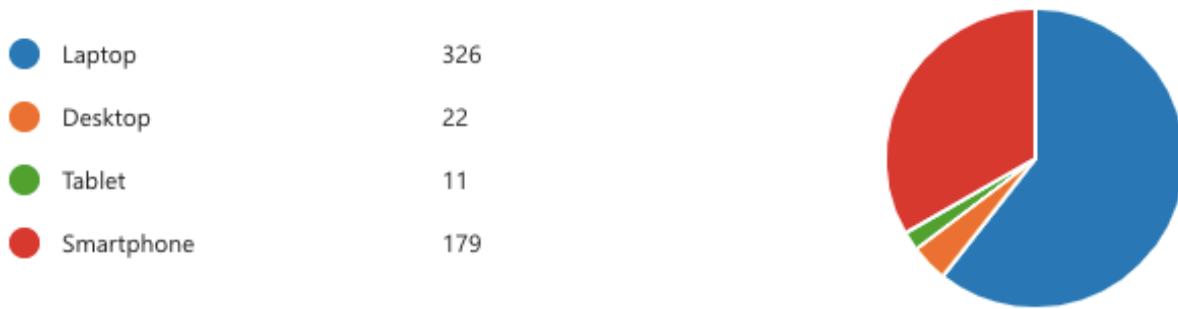
Figure 5.68: Device Used for Learning

61% (n=326) of the study respondents primarily used laptops for their study engagements, while 33% (n=179) used smartphones. The device distribution highlights a significant assumption that the respondents had access to mobile devices and by contrast, 4% (n=22) used desktops and it was not clear whether these desktops were accessed from the institution's computer laboratories.

g. NSFAS Funded distribution

The below distribution shows the split between the students that were NSFAS funded and those that were self-funded or funded through other sources.

| ● Yes | 183 |
| ● No | 355 |

Figure 5.69: NSFAS Funding

66% (n=355) of the study's respondents were not funded by NSFAS while 34% (n=183) were fully funded by NSFAS. This is a significant diverging observation from the focus group as 94% (n=30) out of the 32 participants were NSFAS funded.

5.7   QUANTITATIVE STUDY RESULTS FOR STUDENTS

The questionnaire administered to students was purely a quantitative enquiry that was facilitated through the use of a 5-point Likert-scale. Table 5.14 below shows what the 5 points on the scale represented. The interval limits as set forth in the table were used to interpret the level of agreement or disagreement for each aspect once an aggregated view was presented.

Table 5.14:   Likert-Scale Interval Limits

LEVEL	SCALE	INTERVAL LENGTH	LOWER LIMIT	UPPER LIMIT
Strongly Disagree	1	0,8	1	1,8
Somewhat Disagree	2	0,8	1,81	2,6
Neutral	3	0,8	2,61	3,4
Somewhat Agree	4	0,8	3,41	4,2
Strongly Agree	5	0,8	4,21	5

The themes that were considered in the study to reflect the same as the staff survey but reduced with different questions. The themes were: institutional culture, policy and governance, access and admissions, technology and support and lastly pedagogy, assessment, quality and student engagement.

a.   Institutional culture, policy and governance

The researcher wanted to assess from the perspective of the students if UNISA academics and support staff were committed in supporting the students. The results of the responses are depicted below on Figure 5.70.

3.03
Average Rating
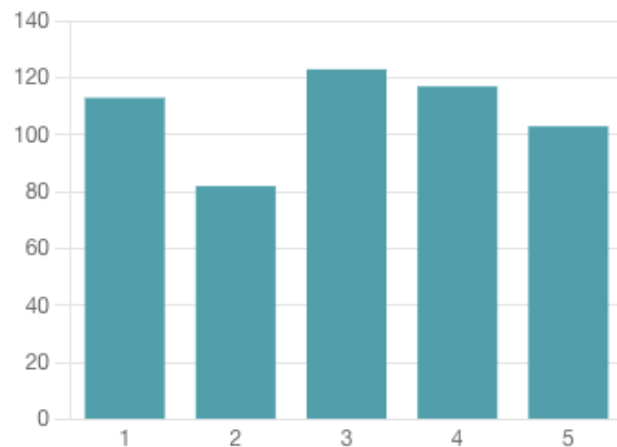
Figure 5.70: Commitment to student engagement and support

The respondents had an average rating of 3.03 and 41% (N=220) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they were undecided or neutral as to whether UNISA academics or support staff were actually committed in supporting them.

Furthermore, the researcher assessed if UNISA as an institution, had a strong culture of student support across its functions, both academic and support. The results of this assessment were as shown on Figure 5.71 below.

3.09
Average Rating
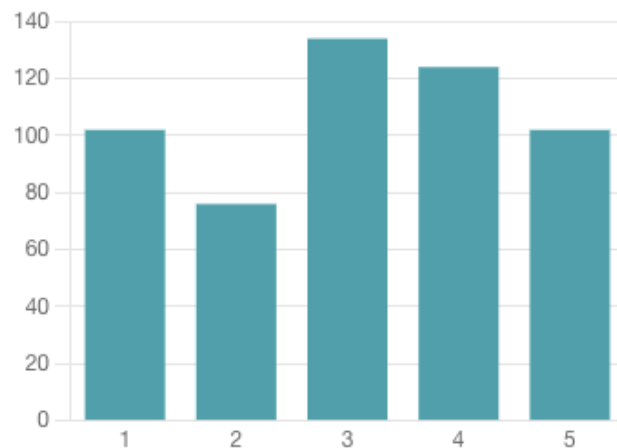
Figure 5.71: Culture of student support

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.09 and 42% (N=226) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the study's respondents were undecided

or neutral as to whether UNISA has a strong culture of student support across its functions, both academic and support.

As a follow up, the researcher further investigated through the perspective of the students as to whether the processes and systems of UNISA worked coherently and collaboratively in delivering academic and administrative support to students.
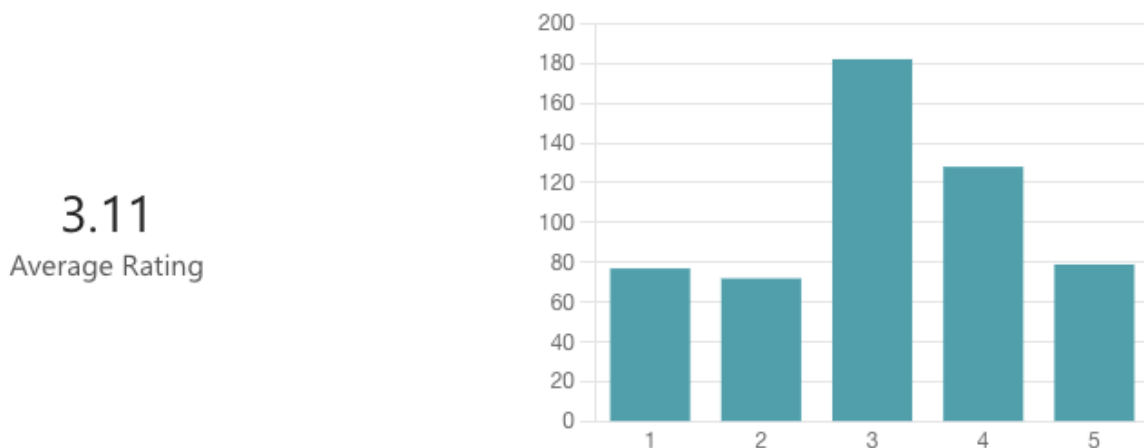
Figure 5.72: Coherent and collaborative processes and systems of UNISA to deliver student support

The perceptions and responses of the student respondents suggested that on average, they were undecisive as to whether the processes and systems of UNISA worked coherently and collaboratively in delivering academic and administrative support to students. The average rating on this question was 3.11 and 41% (N=222) of the respondents gave a rating of either 4 or 5.

5.7.1   Access and admissions

Student preparedness is one of the key drivers for open education, learners must enter UNISA ready and must be self-directed to proceed to the next level of their academic learning journey. This question was posed to the study participants and the responses were captured graphically as per Figure 5.73 below.

4.00
Average Rating
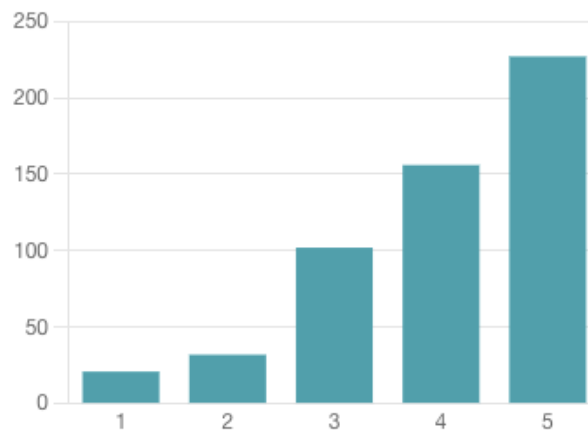
Figure 5.73: Student preparedness and self-direction to learning

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.00 and 71% (N=383) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that student preparedness was one of the key drivers for open education, learners had to join the UNISA ready and be self-directed to proceed to the next level of their academic learning journey.

Further to this, to gain more clarity on access and admission, the researcher needed to assess if Open and Distance learning was for students who were matured and understood what they were studying and why they were studying. The study's participants responded as follows.

4.02
Average Rating
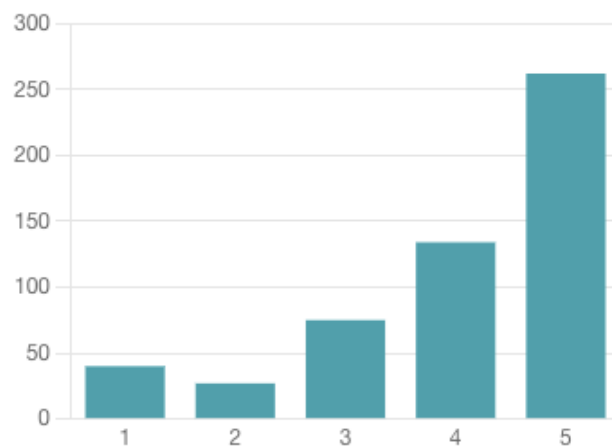
Figure 5.74: Is Open and Distance learning is for matured students?

The respondent students had an average rating of 4.02 and 74% (N=396) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that Open and Distance learning was for students who were matured and understood what they were studying and why they were studying.

A clear understanding was solicited from the study's participants to understand the level of importance placed around the UNISA Admissions Policy. UNISA Admissions Policy needs to be a driver of open education and its principles was the question posed to the participants. The responses that followed are depicted below in Figure 5.75.
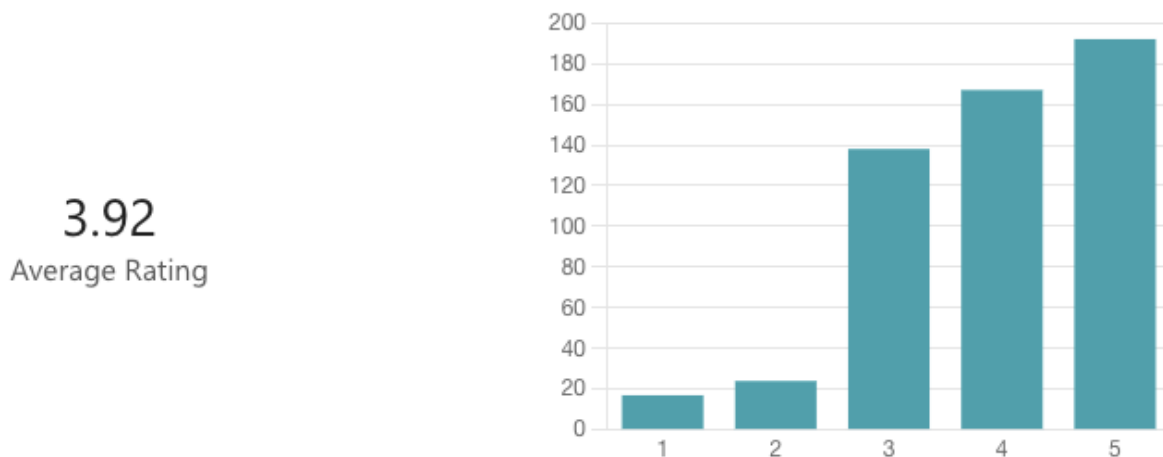
Figure 5.75: Admissions policy as a driver for openness and access

The study's respondents had an average rating of 3.92 and 67% (N=359) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the study's participants Somewhat Agree that UNISA Admissions Policy needed to be a driver of open education and its principles.

b.   Technology and support

There needs to be better access to devices and data to access provision at UNISA. Students should be able to access a university's resources from anywhere. The student participants were given an opportunity to comment and give their perspective on this issue. Figure 5.76 is a depiction of these responses.

4.19
Average Rating
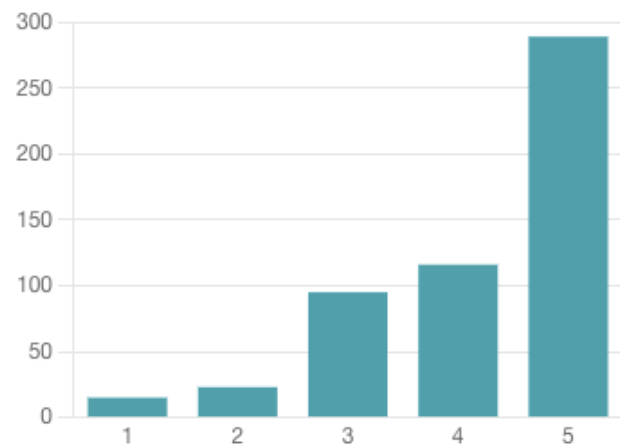
Figure 5.76: Access to devices and data provision at UNISA

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.19 and 75% (N=405) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that there needed to be better access to devices and data to access provision at UNISA. Students should have been able to access the university's resources from anywhere.

SMS system was pivotal in bridging the communication gap between students who had challenges with connectivity and those who were able to receive SMSs due to lack of access to data. The student participants were asked to comment about this assertion and the results are shown on Figure 5.77 below.

4.03
Average Rating
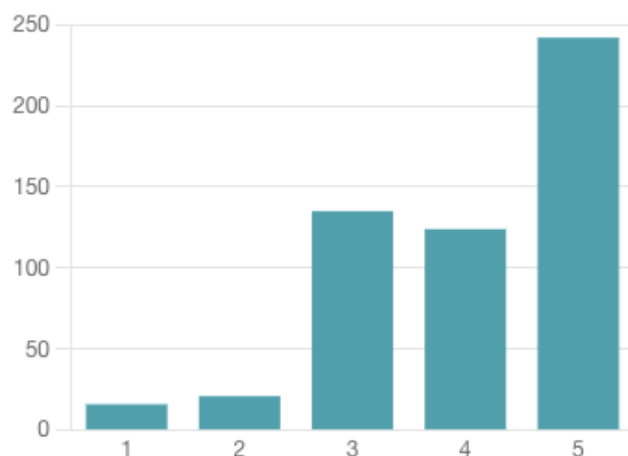
Figure 5.77: Importance of SMS system

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.03 and 68% (N=366) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that the SMS system was pivotal in bridging the communication gap between students who had challenges with connectivity and those who were able to receive SMSs due to lack of access to data.

Furthermore, the researcher attempted to understand whether there was a technology gap amongst students with respect to access. The study results are shown graphically below on Figure 5.78.

3.89
Average Rating
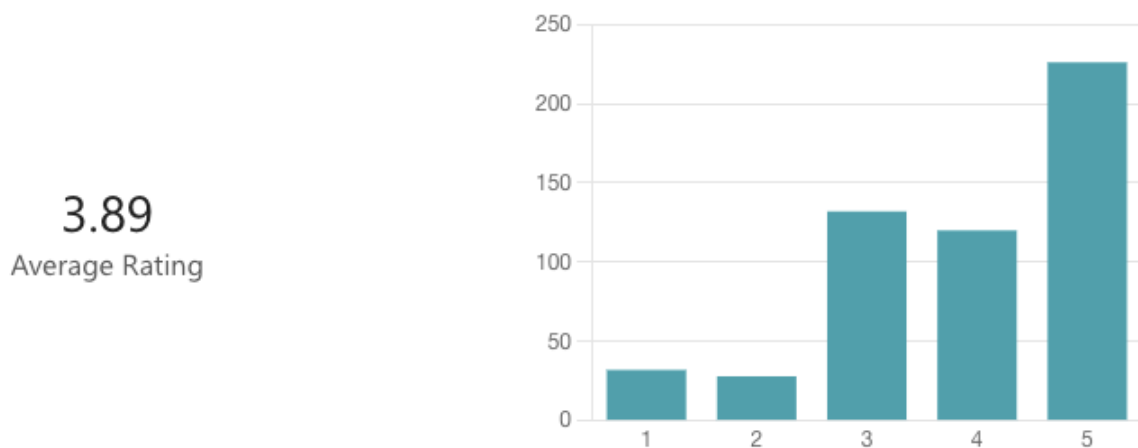
Figure 5.78: Access and technology gap

The respondents had an average rating of 3.89 and 64% (N=346) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that there was a technology gap amongst students with respect to access. Not all students were getting the same access and connectivity; technological advancements seemed to be concentrated in the urban centres, to the detriment of the marginalised students in the rural peripheries.

c.   Pedagogy, assessment, quality and student engagement

The researcher also needed to understand if Open education was about ensuring that people that wished to pursue further studies and attain a qualification and knowledge had access to do so. The curriculum structure and module composition is a critical driver to openness. This question was posed to the student respondents and the following responses followed as depicted in Figure 5.79 below.

4.08
Average Rating
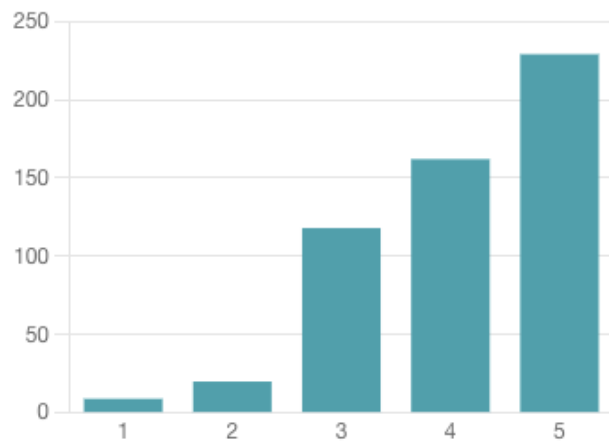
Figure 5.79: Curriculum structure and module composition as a driver to openness

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.08 and 53% (N=285) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the study's participants Somewhat Agree that Open education was about ensuring that people that wished to pursue further studies and attain a qualification and knowledge had access to do so. The curriculum structure and module composition is a critical driver to openness.

The semester system does not provide students time to familiarise themselves with the content of their modules. The student study participants made the following observations with the regards to this as depicted graphically in Figure 5.80.

2.85
Average Rating
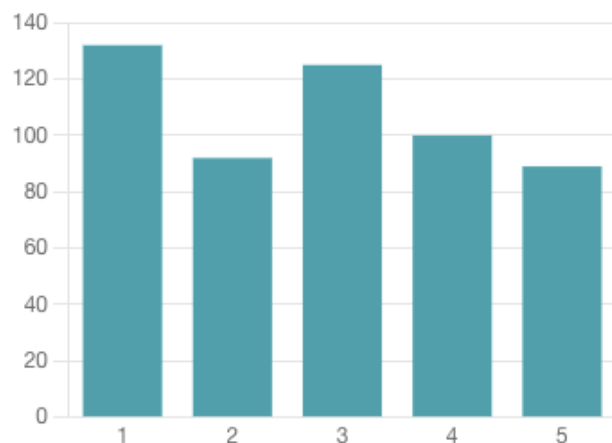
Figure 5.80: The semester system

The selected respondents had an average rating of 2.85 and 35% (N=189) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they were neutral or unclear on their

position or opinions on whether the semester system provided or did not not provide students time to familiarise themselves with the content of their modules.

Further to this, the researcher wanted to understand the engagement levels between students and their lecturers. The researcher therefore posed the following question, and the responses are depicted in Figure 5.81 below. Do UNISA students interact frequently with their lectures and often have one to one discussion with lecturers?
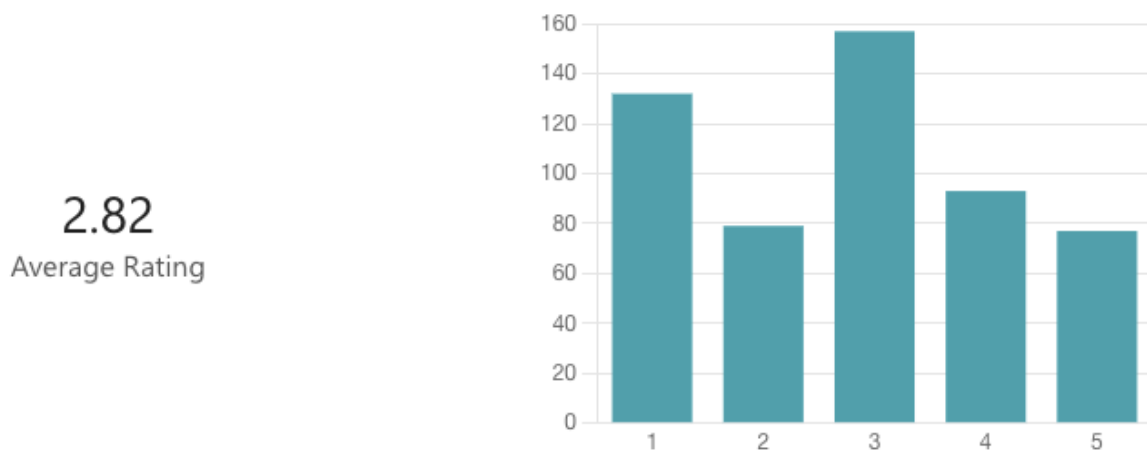
Figure 5.81: Frequency of interaction students with their lectures

The study's respondents had an average rating of 2.82 and 32% (N=170) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they were neutral or unclear as to whether UNISA students interacted frequently with their lecturers and often had one-to-one discussions with their lecturers or not.

Competency of the lectures, student readiness, and the passion to support the students should be given priority. The study's participants responded in saying as depicted in Figure 5.82.

4.17
Average Rating
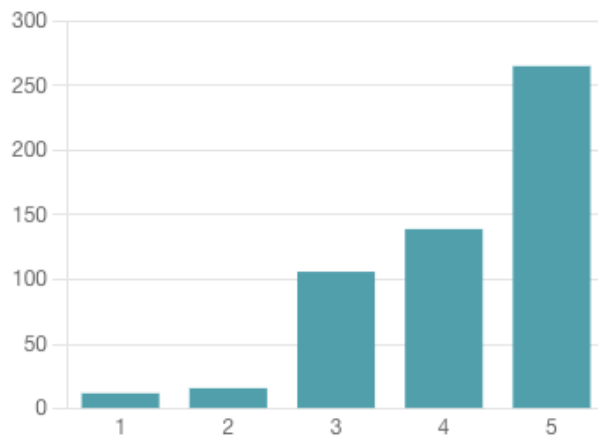
Figure 5.82: Priority to support students

The respondents had an average rating of 4.17 and 75% (N=404) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that competency of the lecturers, student readiness, and the passion to support the students should be given priority.

Students must be able to access academics from the regions. Lecturers need to connect and network with students at the regions. The importance levels for students with relation to this are shown graphically in Figure 5.83 below.

4.10
Average Rating
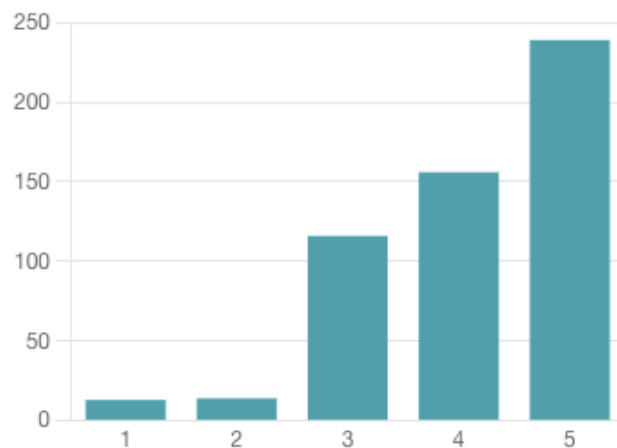
Figure 5.83: Students accessing academics at the regions

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.10 and 73% (N=495) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, they Somewhat Agree that students must be able to access academics from the regions.

Lecturers need to improve their commitment in supporting students. UNISA needs to instil a better culture of student support. The students' perspective with relation to this are shown below in Figure 5.84.
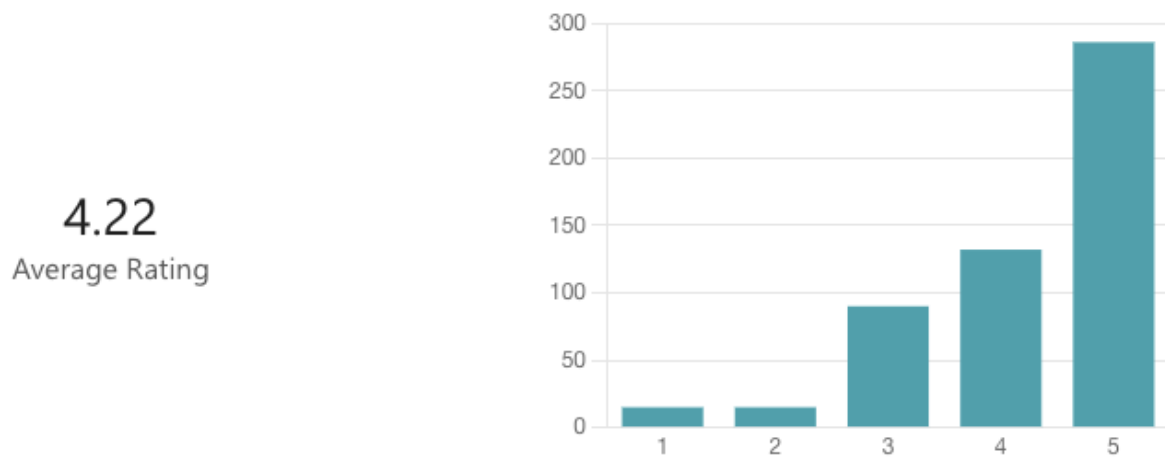
Figure 5.84: UNISA must instil a better culture of student support

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.22 and 78% (N=418) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the respondents Strongly Agree that UNISA needed to instil a better culture of student support.

As a follow up question to better understand the current ensuing student lecturer engagement conditions, the researcher needed to assess if UNISA needed to listen to students, and institutional decisions must be taken in accordance with what students identified as suitable for supporting the academic programme. The responses that followed a shown below in Figure 5.85.

4.05
Average Rating
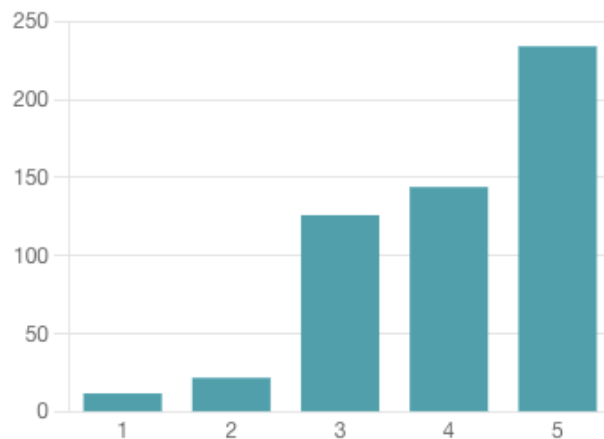
Figure 5.85: Student consultation and institutional decisions

The study's respondents had an average rating of 4.05 and 70% (N=378) of them gave a rating of either 4 or 5 which suggests that on average, the study participants Strongly Agree that UNISA needed to listen to students, and institutional decisions must be taken in accordance with what students identified as suitable for supporting the academic programmes.

5.7.2 Summative remarks on student on the results of the student survey

Overall, the respondents showed awareness of open education and ODeL, demonstrating a good grasp of its practices and how it impacted on them as students. From a policy perspective, it was clear from the focus groups and the survey that the admissions policy and its associated processes as a driver of openness, could serve an enabling factor and should be given priority to advance enrolment management better quality in admissions. The researcher expected a correlation of themes from the focus groups and the student survey particularly the theme and factors of communication and the SMS. From the theme of student support and assessments, issues of lecturer workloads and availability of lecturers at the regions emerged strongly from the focus groups.

The survey outcomes affirmed the challenges of lecturer workloads as impacting the quality of support. From the student survey results, the factors associated with student support, learner-lecturer relations, staff workloads, appropriate technology and infrastructure, advice and support on curriculum issues emerged strongly.

357

Two factors received high levels of agreement where respondents strongly agreed that UNISA needed to listen to students, and institutional decisions must be taken in accord with what students identified as appropriate support practices to their learning and that UNISA needed to instil a better culture of student support. The results obtained through interacting with the students corroborated the staff views on their readiness and a strengthened culture on student support and that these must be given priority by the institution.

Further, the student results expressed an agreement on improved communication and strengthened relations between the learner and student and student with the institution. They agreed that the SMS system was pivotal in bridging the communication gap between themselves, the academy and the support enterprise of the institution.

Some contrasting views were observed where the student survey reflected a neutral or indecisive posture on the semester system as a delivery model in open education. This was a contrasting view when compared to the student focus groups where strong opinions were expressed about the challenges afflicting this delivery model.

A further contrasting view observed in the student survey was on the frequency and interactions between students and lecturers. The study participants seemed to be neutral or unclear as to whether UNISA students interacted frequently with their lectures, a critical factor that was strongly viewed by the student focus groups as an impediment to success in learning.

5.8 SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS, FOCUS GROUPS AND THE SURVEYS

The results of quantitative and qualitative phases were presented separately in the previous sections (5.3 and 5.4 respectively). At this integration phase of the study, the composite findings provide comprehensive and depth insights into the openness dimensions and factors of openness. Thus, the integration of the survey and interviews highlights the issues that relate to the influence of these factors across the various indicators of the institution. Pertinent and important findings of the 2nd and 3rd phases are summarised and presented in table 5.15 below.

The first phase of the study revealed that there exists an incoherent understanding of openness across the varied functions of the university. Finally, the influencing factors of openness and their indicators demonstrate a need to for the institution to reflect on the access and admission practices as these practices did not cohere with the principles of openness and

the desirable success outcomes. The perceived access and admissions practices were viewed as not advancing the requisite high levels of quality in students admitted and that these students were challenged in adapting to self-directed learning with no bridging mechanism available for them to manage their transition from basic education systems into higher education, particularly studying in ODeL models.

The analysis of the staff and student results from the quantitative phases of the study in relation to factors and dimensions of openness identified a statistically significant positive correlation between views expressed in the qualitative phase of the study. This is a clear indication that the openness factors had an impact on learner success outcomes on students from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds. The background of students, their interaction with the institution and lecturers, therefore; may significantly affect the improvement or decline in student performance. The issues of academic workloads were strongly observed in both phases as a facte that needed a concerted institutional intervention and viewed as a central impediment to optimal student and lecturer relationships and support to students.

The results further confirm that the lecturers felt overburdened and having to engage with new technology platforms that were introduced without due consideration of their workloads severely challenged the quality of their work and appropriate support to students. Student support systems were confirmed by the results to be inadequate and required urgent attention, further, their access to lecturers in rural areas was limited, a challenge which needed to be tackled as a matter of urgency. This limited access to appropriate support resulted in cost burden to students as they had to navigate additional mechanisms to access the internet and other computer facilities for learning. Baloyi (2012) concludes that when distance education institutions fail to plan for the provision of appropriate learner support services, systematic learning support is adversely affected, and the most likely outcome is that distance learners drop out of their studies.

The two phases of the study identified openness dimensions and their associated factors as among some that needed to be managed accordingly in order for the UNISA to advance the principles of openness, particularly the interests of marginalised students. Inadequacies in managing these dimensions and the key factors of openness can impact learning conditions of students on the basis of the conceptual student success framework as presented in the model shown in Chapter 3. The following table further illustrates findings of the study based on the constructs of the framework

Table 5.15:   Summary of according to the eight dimensions of access – success framework

FACTORS OF OPENNESS	DIMENSIONS OF OPENNESS	IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW FINDINGS	SURVEY FINDINGS
Institutional Factors	Institutional culture, Access, Policy, Governance and Technology	Respondents agreed that: • There exist a lack of coherent and shared understanding of openness. • Policy should be a driver of openness, but lack of coherence and inclusivity resulted in poor implementation conditions across core functions of the university. • Technology provision was lagging behind and that the incoherent technology planning compromised student information security. • Inadequate student readiness for ODeL and this needed to be assessed during the access and admission process of the university. • Communication breakdown between the university and students. • Students were not optimally included in the governance and decision-making processes of the university.	• Respondents were undecisive on whether the principles of openness were adequately reflected in all operations and services of the university. • Respondents were inconclusive on the university's relations with students and whether students were engaged adequately in decision making on matters that impacted them • Respondents agreed that access at the university did not produce the high levels of quality in students admitted and that students were challenged in adapting to self-directed learning with no bridging mechanism available for them to manage their transition. • Respondents strongly agreed that technology planning and implementation was fundamental to advance open education for optimal teaching and learning.

FACTORS OF OPENNESS	DIMENSIONS OF OPENNESS	IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW FINDINGS	SURVEY FINDINGS
Teacher and learner contributory factors	Pedagogy, assessment, quality and student engagement	• Respondents agreed that the academic workloads were high and the institutional resource allocation models were desperately needed to manage the work demands confronting academics. • Respondents agreed that students did not receive adequate support and those in regional rural centres were most impacted. • Respondents concurred that academics needed to understand the emerging profiles of new students admitted by the institution and that a lack of understanding by academics on the challenges impacting on students and that minimal time was afforded to learning and support during the semester periods. • Respondents agreed that marginalised students were thrown in the same basket and treated just like any other students with no systems of mechanisms: UNISA should look	• Respondents strongly agreed that the workload of lecturers compromised the quality of work and outputs and that workload of both students and the lecturers resulted in an inadequate student-lecturer relationship. • Respondents were unclear as to whether UNISA students were adequately supported and interacted frequently with their lecturers and often had one-to-one discussions with their lecturers or not. • Participants strongly agreed that UNISA needed to instil a better culture of student support. • Respondents agreed that the support of student in the regional centres was inadequate and that lecturers needed to improve their commitment in supporting students.

FACTORS OF OPENNESS	DIMENSIONS OF OPENNESS	IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW FINDINGS	SURVEY FINDINGS
Environmental and geographical factors	Environmental and geographical factors	differently at the needs of these students. Respondents agreed that there exist systemic structural configurations challenges and the university regional model was ineffective. The study participants agreed that the current regional model was incoherent working to the disadvantage of Unisa students Respondents agreed on raised views of decentralization of services and support at college level that advances self-determine their own approaches to better support students and the delivery of programmes	• The study participants were undecisive as to whether the UNISA regional model was ineffective, and whether the university's increased invests in its urban centres was to the detriment of support to students in the regions or not.

The quantitative and qualitative findings also confirmed the presence of a shared understanding of openness, lack of a strong culture towards student support. By the lecturers and across the support functions.

Overall, the impacts of openness dimensions and associated factors as identified in Chapter three in the conceptual framework received a concurrence and that its factors were varied multifaceted but had close interfaces in advancing improved learning experiences of students. The current institutional strategies were perceived by the respondents as being ineffective and rarely optimally improved the success outcomes of students.

5.9 CONCLUDING REMARKS OF THE RESULTS

This study integrated both the quantitative and qualitative methods to develop a student success framework by exploring the principles of openness and associated factors. The qualitative phase of the study involved a situational analysis of institutional documents and

reports over a period of four years quantitative student data over an 8-year period 2012 – 2019.

The objectives of these two phases were predominantly concentrated on three areas of the research objectives:

i.   conducting a situational analysis of access and success patterns within the identified open and distance university in South Africa.
ii.   identifying and describing the range of institutional, learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to openness during the study pathway of university learners.
iii.   analysing the role each of the identified contributory factors have on student access, teaching and learning and student-success.

The data generated through in-depth university staff interviews and focus groups with students provided insights on the lived experiences of the respondents and enhanced the dimensions of openness and associated factors of openness as found within the literature of open education.

As it has been presented in the preceding sections of the study, there are varied factors of openness and each driven by operational indicators that a university can consider informed by the institutional priorities and mission. The first two phase of the study revealed that the openness factors provided a confirmatory support to the openness dimensions.
The two phases further identified seven areas of importance guided by the openness dimensions and factors.

The identified seven areas of importance were:

i.   a shared or lack thereof in the understanding of openness
ii.   incoherent policy environment as a driver of openness
iii.   high academic workloads and lack of adequate institutional resource allocation models
iv.   inadequacy in technology provision and planning
v.   communication breakdown between the university and students
vi.   varied approaches to student support
vii.   ineffective regional model

Phase three of the study dealt with the quantitative phase and pursued to provide further reflections and confirmatory lens of the qualitative phases. The quantitative phase applied statistical data to reflect numerical comparisons to draw correlational or refute inferences in an attempt to verify or refute the observations of phase one and two. The objectives of phase three was concentrated on three area of evaluating current performance in the implementation of the principles of openness across the chosen study site.

Tables 5.15 above provides a summation of the findings for two phases (2 & 3). A significant observation can be drawn that all phases of the study concur on the identified openness dimensions and influences of the institutional factors that drive openness at UNISA. Commonalities exists as presented in these factors, thus confirming the identified seven areas of importance in phase two.

The quantitative and qualitative findings confirmed the presence of commonalities in the views of the respondents particularly in the presence of high workloads of academics, inadequate and varied student support at module level. The factors associated with technology provision also observed significant concurrence together with issues associated with the institutional regional model and a need decentralise services to better support students. There were areas of disagreements particularly from the student survey responses in the area of student support where an unclear observation was noted on whether UNISA students were adequately supported and interacted frequently with their lectures and often had one-to-one discussions with their lecturers, a diverging view from the staff interviews and survey. Another surprising observation was noted on the factors associated with delivery models and the question of the semester model. The interview and focus groups shared strong views on the inefficacies of this model whereas the surveys identified a rather inclusive finding if this model was effective or not.

The integration of all findings in phases one to three concur that improvements in student support strategies were needed and that the most impacted cohort of students were those in the margins, particularly in the rural centres. The findings further support that the current practices in the institution did not cohere in the implementation of openness principles and that management interventions across the learner and teacher contributory factors were not optimal in supporting success outcomes of marginalised students. The area of governance and institutional decision-making systems observed a need to strengthen the relationship between the institution and students. The integration of the findings succeeded to identify the openness dimensions and the associated factors of openness. The findings also provided broader insights on how these factors could promote the inculcation of openness principles

across the functions of the university. These results and finding provide a concrete premise to develop the student access - success model and an advocacy premise of integration and strong interphase of the academic and support systems promoting student success initiatives. The next chapter (Chapter 6) present the process that was followed in order to develop student access-success model by incorporating the openness dimensions and factors influencing openness in a university informed by the findings of this chapter.

5.10   CONCLUSION OF THE CHAPTER

The chapter has presented a comprehensive and more inclusive assessment than the studies carried out previously on the concept of openness. This study includes both the quantitative and qualitative enquiry methodologies. The results obtained from these two phases of numerous techniques and tools allowed the researcher to draw detailed and well considered conclusions about the principles, dimensions and factors of openness.

This study integrates both the quantitative and qualitative methods to develop a student access and success model in the study area. It explored the openness factors and institutional indicators across the varied functions of the institutions. The openness factors were segregated into three, namely the institutional factors, teacher and learner contributory factors, as well as environmental and geographical factors. These factors were then linked to dimensions of openness and factors were explored in-detail with their associated indicators. The study is comprehensive than aforementioned studies about the concept of openness at the University of South Africa (Unisa) and assists the researcher to develop an integrated openness model for the advances of access and success imperatives of the university for marginalised students.

CHAPTER 6
THEORY DEVELOPMENT

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6.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter (5) was a detailed presentation and interpretation of the current study results. In achieving the objectives of the study, the researcher used an Exploratory Sequential Mixed Method adapted from Creswell (2009). The data was collected from previously marginalised learners, institutional leaders, higher education administrators', academics and university support staff from an open distance learning institution located in Pretoria, South Africa. The sequential approach makes the study relatively simpler and facilitates its implementation, description, and reporting (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) indicates that the overall advantage of this design is that the qualitative data helps to explain in more detail, the initial quantitative findings. Given that the study followed a mixed methods design, the researcher was able to maximally exploit the dual benefits observed from a qualitative and a quantitative design, therefore expanding understanding of the research problem.

The theoretical framework from chapter 3 together with the study findings from Chapter 5, offered the foundational information that was required by the researcher to formulate a conceptual framework relating to openness, to promote student success and further identify a set of recommendations for universities. Hult et al. (2011) defined a conceptual framework as a motive as to why a given study should be conducted. Through an intensive review of literature, the researcher utilised the conceptual framework to describe the state of knowledge. From this exploration, the researcher identified the gaps within the study phenomenon and used these findings to outline the methodological underpinnings of the study (Hult et al., 2011). The aim therefore of this chapter was to develop a modification framework and give recommendations that would support student success.

6.1.1   Basic Understanding of the Empirical Evidence to Theory Development

For theory to be widely accepted as true, a hypothesis needs to be tested several times and needs to be supported by a significant amount of evidence (Wacker, 1998). Wacker (1998)'s viewpoint is widely supported by Tian et al. (2016) who posit that for a theory to be respected, it needs to be adequately developed to ensure scientific or practical rigour. Marchau et al.

(2019) attest to the notion that theory always presents a degree of uncertainty and for that reason, research needs to be carefully diagnosed before any decisions are made on the basis of a theory. The above challenges have paved the way for reliance on philosophy (Tian et al., 2016). While the researcher develops the theory, she remains cognisant of the limitations presented within theory and continually takes note of these observations. In this chapter, the researcher primarily focused on knowledge production through the use of empirical evidence to develop a theoretical framework or model. The theoretical framework that was developed by the researcher was geared towards creating openness, to promote student success and further identify a set of recommendations.

The conceptual framework that is presented in this chapter draw insights from existing empirical evidence that was incorporated, to ensure a robust framework encapsulating real world events. The empirical evidence informing the conceptual framework was drawn from literary data and existing theories focusing on the openness in higher education relating to student access and success among previously excluded populations.

6.2 SCIENCE, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND METHODS

6.2.1 Basic and Applied Sciences

Gooday (2012) and later Roll-Hansen (2017) defined basic sciences as the body of expansive knowledge relating to a study phenomenon. In basic sciences, a researcher is able to make pre-determinations on the basis of a hypothesis whereas in applied sciences this is not possible. In contrast, applied sciences is a discipline utilised to apply existing scientific knowledge within a practical environment (Roll-Hansen, 2017). The two definitions are essentially interdependent both in theory and in practice. Roll-Hansen (2017) posits that the distinction between basic and applied sciences as critics often maintain does not infer isolation and separation. It is a means to determine how these two sciences mutually support and overlap with each other. Applied sciences on the contrary provides legitimation and social contact for the basic sciences. On the other hand, basic sciences provide cultivation of methodological standards and theoretical understanding for applied sciences (Gooday, 2012).

6.2.2 Strategies for Theory Development within Research

Deductive Research Approach

Woiceshyn and Daellenbach (2018) postulate that a deductive research approach entails moving from the general to the particular i.e. moving from a theory, deriving hypotheses from that theory, testing the hypotheses and then revising the theory. This deductive process is illustrated on Figure 6.1 below:
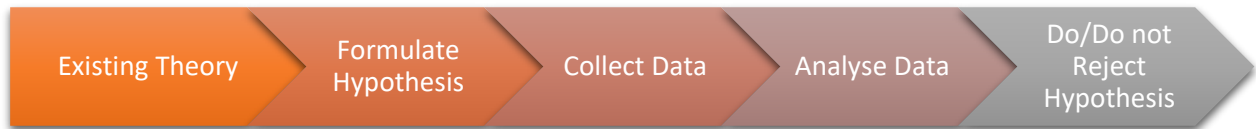
Figure 6.1: The Deductive Research Approach (Source: Streefkerk, 2019)

When conducting deductive research, Pandey (2019) stipulates that the researcher starts with a theory which is a result of inductive research. Deductive reasoning involves testing these theories. Therefore, to conduct deductive research a theory needs to exist already. The deductive methodology therefore looks at the suppositions relating to an existing theory and forms an opinion or declaration as characterised by Pandey (2019). This opinion suggests that the researcher moves from a hypothesis to the genuine perception. In other scholarly writing this approach is referred to as the "Top-Down" approach as shown on Figure 6.1 above.

Inductive Research Approach

As suggested by Azungah (2018), an inductive approach is best utilised when there is little or no existing literature on the phenomenon being studied. In this case an inductive approach is adopted as there is no theory to test. The inductive research approach consists of three stages as depicted on Figure 6.2 below:

Figure 6.2: The Inductive Research Approach (Source: Streefkerk, 2019)

Azungah (2019) further suggests that an inductive methodology is best utilised to consolidate broad crude content into a justifiable, understandable and brief configuration, thereby creating a model or hypothesis about the construction of the fundamental encounters or cycles inside the crude content information. Benitez-Correa et al. (2019) further support the definition by suggesting that inductive research involves searching for patterns within observations and developing explanations deriving from these observations to ultimately formulate a new

theory. No theories or hypotheses apply at commencement of inductive research and therefore the researcher is free to alter the direction of the research at any time after the research study has commenced (Benitez-Correa et al., 2019).

This study was a mixed method study, and its theory development thus utilsed both the deductive and inductive research processes. This informed the use existing theoretical frameworks, information from the literature review and empirical data jointly to develop the resulting emergent student access and success framework.

6.3   BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES WITHIN RESEARCH

Research methodologies differ from each other on the basis of theoretical and philosophical research viewpoints that guide researchers when they conduct their studies (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Furthermore, Al-Ababneh (2020) defines Epistemology as the nature of knowledge and Ontology as the nature of reality. Researchers can select the research methodology on the basis of philosophical issues including epistemology and ontology.

According to Crotty (1998), the research process consists of four very distinct elements that are depicted below on Figure 6.3. The four elements include epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods that inform each other. Each layer of the process below informs the following layer.
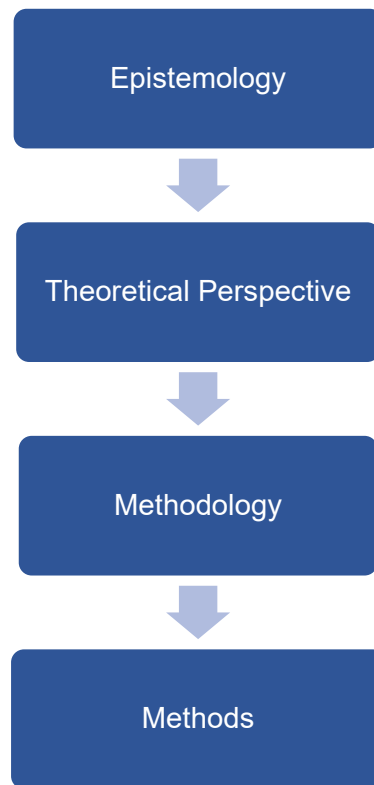
Figure 6.3: Elements of Research Process (Crotty, 1998)

The lead element of the research process is epistemology and Crotty (1998) posits that epistemology is inherent in the theoretical perspective as "a way of viewing the world and making sense of it". The major types of epistemologies include objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism.

The second element of the research process is theoretical perspective which describes the philosophical viewpoint that lies behind the selected methodology. It gives foundation to the main assumptions considered to choose a methodology. Major types of theoretical perspective are positivism, feminism, postmodernism, interpretivism and critical enquiry. Of these, the third element which is the research methodology forms the strategy and plan of action which is usually referred to as the research design. The methodology includes the selection of different research methods that can be used together with the implementation plan of that chosen method. Predominantly utilised methodologies include survey research, experimental research, grounded theory, phenomenological research, discourse analysis, heuristic inquiry, action research and feminist standpoint research. The final element of the research process is the research methods which refer to the techniques or procedures used to collect and analyse data on the basis of a hypothesis or research question. The major

research methods used include interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, observations, case studies, narratives, visual ethnographic methods, data reduction, statistical analysis, comparative analysis, theme identification, content analysis, conversation analysis, cognitive mapping, document analysis and life history (Crotty, 1998).

The research process is sometimes described as an onion that includes several layers, with each layer revealing the next until you reach the centre of the onion which includes the choice of data collection techniques and data analysis procedures (Saunders et al., 2009). This process is depicted graphically on Figure 6.4 below. The top layer represents the research philosophy relating to the nature and development of knowledge. The different research philosophies represented in this layer include pragmatism, positivism, realism and interpretivism. The second layer involves the researcher selecting a research approach which is either deductive or inductive. The third layer is the next step which is a selection of the research strategy which would be used to respond to the research questions namely, surveys, experiments, case studies, action research, ethnography, archival research and grounded theory. The fourth layer includes the research methods to collect data that can be used namely, mono-methods (qualitative or quantitative), mixed methods and multi-methods. The fifth layer includes the option of following a cross-sectional or longitudinal approach to collect data where the choice is determined by time available to conduct the research. Cross-sectional data is collected once over a short period of time while, longitudinal data is collected several times over a longer period of time. Lastly, the centre of the onion includes the core of research which includes data collection techniques and data analysis procedures (Saunders et al., 2009).
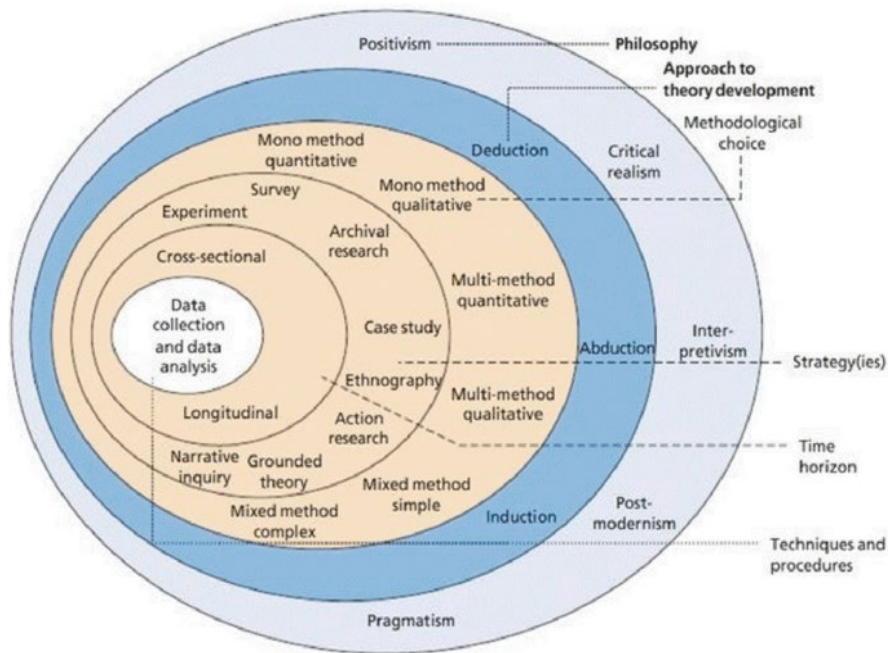
Figure 6.4: The Research Onion (Saunders et al 2009)

6.3.1 Epistemology

As defined by Al-Ababneh (2020), epistemology involves knowledge and embodies how we know what we know. Furthermore, Crotty (1998) identifies that epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge. Preceding Crotty, Maynard (1994) suggests that epistemology is concerned with the provision of philosophical grounding for knowledge and how we can ensure its legitimacy and adequacy. The three major types of epistemologies according to Crotty (1998) are objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism. Objectivism means that meaning and meaningful reality exists as is, separate from the operation of any consciousness and this represents the position social entities exist external to social actors in reality (Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) also defines Constructionism as the coming into existence of human engagement with worldly reality. The subject and the object together generate meaning. According to Saunders et al. (2009), Subjectivism suggests that social phenomena is created from perceptions and consequent actions of humans within the social setting.

6.3.2 Research Philosophy or Theoretical Perspective

The research methodology is determined by the philosophical stance described by a theoretical perspective as alluded to by Crotty (1998). The research philosophy is a useful element in determining which research design is appropriate for the study and why (Easterby-Smith et al., 1999). Saunders et al. (2009) in contrast considers a research philosophy as a

researcher in the process of developing knowledge. The authors describe four types of research philosophy which include pragmatism, interpretivism, realism and positivism, whereas Collis and Hussey (2003) have two-pronged separation of paradigms which include positivistic and interpretivist (phenomenological) paradigms.

Saunders et al. (2009) made a comparison of the four research philosophies in terms of Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology and Data Collection Techniques as presented in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1:   The Four Research Philosophies

CONCEPT	POSITIVISM	INTERPRETIVISM	REALISM	PRAGMATISM
Ontology	External, objective and independent of social actors.	Socially constructed, subjective, may change, multiple.	Is objective. Exists independently of human thoughts and beliefs or knowledge of their existence (realist), but is interpreted through social conditioning (critical relist).	External, multiple, view chosen to best enable answering of research question.
Epistemology	Only observable phenomena can provide credible data, facts. Focus on causality and law like generalisations, reducing phenomena to simplest elements.	Subjective meanings and social phenomena. Focus upon the details of situation, a reality details, subjective meanings motivating actions.	Observable phenomena provide credible data, facts. Insufficient data means inaccuracies in sensations (direct realism). Alternatively, phenomena create sensations which are open to misinterpretation on (critical realism). Focus on explaining within a context or contexts.	Either or both observable phenomena and subjective meanings can provide acceptable knowledge dependent upon the research question. Focus on practical applied research, integrating different perspectives to help interpret the data.

Axiology	Research is undertaken in a value-free way, the researcher is independent of the data and maintains an objective stance.	Research is value bound, the researcher is part of what is being researched, cannot be separated and so will be subjective.	Research is value laden; the researcher is biased by world views, cultural experiences and upbringing. These will impact on the research.	Values play a large role in interpreting results, the researcher adopting both objective and subjective points of view.
Data Collection Techniques	Highly structured, large samples, measurement, quantitative, but can use qualitative.	Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative.	Methods chosen must fit the subject matter, quantitative or qualitative.	Mixed or multiple method designs, quantitative and qualitative.

6.3.3   Understanding of What Research Can Add to Theory

Social Scientists and other academics have similar beliefs in relation to the definition of theory, however the exact nature of theory is still a contentious subject (Wacker, 1998). Some scholars have a strong belief that application of theory in the real world is very limited and unreliable, while others are of the opinion that in the academic world, there is very little theory that exists.

Over the years, theory has been defined in several ways by varied scholarly authors. As suggested by Fawcett and Downs (1986), theory is considered as the currency within the domain of scholars. Furthermore, Hunt (1991) postulates that academics point to a theory as having four standard components that include: definitions of terms of variables, a domain where the theory will apply, a collection of relationships between variables and lastly factual claims or predictions. These four components are what constitute the precision and limitations of a theory. Furthermore, theory is defined as an ordered set of assertions regarding a structure or universal behaviour assumed to hold true throughout a significantly expansive range of explicit instances (Sutherland, 1956). Researchers have simplified the definition of theory to meaning a statement of relationships between units observed or approximated in the empirical world (Wacker, 1998). Corley and Gioia (2011) support the views that a theory is a relationship of concepts that expresses how and why a phenomenon occurs. They further posit that a theory is made up of constructs linked together by propositions that have an underlying, coherent logic and related assumptions.

As alluded to by Daspit et al. (2018), a review of literature within the area of study is essential before a new theory can be developed. This relationship is depicted graphically in Figure 6.5 below termed as the Research Cycle. The diagram shows the interrelated convergence between theory and observations using either deductive or inductive approaches.
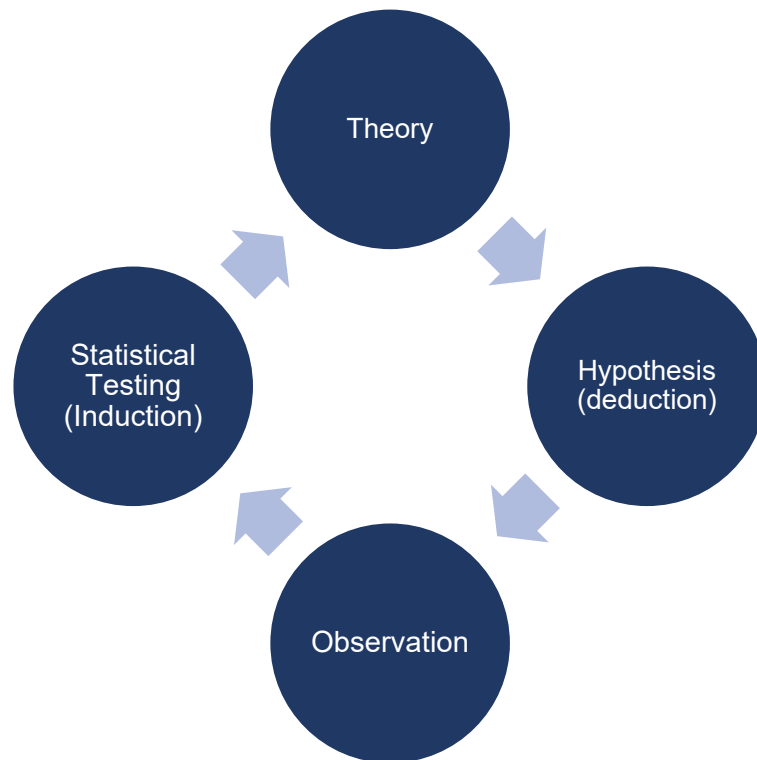
Figure 6.5: The Research Cycle

Daspit et al. (2018), Keating et al. (2020) and various other authors concur that a theory must fill the gap between science and practice in order to remain relevant. Its application in the real world is fundamental to its relevance as a theory.

6.3.4 Virtues of Good Theory

Although scientists have a diverse perspective on each virtue of 'good' theory with respect to their relevance and importance, there is widespread agreement in relation to what these virtues are. These virtues include uniqueness, parsimony, conservatism, generalizability, fecundity, internal consistency, empirical riskiness and abstraction (Quine & Ullian, 1980). Table 6.2 below is a table highlighting the key features and the importance of each virtue of good theory:

Table 6.2:   Virtues of "Good" Theory (Quine & Ullian, 1980)

Virtue	Key Feature	Why important for 'good' theory and for the development of the field
Uniqueness	The uniqueness virtue means that one theory must be differentiated from another.	If two theories are identical, they should be considered a single theory. Although it applies to all criteria for theory, this virtue directly applies to definitions since definitions are the most elemental of building blocks for theory.
Conservatism	A current theory cannot be replaced unless the new theory is superior in its virtues.	Therefore, current theory is not rejected for the sake of change. This criterion is needed so that when a new theory is proposed, there is a good reason to believe all other theories are lacking in some virtue (Popper, 1957).
Generalizability	The more areas that a theory can be applied to makes the theory a better theory.	If one theory can be applied to one type of environment, and another theory can be applied to many environments, then the second theory is the more virtuous theory since it can be more widely applied. Some authors call this virtue the utility of the theory since those theories that have wider application have more importance.
Fecundity	A theory which is more fertile in generating new models and hypotheses is better than a theory that has fewer hypotheses	Theories which expand the area of investigation into new conceptual areas are considered superior to theories which investigate established research areas.
Parsimony	The parsimony virtue states, other things being equal, the fewer the assumptions the better.	If two theories are equal in all other aspects, the one with fewer assumptions and fewer definitions is more virtuous. This virtue also includes the notion that the simpler the explanation, the better the theory. This virtue keeps theories from becoming too complex and incomprehensible.
Internal Consistency	Internal consistency means the theory has identified all relationships and gives adequate explanation.	Internal consistency refutation means that the theory logically explains the relationships between variables. The more logically the theory explains the variables and predicts the subsequent event, the better the theory is. This internal consistency virtue means that the theories entities and relationships must be internally compatible using symbolic logic or mathematics. This internal consistency means that the concepts and relationships are logically compatible with each other.
Empirical Riskiness	Any empirical test of a theory should be risky. Refutation	If there are two competing theories, the theory that predicts the most unlikely

Virtue	Key Feature	Why important for 'good' theory and for the development of the field
	must be very possible if theory is to be considered a 'good' theory.	event is considered the superior theory. In the opposite case, if the theory predicts a very likely event, then it is not seen as being a very valuable theory. This criterion is sometimes put in a different way: "Every good theory has at least one prohibition; it prohibits certain things from happening" (Popper, 1957).
Abstraction	The abstraction level of theory means it is independent of time and space. It achieves this independence by including more relationships.	The abstraction level means it is better to integrate many relationships and variables into a logical theory. If one of two competing theories integrates more internally consistent concepts, it is more virtuous than a theory that integrates fewer internally consistent relationships.

All the virtues of 'good' theory are highly significant for theory-building, however the relative weighting applied to each virtue is very important when comparing two or more theories as we know virtues trade off with one another. Popper (1957) however hypothesises that the empirical riskiness and the internal consistency virtues are generally considered to be the most important since without refutation the theory becomes redundant.

In the scholarly world, evidence shows that theory has been excessively streamlined for convenience reducing the relevance and accuracy of prediction of the theory. It is therefore extremely fundamental that a researcher has a good understanding of what constitutes a good theory before developing one. A theory must therefore be known to have an "Explanatory Power" which entails the ability to foresee and clarify a real-world phenomenon. It is also important for a good theory to be falsifiable.

6.4 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THEORY BUILDING

6.4.1 Strengths

Uri (2015) highlights that deductive theories are moulded from experiences and therefore can be used to predict genuine real-world phenomena. Furthermore, theories allow the researcher to give a summative view of several studies and amalgamate a number of ideologies of learning. Scientists and academics view theories as affirmations of real-world occurrences (Sorensen et al., 2019). Keating et al. (2020) amongst other authors agree that scholarly

studies are not possible without theory as a basis and therefore are viewed as the currency for academic exploration.

6.4.2   Limitations

Theories, as postulated by Belkoniene (2017), may be incredibly complex given the rigorous use of empirical evidence to inform the framework. This is a result of overwhelming availability of data relating to the study phenomenon being observed, tempting researchers to encapsulate all the information gathered into the theory. A different point of view as posited by Jaakkola (2020) is that other researchers avoid using all the data observed and therefore eventually develop an excessively oversimplified theory that leaves out relevant viewpoints, leading to the oversight of significant and applicable ideologies. Although theories can be extremely viable the above limitations can lead to the production of an irrelevant theory that may fail to bring clarity to the phenomenon being researched.

6.4.3   From Theory to the praxis of Theory-Development

The foundations of a strong theory as proposed by Dankasa (2015) should be simple, interconnected, be able to predict and explain. Dankasa further posits that theories begin with insights that have to be developed into concepts and relationships, these concepts and relationships are then connected and integrated into a whole. Such a presentation of a theory id foregrounded by the understanding that the author should has the readers in mind when constructing a theory.

As succinctly defined in the preceding sections of this chapter, the researcher followed the described processes to collect all the emerging themes from the data collected, combined with findings from the review of literature to formulate a conceptual framework for predicting and guiding the user relating to openness, to promote student success and further identify a set of recommendations as graphically depicted on Figure 6.6 below:

6.5   PRESENTATION OF THE STUDENT MULTI-CONTEXT ACCESS AND SUCCESS CORRECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK

The presentation of cultural dependent openness dimensions and factors emerging through literature review and findings of the study that in informed the framework blow as presented in figure 6.6 below. The framework is proposed to use as a reference point that offers a means of conceptualising the complex considerations of openness and influence of context based

institutional factors in support of advancing student success outcomes in ODeL Education settings.

A FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT MULTI-CONTEXT ACCESS AND SUCCESS
CORRECTIVE FACTORS

National Policy and Institutional Political interfaces

INPUT

| OPENNESS AND ACCESS CONTRIBUTORS | → | REMEDIAL INTERVENTIONS | → | SUCCESS MOTIVATORS |

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS
- o Policy inclusiveness
- o Student readiness assessment tools
- o Technology adoption accommodations
- o Provision affordability

→ Proactive and responsive policy provision →

- o Student funding
- o ODeL orientation programmes
- o Simplified curriculum
- o Extended programme provision
- o Technology planning

TEACHER – LEARNER CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS
- o Student/ Staff Workloads
- o Support and Engagement
- o Content delivery models
- o Non-adoptive learning systems

→ Collective and collaborative human intervention →

- o Co-curricular provision
- o Flexible pedagogies
- o Programme and content delivery models
- o Engaged online teacher programmes
- o Collaborative learning strategies
- o Student/Lecturer ratios for ODeL
- o Decentralised discipline-based resource allocation models

ENVIRONMENTAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS
- o Coherent regional models
- o Decentralisation models
- o Support systems
- o Staff skills and attributes

→ Avant-garde systems readiness →

- o Decentralized regional models
- o Staff development
- o Community engagement

OUTCOMES

National Policy and Institutional Political interfaces

6.5.1   Description of the different components of the framework

The components of the proposed framework presented in figure 6.6 were shaped during presentation and discussion of the research findings in Chapter five. The term openness has remained elusive with multiple interpretations. This study advanced an interpretation of openness to be wide and encompassing all university functions, practices and interfaces in support of students to succeed. A systems thinking approach is advocated in the study that looks to assert the student learning journey is comprised by a multiplicity of experiences that continuously interface within the academy, support learning environments with their peers, their socio-economic conditions in society. These interfaces must be monitored and be informed by student engagement and experiences is important if universities are to maintain healthy enrolments and produce quality outcomes.

The framework presented in figure 6.6 is a graphical illustration of a formal guiding principle that interfaces the access and success factors within a multi-context setting such as Unisa. The researcher developed this framework with the main aim of promoting the use of openness principles and institutional approaches to identify applicable dimensions of openness to advance the relationship in access and success imperatives of the university. The framework emphasises a shared institutional understanding of openness and centrally locates student support factors at the centre of the success agenda. The literature review related to the open education and findings of the study were integrated into three identified factors:

   i.   Institutional factors
  ii.   Teacher – learner contributory factors
 iii.   Environmental and geographical factors

Every university utilises performance indicators and focussing on benchmarks using evidence-based research approaches to inform the many facets of university operations. Thus, the operational indicators must be aligned to these factors to allow for measurable deliverables in the outcomes.

From the systems approach thinking, the framework constitutes the following eight (8) key dimensions, as identified in chapter three of the conceptual framework:

   a.   Access and admission
   b.   Pedagogy
   c.   Assessment
   d.   Student experience and engagement
   e.   Policy and Governance

f.   Institutional Culture

g.   Quality

h.   Technology

The above dimensions were then grouped and linked together to follow an input, process and output approach as depicted in figure 6.6. The groupings are then segregated into 3 segments of:

I.   Openness and Access contributors

II.   Remedial interventions

III.   Success motivators

Openness and access contributors as input factors providing the necessary principles consideration that must be considered by the institution in promoting access, positive relationship between the student and the lecturer and regional considerations if the institution comprises of satellite campuses such as Unisa. Drawing from the meanings of openness, these contributors are all encompassing and are underpinned by the definition of openness as inclusivity, access, flexibility, autonomy and self-directedness.

The openness and access contributors are divided into three main factors as identified above, institutional factors as institutionally determined drivers that should influence the factors at individual levels driven by the relational interactions between the student and the lecturer to achieve success outcomes in their learning journey. Teacher – Learner relational contributory factors are central to the student engagement their experiences in the classroom. The Environmental and geographical factors consider the locations of the students and the support students must be afforded where they are located and the interfaces of the community and the regional learning centres that support students.

The factors identify several critical indicators as for advancing of openness principles as input contributors. These indicators as factor can draw on an extensive range of institutional consideration and strategic directions and measures that have been shown to have an impact on the quality of student learning and the student and staff experiences in their interactions. The list below provides openness contributors their associated factors and considerations of indicators:

i.   Institutional factors

a.   Policy inclusiveness

b.   Student readiness assessment tools

c.   Technology adoption accommodations

d.   Provision affordability

ii.Teacher – Learner relational factors

 a. Student/ Staff Workloads

 b. Support and Engagement

 c. Content delivery models

 d. Non-adoptive learning systems

iii.Environmental and geographical factors.

 a. Coherent regional models

 b. Decentralisation models

 c. Support systems

 d. Staff skills and attributes

There are a range of internal and external pressures that can influence the direction and emphasis of institutions, thus; it is important for institutions to consider national policy and institutional political interfaces as these vary from one institution to another. External factors such as country laws, qualification frameworks and quality regulatory frameworks, can, and will influence institutional decisions thus, policy alignment is key to drive such considerations.

Table 6.3 below outlines some indicators that the institution can consider developing an initial evaluation template on the identification of openness and access contributors.

Table 6.3: Template for Openness contribution measures, remedial interventions and outcomes adopted from Economides & Perifanou, 2018

Openness/Access contributors	Available/ Not available	Low	Medium	High	Remedial Intervention	Outcomes
Policy Drivers in Admissions, Teaching, Assessments and Support						
Learning and progression paths						
Academic event Scheduling						
Delivery modes						
Interaction modes						
Lecturer to student ratios						
Infrastructure						

Once the openness and access contributors have been identified as aligned to the mission and strategic direction of the institution, intervention for implementation must be identified and adopted in a prioritized manner as the process factor of the framework. To operationalized interventions and processing of institutional landscape, the intervention results serve to support the implementation of a systematic targeted intervention strategy for improvement. The remedial interventions operationalize the strategies and the output considerations are represented by the success motivators which serve as outcomes from the remedial interventions. The indicators of success motivators such as increment in funding, ODeL orientation programmes and the engaged online teacher programmes are provided as exemplary considerations for outcomes measured over a period time as identified in figure 6.6.

6.5.2   Benefits of the framework

The framework is uniquely informed by the integration of literature and empirical evidence founded on the findings from both quantitative and qualitative phases as presented in Chapter five. The inclusion of both the literature and empirical evidence provides and important interface of openness dimensions and associated factors thus, providing a complex understanding of the gaps in promoting of student support initiatives that advances success motivator that assist in student

retention and persistence. It is also recognised that due to the complexity of the development of framework, it may not deliver the exclusive institutional indicators as these will be informed by the strategic direction and imperatives of a specific university.

The framework provides a tool by which an institution can interrogate and reflect on its advancement of openness practices, identify sources of evidence to support student success outcomes that allows for the implementation of a process of review and monitoring, all whilst working towards its own mission, strategies and goals. McEwen and Wills (2011) firmly directs us on a useful technique of evaluating the usefulness of a framework and provides the criteria of clarity, consistency, simplicity, generality, accessibility and significance. The framework aligns well with these criteria and simplicity is centrally located in its design and applicability.

A number of institutions will find that most of the concepts, practices and strategies suggested in the framework are already in place to support students, but the framework adds a benefit of cohering all these practices and additional considerations in a coherent and cohesive approach applying a systems approach in advancing student support and success. University will understand better its strengths and weaknesses comprehensively in a period of time. The framework allows a lens through which they it facilitate and direct decision-making more systematically and to assist it in making informed decisions on issues affecting students and improvement measures in supporting their learning journeys.

The intersections of academic and student support are critical in driving student success and the framework centres such interfaces and a collaborative approach in student support. By segregating, institutional, learner-teacher, environmental and geographical factors in this manner anchors the framework across the core function of the institution, hence its mutli-context applicability.

The institutional factors are grounded by the policy context of the university in advancing opportunities to learning, infrastructure and student quality. Open education is about removing barriers and the framework aligns itself this principle but goes a step further in ensuring that the opportunities provided to student in accessing education are met with the requisite support and an institutional understanding of support measures to ensure that they also succeed. The institutional contextual considerations are important and thus, the framework provides flexibility in its adoption by any institution in its usage for individual institutions interested in improving practice and as benchmarking tool across the sector, region even across the continent. The development of the framework and its identified factors are critical for quality and improvement to learning conditions for students learning and represents a marked shift in the focus of learning support in the South African contexts where the majority of the populace suffered intentional and deliberate exclusions to education.

The framework allows diverse approaches to its implementation whilst ensuring consistency that any university can benchmark and work espcially concerning dimensions of openness. The diverse applicability of the framework advances a contextualized application, and the university can apply it across its varied core functions or practices of teaching, learning, research, and community engagement. Each university function can apply the principles of openness and apply them in their own way, followed by measuring the outcomes in the particular areas of need whilst keeping to the same set of principles and the same set of system measurements towards the same evidence-based led definitions of best practice in open education.

For the institution under study, the researcher applied eight dimensions of openness and the influence for the factors across the key identified areas of improvements as per the outcomes of the qualitative phase outcomes in chapter 5, identified by the research respondents. The factors and indicators are informed by what was considered priority and evaluation template can further assist in understanding the degree of application of these indicators.

The benefit of the framework is further identified in terms of holistic considerations in strategy directions for the university in terms of the "what" through the identified principles of openness and the "how" in application and operationalization and adoption of best practices in open education.

The framework advances collaboration among the varied units within the academic and support spaces in promoting student success outcomes. Student learning experience must be placed centrally through this collaboration and sustainability of the improvements in success outcomes. The strength of the access and success factors through the application of a multi-context framework is its recognition of the diverse needs of institutions but whilst allowing context to inform the best practice in openness principles and applications that are prioritized by the institution. The process of collaboration can be led by applying both a bottom-up and top-down approach of engagement, with either the university management leading through the policy dimension and associated factors of policy inclusiveness, strategies on regional models or the lower-level practitioners or functionaries leading in functions of technology, quality for the achievement of a high standard of education provision. The flexibility and diversified applicability of the framework are the most beneficial and valuable contributions of the framework.

6.5.3   Limitations of the Framework

McEwen and Wills (2014) identify that theory development provides the degree of usefulness to guide practice, research, education and administration. Such degrees of evaluations give insight into relationships among concepts and their linkages to each other and allows the reviewer to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the theory. McEwen and Wills (2011) further identify that a model is evaluated using the criteria of clarity, consistency, simplicity, generality, accessibility

and significance. Belkoniene (2017) identify further that theory development may be incredibly complex given the rigorous use of empirical evidence to inform the framework and that this may be a result of overwhelming availability of data relating to the study phenomenon being observed, tempting researchers to encapsulate all the information gathered into the theory.

The researcher acknowledges that this research was data rich, looking at the amounts of empirical evidence that was gathered. This might lead to challenges relating to simplification of the framework, thus presenting it in some contexts as complex. Due to the complexity of the openness phenomenon, the framework does not provide the exclusive factors and indicators of openness and the list of such indicators can be exhaustive.

The framework does not specify the factors and indicators as these must be informed by the institutional context but there are associated limitations with this approach in that it may lead to the development or identification of too many factors and indicators pursuing different goals. Such an approach may result in incoherent strategic directions hence the need to apply and be consistent in the systems thinking approaches and not see factors as individual events but rather as a combination of many interactions allowing a holistic view of the institution.

Klempin & Karp (2018) assert that the provision of support for adoptions of new concepts and reforms at a university can be both diverse in scope and diffuse in delivery and as a result, the development of streamlined and integrated evaluation tools and strategies to measure the extent to which these reforms are being successfully delivered can be challenging. The diverse applicability of the framework may limit the asset of this framework, resulting in diffusion and complexities at implementation level.

The key concepts of open education and associated openness factors including all the related concepts of the framework, were defined and graphically, as presented in figure 6.6.

Increasing openness and adoption of its principles necessitates understanding and unpacking the concept of openness itself, argues McNally & Christiansen (2019), and the absence or limitation of such and understanding could limit the optimal application of the student multi-context access and success corrective factors framework. The development of the framework demonstrated that the most fundamental and often compromising element of any models is the lack of a shared understanding of concepts. The researcher acknowledges that the application of this framework depends on the context, educational and a shared understanding levels and principles of openness. As asserted by Botes (2002), concepts are the basic building blocks of scientific knowledge or theoretical frameworks for any discipline. The strength of the theories that guide a discipline is dependent on the quality of the concept analysis (Botes, 2002).

Not only in its development but also in application of the framework, shared understanding and development of awareness across all the dimensions and factors of openness, access and success and the increased recognition of the value propositions of the openness principles in the day-today operations of the university are a necessary requirement. The lack of consistence in understanding of the meaning and definitions of openness principles would lead to incoherence in application and this need to be addressed right from the onset and agreement is central. The diversity and flexibility of the framework is driven on common understanding and coherence in the openness principles.

The proposed framework is based on the teaching and learning contexts of a university focused at undergraduate levels. The framework thus provides a limited understanding of the gaps in other core functions of the university such as research and associated practices. These incoherent and ambiguities in the commonality of understanding of the scholarship on openness within the same institution and functionaries may results in fragmentation at implementation level and this must be guarded against.

A further consideration are the institutional cultures which can influence the implementation and adaptability of the framework. Institutions must be considered as living organisations informed by the lived experiences of students, staff and management. Implementing reforms requires a significant commitment of financial and staff resources, and college leaders want to know whether a new technology is likely to be successful at their particular institution before committing those resources. Klempin & Karp (2018) assert that common understanding of new concepts can help leaders decide whether to implement any reform, identify approaches that may increase end-user adoption, or decide to postpone implementing a reform in order to first ensure that the institution is ready for its adoption, thus organizational behavior and departmental cultures are critical.

The development of the framework is informed by the local realities of the institution located in South Africa as a developing country, the application of the framework is limited by this context i.e. local applicability. This local applicability of the framework limits the framework's application in other context such as in developed countries where open education models are advanced. The generality of the framework can still be applied in advanced education contexts but the factors need to be considered closely to align to the mission and strategic considerations of that institution. At a general level of application, the framework allows for institutional reflections on their practices by looking at the institutional, learner – teacher, environmental and geographical factors and align them to the mission and vision, organisational management structures, policies, governance and decision-making systems and the institution's role in the community.

In its limitations, the framework does not seek to provide a model for specific student success outcome or stage. Rather, it is designed to bring wide display of theoretical considerations of openness principles and associated factors on how their application in specific contexts can be

considered holistically to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ways that policymakers and practitioners may intervene to effectively promote student success.

6.5.4   Implications for future research and benefits for future researchers

The researcher believes that such type of openness studies in a developing country's context should first focus on how current legislation advances the open education agenda and how the agenda is located institutionally. Openness principles are accepted as guided by the social justice tenets, thus heightened levels of awareness of these principles must exist. Therefore, future researchers should focus effective implementation of student support interventions guided by these principles. Thereafter, it would become meaningful to conduct research to explore institutional factors in order to develop a context driven integrated student success framework.

Previous research in ODeL has largely focused on the open education practices utilising unit of analysis in the varied subject matters of open education. This study provided a differing approach in understanding openness from a holistic view and academic and support dimension and illustrated interactions in the factors that influence student success outcomes. This study provided multiple research propositions to enhance understanding and application of openness to improve institutional services to students, teaching and learning approaches as a collaborative approach. The application of an exploratory approach to openness provided a substantial foundation for the framework development and thus its application is descriptive and explanatory. In order to test its explanatory and descriptive value, other researchers should have tested utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The conceptual framework demonstrates that more empirical work is required to establish the most effective ways to manage the situational factors of openness that affect and impact a student's capacity to success in higher education.

The framework is a noteworthy contribution within the context of a developing country to knowledge in that it outlines a comprehensive and holistic understanding in the varied interpretations of openness and how these meaning can be brough together in coherent manner to improved student outcomes. The framework, a first for the university under this study, represents the breadth of student support. The simplicity of the framework allows for the development of integrated tools and practice to effect desired student outcomes.

In the future, educators and researchers can benefit from the simplicity of the framework and its applicability adopting a systems approach thinking in cohering student support interventions to support student success outcomes. The framework is not a definitive tool to support institutional

interventions but should be considered by researchers as a work in progress and that is acquiescent to further developments.

The framework is a combination of literature and is empirical evidence-lead. In fact, it is informed by many research sources in open education, distance education with a number of subject areas such OERs, MOOCS, Technology, Teaching, Learning, Quality, student engagement, student persistence, Policy and Governance. This mix of literature sources and empirical evidence sets it apart from predecessor studies that might have relied on either one or the combination of both. Success is a process (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017) thus, the framework provides meaningful contributions in the field of ODeL and aims to assist institutions and emerging scholars in a shared understanding of openness and further provide opportunities for reflection and improvement in students' total learning environments, context and culture.

Kinzie & Kuh (2017) argue that precursors to student success rate shortcomings such as race-ethnicity, gender, first-generation among others must be better understood and the proximal causes addressed as such this study provides a lens to which environments such as in developing countries can be reviewed utilising existing tools and advance them to better their efficacies in application.

As a conceptual framework, the tool can benefit from further studies in integrated system approaches as many institutions still grapple with legacy student information systems, lags in adapting to new models of technologies, dated admissions and advancement efforts which discourages collaboration chronic data integrity issues. New approaches to university systems as a starting point to emphasise reflections in practice to the entire student lifecycle experiences are still needed.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the development of a student multi-context access and success corrective factors framework on how these factors can influence success outcomes of students. The framework was constructed by applying the various components that emerged from the study results. The major components of the framework related to this conceptual model were identified and explained. Discussion of each component of the framework brought more clarity of its development and applicability.

The chapter presented the strengths, limitations and concluded with some guidance on the future use of the informed by contextual considerations. Open education is a tool for social change, argues Economides & Perifanou (2018) and once higher education institutions fully embrace openness and transparency in their day-to-day practices, the adoption of innovative ways to support students provides a meaningful of engaging with the social justice aspirations, in particular ODeL institutions.

Fostering student success requires meaning and shared understanding of the challenges confronting students from marginalised backgrounds. Creating and sustaining conditions that increase the educational achievements for this cohort of students remains an elusive goal for institutions (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005). The development of this conceptual framework attempts to bring forth ways in which institutions can adopt a comprehensive and holistic way in supporting students through collaborative and reflective practices in the various institutional interventions once access imperative has been achieved.

The development of a framework further identified factors of openness in supporting students for quality learning outcomes represents a shift in the focus on learning experiences of marginalised student cohorts at universities. The use of this framework to develop a range of indicators to measure student support intervention and assessment of success outcomes inform institutional and learning practices as informed by contextual considerations in terms of the needs of these students.

The flexibility of the framework and its diversified applicability is the strength of the tool as it provides means by which an institution can interrogate its practices, identify sources of evidence and interventions that student support student learning experiences and success considerations whilst working towards its own mission and goals.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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7.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter seven focuses on the conclusion the study and provides a brief overview in terms of the key research findings, recommendations and the limitations experienced while conducting the research. The unique contributions of the study are also discussed: open education, its practices, student engagement, and services to marginalised student cohorts at a university. The primary purpose of this study was to explore the concepts of openness and student support to marginalised student populations and how the associated factors of openness influenced openness in practice and impacted success outcomes of students. To achieve this purpose and the research objectives, the researcher employed the exploratory sequential mixed method study design, which is qualitative, quantitative, exploratory, and contextual in nature. The study aimed also at developing a student success framework for integration, that is, access contributors in openness and associated success motivators that can be employed by universities in supporting students in both the academy and the support enterprise services and practice. Thus, the framework identified the linkage of factors and contextual based indicators in the student multi-context access and success corrective factors was developed as outlined in chapter six. The study comprised of three phases, Phase one involved a situational analysis component which was a retrospective review and analysis of policy and documents of the institution under study. Phase two was a qualitative enquiry and analysis involving individual, student focus group interviews. Phase three concluded the phases with a quantitative enquiry involving a self-complete questionnaire by staff and students.

During the qualitative phase, semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were held with staff segregated into categories of management, academic staff, administrative and middle management. Four focus group interviews were also held with students in the Limpopo and Gauteng provinces where a total of 32 participants elucidated insights about their lived experiences as students and the study phenomenon. The last phase, a quantitative enquiry concluded the data collection where surveys were conducted with staff and students, this phase was employed as a numerical comparisons phase to draw correlational inferences with the qualitative phase in an attempt to verify or refute the hypothesis of the study to be able to reach rational conclusions.

This multi-phase mixed method approach allowed the gathering of empirical data and enabled the participants to describe their experiences freely without any influence from the researcher.

The complex and multi-dimensional nature of the research question central to the study guided the researcher toward the mixed method research design so as to address a complex understanding

of a research problem. The results and findings of the study were then discussed in chapter five, focusing on the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data elicited from the primary data sources identified in each phase. A summative discussion of key emergent findings from the different phases was conducted with the primary intention of contextualizing the findings from this study with prevailing discourses within the study area.

To this date, there are no similar studies that integrate the multi-context application of openness, reflecting on the openness phenomenon from a social justice lens and the identification of openness dimensions with associated factors to influence the support intervention of institutions where student success outcomes can be improved. Therefore, the findings of this study will assist to strengthen the body of knowledge in open and distance education and of the openness principles in practice and application in access, success and student support. It is anticipated that data collected in this study will also be valuable for planning of university core functions and services both at strategic and operational levels. The study further serves as a critical lever to carry further studies to know more about the concept of openness and its associated dimensions.

7.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to explore the concept of openness in the context of ODeL, to identify and describe the range of institutional, learner and teacher-related openness factors that contribute to access and success outcomes during the study journeys of university students. Particular focus was on previously disadvantaged learners or marginalised students. The study aimed to critically assess the nature and contribution openness and its impact on learner access and success patterns. Secondly, the study sought to develop a framework to reflect on the influence and interfaces of the identified openness factors to help understand how their contribution could improve outcomes of success for students in their learning experiences. The study sought to respond to the question of how openness and implementation of the discourse has influenced access and success among disadvantaged previously marginalised student populations and what remedial interventions can be considered to improve student success outcomes.

7.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A multi-approach exploratory mixed-method research design was used to explore the openness concept, its principles and its implementation as a vehicle for student access and success in higher education, with particular reference to a comprehensive open and distance learning institution. The factors of openness were identified with the use of dimensions of openness as informed by available literature sources. The sequential exploratory mixed methods research design was chosen as the appropriate design for this study because of the complex phenomenon of openness. Singularly using either quantitative or qualitative methodologies was not sufficient to answer the research

questions. Therefore, the study employed the mixed method design premised on the acceptance that qualitative methodologies were needed to ascertain the factors of openness and the quantitative method was required to correlate the factors of access and success that could be viewed to promote the openness discourse and its implementation. These factors were used to widen the scope of openness dimensions as informed by the literature identified in chapter two. Thus, the study was informed by various facts from different sources, to produce comprehensive insights, and to triangulate findings in order to develop the openness access and success framework (Creswell, Klassen & Plano Clark, 2011). The multiple methodologies utilised within this mixed method research represented an appropriate approach to the study as they offered insight and meaning that might otherwise be missed in mono-method approaches and arguably producing more complete knowledge to inform practice and policy.

The qualitative phase (phase 2) was viewed as central to the study as it provided the participants' verbal reports about their lived experiences as the primary data in the exploration of the institution and their understanding of openness concepts and factors, the influences of these in their situated contexts. Fletcher (2017) argues that the research participants are the authors of their own settings and experiences and the role of the researcher is to maintain a constructive and sympathetic neutrality, in the hopes of compiling a definitive description of the world according to the participants' views. The individual and focus group interviews thus provided meaningful insights in the practices, interfaces of students and staff within the institution.

Fletcher (2017) further advances the view that the participant is the first-person perspective and then researcher conveys it to science as a third-person perspective. This process, therefore, required the researcher to listen to the participants and take what they said in totality, but to also observe everything available around them, including the participants' bodily responses, environment and interfaces among themselves with each other and institutional documentary evidence provided by relevant sources or other studies. Thus, the management of phase one, phase two and integration of both into the qualitative phase of the study was critical.

The last phase (phase 3) as the correlational design was used to reflect of the findings of phase one and two to gave expressions of the research objectives. The quantitative phase applied a simple approach to identify patterns and correlations within the numbers from the survey instruments disseminated to staff and students.

Speziale Streubert & Carpenter (2011) identify that the researcher, as an instrument, is a characteristic of qualitative research and the researcher as an instrument requires an acceptance that the researcher is part of the study. They argue that because the researcher is the observer, interviewer or the interpreter of various aspects of the inquiry, objectivity serves no purpose and thus it was deemed appropriate to correlate the qualitative phase through the quantitative phase of

the study. The researcher's participation in the inquiry has the potential to add to the richness of data collection and analysis (Speziale, Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). Wilson (2004) indicate that apart from observation instruments and strategies, including open and structured interviews, the researcher becomes the instrument of observation and sees for herself first-hand how people act and interact in specific settings. The interface of the researcher and the research enquiry provided a significant value in how the concept of openness is viewed with its multiple meanings, interpretations and application in education practices.

7.4 SUMMARY OF KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

7.4.1 Discoveries from the situational analysis (Phase one)

The situational analysis provided the researcher with an opportunity to retrieve and analyse institutional data which included reviewing important access and student success quantitative data over an eight (8) year period (2012 – 2019). Further analysis with a critical appraisal of institutional qualitative decision documents from the governance structures and policy documents. The statistical data analysis revealed comparative college student performances as analysed over an 8-year period and the performance of the College of Education over the eight-year period was observed to have been substantially higher than most of the other colleges. This was especially notable given the student headcount which ranged from 72 615 to 114 002 over the period under study. The high student numbers and relatively high graduation rates found at the College of education were similar to those found within the College of Human Sciences, and for that reason, the latter represents an interesting comparison to College of Education outcomes.

The domains related data demonstrated that different types of qualifications have historically and continue to have differing access levels for the varied student groups. The Graduate School of Business Leadership (SBL) reflected the highest graduation rate overall when compared to other colleges at the university. For example, the data obtained revealed a graduation rate of 42.2% in 2018, while its lowest recorded rate during the index period was 19.6% in 2013. The average maintained over the 8 years. The College of Science, Engineering and Technology (CSET) a relatively small college had the highest graduation rate per registered student was 8.5%, recorded in 2019, whilst by contrast, the lowest graduation rate was 4.5% in 2012. The average graduation rate over the 8 years was 7.2%.

This observation confirmed the long-held contentions about how some disciplines appear to have disproportionate levels of access and success representations when compared to others. For example, as noted by the DHET (2019) and the PSA (2016) reports, the South African higher education system remains skewed and such contradicts the ambitions of a developmental country. Normally, in such countries, students tend to be prefer theoretical and formative degree studies at

universities as opposed to much needed concentrations in particular skills. Technical and vocational fields of Science and Engineering, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subject areas have had historically lower graduation outcomes in distance education and representation of women and/or individuals from marginalised groups thus, the data reviewed continue to reflect such patterns.

On the aspects of government bursary funding, the results confirmed disproportionately low graduation rates among students that applied for NSFAS funding and were unsuccessful. Evidence analysed suggests that access to NSFAS served as an important access factor and in basic terms, the status of whether or not students received this funding, act as determining factors in whether or not, they could study. It was observed on the rates of graduation amongst successful NSFAS applicants that success outcomes were significantly higher than those depicted amongst non-successful applicants. The numbers of successful funding applications between 2012 and 2018 and in this, 2017 (41725) and 2018 (16147) concurred with the widely held view about lack of financial support and the likely resulting negative implications on graduation. Given this, the attainment of NSFAS funding represented a noteworthy contributing factor in determining whether or not students gained access to and endured in their studies which confirms high levels of persistence in marginalised students who access funding.

The institutional documents provided the policy guidance, strategic priority directions of the university together with wide ranging interventions and activities that fell into two categories of data:

a.   Policies and practice guidance that specifically focused on increasing university inclusivity and access to specified vulnerable groups.

b.   Documents that related to ancillary policies and guidance that does not specifically relate to openness, access and success issue, but may positively impact student success.

The review of the documents observed deliberate and intentional approaches on advancing access, student support and success. It was however unclear if these emergent themes found expression in practice across the varied functions of the university. The institutional framing on the matter of access was observed to be sound and advancing a well understood concept of openness from an access dimension and creation of opportunities to learning with an appreciation of challenges confronting its student body. The business model and transition of the institution from ODL to ODeL provision provided meaningful consideration and developments of technology in the mediation of learning and value propositions, it presented to both the students and the academy in teaching and learning. The revised models further advanced a shift from considerations of a homogenous student body applying a one size fits all approach to learning support recognizing the centrality of the academic programmes to learning and introduces, heterogeneity, flexibility and variation in terms of substance and pace between disciplines. Despite adequate policy provisions to support students

with access and technology devices for learning activities, it was observed that provisions had not gone long enough to assist students in practice. Accessibility met with poor and unstable technology platforms suggests that the policy principles had not yet been realized in practice.

7.4.2 Qualitative Research Findings (Phase 2)

The phase involved individual interviews (n=19) that were carried with staff segregated into three categories management, academic, administrative, and middle management. Interactions with such a sample size allowed for more in-depth questions, and the qualitative nature of the engagements allowed for deep illuminating responses and detail. A substantive proportion of participants n=9 (47%) fell within the category of academic staff management followed by n=6 (32%), Management and only n=4 (21%) represented the Administrative Middle Management category which also included staff in the professional designations such as quality assurance practitioners and educational technologists. Participants were asked open-ended questions seeking to elicit their understanding of the current policies and guidelines related openness its principles and associated dimensions. The questions were meant to give participants freedom to express themselves and share as much as they could information on what they considered the drivers of openness and application of the drivers in practice.

7.4.2.1 Results of the individual interviews

The results revealed that all participants (n=19) were aware openness principles and their association with the social justice tenets. A shared common understanding of openness was however identified as an impediment to the operationalization of openness in the institution. Staff workloads emerged as a topical and factor that requires urgent attention. The staff workload factor was deepened with issues associated with teaching skills and competencies required in ODeL. The themes that emerged from the participants were grouped to inform three main interlinked factors as:

a.   Institutional factors
b.   Teacher – learner contributory factors
c.   Environmental and geographical factors

The regional model as an environmental and geographical factor was identified as a barrier of access to learning and an impediment to optimal student learning conditions. The regional localities were identified as very ineffective, and the institutional approaches of centralizing student services and support further inhibited the relations between the lecturers and students.

7.4.2.2   *Student focus groups*

As part of phase two, focus group interviews (n=4) were conducted with the students. The researcher visited multiple sites across the different regions in which the university had provincial offices and campuses. The intent was to ensure that the mix of regions represented both urban and rural centres of the university. Multi-site data collection was opted for as a means of promoting variability in the responses elicited by the researcher. The focus group comprised of a total of 32 students split into 4 groups, two in Limpopo (n=12 & 6) and two groups in Gauteng (n=8 & 6). The sessions comprised of smaller groups with a maximum of 12 students in Limpopo whilst Gauteng had a maximum of 8 students in a group.

The results revealed that all the focus groups reverberated a theme of information security which was deemed critical and an area that required urgent institutional attention. The students voiced a need for strengthen information security and that their information was being compromised by university staff and dated technology platforms that needed to be upgraded. Strong views were expressed on how the institution communicated with students. Overall, the students expressed that communication systems with students had broken down.

Concurrence emerged on theme of staff and that the workload of lecturers as impacting their learning and module success outcomes. This theme was expressed as major learner and teacher relational contributory factor in that the lack of availability and support of academics during the tuition periods impacted them negatively.

7.4.3   Quantitative Research Findings (Phase 3)

Phase three involved the collection of statistical data for numerical comparisons in order to draw correlational inferences with the emergent themes of the qualitative outcomes. The correlational design was utilised in this phase to reflect of the findings of phase two quantitatively to give expressions of the research objectives. The literature informed the dimensions of openness and the emergent themes from qualitative phase anchored the questions of the surveys. Thus, the presentation of the results demonstrated a confirmatory concurrence to the qualitative outcomes of the individual and focus group interviews.

7.4.3.1   *Results from the staff survey*

They survey was disseminated to staff who met the inclusion criteria of the sample and was at the employ of the university for more than 5 years. The demographic distribution and patterns of the staff dealt with participants' profile where the study was interested in identifying their level of occupation, education, position grade and the level of modules they taught. Identification of their

College was also required to determine the fields of study or disciplines. The study recruited 174 study participants. The most representation of staff was in the College of Human Sciences with 29% (n=50) with an even spread with all other colleges represented with the College of Accounting Sciences 5% (n=9) and College of Science, Engineering and Technology 4% (n=7). Course/module distributions identified that 48% (n=84) of the study participants were teaching modules at NQF level 8. Other study participants fell between lecturing at NQF level 7 with 29% (n=50) and level 6 with 23% (n=40). The module distribution was significant to affirm that staff were teaching at undergraduate level interacting with the appropriate student profiles at Bachelors' and Diploma qualification levels. The survey instrument included sixty-nine (69) questions grouped into five sections expressing dimensions of openness, institutional culture, policy, governance, access and admissions, technology and support, pedagogy, assessment, quality and student engagement.

The findings of the survey revealed a concurrence that openness discourse at Unisa was not coherently understood, and the application of the openness principles suggested an interpersonal deficit between student and university. A strong agreement was observed that openness deals with pedagogy, social issues, cultural issues, political and technological issues, which cut across governance, university operations, systems and practices and not only issue of access to study at the university. Questions on the factors of openness dealing with the dimensions of pedagogy, assessment, quality, technology and student engagement were observed as topical. In fact, a strong agreement was observed on the high workloads of academics and ineffective technology planning and that the capacity of current technology platforms remained a challenge as the systems were unable to cope with high traffic and student volumes.

The competency of the academics in open education discourse, student readiness for open and distance learning and the passion to support the students were agreed as needing heightened levels of attention and required the strengthening the social justice mandate in pedagogy. The respondents were rather neutral on the expression if the programme delivery model of Unisa adhered to the principles of openness. On the questions dealing with the Unisa regional model, the respondents were rather undecisive as to whether the Unisa regional model was ineffective, and if the university was investing more in its urban centres to the detriment of support to students in the regions.

7.4.3.2 *Results from the student survey*

The student eligibility was determined by virtue of being actively registered for the current academic year and currently in their final year of study at NQF levels 6, 7 and 8. The survey was disseminated to a source population of 35 589 students. The questionnaire included sixty-two (62) questions grouped as well into five sections expressing dimensions of openness, institutional culture, policy, governance, access and admissions, technology and support, pedagogy, assessment, quality and

student engagement. The total number of the survey respondents of students was n = 538 respondents.

The results identified a strong correlation with the focus groups outcomes that the admissions policy and its associated processes must be considered a driver of openness and could serve an enabling factor to advance enrolment management and better quality in admissions. The themes of student support and assessments, lecturer workloads and availability of lecturers at the regions emerged strongly and survey results affirmed the challenges of lecturer workloads as impacting the quality of support. The factors learner-lecturer relations, staff workloads, appropriate technology and infrastructure, advice and support on curriculum issues emerged strongly.

Two factors received high levels of agreement where students strongly agreed that UNISA needed to listen to students, and institutional decisions systems must accord with what students identified as appropriate support practices to their learning and improved culture of student support. The student results corroborated the staff views on student readiness. The student results expressed an agreement on a need to improved communication and strengthened relations between the lecturer and student as well as between the student with the institution.

Contrasting views were observed where the student survey reflected a neutral or indecisive position on the semester system as a delivery model in open education, a contrasting view when compared to the student focus groups where strong opinions were expressed about the challenges afflicting this delivery model. The study participants were further neutral or unclear on whether UNISA students interacted frequently with their lecturers, a critical factor that was strongly viewed by the student focus groups as an impediment to success in learning.

7.4.4   Summation and integration of all the results phases

The integration phase of the study provided composite findings with depth insights into the openness dimensions and factors of openness. The analysis of the staff and student results from the quantitative phases of the study in relation to factors and dimensions of openness identified a statistically significant positive correlation between views expressed in the qualitative phase of the study. Identifying that the openness factors had an impact on learner success outcomes on students from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds. Thus, the integration of the survey and interviews highlighted the issues that related to the influence of these factors across the various indicators of the institutional functioning.

An incoherent understanding of openness across the varied functions of the university was observed, factors of openness and their indicators were considered requiring institutional reflections particularly on the access and admission practices at the university as the practices seemed not to

cohere with the principles of openness and the social justice mission of the institution. The results confirmed an observed an overburdened lecturer cohort at undergraduate levels with inconsiderate planning tools on technology platforms that further posed challenges on workloads impacting on their quality of work thus, impeding appropriate support levels to students. Student support systems were observed to be inadequate and requiring urgent attention together with availability of lecturers in rural regional, a challenge which needs to be tackled as a matter of urgency as was commented. The limited access to appropriate support systems was inferred as resulting with a cost burden to students as they have to navigate additional mechanisms to access the internet and other computer facilities for learning in the regions. All three phases identified seven areas of importance that require institutional reflections that guided by the openness dimensions and factors. The seven areas were:

a.   a shared common or lack thereof in the understanding of openness
b.   incoherent policy environment and a need for coherent implementation framework as a driver of openness
c.   high academic workloads and lack of adequate institutional resource allocation models
d.   inadequacy in technology provision and planning
e.   communication breakdown between the university and students
f.   varied approaches to student support
g.   ineffective regional model

The seven areas as confirmed by the results of the study presented varied factors of openness and each considered to be driven by operational indicators that respondents agreed the university must consider them as institutional priorities in line with its mission.

7.5   IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE ARISING FROM THE FRAMEWORK

Based on the findings of the study, the following implications and contributions for open education, practice and research are made:

7.5.1   Open education at UNISA

Openness implications at Unisa include but are not limited to the following:

The findings of this study have revealed that some staff members were not sufficiently exposed to open education principles and practices due to limited knowledge of the field of study. Awareness and induction programmes should be incorporated into basic and advanced training programmes for academics and professional staff members. Using existing policies can serve as a good starting

point and an opportunity to practice institutional strategies on how to incorporate the principles of openness into their teaching and support strategies as outlined in the proposed student multi-context access and success corrective factors framework presented and described in Chapter six.

The study has also found that the students' exposure to open education was limited to mainly distance education, a cohered understanding with open education principles, e-learning and the comprehensive of the institution was limited. The results highlight the concept of openness to be used within the institution without a thorough consideration of its meaning or through various interpretations. The concept of openness should never be employed for its own sake, but rather be promoted to facilitate optimal learning environments that centres students as the core function in pedagogical approaches and support.

It is therefore, recommended that workshops and induction programmes particularly at first year level of their studies be provided. A targeted orientation workshop be specifically developed for student leaders as a co-curricular programme to orientate these students about the academic activities and university operations in the practice of open education and how the institution applies the principles of openness to advance learning and delivery of programmes. Therefore, staff and students at the university need to be made aware of the concept of openness to enable them to optimise positive characteristics and eliminate negative facets related to student support on the provision of education and learning.

7.5.2   Holistic review and reflections on Planning

Results of this study identified that some participants reported to have received limited orientation to planning in particular the planning on the implementation and induction to new technology platforms at UNISA. As such, comprehensive view on the planning instruments of the university that directly impacts the academy is recommended. A forum for open and honest discussions issues of policy and implementation framework, strategic planning, human resource models, enrolments in an integrated manner would empower the academy to identify their deficiencies in the capacities available to teach, support and provision of relevant services to students. Thus, it is ideal to employ experts in this critical university function that are trained as Academic Planners to re-orientate the university on the functions of academic planning and provide a holistic approach on the training of academics.

The identified factors of the framework provide a basis for a holistic review of the principles of openness, dimensions of openness and the factors across the varied functions of the academy and support enterprise of the university. These functions need to be anchored and coordinated to ensure alignment, thus Academic planning presents an ideal environment to effect optimal considerations of the openness factors as proposed by the student multi-context access and success corrective

factors framework. The approach that can be considered will need to employ the identification of institutional factors of openness, commencing with policy reviews that are inclusive and comprehensively consulted guided by the institutional governance orientations.

On the other hand, students require training on the role of academic planning in the structuring and scheduling of the university academic activities, such workshops can be focused on the formative years (1st and 2nd year of study) of the student journeys on how the university support functions and services integrate to provide a comprehensive student learning experiences.

7.5.3 Pedagogy and student engagement

The study has revealed that the university did not offer induction to teachers on how they could incorporate university strategic plans in the programme delivery models at course level which can assist with issues expressed with the management of workloads and student to lecturer ratios. To address this challenge, the university management requires a review in its teaching and learning policies as well as teaching practices. How these activities can be improved and given expression in the institutional strategic directions, would require appropriate workload modelling aligned to openness principles in pedagogical approaches. The contributions of the framework can be useful in this regard in that the characteristics of defining successful pedagogy differs from one context to another, thus the teacher and learner contributory factors would need to be identified to guide the openness factors guided by the indicators of appropriate lecturer workload, content delivery and learning systems defined at course levels. Each academic department should identify the support structures that should be in place to assist and support lecturers and provide benchmarks on appropriate lecturer to student ratios guided by the disciplinary considerations of the modules.

What is important is that pedagogical approach should be contextually defined with the requisite understanding of the student profile in the course then appropriate teaching plan can be developed employing the openness principles.

7.5.4 Student Communication

The results from the student respondents have revealed that there was a conceived communication breakdown between the students and the university. The university was reflected as unresponsive to the needs of the students and discontinuation of the SMS service disadvantaged them and that the reliance by the institution in communicating via emails was ineffective due to limited provision and access to data. Another important factor that was identified was the lack of communication between lecturers and students, feedback on assignments and the late release of examination results, where the learning process was concerned. Communication systems must be reflected across all functions of the university and the deployment of openness environmental factors be

considered interacting with institutional factors of openness. Communication with students on assessment periods, accessibility and lead time responses from lecturers must be prioritized as students view that the delays in assessment feedback from lecturers as limiting optimal learning opportunities and participation in their summative assessments, thus resulting in poor module success outcomes.

The university must engage in regional visits and hold workshops with students to solicit their views on what can be improved and what students considered meaningful platforms for engagement. Communication experts are recommended to lead the engagements with a view to develop a communication framework for the academy to guide lecturers.

7.5.5 The Unisa regional model

Both staff and student respondents have revealed that the university's regional model is ineffective and urgent attention is required to effect improvements and considerations on decentralization of services to alleviate the heavy reliance from the main campus in Pretoria. Student results highlight that students expressed difficulty in accessing services in the regional centres and that support staff lacked in certain skills and had to escalate queries to Pretoria for assistance. It is recommended that the development of an appropriate regional model be alleviated as an institutional priority and considerations in investments made to develop staff capacities and re-skilling in the regions. The model should consider what literature such as the proposal by Ndlovu (2008) that three factors be considered in the development of any regional model, environmental factors, capacity factors, and regional organisational factors. Ndlovu argues that these factors, together affect the participation rate of the entity and surrounding communities in economic, education and other contributions for optimal development. The university must also reflect on the perceived existence of incongruencies between the assumptions and requirements of staff resulting in disproportionalities of services for students.

7.5.6 Summative overview of the framework application for future practitioners

Education practitioners and administrators need to be constantly alive to the influences the directions of national policy and how the institution responds to the institutional political interfaces. External factors such as country laws, qualification frameworks and quality regulatory frameworks, can, and will influence institutional decisions thus, policy alignment is key to drive such considerations. The framework for student multi-context access and success corrective factors is foregrounded and anchored on the national landscape and its directions on the positioning of open education. Continuous reflections are required to ensure strengthened alignment and practitioners should deploy the use of indicators that the institution considers as performance benchmarks in developing operational openness evaluation template on the identification of openness and access

contributors. The identification of the openness access contributors guides how the institution can respond with remedial interventions in the practice oriented application of the framework centred on the interfaces and integrated collaborative approaches in supporting students.

7.5.7 Directions for further research

The significant aspects that require further exploration in future studies is students at postgraduate levels. This cohort of students were not the target population for this research therefore, the researcher recommends that other studies be conducted to explore the influence of openness in the learning conditions and support services provided to this student cohort.

There is a need for exploration of other university core functions in research, graduate studies, research academic and support services and community engagement. The openness dimensions and associate factors can be considered in these core university activities using the access and success corrective factors framework within these environments in order to allow integration of undergraduate and postgraduate considerations of openness theoretically and in practice when providing services to and learning opportunities.

The research may need to focus on marginalised student and funding opportunities in advancing progression opportunities beyond undergraduate studies. Student results in this study observed higher persistent levels and success outcomes in those students who received NSFAS funding and that such a government funding opportunity is only available for students who are learning towards their first undergraduate qualification. Research is needed for the development of strategies to involve postgraduate students to reflect on their learning experiences. Follow-on research can be conducted on this cohort of students, to determine how they adjust to ODeL learning conditions, reflections of academic and student support intervention. Factors such as workload ratio can be reflected and contrasted against student/lecturer teaching ratios to student/supervisory ratios for the development of appropriate resource models for colleges and improvement of success outcomes and research outputs at Masters and Doctoral levels.

7.6 THE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION MADE TO THE RESEARCH AREA

The study of open education and associated learning systems has received some attention globally. The openness discourse is usually associated with access and the democratization of education are main considerations in existing knowledge with minimal focus on the other dimensions of openness, such as curriculum, student success and persistence particularly within Africa and South Africa. In this regard, the limitation in its scope represents a sparsely studied area. Some studies in this area have tended to focus on such OERs, MOOCS, technology, teaching and quality

assurance. There is limited knowledge about the dimensions of openness linked to the principles of open education practices and the influence of institutional derived openness factors and impact on its practices and decision-making systems. It must be noted that within this interface of openness principles, dimensions and factors other published studies have focused on the singularity of specific concepts and this study explored holistically and associated linkage in supporting students and their impact in improving student success outcomes.

Furthermore, this study explores the study area in a way not previously done in the African region and South Africa, representing an important and unique contribution to the subject area, with its history of grave discrimination, colonial legacy and apartheid. The South African context is particularly important to differentiate from other contexts because, unlike other countries, the debate about openness is not only about one class of learner and another but it relates to the racially driven segregatory practices that remain a perennial social challenge still confronting society and the impact to barriers of entry in higher education.

The use of a sequential exploratory mixed method, as a research design for this study, sets it apart from all published work within the study area. Previous studies in this research area have used singular methods study designs and not both, the qualitative and quantitative enquiry approaches. This is the first study in the South African context that explored complex openness discourse with its numerous definitions and interpretations. The complexity in understanding of openness and the influence of openness factors presented an opportunity to study the concept utilizing a mixed method approach. A mono research design would have not adequately addressed the research questions explored in this study.

Another notable area in which the current study is making a unique contribution to existing knowledge within the research area relates to the development of a framework on the student multi-context access and success corrective factors. Thus, the development and use of the proposed model derived from literature and the empirical evidence of the study can support institutional practices in openness to integrate its application and adoption into various institutional functions and practice.

The model has the potential to be utilised in the process of addressing challenges related to the perennial student success outcomes across the support functions and intervention universities seek to explore in improving student throughput and not specifically one specific area but holistically across the academic and student support services.

In addition, the combination and use of three (3) phases of the research design in a single study in a comprehensive ODeL institution has not been done within South Africa and African region. Therefore, the use of the three theories of openness discussed in chapter three as theoretical

frameworks guiding the study is another notable area in which the current study is making a unique contribution to the existing knowledge. Thus, the theoretical framework proposed in chapter six helps to harmonise and present a comprehensive view on a number of theoretical perspectives so that key considerations related to openness dimensions and associated factors to illuminate a better understanding on the concept, practice and application in different ODL institutional settings.

7.7   SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Polit & Beck (2008) identify that limitations in a research study are the conceptual and methodological shortcomings that could not be overcome in the study. This study had some limitations. Firstly, it was conducted in an ODeL comprehensive university, the University of South Africa, therefore, the results cannot be generalised to the entire higher education system in open and distance education in South Africa. The study managed to yield in-depth insights into the openness principles, dimensions and factors and may be criticised for its lack of generalisability of its findings. The small sample size for qualitative phase and the staff survey responses are other two factors that have impacted on the representativeness and generalisability of the findings. However, in qualitative research, the focus is on in-depth exploration and description of the phenomenon under investigation and not on the quantity of the sample.

Secondly, the study investigated the opinions of students who were studying NQF level 6 – 8 qualification and in their final year of completion. Therefore, their views may not necessarily represent that of their counterparts who were still in their formative years, 1st and 2nd year studies and their experiences but their contributions provided a useful lens on their learning journey in ODeL. However, the access – success multi-context framework and the practice guidelines presented in chapter six may serve as a preliminary framework for understanding the phenomenon of openness and institutional dimensions as guided by available literature sources in relation to its practice and support provision.

Thirdly, the focus of the study was on the concept of openness and its factors from the perspectives of marginalised groups of learners. Also, it solicited knowledge from an ODeL institution assist in offering insights into the relationship between the learners and institution on how its support practices in the the diverse student intake as facilitated by their access and success discourse. The inclusion of the institutional analysis as phase one, yielded additional information on aspects of contextual consideration in relation how the institution monitored its strategy directions and performance indicators associated with access and success. An in-depth analysis of the factors influencing retention and persistence were not extensively explored or engaged, it is accepted that retention is a critical contributory factor in success outcomes. Therefore, a recommendation is made to include these two aspects in future research.

Lastly, all the student participants who were interviewed came from only two regional locations, Limpopo and Gauteng and the staff participants were located in the main campus of Pretoria which may be perceived to have bias in the findings and that these can be narrowly interpreted from these views only. In can be argued that the perspectives and experiences of participants from other settings could be different if they were sampled.

7.8   CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study explored the concept of openness and student support to marginalised student populations and identified associated factors of openness their influence in the success outcomes of students. To achieve the research objectives, the researcher employed an exploratory sequential mixed method study design, which is qualitative, quantitative and exploratory informed by contextual considerations. The study further presented a student multi-context access and success corrective factors framework for the integration of the access contributors in openness and associated success motivators that can be employed by ODL universities.

The results of the study confirm the findings of earlier studies on the challenges associated with student support in ODL. It was for this purpose that this study sought to demonstrate a relational consideration of access and success and identify contributory factors that ODL institution can consider improving student success. The presentation of a framework was useful in highlighting the linkages in institutional factors and how these can be applied in answering the research questions. The issues presented in the literature and the data from participants have an administrative, pedagogical and learner support implication. The study raised questions and issues about learner support strategies for improvement. The contributions from the study's participants identified challenges and important questions about teaching, academic support and student support and the study proposes a valuable framework in exploring issues associated with openness and practice in teaching and learning in an ODL contexts.

Insightful responses were obtained from the participants on student support in ODeL and the potential to improve throughput rate and to ensure successful completion of learning programmes and graduations rates. Students need to be support in other to learn better, pass and complete their qualifications. The study demonstrated that conducive learning environments and support are crucial.

Students in the rural localities feel isolated and are confronted by additional cost burdens due to a need to access better support services outside their regional centres. Students identified that they came from diverse backgrounds and were struggling to be active self-directed learners due to a lack of orientation programmes during their 1st year of study. The study has also revealed that commitment and innovative ways were needed to infuse learner support systems coherently in both academic and support systems.

The recommendations confirm that the institution needs to design holistic support interventions appropriate for the conducive learning provision which students can optimally benefit from their learning experiences to allow for maximum self-organisation of learning with support.

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ANNEXURE A - CURRICULUM VITAE OF THE RESEARCHER

SEFORA ALICE MKUZANGWE

Pretoria, Gauteng • Mobile: +27 [0] 79 264 2685 • Email: amkuzangwe@gmail.com

EXECUTIVE PROFILE

An experienced and qualified Higher Education Sector role-player, with over 20-years' experience in Programme Management, Accreditation and Qualification Registration, Academic Administration and Leadership in South African Universities. Sefora Mkuzangwe offers an extensive skill-base garnered across the following spheres; Academic Planning, Accreditation and Academic Quality Assurance, Higher Education Policy, Academic Administration, Admissions and Student administration.

She has held a range of varied roles that include *Portfolio Specialist | Programme Manager | Project Director [Teaching, Learning, Community Engagement & Student Support] | Acting Executive Director for Academic Planning |* and most prominently *Director for Programme Accreditation & Registration and Short Learning Programmes*. Across these tenures, she has supported diverse aspects of strategic direction; operations leadership; project implementation; people leadership; financial & resource management; as well as marketing & business development.

Her value-added participation in the Academic Arena extends to personal development, with a research focus on the Scholarship of Open Distance Education, Quality Assurance in Higher Education [Curriculum Assessment, Academic Planning & Higher Education Policy, Management & Governance].

Key to Ms Mkuzangwe;s success is her robust capacity to form solid alliances with internal and external stakeholders, including Academic Leadership, Industry Bodies [CHE, DHET, SAQA] and various other Professional Bodies [including ECSA and HPCSA]. She closely collaborates with diverse industry bodies to maximise on transformational activities and projects across varied academic areas for both Formal and Non-Formal Academic Programmes.

A Doctoral Candidate for her studies in Education Management and Leadership with a Research Focus in ODeL I Education Policy | Quality Assurance | Education Management & Leadership | Governance & Higher Education Institutional Operations | Student Access, Success and Retention in ODeL.

She is a Harvard University (USA), Graduate School of Education Alumnus and holds a Certificate in Management Development in Higher Education, 2015. Holds another Certificate from the Institute in Higher Education Studies completed at the State University of California, Berkely (USA), 2014.

Professional Affiliations: Society for College and University Planning (USA) I Institute of Directors [IoD] | International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education [INQAAHE], ASIIN (Germany)

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- *Strategy*

- *Policy & Procedure Development*

- *Academic Planning*

- *Academic Programme Management*

- *Management & Evaluation*

- *Accreditation & Registration of Qualifications*

- *Curriculum Development*

- *Sector Research & Transformation*

- *Quality Management*

- *Risk Management*

- *Operations Leadership*

- *Project Management*

- *ODL & e-Learning*

- *Short Learning Programmes*

- *Financial Management [Budgeting & Expense Control]*

- *Resource Coordination*

- *Business Development & Marketing*

- *Administration & Reporting*

- *Governance & Regulatory Compliance*

- *Educational / Academic Consultation*

- *Stakeholder Engagement & Relationship Management*

- *Community / Student Engagement*

- *People Leadership & HR Management*

- *Team Development*

- *Computer Literacy: MS Office | Student Administration Systems | Academic Information Systems & HEMIS*

QUALIFICATIONS

Doctoral Candidate, Doctor of Philosophy in Education Management [PhD (Education Management)]; University of South Africa (UNISA),
Research Focus: ODEL I Education Policy | Quality Assurance | Education Management & Leadership | Governance & Higher Education Institutional Operations | Student Access, Success and Retention in ODeL |

Master of Philosophy in Higher Education [MPhil (Higher Education)]; University of Stellenbosch, 2019
Research Focus: Quality Assurance, Assessment, Curriculum, Technology & Management

Bachelor of Business Administration Honours; Southern Business School, 2014
Research Focus: The Effectiveness, Oversight & Leadership Role Played by Institutional Forums at The University of South Africa

Bachelor of Science (BSc) [Chemistry]; Vista University, 2004

Senior Certificate / Matric; Vlakfontein High School, 1997

PROFESIONAL DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING

Management Development Programme in Higher Education; Harvard University (USA) Graduate School of Education, 2015

Institute in Higher Education Studies; State University of California, Berkely (USA), 2014

HERS-SA Academy; Women in Leadership in Higher Education, 2014

Management Development Programme; University of Pretoria, 2009

Programme in Advanced Project Management; Damelin, 2005

University of South Africa [UNISA]

Acting Executive Director: Academic Planning   *July 2021 to Date*

- Drives successful implementation of the Academic Planning Strategy; securing optimal alignment with the overall Academic Planning Architecture of Unisa.

- Develops and monitors the implementation of Academic Planning Policies across all Academic Disciplines; further defining, implementing and overseeing the Institutional Academic Planning Calendar.

- Secures the alignment of National Policy to meet Institutional Policies in the areas of academic planning, governance and University regulation.

- Compiles key Departmental Operational Plans, employing the same to ensure that all strategic initiatives were achieved in alignment with the Academic Planning Strategy [Enrolment Planning | University Programme Quality Management | Academic Information Systems | College Programme Qualification Mix | Accreditation of New Programmes].

- Plans and monitors various Departmental initiatives, ensuring that all Institutional objectives were being met efficiently and effectively.

- Monitors and reports on the external regulatory environment as relating to South African higher education and International trends.

University of South Africa [UNISA]   *October 2020 to Date*
Director Student Admissions and Registration

- Contribute and develops the Admissions Policy, related admissions procedures
    Drives the implementation of the enrolment plan of the university and its associated procedures and management activities
- Provides advisory support to Colleges on Admission Policy prescripts, curriculum, Qualification Audits and Credit Transfers
- Provide input into the development of the ODeL and Student Walk Strategy
- Drive the ODeL Strategy in collaboration with management and the decision bodies within the
- university committees.
- Provide input into the University Strategy in respect of the maintenance and development of a suitable infrastructure to ensure an uninterrupted user-friendly support and advisory service to prospective and registered students as well as other parties and stakeholders
- Monitor departmental initiatives to ensure business objectives are being met in terms of quality control and performance management
- Develop and consult on student administration system policies including RPL, Exemption and statutory admissions.
- Determines the process and policies in terms of Senate Rules pertaining to the verification of
- completed qualifications

- Ensures implementation of policies in respect of applications, registration, exemptions , re-admission and verification of completed qualification throughout the university and monitor adherence to policies.
- Oversee the interpretation and implementation of all Senate rules, to ensure that registrations, exemptions, cancellations, exchanges and additions are carried out on behalf of Senate and that rules and regulations are implemented in accordance with the information in the academic institutional calender
- Oversee training and quality control of non-formal programs in respect of system development and student registration process

University of South Africa [UNISA]

Director: Programme Accreditation & Registration   *January 2011 to September 2020*

Strategic Direction:

- Responsible for overseeing / managing the accreditation, clearance, registration, structuring and quality assurance procedures of all Unisa Academic Programmes; supporting the University in maintaining its position as a leading ODL and e-learning comprehensive provider.

- Coordinated submission of Unisa Academic Programmes to the HEQC - Institutional Administrator for Programme Accreditation.

- Provided strategic and managerial leadership regarding the development and implementation of the University Plan / Model for Academic Programmes.

- Advised University Leadership regarding optimal qualification and programme alignment, promoting articulation between programmes [Formative Degrees | Career-Focused Professional | Vocational Academic | Non-Formal Short Learning].

- Monitored the external regulatory environment governing higher education, advising University Leadership regarding related higher education policies and developments.

- Contributed to optimal governance of Department and Institutional initiatives, supporting the development and implementation of effective risk management controls, audit information processes and standards.

Operations Leadership:

- Determined and implemented Directorate deliverables in accordance with Institutional objectives and operational planning.

- Advised regarding the process for new qualification and programme development, providing related support to all Academic Departments and Colleges.

- Develop policies and guidelines for the quality management of qualifications, programmes and courses – including non-formal short courses.

- Provide regular clarification regarding the product range of each discipline, in accordance with the correct classification of subject matter for Institutional and Legislative accreditation requirements.

- Manage the PQM of Unisa, ensuring availability of requisite academic information to support secondary Institutional processes per academic year [Registrations | Assessments | Study Materials].

- Evaluate and monitored the operation of Functional Learning Centres, ensuring optimal adherence to policies and guidelines.

- Compile and managed comprehensive budgets, ensuring the meeting of financial requirements | Identified and procured appropriate resources for sustainable operation, covering Human Resources, Physical Resources and Financial Resources.

- Define performance indicators for each area of Divisional functioning, measuring / monitoring progress in accordance with set Institutional metrics and agreements, including those for Open Distance Learning (ODL).

- Guide academic renewal initiatives targeted towards improving graduate outputs, promoting social relevance, and ensuring Institutional responsiveness to National Developmental Obligations.

- Compile and presented regular reporting on Directorate performance, reflecting all relevant qualitative and quantitative deliverables.

- Maintain the productive use and management of Academic Information Management Systems.

Specialised Leadership of Short Learning Programmes:

- Supervise all activities relating to the provision of Short Learning Programmes [3rd income stream], streamlining business process alignment of third missions with the Universities mainstream core functions | Assessed the viability of all non-formal programmes [profit margins and potential income].

- Facilitate research and engagement regarding the provision of community development focused short learning programmes.

- Promote entrepreneurship amongst Academic and Professional Staff, regarding the development of short learning programmes / opportunities.

People Leadership:

- Direct guide and develop Divisional Staff; outlining KPAs and implementing routine performance reviews – employing findings to compile personal development plans.

- Track performance; providing ongoing feedback to Team Members and ensuring fulfilment of duties at optimum productivity levels via creating an environment conducive to success.

Project Director in The Office of The Vice Principal for   *February 2018 to February 2020*

Teaching, Learning, Community Engagement & Student Support

- Monitored and provided support regarding the implementation of e-learning across diverse academic disciplines.

- Supported the various Colleges in the drafting of strategies and approaches to develop the transformation of on-line teaching and learning modalities.

- Monitored the implementation of initiatives conducted by the various Colleges, ensuring that related Institutional objectives were being met.

- Identified and coordinated initiatives targeted towards maintaining academic quality assurance and facilitating on-going enhancement.

- Engaged with role-players in the external regulatory environment regarding South African higher education matters affecting the portfolio.

- Championed positive academic transformation via requisite leadership and management of value-adding initiatives – planning and executing any ad hoc projects as directed.

Acting Executive Director: Academic Planning   *September 2013 to December 2015*

- Drove successful implementation of the Academic Planning Strategy; securing optimal alignment with the overall Academic Planning Architecture of Unisa.

KEY CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- **Nominated for the 2020 Chair of Council Award for Excellence in Leadership,** for key role played in the management of the Largest Programme and Qualifications Mix Nationwide [UNISA – 500 Qualifications, 750 Programmes and In-Excess of 3000 Learning Units].

- **Selected to attend a Management and Leadership Development Programme for Emerging Leaders in Higher Education at Harvard University** in 2015, was the only participant from Africa selected to attend.

- **Selected to serve as a Member of the 2015 Reference Group for the CHE,** facilitating the development of a Good Practice Guide for the Quality Management of Continuing Education / Short Courses in South African Higher Education.

- **Selected to serve as a Member of the 2014 Ministerial Task Team** for the review of Non-Formal Provision of Short Courses and Quality Management Systems in South Africa [as convened by the South African Qualifications Authority].

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Member of the Society for College and University Planning – 2018 - To Date

Member of The Reference Group for Good Practice Guidance for The Quality Management of Continuing Education / Short Courses in Higher Education; Council on Higher Education (CHE), 2015

Member of The Ministerial Task Team for The Review of Non-Formal Provision of Short Courses in South Africa; South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), 2014 & 2015

Project Manager & Member of Coordination Team: Monitoring & Evaluation in Hospitals; Belgian Technical Corporation / National Department of Health, 2009

Project Manager & Member of Coordination Team: District Health Systems (SADC Regions); Japan International Corporation, 2005 to 2009

Project Manager & Member of Coordination Team: Monitoring & Evaluation of HIV / AIDS Programmes; Measure Evaluation Project (USA), 2006 to 2008

Programme Coordinator: Health Information Systems; HMN (USA), 2005

University Governance and Committees: University Senate | Senate Executive Committee | College / Faculty Boards | Senate Research, Innovation & Higher Degrees | Postgraduate Studies Inter-College Committee | Academic Enrolment & Academic Human Resources Planning Committee | Academic Planning Committee | Senate Teaching & Learning | Senate Language Committee | Professional Academic & Administrative Quality Assurance Committee | Quality Assurance Committees | Registrar Operations Committee | UNISA Short Learning Programme Committee (Deputy Chairperson) | Finance & Infrastructure Planning Committee | Risk Management & Internal Audit Committee | ICT Development Committee | Intercollege Postgraduate Studies Committee.

RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

Alice Sefora Mkuzangwe and *Tennyson Mgutshini* (2019) Interactions between Internal and External Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa – A Case Analysis of Development Challenges Facing Academics
https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2019/sp29a11

PERSONAL DETAILS

Date of Birth, Nationality	11 January 1980, South African
Languages	English	isiZulu	Afrikaans	SePedi	SeTswana
Driver's License	Code 08 / B
References & Certificates	*Presented Upon Request*
Availability	30 Day Notice Period

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2021/04/14

Dear Ms. SA Mkuzangwe

Ref: **2021/04/14/35250968/23/AM**

Name: Ms SA Mkuzangwe

Student No.: 35250968

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2021/04/14 to 2026/04/14

Researcher(s): Name: Ms. SA Mkuzangwe
E-mail address: amkuzangwe@gmail.com Telephone: 079 264 2685

Supervisor(s): Name: Prof T Mgutshini
E-mail address: mgutst@unisa.ac.za Telephone: 082 885 3037

Title of research:

Openness in higher education: The panacea to endemic challenges with student

Qualification: PhD Education Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2021/04/14 to 2026/04/14.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2021/04/14 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

ANNEXURE C - INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION APPROVAL

RESEARCH PERMISSION SUB-COMMITTEE (RPSC) OF THE
SENATE RESEARCH, INNOVATION, POSTGRADUATE DEGREES
AND COMMERCIALISATION COMMITTEE (SRIPCC)

12 July 2021

<table>
<tr><td>Ref #: 2021_RPSC_036</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ms Sefora Alice Mkuzangwe</td></tr>
<tr><td>Student #:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Staff #: 90176201</td></tr>
</table>

Decision: Permission approval 12 July 2021 to 11 July 2022

Principal Investigator:

Ms. Sefora Alice Mkuzangwe Admissions and Registration UNISA
mkuzasa@unisa.ac.za; 0792642685

Supervisor: Prof Tennyson Mgutshini; mgutst@unisa.ac.za; 0792642685

OPENNESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE PANACEA TO ENDEMIC CHALLENGES WITH STUDENT ACCESS AND SUCCESS AMONG PREVIOUSLY EXCLUDED POPULATIONS

Your request for permission to involve UNISA employees, students and data regarding the above study has been received and was considered by the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC) of the UNISA Senate, Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) on 17 June 2021.

It is my pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted for the study. You may include the following Unisa employees by e-mail to voluntarily participate in individual interviews and 4 focus group sessions:

20 Unisa management staff

25 academics

15 Support and middle management staff

You may invite the following groups of Unisa students with the gatekeeping assistance of ICT

ANNEXURE D - EXTENSION OF INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION APPROVAL

RESEARCH PERMISSION SUB-COMMITTEE (RPSC) OF THE
SENATE RESEARCH, INNOVATION, POSTGRADUATE DEGREES
AND COMMERCIALISATION COMMITTEE (SRIPCC)

12 July 2021 (Date of first issue)

29 July 2022 (Date of first amendment)

Ref #: 2021_RPSC_036

Ms Sefora Alice Mkuzangwe

Student #:

Staff #: 90176201

Decision: Permission approval 12 July 2022 to 11 July 2023

Principal Investigator:

> Ms. Sefora Alice Mkuzangwe Admissions and Registration UNISA
> mkuzasa@unisa.ac.za; 0792642685

Supervisor: Prof Tennyson Mgutshini; mgutst@unisa.ac.za; 0792642685

OPENNESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE PANACEA TO ENDEMIC CHALLENGES WITH STUDENT ACCESS AND SUCCESS AMONG PREVIOUSLY EXCLUDED POPULATIONS

Your request for the extension for permission to involve UNISA employees, students and data regarding the above study has been received and was considered by the Deputy Chairperson, duly authorised to review an extension request, and will serve on the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC) of the UNISA Senate, Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) on 18 August 2022 for ratification.

It is my pleasure to inform you that extension for the study was granted.

You may include the following Unisa employees by e-mail to voluntarily participate in individual interviews and 4 focus group sessions:

20 Unisa management staff

25 academics

15 Support and middle management staff

ANNEXURE E - INFORMED CONSENT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics clearance reference number: 2021/04/14/35250968/23/AM
Research permission reference number: 2021_RPSC_036

15 May 2022

TITLE: OPENNESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE PANACEA TO ENDEMIC CHALLENGES WITH STUDENT ACCESS AND SUCCESS AMONG PREVIOUSLY EXCLUDED POPULATIONS

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is **Sefora Alice Mkuzangwe,** and I am doing research with Prof T Mgutshini, a Professor from the College of Graduate Studies towards a degree title Doctor of Philosophy in Education (Management) at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled **Openness in higher education: The panacea to endemic challenges with student access and success among previously excluded populations.**

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is seeking to explore the openness discourse in higher education through a lens of student retention and success in higher education. The research title posits that limited success and by some accounts, openness in higher education has failed and this represents an area that is not well understood. These observations serve as the basis for the current study whose aim is explore the challenges of the marginalised groups of student populations and investigate

dimensions of openness and institutional responses related to the important issues of access, opportunity and success in higher education.

The research study aims to critically evaluate openness and its implementation as a vehicle for student access and success in higher education, with particular reference to a comprehensive open and distance learning institution in South Africa. The study will consider openness in the context of a public comprehensive university and critically assess whether the principle

openness as espoused by the institution permeates across the multiple spheres of institution. The study will further critically evaluate if opening access has created equal opportunities for participation and success for previously excluded student populations in order to develop a student success framework for universities.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

The identified participants were selected as possible participants in this study because of their expertise, knowledge, experience and other critical factors relating to research area including the availability and willingness to participate. The ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner is considered critical in this study. Further to their expertise, the content knowledge of the study area, the participants were identified in terms of the job profile with the institution.

Participants were identified through their roles and positions they hold in the institution, and involvement in within Unisa as academics, academic support and students.

A total of twenty (25) participants have been identified to participate in the study and a minimum number (n=2) of focus group discussions will be organized comprising of a total of between 8 - 10 participants per group.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The interviews together with the group discussions will include questions such as:

a. Openness is viewed differently by different people and contexts, in your view please provide your understanding of the concept of openness/ open education practices and what it means to your environment?

b. From your understanding what are the triggers that drive open education within your context?

c. What are the challenges you consider prevalent and are the most common in the openness discourse?

d. What is the current performance on the implementation of the principles of openness at UNISA as an ODeL institution?

e. What are the emergent patterns of access and success within UNISA as an ODeL comprehensive public institution? In your view has open and distance education at UNISA improved access to marginalised groups of society and has this access resulted with the success outcomes for these student profile?

f. What is the range and nature of UNISA's learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to the discourse of openness? Is the student learning pathway representative of the openness principles and adequately supported in terms of interactions and delivery of the learning?

The participants are afforded the right of self-determination in terms of their perceived safety when it comes to risks associated with COVID-19. Due to the impact of COVID 19 pandemic the Interviews and focus groups are planned to be conducted physically or virtually via Microsoft Teams. Should any participant prefer to be interviewed in person the interviews will be conducted at their offices or at Unisa. The utmost adherence to the COVID-19 social distancing regulations will be observed as prescribed by the institution.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This study is expected to collect critical and important information that could assist in identifying and analysing how the UNISA interacts and responds to the discourse of openness and its implementation as a vehicle for student access and success in higher education, with a particular reference to open and distance learning in South Africa.

Your participation will benefit the study as its emphasis is on exploring and reviewing issues of openness, student access, throughput and dropout and critically evaluate how universities apply these principles and how successful they are in implementation. This exploration is the first of its kind within a university in South Africa and also within an open distance learning University in Africa. The study proposes the development of an evidence-based framework that would guide universities on how to best effect openness within their contexts. This framework is the first of its kind within South Africa and indeed among Africa Open distance education institutes.

ARE THEIR ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

There are minimal risks associated with the study and the risks are classified as minimal or negligible. The study will be conducted at a public institution and the information gathered will mainly be available in the public domain and the results of the study will be openly published. The topic is deemed not to be of a sensitive nature and the prospective participants are all adults and deemed not to be vulnerable, but it is accepted that some institutional information might be revealed which is/will be reported in the DHET reports which are already classified as public documentation and open for public consumption.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your identity will be kept confidential in the research and your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this study. Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a code number and segregated into a category and you will be referred to in this way in the data and report.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of hiding each participant's name. The data analysis process will organise the data in a coherent manner to provide structure and comparison of responses, where the data will be partitioned into word or phrase variables and differentiated systematically into ordered explanatory matrices. A coding process for data analysis will be followed to identify the critical links between the data collected and its explanatory meaning without any identification of the names of the participants. The identity of the participants will be protected at all times during the reporting.

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard or filing cabinet at UNISA, Pretoria for future research or academic purposes and electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Electronic copies of your answers in terms of recordings will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked password protected files in a computer at at Unisa, Pretoria for future research or academic purposes. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

After five years any hard copy hard record will be shredded, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software once the data has been anylsed and coded after safe keeping as prescribe by the Unisa policy.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

No cost will be incurred by participating in this research nor any payment will be made to research participants.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the UNISA Research Ethics Review Committee (URERC) and RPSC permission has been obtained.

The copies of the approval letters can be obtained from the researcher should you so wish to have a copy.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Alice Mkuzangwe on 012 429 2320 or via email at amkuzangwe@gmail.com or mkuzasa@unisa.ac.za. The findings are accessible for 5 years. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact the principal researcher Alice Mkuzangwe or the Supervisor; Prof T Mgutshini at mgutst@unisa.ac.za.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact the Supervisor, Prof T Mgutshini, mgutst@unisa.ac.za.

Ethical complaints may also be directed to Unisa to the Deputy Chairperson of URERC Dr. RG Visagie, Visagrg@unisa.ac.za; 012 429 2478.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study
Thank you.

Sefora Alice Mkuzangwe

ANNEXURE F - STAFF INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

THE DATA COLLECTION INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE:

OPENNESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE PANACEA TO ENDEMIC CHALLENGES WITH STUDENT ACCESS AND SUCCESS AMONG PREVIOUSLY EXCLUDED POPULATIONS

RESEARCHER NAME:

Alice Mkuzangwe

Pre-amble to the interview

Open education is seen as an important tool to widen participation in higher education and central to social justice, a concern to which most open universities attempt to respond to. The provision of open education is viewed as a sustainable way for education provision because it operates through radical cost reduction, efficient use of resources and remains a huge focus in the South African education system where the number of students in South Africa's higher education system. As a developing country with a size of its population (60 million) ODL is identified as a means to expand access, reduce costs and enhance quality in the country. The focus of educational provision at a distance in South Africa has tended to be at university level and has made a significant contribution to the overall growth in student enrolment. (Smidt & Sursock, 2011) however, argue that the rapid increase in participation rates in South Africa has not resulted in improved success rates and the widening of participation to higher education still identifies levels of exclusion in marginalised groups of society, therefore, it is important to enquire who the beneficiaries are. It is further central to enquire if widening participation has formed an integral part of the education system in the country and whether this rapid increase in access has provided the necessary support for success for these students in ODL provision.

Pre-interview Preparation

1. Introduce Study and read contents of the information sheet to individual participant and reassure then about their rights to withdraws without repercussion.

2. Introduce that the study will be strictly adhering to the government's COVID-19 Social distancing requirements.

3. Restate that their right for self-determination will always be carefully considered, and that it is their right to decline participation or to withdraw or collectively exploring alternative ways of participation, should you feel uneasy about any aspect of the study

4. Outline what study is about and invite any additional clarification the participant may seek.

5. Outline Primary aim and objectives of the study.

6. Re-assure participant that their identity will be protected & confidentiality will be maintained.

7. Re-iterate that responses will be audio recorded and anonymity will be ensured.

8. Provide guidance on how to speak audibly to ensure that responses are clearly recorded.

9. Advise participant that my role will be as a passive facilitator.

10. Facilitator will be asking open questions with a short initial section where non-identifying demographic data will be collected.

11. Interview will last no longer than 1h00 – 1h30 minutes.

The interview guide has been developed as part of a study on the openness discourse in higher education through a lens of student retention and success. The research title posits that limited success and by some accounts openness in higher education has been unsuccessful and this represents an area that is not well understood. These observations serve as the basis for the current study whose aim is to explore the challenges of the marginalised student populations and investigate dimensions of openness and institutional responses related to the important issues of access, opportunity, retention and success in higher education.

The participants are afforded the right of self-determination in terms of their perceived safety when it comes to risks associated with infection to COVID-19. Due to the impact of COVID 19 pandemic the Interviews are conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams of Zoom or should any participant prefer to be interviewed in person the interviews can be conducted at their offices or at Unisa. The utmost adherence to the COVID-19 social distancing regulations will be observed as prescribed by the institution

Participants have been selected from strategic higher education policy makers, institutional leaders; administrators, academics and students identified during the situational analysis in phase of the data collection.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Openness is viewed differently by different people and contexts, in your view please provide your understanding of the concept of openness/ open education practices and what it means to your environment?

2. Briefly share your views and understanding on what you consider to be the drivers that necessitate open education within your context?

3. What are the challenges you consider prevalent and are the most common in the openness discourse?

4. In your view and observations, how has openness and the implementation of the discourse in your institution influenced access and success among disadvantaged previously marginalised student populations?

5. What institutional approaches to openness or open education should be considered in your context, as the discourse can be varied? Can open education be considered at an institutional level as informed by context or should the openness discourse be driven from sectoral, national agenda of the country?

6. What are the current policies and legislative instruments in South African higher education that drive the openness discourse, are you familiar with them?

7. Are you familiar with Government or sectoral responses to the challenges access, retention and student success in the South African higher education?

8. What is the current performance on the implementation of the principles of openness at UNISA as an ODeL institution?

9. What are the emergent patterns of access and success within UNISA as an ODeL comprehensive public institution? In your view has open and distance education at UNISA improved access to marginalised groups of society and has this access resulted with the success outcomes for these student profile?

10. What is the range and nature of UNISA's learner and teacher-related factors that contribute to the discourse of openness? Is the student learning pathway representative of the openness principles and adequately supported in terms of interactions and delivery of the learning?

11. How do the identified the learner and teacher related contributory factors impact student access, teaching, learning and student-success?

12. How do these contributory factors and institutional responses impact marginalised students in your environment, institution or department?

13. Can you offer insights into what actions and interventions do you believe universities can adopt to ensure improved openness and success to students in particular from marginalised populations?

ANNEXURE G - STUDENT FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE:

OPENNESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE PANACEA TO ENDEMIC CHALLENGES WITH STUDENT ACCESS AND SUCCESS AMONG PREVIOUSLY EXCLUDED POPULATIONS

RESEARCHER NAME:

Alice Mkuzangwe

FOCUS GROUP PREPARATORY NOTES

The Focus Group guide has been developed as part of a study on the openness discourse in higher education through a lens of student retention and success in higher education. The research title posits that limited success and by some accounts openness in higher education has failed and this represents an area that is not well understood, and these observations serve as the basis for the current study whose aim is explore the challenges of the marginalised groups of student populations and investigate dimensions of openness and institutional responses related to the important issues of access, opportunity and success in higher education.

The group discussants are afforded the right of self-determination in terms of their perceived safety when it comes to risks associated with infection to COVID-19. Due to the impact of COVID 19 pandemic the discussions are conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams of Zoom or should any participants prefer to have a physical face to face engagement, an appropriate venue will be organised at Unisa or around Pretoria, limited to a maximum of ten (10) individuals per group. The utmost adherence to the COVID-19 social distancing regulations will be observed as prescribed by the institution.

Participants have been selected from strategic higher education policy makers, institutional leaders; administrators, academics and students identified during the situational analysis in phase of the data collection. The following steps will be followed to prepare for the commencement of the discussions:

1. Introduce Study and read contents of the information sheet to focus group participants
2. Outline what study is about AND specify the objectives of the study and expected involvement requirements of participants.
3. Assure participants about the confidentiality measures that have been out into place to protect their identities and provide ground rules for taking part in the focus group discussion.
4. Outline provisions for recording of responses and that discussants should speak clearly
5. Advise participants that the role of the researcher will be as a passive facilitator.
6. Advise that Facilitator will have a passive role and will be asking open questions.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

14. Please can you offer your views, perceptions and insights in your understanding of open education and the factors you consider that drive open education?

15. Please share some of the evidence that you have relied on as a basis for confirming your views and perceptions

16. Using UNISA as a point of reference, what are the issues that you consider to be prevalent and most common in the openness discourse?

17. What are the benefits and tensions to being an open-education HEI from the context of UNISA?

18. Briefly explain the range and nature of contributory factors that you see as impacting student access, retention and success, particularly among marginalised student populations?

19. What role do institutional cultural factors play in student learning with respect to retention and success?

20. In what ways are students optimally supported in their learning, interactions with their Teachers and institution to successfully complete their learning

21. In your view, how do you believe the social circumstances of students contribute to their learning experiences? What are your views about UNISA's preparedness to understand and respond to these circumstances?

22. What are the key elements that you believe need to be considered by the institution in the management, operationalisation of openness that can provide the necessary support to students in particular, those from previously marginalised student populations.

23. What policy provisions / recommendations do you believe are necessary to effectively implement open education at UNISA and the provision of adequate support for students to succeed in open learning

ANNEXURE H - UNISA STAFF SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

DEAR UNISA COLLEAGUE

We would appreciate your valuable feedback on this questionnaire.

The questionnaire is aimed at soliciting your views on the openness discourse at UNISA and the implementation of the principles of openness in your interactions with students and your experiences regarding access and whether access has resulted in improved success rates. In this study we enquire if the widening of participation into higher education still identifies levels of exclusion in marginalised groups of society. Therefore, it is important to enquire who the beneficiaries are at UNISA, and also how you perceive institutional landscape.

You have been given a series of questions aligned to the objectives of this study that you need to respond to in accordance with what you are experiencing or have experienced, by indicating whether you agree or disagree with the respective statements.
Remember, you are rating your own experience and your response is anonymous.
Completing the questionnaire should take you no more than 30 minutes.
Thanking you in advance for offering your time to gain helpful insights that may result in positive outcomes for our students.

Best Regards

Alice Mkuzangwe

Ethical Clearance Ref: 2021/04/14/35250968/23/AM
Ref No: 2021_RPSC_036

SECTION A : RESPONDENT PROFILE

1. **What is your highest degree or level of education?**
   - o   Bachelor's Degree
   - o   Bachelors' Honour Degree
   - o   Master's Degree
   - o   Doctorate Degree

2. **What is your level of occupation?**
   - o Institutional Management
   - o College Management
   - o Professor
   - o Associate Professor
   - o Senior Lecturer
   - o Junior lecturer
   - o Professional
   - o Academic support

3. **What is your post Position Grade?**
   - o Peromnes Grade 2 (P2)
   - o Peromnes Grade 3 (P3)
   - o Peromnes Grade 4 (P4)
   - o Peromnes Grade 5 (P5)
   - o Peromnes Grade 6 (P6)
   - o Peromnes Grade 7 (P7)
   - o Peromnes Grade 8 (P8)
   - o Peromnes Grade 9 (P9)

4. **If you are teaching a module at what NQF level is the module.**
   - o NQF level 8
   - o NQF level 7
   - o NQF level 6

5. **Please specify your College.**
   - o Law (CLAW)
   - o Education (CEDU)
   - o Accounting Sciences (CAS)
   - o Economic and Management Sciences (CEMS)
   - o Human Sciences (CHS)
   - o Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES)
   - o Science, Engineering and Technology (CSET)
   - o Other (Specify……….)

PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5

1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neutral/No opinion , 4 = Somewhat agree , 5 = Strongly agree

SECTION B: INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE, POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

1. UNISA does take cognizance of its social justice mandate and mission of the university.
- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

2. Staff at UNISA have adequate understanding of the open education (Openness) discourse.
- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

3. The principles of openness are access, flexibility, and affordability and student centeredness. Openness is about opening all university systems to advance learning.
- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

4. The principles of openness are adequately reflected in all operations and services of the university.
- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

5. **UNISA actively advances the principles of open education and provide the necessary capacity and support to staff to succeed in their roles and functions.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

6. **Openness has a dimension of time. If we are running an open system, we should not be limiting students with completion time for qualifications.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

7. **The University systems support the openness agenda and are flexible from the process of admissions, registrations to the classroom and graduation.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

8. **UNISA Academics and support staff are committed to supporting students.**
   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

9. **As an institution, UNISA has a strong culture of student support across its functions, both academic and support.**
   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

10. **The processes and systems of UNISA work coherently and collaboratively in delivering academic and administrative support to students.**
    - o 1 = Strongly disagree
    - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o 4 = Somewhat agree
    - o 5 = Strongly agree

11. **There is good synergy in the leadership and quality of leadership across of spheres of the institution and college management.**
    - o 1 = Strongly disagree
    - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o 4 = Somewhat agree
    - o 5 = Strongly agree

12. **UNISA has strong oversight and the university decision systems have an adequate oversight role across all university functions.**
    - o 1 = Strongly disagree
    - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o 4 = Somewhat agree
    - o 5 = Strongly agree

13. **The University lacks capacity in its decision-making structures of governance to support the openness agenda.**
    - o 1 = Strongly disagree
    - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o 4 = Somewhat agree
    - o 5 = Strongly agree

14. **The university has good relations with students and are engaged adequately in decision making on matters that impact them.**
    - o 1 = Strongly disagree
    - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o 4 = Somewhat agree
    - o 5 = Strongly agree

15. **Student representation is adequate in all governance structures of the university.**

    - o   1 = Strongly disagree
    - o   2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o   4 = Somewhat agree
    - o   5 = Strongly agree

16. **UNISA Policies are drivers of open education and advance the application of openness principles across the institution.**
    - o   1 = Strongly disagree
    - o   2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o   4 = Somewhat agree
    - o   5 = Strongly agree

17. **The UNISA regional model is ineffective, the university invests more in its urban centers to the detriment of support to students in the regions.**
    - o   1 = Strongly disagree
    - o   2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o   4 = Somewhat agree
    - o   Strongly agree
    - o   5 =

Comments:

SECTION C: ACCESS AND ADMISSIONS

18. **UNISA provides meaningful access into higher education as an institution.**
    - o   1 = Strongly disagree
    - o   2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o   4 = Somewhat agree
    - o   5 = Strongly agree

19. **At UNISA Openness is related to access, students who have not been accepted in residential contact universities, have an opportunity to enroll at the university.**

    - o   1 = Strongly disagree

- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

20. **Access at UNISA remains a challenge from an open education context, in that it is limited to the traditional ways of admitting students and prescribed enrolment numbers.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

21. **Access at UNISA does not yield the high levels of quality in students admitted, especially younger students who have come directly from a classroom background, adapting to self-directed learning with no bridging mechanism available to manage their transition**.

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

22. **UNISA needs to recognize that most of the students enter its doors already defeated in terms of their socio-economic status, they come from poverty driven backgrounds and the institution does not optimally cater for them, this is affecting them negatively.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

23. **Student preparedness is one of the key drivers for open education, learners must enter UNISA ready and must be self-directed to proceed to the next level of their academic learning journey.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion

- o   4 = Somewhat agree
- o   5 = Strongly agree

24.   Open and Distance learning is for students who are matured and understand what they are studying and why they are studying.

- o   1 = Strongly disagree
- o   2 = Somewhat disagree
- o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o   4 = Somewhat agree
- o   5 = Strongly agree

25.   UNISA does not go deep during the admission process of students. We tend to focus on numbers or quantities instead of envisaging quality outputs.

- o   1 = Strongly disagree
- o   2 = Somewhat disagree
- o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o   4 = Somewhat agree
- o   5 = Strongly agree

26.   UNISA enrolments are concentrated in a few colleges such as CEDU, CHS and CLAW and enrolment dominance is leaning towards African students.

- o   1 = Strongly disagree
- o   2 = Somewhat disagree
- o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o   4 = Somewhat agree
- o   5 = Strongly agree

27.   The University systems oppose the principles of openness. There is no flexibility from the process of admissions and registrations. Our students apply at a certain time, are responded to at a certain time and register at a certain time, this process defeats the purpose of being an open institution.

- o   1 = Strongly disagree
- o   2 = Somewhat disagree
- o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o   4 = Somewhat agree
- o   5 = Strongly agree

28.   UNISA Admissions Policy needs to be a driver of openness and its principles.

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

29. **The UNISA environment has advanced the openness and access discourse, but the decision makers are still locked in their own predispositions of student admissions that create barriers of entry into learning.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

Comments:

SECTION D: TECHNOLOGY AND SUPPORT

30. **Technology planning and implementation is fundamental to advance open education foroptimal teaching and learning.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

31. **The implementation and how technology is introduced remains challenging, the reliability and accessibility of the technology platforms is a challenge.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

32. **Technology, internet, and connectivity are the most prevalent challenges at UNISA.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree

- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

33. **E-learning continues to lag in advancing openness. Open education should benefit from e-Learning, and it must be balanced with pedagogy, communication between the teacher and student.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

34. **ICT platforms at UNISA should be seamless and support the university operations optimally. The capacity of current technology platforms remains a challenge as the systems are unable to handle traffic and student volumes.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

35. **Access to technology is a challenge at UNISA, students are said to be provided with devices, but some students do not have computers and gadgets to do their work, students are not trained in the use of technology.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

36. **The main issues contributing towards support of UNISA students is data. Online classes are a good initiative, but it all depends on data accessibility but   students particularly in the rural areas don't have access to data.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

37. **Student information security is compromise, student information is used by private or unsolicited providers offering services to students without the student's consent.**
    - o 1 = Strongly disagree
    - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o 4 = Somewhat agree
    - o 5 = Strongly agree

38. **The impact of Covid-19 brought immense technological fluctuations to open distance e-learning with limited to no resources provided by the University. Students who had no access, connectivity and data dropped out. Students struggled with simple tasks such as submitting assignments on time, this became a hard reality for those with no resources.**
    - o 1 = Strongly disagree
    - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o 4 = Somewhat agree
    - o 5 = Strongly agree

39. **There needs to be better access to devices and data to access provision at UNISA, students should be able to access university resources from anywhere.**
    - o 1 = Strongly disagree
    - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o 4 = Somewhat agree
    - o 5 = Strongly agree

40. **The SMS system was pivotal in bridging the communication gap between students who had challenges with connectivity and students were able to receive communication timeously.**
    - o 1 = Strongly disagree
    - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o 4 = Somewhat agree
    - o 5 = Strongly agree

41. **There is a technology gap amongst our student, not all students are getting the same access and connectivity, technological advancements seem to be concentrated in the urban centers to the detriment of the marginalised students in the rural peripheries. Technology provision It is not equitable.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

Comments:

SECTION E : PEDAGOGY, ASSESSMENT, QUALITY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

42. **Openness deals with pedagogy, social issues, cultural issues, political and technological issues, which cut across governance, university operations, systems and practices. We need to see this comprehensive picture first in order to effectively operationalize open education. .**

    - o 1 = Strongly disagree
    - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o 4 = Somewhat agree
    - o 5 = Strongly agree

43. **In our curriculum design, execution, and the pedagogy, openness is about being available to anybody who wishes to and needs a qualifications and knowledge. Curriculum praxis is a critical driver to openness.**

    - o 1 = Strongly disagree
    - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o 4 = Somewhat agree
    - o 5 = Strongly agree

44. **Openness is flexibility, affordability and student centeredness it's about opening all systems but there seems to be no strategy that speaks to openness in teaching and learning.**
    - o 1 = Strongly disagree
    - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
    - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
    - o 4 = Somewhat agree
    - o 5 = Strongly agree

45. **The principles of open learning are adequately espoused in the teaching and delivery of UNISA programmes and learning materials? Curriculum, designing and qualification structures.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

46. **The programme delivery model of UNISA adheres to the principles of openness but has a dimension of time. If we are running an open system, we should not be limiting students.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

47. **The semester system does not provide our students time to familiarise themselves with the content of the module.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

48. **The semester system is a challenge often observed amongst 1st year students. UNISA should explored if 1st year students can only undertake their learning with year modules, whilst 2nd and 3rd year students continue their studies on a semester delivery model.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

49. **There needs to be more awareness and induction workshops where we unpack openness, top management should be included, because if top management does not understand what openness means, then they will become a barrier.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree

- o   2 = Somewhat disagree
- o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o   4 = Somewhat agree
- o   5 = Strongly agree

50.   **Students need to determine their choices in learning, in terms of their co-construction of knowledge and we should allow students to self-pace to complete their studies in whatever timeframe they so wish.**

- o   1 = Strongly disagree
- o   2 = Somewhat disagree
- o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o   4 = Somewhat agree
- o   5 = Strongly agree

51.   **University's systems are the opposite to what open education is about. The available principles should be demonstrated from access through to the process of programme and course development, then through to the student's journey in all aspects from teaching, learning and assessments, student support, resources, learning management systems.**

- o   1 = Strongly disagree
- o   2 = Somewhat disagree
- o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o   4 = Somewhat agree
- o   5 = Strongly agree

52.   **The quality of our learning materials needs to be improved in terms of content compilation and Instructional design. The quality of material is paramount in open distance learning, because the material is the primary engagement source for the student in the module.**

- o   1 = Strongly disagree
- o   2 = Somewhat disagree
- o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o   4 = Somewhat agree
- o   5 = Strongly agree

53.   **The assessments strategies in modules promote the principles of an open education system but lacks in implementation. If the student is ready for an assessment, they should be allowed to undertake it anytime they feel ready. Students must be allowed to start the course anytime they wish.**

- o   1 = Strongly disagree
- o   2 = Somewhat disagree

- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

54. **In an open system Using alternative assessment methods does not erode quality, Therefore, constant research on how the University responds to the aspirations of an Open University must be undertaken.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

55. **The current assessment feedback mechanisms to students do not promote deep learning and are not enough to assist in learning improvements.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

56. **The workload of lecturers compromises the quality of work and outputs. The workload of both students and the lecturers' result in an inadequate student-lecturer relationship.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

57. **The relationship between lecturers and students is poor, our lecturer student relationship needs to be more visible, lecturers must be more accessible.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

58. **Teaching staff competency and conducive environment are critical drivers of openness. There is a need for a skills audit to better understand if the institution has the necessary skills to implement the openness mandate in the University.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

59. **Competency of the academics, student readiness, and the passion to support the students should be given a priority, more needs to be done in strengthening our social justice mandate in pedagogy.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

60. **We have good and adequate teaching and learning policies, The Curriculum policy speaks to openness and our learning character when it comes to ODeL and OERS, but these policy principles are not visible in practice. The openness principles need to be given full expression at operational level.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

61. **We need better advocacy for openness in our assessment practices are not open.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

62. **Students must be able to access academics from the regions, we need to connect and network students in the regions. The current content delivery model is too focused on urban areas.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree

o   2 = Somewhat disagree

o   3 = Neutral/No opinion

o   4 = Somewhat agree

o   5 = Strongly agree

63.   **Lecturers need to improve their commitment in supporting our students. As an institution, we need to instill a better culture of student support.**

o   1 = Strongly disagree

o   2 = Somewhat disagree

o   3 = Neutral/No opinion

o   4 = Somewhat agree

o   5 = Strongly agree

64.   **The lecturers do not have an appreciation of hardships confronting our students. There is no mirror for the academics to reflect the hardships of the students.**

o   1 = Strongly disagree

o   2 = Somewhat disagree

o   3 = Neutral/No opinion

o   4 = Somewhat agree

o   5 = Strongly agree

65.   **Our student success rate is low because students are put on autopilot by lecturers. Lecturers do not teach and adequately engage our students. Students are left on their own.**

o   1 = Strongly disagree

o   2 = Somewhat disagree

o   3 = Neutral/No opinion

o   4 = Somewhat agree

o   5 = Strongly agree

66.   **Lecturers should be at the forefront driving the openness agenda in teaching and learning.**

o   1 = Strongly disagree

o   2 = Somewhat disagree

o   3 = Neutral/No opinion

o   4 = Somewhat agree

o   5 = Strongly agree

67. **If we open ourselves up in getting student views, we will understand the needs of our students, lectures should play a role in knowing who they are teaching. We need to make decision in line with what students are saying and identify what is suitable for supporting the academic programme.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

68. **Our academic staff members need to be empowered with the intelligence of their student profiles in modules. This will obviate the need treat all students with size one fits all approach.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

69. **Marginalised students are thrown in the same basket and treated just like any other students. There should be a way to look differently at these students. We keep providing generic support without intelligence to segregate the needs of support for students**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

Comments:

Thank you for your valued time and participation in this study. The results of the study will be disseminated in the near future, in the form of an anonymized research report.

ANNEXURE I - STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

UNISA STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

_____

DEAR UNISA STUDENT

We would appreciate your valuable feedback on this questionnaire.

The questionnaire is aimed at soliciting your views on the open education discourse at UNISA and the implementation of the principles of openness in your experiences with the institution regarding access and whether your studies at UNISA have resulted in improved success outcomes and completion of your qualification. In this study we enquire if the widening of participation into higher education still identifies levels of exclusion in marginalised student populations. Therefore, it is important to enquire who the beneficiaries of access and opportunity are at UNISA, and also how you perceive institutional landscape.

You have been given a series of questions aligned to the objectives of this study that you need to respond to in accordance with what you are experiencing or have experienced, by indicating whether you agree or disagree with the respective statements.

Remember, you are rating your own experience and your response is anonymous.

Completing the questionnaire should take you no more than 30 minutes.

Thanking you in advance for offering your time to gain helpful insights that may result in positive outcomes for our students.

Best Regards

Alice Mkuzangwe
Ethical Clearance Ref: 2021/04/14/35250968/23/AM
Ref No: 2021_RPSC_036

SECTION A: STUDENT PROFILE

    i.   **What is your age?**

o 18 - 25 years old

o 26 - 35 years old

o 36 - 45 years old

o 45+

o Prefer not to say

ii. Please specify your Race?

o African

o Coloured

o Indian

o White

o Prefer not to say

iii. Where are you regionally located in terms of your studies?

o Gauteng

o Western Cape

o KZN

o Limpopo

o Mpumalanga

o North-West

o Northern Cape

o Eastern Cape

o Free State

iv. What qualification are you studying?

o 3 Year Diploma (NQF level 6)

o Bachelors' Degree (3 Years, NQF level 7)

o Bachelors' Degree (4 Years, NQF level 8)

v. What device do you use for your learning?

o Laptop
o Desktop
o Tablet
o Smartphone

vi. Please specify field of study, eg. Education, Law,

o Law (CLAW)

o Education (CEDU)

o Accounting Sciences (CAS)

o Economic and Management Sciences (CEMS)

o   Human Sciences (CHS)

o   Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES)

o   Science, Engineering and Technology (CSET)

o   Other (Specify……….)

vii.   Are you NSFAS funded?

o   Yes

o   No

PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5

1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neutral/No opinion , 4 = Somewhat agree , 5 = Strongly agree

SECTION B: INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE, POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

70.   UNISA does take cognizance of its social justice mandate and provides access to study.

o   1 = Strongly disagree

o   2 = Somewhat disagree

o   3 = Neutral/No opinion

o   4 = Somewhat agree

o   5 = Strongly agree

71.   UNISA students have adequate understanding of the open education (Openness) discourse.

o   1 = Strongly disagree

o   2 = Somewhat disagree

o   3 = Neutral/No opinion

o   4 = Somewhat agree

o   5 = Strongly agree

72.   The principles of openness are access, flexibility, and affordability and student centeredness. Openness is about opening all university systems to advance learning for students

o   1 = Strongly disagree

o   2 = Somewhat disagree

o   3 = Neutral/No opinion

o   4 = Somewhat agree

o   5 = Strongly agree

73. **The principles of openness are adequately espoused in all operations and services of the university.**
   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

74. **UNISA does advance the principles of open education and provide the necessary capacity and support to students for success in their learning journey.**
   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

75. **Open education has a dimension of time. If we are studying in an open system, we should not be limited by time as students.**
   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

76. **The University systems support the openness agenda and are flexible from the process of admissions, registrations to the classroom and graduation.**
   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

77. **UNISA Academics and support staff are committed in supporting the students.**
   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree

o 5 = Strongly agree

78. **As an institution, UNISA does have a strong culture of student support across its functions, both academic and support.**
   o 1 = Strongly disagree
   o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   o 4 = Somewhat agree
   o 5 = Strongly agree

79. **The processes and systems of UNISA do work coherently and collaboratively in delivering academic and administrative support to students.**
   o 1 = Strongly disagree
   o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   o 4 = Somewhat agree
   o 5 = Strongly agree

80. **There is good synergy in the leadership and quality of leadership across of spheres of the institution and college management.**
   o 1 = Strongly disagree
   o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   o 4 = Somewhat agree
   o 5 = Strongly agree

81. **The University has capacity in its decision-making structures of governance and student leadership provides the necessary direction in matters that affect students.**
   o 1 = Strongly disagree
   o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   o 4 = Somewhat agree
   o 5 = Strongly agree

82. **The university has good relations with students and students are engaged adequately in decision making on matters that impact them.**
   o 1 = Strongly disagree
   o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   o 3 = Neutral/No opinion

- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

83. **Student representation is adequate in all governance structures of the university.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

84. **The UNISA regional model is ineffective, the university invests more in the urban centers and neglect the provision of support to students who are marginalised in the regions.**
- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

5 =

Comments:

SECTION C: ACCESS AND ADMISSIONS

85. **UNISA provides meaningful access into higher education as an institution.**
- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

86. **At UNISA open education is related to access, students who have not been accepted in residential contact universities, have an opportunity to enroll in the university.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

87. **Access at UNISA remains a challenge from an open education context, in that it is limited to the traditional ways of admitting students limited by enrolment numbers.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

88. **Communication with students is a challenge at UNISA, students are not informed timeously on important matters that impact their studies.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

89. **Student preparedness is one of the key drivers for open education, learners must enter UNISA ready and must be self-directed to proceed to the next level of their academic learning journey.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

90. **Open and Distance learning is for students who are matured and understand what they are studying and why they are studying.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

91. **UNISA enrolments are concentrated in a few colleges such as CEDU, CHS and CLAW and enrolment dominance is leaning towards African students.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree

- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

92. **There is no flexibility from the process of admissions and registrations. Students apply at a certain time, are responded to at a certain time and register at a certain time, this process defeats the purpose of being an open institution.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

93. **UNISA Admissions Policy needs to be a driver of open education and its principles.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

94. **The UNISA environment has advanced the access discourse, but the institution's decisions still lag in terms of student admissions.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

Comments:

SECTION D: DIMENSION 8 – TECHNOLOGY AND SUPPORT

95. **The implementation and how technology is introduced remains challenging at UNISA, the reliability and accessibility of the technology platforms is a challenge.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree

- o 2 = Somewhat disagree

- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion

- o 4 = Somewhat agree

- o 5 = Strongly agree

96. Technology, internet, and connectivity are the most challenges at UNISA.

- o 1 = Strongly disagree

- o 2 = Somewhat disagree

- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion

- o 4 = Somewhat agree

- o 5 = Strongly agree

97. E-learning continues to lag in advancing openness, communication between the teacher and student is not adequate.

- o 1 = Strongly disagree

- o 2 = Somewhat disagree

- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion

- o 4 = Somewhat agree

- o 5 = Strongly agree

98. ICT platforms at UNISA should be seamless and support the university students optimally. Systems functionality and the introduction of technology to deliver online teaching and learning is a challenge.

- o 1 = Strongly disagree

- o 2 = Somewhat disagree

- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion

- o 4 = Somewhat agree

- o 5 = Strongly agree

99. Access to technology is a challenge at UNISA, students are said to be provided with devices, but some students do not have computers and gadgets to do their work, students are not trained in the use of technology.

- o 1 = Strongly disagree

- o 2 = Somewhat disagree

- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion

- o 4 = Somewhat agree

- o 5 = Strongly agree

100. **The main issues contributing towards the support of UNISA students is data. Online classes are a good initiative but depends on data accessibility. Students in the rural areas don't have access to data.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

101. **Student information security is compromise, student information is used by private or unsolicited providers offering services to students without the student's consent.**
- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

102. **There needs to be better access to devices and data to access provision at UNISA, students should be able to access university resources from anywhere.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

103. **SMS system was pivotal in bridging the communication gap between students who had challenges with connectivity and those who were able to receive SMSs due to lack of access to data.**
- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

104. **There is a technology gap amongst students, not all students are getting the same access and connectivity, technological advancements seem to be concentrated in the urban centers to the detriment of the marginalised students in the rural peripheries. Technology provision It is not equitable.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree

- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

Comments:

SECTION E : PEDAGOGY, ASSESSMENT, QUALITY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

105. **Open education deals with social issues, cultural issues, political and technological issues, which cut across governance, university operations, systems and practices that must be reflected on comprehensively due to their impact on students.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

106. **Open education should be is about being available to students who wishes to and need a qualification and knowledge. Curriculum stricture and module composition is a critical driver to openness.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

107. **Flexibility, affordability and student centeredness it's about opening all systems but there seems to be no strategy that speaks to openness in learning for students.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

108. **UNISA as a university offers students adequate resources to learn remotely at a Distance and Online.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree

- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

109. **The programme delivery model of UNISA adheres to the principles of openness but has a dimension of time. If UNISA is running an open system, students should not be limited in terms of completion time for their qualifications**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

110. **The semester system does not provide students time to familiarise themselves with the content of their modules.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

111. **The semester system is a challenge especially for 1st year students. UNISA should explored if 1st year students can only undertake their learning with year modules, whilst 2nd and 3rd year students continue their studies on a semester delivery model.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

112. **Students need to determine their choices in learning, in terms of their co-construction of knowledge and be allowed to pace their studies in whatever timeframe they wish.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

113. **University's systems are the opposite to what open education is about. The principles of openness should be demonstrated from access through to the process of programme and course development, then through to the student's journey in all aspects from teaching, learning and assessments, student support, resources, learning management systems.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

114. **The learning management system Moodle is a challenge for students.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

115. **Unisa provides basic resources in good working condition at its study centres in the regions.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

116. **UNISA provides learning materials and centres are equipped with modern resources such as computers and internet connection.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

117. **UNISA infrastructure such as libraries and learning centres are adequate and support student learning.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree

- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

118. **The quality of student learning materials needs to be improved in terms of content compilation and Instructional design. The quality of material is paramount in open distance learning, because the material is the primary engagement source for students in a module.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

119. **The scheduling of assessments is a challenge for students. If the students are ready for an assessment, they should be allowed to undertake it anytime they feel ready. Students must be allowed to start the course anytime they wish.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

120. **The assessment feedback to students does not promote deep learning and it is not enough to assist in learning improvements.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

121. **UNISA students interact frequently with their lectures and often have one to one discussion with lecturers.**

- o 1 = Strongly disagree
- o 2 = Somewhat disagree
- o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o 4 = Somewhat agree
- o 5 = Strongly agree

122. **The workload of lecturers compromises the quality of work and outputs. The workload of both students and the lecturers' result in an inadequate student-lecturer relationship.**

   o 1 = Strongly disagree
   o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   o 4 = Somewhat agree
   o 5 = Strongly agree

123. **The relationship between lecturers and students is poor, our lecturer and student relationship need to be more visible, lecturers must be more accessible.**

   o 1 = Strongly disagree
   o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   o 4 = Somewhat agree
   o 5 = Strongly agree

124. **Competency of the lectures, student readiness, and the passion to support the students should be given a priority.**

   o 1 = Strongly disagree
   o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   o 4 = Somewhat agree
   o 5 = Strongly agree

125. **Students must be able to access academics from the regions, we need to connect and network students at the regions.**

   o 1 = Strongly disagree
   o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   o 4 = Somewhat agree
   o 5 = Strongly agree

126. **Lecturers need to improve their commitment in supporting students. UNISA needs to instill a better culture of student support.**

   o 1 = Strongly disagree
   o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   o 4 = Somewhat agree
   o 5 = Strongly agree

127. **Our student success rate is low because students are put on autopilot by lecturers. Lecturers do not teach and adequately engage students. Students are left on their own.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

128. **Students have observed that lecturers are overwhelmed by the workload and the number of students they have to teach, thus affecting the student's learning experience.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

129. **UNISA needs to listen to students, institutional decisions must be taken in accord with what students identify what is suitable for supporting the academic programme.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

130. **The lecturers do not have an appreciation of hardships by the students. There is no mirror for the academics to reflect on the hardships of the students.**

   - o 1 = Strongly disagree
   - o 2 = Somewhat disagree
   - o 3 = Neutral/No opinion
   - o 4 = Somewhat agree
   - o 5 = Strongly agree

131. **Students have different challenges in their learning journey, but students are thrown in the same basket and treated the same. UNISA provides generic support with urban students being advantaged and rural students in the regions disadvantaged.**

- o   1 = Strongly disagree
- o   2 = Somewhat disagree
- o   3 = Neutral/No opinion
- o   4 = Somewhat agree
- o   5 = Strongly agree

Comments:

Thank you for your valued time and participation in this study. The results of the study will be disseminated in the near future, in the form of an anonymized research report.

End///

ANNEXURE J – EDITING CERTIFICATE

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Date: 16 March 2023

This is to certify that I have edited the PhD thesis of the following candidate:

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Student number: 35250968

Title: Openness in higher education: the panacea to endemic challenges with student access and success among previously excluded populations.

Maseko

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