

The academic experiences of Faculty of Education postgraduate students who have dropped out of a Higher Education Institution in Eastern Cape Province

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By

Winkie Mdyogolo

Supervisor

Dr. N. Duku.

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DECLARATION

I, Winkie Mdyogolo, declare that *The academic experiences of Faculty of Education postgraduate students who have dropped out of one of the Higher Education Institutions in Eastern Cape* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of referencing.

Winkie Mdyogolo

Date

Student Number : 200438557

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore academic learning experiences of students who have dropped out of postgraduate studies in a Higher Education Institution in Eastern Cape.

The study employed phenomenological approach using unstructured in-depth interviews to collect data from participants who have dropped out of Masters Programme in HEI in Eastern Cape. Four participants participated in this study. A lot of themes emerged from what the participants reported and similar experiences were noted as well as different experiences.

Central to what this study ascertained is the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee. From the findings of the study it can be ascertained that for any postgraduate student to succeed in his/her studies he / she needs a positive relationship with the supervisor who will play a role of guide, mentor, supporter and a friend. However, the academic preparedness of the students in terms of academic reading and writing, computer literacy and determination to be an independent researcher is also key.

Whilst this study provides insight to what the students have experienced academically its findings cannot be generalised because the experiences are those of individuals.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GMRDC	GOVAN MBEKI RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE
HEI	HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION
NSFAS	NATIONAL STUDENT FINANCIAL AID SCHEME
NRF	NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION
M.Ed	MASTER IN EDUCATION
B.Ed (Honours)	BACHELOR OF EDUCATION (HONOURS)
P.hD	DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
HESA	HIGHER EDUCATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the presentation of the background and significance of the study. This chapter also gives an outline of the research problem, research questions, purpose of the study, and the paradigmatic perspective. Key concepts are also defined, and delimitation of the study explained in this chapter. Finally it will end with the chapter outline of the study.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Student retention and attrition is a global concern that many countries are faced with. Cosser and Letseka (2010:3) report that concern with dropout rates has become a worldwide phenomenon, the dropout rate in the UK, for an example, is estimated to be 22%, and in Australia was 19% in 2002 , in the United States, approximately 58% of first time students wanting to complete a four year degree completed it in six years.

Literature indicates that dropout rates affect both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Globally countries such as Australia are concerned with the dropout rates of postgraduate students. Alston, Allan and Bell (2005) state that the attrition and completion rates of students from postgraduate Education programs in Australian universities have created concern within Australian government circles. Some academics and

politicians alike in South Africa have raised similar concerns that postgraduate student enrolments and outputs, and especially doctoral enrolments and outputs, are low and inadequate in relation to South Africa's economic and social development needs (Cosser and Letseka, 2010; HESA 2009).

Crosling, Heagney and Thomas (2009) state that student attrition, non-completion of studies, entails costs to the individual, family, society, higher education institutions and economy. At individual and family levels, losses can range from financial to disappointments and failed opportunities. At societal and economy wide level, costs include potential human capital losses in terms of skills and knowledge (Ibid). For universities, low succession rates and non completion has an impact on funding of the higher education institutes, funding from sponsors and government becomes less because of low research succession and graduation rates and that is why most South African universities have started developing student and retention policies (Higher Education Monitor, 2009; Koen, 2007). For example, the Higher Education Institute which was used in this study developed its own Student Retention Policy in 2009.

1.2.1 Contributing factors to drop out of postgraduate students

Literature has identified many different factors that contribute to students dropping out of their postgraduate studies. Albertyn, Kapp and Bitzer (2008) identify issues such as funding, social class, personal factors and social, organizational and academic aspects as some of the contributory factors to

postgraduate dropout. Although literature identifies the above mentioned aspects as the contributory factors to postgraduate dropouts, however, Letseka and Breier (2010) claim that the historical legacy of Apartheid in South Africa still has a bearing who graduates and who does not. The socio-economic status of the majority of students in undergraduate and postgraduate studies in higher education institutions is the contributory factor to slow succession rate (Ibid).

With regards to issue of funding, Kahn, Blankely, Maharaj, Pogue, Reddy, Cele and du Toit (2004) report that the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is largely aimed at supporting first degrees and funds for postgraduate research students which is provided by the National Research Foundation (NRF) is very limited. This means that postgraduate students may enrol for their postgraduate degrees but then find it difficult to continue with their studies due to lack of funds. However, funding of postgraduate students is not the only contributing factor to postgraduate student retention and attrition.

Issues such as organisational and academic factors contribute to retention and attrition. Waghid (2006) asserts that the relationship between a student and a supervisor is key in ensuring the success of the students. This relationship should not be understood as one between a customer and a supplier; it ought to be constituted by freedom and friendship (Cullen, Pearson, Saha and Spear, 2005; Lessing and Lessing, 2004). This type of relationship can be achieved if student and supervisor ratios are very low as supervisors would have enough time to deal with their students. A report on

post graduate studies commissioned by the Council on Higher Education entitled: Higher Education Monitor, Postgraduate Studies in South Africa: A Statistical Profile, released in 2009, introduced the term "burden of supervision". The report indicates that South African academics are increasingly burdened with an unrealistically high number of postgraduate students to supervise. This may mean that students might find it difficult to meet their supervisors due to high student supervisor ratio.

De Beer and Mason (2009) further argue that in South Africa, as in Australia and New Zealand, funding is directly linked to the completion rate of postgraduate students, and with postgraduate supervision still relatively under-resourced, the number of postgraduate students per supervisor has increased significantly. de Beer and Mason further assert that some supervisors at University of Gauteng (pseudonym) face the task of supervising up to 14 postgraduate students, both doctoral and masters, and it was necessary to find ways of reducing the administration and, where possible, the contact with students, without prejudicing the quality and standard of the postgraduate work (Ibid).

Academic ability plays a very significant role in the success and attrition of postgraduate students. Albertyn, Kapp and Bitzer (2008) point out that 75% of M. Phil students reported difficulty with writing research proposals, research methodology, and 63% had a problem with preparing a title and research design. This means that although there are other factors that contribute to student retention and attrition, academic performance is also

one of the key factors that make postgraduate students dropout or exceed the maximum prescribed time of graduating in Masters and doctoral studies. Frouws (2007) claims that students submit poor research proposals, which are invariably approved by academic departments and academic departments, should be in a position to evaluate research proposals and provide students with proper guidance, which is sadly lacking.

Being a part time student also has a contribution to student dropout. The above factors are part of being part time students. It is a known fact that part time students sometimes have to juggle between work family, and their studies and that poses a threat to their studies. Although at the moment there is no literature to support this idea it is also a known fact that part time students drop out of their studies because they have to choose between their studies and their work. Situational challenges of part time students such as balancing his/her life, socio-economic status and other personal factors contribute heavily on part time students dropping out.

1.2.2 The context of the Education Faculty of the selected institution

Literature out there indicates that most if not all the South African Higher Education Institutions face similar problems of slow succession rates, slow graduation rates and student dropout both in undergraduate and postgraduate studies (Statistical Profile, 2009). This is why the selected institution developed a student retention policy in 2009. In the context of the Education Faculty of this institution, the following data emerged. Although

the following data is not the official statistics of the university, they were received from the student bureaux' office.

Table 1.1 Statistical profile of students registered and dropouts

Year	B. Ed (Hons.)			M. Ed			Ph. D			Total For the three programmes		
	registered	dropouts	% dropouts	registered	dropouts	% dropouts	Registere	dropouts	% dropouts	registered	Dropouts	Total % of dropouts
2007	27	06	22.2%	20	13	65.0%	05	01	20.0%	52	20	38.5%
2008	31	10	32.3%	26	13	50.0%	17	04	23.5%	74	27	36.5%
2009	39	08	20.5%	28	03	10.7%	17	05	29.4%	84	16	19.0%
Total	97	24	24.7%	74	29	39.2%	39	10	25.6%	210	63	30.0%

Source: HEI in Eastern Cape: Student Bureau's office

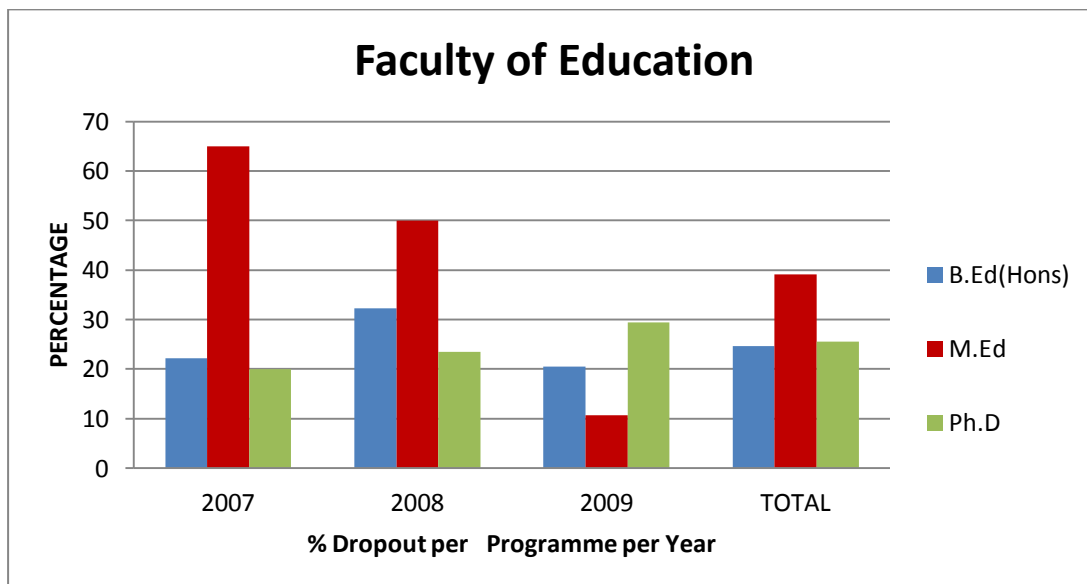


Figure 1.1 Graphical representation of percentage dropouts

Source: HEI in Eastern Cape: Student Bureau's office

Table 1.1 and Figure 1.1 shows data that was received from the University of Hope (pseudonym). The data was data of students who registered in Education Faculty as part time students in order to upgrade their undergraduate degrees to postgraduate degrees. The data shows students who dropped out of postgraduate studies in the Education Faculty. The data was for students studying towards the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) honours, Master of Education (M.Ed) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D). The data was for students from the academic year 2007 to 2009.

According to the statistics provided above, in 2007 the M.Ed programme had the highest dropout rate in all the three programmes which was 65%. This means that more than half of the students enrolled in 2007 decided to drop out of their postgraduate studies. And in 2008, half of the M.Ed students (50%) dropped out of the programme. In fact, the statistics provided also shows that it was only in 2009 where the Masters Programme showed a decline in dropout rates and had the lowest figures of 10,7% as compared to other postgraduate programmes. Also in 2009, table 1.1 reveals that the total for postgraduate students who had dropped out was the lowest as compared to other years.

However, when the three years are added up, the Masters Programme had the highest total of students (39.2%). who had dropped out. The table 1.1 also shows that for the three years the average dropout rate for the postgraduate studies was 30%. This means that for the three years nearly one third of students registered had dropped out of postgraduate studies.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the fact that the selected University has a retention policy in place, students who are studying part time postgraduate studies in the Education Faculty continue to drop out of their studies. Evidence shows that for the past three years the Education Faculty had an average of 30% dropouts. Literature reveals that finances, social class, organizational issues and academic performance contribute to student dropping out of their postgraduate studies.

However, Koen (2007) maintains that despite the student-related financial, time, personal circumstances and academic ability explanations there are signs, nonetheless, that we actually do not know why students leave Higher Education institutions 'voluntarily' in South Africa. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the experiences of the part time postgraduate students who have dropped out of the postgraduate Education programme of one Higher Education Institution in Eastern Cape.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1 Core question

- ✓ How did postgraduate students who have dropped out experience academic learning in the Education Faculty of one HEI in Eastern Cape?

1.4.2 Sub-research questions

- ✓ In the light of experiences reported by the students who have dropped out, what are the implications for how students are supported in their academic needs?

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to ascertain and understand how students who have dropped out experienced academic learning in education faculty of postgraduate studies.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study can be of benefit to both students enrolling at the university for their postgraduate studies and to this HEI as well. This means that from the findings of the research, students who enrol at the university would be able to draw advice from the data the participants reported on. Secondly, this University would also be able to analyse critically its own retention policy. This, then, can lead to the university strengthening its retention and attrition for the benefit of the students. Thirdly, this study can be of benefit to policy implementation of student retention and attrition nationally.

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

A number of concepts relevant to this research have been defined in this section as follows:

1.7.1 Academic experience

For the purpose of this study, academic experiences refers to the personal involvement in or observation of academic events as they occur.

1.7.2 Retention

Crosling, Thomas and Heagney (2009) define retention as the process of retaining students who enrol for a qualification and remain at a particular institution until they complete their studies for that qualification.

1.7.3 Dropout

A dropout student is a student who leaves the higher education institution without attaining the degree or diploma.

1.7.4 Part time student

A part time student is a student who enrolls at a higher education institution on part time basis that is to study either on weekends or on evening classes.

1.7.5 Attrition

Angelo, Williams and Natvig (2007) define attrition as a decrease in the number of students participating in course activities or a degree program.

1.8 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was limited to one Higher Education Institution in the Eastern Cape. Like any other higher education institution, it had a number of students who dropped out of postgraduate studies. Although the participants were no longer part of this university, the researcher deemed it fit to utilise

the university as it was core in providing the researcher with the database of students who had dropped out.

1.9 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter one provides the background to the study and the rationale for the study. This chapter also presents the significance of the study and definition of key concepts.

Chapter two presents the literature review and defined the notion of dropouts, stop-out and push outs. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the factors behind the notion of dropouts, causes and consequences.

Chapter three describes the research methodology employed by the study. Furthermore, research design and paradigm are outlined including measures to ensure that the study is reliable and valid.

Chapter four presents discussions of findings from the data that was collected and how these findings were interpreted and analysed. The summary of the main results is also outlined.

Chapter five consists of lessons learnt from the study and conclusions were drawn from the literature review and the investigation itself. Recommendations are also made.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the literature review on the issue of postgraduate students who have dropped out of postgraduate studies with the particular reference to the causes of dropouts, strategies to combat dropout, student retention and experiences of students who have dropped out. The review also looks at what the scholars have articulated about the South African Higher Education Institutions retention and attrition policies.

An overview on the conceptual frameworks that were central to this study have been discussed. These conceptual frameworks are discussed with aim of understanding the dropout phenomenon. The argument was made that these framework were useful to understand the complex phenomenon of experiences of postgraduate students who have dropped out. The literature had articulated that various factors contribute to students dropping out of their postgraduate studies. Merits of these arguments were teased out and reviewed in context of this study.

Central to these arguments was also the review of what higher education institutions are putting as policies to decrease the postgraduate students' dropout rates. The literature review was structured into four sections. The first section was going to conceptualise the notion of the dropout and further

discuss the causes on the causes of dropouts. On the second section, the researcher engaged on what the literature has articulated on part time students and strategies to decrease dropout rates. The researcher on the third section discussed what the theories have put as a framework for this study. The final section was the conclusion of the literature review.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A coherent conceptual framework was demanded in this study to understand the nature of academic experiences of postgraduate dropouts at one HEI in Eastern Cape. Henceforth, the key central theories that sought this exploration were the Dropout Theory , and Adult Learning Theory or Andragogy developed by Knowles (Clardy, 2005).

The dropout theory appeared to be appropriate theory for this study because the study itself was about postgraduate dropouts and Lanier (1986) cites that the causes of dropping out are multiple and extremely interrelated but mainly can be categorised to experiences, family circumstances, economic factors and individual behaviour. Lanier further argues low socio economic status, high levels of work and lack of self esteem are causes of students to dropout but no all potential dropouts fit the above description (Ibid). That was why this study sought to explore the experiences of dropouts other than the reasons mentioned by the literature.

Knowles as cited in Clardy (2005) defines andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn. The Adult Learning Theory also known as Andragogy by Knowles notes that adult learner comes to learning with a

wide range of previous experiences, knowledge, self-direction, interests, and competencies. Baskas (2011) postulates that no single theory explains how adults learn, it can best be assumed that adults learn through the accumulation of formal and informal education, and lifelong experiences.

Baskas (2011) further asserts that as adults mature, their lifelong learning experiences and education tend to become more complex due to variables that they must manipulate in order to become successful in life. This theory is appropriate for this study as the theory notes that adult learning is a complex issue and this study sought to explore how have the participants experienced academic learning.

Central to the theory of andragogy is that adult learning is complicated by different variables which adult learning come with to learning, and that the adults learn differently as adults from how we learn when we were children (Moberg, 2006; Roberson, 2002). Holton, Wilson and Bates (2009) argue that there are six basic principles aligned with andragogy. Baskas (2011) concur to this by postulating that andragogy is based on six assumptions which are:

- Motivation to learn
- Positive affects
- Learning from mistakes
- Study team
- Role of learners experience
- Teacher educators

Pew (2007) defines motivation to learn as the level of effort an individual is willing to expend toward the achievement of a certain goal and that there are types of motivation which are intrinsic and extrinsic. This means that adult learners need to have some form of motivation for them to be able to succeed in their studies. The andragogical theory was therefore suitable for this study as it allowed the researcher to analyse the data that the participants provided.

2.3 DROP OUT AND ITS CAUSES

2.3.1 Conceptualising the notion of dropouts

The term drop out is a very complex term to define. There is no correct or best way of defining what a drop out student is. Chavez, Belkin, Hornback and Adams (1991).state that one of the problems encountered in the studies of dropouts is the lack of a uniform definition. Many terms are used synonymously with the term dropout i.e., educational mortality, disaffiliated student (i.e., one no longer wishing to be associated with the school), capable dropout (i.e., family or cultural situation did not agree with school demands), stop outs (i.e., dropouts who return to school usually within the same academic year), push outs (i.e., individuals who feel, sometimes quite accurately, that people in the school want them to leave (Ibid).

Dropping out of university students whether in their undergraduate or postgraduate studies is a complex phenomenon. Gaustad as cited in Jajuja (2009) argues that the definition of a “drop out” varies widely with different countries, states, districts, and even schools within a country or district using

the term somewhat differently. Hagedorn (2006) concurs to this by postulating that measuring college student retention is complicated, confusing, and context dependent. Astin as cited in Hagedorn (2006) further put emphases on the complexity of drop out by arguing that the term “drop out” is imperfectly defined: the so-called drop outs may ultimately become non dropouts and vice versa.

It is very complex to align a student who has left or deregistered in a particular higher education institution because he or she might have left the particular institution and enrolled for studies in another institution. This is evident when Astin as cited in Hagedorn (2006) assert that defining drop out is further complicated by the prevalence of student enrolment in several different institutions throughout their educational career.

International universities encourage students to transfer to other institutions. For an example, in Canada, Brown (2008) states that in general, it is considered academically beneficial for a student to be exposed to other faculty and curriculum content, and so not to do all three degrees at the same university. Accordingly, many students are encouraged to move to a different university after the bachelor’s degree and/or after the master’s. Of course, while some professors encourage their own students to maximize their opportunities by moving to another university, others encourage their best students to continue onto higher degree levels under their own supervision (Ibid).

In the South African context, this then means that students may enrol at a particular institution for postgraduate studies and then not complete the degree that was enrolled for but transfer to another institution because of various factors for the completion of the degree or register for a another degree. These students are then identified as drop outs in the institutions they were firstly registered in. However, other students do not transfer to other institutions. For this study, a dropout student is considered to be a student who have enrolled for a Masters degree but has not attained the degree on the prescribed period and did not register the following academic year.

Some students of postgraduate studies sometimes decide not to continue with their studies due to a variety of factors. These factors may be factors such as lack of finances to carry on studying, personal factors, work related factors and family commitments. Letseka and Breier (2010) reveal that some academics argued for the reconceptualisation of 'drop out' to recognise favourably those who are forced to 'stop out' for a while mostly to earn money but intend to return. These students stop for some times a year and decide to come back the next academic year. These students are then known as stop outs because they stop for a year or two and come back again to study. However, other students do not stop out but permanently leave the higher education institution against their will.

Students that leave the higher education institutions permanently against their will are known as push outs. Being pushed out at higher education

institution can be caused by a variety of factors. These factors may include institutional factors such as finding the curriculum not suitable for every student or owing the university a lot of money of tuition fees which blocks the student to be enrolled back to the university. Koen (2007) mentions that forced exclusion relate to students excluded by an admissions committee consisting of academics, institutional managers and student representatives. The committee is required to examine whether the students earmarked for exclusion because their financial debt is too high or because they have failed too many courses – can be re-registered on defensible grounds (Ibid).

Society has a perception that a drop out is a learner who has not completed his high school education, matriculated in the case of South African schooling context. In the context of higher education institution, a drop out student is assigned to a person who leaves the higher education institution without attaining any degree or diploma.

2.3.2 Causes of students to drop out of postgraduate studies.

In the context of the world and South African society in particular, higher education institutions are the key factors that can play a significant role in addressing the imbalances that were created by the South Africa that existed before the post-apartheid South Africa. Negash, Olusola and Colucci (2009) affirm that the benefits of higher education to all-round human development need no exaggeration.

Higher education can be considered as an important engine for overall socio-economic advancement. Most importantly, it has been a crucial instrument through which knowledge has been created and disseminated. It goes without saying that higher education plays vital role for economic and political advancement of nations (Ibid). However, globally higher education institutions are faced with a problem of high student dropout.

The global trends have shown that higher education institutions are experiencing huge dropout rates. Cosser and Letseka (2010) reveal that concern with the dropout rate has become a worldwide phenomenon. They further assert that the dropout rate in the UK, for an example, is estimated to be 22% and in 2002, Australia 19%. In the United States, approximately 58% of first time students wanting to complete a four year degree completed it in six years (Ibid).

In the context of South African Higher Education Institutions, Breier and Letseka (2010) establish that the data on higher education trends in South Africa indicate that 50% of students enrolled in higher education institutions drop out in their first three years, with about 30% dropping out in their first year. Although most of the literature has concentrated on undergraduate studies, postgraduate studies are affected by drop out rates as well.

Frouws (2007) advocates that concern has been raised in recent years over the proportion of research students who fail to submit a dissertation after a period of public or business funding. An additional factor for low Masters and Doctoral throughput rates is to be found in the perceived

unattractiveness of academic and scientific careers (Ibid). Of course this means that if the throughput rates of higher education institutions are low, then the dropout rates are high and this is a global concern countries are faced with.

Albertyn, Kapp and Bitzer (2008) argue that global changes have influenced the postgraduate landscape in higher educational institutions (HEIs). It has been shown that attrition rates for postgraduate students in some countries are high with 17 per cent found in the UK study of Christie, Munro and Fisher (2004:619) and 40–50 per cent noted in the American studies of Golde (2005:669) and Lovitts (2005:139). Countries such as Australia are also concerned with their dropout rates especially in postgraduate studies. Alston et al. (2005) concur to this by advocating that the attrition and completion rates of students from postgraduate Education programs in Australia universities have created concern within Australian government circles.

In the context of postgraduate studies in South Africa, the country has a very low succession and throughput rate as compared to other countries. A report by HESA (2009) states that postgraduate student enrolments and outputs, and especially doctoral enrolments and outputs, are low and inadequate in relation to South Africa's economic and social development needs. In 2007, there were 1 271 doctoral graduates (45% black and 41% women). South Africa produces 23 doctoral graduates per million of population, compared to 43 by Brazil, 157 by South Korea and almost 200 by Australia. Black and women students continue to be under-represented

in doctoral programmes, and only 32% of university academics possess doctorates (Ibid).

Literature has identified many key factors that contribute to postgraduate students dropping out of their studies. These key factors include, among others, the isolation a postgraduate student finds himself or herself in, personal factors, funding, the state of higher educational institutions, socio-economic status of students and academic skills of students. These key factors are discussed below:

2.3.2.1 Isolation

With regards to isolation, postgraduate students often find their journey of research studies a very lonely journey. Alston et al (2005) advises that also of significance to successful completion is a student's sense of isolation, a factor exacerbated by off-campus study. Sayed, Kruss and Badat (1998) concur to this by establishing that isolation emerged as the most common problem for research students in education and that studies have shown that part-time students not only tend to have greater commitments outside research but also they experience the problem of isolation in a more acute form. Conrad and Phillips (1995) and Theron (2002) also note the loneliness in postgraduate studies especially loneliness that is experienced by mature women who are studying on part time basis.

In the context of South Africa, most students who are enrolled in Masters and Doctoral studies often start by studying Honours degree. In Honours degree students whether part time or full time are taught as a group or as a

class, so it will be the first time experience where a student is taught on one to one basis in Masters Programme. This for many students poses as a threat for dropping out as they find their journey of studying lonely.

McLean (2001) notes that higher education institutions are following an assimilation policy. Higher Education Institutions expect students to adapt and assimilate their culture. For an example, students who enrol for Masters Programme are expected to assimilate the culture of being taught on one to one basis. However, isolation in postgraduate studies is intertwined with the way Higher Education Institutions in South Africa are organised and the way they conduct their supervision.

2.3.2.2 HEI and Supervision

Frouws (2007:26) states that the term 'postgraduate supervision' usually refers to the supervision or promotion of students' research activities leading in whole or in part to the awarding of a Master's or Doctoral degree. The goals of postgraduate supervision are both the production of a good dissertation or thesis, and the transformation of the student into a competent and independent researcher. The key to postgraduate research supervision is a process of fostering and enhancing learning, research and communication at the highest level (Ibid).

Supervision of postgraduate students especially the Masters and Doctoral students is the cornerstone to the success of these students. Waghid (2006) asserts that the relationship between a student and a supervisor is key. Mouton (2001) explains that the supervision of postgraduate research has

four dimensions, namely the advisory role, the quality control role, the supporting relationship nurtured by the supervisor and the guidance of the student by the supervisor. The role a supervisor plays in helping a student pass his/her dissertation or thesis is of vital importance. Frouws (2007) supports this argument by establishing that supervisors must be able to provide guidance to the expansion of knowledge, as well as the utilization of existing and new knowledge in solving problems and meeting the needs and priorities of students.

Brown (2008) notes that while every doctoral student is admitted to and registered in a doctoral programme, the key to the success of doctoral education is the relationship between the student and his or her individual faculty supervisor and the essential requirement in every doctoral programme is the production of a substantial and original contribution to knowledge (i.e. the thesis), and the relationship with the supervisor is of crucial importance in that endeavour. Although this literature puts emphasis on how the supervisors' role is pivotal to the success of postgraduate students however, for this to work, student and supervisor ratio is of key.

De Beer and Mason (2009) establish that the number of postgraduate students per supervisor has increased significantly. Some supervisors at DUT face the task of supervising up to 14 postgraduate students, both doctoral and masters, and it was necessary to find ways of reducing the administration and, where possible, the contact with students, without prejudicing the quality and standard of the postgraduate work (Ibid). Koen (2007) concurs to the high ratio of student and supervisor by asserting

that students complained bitterly about limited contact with supervisors, inadequate and delayed feedback and absence clear guidance from staff and factors singled out included academics taking leave without informing students due heavy workloads.

In the South African context, the following statistics provided by the Higher Education Monitor (2009) show that there is a concern on the student and supervisor ratio. Supervision in the higher education institutions in South Africa is conducted on one to one basis. One supervisor is allocated to supervise one or more students whereas in more developed countries students are supervised by a team of supervisors. A student is not assigned to one supervisor but is helped in the process of research learning by a team of supervisors.

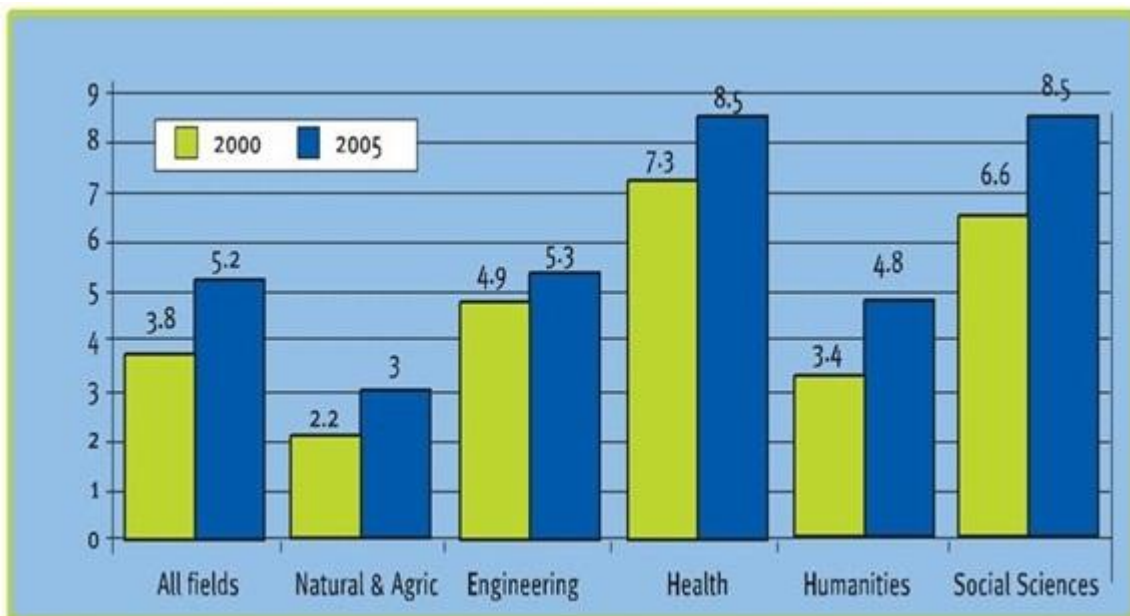


Figure 2.1 Average number of Master's student per academic

(Source: Higher Education Monitor, 2009)

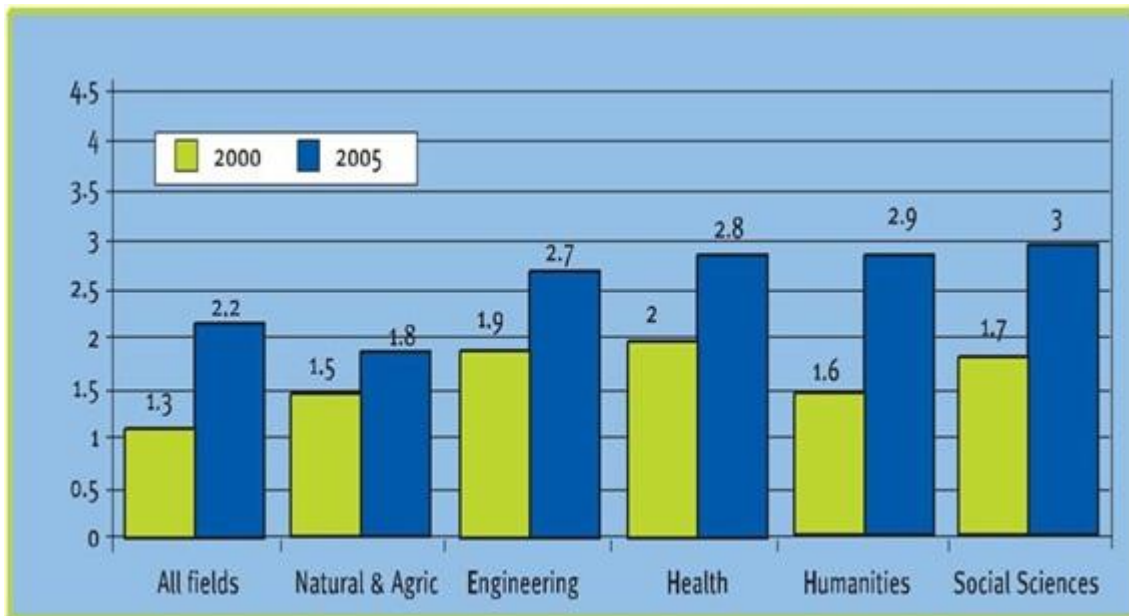


Figure 2.2 Average number of Doctoral student per academic

(Source: Higher Education Monitor, 2009)

According to figure 2.1 and figure 2.2, the term 'burden of supervision' to refer to the phenomenon that - due to a number of trends highlighted in this report - South African academics are increasingly burdened with an unrealistically high number of postgraduate students to supervise. The number of postgraduate students has more than doubled over the past 15 years, whilst the number of permanent academics has only increased by 40% over the same period. In addition, the pile-up effect of postgraduate students places more demands on the supervisory capacity of the system. We refer to the burden of supervision as the number of students (Master's and Doctoral) relative to the number of permanent academic staff who are qualified to supervise such students.

Table 2.1 Average number of Master's student per academic staff member, by broad field and selected institutions (2000 – 2005)

University	All Fields		Natural & Agricultural Sciences		Engineering & Applied Technologies		Health Sciences		Humanities		Social Sciences	
	2000	2005	2000	2005	2000	2005	2000	2005	2000	2005	2000	2005
NMMU	4.3	4.1	1.4	2.1	5.3	5.1	7.2	4.2	3.9	3.5	10.9	9.1
NWU	6.8	6.7	2.2	4.1	3.5	7.6	5.0	9.8	4.3	3.2	17.6	8.9
RHODES	2.1	2.5	2.7	2.6	0.0	0.0	1.3	1.2	2.0	1.5	3.5	6.0
SU	5.1	7.1	1.8	2.8	3.8	5.5	6.0	9.6	7.2	7.3	7.9	12.2
UCT	4.9	5.6	2.9	3.6	7.9	6.0	19.4	9.4	4.0	4.3	7.1	6.6
UFS	4.0	5.2	3.7	3.7	13.3	5.7	2.6	5.1	2.8	3.1	6.3	7.8
UJ	5.1	4.7	1.7	1.8	3.9	4.4	7.2	5.9	5.9	6.6	10.3	8.5
UKZN	3.5	5.1	2.7	3.1	3.7	5.7	7.9	12.8	2.9	4.1	6.5	8.7
UL	2.7	4.4	1.5	3.3	0.0	0.0	19.0	3.6	2.2	12.9	3.1	11.6
UNISA	3.8	7.3	0.7	1.4	0.0	0.0	17.1	19.6	3.8	8.9	6.0	10.6
UP	4.5	5.6	3.4	5.2	6.0	6.3	6.0	6.7	5.1	6.8	8.8	9.7
UWC	3.9	3.4	2.9	4.2	0.0	0.0	6.2	3.5	2.9	2.3	6.5	5.0
WITS	4.5	7.1	1.2	1.0	4.5	7.0	9.7	29.7	2.3	3.0	6.3	7.5
All universities	3.8	5.2	2.2	3.0	4.9	5.3	7.3	8.5	3.4	4.8	6.6	8.5

(Source: Higher Education Monitor, 2009)

Table 2.2 Average number of Doctoral student per academic staff member, by broad field and selected institutions (2000 – 2005)

University	All Fields		Natural & Agricultural Sciences		Engineering & Applied Technologies		Health Sciences		Humanities		Social Sciences	
	2000	2005	2000	2005	2000	2005	2000	2005	2000	2005	2000	2005
NMMU	1.3	1.5	1.8	1.8	7.9	2.5	1.6	1.8	1.1	1.3	1.8	2.5
NWU	1.3	5.2	1.0	3.3	2.1	23.0	1.7	18.5	1.9	6.2	1.9	4.4
RHODES	1.5	1.5	2.7	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	2.3	1.0	0.6	2.6	3.6
SU	1.7	2.3	1.1	1.8	2.1	2.1	1.7	2.5	2.5	3.0	2.0	2.9
UCT	1.9	2.6	2.1	2.3	2.8	3.3	7.1	3.2	1.9	1.8	1.4	2.9
UFS	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.8	3.0	0.8	1.1	2.2	2.7	2.2	1.7
UJ	2.1	2.8	1.6	1.9	4.9	4.5	1.9	2.9	2.9	3.3	3.1	4.7
UKZN	1.3	2.3	1.5	2.3	1.0	2.1	2.5	2.3	1.6	3.4	2.1	4.4
UL	0.4	1.6	0.7	1.2	0.0	0.0	3.1	2.2	0.3	3.1	0.4	2.3
UNISA	0.2	2.1	0.1	0.9	0.0	0.0	1.2	5.6	0.2	3.8	0.2	2.6
UP	2.2	2.5	2.3	2.9	1.3	2.0	1.5	0.7	4.3	5.1	3.8	4.3
UWC	1.0	1.7	1.3	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.2	1.1	0.8	1.3	2.4	2.6
WITS	1.4	1.9	1.5	0.4	1.9	2.4	2.0	9.4	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.5
All universities	1.3	2.2	1.5	1.8	1.9	2.7	2.0	2.8	1.6	2.9	1.7	3.0

(Source: Higher Education Monitor, 2009)

As tables 2.1 and 2.2 shows the burden of supervision at both levels increased across all fields of science between 2000 and 2005, as the average number of students per supervisor in all fields has increased substantially. At the Master's level, this has increased from 3.8 to 5.2; and at the Doctoral level from 1.3 to 2.2" (Higher Education Monitor, 2009). This increase in higher number of students to supervise has developed problems in helping postgraduate students develop academic research skills.

2.3.2.3 Academic research skills

A number of students embark on their master's degrees without sufficient background or experience in research and to some students, mention of the concept research raises fear and concern (Frouws, 2007). Most of postgraduate students lack research skills such as academic reading and writing skills. Academic ability plays a very significant role in the success and attrition of postgraduate students. Alibertyn et al (2008) point out that 75% of M. Phil students reported difficulty with writing research proposals, research methodology, and 63% had a problem with preparing a title and research design. This means that although there are other factors that contribute to student retention and attrition, academic performance is also one of the key factors that make postgraduate students dropout or exceed the maximum prescribed time of graduating in Masters and doctoral studies.

Frouws (2007) claims that students submit poor research proposals, which are invariably approved by academic departments and academic departments, should be in a position to evaluate research proposals and provide students with proper guidance, which is sadly lacking. Furthermore,

Frouws emphasises that students formulate research problems which cannot be solved within the environment the research is to be conducted in and this calls for sufficient tertiary institutions information required by students to enable them to complete their research (Ibid). This may mean that the research proposals submitted by students may hinder their completion of postgraduate degrees as students might find it difficult to continue with research because the topic is not researchable. However, the personal circumstances of postgraduate students is another key factor in the success of their postgraduate studies.

2.3.2.4 *Personal factors*

One of the major contributory factors to postgraduate students dropping out of their studies is the personal factors they are faced with, especially those who are part time students. Part time students have multiple identities. These identities include being a worker, student, family member and social being.

Table 2.3 Factors that affect time-to-completion of masters and doctoral students

Factors	%
Demands of Employment	34%
Taking up Employment	19%
Workload too Great	16%
Poor Supervision	14%
Financial Problems	11%
Limited Library Resources	5%
Personal Problems	5%
Quality of Teaching	2%
Degree of Commitment to Studies	3%
Low Motivation Levels	2%
Require a Break from Studies	0,4%
Length of Course	0,3%
Wrong Field of Study	0,3%
Lack of Support from Staff	0,2%
Need a Break from Education	0,1%
Insufficient Academic Progress	0,1%

(Source: Koen, 2001)

As the shown by table 2.3 above, the demands of employment take up 34% of contributory factors to time of completion of Masters and Doctoral studies. Students who are studying postgraduate on part time basis have to juggle between their work and studies especially students who are females and have a more significant role to play in their families. Hood states (2008) that the women's multiple roles as family members, parents, community members, workers and students pressure to maintain their 'overall performance in all their roles. Women who return to education, are often wives and mothers and as a consequence they "juggle" their commitments. This 'juggle' can become a "struggle" and in fact lead to a tiring triple load of responsibilities; paid work, domestic responsibilities and education (Ibid).

The second barrier identified by all three students was a lack of time to meet other commitments, either at work or, more particularly, at home and the lack of time called for sacrifices and compromises in their personal lives, and the lives of their partners and children (Castle, 2003).

2.3.2.5 Funding

With regards to issue of funding, Kahn, Blankely, Maharaj, Pogue, Reddy, Cele and du Toit (2004) report that the NSFAS is largely aimed at supporting first degrees and funds for postgraduate research students is provided by the National Research Foundation (NRF) and there is very little financial support available for part-time postgraduate students particularly in the social science and humanities where part-time enrolments are common.

Castle (2003:47) states that according to the students, the most significant barrier to their participation in higher education was not physical or epistemological access, but cost. In interviews they mentioned not only the cost of tuition fees and course materials, but also the expense of transportation to the university and subsistence during residential sessions, and the charges for telephone, postage and courier services associated with learning at a distance. These expenses were all borne by the students themselves, in the absence of bursaries or grants for part-time students, or financial assistance from their employers. All three students used the word 'sacrifice' to describe the adjustments which they and their families had to make to pay their way in higher education. Lepheana and Mokwena, both single parents, noted that as their children got older, the strain on the family

budget increased, and it became difficult to pay their own tuition and other costs, alongside their children's (Ibid).

Postgraduate students may enrol for their postgraduate degrees but then find it difficult to continue with their studies due to lack of funds. However, higher education institutions are trying to reverse the unavailability of funds for postgraduate students by making available funds for studies. For an example, the University of Hope (pseudonym) has a fee waiver policy which funds postgraduate students (University of Hope, (pseudonym) Student Retention Policy, 2009).

2.3.2.6 Socio – economic status

The socio-economic status of postgraduate students is another key factor in throughput of postgraduate students. Internationally, Brown (2008) reports that the largest issue concerning accessibility to higher education in general and doctoral education in particular, has to do with socio-economic status, or level of family income. Despite the overwhelming statistical data demonstrating the greater lifetime earnings associated with higher degrees, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to be able to afford the tuition and living costs of an undergraduate education, let alone a master's or doctoral education, and are more averse to taking on debt in order to pursue an education. The participation rate in higher education is lower for those in the lowest socio-economic quartile. Therefore, fewer of them are in the pipeline to proceed to a master's and then a doctoral education, even if they were so inclined (Brown 2008: 118).

In the context of South Africa, Letseka and Breier (2010) argue that the historical legacy of South Africa still determines who graduates and who does not. In this context, it means that the historical legacy of South Africa which divides the nation to haves and have not's has a greater impact on higher education institutions. Students may be willing to continue with their studies but due to financial constraints they are not able to. As the literature have mentioned that most of part time postgraduate students have multiple identities such as work and vocational life, their family needs in terms of finances may supersede the academic financial needs.

2.4 BARRIERS FACED BY PART TIME POSTGRADUATE STUDENT

A part time student is a student who enrolls at a higher education institution on part time basis that is to study for some of the normal required time. In the context of this study, part time students refer to postgraduate students who are enrolled on Masters and Doctoral education programmes on part time basis and are working adults.

Internationally, the part time research student is the forgotten man or women of British higher education (McCulloch and Stokes, 2008). Part-time students are more likely than full-timers to be mature, to have dependents (whether in the form of children or ageing relatives), or to be in work or have had significant career experience. The institutional tendency in dealing with part-time students is to expect them to fit in with the full-timers, or to put things on in the evenings (Ibid).

Literature further indicates that part time students are likely to have more barriers that can hinder their succession and throughput rate at higher education institutions. This becomes evident when Tones, Fraser, Elder and White (2009:506) state that, however, while mature-aged students have the potential to succeed at university, their economic and family responsibilities are barriers to study and might lead to attrition. Study barriers are likely to be intensive for mature-aged students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Ibid).

In the context of higher education institutions in South Africa, part time students may need a lot of support if they are to succeed with their postgraduate studies. Internationally, according to literature, research on support services to assist and promote retention among this demographic is virtually non-existent (Tones et al, 2009). Part time students may need support in terms of finances, use of libraries, and help in accessing computers and internet.

Robertson (2003:5) reports that since my appointment at the School in 1998 several hundred postgraduate students have visited my office for individual library consultations. Initially, many of the postgraduates who sought my help were mature age postgraduate students returning to study. This trend was confirmed in the Ross report (2001). Some of these postgraduates were not used to researching for information or writing up reports as their secretaries would take care of these duties. Their information needs covered setting up email accounts, selecting an Internet Service Provider (ISP), computer skills training, presentation skills, managing information,

manipulating data, navigating the web, searching databases and making sense of the complex world of libraries (Robertson, 2003:5).

McCulloch and Stokes (2008) proposes that policy makers should explicitly address the needs of part time students and that universities should take a radical look at their policies, processes and support for research students and then redesign them as far as possible from the perspective of part time research student, secure in the knowledge that if they work for the part time student, they will undoubtedly work for the full time students.

From the literature reviewed, it is noted that if part time postgraduate students are to succeed in their studies or if higher education institutions need to retain these students, it means that a lot of support needs to be given to the students wishing to attain Masters and Doctoral degrees.

2.5 SUMMARY

The literature reviewed shows evidence that drop out is a complex social phenomenon. Furthermore, there is evidence that a variety of factors are a cause for postgraduate students to drop out of higher education institutions especially for students who are studying their postgraduate studies on a part time basis. Barriers to studying part time are more likely higher than those student that are studying on full time basis. As it has been noted, part time students have multiple roles that they need to juggle with their academic life.

Institutions of higher learning can take proactive steps to overcome such student difficulties and they can provide the much-needed support and

facilities to their postgraduate students, considering that the current trend shows that the number of postgraduate students is multiplying over time in many developing countries. Suggestions to set up a Reading and Writing Centre for postgraduate students, the creation of reading groups and the introduction of a properly structured Orientation Programme can easily be implemented as such schemes will enhance the quality of postgraduates and their research output (Kaur, 2009).

In the South African context, very little is said about the support services part time students require in order to achieve success in their studies. Hence this study seeks to understand the academic learning experiences of postgraduate students who have dropped out.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed literature on what the scholars have articulated on students dropping out of postgraduate studies. In this chapter, the researcher presents the research methodology that was employed by the study, and how the research process unfolded. The researcher gives a clear indication of research methods and designs that were adopted in this study, including measures to ensure that the study was reliable, valid and trustworthy. Other issues that are addressed by this chapter are:

- Research questions the participants respondent to
- Research approach
- Research methodology
- Research design
- Data collection methods
- Population, sample and sampling
- Ethical issues and
- Data analysis

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The overall methodology of this study was qualitative research. The reasons why the researcher had employed the qualitative approach to this study were because Babbie and Mouton (2001) say that qualitative researchers attempt always to study

human action from the 'insiders' perspective and the primary goal of studies using this approach is defined as describing and understanding rather than explaining human behaviour.

Secondly, Maree as cited in Hood (2008) concurs to this by postulating that a qualitative research approach is an umbrella term for a wide range of approaches intended at collecting rich, descriptive data in respect of a particular phenomenon with the aim of understanding a situation from the participant's point of view, and this is what the study attempted to do. The study investigated the academic experiences of students who dropped out of the University of Hope (pseudonym) . The qualitative research approach therefore was the appropriate approach as it was envisaged unstructured interviews have been used for this study.

Since this study made use of rich descriptive interviews, Du Plooy as cited in Adam (2010) asserts that qualitative design is appropriate when researchers intend examining the properties, values, needs or characteristics that distinguish individuals, groups, communities, organizations, events, settings or messages. Mwanje as cited in Adam (2010) concurs by postulating that qualitative method is better suited to description, whether dealing with meanings or patterns of behaviour, as it intends to rely on a detailed and complex description of events or people. Such a thick description is necessary in order to convey complexity of events of the situation and to provide the reader with enough detail to conclude for themselves whether the researcher's interpretations of the phenomenon are relevant and justifiable for the circumstances (Ibid). And, therefore, qualitative research paradigm was appropriate for the study as the participants were going to give a descriptive journey of how they experienced their academic learning.

The qualitative paradigm in its broadest sense refers to research that elicits participant accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions; it thus involves identifying the participant's beliefs and values underlying the phenomena (Strydom, 2007). The qualitative research paradigm therefore made it to be able for the participant to give or make meaning of what he or she has experienced himself or herself from his own point of view and in this study the phenomena was studied through the descriptive experiences of the participants. Participants in this study were giving an account of how they had academically experienced studying at the university.

According to McMillan and Schumacher as cited in Smit (2010), qualitative research involves relatively small-scale studies for in-depth investigations with the aim of understanding social phenomena from the participants' perspectives, using interactive strategies in real-life situations. The aim of the researcher was to understand the experiences of the students who have dropped out of postgraduate studies. Therefore, as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher cited in Smit (2010), the researcher made an effort to gather as much of the true feelings and experiences of the participants as possible.

One of the reasons of considering qualitative research to be appropriate for this study was because it enabled the researcher to gain understanding of the phenomenon from the participants' view. The ultimate aim of this study was to explore the academic learning experiences of the participants rather than to explain.

For this study, exploring was only achieved through utterances of participants. These utterances were gained through the employment of unstructured interviews.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Interpretive paradigm was adopted for this study. Peshkin (1993) argues that in the interpretive paradigm, the researcher's interest is in the meaning that people make of the phenomena. Littlejohn (2000) adds that the interpretive paradigm supports the belief that reality is constructed by subjective perception and predictions cannot be made and researchers who agree with this paradigm are interested in the social construction of meaning and that people have free will, purposes, goals, and intentions, so people should be studied as active agents. This meant that for this study the researcher was interested on how the participants have made meaning of their experiences of learning at the University of Hope (pseudonym). Littlejohn (2000) further states that, the basic premises of interpretive paradigm is that people make decisions and act in accordance with their subjective understandings of the situations in which they find themselves.

One of the reasons of adopting interpretive paradigm for this study is because Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) advocate that the world should be studied in its natural state, rather than in controlled laboratory type experiments and with minimum intervention by a researcher. This means that interpretive paradigm gives the interviewees freedom to express their views on the question without the intervention of the researcher (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). For this study, this meant that interpretive paradigm would allow the researcher to study the participants in their

natural world and be able to understand the experiences of the students who have dropped out in one HEI in Eastern Cape.

Babbie and Mouton (2001) state that the phenomenologist emphasizes that all human beings are engaged in the process of making sense of their (life) worlds. That is the reason the researcher was saying the study was based on interpretivism because the study would be giving voice to my participants to say what they have experienced and what their own understanding of the postgraduate studies in the Education Faculty of one HEI in Eastern Cape.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Fouche (2010) advocates that some authors refer to 'design' as all those decisions a researcher makes in planning the study. Others on other hand, use of the term refer only to those groups of small, worked-out formulas from which prospective researchers can select or develop one or more that may be suitable for their specific research goal (Ibid). Creswell (1998) defines design in the qualitative context as the entire process of research from conceptualising a problem, to writing the narrative.

The study had employed qualitative research methods and was adopting interpretive paradigm, the researcher decided to adopt a phenomenological design since the study was about investigating experiences. Husserl as cited in Wojnar and Swanson (2007) defined phenomenology as the science of essence of consciousness and focused on defining the concept of intentionality and the meaning of lived experience, from the first-person point of view. Collingridge, and Gantt (2008) concur to this by postulating

that the purpose of phenomenology is to understand phenomena from the perspective of those who experience the phenomena. Specifically, the aim is to know an experience the way that the participants know it, to understand the meanings they attach to their experiences, and to capture the essence of a phenomenon as they experience it (Ibid). And that was the reason why the study adopted phenomenological approach as the study was about exploring lived experiences of the participants.

Willis as cited in Grant (2005) points out that phenomenology has mutated to meet various research needs in different disciplines. While phenomenology as an approach has been used extensively for research in the field of psychology a new interest in this approach within the education discipline has begun to emerge. Staff at the University of Alberta, under the inspiration of Max van Manen have published the journal *Phenomenology and Pedagogy* which has a specific reference to schooling while the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* edited by Chris Stones at Rhodes University, South Africa, focuses on educational in addition to psychological issues (Starks and Trinidad , 2007; LeVasseur , 2003).

Van Manen (1990) postulates that phenomenology as a research method in education tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project . This means that the phenomenological approach adopted for this study was trying to ward off the known facts that literature has written about postgraduate students who drop out of their studies because as Koen (2007) also assert that we do not really know what causes students to drop out of postgraduate studies. Van

Manen (1990) further advocates that phenomenological research in the human sciences as an interplay of six research activities:

- turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- manipulating a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (Ibid).

For Giorgi, as cited in Groenewald (2004) the operative word in phenomenological research is 'describe'. The aim of the researcher was to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework. The phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved (Groenewald, 2004). A researcher applying phenomenology is concerned with the lived experiences of the people involved, or who were involved, with the issue that is being researched (Ibid), and that was what the study intended to do, exploring what the participants had gone through .

Flood (2010) states that phenomenology is a philosophic attitude and research approach. This means that phenomenology is concerned with the study of the nature of life and reality. And for this study, the reality was the experiences the participants have gone through. Its primary position is that the most basic human truths are accessible only through inner subjectivity, and that the person is integral to the

environment (Ibid). Fouche (2007) points out that phenomenology aims to understand and interpret the meaning that subjects give to their everyday lives. Creswell as cited by Fouche (2007) regards a phenomenological study as a study that describes the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon, topic, or concept for various individuals. Eventually, the researcher utilising this approach reduces the experiences to a central meaning or the essence of the experience and the product of the research is a description of the essence of the experiences being studied (Fouche, 2007).

The study was about investigating academic learning experiences of postgraduate students who have dropped out. This meant if the study was about investigating experiences, it was going to follow a phenomenological research approach. Grant (2005) indicates that phenomenology seeks to understand the human condition as it manifests itself in our concrete, lived situations, and that was what this study intends doing which was investigating from the participants' perspectives of how have they experienced dropping out of the postgraduate studies.

Clark, Denzin and Lincoln as cited in Wojnar and Swanson (2007) postulate that phenomenology is often considered central to the interpretive paradigm. As it has unfolded throughout the past 100 years, phenomenology as philosophical perspective has thrown light on previously ignored phenomena of the human experience, reformulated philosophical questions. At the core of phenomenology lies the attempt to describe and understand phenomena such as caring, healing and wholeness as experienced by individuals who have lived through them (Ibid).

One of the reasons for adopting phenomenological approach for this study was because Husserl as cited in Wojnar and Swanson (2007) defined *phenomenology* as 'the science of essence of consciousness' and focused on defining the concept of *intentionality* and the meaning of lived experience, from the first-person point of view. An important tenet of the Husserlian approach to science was the belief that the meaning of lived experiences may be unravelled only through one-to-one transactions between the researcher and the objects of research. These transactions must involve attentive listening, interaction, and observation to create representation of reality more sophisticated than previous understandings (Ibid). Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) concurs by asserting that phenomenology is concerned with lived experiences and is thus ideal for investigating personal learning journeys. This, therefore, meant that the phenomenological approach was ideal for this study because the study was investigating participants' experiences of learning in postgraduate studies at one HEI in Eastern Cape.

Van Manen as cited in Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) postulate the goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research as being to develop a rich or dense description of the phenomenon being investigated in a particular context. In this study, participants who dropped out of the Faculty of Education programme gave a descriptive understanding of their own academic experiences when they were studying.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

3.5.1 The Process

The study adopted a phenomenological approach, therefore unstructured interviews were used. The researcher first carried out a pilot study for testing the feasibility of

the study. A letter requesting permission to carry out the study was requested from the university (see Appendix A). Also a supporting letter from the supervisor was requested (see Appendix B). After the researcher received the ethical clearance letter (see Appendix C) an invitation letter (see Appendix D) was sent to three participants to be part of the pilot study. Only two participants responded and agreed to be part of the pilot study. The interviews were taped with the permission that was sought from the participants.

After the pilot study, data with the names of students who dropped out of Masters programme was requested from the University of Hope (pseudonym) and received. The participants were contacted telephonically. After several attempts Only 4 participants agreed to be part of the study. Consent letters (see Appendix F) were given to participants. With the consent of the participants the unstructured interviews were also taped.

3.5.2 Piloting the study

A pilot study is defined as the new process whereby the research designs for a prospective survey is tested (Strydom, 2007). Bless and Higson-Smith as cited in Strydom (2007) concur by defining a pilot study as a small study conducted prior to a larger piece of research to determine whether the methodology, sampling, instruments and analysis are adequate and appropriate. Strydom (2007) identifies the following four important aspects of pilot study

- reviewing the literature
- discussions with experts

- feasibility of the study
- testing the measuring instrument

Strydom (2007) articulates that in order to undertake scientific research on a specific problem, the researcher should have thorough background knowledge about it. The pilot study is one way in which the prospective researcher can orientate himself to the project he has in mind (Ibid). Smit (2010) states that a pilot study is indispensable for the appropriate administering of the data. It also helps the researcher to think well in advance about the analysis of the results. Strydom as cited in Smit (2010) advocates that a pilot study can be viewed as a 'dress rehearsal' for the main investigation. As for any study to be successful, a pilot study needs to be carried out. This study will also undergo a test of its methodologies. A small scale of participants of about 2 participants were utilised for the pilot study.

3.6 Research Instrument

3.6.1 The researcher as an instrument

Jakuja (2009) postulate the researcher serves as the data collection instrument by interviewing the participants. The researcher gives close attention to the participants' own words and should maintain the awareness of the researcher is situated according to the relevant dimensions of the participant's life-worlds (Ibid). Moore (2010) asserts the researcher is key in the research process for many qualitative researches. However, being a research instrument has its disadvantages. The researcher needed to apply research ethics and be sensitive to participants' needs in order to provide a more relaxed atmosphere for the participants. In this study the

researcher would be used as a research instrument as he would be collecting data through interviews.

3.6.2 Interviews

The study adopted a phenomenological approach and was about investigating experiences of students who dropped out of postgraduate studies one HEI in Eastern Cape. Therefore, the researcher employed interviews as an instrument for collecting data. The type of interviews utilised were unstructured interviews. According to McMillan and Schumacher as cited in Smit (2010:84), in-depth interviews are open-response questions to obtain data from participants' meaning - how individuals conceive of their world and how they explain or make sense of the important events in their lives.

According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison as cited in Adam (2010), an interview is an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee; it is also referred to as an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest for production of knowledge. An interview is a research technique considered as one of a range of survey methods in social research (Babbie and Mouton 2001). Research interview has been defined as a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by the researcher on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation (Greef, 2007).

As the study was about lived experiences, unstructured in-depth interviews, as they are sometimes called, were best suitable for this study. According to Greef (2007:293), the unstructured one-to-one interview, also sometimes referred to as the

in-depth interview, merely extends and formalises conversations. It is referred to as a 'conversation with a purpose'. The purpose is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to 'evaluate' in the usual sense of the term. At the root of unstructured interviews is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. This meant that for this study unstructured interviews were appropriate as the study sought to understand rather than explain. The study made use of one-to-one interviews.

According to Kumar as cited in Kuze (2009), unstructured interviews have strength of almost complete freedom in terms of content and structure. The researcher has a complete freedom in terms of the wording s/he uses and the way s/he explains questions to his/her respondents (Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007). Questions can be formulated and issues raised in front of the respondents depending on what actually occurs to the researcher in the context of the discussion. Unstructured interviews, also known as 'intensive interviews' are a purely qualitative interviewing strategy in which questions and follow-up probes are generated during the interview itself (Ibid).

Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) assert that in phenomenology interviews are used as means for exploring and gathering of narratives or stories of lived experiences and they are a vehicle by which to develop a conversational relationship with the participants about the meaning of their experiences. That is why this study used unstructured interviews as a research instrument because these types of interviews allowed the participants to be descriptive and narratives as much as possible with their lived experiences.

3.7 NEGOTIATION OF ACCESS

The researcher made arrangements with the participants that were going to be interviewed for a place where they want to be interviewed. The researcher made sure that the world of the participant is not compromised hence the researcher tried and fitted into the schedule of participants. Consent forms (see Appendix F) were also given to participants and letters from the university granting permission to conduct the interviews were given to the participants.

Permission to record the interviews was requested from the participants and when granted the interviews were recorded on a tape with the participants, permission. The recorded tapes ensured valid and reliable data as they were transcribed. Participants who were not willing to be recorded, then notes were taken when the interviews were carried out. Greef (2007) advocates that if possible, and if permission is obtained from the participants, the researcher should record interview on tape or video. A tape recorder allows a much fuller record than notes taken during the interview. However, recording the interview may have its own disadvantage such as participants not happy being taped. .

3.8 SAMPLING PROCEDURE

According to Adam (2010), sampling must be done whenever one can gather information from only a fraction of the population of a group or a phenomenon which one wants to study. Ideally, one should try to select a sample which is free from bias and it allows the researcher to select a fraction of respondents from a population (Ibid). Starks and Trinidad (2007) postulate that each approach involves use of purposive sampling methods to recruit participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study. The concept or the experience under study is the unit of

analysis; given that an individual person can generate hundreds or thousands of concepts, large samples are not necessarily needed to generate rich data sets (Ibid). The exact number of individuals needed, and the number of interviews per individual, depends on the goals and purpose of the study (Ibid).

Sampling is the method for selecting people, events or objects for study in research. Since the study is following a Qualitative Research approach, the sampling method utilised was non probability sampling. A strategy used for sampling was volunteer sampling since the participants were asked to volunteer for the study. However, Strydom and Delport (2007) warns against volunteer sampling by articulating volunteers may not necessary be used, merely because nobody comes forward or because the people who volunteer may not be suitable. Volunteer sampling works well when the respondents are known to one another or are at least aware of one another and can encourage one another to be involved in the study (Ibid). Persons who come forward voluntarily may of course, facilitate the task of the researcher and accelerate the process however the researcher should check the motives of the volunteers with regard to the objectives of the survey in question, thus guarding against possible hidden agendas (Ibid).

3.8.1 Sampling the research site

The researcher sampled the University of Hope (pseudonym) as the research site because the researcher wanted to have access to the participants who lived within the Eastern Cape province so as to easily contact the participants. Although there are several HEI in Eastern Cape that offer the same Masters programme the researcher felt that the research site sampled was the best to approach as it

belonged to the category of the previously disadvantaged higher education institution.

3.8.2 Sampling the respondents

Patton as cited in Strydom and Delpont (2007) says that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources (Ibid). In qualitative studies non-probability sampling methods are utilised and, in particular, theoretical or purposive sampling techniques are used rather than random sampling.

The population were postgraduate dropouts from 2007 to 2010 academic years. Since the study was a qualitative research and was adopting in-depth interviews so as to get rich descriptive or narrative data from the respondents four M.Ed students were interviewed. The sample was not categorised according to gender as it depended on the willingness of participants to be part of the research.

3.10 ACCESS TO RESEARCH SITE AND PARTICIPANTS

3.10.1 Negotiation of entry into the research site

As already mentioned, participants were postgraduate students who dropped out on a HEI in Eastern Cape. Although these students had already left the university, permission from the university to conduct the study was requested (see Appendix A). The other reason for requesting permission was the fact that the names of students who have dropped out was requested from the university as well. A letter requesting permission will be sent to the Education Faculty and the Registrar of the university (see Appendix A).

3.10.2 Negotiation of entry to the respondents

A letter of approval from the university to permit to carry out the research was presented to the participants (see Appendix C). After receiving 8 names of students who have dropped out from the research site the researcher contacted all the participants telephonically. The aim of phoning all the names was because the researcher was not sure how many participants would be willing to be part of the study.

All of the participants answered the telephone of the researcher but 4 of participants became angry as soon as the researcher mentioned the purpose of the research and the name of the research site. They immediately told the researcher never to contact them again. Some of the students did not want to be part of the study and were not willing to hear anything or be contacted for the research. They either switched off their phones when contacted telephonically or showed that they were upset and did not want to be contacted. The researcher assumed that the participants that were not willing to be part of the study were still not in a position to talk about their experiences as some indicated that it was still traumatic for them to part of any research of the university they dropped out from. An assumption was made that those that were not willing to be part of the study were blaming the University for not being able to complete their degrees.

After several attempts of trying to contact the last 4 participants, the researcher got a breakthrough and the 4 participants willingly participated in the study. Also a letter from the supervisor (see Appendix B) validating the purpose of the research was requested and it was also presented to the participants. 50% of participants who

were willing to be part of the study did not bother to read the letter and they just wanted to carry on with the interview.

3.11 ETHICAL ISSUES

Strydom (2007) advocates that human beings are the objects of study in the social sciences brings unique ethical problems to the fore which would never be relevant in the pure, clinical laboratory settings of the natural science. For researchers in the social sciences, the ethical issues are pervasive and complex, since data should never be obtained at the expense of human beings (Ibid). Babbie (2001) asserts that anyone involved in research needs to be aware of the general agreement about what is proper and improper in scientific research. Ethical principles should be internalised in the personality of the researcher to such extent that ethically guided decision making becomes part of his lifestyle (Strydom, 2007). This meant that in this study the researcher abided by the research ethics and had to follow all the ethical issues so as to validate the study and not compromise the trust the participants had on him.

According to Kuze (2009), in any research endeavour, researchers are expected to employ high standards of academic rigor and to behave with honesty and dignity... 'The acceptability of social research depends increasingly on the willingness of social researchers to accord respect to their subjects and to treat them with consideration'. Ethical issues in research include the need for informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality.

3.11.1 Informed consent

Obtaining informed consent implies that all possible or adequate information on the goal of the investigation, the procedures which will be followed during the investigation, the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers to which the respondents may be exposed, as well as the credibility of the researcher, be rendered to potential subjects or their legal representatives (Strydom, 2007). According to Cohen et al (2000:51), the principle of informed consent arises from the subject's right to freedom and self-determination.

The researcher was upfront with the reason of conducting the research with the participants and also requested for consent and promise non – deception to the participants. Permission was also requested from the participants to allow the interviews to be recorded. Secondly, consent was requested from this HEI which is the gatekeeper since the researcher interviewed participants that he got from the university's statistics. Since the study was dealing with adults, they were requested to sign a letter of consent if they are willing to be part of the study.

3.11.2 Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study

As the researcher have already mentioned the sample that was utilised in this study was a voluntary sample, so participants were requested to participate on the study on voluntary basis. No participant was forced to participate and only those that had volunteered would be part of the study. They were also told that they had the right to withdraw from the research anytime they felt they wanted to.

3.11.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

Sieber as cited in Strydom (2007) defines privacy as that which normally is not intended for others to observe or analyze. The right to privacy is the individual's right to decide when, where, to whom, and to what extent his or her attitudes, beliefs and behaviour will be revealed (Ibid). Cohen et al (2000) emphasizes that the anonymity of research participants should be guaranteed at all times. A research participant is considered to be anonymous if a reader is not able to identify him/her (Cohen et al, 2000). All the participants were assured that the data they were giving would be treated with the strictest confidentiality and no personal information was used as pseudo names were given to participants.

3.11.4 Avoidance of harm

Strydom (2007) says that subjects can be harmed in a physical and/or emotional manner. One may accept that harm to respondents in a social science will be mainly of an emotional nature, although physical injury cannot be ruled out completely... an ethical obligation rests with the researcher to protect subjects, from any physical discomfort that may emerge from the research project. Emotional harm to subjects is often more difficult to predict and determine than physical discomfort, but often has more far-reaching consequences for respondents (Ibid). The researcher therefore requested for assistance at the University for Empowerment with psychological skills as the respondents would be describing their lived experiences and some respondents may be engaged in recalling experiences that had negative effects on their lives.

3.12 DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH

De Vos (2007) define data analysis as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not tidy (Ibid). Data analysis is an ongoing and interactive, that is, non-linear process in qualitative research. This meant that the data that was collected from this study was not done just once, it became a process as the researcher had to go back and do interviews again as phenomenology requires so. Follow up interviews were scheduled with the participants. Mouton and Marais cited in De Vos and Van Zyl (1998) explain that analysis is a reasoning strategy with the objective of taking a complex whole and resolving it into parts. By means of constant analysis the constant variables of factors that relevant to the understanding of a phenomenon or an event are isolated (Ibid).

Creswell as cited in De Vos (2007) believes that the process of data analysis and interpretation can best be represented by a spiral image – a data spiral and the researcher moves in analytical circles rather than using a linear approach. According to Babbie (2001), data analysis refers to the analysis of data that was gathered using qualitative techniques. Babbie and Mouton (2001) state there is neither one neat and tidy approach to qualitative data analysis nor even one approach to each specific type of qualitative data analysis. Two aspects of importance in data analysis include the topic you want to study and a specific research question on that topic and the question behind the question (Ibid).

Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter as cited in Kuze (2009) also argue that in qualitative studies there is no clear point at which data collection stops and analysis begins. These authors state there is a rather gradual fading out of the one and a fading in of the other and this means that at first the researcher mainly collects data and towards the end mainly analyzing what has been collected (De Vos, 2007).

Data in qualitative analysis are usually in the format of textual narrative description and since this study is going to use unstructured interviews as a data collection method it is therefore appropriate to use analytical inductive strategy. Inductive model of data analysis will allow the themes that will emerge from the interviews to be identified, compared and interpreted. As proposed the interviews were recorded and the recordings were transcribed.

3.12.1 Bracketing

The technique of bracketing has been described as an attempt to hold prior knowledge or belief about the phenomena under study in suspension in order to perceive it more clearly (LeVasseur, 2003). According to Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, and Poole (2004) bracketing is an investigator's attempt to achieve the state of transcendental subjectivity (neutrality) by putting aside prior understanding or preconceptions about the phenomenon under investigation. Bracketing may be accomplished by using the field notes as a reflective "diary" to write down the investigator's observations, assumptions, and confusions; by seeking critique for the investigator's insights from methodological experts or others who might have personal or professional experience with the topic under investigation; and by maintaining an ongoing sense of caution about the role personal bias plays when making sense of data" (De Vos, 2007).

Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, and Poole (2004) assert that researchers come into the research situation with their own preconceptions and presuppositions about the phenomenon under investigation. One of the greatest challenges as a phenomenologist is to put aside all preconceived and theoretical ideas and open ourselves up to how that phenomenon is experienced by the individual. This process, where one tries to render these assumptions inoperative is known as “bracketing” (Valle, King and Halling, 1989:11). In order to bracket one’s existing ideas it is suggested that one first make them explicit by laying out these assumptions so that they appear as clearly as possible to oneself.

The researcher needed to bracket as well in this study as the researcher himself had his own experiences of academic learning and he was still under supervision as he was still a Master of Education himself. He needed to bracket a lot as some participants wanted the researcher either to confirm or align himself with what they were reporting. The participants assumed that the researcher also went through what they experienced at the HEI. The researcher had a diary where before carrying out interviews he wrote down his own experiences, assumptions, preconceived ideas and feelings about academic learning of postgraduate studies. He did this so as not to confuse what the participants reported with his own assumptions, ideas, and experiences.

These processes of bracketing and explication of assumptions have been found to interact dynamically and it seems that as one brackets one’s preconceptions and presuppositions, more assumptions emerge. This process of bracketing and rebracketing is the manner in which one moves from the “natural attitude” to what

Husserl (1962) cited in Valle and King and Halling, (1989:12) has referred to as the “transcendental attitude”. This attempt to adopt the transcendental attitude is called “reduction”. In the process of reduction, one does not categorically deny the existence of the natural world but rather puts in abeyance one’s natural scientific belief that the world is independent of each individual person in favour of a view which says that the individual and world co-constitute one another (Ibid).

Norlyk and Harder postulate the terms *bracketing*, *reduction*, and *epoché* seem to have been used synonymously. For example, reduction was described as “to bracket the researcher’s pre-understanding of the phenomenon such as experiences, ideas and prejudices, in order to meet the phenomenon with an ‘open mind’” (2010). Bracketing is described as avoiding “influence” due to researcher’s pre understandings, and epoché was described as setting “aside past associations, understandings and biases” to look and see things as if for the first time. But there were also other understandings of these terms (Ibid).

Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, and Poole as cited in Wojnar and Swanson (2007) state that bracketing is an investigator’s attempt to achieve the state of transcendental subjectivity (neutrality) by putting aside prior understanding or preconceptions about the phenomenon under investigation.

A bracketing principle was employed for this study because Burns and Grove as cited in De Vos and Van Zyl (1998) advises that the researcher needs to get rid of preconceived ideas and reconstructs so that the procedure of data analysis

facilitates “seeing” all the facets of the phenomenon and the formation of the new constructs.

3.13 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Marshall and Roshman as cited in De Vos (2007) observe that all research must respond to canons that stand as criteria which the trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated. These canons can be phrased as questions to which all research must respond to (Ibid). They are paraphrased by Marshall and Rossman as follows.

- How credible are the particular findings of the study? By what criteria can we judge them?
- How transferable and applicable are these findings to another setting or group of people?
- How can we be reasonable sure that the findings would be replicated if the study were conducted with the same participants in the same context/
- How can we be sure that the findings are reflective of the subjects and the inquiry itself, rather than a creation of the researcher’s biases or prejudices?
(Ibid).

3.13.1 Reliability

The reliability and validity of a study affects the credibility of the findings. Reliability relates to the methods of data collection and the concern that they should be consistent and not distort the findings (Kuze, 2009). According to Denscombe as cited in Kuze (2009):

It refers to the ability of a research process to provide results that do not vary from occasion to occasion and that do not vary

according to particular persons undertaking the research. Researchers need to feel confident that the results they obtain are not being affected by a research instrument that throws up different results each time it is used

Reliability thus refers to the stability, accuracy and precision of measurement (Kuze, 2009). Reliability is concerned with accuracy and precision (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). This means that if a variable is tested under the same conditions then that variable must produce the same result. Reliability is reflected in the fact that an instrument produces the same results each time the instrument is applied (Delpont, 2005).

Mays & Pope (1995) advocates that the main ways in which qualitative researchers ensure the retest reliability of their analyses is by maintaining meticulous records of interviews and observations and by documenting the process of analysis in detail and that was what the researcher in this intended doing in order to make the study credible.

3.13.2 Validity

Deport as cited in Komle (2009) asserts that face validity is concerned about the superficial appearance or face value of an instrument. This simply means that, if the instrument appears to measure the variables it claims to measure, then the instrument has face validity. There are two aspects to validity – whether the instrument measures the concept in question and whether the instrument measures the concept accurately (Ibid). Denscombe as cited in Kuze (2009) provides a concise definition of validity as follows:

It refers to the quality of data and explanations and the confidence we might have that they accord with what is true and what is real. Claims to validity involve some demonstration that the researcher's data and his/her analysis are firmly rooted in the realm of things that are relevant, genuine and real; they act to reassure the reader that the research is not based on poor data and erroneous interpretations.

For this study, to ensure that it was reliable and valid the researcher carried out a pilot study which helped in the reduction of ambiguity, and ensured that the methodologies employed, instruments and data collection techniques were appropriate for this study.

3.14 SUMMARY

In this chapter the research approach, methodology and the research designs used in this research were outlined. The methodologies and instruments used for data collection were also discussed. Ethical issues were discussed and the researcher explained how these ethical issues were observed in the study. The quality of any research is important and, thus, the researcher alluded to the way in which the quality of this research had been ensured. The next chapter presented the research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the researcher presents the data that was collected through thematic analysis. The data is then discussed according to the themes that have emerged when the data was analysed and presented. The data that is presented in this chapter responds to the research questions that were posed to the participants. Also included in this chapter is the profile of the respondents as well as their life stories.

Core research question

- How did postgraduate students who have dropped out experience academic learning in the Education Faculty of HEI in Eastern Cape.

Sub research question

- In the light of experiences reported by the students who have dropped out, what are the implications for how students are supported in their academic needs?

4.2 PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Table 4.1 Profile of the participant

Participant	Gender	Age	Marital status	No of children	Race	Occupation	Supervisor		Type of Supervision	Stage of research when dropped out	Year of dropping out
							G	R			
P1	F	52	M	3	B	Subject Education Specialist	F	B	Single	After presenting at dry run	2010
P2	F	43	S	3	B	Teacher	F	B	Single	Research proposal accepted by FRHDC	2007
P3	F	44	M	4	B	Teacher	M	B	Single	Conceptualising research proposal	2010
P4	M	38	M	2	B	H.O.D.	M	I	Single	After presenting at dry run	2010

Key: P for Participant. G for Gender, M for Male, R for Race, F for Female and I for Indian.

Table 4.1 shows that there were four participants who participated in this study. All four participants were studying towards attaining Masters Degree in the Education Faculty of one HEI in Eastern Cape when they dropped out. All the participants dropped out in their first year of their study. They were all interviewed separately. The participants were subjected to in-depth interview sessions. The sample composed of 3 female participants and 1 male participant. They were selected according to those who were willing to participate in the study.

The table also shows that all four participants were full time employees of the Department of Education in Eastern Cape. All the participants were studying for their degree on part time basis. The table also shows that the participants were from the same ethnical group which is AmaXhosa. The table also shows that all the four participants dropped out of their Masters degree studies at the first year of study. The table indicates that only participant 2 had her research proposal approved by the FRHDC and all other 3 participants did not have their proposals approved. Participant 1 and 4 went to the dry run and participant 3 was still in the conceptualising phase of the research proposal when they all dropped out.

The table also shows that the all the participants were supervised by a person who was the same gender as they were except for participant 3 who was supervised by a supervisor of the opposite sex. It also shows that all the participants were on single supervision style. All the supervisors belonged to the same ethnic group of the participants which is AmaXhosa except for the supervisor of the fourth participant.

4.3 LIFE STORIES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

4.3.1 Participant 1

Participant 1 was a female aged 52 years married with 3 children. She was Black and belongs to AmaXhosa ethnic group. She was a teacher by profession and had a teaching experience of 33 years. She started her teaching when she was 19 years old. After obtaining her Senior Education Course, she started teaching in a primary school. She furthered her studies and obtained a Secondary Education Diploma and after that she started teaching at high school. She wanted to further her studies so she enrolled on part time basis for the Bachelor of Arts degree. After passing the B.A. Degree she further enrolled for the B.Ed Hons degree also on part time basis. She also passed the degree.

She taught in all the levels of schooling, that is primary, secondary and tertiary level. Before being employed at the district office she taught at a Teacher Training college. After the closure of teacher training colleges she got a post as a Subject Education Specialist at the Education District offices as SES. As already mentioned she was a wife, mother and a worker. She applied to study for Masters degree in 2009 at the University of Hope (pseudonym) and got accepted and started her studies in 2010. She dropped out of the Masters Programme the same year.

4.3.2 Participant 2

Participant 2 was a female aged 43 years. She was a single mother of 3 children. She was never married. She was a teacher by profession. She taught Grade 1 at a junior primary school. When she spoke about her work you could see she really

loved teaching in a junior primary section. She was also employed on full time basis by the Department of Education, Eastern Cape Province.

She had been teaching grade 1 for the past 20 years. After obtaining her senior certificate she enrolled at a Teacher Training College and did her Junior Primary Teachers Diploma. She passed it and started working and decided after some few years that she should further her studies. She started by enrolling for the Bachelor of Education degree on part time basis. After completing the degree she went on and studied for the B.Ed honours degree and passed it. In 2007 she enrolled for the Masters degree at the University of Hope (pseudonym).

Unfortunately for her she could not complete the degree due to her personal circumstances and she decided to drop out the same year. She dropped out after her research proposal was accepted by the FRHDC. She was living with her mother and her siblings at the time of studying for the Honours degree. She then felt that she should buy her own house and live with her children. She did and moved to a new house when she started the Masters Programme. She said she was very fond of her children and she was very much happy living with them. Although it was difficult to be a single parent, she enjoyed it very much.

4.3.3 Participant 3

Participant 3 was also a female aged 44 years married with 4 children. She was also a teacher by profession and is full time employed by the Department of Education in Eastern Cape. She taught Grade 6 at a Senior primary School. She had been teaching for the past 21 years. After some years after attaining her Senior Primary

Teachers Diploma, she decided to register for B.Ed degree at the University of Hope (pseudonym). After passing her junior degree she went on and enrolled for the honours degree at the same institution. When she attained it she immediately registered for the Masters Degree in 2010. She dropped out of the programme whilst she was still in the process of conceptualising her research proposal. She spoke sadly about the loss of her mother.

4.3.4 Participant 4

Participant 4 was a male aged 38 years and was married with 2 children. He was full time employed by the Department of Education, Eastern Cape as a Head of Division in a Secondary School. He started teaching 15 years ago with a Secondary Teachers Diploma attained at a teacher training college. After some few years teaching he enrolled for the Advanced Certificate in Education at the University of Hope (pseudonym). He went on and registered for the Bachelor of Education Honours Degree at the same university.

After completing the B.Ed Honours degree he enrolled for a Masters Degree in 2010. He did not complete his degree and he dropped out of the programme the same after he presented his research proposal at the dry run. He is the only participant that was supervised by a supervisor of a different race other than his.

4.4 PRESENTING THE DATA

Having conducted phenomenological in-depth unstructured interviews with the participants, the following themes emerged out of those interviews.

- Feeling prepared for Masters Programme

- Understanding of Supervision
- Institutional factors
- Supervision practises
- Supervisor – student relationship
- Supervisor geographical location
- Academic power struggle
- Supervisor capacity
- Personal factors versus academic responsibility

4.4.1 Feeling prepared for Masters Programme

All the participants said that they all felt that they were prepared for the journey they were undertaking as M.Ed students. 100% reported that they felt that they were ready for the programme and also they were competent to be part of the programme because they have all passed their B.Ed Honours degree without any hassles.

Participant 3 felt most confident than other participants, she said:

*When I applied for the Masters degree I knew that I was capable of achieving because I was accepted from the interviews that I went through. I did not even know there was a sifting process. The sifting process proved that I was capable and I passed my honours , but when I started the degree I became afraid but I was helped by the workshops we attended and my moral picked up and up. I knew mos, the university has all the resources , I mean library , computers and as I studied my honours at the main campus **(Participant 3)***

Although I did not study for my Bachelor of Education Honours at the University of Hope (pseudonym) I felt confident and I would be able to be competent for the Masters Programme. I

have a B.Ed Honours which is the same requirement for admission in a Masters Programme. Moreover I was shortlisted from the list of applicants that had applied and when I went for the interview with the committee I passed the interview.

(Participant 1).

All the participants perceived passing the Honours degree meant that one was ready for the next degree which was a Masters Degree. However, when the researcher probed more if they had known prior their applications what would be expected of them in the programme, all the participants tended to avoid answering the probing and just said that having a B.Ed Honours degree makes one ready for the Masters programme.

What else do you need to be prepared for Masters? It is your Honours Degree. We were all prepared in the when we were studying the honours degree. I mean the university knows that after completing your honours degree you will surely be able to go on the next level which is Masters. So I think the university structures its course according to what you are going to do next

(Participant 2)

Although all the participants said they were ready for the degree and it also emerged that some were not fully confident in terms of being ready. Participant 1 spoke about experience of utilising her academic reading and writing skills. She also spoke about the fact of not being fully computer literate. Although she reported that she could use a computer, she felt that she was not fully capacitated to use a computer. Although participant spoke about the support she received through the courses they attended for academic reading and writing, she felt that he could not cope well with issue of

writing academically as he lacked computer skills. Participant 1 felt that being semi computer literate was hindering her progress.

I had difficulty in using the internet. I experienced a problem when I wanted to search for information relating to my topic. I could not find books or journals that are relevant for my topic. Even when I did get that information I had difficulty in understanding the journal and how I should use the information. This frustrated me a lot as I thought that I could not move on with my topic. (Participant 1)

When I was doing my honours degree, the lecturers did not want us to write our assignments using our handwriting because they sometimes could not see clearly our hand writings, so they wanted us to type our assignments . that is where I started learning about the computers and internet. I was helped a lot by my fiends in the classroom. We would stay in the library and use the computer for searching information. Although we did that I am not 100% sure of using the internet and searching for information. You know going through the information and journals is not easy. (Participant 3)

4.4.2 Understanding of supervision

4.4.2.1 Role of supervisor

In terms of understanding what is meant by studying for a Masters Degree with the assistance of a supervisor, 75% of the participants (participants 2, 3, and 4) reported that a supervisor as a lecturer who was going to assist with the attaining of the degree just like the lecturers they had when they were studying for their B.Ed Honours degree at the same institution.

A supervisor does the same job as the lecturer when you studying honours degree. The lecturer wants you to pass at the end of the year. He assists you with all the necessary information for your assignments and tests so the supervisor also is there to assist you to pass your degree. He is doing the same job as the lecturer in honours class nothing is different.

(Participant 2)

A lecturer is a lecturer whether you are assisting in honours class or Masters class. Your job is to help students pass. That's it. A supervisor is there to assist me with my work and help me pass. I think in masters class the only difference is that you see your lecturer on one on one basis, you don't come as a class

(Participant 4)

However, participant 1 said she understood a supervisor as somebody who will help you and give you a lot of information when you need one.

I expected to get people who will boost me, so that I can progress. I expect somebody who will get under my wings and carry me. Those were my expectations. I mean that I expected to have somebody from my own culture who will understand me and I had high hopes for this university as it is mostly run by people from my ethnic group and you know the lecturers at least understand where we are coming from and they know our backgrounds. I never had contacts with the lecturers when I was studying for my other degrees. We only wrote assignments and posted them and then went for exams. So when I came to University of Hope (pseudonym) and I was going to have somebody who I was going to be in contact with, that made feel great because the supervisor will be there to help me a lot with information and how to go about doing my work **(Participant 1)**

The participants reported that they viewed a supervisor as somebody who would give guidance, support, and mentorship, become a friend and play a significant role in helping them achieve their goals.

When the researcher probed more about being boosted the participant reported that she meant that the supervisor had to help her pass as the supervisor was somebody who was knowledgeable and is there to help and give support to the students.

I expected supervisors to help us with information. When I was studying for my honours degree at this university, the lectures downloaded for us a lot of material to read and use them on our assignments as references. So even now in Masters programme I thought and expected the supervisor would give you pamphlets that are related to your topic not just to go into the library and search for information because it is time consuming and for instance in my case I work and I don't have time to go library and search for information as I also live far away from the university. Going to the library frustrated me and made me angry as I had to search for information. Do you understand how frustrating it is to search for those books or journals and at the end of the day come out with nothing?

(Participant 4)

From what the participants reported, the researcher assumed that the participants understood supervision as being given somebody who would help you with your research topic by downloading for you documents, journals, information and giving relevant advice.

It also emerged that participant 2, 3, and 4 who studied at the same university for the honours degree expected supervisors to play the same roles that were played by the

lecturers that were tutoring them when they were studying for their honours degree. From what participant 4 reported, it emerged that the participants became frustrated when what they had expected to happen in terms of the role of the supervisor did not actually materialise as they thought would.

4.4.3 Institutional factors

4.4.3.1 Feeling needing Library assistance

As the researcher reported earlier that participants expected to get information from the supervisors, the participants reported that when they had to look for information on the library it proved to be a daunting task which led to frustration. When the researcher probed more asking about his using her computer skills at the honours level, participant 3 reported it was different when she was studying the honours degree as most of the time the lecturers used to bring them pamphlets that were already related to the topic.

She reported that she used to be helped by the librarians when she needed information and most of the times she used to take out books at the library, she was not used to using journals and that frustrated her because she did not know which journal to take.

One time I went to the library and asked the lady there to check for me a journal related to my topic. She helped me and she showed me that a lot of journals were found, so I should decide which journals I wanted. I was confused now because I thought when I will have time to read all these journals in order to find out which ones are right for my study. That frustrated me and the lady at the library said I must choose on my own which are right for me. (Participant 3)

Going to the library posed a lot of challenge for me. Even if you are computer literate, it is very difficult without the assistance of librarians to search for information. You just get confused with the way of searching for relevant journals to your study. And you know the ladies there they get irritated and fed up with helping you choose your journals. I am a little bit old I did not use computers at an early age and sometimes I would get the information and lose it again after not saving it. I was sometimes helped by these young students who were doing their junior degrees. They are very good with computers but even them get fed up looking up journals for you

(Participant 2)

To the researcher, this meant that the participants became frustrated and annoyed by the process of looking for journals that were suitable for their own studies and also downloading the relevant information. The transition between an Honours degree and Masters Degree proved to be difficult for the participants.

4.4.4 Supervision practises

On this section, the participants reported about how they felt about the supervisory practises they encountered. The following emerged from the participants' report.

4.4.4.1 Frustration with the research topic

75 % the participants reported that they became frustrated with the way the supervisors engaged them in terms of their research topics. 75% of the participants reported that when they went to supervisory meetings, they all came back frustrated because the supervisors would change their research topics whereas they knew what they wanted to research about. The participants asserted that the supervisors told them that their topics were not researchable and the topics the supervisors

suggested did not interest them as they (participants) knew what they wanted to research about. However, 1 participant felt that the meetings with supervisor were most fruitful as she had a supervisor who was passionate about the topic she was researching.

*I have been teaching at Junior Primary all my life. When I wanted to carry out a research I chose a topic that I liked a lot. Although I cannot clearly remember the exact words but it was about Early Childhood Development. I liked the topic very much because it was in my line of work since I am teaching grade 1. Even my supervisor liked the topic because she showed she had a passion of ECD. She would call me and give me materials that were not even for the research but material to use in my class for my learners and for my teaching practises. And I thought my topic **(Participant 2)***

*I wanted to research about corporal punishment in schools. I wanted to research what can be used in its place because learners need to be disciplined at school. I don't know whether my supervisor and I didn't have the same understanding of what I wanted to research. I don't think he understood me because he just said what am I going to research as corporal punishment is abolished in South Africa. It is a non researchable topic he said. That made me to be frustrated and you know I didn't know which topic to choose now. I was really frustrated. **(Participant 3)***

4.4.4.2 Confusion

Participant 1, 3, and 4 which was 75 % of the participants reported how they had felt confused and frustrated because of the changes that were made to their research topics. Participant 1 showed a lot of emotion when she talked about her research

topic. She said her research topic was changed and that did not make her comfortable as she was the one who knew what she wanted to research about.

I had a topic on LIFE ORIENTATION and I dropped it and then I took one on how to teach poetry. The supervisor changed it more than one time. I did not understand this because I was confused now because I felt we didn't have the same understanding about my research topic because I feel the person who understands what I want to research is me. I am very passionate about Life Orientation and I wanted to research about it, the new research topic that was suggested did not interest me at all. (Participant 1)

When the researcher probed more on a follow up interview with participant 1 on how did she feel when her topic was changed and also did she identify with the new topic. Participant 1 responded by saying that she was angry and confused that her topic was changed. She also said she wanted her original topic because she knew that she wanted to research something that would be of value to her line of work and since she was a Subject Education Specialist, she wanted to research something that would help the teachers she was working with at the Education district office and also help the learners that were in Grade 12. Participant 1 said she did not identify with the new topic as it is something she did not want to research.

I am passionate about my topic I still want to continue with it. I feel this topic is a tool to unlock the failure of students at schools. I would continue with it even if its overseas and what makes it more interesting is that I have not seen anyone who is researching about it. I thought it would open doors for many people; I am still very much interested in it. But I won't go with it to University of Hope(pseudonym) because I was not treated right. They will have to sit down me. (Participant 1)

Participant 3 said that changing of the research topic made her to become confused. She said she was researching about corporal punishment and was told that corporal punishment in South Africa was abolished and no longer exists so she should research something new.

I felt confused because my topic was changed from corporal punishment to effectiveness of punishment in schools or to perceptions of teachers with regards to punishment. I did not understand the change at all. It just brought confusion to me. I knew that corporal punishment is abolished and then I wanted to research what can be used in its place. But my supervisor now told me about perceptions of teachers. This really confused me , I didn't want to know what the teachers were thinking about the abolishment of corporal punishment but what strategies can we use in our schools to bring back the culture of learning and teaching. Seemingly now we as teachers don't know what to do in our schools. (Participant 3)

Participant 3 said the way she was confused and frustrated with change in her research topic she even considered changing from the Faculty of Education and register with the Faculty of Arts. Participant 3 said she spoke with her supervisor and enquired about changing her faculty and was referred to the administration offices where she learnt that it was already late to change faculties.

4.4.4.3 Despair

50% of the participant reported that they felt disparity because of getting a slow progress they were making on their research proposals. They also reported that they felt being in a state of disparity because of slow feedback they were getting from the supervisors.

My supervisor did not make time for me. You know, I sent him a draft of my research proposal in June and he only responded to me in September or October. I don't think that is fair. He didn't respond to any E-mails I have sent him. I sent my draft proposal to him and he didn't give himself a chance to look at my work. He looked at my proposal only when we were going to the dry run. I was so desperate and I wanted to know if I am submitting work that is of standard. I did not get any feedback from my supervisor. I won't even say he was slow with feedback because I didn't get any **(Participant 4)**

When I went to meet him to get feedback on E-mail I have sent him, I would feel that he is staring to read what I have sent him when I am right in front of him. I am also a teacher, when you show to your learners that you only mark their work in front of them they will lose confidence in you. I didn't think the corrections he made to my work were genuine because it seemed that he only marked my work for the sake of marking and also because I was just in front of him. That didn't go well with me it made me feel frustrated and wanted to have another supervisor. **(Participant 3)**

4.4.5 Supervisor student relationship

4.4.5.1 Feeling supported

On supervisor student relationship the participants reported contrasting stories. 25% of the participants reported that she felt that the supervisor was giving her support. Participant 2 said that she had a good student and supervisor relationship. She said her supervisor was encouraging her, supportive and she managed to have good professional relations with her supervisor.

Well firstly I can say I had a very good understanding with my supervisor. She motivated me, an encouraging person, and straightforward person. She was that kind of supervisor. My supervisor supported me very much. She would even call me before I even thought of going to see her. She would see you even if you didn't make an appointment unless she was really busy. I don't know whether it is because she shared the same passion I had with my research topic or because she is a women who understood all the difficulties I faced. She even called me when I was not submitting any work. Even the head of masters programme called me when I was not showing up at the university. I got all the support I needed from my supervisor.

(Participant 2)

To participant 2, the relationship with the supervisor was good and it did not pose any hinderers to her study. Participant 2 also said she had a very good professional relationship with her supervisor in so much that she worked hard with supervisor and she felt good every time she met him.

She was a little bit concerned when her supervisor informed her that he was leaving the university and she felt that she would not be able to cope with the new supervisor as she thought that they would not be on the same understanding as she was with her previous supervisor.

I felt very concerned when my supervisor told me that he is leaving the university. I thought that I would not cope because I won't be at the same page with my new supervisor as I was with my previous supervisor. But my new supervisor proved me wrong, we also had a good relationship. She was a lady and she supported me very well. At first I was not comfortable with the idea of a new supervisor and I decided not to go to

meetings with her. She kept on calling me and insisted to see me. Eventually we met and then she encouraged me and she never stopped assisting me with my work. She taught me how to download important information and sometimes gave me downloaded documents; I would never forget her.

(Participant 2)

Participant 2 explained that the second supervisor showed a lot of interest in her work. According to participant 2, the supervisor was supportive, showed interest in her work, supplied her with information and documents and participant 2 felt she had a friend to help her with research. Participant 2 uttered that she thinks the other reason why her supervisor was interested in her research was because she was researching about what her supervisor had passion for which was Early Childhood Development. However, participant 2 said that the second supervisor that she was allocated also left the university and that did not make her comfortable at all. Participant 2 said she did not feel comfortable with the third supervisor she was allocated to.

I felt uncomfortable with this supervisor and the good experience I had with my previous two supervisors was not there. I had no confidence in the new supervisor. The warmth I used to feel with my supervisor made me not to want to go and meet my new supervisor. I lost interest and the university programme coordinator kept calling me, but I did not respond.

(Participant2)

Other participants reported that they felt that they were not supported by their supervisors.

I don't know whether is is because my supervisor was a male, I felt that we didn't have the connection of student and teacher

relationship. I mean that feeling you have every time you are to see your teacher. Our relationship was very cold and very much professional. When my mother was sick I wanted even somebody to talk to even if it was my supervisor because I could not carry on with my work. I could not report what I felt to my supervisor. (Participant 2)

4.4.5.2 Feeling neglected

50% of the participants reported that they felt neglected by their supervisors. They asserted that they felt that the supervisors were not making enough time for them. Participant 4 reported that the main reason for him to decide to drop out of the programme was because he felt that the supervisor he had did not have his interest at heart. The experience he had with supervisor was bad, unprofessional and poor. He felt that the supervisor was always busy and did not make time to see him.

The reason I decided to drop out of the Masters degree was because of my supervisor. My supervisor did not make time for me. You know, I sent him a draft of my research proposal in June and he only responded to me in September or October. I once went to him to Trafalgar town (pseudonym) to enquire about my proposal and he said he could not open my E-mail and when I asked him to show it to me on his laptop, I opened the E-mail and this meant that he did not even look at it and in fact he did not know which E- mail was it. The second time I saw him it was here in Trafalgar (pseudonym) and he was not coming to meet me but was coming for his meeting and the reason I am saying so is that after the meeting he spoke to me for only ten minutes and said was in a hurry to Trafalgar town (pseudonym) . (Participant 4)

However, participant 3 reported a different experience of feeling neglected. She said she met her supervisor on a regular basis. She said she was allocated a supervisor who was having a positive attitude towards her and her work. However, she also mentioned that she felt that her supervisor was busy and that he did not have time to look at her work.

When I went to meet him to get feedback on E-mail I have sent him, I would feel that he is starting to read what I have sent him when I am right in front of him. You know you are also a teacher; it makes you to lose confidence in your teacher if he only looks at your work when you are in front of him. Although I don't blame him maybe he had a lot of work I don't know but I would have appreciated it if I would arrive in his office and see that he has read my work. (Participant 3)

Although she said that she met on regular basis with her supervisor, she felt that she was not making any progress with the supervisor. She said she felt she was going around in circles and not making progress on the study. She explained,

When we were in one of the workshops that was organised by the programme coordinator for all M.Ed students, one of the supervisors who was at the workshop asked me at what stage of the research I was in, and I said I was still in the process of drafting the research proposal. The supervisor said, Oh you are still in the conceptualisation stage, you are still conceptualising the topic. I was very demoralised and frustrated. Other students were sharing that they are in preparing for the dry run and I felt that I was far behind. (Participant 3)

When the researcher asked what she did when she saw that she was not making any progress with her study. She responded by saying that she knew that it was not anybody's fault that she was progressing and she was not blaming anybody. She said she did go to the programme coordinator. Participant 3 explained as follows,

I made an appointment with the coordinator and she agreed to see me. When I was in her office I did not know what I wanted her to do but anyway I wanted her to see her and explained my situation to her. I even told her I don't know what I want her to do but can she at least try to have another supervisor for me. Not that I don't want this supervisor but if I can get a second supervisor who would help me when my supervisor is busy. The programme coordinator said every supervisor has a workload; she cannot just give me another supervisor as they (supervisors) are all busy. I understood her and I did not blame her. I knew that everybody is busy with his students. But I felt frustrated as I would be facing the same problem. Even the programme coordinator said I and my father (father meaning supervisor) are not making good progress. (Participant 3)

When the researcher asked her how the meeting with the supervisor made her feel, she responded by uttering that she felt as if she is a failure. She said when she was from her meeting with supervisor she would get stuck at home and did not know what to write and she would close her books and go to sleep and luckily for her she was a heavy sleeper. Also when the researcher probed more on how the participant understand co supervision and if she wanted co supervision, the researcher noted from her response that the participant wanted somebody who would replace her supervisor when she could not get hold of him. She reported that,

I even made an appointment with the programme coordinator to request if I can get another supervisor to help me when mine was busy. When I arrived at her office I didn't know what to say to her but I told her I felt I was not making progress on my study and I would be glad if I can get another supervisor to assist me. The programme coordinator explained to me that all supervisors were allocated students evenly and she would not be able to get me a second supervisor. I understood her point it is such just I was frustrated with the progress of my work. (Participant 3)

4.4.6 Supervisor geographical location

Only one of the four participants reported about the effect the distance between himself and the supervisor hindered his progress. He reported that he lived far away from the university and the supervisor was based on the campus that was far away from the main campus and he himself the participant lived close to the main campus of the university.

I could not just go and see my supervisor just as other students did. I had to travel a lot of kilometres in order to see him and that cost a lot of money. I would have appreciated it if I was allocated a supervisor who is based at the main campus of the university here on Trafalgar (pseudonym) as I live very close to the campus and I would have had an easy access to my supervisor. What if I go down there to Trafalgar (pseudonym) and don't see him? Do you know how much does it cost to go to Trafalgar (pseudonym)? I would have wasted my money, and my time. Do you know how unreliable he is? He just didn't have time for me. (Participant 4)

4.4.7 Academic power struggle

Participants reported about how power struggle amongst stakeholders (invited supervisors, higher degrees committee and faculty staff) left them confused when attending a dry run.

4.3.7.1 Faculty support versus supervisor

One participant out of the four participants reported that when she went to present her research proposal at the dry run session, she was advised by other supervisors on how to strengthen her proposal. However, when she was in a meeting with her supervisor after the dry run, it was a different story.

Participant 1 said that the supervisors were not giving her the same ideas about her topic.

I went to the Dry run once and I was advised by the panel. Before I went for the second try at Dry run there were some meetings aimed at improving my research proposal and my performance and performance of other students who had not had their research proposals approved yet. I got advice from other supervisors but somewhere there was a misunderstanding between the advices given because it did not tally with what my supervisor was saying. I do not know how to put it. I felt there was interference and that disturbed me. The cause of the misunderstanding was different advices I got from different supervisors. Their advices were contradicting each other. And I found myself caught in the middle of advices of supervisors. Well for me when I found myself in this dilemma the first thing that came to me was to back off, because I could not understand why people of the same institution could have different ideas about the same topic. I could not understand

why they could not work together and they were not united and they were confusing me. One supervisor gave me this advice and the other one gave me another different advice. Different ideas from the same institution. I felt no, no, no. I then made a decision to back off. I did not want to make conflict between my supervisors. I just felt the best thing for me is to back off.

(Participant 1)

When the researcher probed more and asked participant 1 on a follow up interview if she raised the issue of different ideas given by supervisors with her supervisor, and did she also raise the of interference and if not why. Participant 1 responded saying that she did not want to raise it with her supervisor as she would be seen as somebody who is instigating conflicts.

Participant 1 also said that her character did not allow her to confront people and ask a lot of questions, she just left things as they are.

I am a humble person, I don't like situations of confrontations. I didn't want to have any confrontation and arguments with my supervisors. My character does not allow me to be part of wrong doings. I am always suffering even at work and at home because I would just shut my mouth when I don't like the way things go. (Participant 1)

4.4.7.1.2 *Feeling humiliated*

One of the participants reported that he felt humiliated after presenting his research proposal at the dry run session. He reported that the comments made at the dry run by the faculty support staff demoralised him as he also felt that he was not properly prepared by his supervisor for the dry run.

I am not trying to shift the blame here but he is the reason why I decided to drop out. You know the only Dry Run I presented my proposal at was the last Dry Run of the year, and my supervisor sent me that because he was forced to because it was the last dry run of the year. I attended other dry runs he to observe and I noticed that his other students presented without him being there. The comments from the committee at the Dry Run I was presenting also demoralised and killed my self esteem and I decided then and then to quit. (Participant 4)

4.4.8 Supervisor Capacity

25% of the participants uttered that they feel the university is allocating supervisors to students who were not fully knowledgeable about the research processes but were only expertise on their fields. Participant 4 reported that he felt that his supervisor was the expert on the content he was about to research not on the processes how a research on his topic should be carried out.

4.4.8.1 Content Knowledge versus knowledge of research

Participant 4 reported the following on content knowledge versus knowledge of research.

I don't think my supervisor cared about supervising students. He is just a science lecturer. He knows a lot about science but I think he does not fit in research because he did not have time for me. The university made a mistake of allocating me a science lecturer simply because he is good in science. I think I should have been given somebody else even if that supervisor is not a science lecturer. (Participant 4)

4.4.9 Personal factors versus academic responsibility

50% of the participants reported that although all the above mentioned factors had a bearing on the decisions they took on dropping out of the postgraduate studies but their personal circumstances and family matters had the most influence on the decision of dropping out of the Masters Programme of one HEI in Eastern Cape. Participant 2 and 3 acknowledged that the changes in their personal circumstances forced them to drop out of their studies.

4.4.9.1 Feeling heavily burdened by too much responsibilities

Both participants 2 and 3 reported that the responsibilities they had, had a negative influence on their studies. Participant 2 reported that the fact that she was a single parent and had to look after her children weighed heavily on her studies. She reported that the attention her children were demanding and she felt she should sacrifice her studies because her children were her propriety and she did not have a partner to help her with the attention her children needed.

You know I used to come home late because after work I had to go the university library to do my research work because I didn't have a computer at home. I saw that my children were suffering because they had nobody to help them with their homework. I would arrive home late, tired and wanted to go straight to bed. I could not stand seeing my children suffer like that because they also had to study and anyway I was not under pressure as if I wanted to have a degree I was just studying because I wanted to. A lot of people do not even have the Honours degree I was having. (Participant 2)

Participant 3 said she did not have time to concentrate on her studies because of her personal problem. She said that her mother became sick and she had to take care of

her. Participant 3 said her mother had to go to the private hospital 3 times a week to have her dialysis treatment done. And that put a strain in her as she was the one who had to take to hospital daily and pick her up after 4 hours. Participant 3 reported that she did not have enough time for her studies and she was busy the whole week. It traumatised to see her mother sick as she was not only her mother but her best friend.

Yazi mna nomama wam indlela besivana ngayo .Ubungasoze utsho xa usibona ukuba ubona umntu nentombi yakhe ,ubunokucinga ukuba ubona umntu nodadewabo. Basisisthi xa sincokola , athi omnye komnye, he ntombi wethu. Ibingathi man ndithetha nodade wethu xa sincokola izinto zethu. Akhonto ndingamxeleli yona man zonke izinto zam zaziwa nguye nam ndiyazazi ezakhe. (Participant 3)

Participant 3 became so emotional and the researcher had to stop with the interview and comfort the participant. But the participant insisted that the researcher should continue with the interview after sometime. This also brought a lot of emotion to the researcher as he himself has buried his close nephew whom he was a guardian to in the past 3 weeks. However, the researcher and the participant 3 came to understanding why death is necessary and comforted each other. Participant 3 said she eventually lost her mother in November after an illness of 4 months. She said she told her supervisor that she could not study as she was looking after her mother and she even told the supervisor about her mothers' death. But she also said she did not expect anything from the university it was just a matter of formally informing the supervisor about the reason of not attending to her studies.

4.4.9.2 Feeling financially unstable

Participant 2 reported that the change in her financial status had a negative influence on her studies. Participant 2 said the changes made her also to lose interest in her studies because she was financially unstable.

I was leaving at home with my family. I applied for a bond and it was approved so I bought a new house. This meant a big change to my financial status as I had to move to a new house get used to all the financial implications I did not have when I was leaving with my parents. My financial status changed and it did not change for the better but for the worst as I found myself in lots of debts. My child was also starting school in former Model C schools so that cost a lot of money. I did not have the patience to go through my studies as I was frustrated financially. (Participant 2)

4.5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Having presented the experiences of participants on their academic learning at one Higher Education Institution in Eastern Cape, the following section discussed the thematic findings of the study which were:

- Feeling prepared for Masters Programme
- Understanding of Supervision
- Institutional factors
- Supervision practises
- Supervisor – student relationship
- Supervisor geographical location
- Academic power struggle

- Supervisor capacity
- Personal factors versus academic responsibility

4.5.1 Feeling prepared for Masters Programme

Literature indicates that students embark on Master's and Doctoral studies without being fully aware or prepared for the courses, the students are most of the times not aware of what will be required of them when they study for their Master's and Doctoral degrees. (Frouws , 2007, De Beer and Masson , 2009, Bailey , 2002) .

The study found out that the transition between the honours degree and Masters Degree proved to a daunting task for the participants. Frouws (2007) asserts that a number of students embark on their Masters Degrees without sufficient background or experience in research and to some students, mention of the concept research raises fear and concern. However, 75% of the participants in this study reported that they had a mini research module when they were studying for their honours degree. However, as they reported that they were prepared for the Masters programme. The study found out that the students were not prepared to work independently as researchers. The students needed the supervisors to hold their hands and simulate the role the honours lecturers played when they were studying for the honours degree.

4.5.2 Understanding of supervision

The study found out that the participants perceived supervision at Masters Programme as the same as having the lecturers that were tutoring them when they were studying for their Bachelor of Education Honours degree.

4.5.2.1 Role of supervisor

The study found out that the participants perceived the role of the supervisor as someone who should be helping them in attaining their degrees. The researcher also noted that the participants perceived the supervisor as somebody who was there to guide, help, and become a friend. Mouton (2001) explains that the supervision of postgraduate students has four dimensions, namely advisory role, quality control role, supporting role, and guidance role.

However, the study also established that although the participants understood the above roles of supervisors, they, the participants had more expectations of their supervisors. The participants had expectations that the supervisors needed to hold their hands in the process of carrying out their research and also the supervisors needed to point the participants on the right direction in terms of showing the participants which material such as journals, literature and so forth to utilise.

From what the participants have reported, it is evident that the participants expected the supervisors to download for them the literature and journals that they would be utilising. To the researcher, it meant that the transition for the Honours Degree to Masters Degree proved to be difficult for the participants. It can also be noted that the participants found it difficult to work independently. However, Brown (2007) postulates that supervisor need to see their students work independently as researchers. Although 3 of the participants did carry out a mini research in their honours degree, the study found out that they were not utilising what they had learnt on the previous programme and they were confusing what the supervisor should be doing and not doing for them.

The study found out that this was what brings tension and strain to the relationship of supervisors and students. Participants expected supervisors to have all the necessary information that would be used by the students and on the other hand supervisors expected students to come to supervisory meetings with problems they encountered whilst they were working on their own. It was also found out by the study that 100% of the participants viewed their learning process in a traditional form of teaching in South Africa where a student comes to school with the aim of having the teacher pouring in information and the teacher as the source of information.

4.5.3 Institutional factors

4.5.3.1 *Library assistance*

The findings of the study have shown that the participants struggled with the use of the universities' resources such as library and computer laboratory. Although the participants reported that they were ready for the Masters programme, it has shown that they were not fully skilled for the academic writing and reading as they have reported that they found it difficult to search for journals and utilise the library resources.

The study has also revealed that the participants were not entirely happy with the library assistance they received. The participants' expectations were that they should be assisted with searching for on line journals. However, institutional policies are contrary to their expectations as library support staff are employed to assist in giving only directions not on searching and downloading on line journals for students as they serve a lot of students who are part time and full time students. The researcher also noted that participants lacked computer literacy skills as some reported that the use of internet and online search for journals was not something they were used to.

4.5.4 Supervision practises

Literature has defined supervision in many different ways. Supervision internationally and here in our country differs. According to Brown (2008) there are three types of supervision:

- Single supervision
- Co supervision
- Group supervision

Brown (2008) further asserts that international universities have adopted either co supervision or group supervision. However, here in South Africa most of the Higher Education Institutions are still following the traditional form of supervision which is single supervision. Supervision in postgraduate students especially at Masters and Doctoral level plays a vital role in ensuring the success of postgraduate students, the interaction between the student and supervisor is key (Frouws, 2007; Waghid, 2006; Mouton, 2001). The study determined that the engagements between the supervisors and the participants left some of the participants with different feelings and experiences.

4.5.4.1 Frustration and Confusion with the research topics

It is a known fact that formulating a research topic for a study has been one of the key areas where students faced challenges which sometimes leads to straining of the relationship between the supervisor and student. Frouws (2007) emphasises that students formulate research problems which cannot be solved within the environment the research is to be conducted in. The study established that most of the participants became frustrated and

confused when they engaged themselves with their supervisors in terms of the research topic.

The academic preparedness and ability is very important for the students in Masters level in order to be able to succeed and formulate proper researchable topics. Albertyn, Kapp, and Bitzer, (2008) point out that 75% of M. Phil students reported difficulty with writing research proposals, research methodology, and 63% had a problem with preparing a title and research design. This means that although there are other factors that contribute to student retention and attrition, academic performance is also one of the key factors that make postgraduate students dropout or exceed the maximum prescribed time of graduating in Masters level.

This study also found out that the relationship between the supervisors and the participants was compromised and strained because of changes made to research topics. The researcher assumed that the supervisors as they have extensive knowledge on how to formulate research topics were bound to give advice to the participants because the topics were not researchable or would not come up with something new or a fresh angle. However, for the participants this was not taken in a positive way.

According to participants, they had full understanding of what they wanted to research despite the fact that some of their topics may not be researchable. One of the reasons for conducting a research was to come up with something new from what the previous researchers have already researched. For example, one of the

participants wanted to research on corporal punishment which was already banished in South Africa and the supervisor wanted a new angle on the research topic which maybe was the perceptions of teachers on strategies that are in place for corporal punishment. It seemed that the supervisors were applying what Frouws (2007) suggested which is academic departments of HEI's should be in a position to evaluate research proposals and provide students with proper guidance.

4.5.4.2 *Despair*

As already stated from the above that there are three kinds of supervision namely single supervision, co-supervision and group supervision, the HEI which was used in this study adopted a single supervision style in Education Faculty. Although the participants reported that they wanted a second supervisor to help, the researcher established that the participants were not meaning co-supervision because when he had probed more on the issue the participants have reported that they wanted somebody to replace the supervisor when he was busy. For this study, therefore, this meant that the supervisor had a number of students to supervise and could not give ample time to their students.

In South African Higher Education Institutions it has been established that supervisors are faced with an acute problem of rising number of students to supervise (Higher Education Monitor, 2009). This study also established that the participants felt that the supervisors were not having enough time to assist them with their research.

4.5.5 Supervisor student relationship

According to Lubbe (2003), postgraduate students look to supervisors to be a role model and for a support system. Should the working relationship turns sour, then it should be resolved as soon as possible or changes should be made. Student and supervisor relationship plays a vital part in the success of the degree process and “can make or break the postgraduate (Bailey, 2002; Waghid 2006).

The findings of this study were that the only 25% of the participants reported that they were supported by their supervisors. As already mentioned, the relationship between the supervisor and the students is vital for the success of the research project. The study also ascertained that since the relationship between the supervisor and participant 2 was positive, it had lead to positive results because the participant went through the dry run and further processed to present her research proposal to the Higher Degrees Committee and it was accepted. To the researcher, this meant that the positive relation the participant had with her supervisor made her to feel good with her studies as she said she had somebody who supported her academically, morally, and spiritually. The findings of this can deduce that the extra mile the supervisor went for her student motivated her.

The study also found out that the working together of supervisor and the head of Masters programme also had a positive bearing on students. Participant 2 had reported that even the head of the Masters programme kept calling when she decided to drop out of the studies. The researcher had therefore deduced that a good relationship between the supervisor, student and head of programme can yield positive results.

However, in this study it was also ascertained that the 50 % of participants had a relationship that was not sound with their supervisors. Although the researcher found out that the relationship with the supervisors was not sound in terms of support academically and morally the researcher also assumed that the supervisors were not aware of the how their students felt because when the researcher probed more on participants if they had engaged their supervisors the response was no. The study also found out that the relationships with the supervisors of the 2 participants had a great influence on the decision taken by the participants to drop out of postgraduate studies.

4.5.6 Supervisor geographical location

The findings of the study are that long distance between the supervisor and student can also hinder the progress of the research project. As 25% of participants reported that they could not have access to the supervisor because of the long distance between himself and the supervisor. However, 75 % of participants reported nothing on the geographical location of their supervisors and the researcher assumed that they had no problems and since the researcher had visited the participants at home while carrying out the interviews and ascertained that they live close to the institution they were studying in.

4.5.7 Academic power struggle

Most central to what the participants reported on this theme, the study determined that the power struggle between the academics had a negative bearing towards the success of the postgraduate students. The study found out that the participants were left in state of dilemma as to which advice to utilise when they were formulating their research proposals.

According to the report of the participants, when they were in dry run the faculty support team gave them advice on how they could strengthen their proposal and when they went back to discuss the advices, the supervisors tended to ignore the advices and foster for her or his own way of strengthening the research proposal. Perhaps the researcher assumes that this may be caused by the style of supervision in this HEI which was single supervision. Perhaps if it were co- supervision or group supervision the power struggle between the faculty support and the supervisors would be minimal.

The researcher also made an assumption that personal factors such as differences between the faculty support staff and supervisors also comes in to play when students presents their research proposals. The study also noted that the absence of supervisors when their students were presenting in dry runs also tended to have a bearing on causing confusion with the research topic and proposal because a student would be given advise at the dry run by the faculty staff and the supervisor would not be there to acknowledge the advise instead the supervisor would go on as planned with his/her student.

4.5.8 Supervisor capacity

The research study found out that 25 % of the participants reported that the supervisor was not capacitated enough to assist students with research and he was only an expert on a subject or a certain topic. However, the researcher could not ascertain the capacity of the supervisor in terms of knowledge of research as the participant reported as well that he had a very few meetings with the supervisor and that the supervisor had sent him to the dry run not well prepared for the dry run.

The study deduced that the frustration the participant was feeling may be caused by different variables (as reported by the participant):

- Few student and supervisor meetings
- Academic preparedness of the student
- Few contact and feedback sessions
- Poor student and supervisor relationship

However, the study reported what the participant felt as the focus of the study are experiences of postgraduate studies who have dropped out of HEI in Eastern Cape.

4.5.9 Personal factors versus academic responsibility

4.5.9.1 Feeling burdened by too much responsibilities

McCulloch and Stokes (2008) report that part time research students is the forgotten man or women. Part-time students are more likely than full-timers to be mature, to have dependents (whether in the form of children or ageing relatives), or to be in work or have had significant career experience. The institutional tendency in dealing with part-time students is to expect them to fit in with the full-timers, or to put things on in the evenings (Hood , 2008).

The study also revealed from the reports of the participants that they had to look after their family members, Participant 2 after her children and participant 3 after her sick mother. 50 % of the participants reported that the multiple identities they had hindered their progress, in fact they reported that the juggling between family responsibilities and academic responsibilities made them to decide to drop out of their studies. The researcher noted that

the participants who reported that they had to drop out of the Masters Programme were female students. It is a known fact that females in most households bear a lot of responsibilities than their male partners.

Female students are the most vulnerable students when it comes to balancing work, studying and family commitments. Osborne, Marks and Turner (2004) and Castle (2003) assert that students carrying out a research often have a lot of pressure from work and family commitments. Hood (2008) concur to this by asserting that women's multiple roles as family members, parents, community members, workers and students hinders their progress, women who return to education, are often wives and mothers. The women experience pressure to maintain their 'overall performance in all their roles. As a consequence they "juggle" their commitments. This 'juggle' can become a "struggle" and in fact lead to a tiring triple load of responsibilities; paid work, domestic responsibilities and education"

It is, therefore, evident in this study that although the participants reported that there were factors that had experience and seen them as barriers in their postgraduate studies the most significant one that has had the most bearing on taking decision to drop out of the studies were family commitments.

4.5.9.2 *Feeling financially unstable*

As reported by one of the participants, financial status of a student hinders graduation for a Masters Degree. Participant 3 reported that the change in her financial status made her experience some problems. The socio-economic status of postgraduate students is another key factor in throughput of postgraduate students. Although financial assistance may be

available to postgraduate from universities but their own financial status put a lot of stress and pressure on them to cope with their studies.

4.6 SUMMARY

This research study reported interesting academic learning experiences of what the students who dropped out of Masters Programme in one HEI in Eastern Cape had undergone. Although some of the participants had reported similar experiences that had negative impact on them as students, however, some participants had reported positive learning experiences in most areas of their interaction with the university and supervisors.

The research question that was under investigation in this study was asked and responded to in this chapter by means of unstructured interviews. The themes that emerged from this study were matched analysed and discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter data was presented, analysed and discussed. In this chapter lessons learnt from the study are presented. Summary of findings is also done. Implication for policies, suggestions and recommendations are tabulated and concluded. The chapter ends by citing the main limitations of the study.

5.2 LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE STUDY

The purpose was to find out how students who dropped out of Faculty of Education of one HEI IN Eastern Cape experienced academic learning. Secondly, it was to explore, in the light of what the participants have reported, what were the implications for how the students were supported in their academic needs. Lastly, the purpose of the study was to make suggestions and recommendations for Higher Education Institutions in terms of how they made sure that their students attain their research projects and also how students could learn from what their fellow students reported.

5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

From what the participants reported, the following can be deduced:

5.3.1 Readiness of students for M.Ed programme

Students who applied for the Masters Programme perceived having attained the Honours degree as the only requirement one should have had in order to be competent at the programme. Readiness to them meant possession of an honours Degree. Studying for the Masters Degree through Dissertation only and being a part time student did not mean a lot to participants.

The transition from honours class to Masters proved to be difficult for the participants. Moving from a class where you learnt as a group with a lecturer facilitating learning and helping with the literature to be used in assignments to a single supervision style where one ought to be independent researcher proved difficult for the participants.

5.3.2 Understanding of supervision

As the researcher mentioned before, the role of what the supervisor was expected to do with the participant was not clearly understood by the participant. Participants expected the supervisor to hold their hands throughout the research process and also the supervisor to assume with the role they had experienced when they were studying for their honours degree. Participants expected the supervisor to be a lecturer more than be a guide in the research process.

Secondly, what was expected of them participants as when they were carrying out their research was not clearly understood as some have reported that the researcher needed to download information for them. Their (participants) role as independent researchers was not clearly understood.

5.3.3 Supervision practises, student and supervision relationship

From what the participant reported, different experiences by the participants on supervisory practises emerged. The study find out that 25% of participants alluded that supervisors did support them in terms of giving guidance, support and mentoring. However, 75% reported that they had negative experience in terms of support from their supervisors. That negativity lead to the participants feeling neglected, frustrated and confused

The study can deduce that these feelings can be attributed to change in research topics which were not positively welcomed by the participants. Also these feelings can also be attributed to the fact that the participants felt that the supervisors were not allocating enough time for the students. Lastly, another fact that emerged was that the participants felt that the supervisors did not do justice in giving feedback to them as they reported that some supervisors looked at their work just at the beginning of supervisory meetings.

The participants also reported that they would prefer co-supervision rather than single supervision as it would at least help with the manpower on supervisory practises.

5.3.4 Supervisor geographical location

From the study it can be ascertained that 25% of the participants felt that the geographical distance between the supervisor and the supervisee hampers progress on the supervisee. It can be deduced that the long distance between the supervisor and supervisee made it difficult for the supervisee to have access to supervisor. 75 % of participants had, however, reported that they had easy access to their supervisors and that proves the point that distance between the supervisor and supervisee was key because the 75% of participants lived close to where the supervisors were based.

5.3.5 Academic power struggles

The findings of this study in terms of academic power struggle was that the participants were left confused as they had to choose either from the advice of faculty support or the advice of his/her supervisor. An assumption was made that there were power struggles amongst the academics and each academic would want to stamp his/her authority on the knowledge of research and sadly the students end up being the victims.

It was also noted from the study that 25% of the participants reported that they were not thoroughly prepared for the dry run hence it left them feel humiliated as they had prepared a research proposal that was not up to the expectations of the faculty support staff at the dry run.

5.3.6 Supervisor capacity

The study found out that 25 % participants felt that the supervisors were not capacitated in terms of knowledge of research but were experts in fields of subjects.

5.3.7 Personal factors versus academic responsibility

From the study, it can be deduced that personal factors had a negative impact on the studies of postgraduate students as 50% reported that their personal circumstances such as family commitments and financial status made them to finally take a decision of dropping out of postgraduate studies. In the light of what this study ascertained, it can be reported that the multiple roles part time students had, made it difficult for them to carry out their studies especially women participants who were mothers, wives, and partners in relationships.

5.4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study, it can be concluded that dropping out of postgraduate studies is a complex phenomenon as participants experience academic learning differently. There are variables that can contribute to students dropping out of postgraduate studies, however, central to all the variables the following as reported by the participants are prominent:

- Academic research skills
- Supervisory practises and relationship with students
- Academic power struggles

5.4.1 Recommendations and Implications for policy makers

The study made the following suggestions and recommendations:

- (a) The students would be in a better position of being prepared for the journey they will be undertaking when they enrol for Masters programme when they are workshopped immediately after acceptance to the programme and be told exactly what is expected of them and what the programme entails and how its is structured.
- (b) Secondly, if the roles of supervisors and the roles of students can be clearly defined to the students, transition from the honours programme to masters programme would be easy.
- (c) Although the intention of the lecturers of Honours programme is good in supplying students with the necessary material for their studies, it would of benefit to the university if students can be guided only on how to search for relevant literature to their work not supplied.
- (d) It would of benefit to both the students and supervisors if the universities can lower the ratio of student supervisor as this would mean enough time for both supervisors and students to engage in supervisory meetings.
- (e) The single style of supervision as reported by the participants is not quite effective. If universities can either utilise co-supervision or group supervision or both can be of great benefit to students. The loneliness part time students face when they are engaged in single style of

supervision would be eliminated as they would have other colleagues to bounce off ideas if they are group supervision.

5.5 ISSUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study explored academic learning experiences of students who dropout of postgraduate studies. Many themes emerged out of what the students reported, however, the voice of supervisors and faculty support staff in terms of experiences of guiding and assisting students attain their degrees is still a field that needs to be explored.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study cannot be generalised because the study focused on only four participants and they reported their own academic experiences hence it can be said that what they have experienced may be different or similar students who have also dropped out of Masters Programme in one HEI in Eastern Cape. Also since the study employed phenomenological research approach what the participants reported cannot be compared.

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7. APPENDICES

7.1 APPENDIX A: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY AT ONE HEI

2321 Zone 1

Mdantsane

5219

03 September 2010

The Registrar

████████████████████

████████████████

████

████

Dear Madam

Request for Permission to carry out Research at the University of ██████████

I am a M.Ed. student under the supervision of Dr. ██████████. The working title of my research proposal is: The study of academic experiences of Faculty of Education postgraduates who have dropped out and the focus is the University of ██████████

Even though these students have dropped out of the University, I would like to request permission from the University to use it as a research site. I would also be grateful if the university can grant me access to students who have dropped out from the postgraduate studies. The data that will be gathered from the study will be used for academic purposes only and is not intended to bring disrepute to the participants nor the University.

I am looking forward to your positive response.

Yours Faithfully

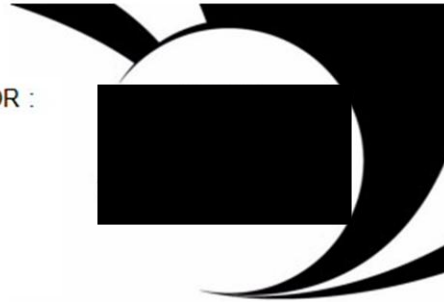
Winkie Mdyogolo

.....

7.2 APPENDIX B: LETTER FROM SUPERVISOR

7.2 APPENDIX C: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR :
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND RESEARCH



REC-270710 -028

Application for clearance from the University of [REDACTED] Ethics Committee

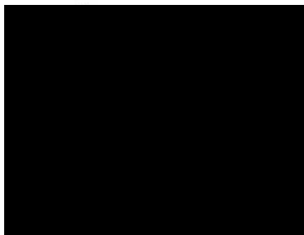
Project title: "An investigation into the academic experiences of Faculty of Education postgraduates who have dropped out at the University of [REDACTED]"

Chief Researcher : Winkie Mdyogolo

Supervisor: Dr [REDACTED]

Date of application: 22 February 2011

Having consulted the Dean of Research, I hereby grant permission to conduct the research.



**Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Chairperson of the interim Ethics Committee**

2 March 2011

7.4 APPENDIX D: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN PILOT STUDY

2321 Zone 1

MDANTSANE

5219

12 MAY 2011

Dear Sir / Madam

I , Winkie Mdyogolo student number 200438557 is astudent at the University of [REDACTED] under the supervision of Dr. [REDACTED]. I am studying for Masters in Education. I am conducting a study on academic learning experiences of students who have dropped out of postgraduate studies at the above mentioned institution. I would like therefore to invite you Sir / Madam to participate in the study.

Hoping to receive your positive response.

Thanking you in advance.

Winkie Mdyogolo

072 424 5300

7.5 APPENDIX E: PILOT STUDY

PILOTING THE STUDY

A pilot study is defined as the new process whereby the research designs for a prospective survey is tested (Strydom, 2007). Bless and Higson-Smith as cited in Strydom (2007) define a pilot study as a small study conducted prior to a larger piece of research to determine whether the methodology, sampling, instruments and analysis are adequate and appropriate. Strydom (2007) identifies the following four important aspects of pilot study

- reviewing the literature
- discussions with experts
- feasibility of the study
- testing the measuring instrument

Strydom (2007) articulates that in order to undertake scientific research on a specific problem, the researcher should have thorough background knowledge about it. The pilot study is one way in which the prospective researcher can orientate himself to the project he has in mind (Ibid). Smit (2010) states that a pilot study is indispensable for the appropriate administering of the data. It also helps the researcher to think well in advance about the analysis of the results. Strydom as cited in Smit (2010) advocates that a pilot study can be viewed as a “dress rehearsal” for the main investigation. As for any study to be successful, a pilot study needs to be carried out. This study will also undergo a test of its methodologies. A small scale of participants of about 2 to 3 participants will be utilised for the pilot study.

Sampling

Adam (2010) notes that sampling must be done whenever one can gather information from only a fraction of the population of a group or a phenomenon which one wants to study. Ideally, one should try

to select a sample which is free from bias and it allows the researcher to select a fraction of respondents from a population (Ibid). Morse as cited in Starks and Trinidad (2007) has written that in qualitative research studies sample size depends on five things: the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the quality of the data, the study design, and the use of shadowed data (when participants speak of others' experience as well as their own). Each approach involves use of purposive sampling methods to recruit participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study (Ibid). The concept or the experience under study is the unit of analysis; given that an individual person can generate hundreds or thousands of concepts, large samples are not necessarily needed to generate rich data sets (Ibid). The exact number of individuals needed, and the number of interviews per individual, depends on the goals and purpose of the study (Ibid).

Sampling is the method for selecting people, events or objects for study in research. Since the study is following a Qualitative Research approach, the sampling that will be utilised will be Non probability sampling. A strategy to be used for sampling in this study is volunteer sampling since the participants will be asked to volunteer for the study. However, Strydom and Delport (2007) warns against volunteer sampling by articulating volunteers may not necessary be used, merely because nobody comes forward or because the people who volunteer may not be suitable. Volunteer sampling works well when the respondents are known to one another or are at least aware of one another and can encourage one another to be involved in the study (Ibid). Persons who come forward voluntarily may of course, facilitate the task of the researcher and accelerate the process however the researcher should check the motives of the volunteers with regard to the objectives of the survey in question, thus guarding against possible hidden agendas (Ibid).

Sampling the respondents

Patton as cited in Strydom and Delpont (2007) says that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources (Ibid). In qualitative studies non-probability sampling methods are utilised and, in particular, theoretical or purposive sampling techniques are used rather than random sampling. A small scale of participants of about 2 to 3 participants will be utilised for the pilot study. There were two participants in total for the pilot study. Both participants have dropped out of postgraduate studies at HEI in Eastern Cape. The participants were interviewed individually.

Sampling the research site

Participants of the study are students who have dropped out of postgraduate studies at one HEI in Eastern Cape. The researcher decided to sample the University of Hope as a research site because of the throughput and graduation rates of the University of Fort Hare. The CHE Audit report of University of Hope (2009) states that "Despite being primarily an undergraduate teaching institution, University of Hope is nevertheless committed to growing its enrolments in postgraduate education. Doctoral and Masters programmes are offered in all faculties. The Panel noted that headcount postgraduate enrolment has increased steadily since 2004. The Panel also noted that the majority of enrolments for masters' degrees were in the Social Sciences. The University acknowledges a number of challenges relating to postgraduate throughput and graduation rates. The Panel agrees with the university that the use of an interactive and effective IT system to track and monitor postgraduate students could be one of the ways in which students can be assisted to complete their studies within

the recommended times. While has procedures in place to govern the relationship between supervisors and postgraduate students, the Panel learned during interviews with postgraduate students of instances of poor communication between students and supervisors. It heard in interviews with academics of the high workload in terms of both undergraduate teaching and postgraduate supervision. The Panel urges Hope (pseudonym) to find ways of decreasing the supervisor-to-student ratio, for example, by increasing the pool of supervisors and using the Hope (pseudonym) Postgraduate Guide effectively to regulate all postgraduate supervision matters.”

The other reason for sampling the University of Fort Hare the researcher showed great interest in the study when the researcher read what the CHE Executive summary audit report of October 2009 stated. The CHE report stated that “The HEQC recommends that the University of Hope (pseudonym) explore ways to recruit and retain South African students at the postgraduate level”

Negotiation of entry into the research site

As already mentioned, participants will be postgraduate students who have dropped out of one HEI in Eastern Cape. Although these students have already left the university, permission from the university to conduct the study will be requested. The other reason for requesting permission is the fact that the names of students who have dropped out will be requested from the university as well. A letter requesting permission has been sent to the Education Faculty and the Registrar of the university.

Negotiation of entry to the respondents

A letter which will be requested from the university to permit to carry out the research will be presented to the participants. Also a letter

from the supervisor validating the purpose of the research will be requested and it will also be presented to the participants. A consent letter to participate in the pilot study will be presented to the participants so that they can sign it.

Research Instrument

The researcher as an instrument

Sherrard as cited in Jakuja (2009) postulate the researcher serves as the data collection instrument by interviewing the participants. The researcher gives close attention to the participants' own words and should maintain the awareness of the researcher is situated according to the relevant dimensions of the participant's life-worlds (Ibid). Moore (2010) asserts the researcher is key in the research process for many qualitative researches. However, being a research instrument has its disadvantages. The researcher needs to apply research ethics and be sensitive to participants' needs in order to provide a more relaxed atmosphere for the participants. In this study the researcher will be used as a research instrument as he will be collecting data through interviews.

Interviews

The study has adopted a phenomenological approach and is about investigating experiences of students who have dropped out of postgraduate studies at the University of Fort Hare, therefore the researcher is going to employ interviews as an instrument for collecting data. The type of interviews that will be utilised are unstructured interviews. According to McMillan and Schumacher as cited in Smit, "In-depth interviews are open-response questions to obtain data from participants' meaning - how individuals conceive of their world and how they explain or make sense of the important events in their lives" (2010 : 84).

According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison as cited in Adam (2010) an interview is an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee; it is also referred to as an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest for production of knowledge. An interview is a research technique considered as one of a range of survey methods in social research (Ibid). Research interview has been defined as a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by the researcher on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation (Ibid).

As the study is about lived experiences, unstructured or in-depth interviews as they are sometimes called are best suitable for this study. According to Greef , “ The unstructured one-to-one interview, also sometimes referred to as the in-depth interview, merely extends and formalises conversations. It is referred to as a ‘conversation with a purpose’. The purpose is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to ‘evaluate’ in the usual sense of the term. At the root of unstructured interviews is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (2007 : 293). This means that for this study unstructured interviews are appropriate as the study seeks to understand rather than explain. The study is going to utilise one-to-one interviews.

According to Kumar as cited in Kuze (2009) unstructured interviews have strength of almost complete freedom in terms of content and structure The researcher has a complete freedom in terms of the wording s/he uses and the way s/he explains questions to his/her respondents (Ibid). Questions can be formulated and issues raised in front of the respondents depending on what actually occurs to the researcher in the context of the discussion (Ibid). Unstructured interviews, also known as ‘intensive interviews’ are a purely

qualitative interviewing strategy in which questions and follow-up probes are generated during the interview itself (Ibid).

Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) assert that in phenomenology interviews are used as means for exploring and gathering of narratives or stories of lived experiences and they are a vehicle by which to develop a conversational relationship with the participants about the meaning of their experiences. That is why this study is using unstructured interviews as a research instrument because these types of interviews allow the participants to be descriptive and narratives as much as possible with their lived experiences.

Data collection procedure

As the researcher have already mentioned, two respondents were sampled for the piloting. The researcher first made telephonic appointments with the respondents and did not fully explained the purpose of the research as the researcher felt that he needed to make the explanation when he is face to face with the respondents. Both respondents agreed to meet the researcher separately.

When the researcher met the first respondent, the researcher fully explained the purpose of the research and the respondent did not have a problem. The second respondent did not honour the appointment and the researcher had to phone again and the respondent apologised and a new meeting date was set. When the researcher phoned the first respondent to confirm the meeting a day before we were supposed to meet the first respondent asked if the researcher could meet him at a school. The researcher suggested his own school and the first respondent gladly welcomed the idea. The second respondent was met at her place of employment.

During the meeting with the first respondent the researcher reminded the respondent about the purpose of the study and assured the respondent the promise the researcher made of

anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher was surprised by the respondent when he asked if the researcher was not going to record the interview. The researcher was surprised because he was still going to ask for permission to record the interviews, but the respondent suggested it first. The respondent explained that he was at the university doing Masters Degree and he knows about recording of interviews and that he is continuing with his Masters Degree at another university. The interview with first respondent lasted for one hour.

The interview with second respondent was not recorded as the respondent felt uneasy with the recording of the interview. The interview lasted about forty five minutes. Both interviews had good atmosphere as both respondents were talking freely and the language used was the language of the respondents.

Data Analysis

De Vos (2007) define data analysis as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data . It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process (Ibid). It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not tidy (Ibid). Data analysis is an ongoing and interactive, that is, non-linear process in qualitative research. Mouton and Marais cited in De Vos and Van Zyl (1998) explain that analysis is a reasoning strategy with the objective of taking a complex whole and resolving it into parts. By means of constant analysis the constant variables of factors that relevant to the understanding of a phenomenon or an event are isolated (Ibid). Creswell as cited in De Vos (2007) believes that the process of data analysis and interpretation can best be represented by a spiral image – a data spiral and the researcher moves in analytical circles rather than using a linear approach.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

CORE RESEARCH QUESTION

- How did postgraduate students who have dropped out experience academic learning in the Education Faculty of one HEI in Eastern Cape ?

SUB RESEARCH QUESTION

- In the light of experiences reported by the students who have dropped out, what are the implications for how students are supported in their academic needs?

Findings

The findings of piloting are presented in accordance with the research questions that are posed above. Both respondents at first said they enjoyed their studies at the university when they were doing their undergraduate studies but the only challenge they faced was being computer illiterate and possessed less academic reading and writing skills.

The respondents perceived and experienced a lot of factors that influenced them to drop out of postgraduate studies and as they spoke about these factors the researcher managed to put these experiences into themes. Both respondents shared similar experiences whilst they were studying for their postgraduate degree. When they spoke about their decision to drop out of postgraduate studies they said the following experiences had influence on their decision to drop out. These experience included lack of academic research skills, experiencing personal problems, supervisory issues.

These experiences are discussed below.

1. Experience of lacking Academic research skills

Both respondents spoke about experience of lacking academic reading and writing skills. Although both respondents spoke about the support they received through the courses they attended for academic reading and writing, they felt that they could not cope well with issue of writing academically as they both lacked computer skills. The literature on factors that cause students to drop out of postgraduate studies supports what the respondents have experienced. Albertyn, et al (2008) point out that 75% of M. Phil students reported difficulty with writing research proposals, research methodology, and 63% had a problem with preparing a title and research design. According to Frouws (2007) students submit poor research proposals, which are invariably approved by academic departments and academic departments should be in a position to evaluate research proposals and provide students with proper guidance, which is sadly lacking. Furthermore, Frouws (2007) emphasises that students formulate research problems which cannot be solved within the environment the research is to be conducted in and this calls for sufficient tertiary institutions information required by students to enable them to complete their research.

The respondents felt that they were not well prepared for the academic research skills. Although they shared this, they uttered that they felt they should go on with their studies. According to Piper as cited in Frouws (2007), “ a number of students embark on their master’s degrees without sufficient background or experience in research. To some students, mention of the concept research raises, fear and concern. Not only do many students have limited research capacity their self-confidence regarding research tend to be low. The main idea for a dissertation to be

successful is to draw clear tangent planes between theory and practice.. Although it often seems that everyone but the student knows the unwritten rules, it is obvious that the majority of post-graduate students could benefit from being 'street smart', when it comes to writing a dissertation.” The assumption made from what respondent one said is that if he had more experience in being computer literate, maybe he would have completed his studies. I made this assumption because respondent one said :

I experienced a lot difficulty in searching for literature in Hope(pseudonym) library. I had difficulty in locating correct journals and that frustrated me a lot. I did not know how to use Google. I felt helpless. Even when I did manage to get a journal I could not know what actually the journal was saying. I could not relate it to my study. I felt lacking critical analysis of journals. Sometimes journals had hidden information which needed to be analysed critically and I could not do that and that frustrated me a lot.

2. Experiencing personal problems while studying.

Both respondents talked about having personal problems whilst they were engaged in their studies. The literature reveals that the most contributing factor to students dropping out of postgraduate studies is their personal matters. According to the statistics by A Profile of Postgraduate Higher Education and the Academic Research Community in South Africa (2003:40) personal factors such as employment and workload are the main factors that affect time to completion of masters and doctoral students. According to these statistics, demand of employment contributes 34%, taking up employment contributes 19% and workload too great contributes 16%. This to me means that postgraduate students are often

derailed in their studies by these personal factors. Albertyn, et.al (2008) concurs to this by asserting that the main reasons for terminating studies were noted as being personal circumstances, work pressure and not feeling competent.

Respondent one said that although his personal factors such as family commitments and work weighed heavily on his studies but he overcame them by balancing his work and studies. Respondent two expressed a lot of emotion on the issue of experiencing personal problems. I made an assumption that since respondent two was a female student she had a lot commitments like family responsibilities and work commitments. According to my assumptions , it is a known fact that females have a lot of family responsibilities as compared to their male counterparts. According to Osborne, Marks and Turner (2004) female students especially older women have to have multiple roles such as caring for family members, children, spouses and extended family members. For those with working partners the children and household were deemed “women's work” and the studying was an extra to be fitted in (Ibid). Respondent two said that she had to juggle her motherly duties with her studies and created a lot of tension as she sometimes had to sacrifice one of her role for the other.

3. Supervisory experiences

Both respondents shared different experiences on the above theme. Each respondent had different experience in dealing with supervisors. Respondent one said that supervisory experience has the greatest influence in the decision he made to drop out of postgraduate studies. The way respondent one talked showed that he was greatly attached to his supervisor. Respondent one said that although he experienced problems with other issues relating to his studies , changing of his supervisor made him to decide to drop out because he felt that he had no connection with the new supervisor he was assigned to. His previous supervisor had left the university.

According to Lubbe (2003) postgraduate students look to supervisors to be a role model and for a support system. Should the working relationship turns sour, then it should be resolved as soon as possible or changes should be made. Bailey (2002) asserts that a student and supervisor relationship plays a vital part in the success of the degree process and “can make or break the postgraduate experience.”

The researcher noted the following when respondent one was sharing his experience of having to be assigned to a new supervisor

(a) Confusion

Respondent one said a change in supervisors brought a lot of confusion to him. He said although he had academic support from his new supervisor it was not the same as the old supervisor. He felt confused because with the supervisor the research topic changed from what he was researching about. The new supervisor changed the topic from teaching and learning to curriculum and that brought confusion as he had to go back and change his background to the study, methodologies and literature review. This confusion brought frustration.

(b) Frustration

Respondent one talked about how frustrated he became under the new supervisor. With the old supervisor he had contact often but with the new supervisor contact was minimal. He understood that the new supervisor was busy and sometimes had to go other provinces , even internationally and that hindered the time of contact with supervisor. He felt frustrated with the way things were going with his new supervisor.

(c) Disturbed

The frustration ultimately disturbed the routine of respondent one's studies respondent one said :

I was disturbed by the way things were going with my supervisor. I did not have any will to go on. I felt my study was going nowhere. I had to go forward and backwards with my topic and that disturbed me a lot.

Respondent one uttered that he felt disturbed , frustrated, angry , sad and unwilling to go on with his studies.

(d) Demoralised

The confusion, frustration, disturbance all lead to respondent being demoralised. This is what respondent one ultimately said happened. He felt that he had no willpower to go on and finish his studies. The sense of urgency and high moral was diminished and that lead him to dropping out of postgraduate studies.

From the above analysis it clearly shows that the relationship between supervisor and student is key. For any student to succeed in her/his studies she/he needs to have a good and supportive relationship with the supervisor. Further it is noted that supervisors are the first in line to provide assistance, guidance and support, however, should this relationship break down, this could result in conflict and tension (Bailey, 2002).

Respondent two

Respondent two showed emotions when it came to talk about experience of supervision. She changed her tone and the researcher made an assumption that her experience was not positive. Although she spoke about the experience she had she did not want to go into details what happened. The researcher tried to dig deep but felt it was too much for the respondent. She only said that she was sent to two different supervisors who did not have a common understanding about her topic. One supervisor wanted her to explore a certain topic and the other one changed the topic and

that made her to become angry and frustrated. Respondent two showed a lot of unhappiness around the issue of supervision. Speck (1996) in adult learning theory argues that adults will commit to learning when goals and objectives are considered realistic and important to them.

Lessons learnt from piloting

The purpose of carrying out a pilot study was to test the feasibility of the main study and to investigate the experiences of the postgraduates who have dropped out. From the interviews carried out lessons pertaining to postgraduate dropout can be deduced. From the interviews the following outline is deduced.

1. Lack of academic research skills

From what the respondents have reported it can be deduced that students enter their postgraduate studies not prepared academically for the research skills they are going to utilise when they are learning. Both respondents have shown that they were not comfortable with academic reading and writing.

2. Personal factors

It is evident that belonging to a certain gender while studying part time postgraduate studies has some barriers. Respondent two clearly advocated what has been said by the literature that being a female in postgraduate studies is met with challenges because of the multiple roles a woman has to play.

3. Student and supervisor relationship

The relationship between the students and supervisor is key for the success of the student. From what respondent one has uttered about the confusion he went through when his supervisor was changed, it clearly has shown that student need a stable relationship in order for them to succeed. Despite the fact that he explained that the second supervisor was also supportive to his

studies it has clearly shown that he was emotionally attached to the first supervisor and when the supervisor left that did not settle well with the respondent one. It also has shown that the relationship of a supervisor and student goes further than just learning and teaching but goes as far as academic friends.

7.6 APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

CONSENT LETTER

I , give consent to Winkie Mdyogolo who is a researcher at the University of [REDACTED] under the supervision of Dr. [REDACTED] be part of the study he is undertaking on academic learning experiences of students who have dropped out of Masters Programme in the Education faculty of University of [REDACTED]. All the research processes have been fully explained to me and I fully understand them. I know and understand that I may at any time of the research withdraw.

Name

Signature.....

7.7 APPENDIX G: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW RESPONSE

Raw Data from Participant 1

The researcher has had conversation with the respondent before he actually taped the interview. The purpose of the conversation was to let the respondent know what the interview is all about, request permission to tape the interviews, and let the respondent know about the ethical issues of the interview such as withdrawal from the study and anonymity. The respondent granted permission for the interviews to be taped.

Researcher: As I have already mentioned you are free to withdraw from the study anytime you wish to withdraw. Tell me about yourself

Respondent: I am Zine Booi (pseudonym). I am an old experienced teacher. I have taught at primary school level for a long time. I have taught at high school, I have taught at teacher training college. I have also taught at university because I was responsible for Teaching Life Orientation teachers. Now I am Subject Advisor specialising with Life Orientation but basically I am an English Teacher.

Researcher: Thank you, basically you have taught at all the levels of education and it's interesting to hear that. Maybe I am one of students that you have taught. What is your teaching experience?

Respondent: I have 33 years of teaching experience. I started teaching at 19 years and I feel that I am still teaching because my job involves developing and training teachers on Life Orientation and English.

Researcher: It means you started teaching in 1978 and that a lot of experience. I was studying Grade 4 when you started teaching. Now can you tell me about your tertiary education? I mean where did you start your career up until you enrolled at University of Hope?

Respondent: I started my university life at Vista studying Secondary Education Course (SEC) after completing it I did Secondary Education Diploma (SED) specialising in English and Education. I went to UCG

(pseudonym) to do B.A. studying part time majoring in English and Education. After completing that I studied at UD University (pseudonym) doing B.Ed (Hons) and a certain professor advised me to major in English Language Teaching and it was interesting because it was about tactics of English teaching. Then in 2010 I registered with the university of Hope doing Master in Education.

Researcher: What was your feeling when you were told that you were accepted at the university of Hope? How did you feel?

Respondent: I was very excited.

Researcher: Why?

Respondent: Because I felt I could relate more to the university because it was the first time for me to register in a university that was managed by people from my own culture that is it has mostly lecturers that are black. So I anticipated a lot and the best.

Researcher: What were your expectations about Hope university?

Respondent: I expected to get people who will boost me, so that I can progress. Those were my expectations.

Researcher: Tell me then about your academic experience starting from the time you started your Masters up until you decided not to reenrol. Also you can tell me anything you feel you need to tell me.

Respondent: Well I firstly I can say I had a very good repo with my supervisor. She motivated me, an encouraging person, and straightforward person. She was that kind of supervisor.

Researcher: And then how did you interact? And how did that make you feel?

Respondent: I went to the Dry run once and I was advised by the panel. Before I went for the second try at Dry run there were some meetings aimed at improving my research proposal and my performance and performance of other students who had not had their research proposals approved yet. I got

advice from other supervisors but somewhere somehow there was a misunderstanding between the advices given because it did not tally with what my supervisor was saying. I do not know how to put it. I felt there was interference and that disturbed me. The cause of the misunderstanding was different advices I got from different supervisors. Their advices were contradicting each other. And I found myself caught in the middle of advices of supervisors. And most unfortunate was that the advice was also given by the coordinator of the programme of postgraduate studies.

Researcher: Then how did you feel when you find yourself in this problem?

Respondent: Well for me when I found myself in this dilemma the first thing that came to me was to back off, because I could not understand why people of the same institution could have different ideas about the same topic. I could not understand why they could not work together and they were not united and they were confusing me. One supervisor gave me this advice and the other one gave me another different advice. Different ideas from the same institution. I felt no, no, no. I then made a decision to back off. I did not want to make conflict between my supervisors. I just felt the best thing for me is to back off.

Researcher: And backing off how did that make you feel?

Respondent: It discouraged me, and it discouraged me a lot. In so much I told my supervisor that I am very disappointed because I expected an advise that would strengthen my research proposal and help me progress forward. To me it seemed nobody had an interest in seeing me progress forward. I never sat my foot there again.

Researcher: Did your supervisor try to contact you?

Respondent: No, I just got an invitation to register for this academic year and they phoned me for registration.

Researcher: From the experience you have had what can you recommend to the institution?

Respondent: Well, well Communication between the supervisor and the student is very important. And the institution should have a way of assessing us as students, our progress, our experiences, our problems and so on because when you find yourself in a problem you do not know whom to turn to. There should be a way of making students free of expressing themselves.

Researcher: Is there anything you would like to add to this interview? Anything from your thoughts.

Respondent: I wish I could have a word with the supervisor who discouraged me maybe he or she is not aware of the wrong doing she did to me. Someone people do things unaware of their after effects, I wish to meet the supervisor not in a confrontational way but there should be a way of sitting down. Sometimes people don't understand one another or don't have the same vision or sometimes a person can misjudge you.

Researcher: If you had a chance would you go back to Hope university?

Respondent: I wouldn't without having the matter ironed out. So that something of that nature would not happen again. That is why I didn't write a complaint because I have nothing against the institution.

Researcher: How you categorise your drop out? Would you say you are a drop out, push out or stop out?

Respondent: I would say it is because of institutional factors because coordinator of the program and my supervisor did not complement each other. Supervision is tricky because you should as supervisors work together and complement each other in order to help the students. One should not have different views from the other supervisor. It should not be about our struggle. Supervision should be about the interest of students. Supervision should not be in the best of supervisor.

Researcher: So are you saying this because from your experiences supervision did not work well with you and your supervisor?

Respondent: yes.

Researcher: When we spoke before the taped interview, you spoke about your research topic, tell me more on that.

Respondent: I had a topic on LIFE ORIENTATION and I dropped it and then I took one on how to teach poetry. The supervisor changed it more than one time. I did not understand this because I was confused now because I felt we didn't have the same understanding about my research topic because I feel the person who understands what I want to research is me.

Researcher: Changing your topic, how did that make you feel?

Respondent: Even when my topic was changed my supervisor was not told, the person who changed it did not interact with my supervisor. When I met my supervisor she said my topic is really puzzling her because it is not what we discussed. I didn't understand because the topic was changed by her colleague and I thought they worked as a team. I expected when one changes a topic is supposed to inform the supervisor. That is where I felt they didn't have my interest at mind. I am passionate about my topic I still want to continue with it. I feel this topic is a tool to unlock the failure of students at schools. I would continue with it even if its overseas and what makes it more interesting is that i have not seen anyone who is researching about it. I thought it would open doors for many people; I am still very much interested in it. But I won't go with it to Hope university because I was not treated right. They will have to sit down me.

Researcher: Let me thank you for the time you have given me. I know you were busy but you have fitted me in your schedule. I hope you will grant me more time if i requested one in order to make follow up interviews.

Respondent: I will grant you because I know what I am talking about. You know this interview made me happy because at least I have someone to share my experiences with. I wouldn't love to be seen as a person blaming other people for my dropping out of studies. Dropping out worked me a lot. Even my supervisor at work was so disappointed when I told him about my dropping out. I am so disappointed because I was rating the institution very

high. I expected when I am studying in the closest university there would be wind beneath my wings but I was totally discouraged.

Researcher: Once again, thank you for your time. I would contact you if I need more.

Respondent: Don't hesitate; I would have been glad even if it was the supervisor who was carrying out the interviews.