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**THE CHALLENGE OF ACADEMIC EDUCATION:
AN EXCAVATION STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
THE ISSUES THAT IMPACT ON THE ACADEMIC
DEVELOPMENT IN AN HISTORICALLY AFRICAN
UNIVERSITY**

1997

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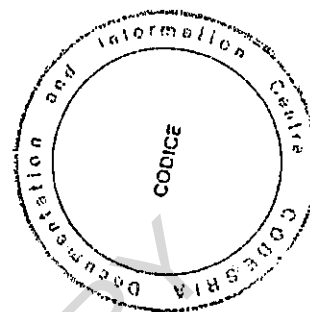
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BY

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**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree MADM in the Department of Industrial Psychology, Faculty of
Management Sciences at the University of the North.**

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April 1997

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fundamental objective of transformation of education and educational institutions is to create conditions conducive to the optimum development of the human mind. Such conditions include social, political, economic and cultural conditions. Whilst the government is doing its bit to improve such, institutions of learning, especially tertiary institutions, which are always consciously and jealously guarding against any threat to their autonomy, have a mammoth task in this regard. This is especially true of the Historically African Universities or the Historically Disadvantaged Universities. The magnitude of the task in these institutions is stunningly overwhelming. This project has attempted to make a minute contribution in terms of the method and the approach to addressing some of the problems that beset Historically African Universities.

I am indebted to my supervisors, Professors Peter Franks and Fanny Duckert, who spent a great deal of their time reading, re-reading and discussing the ideas with me. Much of their critique and ideas about change and development have sharpened my perspective on the topic and actually found their way into this project. Their guidance, and indeed mentoring kept me going for the duration of this project.

I am thankful and grateful to the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) for selecting me as a laureate of the Small

Grants Programme for Thesis Writing. Your financial assistance made a huge difference.

In the spirit of Maat, I also extend my appreciation to Sam Radithalo, who went through a draft copy of this project and gave worthy and useful editorial comments. Your inputs are highly appreciated son of the soil. I also surrounded myself with genuine, brilliant and vivacious friends who are activists of staff development and academic development and whose names do not appear on this project. This is a small token of gratitude to you, accept it. Finally, I am indebted to Matshidiso Moalusi for her warmth, patience and personal support throughout this project.

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SUMMARY

**THE CHALLENGE OF ACADEMIC EDUCATION: AN
EXCAVATION OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE
ISSUES THAT IMPACT ON THE ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE IN HISTORICALLY AFRICAN
UNIVERSITIES**

Academic development hinges on a number of factors. This study explores students' perceptions of the issues that impact on academic development. A questionnaire was administered to 276 undergraduate students in the Faculty of Management Sciences at the University of the North. The findings of this study reveal a plethora of factors that impact on academic development in an Historically African University. Second, the findings are discussed within an historical framework because outside this framework, the facts remain obfuscated and blurred. In the final section, this study focuses on strategies for ameliorating the problems so as to inform policies that would impact on the situation in a desired manner. Finally, such recommendations may provide several suggestions for future research in one of the most intriguing areas of our society - academic education in a society in transition.

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

This study explores students' perceptions of the issues that impact on academic development in a Historically African University with the purpose of developing appropriate transformational strategies that will assist in fundamentally improving the situation. This may imply two things, namely, that looking at the problems that impact on academic development in an Historically African University, may be restating the obvious; and that developing appropriate transformational strategies may suggest a utopian exercise. However, those familiar with the University of the North and comparable institutions will harbour no surprises that this study by a graduate of the institution, and one with a number of years' involvement with the University attempts to identify the problems and suggest strategies for contending and handling the situation.

Many of us take it for granted that we are aware of the problems because "experts" have stated and restated them after "observing the situation". However, more often than not, surveys of the students' experiences, or even scanning or monitoring of the situation as experienced by students are not included in these "expert observation". As Kallaway (1984) observes, the tendency has always been to take politicians' words or declared policies at face value. Often they make no effort to observe the learners in order to investigate or assess the havoc wreaked by the pronounced policies. Although educational policies provide signposts, they are not sufficient for unravelling the problems that students themselves have to cope with in their day-to-day experiences

on campus. This is especially true for a study that aims at informing policy and improving the situation.

It is for this reason that this study is not only about what “experts” have to say about problems that continue to plague academic performance in Historically African Universities. Neither is it limited to what the politicians have said or have to say about African education - past, present and in the future. This project is about the students’ attitudes and perceptions of their day-to-day experiences at the University of the North, exploring the factors that students consider as hindrances or facilitators of academic development. This study relies on the perceptions of students themselves, and in this way attempts to give the students a voice.

Regarding the perception that this study may be a utopian exercise, this study is anchored in the firm belief that acknowledging the presence of problems such as those identified by Franks (1993), is a necessary but not sufficient condition for realising a desired vision. A historical and moral responsibility confronts us to reasonably accelerate the transformation¹ process so as to ameliorate the situation that impedes academic development. We should accelerate it with a view to changing the situation that continues to hinder academic performance and excellence, and arriving at a

¹ By transformation of students and staff, I am referring to changing their hearts and minds, because an individual who is not transformed cannot be aware of the collective conscious will and cannot *ipso facto* transform education and educational institutions. Transformation seeks to empower students and faculty to be creative, have the capacity to influence their environment, including the political, social and economic environment; redefining themselves in relation to others and the world. By transformation of the University of the North, I am essentially talking about redefining the mission of the University through dialogue and free debate so that it becomes a vehicle for reconstruction, development, academic excellence and independence of thought - a fountain of knowledge, skill and expertise for the country and the continent, redefining its image so that it reflects its history and environment.

desired future. In this regard Alexander (1991, p.276) has the following to say: "Our approach cannot, therefore, be a revivalist, tub-thumping, rhetorical one. It has to be a transitional or transformational one that is fully cognisant of the complexity of the historical process ... (and the situation on the ground, as experienced by students themselves). We have to attempt to capture in words the subtlety that characterises the South African reality if we are to help strategists and activists with tools that can reasonably be relied upon to impact in the desired manner on the present situation as it is developing." In order to adequately attempt this, this study borrows from research associated with the nature and causes of problems in African education in general and Historically African Universities in particular. It is fully cognisant of the segregated nature of education in South Africa and that education for Africans was not meant to be comparable with education for the Europeans. In this way, it looks at the problems in African education as the consequences of the conditions shaped by the political system.

Lastly, the study attempts to provide strategies for resolving the problems so as to impact on the situation in a desired manner. To provide strategies for ameliorating the situation, environmental exploration is essential for an accurate perception (that is, environmental awareness) of the problems experienced by the recipients of education.

CHAPTER 2

1. A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF PROBLEMS CONFRONTING HISTORICALLY AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

The challenges of academic education in Historically African Universities lie in the havoc wreaked by the Extension of the University Education Act of 1959 and other apartheid laws. This Act applied the apartheid ideology to tertiary education, engendering inequalities in tertiary education. Hence, students in Historically African Universities are confronted by a unique set of circumstances different from that of Historically White Universities. Many of the problems that students in Historically African Universities have to cope with reflect the apartheid legacy. This legacy can help to explain the problems that still confront African education in South Africa.

In South Africa the informative contributions in the area of African education are by Kallaway (1984), Nkomo (1990) and Millar, Raynham and Schaffer (1991). The distinctive feature of these studies is that they trace the problems that impact on education and academic development to socio-historical developments in South Africa. These studies trace the origin of problems in African education from a perspective that enables one to unravel the political intricacies inherent in African education in South Africa. Problems in African education in South Africa are best understood within the context explicated by these scholars. To look at the problems that affect academic performance outside this context is to ignore the realities of the problems that continue to hamper academic performance and human development at institutions such as the University of the North.

University education is generally potentially stressful. The potential stress of education may be exacerbated by the socio-economic and political systems of the society. In this way, students may be expected to adapt to an abnormal situation that is even more demanding. The conditions that prevail in African educational institutions have been a source of stress and underdevelopment for the majority of the people in South Africa. Gilbert (1984) focuses on the problematic nature of schooling for Africans in South Africa. Amongst the troublesome factors in the life of being a student at the University of Zululand, a Historically African University, Gilbert identifies parent-child relationships, peer relationships, economic factors, the pressure to achieve academic goals, the staff-student relationship, socio-political factors and other non-academic events that take place inside and outside campus. These factors may interact and combine to act as stressors to the student in the sense that they make certain demands on him or her. Numerous models of stress have been provided by a number of stress researchers (Cox, 1978). The models focus on different aspects. There are models that focus on the environmental conditions or stimuli; those that focus on a person's response to the environmental conditions (namely, response-based models); those that attempt to fuse stimulus and response-based models; as well as those that focus on the conservation of resources or the resource-oriented models (Hobfoll, 1989). This study focuses on the environmental conditions in the life of students and how students respond to those conditions.

The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) Discussion Document (April 1996) acknowledges that most of the problems that confront African higher education are largely shaped by the doctrine of apartheid. The division of education along racial

or ethnic bases reinforced white domination by excluding blacks from quality academic education and technical training. This legacy has continued to impede academic performance and human development in the Historically African Universities.

Education was not designed to empower Africans. Christie and Collins (1984) state that apartheid education and ideology had as their major objective the reproduction of cheap labour and dependency. Africans were excluded from certain occupations and by that very fact could not pursue education leading to those fields. This explains the absence of career guidance and counselling to assist students about available careers. In fact, counselling was non-existent in African schools in South Africa. As Ferron (1990) observed, most African schools did not as late as 1990 have career guidance and counselling teachers and universities were still battling to find their own footing.

The University of the North, like other creations of apartheid, could not escape Verwoerd's grand plan and was central in the resistance campaign that responded to it. As Jon Qwelane (1996) observes: "that the tactic was a direct bastard child of the policy of Bantu Education is not in dispute, as equally without question is the fact that the child's destructive mode was at least as vicious in content as the father's." This is not to negate or lose sight of Kallaway's (1984) assertion that education became a site of struggle. It is only to demonstrate that education bred a lot of discontent among its recipients and that in their endeavours to challenge it, they debilitated their capacity to truly transform education and educational institutions. Indeed, the strategies were effective in challenging the government, but they were also destructive and oppositional rather than transformative.

Boycotts, mistrust and distrust, lack of respect for property and authority, and breakdown in discipline became more common in African schools in the post-1976 era. The impact of this culture will remain with us decades after this heady period in our history. Academic performance is still hindered by the pre-1994 climate. It is, therefore, what Qwelane (1996) calls the twin legacies of Verwoerd's grand plan and the ethos of June 1976 that need unravelling to effect the situation as experienced by students and faculty.

Issues such as boycotts, mistrust and distrust, lack of respect for property and authority, and breakdown in discipline render the University of the North dysfunctional and hinder academic development. The University of the North's vision of academic excellence will remain a mere utopian dream if it does not transform itself from these twin legacies. This means that Verwoerdian philosophy wrought havoc intensified by the strategies of the oppressed that sought to undermine the very system of apartheid. June 1976 heralded a rise in resistance to apartheid, but it also brought about a culture of entitlement, breakdown in discipline in the family, school and society, lack of respect for own (community) property as well as school boycotts. But what options did the students have?

In its quest to ameliorate the problems that hinder academic performance and development, the University of the North, a product of the 1959 Extension of University Education Act embraced transformation aimed at self-renewal in 1992. Renewal requires the creation of a culture of learning within an organisation, a continual improvement of the organisation so that it becomes a vehicle for the

development of the human potential. The main thrust of this process is to reposition the institution so that it becomes a centre for academic excellence. In the long run the University of the North will become like Charles Handy's (1989) frog that allows water to slowly heat up and eventually lets itself be boiled to death. It may end up in Toffler's (1985) Museum of Corporate Dinosaurs if it fails to develop and implement adequate strategies to deal with the situation that inhibits academic performance.

Obviously one cannot attribute the problems solely to the challenges to Bantu Education because a host of factors played a role, including apartheid itself. The standard of teaching in African schools has been low (Molteno, 1984). Problems such as the rote learning tradition or what Freire (1972) refers to as "the banking method", overcrowded and impersonal classes continue to impede free academic discourse and performance.

The urgency to ameliorate the situation that adversely impacts on academic performance at the University of the North becomes supreme given the above context and the problems identified by among others, Franks (1993). This means that the need for developing and implementing strategies to assist students and staff deal practically with problems that continue to impede academic performance becomes more compelling.

At the University of the North the Broad Transformation Committee (BTC) Strategic Planning Workshop was held on the 12-14 August 1994, but has so far not adequately raised questions critical to the teaching and learning processes and the day-to-day life of the students and faculty. The managers of the transformation process have not

provided sufficient leadership with regard to issues relating to academic performance and the development and implementation of possible solutions to questions relating to these issues. The people involved have not visualised the impending complexities and formidable hurdles that they have to overcome in the process (BTC Strategic Planning Workshop, 12-14 August 1994). We have not yet witnessed the “coherent alternative embodied in a plan, a model, or a vision” which Toffler (1985) stated as one of the necessary conditions for a transformative leap or milestone.

The rationale for the establishment of the University of the North compounds and complicates the issues to be dealt with. There can be no doubt that the University of the North was conceived as an inferior institution. Franks (1993), among others, identified and elaborated on the following problems that may hinder academic development at the University of the North and comparable institutions:

- “Perhaps the greatest impact that Apartheid has had on education in South Africa is that it has wrought havoc with peoples confidence in their own abilities. Colonial, racist, and paternalistic evaluations in the past, and still in the present have had a tremendous impact on peoples' self-confidence. This factor affects all others.
- Lack of career horizon. Many of the students have little idea as to what careers are available in the modern world. They do not have family and friends who can clue them into what is possible. In addition the career counselling available at the University is not sufficient to meet this demand, let alone any others. This is exacerbated by the fact that the University itself is isolated, in two senses:
 - ⇒ It is situated in a rural setting away from a modern horizon.
 - ⇒ The student body is all black with little contact with white students.
- Inexperience of career politics and strategy. Directly related to the previous point is the fact that many of the students have little experience in career politics and strategy and few mentors who can guide them.
- Rote learning tradition of schooling in South Africa. This was, possibly, worse under “Bantu Education”, although it is present in all South African schooling. Students are unfamiliar with teaching practices which attempt to handle the nuances of the subject through discussion. In this regard students are afraid of the evaluation process because they do not know what is expected of them and do not have a trust that they will be evaluated fairly. In addition, this creates difficulties in attempting to get students to think creatively and laterally.

- Distrust of authority. Because of the illegitimacy of the government in South Africa students come to the University with a distrust of authority. This distrust has generalised to teachers and parents and is intimately associated with the following point.
- Breakdown of discipline in the family, school and society. This is probably more acute in relation to the urban youth. However, as the University of the North has a mixture of urban and rural based students this has an enormous impact on the running of the University and of academic processes. The ability of lecturers to sustain discipline is made very difficult. It also impacts on notions of criticism and evaluation which are deemed to be illegitimate by some of the student body.
- Lack of culture of learning. Few of the students come from backgrounds wherein reading and other learning skills are modelled or encouraged. While their parents want them to get an education there is not an awareness that education is something that one does for oneself, assisted by the institutions. Few even read the daily newspapers as a habit.
- All the above points are, of course, influenced by the fact that many students are not adequately literate in English, the medium of instruction. This hinders their ability to express themselves verbally or in the written form, as well as their ability to grasp the finer distinction between terms required for a university education. However, this does not in any way imply that the students lack the intelligence to cope. Rather that they are hindered by learning in a second language.
- Lack of respect for the property of the institution. While this is not evidenced by most students, it is clear from the amount of theft and vandalism on the campus that this problem (probably from a small minority of students) affects all students in that the use of expensive equipment is hindered by the simple logistics of ensuring that it is not lost, damaged or stolen. It clearly has an effect on the availability and access to such communal facilities.
- Overcrowding and understaffing. The University with over 14,000 students is clearly overcrowded. The facilities are insufficient to handle the number of students requiring accommodation, nor for teaching purposes. There is no spare accommodation so that classes may be broken up into handleable group sizes, and classes are usually crammed to over capacity. The teaching staff is a little over 400 which is totally inadequate to provide anything like a quality education even if these were all of a high quality. It is also difficult for the institution to attract senior staff.
- Career guidance and counselling services are totally inadequate faced with the enormity of the task, and many of the students go without the assistance or guidance they need. This is especially critical in the South African situation since many parents have had their horizons shrunk, their abilities attenuated and their authority all but destroyed by apartheid and the struggle against it.
- It is clear that to many of the staff, teaching is merely a half-day job. The result is very little in the way of extra-curricular activities or research which can involve those students who are interested. In addition, teaching staff do not often take on the role of mentorship, guiding their students' careers. However, this situation is also influenced by the frustration lecturers feel with their work situation.
- Fear of retribution among faculty. Faculty are clearly afraid of retribution from students. Faculty have been suspended at the request of students. Here, the slogans, "Pass-one-pass-all," "The right to pass" and "Academic terrorism"

intimate the present state of play. In order to avoid retribution some faculty resort to just passing students. These kinds of situations still have to be dealt with in terms of normal grievance procedures.

The following are the additional factors that seem to confirm the idea of an inferior University of the North:

- The calibre of faculty employed at the institution.
- The Nationalist Party government strategy of keeping the University dependent with its subsidy formula. The University was a government department and could only use the money allocated to it by the government, with the unspent money being sent back to the government. It could not in this way have its own reserves as was the case with Historically White Universities. It was only in the mid-1980's that this changed.

The history of the University of the North reflects turbulence and turmoil that has over the years periodically affected the institution. This has hindered academic excellence and development among students and faculty, created disharmony, misunderstanding, suffering and underdevelopment. It is within this historical framework that the University of the North's transformation process is sometimes trapped.

While we should be critical of this history, we should avoid being trapped in it because we cannot obliterate the past. The transformation process can easily lose sight of the pertinent issues essential for academic performance and excellence. It will be increasingly difficult to deal with the issues that hinder academic performance at the University, precisely because the strategic vision that the University is grappling with,

has a tendency to become trapped in the past. It is not hereby suggested that the past should not inform the present and the future, (the opposite is true), but rather that the present and the future should engage us more, and be our primary focus so that we deal adequately with this past.

Most people usually prefer to maintain the status quo. This should suggest that certain minimal preconditions are essential for change to take place. Toffler (1985) succinctly explains that for change to occur: "... first, there must be enormous external pressures. Second, there must be people inside who are strongly dissatisfied with the existing order. And third, there must be a coherent alternative embodied in a plan, a model, or a vision."

Change, as Toffler (1985) and Handy (1989) explain, is a painful process not only for those who are anti-change. Talking transformation and academic excellence does not necessarily translate into commitment. Change processes may often fail because of those least expected to sabotage them. It is often the conscious and unconscious acts of those who claim to be for change that fail the institution, such as the squandering of the resources of the University. In addition, managers sometimes fail to mobilise the pro change group that is highly dissatisfied with the status quo so as to "unfreeze the system" or create the "critical mass" that the change process needs to mobilise support for change and overcome resistance. A "critical mass" is crucial for any change process to succeed. This is even more true in instances where there is some form of resistance to change. Failure to prepare and mobilise those who do not have nostalgic affinities and attachment to the status quo often result in this group of potential allies remaining

lukewarm towards the process. This becomes more possible in situations where there is a clouded and opaque vision of what management or the leadership wants the organisation to be and to reflect.

There are a host of reasons why organisational change triggers fear among people directly involved in the process (Toffler, 1985; Handy, 1989; Luthans, 1992; de Vries and Miller, 1984; Schein, 1987). To paraphrase Kets de Vries and Miller (1984), change can:

- Be traumatic and disruptive for those affected
- Excite fear among those affected because it has the potential to reallocate *de facto*, if not formally defined, authority, such as in the case of the perceptions (which can be real or imaginary) that the transformation process at the University of the North was shifting power in favour of the students
- Occasion destructive political behaviour as factions compete for power.
- Change things for the worse.

All these may happen at the expense of the purported prime beneficiaries of transformation, namely students and faculty. It has not dawned on many of us that change is often permanent in contexts. Like other organisational resources and processes, it needs careful management if it is not to be destructive (Seidle, 1979). It is sometimes true that things remain the same because people who manage change do not have a coherent alternative, plan or vision. It is also true that sometimes things remain the same because some people benefit from the confusion and therefore want to keep things confused so that corrupt practices remain uncontrolled.

For the change process to succeed so that academic development becomes a reality, stakeholders have to commit themselves to the institution with disregard for personal aggrandisement. The University of the North needs visionary and transformative leadership, leadership that would provide guidance on, *inter alia*, the following questions:

- What are the problems that hinder academic performance and development at the University of the North?
- What structures and processes do we need?
- What image(s) should the institution reflect?
- How can we improve or modify our structures to facilitate academic excellence?
- What mechanisms do we require to sustain and protect the gains?
- What are the critical elements of academic excellence?
- What kind of institution are we looking for as we enter the next century?

Basic to these questions is an adequate assessment of the situation and the complexity of reasons for this state of affairs. It is the accurate and honest assessment of the situation through monitoring, surveys and scanning that will develop and crystallise the vision and mobilise support for change aimed at correcting the situation. This study aims at better understanding the situation faced by students at the University of the North. It also suggests appropriate transformational strategies essential for correcting and improving the situation.

CHAPTER 3

3. THE FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

This study highlights some of the problems found to impact on academic performance and hinder students' and faculty's development. In a pilot study Moalusi and Franks (1994(a)) describe the problems that impacted negatively on the students' academic performance and hindered their development at the University of the North. The present study operates from the premise that conducive and competent learning, teaching and personal processes are the *sine qua non* for academic development and the ultimate measure of the success of transformation. To this end this study suggests institutional mechanisms for facilitating student, institutional and social development.

This study is fully cognisant of the strides made by the transformation process in repositioning the institution. However, transformation has up till recently focused largely on the structural aspects of the institution, particularly governance, to the disadvantage of the processes of learning and teaching and the day-to-day problems encountered by students and faculty. The Broad Transformation Committee (BTC), which is a body comprising representatives of the various formations and structures on campus, was set up to steer the transformation process at UNIN. The idea of the BTC was probably one of the best possible solutions to the monumental task of transforming the institution because of its purported representativity. It is hoped that the BTC will facilitate the unravelling of the issues that affect academic performance and development adversely and suggest possible strategies for contending with the situation.

This study does not intend to undercut the job of the BTC, but rather to complement it. Huge specialised tasks such as facilitating transformation require expertise, commitment and time to continuously monitor the situation as it develops. For the process to move beyond transformation of the structural aspects and include the learning and teaching processes, that is, academic development, the University needs an honest and accurate assessment of the situation through surveys, environmental scanning and other research to develop and crystallise a vision of academic excellence and a progress for its implementation. In the BTC the group functioning and progress remain to be seen. It may seem like the process has stalled. It is for this reason that the need for development-oriented research that facilitates dialogue concerning implementable strategies to deal with the situation becomes supreme. This study will hopefully assist in developing mechanisms essential for handling issues that adversely impact on academic development.

The focus of this study is to explore students' perceptions of the issues that impact academic development at a Historically African University. The study also attempts to develop an accurate perception of the situation and appropriate transformational strategies for correcting the situation.

CHAPTER 4

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is exploratory and attempts to excavate the situation as perceived by students at the University of the North. It hopes to illuminate some of the problems that affect academic performance and development and to suggest mechanisms for dealing with them. More specifically it builds on the previously mentioned study by Franks (1993). Broadly stated, the following questions formed the *raison d'être* for this study:

- Why did the respondents come to University?
- How the respondents perceived the role that their parents, important “others” and institutions played in their education and development?
- What career information did the respondents have prior to coming to university and what they need?
- What perceptions did the respondents have of the services rendered by the Student Counselling Bureau?
- Did the respondents think that a culture of learning and teaching existed at the University of the North?
- What study methods did the respondents employ in dealing with their academic tasks?
- Which teaching and learning method did the respondents prefer?
- What were the respondents’ perceptions of the relationship that existed between lecturers and themselves?

- What in the perceptions of the respondents determined a better grade?
- What were the respondents' perceptions of the overcrowding that existed at the University of the North?
- What were the respondents' perceptions of the relationships that existed among the students?
- What were the respondents' perceptions of the role of the Student Representative Council (SRC)?
- Were the respondents optimistic or pessimistic about the future?

The preceding questions form the gist of this research project. It was hoped that a systematic investigation of the questions would illuminate the problems that continue to hinder academic performance at the University of the North. The problems become more serious in a society in transition, where students' perceptions of the newly found freedom may lead some to believe "that they can do anything or achieve anything without effort, perseverance and application" (Franks and Glass, 1993, p.67). For others the newly found freedom may be the beginning of the consciousness that they have to apply themselves and persevere in order to accomplish their goals. The study therefore looks at the mechanisms essential for facilitating academic excellence and *ipso facto* development.

The study does not claim to be an exhaustive examination of the problems impacting on academic performance. There are admittedly other problems. Rather, it operates from the premise that we cannot attribute problems that affect academic performance to the legacy of apartheid only. Apartheid has a share in the blame, and perhaps the

greatest share, but there are also a plethora of other factors involved. Now that we have witnessed the end of statutory apartheid we have to take the initiative in developing ourselves. It is the complexity of the situation on the ground as experienced by students themselves that should guide our efforts to deal with the issues that affect academic performance and development. The systematic investigation of students' experiences, perceptions and attitudes will facilitate the examination of the problems involved and hopefully reveal strategies for coping with them.

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CHAPTER 5

5. METHOD

5.1 Sample

This study was conducted in 1994. The target sample was the undergraduate students in one department in the Faculty of Management Sciences. Although the size of the sample was 601, only 276 first, second and third year undergraduate students in that department returned the completed self-completion anonymous questionnaire. The return rate was therefore, 46 percent. This implies that there may be some problems of generalization of the findings of the study, however, 276 respondents are an important source of information and can give valuable inputs, helpful for the academic system.

5.2 Method of Data Collection

A self-completion questionnaire with 98 items was used to collect the data. The questionnaire included some biographical items, in addition to the items stated in chapter 4. An effort was made to provide respondents with an opportunity to volunteer information as in the case of open-ended questions, in addition to the forced choices as in the case of closed-ended questions. Efforts were also made to make the questionnaire as short as possible.

5.3 Method of Data Analysis

The study attempted to use both the qualitative and the quantitative approaches because they are not mutually exclusive. Through the qualitative method the researcher

described the social processes using his understanding of the contextual research setting. The data were described, decoded and translated so as to come to terms not only with the meaning of the respondents' perceptions and verbatim statements, but also the frequency of the occurrence of the perceptions. The open-ended questions were sorted into different categories which were post-coded to obtain quantitative and qualitative information.

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CHAPTER 6

6. THE FINDINGS

6.1 The Characteristics of the Sample

The characteristics of the sample in terms of gender were 54% (150) males and 46% (126) females. Most (57%) of the respondents were in the age category 21-25.

Twenty-six percent of the respondents fell into the age category 16-20; 10% were 26-30; 5% were 31-35 and 1% were 36 and above. The marital status characteristic of the respondents showed that an overwhelming majority (91%) of them was single, 7% married, 1% divorced and widowed respectively.

The home language variable showed the following composition of the sample:

- Northern Sotho - 52%
- Tsonga - 14%
- Tswana - 12%
- Zulu - 7%
- Southern Sotho - 4%
- Venda - 3%
- Swazi - 2%
- Xhosa - 1%
- Ndebele - 1%
- Missing data - 4%

Forty-seven percent of the respondents were from homes located in rural areas, 40% urban and 13% peri-urban. The majority of the respondents (55%) attended secondary schools located in rural areas, 31% in urban areas and 14% in peri-urban areas.

The home background of the respondents and secondary school they attended indicate that the majority of the respondents attended secondary schools located in areas similar to their homes in terms of rural, peri-urban and urban settings. Table 1 illustrates this.

Table 1: Home background and secondary school attended (Percentages of the respondents; number of respondents in each category is given in brackets)

	Rural school (143)	Peri-urban school (40)	Urban school (84)
Rural home	89%	26%	22%
Peri-urban	7%	64%	8%
Urban	4%	10%	70%
Total	100%	100%	100%

The respondents' year of study revealed that the majority of them were in their second (39%) and third (38%) year of study. The year of study refers to the number of years the respondents had been at the University of the North. It does not refer to their academic year. The following is a complete picture of the respondents' year of study:

- First year - 20%
- Second year - 39%
- Third year - 38%
- Fourth year - 1%
- Fifth year - 1%

6.2 Coming to University and Career Information

An overwhelming majority (91%) of the respondents reported that they had always wanted to come to university, with only 9% expressing the perception that they had not. This perception was strong among both male (90%) and female (92%) respondents. Table 2 gives a concise summary of the role of family members, friends

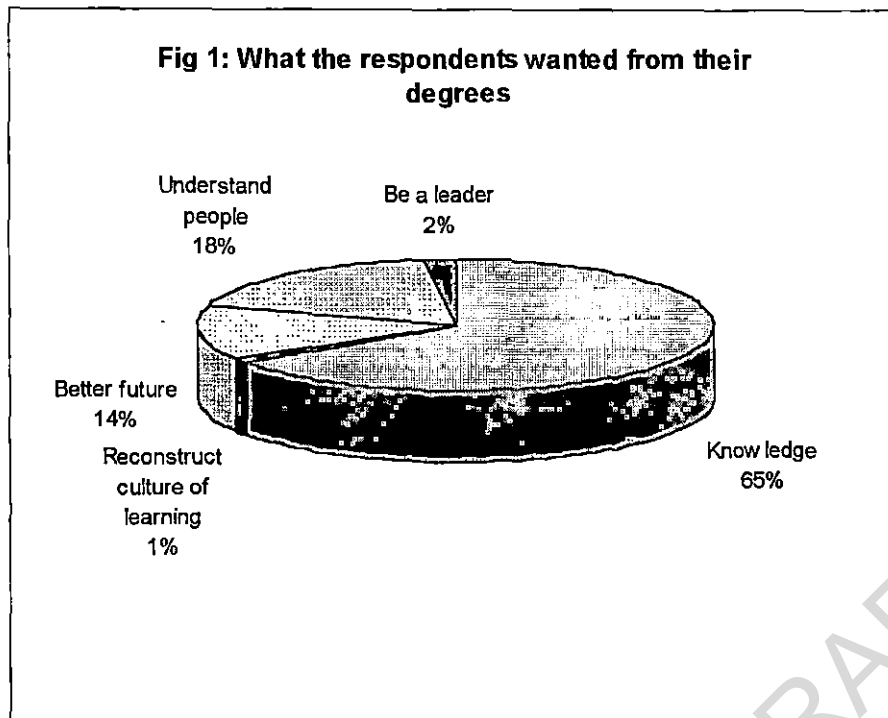
and respondents themselves in providing and acquiring information about career options available in the modern world and the reason for being at university.

Table 2: The reasons given for coming to university and career information received (Percentages of the respondents)

	Yes	No
Had family members who could advice about careers	68%	32%
Had friends who could advise about careers	79%	21%
Had information about careers	75%	25%
Friends the reason for being at university	29%	71%

A somewhat greater frequency of friends than family members who could advise about career options was reported by the students. However, relatively few of the students reported that influence from friends was the reason why they had entered the university.

Ninety-five percent of the respondents expressed the perception that they came to university because “education is the key to a good job. When asked what they wanted from the degrees they were following, the respondents provided the following responses: (See Figure 1).



It is apparent from Figure 1 that the majority of the respondents wanted knowledge from the degrees they were following, to understand people and a better future, with very few expressing a wish for becoming leaders or assisting in reconstructing the culture of learning.

6.3 The Relationship Between Students and their Parents

The students were in different ways asked about their perceptions of their parents' role in their academic lives.

Table 3: The perceived relationship between parents and their children**(Percentage of responses)**

	Yes	No
Parents give me ideas of what I can do with my life	69%	31%
Parents are a help when it comes to education	85%	15%
Parents should assist the development of their children	89%	11%
My parents guide me	91%	9%

According to the responses, the parents play a very significant role in their children's lives, and an acceptance on behalf of the students that it should be so.

The respondents were also asked in what ways their parents assisted them. The following responses were given: (Numbers are used to indicate the frequency of the factors stated)

- **Encouragement to come to school and work hard to ensure a better life** (152 statements)

“Motivating me to study so as to live better.”

“Parents tell you how difficult it is to live without education these days.”

“They do not want us to suffer when they are no longer alive.”

“My parents did not get that opportunity, but when coming to education, they encourage me. My father used to say, we must be educated to get a brighter future; these are not old days when women were staying home to cook for children.”

- **Financial assistance** (125 statements)

“They pay fees, buy books and other student needs like basic necessities.”

“They are sponsoring me.”

“Parents only help in financing the education of their children.”

- **Involvement in the studies** (6 statements)

“They sometimes checked my work.”

“They ask about problems I encounter.”

The respondents were also asked how they thought parents hindered their education, 54% reported that parents did not hinder their education. Those who reported that parents hindered their education gave the following reasons: (The statements are accompanied by the frequency of the statements).

- **Lack of financial support** (7 statements)

“By not having enough financial support, but it does not matter.”

“They fail to make relevant aspects of my studies available, particularly money.”

“They do not give me pocket money monthly.”

- **Lack of encouragement, support, involvement and help about schooling** (4 statements)

“By saying I must study without their assistance.”

“Lack of encouragement to further my studies.”

“They do not bother to ask about my performance.”

- **Lack of knowledge about schooling** (2 statements)

“They cannot give me advice about learning.”

“They cannot help when I am not doing well.”

- **Lack of time for schooling needs** (2 statements)

“By sending me somewhere during school time.”

“By encouraging me to look for work after matric.”

“By giving me a lot of work when I have to study.”

- **Restrictions on independence of thought** (2 statements)

“By denying me a chance to think as an adult.”

“By restricting exercise of discretion.”

- **Making a career choice for the student** (2 statements)

“Making wrong choices in my field of study.”

“When they are trying to choose a career for me.”

Lack of enough financial support, and lack of parents' involvement in their children's education, such as assisting them with school work or checking their school work, were the major reasons why parents were perceived as hindrances in the education of their children. However, the majority of the respondents shared the perception that parents assisted, especially when it came to financing the education of their children.

It is important to note that the negative responses that parents hindered the education of their children were few. Even when they were asked how parents impeded their education, more than half the respondents asserted that their parents did not hinder their education.

However, other issues are important, and perhaps much more important than financing education. The support that the respondents perceived not to have received from their parents is significant in the development of a person and his/her educational advancement. The extent to which parents could assist their children will be discussed more in-depth in the discussion section.

The facilitation of children's development is not the sole responsibility of parents. Other institutions of the society such as counselling centres in institutions of learning also play a role.

6.4 Student Counselling Centre

When the respondents were asked if they had ever consulted the Student Counselling Centre, the majority (65%) reported that they had never consulted the Centre.

Surprisingly, only 35% of students reported to have consulted the Student Counselling Centre.

It is apparent from the above that the majority of the respondents did not consult the Counselling Centre. When the respondents were asked what problems, if any, they did have with the services rendered by the Student Counselling Centre, they put forth the following reasons:

- **Lack of proper guidance and ineffective counselling** (86 statements)
 - “Does not address problems outside the purview of UNIN campus.”
 - “They do not give you a good advise sometimes.”
 - “Their services are ineffective and inefficient.”
- **Negative attitude** (32 statements)
 - “Some of them think that they are better than ourselves.”
 - “There are many problems such that I even fail to mention them, I remember only one, namely, negative attitude towards students.”
- **Unavailability** (26 statements)
 - “The counsellors are most of the time not available in their offices.”
 - “You know people at that centre do not always do their work, very often they ignore students.”
- **Inadequate facilities** (24 statements)
 - “I think the Counselling Centre cannot accommodate all of us, if we go for counselling.”
 - “One professional somebody is overloaded with work, so you have to wait 2-3 days.”
 - “There are only two professional staff members.”
 - “Their consultation room will not instil confidence in you to continue with counselling. It made many students to withdraw.”
- **Favouritism** (16 statements)

“If a student need assistance without knowing anyone from the Counselling Centre, he or she will not be attended.”

“The Centre is riddled with nepotism.”

- **Unawareness of their services (12 statements)**

“They do not encourage students while still at first year level to use their services.”

“It does not avail itself readily to students and no appeal for students to come for consultation on several problems.”

“Some students are not even aware of their services, and I do not know where it is located.”

- **Invasion of privacy (4 statements)**

“The Student Counselling Centre must employ professionals to perform that job, not students who do not know secrecy.”

Although only 35% of the respondents actually did consult the Student Counselling Centre, it is encouraging to note that 54% of the total sample did value the services rendered by the Student Counselling Centre.

The following were stated as reasons for which the students might consult the Centre: (The frequency of the reasons are indicated).

- Social problems (96 statements)
- Academic problems and advice such as study methods (78 statements)
- Information on careers (76 statements)
- Information on financial aid (43 statements)
- Problems between students and lecturers (9 statements)
- Overcrowding in classes and halls of residence (6 statements)
- Counselling, nightmares and insomnia (3 statements)

Hopeful is also to note that 80% of the respondents expressed the perception that access to career guidance throughout their academic stay at UNIN might improve the appropriateness and relevance of education. This indicated a realisation on the part of the majority of the respondents that career guidance is essential for appropriate education and for making the right career decisions.

The findings reveal that the majority of the respondents did not use the Centre and that they shared perceptions that the Centre did not have the capacity to assist them. Nevertheless the respondents had reasons for which they might consult the Centre and believed that counselling and guidance will have a positive role in reshaping the appropriateness of education.

6.5 Culture of Learning

The preceding elements are critical for effective learning and teaching. However, a host of other factors are also critical in ensuring effective learning and teaching. These factors include among others, students' self-perceptions, relationship with fellow students, preferred study method, relationship with teachers and other practical problems such as overcrowding of classes and residences, boycott of schooling, etc.

6.5.1 Students' self-perceptions

Table 4 gives a picture of students' self-perceptions

Table 4: Students' self-perceptions (Percentage of the respondents)

	Yes	No
Apartheid eroded confidence in our own abilities	55%	45%
Do you believe that your memory ability is strong	70%	30%
Do you find it difficult to recall the material learned in the course	31%	69%
Can you attribute your performance to your memory ability	78%	22%
The course work material is difficult to handle	30%	70%
The coursework material is too much to handle	56%	44%
Do you think a better grade depends on your effort in studying	94%	6%
Do you think a better grade depends on luck/fate/accidental happenings	20%	80%

The vast majority believed that academic outcomes depend on one's effort in studying. However, more than half the respondents reported that apartheid had eroded their self-confidence and about one third reported to struggle with the difficulties of learning and memorising. More than half found the coursework too much to handle.

6.5.2 Relationship with fellow students

The relationship with fellow students is also important for effective learning and teaching. The disruptions and disturbances of the learning and teaching functions, the perceptions of whether fellow students have their colleague's interest at heart, commitment to learn, etc. impact on the individual student's preparedness and ability to learn. Table 5 illuminates this point.

Table 5: Relationship with fellow students (Percentage of the respondents)

	Yes	No
Some students disturb the learning process	84%	16%
Do you believe that may of your fellow students have your interest at heart	58%	42%
Do you believe that the SRC has your interest at heart	52%	48%

The vast majority of the respondents reported that other students disturb the learning process. A considerable group expressed a lack of belief in fellow students and did not trust that the SRC had their interests at heart.

The students who reported that some students disturb the learning process gave the following reasons for their responses: (The frequencies indicate the number of times the reason was given).

- **Political activities, boycott and mass actions (102 statements)**

“By organising some unnecessary class boycotts.”

“When they have a problem with their lecturer, they stop classes.”

“By boycotting classes without any valid reasons. Some may come and register when the classes have started and there after they go and demand class boycott from the SRC.”

- **Noise at the residences (40 statements)**
 - “There are no rules regulating noise.”
 - “Because of the noises they create in the hostels with their hi-fi’s.”
 - “The chances of studying at the hostels are slim because of noise pollution.”
- **Late coming and interruptions during lectures (38 statements)**
 - “You will find that when the lecturer is busy teaching, some students are busy talking, more especially those who sit at the back.”
 - “Some students have a tendency of getting out of the lecture room during the course of the lesson. This affects some lecturers and they develop bad attitudes.”
 - “When a fellow student pronounces a word incorrectly, they begin to laugh.”
- **No commitment to learn (35 statements)**
 - “... for in case of tomorrow, we are writing a test, and some students because they did not finish their work, they will say the lecturer does not teach well and we must postpone the test and this thing disturbs the learning process.”
 - “Some students are here because their parents forced them, hence no aim and finally disturb others.”
 - “Some students do not attend classes. Also bad lecturing contributes to low attendance.”
- **Disturbance of the learning process because of not having passed tests (23 statements)**
 - “If they fail a test, they would demand a re-test which after they fail would organise a protest march for the lecturer claiming that he or she failed them.”
 - “Some students know they have performed badly during the year, so they want the rest of the students to do the same.”
 - “Especially when they get low marks in one part of the course, they want it to be cancelled.”
- **Drug and alcohol abuse (8 statements)**
 - “They come to school under the influence of liquor and drugs.”

“There is free access to liquor on campus.”

“When they are drunk, they disturb everybody.”

- **Limiting the scope (5 statements)**

“If they do not call for boycotts, the scope will be broad.”

“Without boycotts, the scope is not manageable.”

The respondents who gave positive reports about believing that their fellow students had their interest at heart, advanced the following reasons: (The frequencies indicate the number of times each of the statements was made).

- **Mutual assistance in solving academic and non-academic problems (129 statements)**

“They borrow me their reading material and are prepared to discuss with me.”

“When experiencing social and academic problems, we solve them together.”

“They guide and offer assistance wherever possible.”

- **Mutual encouragement to read (68 statements)**

“They are eager to see us all passing.”

“They encourage us to prepare hard for tests and ask for retests if we did not perform well.”

“Constructive interaction and advice like going to the library.”

- **Attending classes and being active in asking questions (32 statements)**

“Their active participation in class is helpful.”

“Their questions and comments in class are helpful.”

“Their participation in class is always awakening one to areas he or she would have ignored.”

- **Mutual best wishing when writing tests (17 statements)**

“Before we write tests and examinations, we wish each other luck.”

“Their wishes are always inspiring.”

The students who reported negative experiences stated the following reasons: (The frequencies indicate the number of times each of the statements was made).

- **Pursuing selfish interests** (88 statements)
 - “They are jealous and selfish, hence the test dates that suit them only.”
 - “They drink anytime, make noise and disturb others.”
 - “It is like I am not one of them”
 - “Everything they do reflects their selfish motive.”
- **Misleading others** (13 statements)
 - “If you did not attend class they give you wrong information.”
 - “You must compare what they say with the lecturer’s presentation to understand the motives.”
- **Disruption of classes** (8 statements)
 - “They know that class boycotts are not helpful, but they do it.”
 - “When they have problems with the lecturer they disrupt classes.”
- **Stealing** (6 statements)
 - “They destroy and steal UNIN property, our books and clothes.”
- **Creating an atmosphere not conducive for learning** (2 statements)
 - “They may laugh at me if I ask irrelevant questions.”

When asked what they would like their fellow students to do for them, the following responses were given by the students:

- **Less selfishness** (213 statements)
 - “They should be frank and share experiences with me.”
 - “We should discuss academic and non-academic issues to build each other.”
- **Assisting in creating an atmosphere conducive for learning** (57 statements)
 - “Respect each other and not laugh at colleagues when they ask questions.”
 - “They should actively participate in class.”
- **Stop boycotting and disturbing classes** (15 statements)
 - “When they have problems, they must solve them through negotiations first.”

“They should not make noise in class.”

- **Start treating lecturers as human beings** (12 statements)

“They should do unto others what they want them do to them.”

“They should respect their teachers and understand the mistakes they make as human beings.”

- **Participating in the transformation process** (3 statements)

“Help transform the institution to be more accountable to the community.”

6.5.3 The relationship with the SRC

The Student Representative Council (SRC) is the purported students' government or mouthpiece that represents students interests. The majority of the respondents perceived the then SRC's role positively. The following reasons for saying that the then SRC had their interest at heart were given: (The reasons are accompanied by the frequencies of occurrence).

- **SRC solves academic matters such as negotiating for us to register provisionally** (134 statements)
- **SRC cultivates and improve the culture of learning by encouraging us to study hard** (7 statements)
- **SRC fights for democratisation of UNIN** (2 statements)

The respondents who expressed the perception that the then SRC did not have students' interest at heart attributed this to the following: (The numbers accompanying the statements indicate the frequency of occurrence).

- **SRC is more political and corrupt** (51 statements)
- **SRC members only concerned about themselves and our money** (39 statements)

- **SRC members not always available when students need them, and solve problems in an unsatisfactory manner** (8 statements)
- **SRC members are unknown to the respondents** (3 statements)
- **SRC is undemocratically elected** (2 statements)

However, the respondents felt that the SRC should concentrate on doing the following for the students: (The frequencies indicate the number of times each suggestion was made).

- **Cultivating a culture of learning by organising academic activities (e.g. seminars) and stop calling for boycotts** (85 statements)
- **Impartial representation to ensure that students demands are met** (73 statements)
- **Stop embezzling funds** (45 statements)
- **Obtaining financial assistance to students by raising funds from companies** (43 statements)
- **Maintaining law and order, no dangerous weapons** (8 statements)

Other suggestions which were made individually were:

- **SRC should concentrate on democratic participation in decision-making**
- **Issues benefiting the community**
- **Admission of new students**

Despite some of the negative perceptions the respondents had about the SRC, there is an important role that the SRC could play in reshaping the University. Most of the negative perceptions were the results of corruption, imagined or real, on the part of some SRC members. This implies that the SRC still has some way to go before becoming a true democratic organisation (council) of benefit for the students.

6.5.4 Student-lecturer relationship

The relationship that exists between lecturers and students is a major determinant of academic performance for both lecturers and students. This relationship should entail mutual trust and respect as well as discipline among both parties. Table 6 captures students' perceptions of the relationship between students and teachers.

Table 6: The respondents' experience of the relationship between teachers and students (Percentage of responses)

	yes	No
Lecturers are scared of students	25%	75%
Students are scared of lecturers	50%	50%
Students are scared to speak in class	60%	40%
Students should participate in designing curricula	45%	55%
Do the lecturers have your interest at heart	71%	21% missing data: 8%
Grade depends on how nice one is to one's lecturer	26%	74%

Table 6 indicates that a huge group is afraid of their teachers, and even a larger group is afraid of speaking in class. Interesting is also that as much as one fourth of the students believed that the teachers were afraid of the students.

The students gave the following reasons for believing that lecturers were scared of students: (The frequencies of the reasons are given).

- **Allowing students to control them** (28 statements)
- **Lack of trust** (18 statements)
- **Intimidating students because of fright** (13 statements)
- **Feeling guilty because of apartheid** (7 statements)

- **Poor language and teaching ability** (5 statements)
- **Political favouritism** (3 statements)

6.5.4.1 Positive and negative indicators of lecturers not scared of students

The reasons reported for saying lecturers were not scared of students indicated a harmonious relationship between students and lecturers; others clearly indicated an antagonistic relationship between the two: (Percentages of the respondents stated in brackets and examples of verbatim statements are given)

Positive (58%)

“If they were scared, they would not stand in front of students and lecture”

“They are free to us, friendly and helpful”

“Lecturers and students mutually solve problems”

“They stand firm on their decisions”

“They do not carry arms when they come to class”

Negative (42%)

“They (lecturers) talk to us as they want, resist transformation and express racist tendencies”

“They (lecturers) harass students”

“They do not care about the needs of students”

“If they were scared, no one would fail”

6.5.4.2 Indicators of students scared of lecturers

The respondents also reported the reasons for saying students were scared of lecturers. Some of the reasons focus on the lecturer and others on the students as indicated

below: (Percentage of respondents stated in brackets and examples of verbatim statements are given)

Focus on Lecturer (59%)

“Lecturers are unfriendly and victimise students”

“Lecturers are rude and bullish”

“Favouritism and racism are common among our teachers”

“Lecturers behave like semi-gods”

Focus on Students (41%)

“Students do not participate in class”

“Students are scared to participate in a foreign language”

“Students are just afraid of their lecturers”

“Students have an inferiority complex”

“Some students are afraid to make mistakes”

Despite the perceptions expressed by some of the respondents that both students and lecturers were scared of each other, there was a strong belief that the majority of the lecturers had the interest of their students at heart. When asked, whether they thought some of their lecturers had their interest at heart, seventy-one percent of the respondents responded in the affirmative.

6.5.4.3 Factors indicating whether lecturers have their students’ interest at heart

The students gave the following responses when asked if they believed that their lecturers had their interest at heart: (Percentage of the respondents is stated in brackets and examples of verbatim statements are given)

Lecturers have students’ interest at heart (71%)

“They show commitment to their work and concern on students’ progress”

“They are punctual, fair and reasonable”

“They are friendly”

“They are not impatient when lecturing”

“They allow me to express my opinion”

“They participate in student battles against the regime”

Lecturers did not have students’ interest at heart (29%)

“They concentrate on their studies and do not want to see us progressing”

“They victimise students”

“The scope for examinations and tests is too broad”

“They do not answer questions when students ask them”

The respondents were also asked: “What would you like your lecturers to do for you?”

The following suggestions were obtained: (The numbers indicate the frequency of the suggestions)

- Help, support, guide us in our studies in a friendly way (111 statements)
- Offer us better and quality education and lecturing (54 statements)
- Help us prepare ourselves better for the exam (27 statements)
- Treat us as equal and be kind to all of us (24 statements)
- Advise us about careers and other life experiences (15 statements)
- Give us seminars, educational trips and practical material (12 statements)
- Facilitate discussion and not be like priests (at least one period for discussion) (12 statements)
- Be patient, since some of us take long to understand (12 statements)
- Give a second test when most students have failed (6 statements)
- Be there for us when we need clarifications during consultations (6 statements)

The following responses were also provided individually:

- Address the issue of overcrowded classes

- Should understand us and not be arrogant
- Be more prepared to accept that change is inevitable
- Research and publish
- Understand our economic crisis and make provision for material
- Not use difficult terminology when setting questions

It is clear from the findings of the study that most of the wishes were realistic, positive and not too laborious and difficult to fulfil.

6.5.5 Study method

The outcomes in an academic task do not only depend on the relationship between students and lecturers or between students themselves and the support that they receive from each other and their teachers. The learning and teaching methods are also critical in determining the outcomes in an academic task. Table 7 divulges the study methods preferred by the students:

Table 7: Students' preferred study methods (Percentage of respondents given)

	yes	No
I prefer allocating study time to specific study activities	83%	17%
The best learning method is the discussion method	85%	15%
The evaluation of students' performance would be unfair in the discussion method	56%	44%
The best learning method is the lecture method	67%	33%
Schooling in English assists my development	92%	8%
English hinders my ability to discuss the issues	20%	80%
Learning could be facilitated by discussion groups held in vernacular	80%	20%
Group discussion assists a lot in learning process	80%	6% 14% had no experience of group discussions

It would seem from the afore-going that the majority of respondents favoured a study or learning method that involved discussions. Also noteworthy is that even the 92% stated that schooling in English assisted their development, even though one fourth reported that English hindered their ability to discuss issues.

There is a plethora of other factors that hinder academic development in any learning situation. Table 8 illustrates some of the factors that the students reported as a hindrance to their development:

Table 8: Factors influencing the students' academic development (Percentages of the respondents given)

	Hinder	Assist
Boycott of schooling	86%	14%
Over-involvement in politics	70%	30%
Location of UNIN	50%	50%
Transition from rural to urban living	25%	75%
Overcrowding in classes	88%	10%
Overcrowding in residences	82%	18%

Apart from boycott of schooling, it seemed that overcrowding in classes and residences most often were perceived by the students as hindrances to academic development.

6.5.6 Broad perceptions about the culture of learning

A number of these issues were investigated to assess the respondents' perceptions regarding the presence or absence of culture of learning and teaching. They include the lecturers' teaching mode, the perceptions of what determines a good grade, study method, availability of facilities essential for facilitating learning, disruptions of the learning and teaching programme, etc. A glut of factors may indicate that a culture of learning is absent in a learning institution. These factors may range from lack of or inadequate facilities and services to those disruptive of the teaching and learning process. Some of these factors have already been referred to in the preceding paragraphs. The following section looks at the broad perceptions of students regarding the presence of a culture of learning.

Generally, 56% of the respondents expressed the perception that a culture of learning existed at the University of the North. The perception decreased with an increase in chronological age.

- 16-20 - 65%
- 21-25 - 64%
- 26-30 - 56%
- 31-35 - 46%
- +36 - 33%

This implies that as many as 44% of the students did not perceive that a culture of learning was present at UNIN, even even as a University it should have been a place for the most advanced learning opportunities. The respondents attributed this lack of culture of learning to an assortment of factors that included the following: (The statements are accompanied by the frequency of the statements).

- Boycotts and mass actions (20 statements)
- Lack of books and other learning facilities (15 statements)
- Overcrowding in classes and halls of residence (15 statements)
- Lack of co-operation between students and lecturers (15 statements)
- Apartheid and Bantu Education (10 statements)
- Students attitude and demands (8 statements)
- Some lecturers and students do not come to class (8 statements)
- Student-lecturer ratio unfavourable (7 statements)
- Lack of motivation and career guidance (7 statements)
- Overpoliticizing the institution and over-involvement in politics (6 statements)
- Teaching mode of lecturers (6 statements)
- Strikes by teachers (5 statements)
- Lack of class participation (5 statements)
- Lack of financial incentives for students (5 statements)
- Lack of discipline (5 statements)

- Corrupt management, academic staff and SRC (3 statements)
- Liquor and drugs (2 statements)
- Too much entertainment (2 statements)
- Noise (2 statements)

6.5.7 Politicians' responsibility

The students were also asked about the role that the politicians could play in ensuring a culture of learning. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents expressed the perception that politicians were not doing enough to restore the culture of learning. When asked what the politicians should do about restoring the culture of learning, the respondents advanced the following suggestions: (The numbers indicate the frequency of each of the statements and verbatim statements are used as examples)

- **Encouraging students to learn** (63 statements)
 - “They should tell the youth that political excellence shall not be achieved if there is no academic excellence.”
 - “Maybe they should remind students that we are here for learning, because some seem to have forgotten what they are here for.”
 - “They should hold rallies on the importance of education and help finance students to further their studies at tertiary level.”
- **Increase funding of education** (48 statements)
 - “Fund more space in our institutions, including centres for refreshing our minds.”
 - “Use money to sponsor students and built more schools and facilities.”
 - “Must introduce free education at universities or increase their subsidies, we are paying a lot of money which we do not have.”
- **Not using students for own political benefits** (24 statements)

“The politicians must not use students, must forget own interests and focus on our educational interests.”

“They should stop the boycott of classes by refraining from politicising education.”

- **Consult the community and restructure education (14 statements)**

“They should encourage the community to learn maybe by organising workshops and seminars and discussing education in general.”

“Consult communities about conditions conducive for learning by providing everybody with the same education.”

- **Organise workshops to teach study methods (12 statements)**

“They must organise seminars and guide us on how to learn.”

Also the following suggestions were individually given:

- Improve student-lecturer relationship
- Stop violence
- Put their [politicians’] children in our schools
- Open to other ideas
- Instil discipline
- Should be role models, should study hard
- They should introduce intervarsity education
- They should eliminate apartheid as it is still practised

6.5.8 What can the University community do

Also, there was a recognition that the University community itself could do something about creating a learning environment. The respondents made a number of suggestions as to what the university community could do about the learning environment. (The numbers indicate the frequency of each of the suggestions).

- Library facilities should be increased and upgraded (72 statements)
- Symposia and seminars should be organised (48 statements)
- Bursaries should be used as incentives (39 statements)
- More halls of residence and lecture-halls should be built (36 statements)
- The university community should discuss the relevance of learning with students (27 statements)
- Should create more opportunities for development of projects and centres (21 statements)
- Encourage study groups (15 statements)
- Consult, democratise and agree on rules of the university (15 statements)
- Encourage lecturers and students to change their attitudes towards each other (9 statements)
- Employ more qualified lecturers (9 statements)

Other suggestions made individually were as follow:

- The university community should work together
- Limit the entrance of liquor on campus
- Limit admission
- Redesign curricula
- Punish students who make noise
- Respect academic activities

6.6 Human Development

Human development is often facilitated by certain people and institutions of the society. The respondents were asked whether the state (government), the private sector, political parties or organisations, parents, friends and respondents themselves

were responsible for their development; the following percentages reflect the affirmative responses obtained:

- Parents - 94%
- You yourself - 92%
- Friends - 74%
- The state (government) - 41%
- Political parties - 41%
- The private sector - 32%

It is clear from the above data that fewer respondents felt that the state or government, private sector, and political parties or organisations were responsible for their development.

The following were also identified by the respondents as factors that hindered their development: (The frequency of responses and verbatim statements are given)

- **The learning situation** (12 statements)
 - “Lack of relevant books in the library”
 - “Short-tempered and incompetent lecturers”
 - “Overcrowding in lecture-halls”
 - “Lack of guidance”
- **The living conditions** (7 statements)
 - “Noise in the residences”
 - “Vandalism and stealing/looting”
- **Lack of financial assistance** (6 statements)
 - “Socio-economic conditions”
 - “Insufficient money to buy books”
- **The political situation** (6 statements)
 - “Stayaways and boycotts”
 - “Over-politicising academic institutions”

The participants also identified factors that helped their development. (They are arranged from the highest to the least polled.)

- Discipline and determination to succeed
- Reading more English books
- Discussions with fellow students
- Going to the library for references
- Conferences, workshops and seminars
- Friendly assistance from lecturers
- Partial involvement in politics
- Community involvement
- Mixing with other people
- Part-time jobs

Indeed, there are diverse factors that hinder and assist respondents' development.

There is a dire need to give careful consideration to the factors perceived by the respondents as hindrances to their development with the purpose of ameliorating the situation. In the same breath, there is a need to give attention to those factors identified by the respondents as essential and necessary for their development. These need nurturing and reinforcement so as to assist the students in their academic and personal growth.

6.7 Pessimism-optimism During Transition

Academic performance is not solely determined by purely academic factors. There is a diversity of life events which are non-academic in nature, but which have an impact on academic performance. These may combine in complex ways to stress a person and thereby lower his or her performance on a task.

As part of the study, the students were asked about their perceptions of how the present political situation influenced their own situation. The respondents were asked if they felt that the country's transitional period was making things too difficult for them, 70% answered in the negative. Also, a rather optimistic view was expressed by the respondents regarding the effectiveness of negotiations which were going on in the country. They were asked if they thought the negotiations for a political settlement that were going on in the country were going to solve most of their problems. A large percentage (84%) of the respondents expressed a positive belief in this.

In addition, a very high degree of optimism was expressed by the respondents regarding the future. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents reported that they were hopeful for the future.

The optimism expressed by the respondents should be understood within the context of the negotiations which were promising to deliver a new social order. As pointed out by the respondents, a host of factors impact on academic performance and development of students and faculty. The question that remains is to what degree this optimism is founded in the real situation of the University and society.

CHAPTER 7

7. DISCUSSION

This section attempts to present the results of the study within an enlightening and refined context. In doing so, this study assumes a historical perspective because of the fundamental belief that the problems associated with academic performance remain opaque outside their context. Education and educational institutions are a product of a particular history that evolved out of political decisions. Therefore, to some the study may sound more political. Moalusi and Franks (1994(a), p. 1) make the following observation: "... any attempt to understand education as an independent field of enquiry divorced from the political, social and economic context will definitely result in the protection and perpetuation of the status quo in education." This is not surprising in view of the fact that schools "do not exist in a political vacuum" (Apple, quoted in Nasson, 1990, p.152).

Asante (1990, p.110) among others, writes: "... the acquisition of knowledge occurs within a social and political context defined by economic and historical factors." Schemell, (quoted in Jansen, 1990, pp.327-328) says there is no such thing as "a neutral educational' process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically with the reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world." As Mehl (1990, p.387) puts it: "education has to do with the mind and the spirit of a human. Education has to do with the interaction of a person with his/her environment, the interaction of one mind with another."

South Africa has witnessed rapid and wide-ranging changes in the last two years. These changes have fundamentally affected educational institutions, the University of the North is not immune from such rapid change taking place. This change is contemporaneous with changes in perceptions, expectations and attitudes of the people, including students. The University of the North needs to recognise that change, plan for it and develop a viable strategy for the future.

The findings of the study reflect the important and daunting task facing those in pursuit of academic excellence and the development of the human mind. More importantly they reveal the strategies and mechanisms essential to deal with problems that hamper academic performance and development at the University of the North. As would be expected, academic excellence is likely to remain a utopian dream if the learning and teaching processes as well as the support structures do not receive due consideration because the problems adversely impact performance of students and faculty.

7.1 Education: The Great Myth?

The need for education in South Africa cannot be emphasised because “education” underpins development in the modern technological world. However, the dilemma facing those who feel responsible for giving young people an education for positions in the society is haunting. This is precisely because of the alienating nature of our education. As Boggs (1974, p.64) says “... the myths of education as the magic weapon to open all doors, particularly the door to higher earnings and unlimited consumption, and of the schools as the only place to get an education have been propagated.”

The issue of education being the key to a good life and a good job is a long standing *raison d'être* why people go to school when they do. The great majority of the

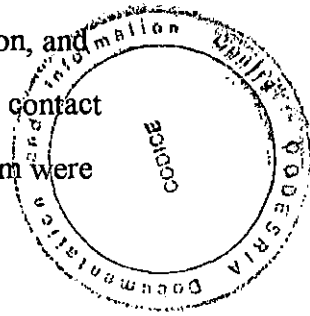
respondents had always wanted to come to university probably because of the perception expressed by almost all of the respondents that education is the key to a good job. Parents also encouraged and supported their children to come to university and work hard because they believed that education ensures a better life and prepares one for the challenges ahead.

A decision to pursue university education involves making choices about the kind of career that one intends to pursue. Career guidance and counselling assist students to discover and realise their potential as well as to make informed career decisions. The majority of the respondents expressed the perception that they had information on possible career options prior to coming to university. The information that the respondents had about career options could be attributed to the perception expressed by the majority of the respondents that reported that they had family members who could guide them on career options available. That the respondents had information on career options available could also be explained by the perception expressed by eighty percent of the respondents who reported that they had friends who could guide them on career options available.

Most universities present students with a curriculum choice without ensuring that the choice is an informed one. As Layer (1995, p.118) puts it, “the student needs to know what is available, what they can do and the consequences of their choice. The student needs to operate in a framework where the language of choice and the awareness of that choice is commonly understood.”

This raises some questions about the students’ actual knowledge of careers in the modern world, especially if one looks at this against Ferron’s (1990) observation that career guidance and counselling had not yet filtered down to the black secondary schools until 1990. Ferron (1990) asserts that most black secondary schools did not even have trained guidance and counselling teachers. One wonder about the quality

and content of the information that the respondents had about career options available in the modern world. Nevertheless, most respondents did have some information, and it is plausible that such information was obtained from people who had been in contact with them as well as through exposure to the modern horizon that some of them were exposed to.



Young people are "taught to believe that a person's social status in society reflects her ability to do difficult intellectual work" (Rothstein, 1991, p.10). The dominant ideology inculcates values such as acceptance of inequalities in society because of inequalities based on educational merit and achievement. Many students come to understand that their parents did not have "good jobs" and "did not make it" because they did not have the educational qualifications required. This often leaves students confused and troubled about their feeling toward their parents, their backgrounds and heritage (Rothstein, 1991).

The respondents' perceptions of the value of education makes it imperative for us to attempt to deal with their expectations and perceptions even before they leave the university. The findings of this study indicated that the myth of education as the magic weapon to open all doors seemed to be well-entrenched among students. Perhaps what we need is to unveil the dialectical and contradictory nature of life and relationships of things in this world. It is important to expose some of the myths because it is not only technical expertise that will guarantee students careers, because jobs also depend on discipline, aggressiveness and entrepreneurship, daring courage, favouritism and luck (Boggs, 1974; Shor and Freire, 1987).

In South Africa, the successive years of favouritism or baasskap imply that jobs also have depended on connections. It was not unusual for whites to have higher career mobility than blacks because of the fact that they were white. Moalusi and Mashegoane (1996) explain the years of white domination and the marginalisation of

blacks in corporate South Africa. Franks (1987) also captures white resistance to black advancement. Describing the situation that confronted blacks in the United States of America, Boggs (1974) explains that "... extended education was not the magic key to upward mobility and higher earnings that it had been played out to be. On the job market they soon discovered that the same piece of paper which qualified White high school graduates for white-collar jobs only qualified Blacks to be tested (and found wanting) for the same jobs. Their teachers, parents and preachers tried to placate them by explaining how even more education was needed to qualify for the increasingly skilled jobs demanded by automation. But all around them Black youth could see that the jobs which they were told required two or more years of college when occupied by Blacks were actually being done by White high school dropouts" (Boggs, 1974, pp.65-66).

The findings of the present study revealed that the respondents wanted knowledge, to understand people, a better future, to become leaders and to assist in reconstructing a culture of learning from their degrees. The majority of the respondents expressed the perception that they wanted knowledge from the degrees they were following. These perceptions confirm the generally used criteria for choosing courses. The question that immediately comes to a student's mind when choosing courses is knowledge and the market value of a course. How do I get a good job out of the degree I am following? The students are concerned with their futures and the kind of threat of unemployment that is ever hovering over their heads. They fear what Shor and Freire (1987) describe as "the predatory job market." This is not to be interpreted as that students should not concern themselves with the market value of their courses. What alternative do they have because it is the market value and the technical skills they acquire that make them survive? (Shor and Freire, 1987). The question that remains with us is whether students have adequate and sufficient knowledge about the labour market that can guide them in doing the important choices for future careers.

7.2 Parental Wisdom and Trust

“Next to the primary unit of the family, formalised and informal processes of education are powerful intergenerational and therefore historical instruments of socialising the youth for their role in sustaining human communities through time. Every independent society (including some that are barely autonomous) creates institutions of socialisation that ideally reinforce, complement and complete the process of nurturing and training that started in the family” (Keto, 1990, p.19).

Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, African families had institutions and processes that prepared children and the youth to play a part in the affairs of the community. It was indeed this education that included instructions in manners, roles, responsibilities, values and history that prepared men and women for life in society. In the words of Keto (1990, p20): “People from a later time may not agree with the roles assigned to people by this system, but it did not socialise them for alienation. This educational process also changed with time - it was modified in order to (1) achieve social objectives of high priority; and (2) come to terms with internal societal changes and external demands triggered by the presence of the European immigrants (invaders) who had their own interests, needs and social objectives.” Therefore, the idea of education in the broad sense of the word has always been with the Africans.

Societies have always had persons and institutions that play a role in the education of their children. The role of parents, among others, in the education² and development of their children has always been profound. It has always been to prepare their children

² The concept is used in its broadest to include non-western education and is informed by Rodney's (1974; 1981) conception of education. It refers to a system that is designed to promote the most rational use of material and social resources. It is a system that is designed to give young people confidence and pride as members of their society. It is also partly informed by the National Society for the Study of Education's definition of education: “Education is the organized development and equipment of all the powers of a human being, moral, intellectual, and physical, by and for their individual and social uses, directed toward the union of these activities with their creator as the final end....” (Brubcher, 1969).

for life in the schools, workplace, and the larger society. This role persists even today. In this study, an overwhelming majority of the respondents reported that their parents guided them. Parents are seen by the respondents as important and a positive factor. Parents also played a role in the life of their children as demonstrated by the expressed perception that parents gave the respondents ideas of what they can do with their lives. The assistance that parents gave to the respondents was not limited to ideas and guidance, they were also perceived as “a help when it comes to education.”

Although reported by a small minority of the respondents, problems connected with the parents' capacity to assist their children with their academic work is a matter worth considering. Moltano (1984), and Cross and Chisholm (1990) discuss the development of African schooling in South Africa. The majority of those who are parents today are without the formal Western education essential for assisting their children's academic work and development. This again reduces their ability to assist their children with contents of school work. The knowledge they have about schooling, school work and career options that are available in the modern world tends to adversely affect the extent to which they can be of assistance to their children. This does not suggest that parents do not take an interest in the education of their children. In fact the opposite is true from the literature of parents' involvement in the education of their children. Lodge (1991) discusses the interests that African parents have had in the education and development of their children which predated opposition to Bantu Education. If it is anything to go by, the parents' school boycotts of 1944 in Brakpan and in the Eastern Cape and East Rand townships in 1955 is but a reflection that parents had an interest in the education of their children. Even at a stage when education was made inaccessible and unaffordable to the African majority, parents made sacrifices in terms of funding the education of their children (Moltano, 1984). That parents play an important role in the lives of their children is indisputable, as demonstrated by the results of this study.

A brief description of the background of education for Africans will assist in putting the issue of parents' capacity to assist their children in a proper perspective. Education in South Africa, from the days of colonialism to the introduction of Bantu Education, was made inaccessible and unaffordable to Africans. The mode of production operant earlier did not necessitate mass schooling for Africans, even worse they did not require "skilled and tutored" African labour. When provided, education was to enable the settler colonial and capitalist system to have an abundant supply of labour. As Christie and Collins (1994, p.167) put it: "For those blacks who did attend schools, the overtly ideological dimensions of schooling were aimed specifically at the reproduction of the sort of workers demanded by the capitalist system. As regard skills, schooling was geared to instruction in basic communication, literacy and numeracy. Familiarity with one of the official languages, English or Afrikaans - the languages of the employers - was an important part of the curriculum. As well as this, schooling for blacks was based overtly on religious and moral training, with values such as cleanliness, punctuality, honesty, respect, courtesy, etc. being explicitly articulated as aims of the system."

Even with the kind of education provided then, there was some reluctance and resistance to provide Africans with education. As far back as 1936, the Welsh Commission, which was established to investigate whether or not the state should assume responsibility for the financing and administration of black education, reported as follows: "From the evidence before the Committee it seems clear that there still exists opposition to the education of the Native on the grounds that (a) it makes him lazy and unfit for manual work; (b) it makes him 'cheeky' and less docile as a servant; and (c) it estranges him from his own people and often leads him to despise his own culture" (In Christie and Collins, 1984, p.168).

Academic education was not to be given to the natives as shown by the following statement made by the White Nationalist politicians prior to the introduction of Bantu

Education: "We should not give the natives an academic education, as some people are prone to do. If we do this we shall later be burdened with a number of academically trained Europeans and non-Europeans, and who is going to do the manual labour in the country? ... I am in thorough agreement with the view that we should so conduct our schools that the native who attends those schools will know that to a great extent he must be a labourer in the country" (In Christie and Collins, 1984, p.176).

It is within the above context that students' perceptions that their parents had a limited capacity to assist them with their academic work should be understood. Perhaps the perception is reinforced by the fact that formal Western education does not build on the traditional institutions of Africa. The knowledge that the parents had may have been perceived as of little significance because there appears to be no relationship between what parents know and what is in the educational and career interests of students of to-day.

The lack of Western education that the majority of parents are without has not deterred them from playing positive roles and assisting their children to advance their education. Parents have not abdicated their responsibilities and duties to their children. This is evident from the perceptions expressed by the respondents regarding the role that parents played in their development in general and education in particular. They assist their children with ideas and material things essential for their development. Specifically, almost half of the respondents perceived their parents' role positively because their parents supported and encouraged them to come to school and work hard because education ensures a better life and prepares one for the challenges ahead. Additionally, almost half reported that parents assisted them financially. However, only 2% stated that their parents checked their work.

The results of the present indicate that despite Africans forming the bottom stratum of the socio-economic ladder of the South African society, the students' parents have

made financial sacrifices to assist their children. Parents' financial involvement is essential for university education, especially when student loans and bursaries are limited or almost non-existent, as they are at the Historically African Universities.

However, the findings indicate that parents', to a very limited degree assistance include assisting their children with their academic work. The reasons as mentioned can be several. Other than the fact that the University of the North is a residential university which might limit contact between parents and their children (students) largely to vacations and holidays, the majority of the respondents' parents were less likely to have had the academic education and training that they so dearly wanted for their children. This is in line with the perception expressed by some of the respondents that "parents lack involvement, knowledge and do not bother to ask about my performance." It is not surprising that some of the respondents reported that the parents also lacked knowledge about the performance of their children and interrupted and interfered with their school work such as by sending them elsewhere when they are studying. Thus the chances are that even the career choices for their children are not based on a complete picture of what the children are capable of doing, but rather on information available to the parents and friends about career options.

This does not negate the financial and other kinds of support that parents gave their children, but reflects that parents are incapacitated to give adequate advice and assistance essential for the academic/educational advancement of their children. What the parents wanted was education for their children - education that many of them never had the opportunity to go through. Also, the parents might not know what this education really implied for their children.

7.3 Mentoring

“Since time immemorial, societies have had built-in systems of guidance and counselling. Indeed, these two terms are synonymous and coterminous with the process of education. Education is a process where the young of the human species are guided and counselled towards maturity so that they can live full and satisfying lives in their communities, find their particular niches in society, and in due course contribute towards the development of that society. What is provided in schools, colleges and universities is only a small part of the education of the whole person. Much of what is provided does not constitute education at all, ... Education has to do with life, with striving after maturity, and physical, mental, social, psychological, spiritual and cultural development” (Ferron, 1990, p.1). Implicit in Ferron’s words is the idea that guidance and counselling, like education, should facilitate individual development so that he/she becomes a useful and full member of his/her society. It should enable members of the society to grow and develop as members of that society.

The preceding section should not suggest that the guidance and development of children rest solely with the parents. Rather, in addition to parents, the society has institutions entrusted with this responsibility. Among these institutions of the society, one notes peers, the extended family, educational institutions, and particularly the guidance and counselling teachers and departments, churches, as well as Assessment Centres. These are some of the institutions that could facilitate students’ development for a useful role in society. Guidance and counselling are important for assisting students to discover and realise their potential for development (Ferron, 1990).

It is also against the background provided by Ferron (1990) that one wonders about the quality of information the respondents had about career options. Ferron (1990) has stated that in South African black secondary schools career guidance and counselling services have not taken root. In most secondary schools, there have not been even

trained guidance and counselling teachers. Most universities in South Africa started giving serious thought to guidance and counselling of their students in the eighties. The University of the North is not an exception. However, counsellors at tertiary institutions are still battling to find their own feet. Only one third of the respondents reported that they consulted the Student Counselling Bureau. The majority of the respondents had not consulted the Counselling Centre because of their perceptions of the Centre.

Indeed, the Counselling Centre at the University of the North is understaffed when one looks at the staff-student ratio, which is 6: 14 000. The Centre may therefore not be in a position to service the student (and faculty). As Franks (1993, p.2) puts it: "... the counselling available at the University is not sufficient to meet the demand for the career guidance and counselling, let alone other services." Like the general problem of overcrowding in lecture-halls, which results in highly impersonal lectures, the problem of understaffing presents the Centre with a major problem of the quality of the services it renders.

The students' unawareness of the services of the Centre could possibly have resulted from the truancy of students at the beginning of the year. First entering students are supposed to attend the orientation program at the beginning of each academic year. It is during this period that they are supposed to learn about the Centre and the services it renders. However, the majority of them do not attend this important session aimed at helping them settle in. Further, it is not only during the part allocated to the Centre that participation is poor; the whole orientation program is not taken seriously by first entering students. This is particularly detrimental, as it is during the orientation period that they are supposed to be guided and assisted in managing the transition from secondary to tertiary education.

However, the majority of the respondents expressed a positive attitude towards the services rendered by the Student Counselling Centre. The respondents understood the duties of the Centre. Those who did consult the Centre reported that they did so when they had social problems, academic problems, and when they wanted information about careers and financial aid.

Universities cannot afford to ignore the significance of career guidance and counselling of students. They can only do so at their own peril and the students' disadvantage. This is more so in instances of institutions like the University of the North, which to large extent depend on government funding. The absence of guidance, counselling and academic support for students may result in loss of opportunity for students who drop out, loss of opportunity for those who make inappropriate course choice, loss of public funds because resources have been allocated to students who were leaving the course and/or the institution. Universities should support students because their failure to assist them means loss of revenue (Layer, 1995). Therefore, it should be a challenge to the University of the North to develop a more coherent guidance and support framework.

7.4 The Culture of Learning

The study revealed that almost half of the respondents expressed the perception that culture of learning did not exist at the University of the North. This should be of concern among the stakeholders because it suggests important obstacles to the academic excellence wished for and entertained in the mission statement of the University. Indeed, the general mood on campus, reflects the absence of serious thinking, debate and analysis. This sentiment expressed by Makhanya (1996) about the black intelligentsia is not without foundation. Lack of debate and analysis reflects the state of the art at the University of the North.

In the pilot study by Moalusi and Franks (1993(a)) even more of the students (53%) expressed the perception that a culture of learning did not exist at the University of the North. This difference in perceptions could be attributed to time difference between the two studies. The administration of the first questionnaire took place in 1993, during a relatively more volatile and turbulent period in South Africa. The environment was characterised by turbulence caused by, *inter alia*, disruptions of academic programs, boycotts and strikes, distrust and fear among students and faculty as evidenced by among others the withdrawal of lecturers from classes because they were perceived as “Academic Terrorists”. In addition to this the climate in the country was more volatile because the negotiations which were going on at the time were not promising to deliver a new order. The second questionnaire was administered at a relatively less volatile period because negotiations had made major milestones. In addition to this, it had become more possible for problems to be solved through more amicable methods.

The results of the present study indicate a slight, but positive development towards a culture of learning, but there is still a long way to go. The creation of a culture of learning is not only something to be talked up. It requires a concerted effort because it involves a multiplicity of factors. When the respondents were asked about perceived hindrances to a culture of learning at the University of the North, the answers revealed a plethora of factors that impinge on the teaching and learning processes, including both academic and non-academic. Nevertheless, all of them have the capacity to impede and disrupt the teaching and learning processes. To say that some are academic and others non-academic is not to ignore the interplay of these factors. For example, mass action and boycotts may be perceived as largely non-academic, but often have an academic origin.

According to the findings of the present study, there were many factors hindering a culture of learning. Apartheid and “Bantu Education”, students boycotts and mass

action, strikes by lecturers, overpoliticizing the institution and over-involvement in politics are factors that tend to impact negatively on the teaching and learning processes. These are some of the factors that continue to plague the University of the North and reflect the conflict that characterises the University. Though the number of strikes, boycotts and mass action by the students continue to decline, actions by the employees of the University seem to be on the increase. The problems that confronted the University of the North in the past still continue to persist.

The perception expressed by many of the respondents that the culture of learning does not exist at the University of the North is not without justification. For instance, the University of the North library is a university library with few available books and other facilities. Books are ordered every year by departments, but do not reach the shelves. What remains non-transparent and uncertain is whether they have been ordered at all or whether the processing takes years to complete. The University of the North library does not compare favourably with other universities' libraries. For a student enrolment of over 14 000 the library facilities are inadequate, both in terms of the physical space and other facilities such as books. The problem becomes more pronounced and conspicuous during examinations.

The students' perceptions of what they are taught, the lecturers' teaching mode and lack of class participation all combine and interact with other issues to adversely affect a learning and teaching environment. The issues perceived to affect a culture of learning pose a potential problem to the realisation of what is called academic excellence which greatly depends on both students' and faculty's academic development, perseverance, discipline, etc.

The knowledge that most of these issues are the legacy of apartheid does not assist us deal with the issues at a practical level because it hides the contributing causes that pose serious practical hindrances to the development of students and faculty. It is for

the University management, the students, staff and other stakeholders to realise that these issues have a debilitating effects on the functioning of the institution, particularly students and faculty in that they affect academic development.

The Rote Learning Tradition

A culture of learning and teaching has often been confounded with the presence of teachers and students in classrooms - teachers or lecturers depositing “objective” knowledge into students’ minds and students accepting what is taught and what they read in the textbook as universal and objective truth (the rote learning tradition). As Boggs (1974, p.69) has written: “It means accepting what is taught you as the “objective” or “gospel” or “immaculately conceived” truth which stares at you out of the pages of the textbook. [The textbook itself, of course, is by its very weight and format, organised to convey the impression of permanence and indubitability of Holy Scripture]. You then feed these truths back to the teacher (“the correct answer”), evading controversial questions which require thinking for yourself or taking a position. If you are willing to do this year after year, giving the “correct answers” on exam after exam, for as long as is necessary to satisfy the “guild” standard of the Establishment, you “have it made.” You have proved yourself a sheep as distinguished from the goats.”

Critical and pivotal in creating a culture of learning is the teaching mode because the former is also affected by the latter. The respondents identified lecturers’ teaching method as one of the factors that hinder a culture of learning. The rote learning tradition of schooling is part of the problem to be confronted. The results of the study indicated that the majority of the respondents do not favour this method of learning. As Franks (1993, p.1) puts it: “This was, possibly, worse under ‘Bantu Education’, although it is present in all South African schooling. Students are unfamiliar with teaching practices which attempt to handle the nuances of the subject through

discussion. In this regard students are afraid of the evaluation process because they do not know what is expected of them and do not have trust that they will be evaluated fairly. In addition, this creates difficulties in attempting to think creatively and laterally.”

This view is confirmed by the findings of the present study that the majority of the respondents favoured a discussion of the subject with the lecturer serving as a facilitator. The respondents’ concerns about this method were largely with the evaluation process which is reflected by one third of the respondents who expressed the perception that the evaluation of performance might be unfair and arbitrary in the discussion method.

The question of lecture versus a discussion method is not as simple as the above argument may sound. It is not a question of either or. The critical and pertinent question is whether the learning/teaching method challenges and disciplines the students’ minds rather than make them regurgitate what is taught and learnt from textbooks? It is important to ensure that a lecture or a discussion not only transfers knowledge from a lecturer to the students, or is what Freire (1972) calls “banking education” or “lecture-transfer” method. In Shor and Freire’s (1987, p.40) words: “You can still be critical while lecturing... A liberating teacher will illuminate reality even if he or she lectures. The question is the content and dynamism of the lecture, the approach to the object that is taken. Does it critically orient students to society? Does it animate their critical thinking or not?”

To further illuminate the argument of a lecture versus a discussion method, Shor and Freire (1987, p.40) ask the following eloquent questions: “How is it possible for you to provoke critical attention by speaking? How to develop a certain dynamism in the interior of your speech? How to have in your speech the instrument to unveil reality, to make it no longer opaque? Afterwards the class takes your very speech as an object

to be thought about.... You take your speech as a kind of oral codification of a problem, now to be decodified by the students and you.”

The observations made by Shor and Freire (1987) represent some of the fundamental problems with schooling. Rothstein (1991, p.6) also makes the following observation: "The teaching profession is portrayed as one which seeks to help children learn what they will need to know when they reach maturity. But its role in perpetuating the social relations of educational and economic production are seldom discussed or recognised by teachers or students." This trend is likely to continue and flourish in instances where the teacher and students would not “speak about the lecture as a verbal codification of reality, rather than as an oral transfer-of-knowledge from the teacher to the students, a problem solving illumination which criticises itself and challenges students’ thinking rather than a delivery system of pre-packaged information passed out verbally in the classroom” (Shor and Freire, 1987, p.40).

This is perhaps the most immaculate way of learning in that it assists students in learning how to learn (Boggs, 1974). This process ensures that students do not only become a warehouse of information and skills and consumers, but that they develop into reasoning human beings. Students learn more by assessing what they and others have done. This opportunity for active learning gives students an opportunity to comprehend; be creative and critical at the same time.

We cannot hope to create academic excellence if we do not tackle these learning and teaching challenges. We need conditions conducive for students participation, more interaction between the student and the teacher in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect.

Student-lecturer Relationship

Closely related to the method of teaching is the climate of fear among faculty and students. The findings of this study animate the fears of retribution that exist among students and faculty at the University of the North. The findings are in line with Franks' (1993, p.2) observation that "Faculty are clearly afraid of retribution from students. Faculty have been suspended at the request of students. Here, the slogans, 'Pass-one-pass-all' and 'Academic terrorism' intimate the state of play. In order to avoid retribution some faculty resort to just passing students...."

Fear of retribution does not only exist among faculty. Students also have fears that they will be failed by their teachers or lecturers, hence the perception expressed by some of the respondents that a better grade depends on how nice one is to one's lecturer. The perception that instructors or lecturers may victimise students may make it difficult for them to disagree with their lecturers. Students do not know how the lecturer is going to take the disagreement because there is seldom any serious discourse in the classroom.

The fear of retribution expressed by some of the respondents is a contribution to the perception that academic performance does not only depend on one's effort at studying. Even in the present study one fourth expressed the perception that a better grade depended on how nice one is to one's lecturer. Although a relatively small number, this perception requires due consideration because it indicates that fear of retribution still exists among students, that is, that lecturers may victimise them by failing them. There is still a long way to go to create an atmosphere of trust and co-operation.

University management, the government, staff and students, each has an important role to play in the creation of a culture of learning and the shaping of the University.

The government should understand and accept that Historically African Universities (HAU's) like the University of the North, have existed in a political environment which was hostile and in one way or the other denied or made it impossible for the university to operate on the level of other universities, especially Historically White Universities. It is for this reason that the government has to know that it has a special historical and a moral obligation to institutions like UNIN.

Pumping more money into HAU's is in itself not the solution to the problems that confront these institutions. "We need to realise from the beginning that education is not only about buildings, equipment, bureaucracies and governance. Education is about the emancipation of the mental universe of a people" (Moalusi and Franks, 1994(b)). Mehl (1990, p.387) says that "education has to do with the mind and the spirit of a human. Education relates to the interaction of a person with his/her environment, the interaction of one mind with another." Above all, education is about co-operation, building trust and a sense of working together with an increase of each other's capacity to deal with the nuances of academic, social, economic and political life.

Student Based Obstacles to a Culture of Learning

Students also reported about student based obstacles to a culture of learning. The majority of the respondents were positive about the relationship between themselves and their fellow students. This implies lending each other reading material, discussing course work material together, encouraging and advising each other to read hard, and go to the library, attending classes and asking questions as well as best wishes when tests are written.

These are positive elements of paramount importance to students, and assist students in dealing with the harsh realities of university education. It is for the other

stakeholders, especially the academic staff, to exploit these to nurture the atmosphere of co-operation and *esprit de corps* among students. This can for example be achieved by assigning students group projects, and other tasks, making it necessary for the students to work together.

The negative elements in students' relations could be explained by selfishness and lack of discipline. Perhaps Franks (1993, p.1) is correct in saying the breakdown in school and society "... has an enormous impact on the running of the University and of other academic processes. The ability of lecturers to sustain discipline is made very difficult..." The negative and self-centred aspects referred to above, include for instance demanding test dates that suit only a section of the students, and other behavioural traits disruptive of the learning process, such as making noise whilst the lecture is in progress, disrupting classes and stealing university property.

The disruption of classes was indeed a common phenomenon prior to April 1994. Coupled with the structural and legitimacy problems this was part of the culture of resistance that persisted at the time. Although this trend abated subsequent to April 1994, sporadic incidents of disruptions still take place. Management of the University has appeared wanting when it comes to problems between students and faculty. To echo the observation made by Franks (1993, p.2): "Faculty have been suspended at the request of students.... This illuminates another inextricably entwined concern as to the ability of the management of this University to handle conflict between students and faculty in an even handed manner."

The respondents also often expressed the perception that the stealing of University property was disturbing and adversely affecting the learning process. It is worth mentioning that the theft of University property continues even though the University has security personnel, and in addition has contracted a private security firm to assist in the prevention of theft. Thus this is still an unresolved problem.

The respondents raised issues that could contribute to creating and nurturing the learning environment, and to the development of students. These included students sharing experiences to support and assist each other as students, stop boycotting and disturbing classes, not to laugh at others when and if they make mistakes in class, and that students should consider lecturers as human beings to be treated as such. These issues have the capacity to improve the learning process because they facilitate participation and discourse essential for true learning in and outside class. The challenge that remains is how to make students more responsible for contributing to a more fruitful learning situation on campus.

Overcrowding and Understaffing

“One of the challenges facing institutions is how to organise educational programmes and support when student numbers are rising and the unit of resource is declining. This affects all institutions and places enormous pressure on academic staff. The normal consequence of increasing student numbers is that class sizes increase.... Such a scenario usually means that little attention has been paid to identifying different learning and support techniques.... The pressure of work through increased marking, trying to ensure that students are all involved in the learning process and ensuring that inadequate learning resources can be further stretched mean that the staff is less available to see students” (Layer, 1995, p.120).

Indeed, there is a glut of reasons for the rapid explosion in the demand for higher education as experienced in South Africa. This study does not aim at giving a comprehensive listing of the reasons for the increase in the demand for higher education. It more only attempts to provide plausible explanations for the overcrowding that continues to exist at the University of the North and how this impedes academic performance.

The overcrowding could be attributed to a host of factors. The 1980s saw a substantial increase in the number of matric graduates seeking admission at tertiary institutions of learning, particularly universities. South African education had to cope with the flood of students to tertiary institutions of learning, a situation that confronted some of the developed countries of the world decades ago. South African universities could not cope with the ever-increasing number of students passing matric. Tertiary institutions had to make choices between moral questions to admit more students (especially black students) and academic excellence often inhibited by overflowing lecture halls. Perhaps there has been an over-evaluation of academic education and an under-evaluation of other kinds of education.

No other South African tertiary institution of learning shouldered this responsibility to the same extent as the University of the North. The issue of overcrowding has to be understood in terms of its aftermath. Overcrowding tends to overstretch the limited resources and creates shortages such as in the case of the physical space, physical facilities and staff-student ratio, the availability of books at the library, etc. All these are inextricably intertwined with the pursuit of academic development.

The pressures put on the University of the North management by the student body finally resulted in the institution seeking to assist Black matriculants who could not find space in other institutions. Of course, there were considerations other than the moral ones. The subsidy system that adversely affected the financial position of the University, has persuaded the institution to consider this option. The University of the North was originally meant to accommodate six thousand students. With over 14 000 students, the University has more than doubled the number of students that it was meant to accommodate. There is not enough physical space to accommodate students in the lecture-halls. It is not uncommon for one to see students attending lectures from outside the lecture halls. The lecture halls are filled to capacity with students eager to learn, often seated on the floor.

Closely linked to the problem of lack of physical space has been the problem of understaffing. In addition to the student enrolment, most departments at the University of the North do not have the capacity to supervise postgraduate studies that the so-called junior faculty need to improve themselves and the quality of education at the institution. This should be considered within the context that the University of the North is bottom heavy with few lecturers with doctoral qualifications compared with most other South African universities.

The problems of understaffing and lack of appropriate or higher qualifications of the majority of faculty are not the only problems that present a hindrance to quality education. Low work morale is another problem. Indeed, it is not uncommon to see the major part of faculty leaving the institution for home or perhaps other places at midday. This is not to suggest that lecturers can do their academic work in their offices only. It is rather to say that the low or poor research output could be partly attributed to this factor. Neither does it overlook the contribution of lack of capacity among faculty to the low research output at the University of the North. The majority of the so-called senior faculty have been able to remain in their senior positions without delivering what one might expect from people employed at that level. An immediate example is the number of professors without doctoral qualifications, research publications and no experience of post-graduate students supervision, save for the honours level. This issue could probably be disentangled through realistic employment policies that take the unique circumstances of faculty at the University of the North into consideration. Staff development may also go a long way in alleviating the problem, especially if one looks at the present lack of possibilities for junior staff to gain academic merit or qualifications that they need.

The findings of this study also reveal that overcrowding in the residences was perceived to be a problem that hindered academic performance. The students

residences are overcrowded, sometimes with rooms designed for two occupants being converted into three and those meant for one being converted into two.

In this regard Garson (1996) made the following observation: “Given that Turfloop’s (the University of the North), 14 500 students literally cram into residence halls and classrooms designed for 6 000 students, that they crouch at the doors of lecture halls for lack of space inside, queue interminably for morning showers and have no entertainment facilities and nowhere else - except Pietersburg, 33 km away - to go to, one would imagine Turfloop, with its rough tradition for expression of a disillusioned young mass clamouring for a stake in higher education.”

7.5 The Role of the SRC

The SRC and students of the University have over the years played an active role in challenging the illegitimate government. The University of the North as an educational institution and a site of struggle was fiercely contested by the students. They never flinched when it came to the overall destiny of students. One can only look at the pivotal role they played in initiating transformation process at the University of the North. In fact, the transformation process was not the initiative of the University authorities; it was a student’s project. The SRC is still perceived by students as a relevant institution because it negotiates for the students to register provisionally and fight for the democratisation of the institution.

Some of the respondents regarded the SRC negatively because they were perceived as corrupt, only concerned about themselves and not treating all of the students fairly.

The perception that the then SRC was corrupt should also be looked at against the background of alarmingly weak financial control measures that were in place.

Although the perception of SRC members being corrupt could cover a variety of areas,

it is most likely that the majority of the students were referring to financial corruption. Some of the student leaders have on a number of occasions been accused of embezzling funds.

Not only did the respondents point out the negative things about the then SRC, some of the thoughts they had were constructive. Positive suggestions regarding what the SRC should concentrate on doing were also made by the respondents. They included some issues essential for the creation and nurturing of a learning and teaching environment. These were cultivating a culture of learning through seminars, debates and other academic activities, impartial representation of students, accountable use of funds and maintaining law and order.

The other processes governed by the constitution of the SRC need revision for the sole reason of creating an effective, efficient and accountable student government. The continuing decline in the polls during SRC elections should be a pointer to a decline not only in student politics, but also in faith and trust that the SRC can serve the interests of students and deliver. The role of the SRC could be made more effective with some training and/or education for the representatives of the SRC. The training could focus on issues such as negotiations, conflict resolution and effective representation, which includes accountability.

7.6 Changing the Society that Denies Human Development

The perception of the role of the state, the private sector and political parties and organisations should be understood within a historic context. First the relations between the former two and education, which (education) is an instrument for development, served the objectives of the minority. In other words, the state and the private sector could not facilitate access and opportunity of the African majority in the

same way that they facilitated that of the Whites. Therefore, education was not an equally effective tool for the development of the African majority. Africans did receive Western education because there was an inhuman need to miseducate and *ipso facto* arrest their development. It was supposed to fulfil specific objectives that would enable the state to have a specific kind of African labour. As Rothstein (1991, p.17) stated: "Because schooling is an instrument of political structures, its goals are necessarily those of the state. Its curriculum, pedagogies, and evaluation methods attempt to fulfil schooling's mandate: the reproduction of the labour force in capitalist production." This is understandable because the South African state existed for the benefit of the White minority. In this regard, Clarke (1991, p.55) points out: "... our former slave masters cannot afford to educate us. Powerful people never educate the victims of their power in how to take the power away from them." It is within this framework that we need to understand the perception that the respondents expressed with regard to the role of the state in their development.

An interesting aspect of the findings was that 92% of the respondents that expressed the perception that the respondents themselves were responsible for their own development. This belief is of tremendous importance for the purpose of facilitating development because it suggests that one of the conditions for development, namely, readiness for taking responsibility for their own development existed among the respondents.

The realisation that development begins with the individual taking the initiative is critical for it to be attainable, especially among those whose development had been distressed. Critical in this process is an understanding and acceptance that development, like "education is something that one does for oneself, assisted by the institutions" (Franks, 1993, p2).

Franks and Glass (1993) state: "In periods of transition as the old beliefs and value systems weaken, individuals are in a position to experience the exhilaration of freedom. At the outset this freedom is intoxicating and leads individuals to believe that they can do anything or achieve anything without effort, perseverance and application. However, this freedom is just freedom from this or that constraint, from one or another obligation and even from morality. The freedom is essentially negative and does not orientate the individual in the world nor does it point to the new, there is no sense of developing this freedom into the freedom to do things, to create, to express oneself and to build." It is this realisation that enables people to seize the moment and develop themselves.

The respondents also identified factors that hindered their development. The area within which UNIN is located was viewed by half of the respondents as a hindrance to their development. It is understandable that the location of the institution poses more of a hindrance for the respondents whose homes are located in urban settings because the University is located in a rural setting away from the modern horizon. Garson's (1996) description of the location of the institution as isolated from the major urban centres in a "dusty, out-of-the-way premises" is a concise one. However, the isolated location of the University of the North reflects the rural nature of the province. This issue is pursued in the recommendations section of this study.

Perhaps on the other hand, the location of the University of the North may be perceived by some as important for their development because it is removed from the hazards that go with urban centres.

The respondents also identified school boycott as a hindrance to their development. Prior to April 1994 boycotts were a common phenomenon in South African life. The students at the University of the North were not an exception. It was the policies of the

government of the day that led to boycotts and what is commonly referred to as over-involvement in politics.

Boycott has historically been a students' (and any people for that matter) weapon against what is perceived as undemocratic or unpopular decisions arrived at without consultation. It is also true that the school boycott was used as a tactic to show resentment to the inferior education that Africans were subjected to. Boycott of schooling was a means of bringing pressure to bear on the authorities so that students' grievances could be attended to. However, this protest action obviously has had serious costs for the African students in particular and the community in general in that it involves spending time away from school. This is not to suggest that learning only takes place in classrooms, because most of what has been going on there can be described as what Boggs (1974) calls miseducation. It is rather to echo Qwelane's (1996) sentiment that: "The intention was to buck the Nationalists' intransigence but, as so woefully happens with such tactics aiming to secure short-term gains ... the campaign backfired very badly. Class boycotts became something of a culture that has since proved a tough nut to crack.... That the tactic was a direct bastard child of the policy of Bantu Education is not in dispute, as equally without question is the fact that the child's destructive mode was at least as vicious as the father's."

Other related factors that hindered the development of the respondents were identified by the respondents as the socio-economic conditions that contributed to lack of financial assistance, the political situation in the country that precipitated most of the boycotts, student-lecturer relationship that was characterised by a degree of fear and mistrust as well as overcrowding. These issues are discussed elsewhere in this work.

The fundamental transformation of the society and educational institutions like the University of the North should assist in alleviating some of the problems. The issues perceived by the respondents to hinder their developments are indeed amenable to

change or transformation. The extent to which they are resolved will depend on the transformation of the society and of the University of the North because some of them are dependent on societal and institutional transformation.

Factors that assisted respondents' development were perceived to include the discipline and determination to succeed, discussions with fellow students, going to the library for references, attending workshops and seminars, friendly assistance from lecturers, partial involvement in politics and community involvement as well as interacting with other people and part-time jobs. These factors present the University with an immediate and direct challenge because most of them are within reach of students and faculty. It is opportunities like these that should be seized and utilised in improving the situation. This implies a special challenge to the academic staff who are in the best position to encourage students' involvement in these areas so as to facilitate their development.

CHAPTER 8

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding discussion section points at the monumental task facing the University of the North in its attempt to re-position itself for a more effective future role in the region and the country. Many of the situations that the University is in are the result of our past. However, we need to adopt and implement a proactive, coherent plan or vision to help us deal with this past without being trapped in it because we cannot eradicate it, only its effects can be eradicated. Piecemeal and reactive solutions to the problems are strategies and plans not worth considering further.

This section attempts to provide and illuminate some of the possible solutions to the task of ameliorating and correcting the problems that impact academic performance adversely. It contributes to finding solutions to the problems that continue to hinder the development of both students and faculty. We need practical and implementable strategies to facilitate the amelioration of these problems, even more so as we purport to be the pace-setters of transformation in tertiary institutions of learning. In this regard speeches should translate into plans, concrete and practical solutions. In this process, an objective assessment of the successes is essential. In our endeavours to reconstruct we should evaluate our efforts on whether they empower students and faculty. We should evaluate the following recommendations in the same light - whether they allay or alleviate the hindrances to academic performance or impede academic performance and development.

8.1 Academic Support and Life Skills Training

Universities have to make choices. Investment in a comprehensive access, guidance and support service and loss of revenue on the one hand and disservice to the country on the other. Institutions like the University of the North cannot afford these luxuries because they have to deal with the apartheid legacy to redress the previous discriminatory government funding. Layer (1995, p.118) observes that “the challenge facing institutions is to find a student support framework that creates the appropriate culture and mechanism for support. In order to achieve this the change needs to be seen positively by staff who must be assured that it is not about throwing away all that has been well developed in the past.”

The successful development and implementation of a student-oriented support framework requires commitment from senior management and academic staff to ensure that the policy is debated, agreed upon and supported. This will ensure that everybody is taken on board. Course teams could be useful in this process. We need massive training intervention programmes to facilitate the development of academic and life skills of our students. This initiative should aim at improving student life by empowering them to deal with problems. Layer (1995, p.112) explains an empowered student as one “who is equipped with the means to tackle the problem. Once we have empowered the students we will have a more questioning and demanding educational process.” The question to be dealt with is whether to attach such programmes to faculties or to a central Student Counselling Centre. The academic support programmes could be attached to individual faculties to make them more visible, accessible and less intimidating to students because of the enormous size of the centre. The academic staff has a more critical role to play in this process because it has more contact with students. Such a support programme should therefore be the responsibility of all involved in the teaching and education of the students. The

academic support and life skills training should infuse the following skills, guidance and counselling:

- Assessment
- Personal guidance and counselling
- Educational guidance and counselling
- Career guidance and counselling
- Time management that should include the importance of goal-setting and prioritising, and scheduling and planning that should in turn involve decisions about allocating study times to specific learning activities.
- Information processing and decision-making
- Test-taking
- Life skills and other extra mural activities

The envisaged training requires a centre well equipped in terms of personnel (including academic staff who are in contact with students) and facilities. We need to train students that time management is crucial for good academic performance. Time management teaches students that the allocation of study time to specific study activities and the skills with which they execute them determines the outcome of their performance, not the time spent studying. The programme should be heavy on goal achievement. The training should emphasise the importance of goal-setting in a task and belief in oneself.

Similarly, the newly established centre or the revitalised and revamped Student Counselling Centre could undertake the functions. Critical in this innovation is to clearly describe the duties, tasks and responsibilities of the institution. It is also essential to staff the institution with appropriately qualified persons.

The African student requires life skills that will enable him or her to survive the harsh realities of University education, life and the world of work - the world often loaded

against him or her. They need a fair deal - a kind of deal that will enable them to deal with the nuances of life and have control over their environment and not mechanical or technical solutions. They need people who are leaders, educators, etc., whose mission is to empower them to change their circumstances and the status quo without gaining personal or ideological control over them.

The University of the North needs proactive career guidance services that will ensure that the career choices that students make are informed ones. Layer (1995, p.118) points out that "if a student is given curriculum choice then that choice needs to be an informed choice." The counselling services of the University requires adequate staffing in such a way that it efficiently and effectively executes this long-ignored function or activity of assisting students about career information, subject choices for different possible careers, assessment of abilities for different career options, etc.

The major purpose of career guidance and counselling services (attached to faculties or a centralised centre, or both sharing the responsibility) would be to facilitate the academic development of students and their readiness for the world of work. The alumni of the University of the North have an important role to play in this regard, especially about preparedness for the world of work. The alumni should register with the University to provide informational interviews and guidance to the University's students. The students should discuss their career interests with the staff of the centre. The staff will in turn, make arrangements with students so that they are able to meet the alumni to provide guidance. In this regard we need prescribed guidelines for the guidance to make it more effective for the students and the alumni. This makes it possible for students to know among other things answers to questions such as: What careers are available within the degree that I am following? What is it that I can do and what are the consequences of my choice? What information about myself do I need to make a career decision? What information about an occupation, an industry and/or an organisation do I need to make a career decision?

The preceding questions are problematic issues that students have to deal with long before they leave the University of the North.

Perhaps the following areas could form the core of the responsibilities, duties and tasks of the Centre:

- Career information
- Subject choices for different possible careers
- Assessment of abilities for different career options
- Informational interviewing
- Identifying sources of employment - utilising the sources of recruitment used by employers.
- Employment interviewing to inculcate skills essential for good performance in an employment interview, for example the significance of knowing oneself, the job and the organisation.
- Effective cover letter and resume writing skills
- Making a fresh start at work
- Assessment of values, skills, aptitudes and interests

We need to establish guidance and counselling services that will help the institution realise these functions. This should not be another attempt to build empires and power blocks. A revamped and specialised Student Counselling Centre could undertake these functions. Properly executed, these activities may not only reveal a strategy for academic development of students but also a source of revenue for the University because their subsidy also depends on their output. This may also reduce loss of public funds. We should ensure that the centre or institutions entrusted with this responsibility is well advertised so that students know about it and find it useful to utilise.

8.2 The Need for a Revamped and Rejuvenated Counselling Centre

The preceding discussions illuminate the need for the restructuring of the Student Counselling Centre if it is to perform its functions adequately. Clearly the centre does not have the capacity to cater for a large student enrolment. There have not been systematic efforts to close the gap between secondary and university education, even after realising and talking about it over the years. Instead the gap is increasingly becoming a bulge because of the increase in student enrolment. Suitable staff procurement did not simultaneously occur. This is imperative if the centre's role is to transcend its current one. It should play a more active role in assisting students with skills that enable them to survive way beyond their student days. The role of the Centre in career guidance and counselling should transcend the annual careers' week.

Career guidance and counselling relate very closely to academic and life skills training. The findings of the study indicated that only a small percentage of the respondents consulted the Centre. Intimately related to this is the fact that career guidance and counselling are conspicuously absent in African secondary schools. Therefore, the vast majority of the students of the University of the North are from backgrounds that suggested that career guidance and counselling are not familiar practices. In this regard we need to make efforts to bring career guidance and counselling and its significance to the attention of students - both its duties and how it can assist students. We need to search for mechanisms that can help in enforcing attendance of the orientation programme by first entering students.

Also noteworthy is to carefully screen students who serve as advisors so that they have something to contribute in assisting other students. To facilitate this, faculty should make an input in choosing student advisors. This may contribute in changing the perception that the centre is inefficient and practices favouritism. Lastly, we could review the name of the centre because it influences the decisions to use its services. As

Brown and Chambers (1986, pp.155-158) discovered, what is in a name often matters to people seeking help because it determines the likelihood that they would utilise the services offered by the centre. The name could be changed to Career Services Centre - Guidance and Counselling because the current name (Student Counselling Centre) may suggest that only students with personal problems may consult the centre.

We need to procure more qualified personnel to enhance quality of services offered. This includes the centre becoming more specialised in the services it renders. The other approach could be to attach the programmes to faculties and procure suitably trained staff. The academic staff could be empowered to play a role through training in the envisaged areas.

8.3 Other Institutions to be Involved in Guidance and Counselling

The University of the North alone cannot cope with the backlog in career guidance and counselling. Effective use of institutions of the society should carry the bulk of the work so that education, training and guidance take place long before students come to university. Surely the government, assessment centres, churches, parents, and other institutions have a pivotal role to play. Other than “educational institutions”, we need to involve these institutions and people in the educating and counselling of the young ones. We need more than “educational institutions” for individual development because education “has to do with life, with striving after maturity, and physical, mental, social, psychological, spiritual and cultural development” (Ferron, 1990, p.1). Parents, teachers and others involved should facilitate decision-making about career options and not make career choices for their children. The process should be more a matter of negotiation with, and advice to children.

The government should also identify its role in this regard. The employment of guidance and counselling teachers at secondary schools should be one of the priorities of the government because they could help alleviate the problem. We need to bring to the attention of people career guidance and assessment centres to facilitate the process of awareness and access to different career options.

8.4 Reconstructing a Culture of Learning and Academic Excellence

Student counselling, guidance and support services are a necessary but not sufficient condition for academic development. Institutions entrusted with the responsibility of counselling, guidance and academic support may operate on the student-oriented framework of empowering students so that they can tackle academic and non-academic problems that confront them. Such institutions also rely on the existence or lack of culture of learning.

We need to redefine the concept culture of learning so that this is relevant and operational within the context outlined elsewhere in the recommendations of this study. This may render education more susceptible to evaluation in terms of its usefulness to the society. Students who are often objects manipulated by forces they cannot see or comprehend in turn can become subjects and learn more about themselves and the system that veils the ideology of schooling. Discourse in the classroom can help reveal the dialectical, antagonistic contradictions that exist in society. This will in turn contribute in the transformation of society and its institutions.

In our endeavours to energise and vitalise the long wished for culture of learning, we have to re-evaluate the current mode of teaching with a view to developing and implementing appropriate ones. We should move away from the rote learning tradition and use methods that enable students to handle the nuances of their subjects and life

through discussion. We need to increase creative and innovative thinking among students. Miracles do not happen to create such capacities. Attempts to honestly deal with questions similar to those posed by Shor and Freire (1987) referred to previously require honest approaches and answers.

The successful reconstruction of the culture of learning does not solely rest with the teaching method. A pivotal ingredient of the culture of learning is the lecturers and students' attitudes towards the learning process and each other. We need to desist from practices that debilitate our capacity to truly reconstruct and nurture the learning environment. Critical, innovative and creative thinking is the *sine qua non* of a truly nurtured learning environment. The extent to which we succeed in our endeavours to create and nurture the learning environment depends on how far we have changed our attitudes towards each other and towards learning. Critical thinking, innovativeness and creativity affect our ability to truly reconstruct our society and institutions.

In our endeavours to create and nourish the culture of learning and academic development, we must debate and analyse what we mean by these concepts. We must clearly explain what quality education or academic excellence means in our context. In this way, we shall guard against importing notions of academic excellence as seen in Western countries and without a context that make them meaningful. Our cultural environment should inform our definition of academic excellence and quality education.

8.4.1 Students' role in ensuring a culture of learning

Students also have the responsibility for ensuring the existence of a culture of learning by among other things focusing on the following:

- Student-based research projects and problem-based learning could become important aspects in the creation of the culture of learning.
- They should not involve themselves in activities and campaigns that debilitate their capacity to truly transform our institutions and society.
- They should realise the power of education and commit themselves to learning.
- They should not disturb or interrupt the learning process such as by making noise in class, laughing at their colleagues when they attempt to answer questions and should actively participate in class to ensure dialogue and discourse, and the end of a predominantly rote tradition of learning.

8.4.2 The role of the University community in creating a learning environment

The University community should also identify its role in the process of transforming and creating conditions conducive to academic development. The following are some of the areas that could be focused on:

Improving the facilities

- Library facilities should be increased and upgraded
- More group and seminar rooms should be built
- More halls of residence and lecture-halls should be built

Improve management and administrative routines

- The University community should work together
- Consult, democratise and agree on rules of the university
- Improve management routines because they limit the teaching capacity of the academic staff

Initiate and organise more educational facilities

- Symposia and seminars should be organised
- Bursaries should be used as incentives
- The University community should discuss the relevance of learning with students

- Should create more opportunities for development of projects and centres
- Encourage study groups
- Encourage lecturers and students to change their attitudes towards each other
- Employ more qualified lecturers
- Increase work morale
- Limit admissions in accordance with needs
- Redesign curricula

8.4.3 The role of the academic staff in improving the learning environment

The academic staff can make an important contribution in creating conditions conducive for academic development and assist students in their academic tasks. Some of the activities that can assist students and the University are:

- Help, support, guide students in their studies and treat them equally and be patient with them
- Offer students better and quality education by introducing problem solving teaching, seminars, practical material, involve students in research projects and publications, and discourage the rote learning tradition
- Help students prepare themselves better for the exams and avail themselves when students need them for consultation

8.5 Re-evaluating and Developing Appropriate Curricula

We need to re-evaluate and develop appropriate flexible curricula and course content involving stronger practical orientation. The University of the North urgently needs an institution wide re-evaluation of curricula, course work, and lecturers and students to deal with programmes that have been in place for decades without evaluation. We need

inclusive curriculum and programme planners to work with course teams with sufficient involvement of academic staff on such teams. Over and above developing curricula, such teams could develop a guidance framework that fits a flexible curricula.

Broad and flexible curriculum teams that involve academic staff who have the strength of knowing the situation on the ground may be critical for such a change process. The inclusion of members of the faculty, students, professionals, practitioners and other stakeholders may reduce opposition to change. Layer (1995) notes that opposition to curriculum change and flexibility happens because departments may perceive it as interference and a threat to their power base. Often arguments against curriculum flexibility is presented “in terms of educational coherence, what the profession want and the student demand. They will ignore the argument that the current model may fit today, but does it address the needs of tomorrow’s educational demands?” (Layer, 1995, p.118).

Although some staff may oppose such change, they become the people who will deliver the real change because they are arguing the case on the basis of their experiences and the situation on the ground. In this way, what Layer (1995) refers to as the earlier protagonists become the agents for change.

Quality enhancement and the competitive urge require that we look at the relevance and appropriateness of the programmes in the present day South Africa. Relevant professional bodies and practitioners could facilitate the process and assist departments or schools with development for accreditation and quality enhancement. Quality control should form part of the process. This means that the University should put mechanisms in place for maintaining and enhancing the quality of the services it renders. Quality audits could also be done by external scrutiny to guarantee that the University has suitable quality control mechanisms in place. The University also needs

quality assessment that involves external review of the quality of teaching and learning” in the institution.

We need curricula that will provide the appropriate value systems consistent with the changing world of work. The curricula should afford our students the opportunity to develop self-insight in relation to their talents - an education that will lessen the “reality shock” experienced by our students. To this end a practically oriented new curriculum is essential. We need to enlist the help and support of outside institutions through linkages to facilitate the development of students and faculty through internships and practical work. This assists in bridging the gap between the world of work and schooling.

8.6 Dealing with the Problems of Overcrowding and Understaffing

We need to sensitise students and other stakeholders of the implications of overcrowding. Quality education is impossible in overcrowded and *ipso facto* impersonal lecture-halls. This has implications for the ability of lecturers to pursue scholarship and research required from university faculty. It also makes it difficult for lecturers to set essay or discussion questions even where such questions are a more effective way of evaluating students.

Overcrowding in residences needs thorough consideration. In this regard, we need to ask ourselves questions as to whether the students are receiving a fair deal in education. We need to answer these questions in an honest and fair way. Obviously the conditions in the residences are not conducive for studying purposes simply because the physical space is not sufficient. The physical space at the library and elsewhere on campus is not sufficient to accommodate them for study purposes.

Overcrowding and overflowing lecture-halls has further implications in that it impedes the ability of faculty to improve themselves because at the University of the North the lower the rank the more the work load. We therefore have to improve the work situation of the academic staff by scrupulously reducing student enrolment and/or increasing staff. The work situation of academic staff is likely to remain impoverished if we do not address the situation urgently. The much talked about evaluation of the academic staff will not contribute to the envisioned academic development because it is likely to focus on issues that have very little to do with staff development to improve faculty's qualification and capacity. We therefore need to take into consideration this truth about university education and academic development.

The University of the North needs to look at its employment policies so that fair and equitable policies to redress the past are in place. The employment policies should take into account the unique circumstances that prevail at the University of the North. This should include opportunities for faculty to improve themselves so that one does not have to work for more than thirty years to qualify for a three year study leave. People who have been long in the system with personal and family responsibilities and are caught in the situation because they do not have sufficient leave days should be assisted in terms of their responsibilities by way of paid study leave. The University could provide faculty members who have worked for a period of two years a study leave with full pay so that upon completion the person works for the University for a pre-specified period as per policy. The University has moved in this regard, but needs to develop policies to formalise and regulate the practice. This will assist the University in terms of having appropriately qualified personnel.

The University should develop policies that regulate the teaching load for Master/Doctoral studies candidates. On the same breath, the so-called senior staff with no post-graduate supervision duties should carry a greater teaching load. These should

be matters of policy and the University should not leave newly appointed staff or the so-called junior staff at the mercy of heads of departments.

Improving management and administrative routines could make less burdensome some of the administrative routines that limit the teaching capacity of faculty. A better administrative support system could circumvent the problem of understaffing and academic staff overworked with administrative responsibilities. Such administrative support system should be established within departments.

The improvement of administrative routines should also mean that information and other resources essential for academic development should be made available to staff for consideration.

The problems of overcrowding and understaffing could through these suggested strategies be dealt with to create and nurture the environment conducive to academic development. The involvement of student in tutorial programmes whereby large classes are broken into small manageable groups could assist in ameliorating the situation.

8.7 The Choice of a University Education must be an Informed One

Making university education affordable does not mean allowing everybody access to tertiary institutions of learning. It does not mean that there must be free tertiary education. Rather, it means that we must be sensitive to the socio-economic imbalances that exist among the majority of the population. We need to take into account the fact that the majority of the students come from the background that forms the bottom stratum of the South African socio-economic ladder. We therefore need a national bursary or loan scheme that will assist students financially. Future plans on higher education need to take this simple fact into consideration. Massive bursary and

loan schemes to assist those who cannot afford could assist in circumventing the problem of access and affordability.

Making university or tertiary education accessible also means exposing all people to career guidance and counselling so that they know the career options available in the modern world. Students need to have a realistic evaluation and alternative career possibilities to ensure that they can make realistic and informed career choices. This implies that students should be exposed to career guidance at secondary school to ensure that those who come to university are better prepared for university education and are in the relevant place.

Access to education at the University of the North could mean rationalisation by way of increasing the number of academic staff and identifying the areas of study that are most needed by the society. This requires planning on the part of the institution to identify those areas crucial to the developmental needs of the society.

8.8 The Need for a Transformative Leadership

Significant to the whole process is that we should not ignore and evade the broader socio-economic, political and historical context within which the University of the North exists. We run the risk of not empowering those that past educational endeavours and policies failed if we ignore the above context.

The University of the North, more than ever before, needs pro-transformation and transformative leadership. More importantly it needs leadership possessing what

Asante (1988) refers to as consciousness towards oppression and consciousness towards victory.

Consciousness towards oppression would include recognition of the problems that continue to hinder academic performance at the University of the North and the predicament that the institution is facing. Consciousness towards victory would mean knowing how to get out of the predicament or quagmire that continues to paralyse the University and hinder academic performance. Consciousness, vision and commitment are critical and essential aspects required for dealing with the practical problems that hinder academic performance at the University of the North. These aspects are critical for top management, but are generally important for all people.

Transformation of any institution requires a transformative leadership because the leaders are the drivers of the transformation process. Transformational leadership involves alteration in the beliefs, values and needs of the followers. It enables leaders to cope with change by employing innovation and entrepreneurship. Peter Drucker (1985) explains innovation and entrepreneurship as economic and social rather than technical terms that relate to the strategic positioning of an organisation in a changing and competitive world. Innovation is the instrument of entrepreneurship which involves mobilising the resources (including human resources) for allocation to areas of higher productivity and greater yield. Several peculiarities and attributes distinguish transformational leaders. According to Tichy and Devanna (1986, pp.30-32) transformational leaders share the following features:

- They identify themselves as change agents
- They believe in people
- They are value-driven
- They are courageous
- They are lifelong learners

- They have the ability to deal with the complexity of the situation, ambiguity and uncertainty
- They are visionaries

Transformational leaders do not operate in a vacuum. They transform and assist in establishing the value system of the institution. They set the stage for the organisation's ideology and culture (Hunsaker and Cook, 1986). The University of the North needs transformational leadership that will provide and develop the correct values or culture on the stakeholders of the institution. This enables leadership to have the same notion of a transformed institution with stakeholders because they share common values and culture.

Asante (1988) explains five levels of awareness that help us to capture the true sense of our souls leading to transformation. These levels represent what one may refer to as the essentials for fundamental transformation, both at the individual and organisation level.

Asante (1988) refers to the first level as skin recognition. This would include recognition of one's skin colour, that he or she is born black or his or her heritage is black. However, skin recognition does not go beyond recognition of one's heritage or skin colour and it does not inform one what it means to have a particular heritage or skin colour. It does not inform one what it means to be a student or staff at a Historically African University. The first level of awareness, skin recognition, is only secondarily related to Afrocentricity. A person cannot grasp any reality beyond recognising his or her heritage.

Environmental recognition is the second level of awareness that can help us capture the true sense of our souls. It involves explaining certain things through one's heritage or colour. One is in a position to explain that he or she experienced problems similar to

those discussed in this study because of the colour of his or her skin. In short, one develops an awareness of what it means to study or work at a Historically African University.

According to Asante (1988, p.50) "personality awareness ... occurs when the brother or sister only talks black, dances black, and eats black, but does not think black." The interest concern level involves having interest and concern in the issues that impact on the lives of blacks and writing about blacks as well as doing other worthy things for the cause of blacks. Thus, personality awareness is not the monopoly of blacks. It is when one has interest and concern about issues that impact academic performance at UNIN but does not have total commitment and faith in the future of the institution.

The highest level of transformation is Afrocentric awareness, according to Asante (1988). It refers to "total commitment to African liberation anywhere and everywhere by a consistent determined effort to repair any psychic, economic, or physical or cultural damage done to Africans. It is further a pro-active statement of the faith we hold in the future of African itself" (Asante, 1988, p.50).

What does this have to do with the topic of the study? Everything, including the need for leadership with proper values consistent with the collective will that enable them to put issues in their proper perspective so that they assist in creating the kind of institution accountable to the community and that will serve the needs of the community.

8.9 Politicians' Role in Ensuring Academic Development

The politicians, as representatives of the people charged with the facilitation of the transformation of the society and its institutions, and as role models have a

responsibility for ensuring the academic development. Some of the contributions they could make in ensuring this are:

- As leaders and role models, they should encourage students to learn by indicating to them the significance of education that could assist in redressing the repressive socio-economic imbalances that characterise our society.
- They should increase funding of education, especially to Historically African Universities and to students from disadvantaged communities through financial assistance.
- They should consult other stakeholders in transforming educational institutions.
- They should do more to stop violence in educational institutions.
- They should enrol their children in our schools.

8.10 Transformation of the Society and its Institutions

To transform the society and its institutions we need to maximise the utilisation of virtuous and worthy institutions of the society for the critical role of socialising, nurturing and training of the younger ones for an effective role. We need aggressive methods of channelling and facilitating the development of members of the community through institutions of the society.

The black intellectual laziness characterised by refusal of the black intelligentsia to debate policy issues or make inputs in policy formulation warrants serious attention if we are to avoid perpetual domination by and dependency on others (Makhanya, 1996).

The reason for this is simply that this truth about the Black intelligentsia equally applies to the University of the North. The transformation of our institutions may not bring about desired end results if we do not take an active part in the process.

Mphahlele (April 1994, p.128) recognises the need for repositioning ourselves when he

says that we should "assert our presence in the world of ideas, policy-making, management, scholarship, and free ourselves from the tyranny of the textbook."

Education should facilitate development. Presently, our education is only effective for reproducing graduates out of the community. As Mphahlele (April 1994, p.128) puts it: "We have been reduced to a nation of consumers for so long that the majority of us have come to accept that we must produce labour and little else."

8.11 Development Oriented Research to Lessen Disharmony

The findings of this study illustrate the need for further research in this area, specially research whose focal point is development of students and faculty. Clearly there is a dire need for us to undertake research whose major thrust is the facilitation of development of those whose developments was contorted and distressed by years of discrimination. We need to shift from the kind of research that focuses on the past without providing for future development. It is the present and the future that should engage us and dominate research in education and the social sciences so as to efface the purported damage wrought by Bantu Education. While we censure, we also in our research should propose viable practical strategies and concrete actions that can lead to the lessening of disharmony, misunderstanding and suffering.

Kallaway (1984) points out the status quo in research in education in general and Black education in particular. This does not overlook the immense academic enquiry entailed in among others, the work of scholars like Nkomo (1991), Millar, Raynham and Schaffer (1991), and others. It is merely to echo the sentiment of Kallaway (1984, p.4) that there has not been enough independent research into education; "there has been almost exclusively descriptive and empiricist" research in South African Black education. Liberal writers on the history of education in South Africa have tended to

take policy statements and statements of intent by politicians and officials at face value. For example, the citing of the notorious statements by Dr H.F. Verwoerd on the nature of Bantu Education have never been matched by a detailed research into the nature of the schooling system to ascertain whether these policy statements really did reflect the practice in the schools during the 1950's."

It is for this reason that this study echoes Alexander's (1991, p.276) proposal that future research should focus on "... how we ... accelerate the process of transformation by intervening in the dynamic reality of the present with a view to arriving at a general constellation in which the realisation of the desired goals will be possible." In this regard, surveys of students and faculty should be undertaken to capture the subtlety of the reality and the situation as experienced by students and faculty.

8.12 Consolidating Student Relations and Reconstructing the SRC

We need to consolidate good relations among students by among others assigning students tasks that require them to work as groups. The proposal on community involvement by groups of students working under the supervision of faculty can indeed go a long way in creating and consolidating co-operative relations among students.

Fellow students could assist by focusing on the following:

- They should not be selfish and should discuss and share experiences with other students
- They should assist in creating an atmosphere conducive for learning by actively participating in class and not laugh at colleagues when they ask questions in class
- They should resolve problems by way of negotiations first
- They should help the transformation process and not pursue sectional interests

The perceptions that the SRC is corrupt are a serious source of concern. We need to review the constitution of the SRC so that we address the corruption and sectarian representation expressed in the findings. Stronger financial control measures are essential for controlling SRC funds. The University should severely deal with members of the SRC, or any student or faculty for that matter, who defraud it.

The student government's structures and processes need restructuring so that the SRC functions as an accountable government of the student body. The establishment of students' parliament could form a forum for openly discussing and debating student related and other issues that impact on the lives of students. The SRC can also play a more positive role such as in the following:

- Assist in cultivating a culture of learning by among others organising academic activities such as seminars
- They should represent students impartially
- They should not embezzle students' funds
- They could assist in raising funds for financial assistance to students
- They should take a firm stand on safety and security
- They should assist in the admission of new students

Education and training for members of the SRC on aspects such as negotiations, conflict resolution effective representation (which includes accountability) may facilitate render the SRC more effective.

8.13 Dealing with the Students' Perceptions of the Future

The optimism expressed by the respondents with regard to the future is overwhelming. We need to assist students through institutions such as career centres, counselling and others. They need assistance so that they compete with students from other institutions

on an equal footing. This is not to suggest that they do not compete on an equal footing, rather that we should empower them by providing certain skills essential for survival in the world of work.

The sustenance of the optimism depends on the extent to which we succeed in transforming the society and its institutions. The racial favouritism observed in yesterday's South Africa is an unpalatable experience. Although favouritism will remain with us way beyond apartheid, it is likely to decline. The optimism expressed in the study was partially due to the negotiations that were going on in the country. The belief was that the negotiations will solve most of the problems facing the country at the time. The fundamental transformation of the society and its institutions may maintain the momentum. Students should be active agents in the transformation of institutions of the society, including after progressing beyond their stay at the University of the North.

CHAPTER 9

9. CONCLUSION

South Africa is going through a phenomenal social and political transformation process. In this milieu, the beleaguered University of the North should not only be committed to transformation, but should have an absolute and unblemished knowledge of the past and a vision for the future. The University has to go beyond talking transformation to actually developing and implementing the appropriate vision that maps out its future if it is to nurture and nourish the development of independent, innovative, creative and critical thinking among its students and staff. In this regard careful consideration should be given to among others, its organisational structure, staff development and the upgrading of its staff's qualifications, its syllabi content, methods of teaching and learning, and the academic support for its students so that they are better prepared to face the challenges of the changing South Africa.

To correct and improve the situation, we need to elicit the interest of students in the learning process. For too long students have not been active participants in the learning process. Rote learning tradition does not translate into practical, useful information that a student can apply. In real life situations, the information ceases to be useful. We need to create conditions within which development of students and faculty can be realised. Our focus should, therefore, be on building capacity because the quality of learning and teaching has been poor in African schools and the environment has not been conducive to any meaningful learning. Students simply go to class and write tests and examinations to pass. After the examination all the facts are forgotten. The concern is not empowerment and preparation for the real world of work and life.

The challenge of academic education in Historically African Universities is confounding and perplexing. The problems to be dealt with in such institutions are more abysmal and intricate. Unless the University of the North develops the capacity

to deal realistically with the problems that impede students' performance and academic development, our students will endure the debilitating effects of these problems way beyond apartheid. Perhaps what such institutions need is to put the purported prime beneficiaries of transformation, namely, the students at the centre of their thinking. We have to begin asking questions around our students and academic development, even when developing strategic plans for our institution: What should the University of the North be? Do the students of UNIN know what is available in terms of career options? Do they know what they can do and the consequences of their choice? What should the University of the North graduate be? What is the University doing to empower its students so that they compete on an equal footing with graduates from other institutions? Does the University have a plan to ensure academic development across the institution?

This study attempted to illuminate the issues that constrain academic performance and development by relying on the perceptions of the recipients of the services. In this way it attempted to give students a voice. However, the study does not claim to be a panacea for issues that adversely impact academic performance and development. If this study manages to inform the situation faced by students and raise more questions than answers about problems that impact academic performance and strategies for assisting students and faculty deal with such problems, then it shall have succeeded in its endeavours. The dialogue flowing from the findings of the study could also form an important yardstick for evaluating the contribution of this study in ameliorating the situation.

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