CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF MATURE POSTGRADUATE PART-TIME STUDENTS AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

The researcher wished to ascertain what challenges mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students faced. The research project focussed on the challenges faced by mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students, in particular those challenges concerning their higher education institution. The interview schedule questions were based on the main challenging domains as revealed in the literature review. The researcher also gave the students the opportunity to voice any other challenges/support that was not covered in the interview schedule. The interview schedule was used at the face-to-face interviews and e-mailed to students that were unable to have interviews.

The researcher used Qualitative Research Design so she could elicit verbal/written, descriptive accounts of students' experiences of challenges and support at their higher education institution.

The focus points allowed the researcher to gather much information with regard to the support the students got in the challenging domains namely; Home, Family, Work, Colleagues, Social, Financial, Institution and any Other Challenges/Support. The mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students felt they needed more support in various areas as well as from their institution of higher education.

The researcher's aim is to bring the challenging domains and findings to the attention of those concerned with student support and recommend some support measures that could be adopted. Further research topics were also put forward.

OPSOMMING

Dit was die navorser se wens om te bepaal watter uitdagings volwasse, deeltydse, nagraadse Meestersgraad studente in die gesig staar. Die navorsingsprojek het gefokus op die uitdagings wat ondervind word deur volwasse, deeltydse, nagraadse Meestersgraad studente veral uitdagings aangaande hoër opvoedkundige instellings. Die onderhoud skedule vrae is gebaseer op die hoof uitdagende areas soos getoon in die Literatuur Oorsig. Die navorser het ook die studente 'n geleentheid gegee om enige ander uitdagings of vorme van ondersteuning te noem wat nie in die onderhoud skedule gedek is nie. Die onderhoud skedule is gebruik in persoonlike onderhoude wat ook ge-epos is aan studente wat nie die onderhoude kon bywoon nie.

Daar is gebruik gemaak van Kwalitatiewe Navorsing sodat die navorser die nodige verbale/geskrewe, beskrywings van die studente se ervarings, uitdagings en ondersteuning by die hoër opvoedkundige instellings kon bestudeer.

Die fokuspunte het die navorser toegelaat om baie informasie met betrekking tot die ondersteuning wat studente gekry het in uitdagende areas bv. Huis, Familie, Werk, Kollegas, Sosiale, Finansiële, Instelling en enige ander uitdagings/ondersteuning te verkry. Die volwasse, deeltydse, nagraadse Meestergraad studente het gevoel dat hul meer ondersteuning benodig in verskeie areas sowel as van hul hoër opvoedkundige instelling.

Die navorser se doel is om uitdagende areas en bevindings onder die aandag van diegene betrokke in die ondersteuning van studente te bring, en sommige meganismes wat as ondersteuning kan bied aan te beveel. Verdere navorsingsonderwerpe is ook na vore gebring.

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INTRODUCTION

Scott, Burns and Cooney (1998:222) cite King that "adult students are characterised by a desire for personal development and to pursue topics of interest to them". When they discover a part-time course that suits them they are enthusiastic to start the course, but they are often not aware of the challenges they will encounter along the way.

The researcher was not fully aware of, or warned by the higher education institution (Department of Educational Psychology: Stellenbosch University), of the challenges one may face or what sacrifices one would make during this educational journey. She did not make a "critical reflection" of her situation "to make a realistic estimation of the difficulties" that she will need to overcome in pursuing part-time studies, as advised by Yum, Kember and Siaw (2005:316). They also mention the following about some higher education institutions: "In attracting adult students to enrol in part-time course there is a tension between making explicit the time demands and extolling the positive features of the programme so that potential students are not lost to similar offerings from other institutions". The researcher was prompted to find out whether mature, associate part-time Masters students had faced similar challenges. It is important for the readers to take note of the fact that the lack of support for part-time Masters students is a worldwide phenomenon and not just prevalent at the higher education institution at which the research took place.

During contact sessions some students had also voiced they were not coping with the course and they were not receiving adequate support at home, work or at the higher education institution. Investigating the experiences of mature students at a particular department could serve to make the higher education institution aware of as many of the challenges as possible so that some support could be made available to mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students.

For the purpose of the thesis the researcher will use the current legislative definition in South Africa for the mature student as one who is 23 years or older. Walter and Koetsier (2006) also made use of the constructive dimensions, which clarify the word adult/mature learner: carriers

of economic, family or community responsibilities which cause time constraints for mature, part-time, postgraduate Master students.

A literature review revealed that generally there was a need of support for mature, part-time, Masters students because of the myriad of challenges they faced. Lowe and Gayle (2007) wrote the challenges faced by part-time students have not been well researched and it is as if mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students are not taken into consideration. According to Merriam (2002), research is necessary to document the challenges faced by these students so that higher education institutions and other role players can understand their complicated lives and the effect challenging domains have on them.

According to Yum et al. (2005) higher education institutions should take cognisance of the fact that the mature part-time students not only face challenges when studying at their institution, but also in other domains e.g. home and work. Each higher education institution has its own unique ethos and will need to respond to its own challenges and devise unique solutions.

Walters (1997) cites Ricoeur that it is necessary to stimulate conversation on the topic so that higher education institutions can reflect more profoundly about the policy on Inclusive Education. Are they implementing lifelong learning? If they want to create a culture of lifelong learning, they should give as much support as they can to mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students to encourage Masters students to continue with their studies. The White Paper 6 (Republic of South Africa, 2001:16) on Inclusive Education and Training emphasizes "changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, curricula and the environment to meet the needs of all learners [and] an inclusive education and training system is organized so that the institution can provide various levels and kinds of support to learners" which includes learners of higher education institutions.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Not much literature on the research topic is available which indicates a knowledge gap. The researcher therefore thought that the research topic she had chosen would add to more knowledge of the topic.

What is suggested from the literature reviewed is that much research needs to be done to make the higher education institutions aware of the challenges faced and the support needed

by mature part-time Masters students (Kember, 1995 and Walters and Koetsier, 2006). The challenges are numerous and should be addressed through appropriate support so that the students may have a fair chance to complete their studies. The most salient of the challenging domains found in the literature review were: amount of time needed, conflicting commitments and the balancing of time and loyalty towards family, work and social and higher education institution obligations.

Each of the challenges and ways of support will now be dealt with briefly and serves merely as an introduction to the literature review in chapter two.

1.1.1 Time

Time was a challenge many students experienced and researchers contributed the following data on time. The younger students, especially those who had recently received their degrees, seemed to cope better (Lore and Tait, 2004).

Lore and Tait (2004) indicate many students complain they do not have enough time to study. They juggled their commitments to manage their studies. Their family commitments varied. Those with children at home found it harder to cope. Students said they would have enjoyed their studies, if they had had enough time to do it. They changed their previous pattern of living to make time for their studies and also found a suitable location in which to study. Many students completed their assignments when it was appropriate and convenient for them. Time is one of the challenges that could be addressed by students' department by structuring the course in such a manner that, for example, there was sufficient time to do assignments and revision for examinations.

It was not always easy to arrange a time to study. Some students worked in the mornings, at night, over weekends or during their holidays (Yum et al., 2005). There was clearly a need for the students to manage their time. If they did not have time management skills they had to get help to acquire them.

1.1.2 Work, family and social commitments

The following challenges namely work; family and social commitments and job/workplace were external factors which played a role in the amount of time the students were able to spend on assignments.

Researchers had the following to contribute to the understanding of the aforementioned challenges. The majority of the mature students in the study of Lowe and Gayle (2007) combined work, family and social commitments into their schedule. The normal student put in many hours a week to study. They felt burdened and there was often a clash of interests. Female students still spent additional time on household responsibilities and had a smaller amount of shared time i.e. time spent socializing (Lowe and Gayle, 2007). The students, according to Yum et al. (2005), needed to negotiate for time to study and ask for support with child help/care.

1.1.3   Jobs/workplace

Most students gave priority to their jobs as many employers expected them to continue being productive, even if the course they were doing was relevant to their workplace. Some employers expected the time spent at educational institutions to be made up. Mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students face the difficulty of conflicting loyalties between the place of employment and personal development (Yum et al., 2005).

They also felt their colleagues could be more supportive instead of demanding that work tasks should be completed. Many complained about a lack of social life and of letting things slip e.g. ties with family and friends as well as doing household chores. Something was given up in order to fit in the extra hours for studying. They often found that their social lives had disappeared into the background. Some employers are very supportive of studying and allow time off from work to study (Kember, 1999).

The researcher discovered that without the abovementioned people giving the necessary support and encouragement the students may not be able to have enough time and motivation to do well. The higher education institution may be advised not to expect the same amount of commitment in time and effort by mature, part-time Masters students because of the aforementioned commitments. Through positive feedback and understanding of the challenges the higher education institution may spirit mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students to complete their studies. The abovementioned challenges are linked with the ability to balance conflicting commitments.

1.1.4   Conflicting commitments

The balancing of conflicting commitments in order to alleviate stress was difficult. More part-time than full time students drop out from the courses because of the aforementioned problem (Kember and Leung, 2004). They identified three coping mechanisms namely sacrifice, support and negotiated arrangements that could be used across the challenging domains particularly the self, work, family and social life.

1.1.5   Institution

The researcher was interested in what challenges and support other researchers had become aware of in order to compare and add to the data collected by them. The following was concluded by other researchers.

Students found times for classes and the number of times they attended sometimes difficult to meet (Kember, 1999). They required help with time management, study skills and some training in academic writing (Yum et al., 2005, Walters &and Koetsier, 2006 and Kember and Leung 2006). The students had problems making contact with the lecturers (Kember, 1999). If lecturers gave them support they coped better. Some students wished that the higher education institutions had structured the courses in order for students to know what was expected of them: including when the various assignments were due so students could arrange and manage their time accordingly (Walters and Koetsier, 2006).

There is a need for higher education institutions to shift their ethos and realize that part-time students find the learning experience practically demanding. The learning experience challenges their self-concept and self-esteem (Yum et al., 2005). Some students expressed the concern that lecturers are not in tune with reality (Walters and Koetsier, 2006). Thomas (as cited in Merriam, 2002) emphasizes one should allow the students to bring their challenges with them into the lecture rooms and take heed of it. The higher education institution should accommodate the realities of students' lives.

1.1.6   Financial support

Financial support was a concern for many students. Lowe and Gayle (2007) concluded in their study a third of the part-time students did not get financial support and a quarter did not get domestic support, which caused extra stress. In many countries e.g. Scotland, England (Lowe and Gayle, 2007) and South Africa there is more financial support for full time students and

restricted financial support for part-time students. Many part-time students did not have enough money to employ someone to help them with their domestic chores.

Financial support needed to be researched by these students or the institution of higher education needed to publicize where one could seek financial help.

1.1.7 Support

Support may be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic support is the personal characteristics of the student and extrinsic support is who or what is supporting the student. The student should have a sense of achievement, personal satisfaction, a general love for learning, self-determination, a deep interest in the course and see an immediate benefit in the workplace: "not in terms of promotion or financial rewards but in having more confidence" (Lore and Tait, 2004:8). They also believe that inherent and external motivation and making use of one's aptitude and resources are important to the student's well being. The student should sustain his/her motivation if he/she has the extrinsic support: praise of his/her partner/wife/husband, his/her family, friends, employer, colleagues and of the higher education institution. If he/she does not receive support he/she may have feelings of guilt and conflict in respect of family relationships and the need to make sacrifices (Lore and Tait, 2004).

Yum et al. (2005:306) state that self-sacrifice is "something given up for the sake of study e.g. time or other activities are forgone". They call it a coping mechanism that operates across four domains: the self, work, family and social lives. The family and social domains require that the student give up more time. Family and friends were asked to provide the necessary support. Times were negotiated with the family when it was more suitable for the student to take part in family activities. The student had less time to spend socializing. Some students gave up socializing with their friends, which allowed them to cope with the work load. Yum et al. (2005) believe the students established a sense of belonging if they were able to negotiate e.g. what days/times lectures would take place and when assignments needed to be handed in. They felt less stress if they were able to negotiate a regular study routine and a place to study with their partner/spouse. A persistence to complete the course is linked to a sense of belonging when the student received the necessary support. The students who were able to negotiate with the different domains, be it partner/spouse, family, friends and work were more likely to complete their courses (Yum et al. 2005).

Yum et al. (2005:316) state that "universities and students themselves can have a much greater impact on completion 'of their courses', even for cases which might appear to have adverse backgrounds on enrolment". If support was not available at home and at work, the researcher thought that maybe if the higher education institution gave as much support as possible to students, they would fare better. The support needed by the student from the higher education institution should be brought to the attention of the relevant parties. One area which could be addressed by the institution is financial support.

According to Merriam (2002) the students should be able to draw up a suitable educational programme for themselves. If the students' context is not taken into consideration, how can the higher education institutions possibly give them ample support? How are some of the students able to cope with all the demands made upon them? Almost everything has to do with support.

A more detailed overview of the challenging domains and intrinsic and extrinsic support and coping mechanisms will be given in the literature review in Chapter 2.

There are no doubt other challenges that confront students and therefore there is a need for support by the higher education institutions they attend to continue to be lifelong learners.

1.2   RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIM

The research question for the study is as follows: What are the challenges and support needs of mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students at a higher education institution? The researcher wishes to uncover the many challenges that the mature, part-time Masters students have faced at the higher education institution. With the challenging domains in mind, she will recommend support the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch could implement and more research that can be done on the topic. Hill, Lomas and Mac Gregor (2003:19) say students "valued the institution support networks".

Secondary, the researcher hopes that by doing the research project, the people concerned with support at the institution of higher education will take note of challenges experienced by mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students, which they may have forgotten about or are not aware of.

1.3   WHY SUPPORT IS NEEDED

The researcher became aware that most of the research on the challenges students face and the support or lack of support they received was done overseas. Kember et al. (1999, 2004 & 2005) have done a great deal of research on coping mechanisms and a sense of belonging on part-time students. The research articles read by the researcher have enlightened her knowledge about the challenging domains and support or lack thereof even though the research was done overseas. In South Africa, Shirley Walters and Jos Koetsier (1998-2006) have published research which highlights aspects relating to work and study and how lecturers could be of assistance to the part-time students at the University of the Western Cape. There are many higher education institutions in South Africa which have not done any research on the challenges students face and the support or lack of support they received and for this reason further research will be of value.

Researchers have concluded part-time students still feel higher education institutions are not supporting them properly. If there is support, they do not know where to access support or the support systems are dysfunctional.

Cooper and Walters (2008) write about a survey that the Human Science Research Committee did, which reflected that some higher education institutions did have support systems in place for the part-time students but the support systems were deemed unimportant or put on hold. The students were not informed about the support systems.

Cooper and Walters (2008) also came to the conclusion the curriculum was not designed for mature students. Walters and Koetsier (2006:107) say, "… there is little consciousness in the national system of the needs of older students and what is required to support their success". They further add if more higher education institutions were sensitive to the realities of working mature students; the knowledge would greatly help towards a symbiotic relationship between them and these students.

Scott et al. (1998:238) writes, "A flexible and sympathetic approach to course organization that takes into account the life demands carried by mature students is essential to improve chances of graduation amongst the student population, as is the development and publicising of support services for the most at-risk groups". Carney, Mc Neish and McColl (2005) add that students are ignorant of where financial support can be accessed.

From the above brief introduction on support needs, one notes the concern of the researchers that not enough is being done for mature, part-time Masters students. The researcher will now inform the reader of how the data was collected which endorsed our concerns. Recommendations for future support for the students at the higher education institution where the study took place will be made.

1.4   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The researcher used Qualitative Research, within the interpretative theoretical framework, which intended to elicit verbal, descriptive accounts from the research participants through means of semi-structured interviews based on challenging domains (themes/categories) and e-mailed interview schedules (Merriam, 1998:4-8). The various challenging domains that emerged from the literature review served as a framework for the interview schedule. An extra domain challenges/support not covered in the interview schedule, was included. The researcher transcribed the subjective experiences of the research participants and summarized the understandings the participants gave to their challenges and what support was necessary to lighten their journey at their higher education institution. The population consisted of all mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students. The research participants were seven allied students who were mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students at the institution during the years 2008, 2009 and 2010.

1.5   PILOT STUDY

The researcher did a pilot study to see whether the research project was viable and to sort out any problems that could occur during the main research project e.g. how to conduct an interview, whether the questions were clear, etc.

The researcher interviewed four of the thirteen students doing the same course as her. Three were married. Two lived at home with their children and two were foreign students staying at the university's residences. The interview schedule was drawn up by using the challenging domains as they revealed themselves in the literature review and an extra domain of other challenges and support was included to give the research participants the opportunity to add to the data.

The interview schedule proved to be a valid and reliable instrument to collect the necessary data. The pilot interview experience helped the researcher to conduct an interesting and

meaningful interview and also allowed her to learn how not to be intimidating towards the research participants during an interview.

The research participants experienced the challenging domains selected from the literature review and other challenging domains. The other challenging domains were elicited from the research participants by asking them the questions the end of the interview schedule; **"Any other challenges faced?"** And **"Any support you received or would have like to have received?"** This validated the researcher's concern that mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students required support from their higher education institute. The pilot study was a valuable exercise because it ratified her concerns.

1.6   STRUCTURE OF PRESENTATION

Chapter 1 deals with what motivated the researcher to do the research project and states the research problem. Some literature, which supports the research problem, is brought to the fore. Most importantly the reason for doing the research is stated. A brief outline of the research paradigm, research design and its implementation is given.

Chapter 2 will be used to give the reader an overview of research literature done on the research topic. The literature will be used to show the importance of such a study and it will be used as the basis of the researcher's interview schedule.

Chapter 3 will inform the reader of the research design, paradigm and method used in the research project. The validity and ethical considerations will also be discussed.

Chapter 4 contains the detailed process of the implementation of the study i.e. the participants, the communication with them and the interviews done with the participants. The handling of the data research project is also discussed.

Chapter 5 introduces the reader to the overview of the data collected which allows the researcher, from the findings, to make some recommendations for support and suggestions for further research.

1.7 REFLECTION

Chapter 1 allowed the researcher to obtain more clarity about what needed to be accomplished. The assumption was made that more support is needed for the mature, part-time students. In Chapter 2 the literature review will be discussed.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Schofield and Dismore (2010) state that in theory, mature adults perhaps benefit from additional life experiences and transferrable skills and may be more determined to complete their studies. What are the factors then which cause mature students to flounder?

The literature review will highlight the challenges that most mature, part-time students face. Their feelings on the lack of support will be clearly expressed and in turn will make the reader aware that indeed more research needs to be done on the topic and mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students need help from their higher education institutions. Andersen, Day and Mc Laughlin (2008:33), write that one sees there is little awareness in the nationwide constitution of adult students and what is required to support their accomplishment, and "the experiences of Masters students in general have received little attention within the research literature". Kember and Leung (2004) state that part-time studies can be very demanding because adults have a life, which is already very time consuming. Part-time study is an "additional commitment", (Kember and Leung, 2004:354). Kember (1999) wrote that the students have got their existing lives and experience many challenges and accommodate more challenges when they start to study.

Cooper and Walters, (2009:99-95) say that the Student Pathways Study found there were a number of reasons why South African students do not complete their higher education courses. The four main challenges that were uncovered were: financial, "academic failure, reasons related to institutional culture," and personal or family matters, also "poor or no academic guidance".

The challenges mature part-time students face should be addressed through support so that the students may have a fair chance of completing their studies. Walters and Koetsier (2006) declare that many higher education institutions have not made the mind shift from young part-time students to more mature part-time students who bring many life experiences and responsibilities with them to the lecture rooms. Lowe and Gayle (2007) add that mature, part-

time, postgraduate Masters students are often not thought of in the sense that they have far more responsibilities and commitments when it comes to work and home.

In 2005, at the University of the Western Cape of the total student population, 81.3% were part-time students over the age of 30 and research done in 2006 revealed 80-90% students were working full time (Walters and Koetsier, 2006). The aforementioned statistics make us aware of the fact that a large percentage of students are part-time and work full time. Kembler and Leung (2004) found in their study students experience difficulty using any time at work for their studies. There were too many demands expected from them in the work domain.

The challenges mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students face are abundant. According to Kembler and Leung (2004) intrinsic and extrinsic support or the lack thereof was a prominent issue as well as the sense of belonging. Challenges could be ameliorated by support.

2.2   TIME CHALLENGE

Part-time students have considerable problems in finding time to study, Yum et al. (2005). Most of their leisure time e.g. vacation, weekends, etc. is used for studying.

According to Lore and Tait (2004) students need to manage their time properly. Yum et al. (2005) recommend that the higher education institutions counsel the students on time management once they have signed up for a part-time course.

Students need to negotiate a time to study that does not interfere with their work, family and social ties.

2.3   CONFLICTING COMMITMENTS CHALLENGE

The majority of mature students combined work, family and social commitments into their schedule. Lowe and Gayle's (2004) research has revealed students put in many hours of study during the week. Female students did more household chores and had even less leisure time. Mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students felt there was too much work for them to do in the week. Tracey Warren (2004:118) adds that the busy working mothers in high positioned jobs experienced difficulty in getting a "work-life" balance. They try to make the best of a bad job i.e. they are not able to actually enjoy what they are doing.

Most students gave priority to their jobs as many employers expected them to, even if the course they were doing was pertinent to their workplace. According to Yum et al. (2005) some employers expected employees to give their best at work even though they may have study commitments. They would not tolerate anything less and therefore the employee might find that he/she had been asked to leave his/her employment. Anderson et al. (2008:42) say that "work colleagues 'could act' as useful sounding boards for testing out ideas and decisions".

In a study conducted by Lore and Tait (2004) they found that students are unhappy that their social and family life was so radically affected. Because of the pressure of studying, they were not able to keep abreast of things and allowed, for example, social and family ties and chores to lag behind.

Yum et al. (2005) state that many part-time students failed to complete their courses because of conflicting commitments and dropping out of the course was a concern for higher education institutions and students. The institutions would receive less funding if students dropped out of their courses and the financial and psychological implications for students were great i.e. their self-esteem could suffer and they could be demoralized and not want to study again.

What were the challenges that the part-time students faced at their institutions?

2.4   INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

Some students were challenged by separation from their present environment e.g. their own or parents' homes. Students who study part-time cannot separate themselves from existing duties, ties and obligations (Kember, 1999).

Tinto (cited in Kember, 1995:48) pointed out mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students do not benefit "from the establishment of strong ties to a campus community". Carney et al. (2005) also write students who stay at home have difficulty integrating into university life because of the fact that more students who stay at home work and therefore do not have much time to socialize at the university. Carney et al. (2005) point out the retention of students depends on the social and academic integration of students; therefore, recognition of the differences between those living at home and those who make use of other forms of

accommodation should be taken into account when organizing interaction activities. The interaction activities should allow the student to feel he/she is part of the student community.

The researcher feels it is necessary to explore the term 'community' because feeling part of a (student) community may give the student a sense of belonging and may be good for the student's mental state. Garcia (1999) defines community, which is an appropriate definition for student community as well as a sharing of common characteristics and interests. The common characteristics, interests and attributes set a student community apart from other communities e.g. various clubs; sport, medical and education. Students feel they belong to the student community and yet are part of the greater community. Students are a specific, vibrant, social group who share their problems and interests in a specific venue and time. She further adds to have a sense of community one must feel a part of the community i.e. be a member of the community.

Being a member makes one feel part of the group, which contributes to a sense of emotional security, belonging and identification; personal investment, shared emotional connections and a system of shared symbols. Rohleder, Swartz, Bozalek, Carolissen and Leibowitz (2008) cite Wenger that students need to feel they are respected and accepted in the group. They need to identify with the group and feel they are able to make a valuable contribution. The group as a whole has a shared responsibility and give the members their shared identity. The shared identity gives students a sense of belonging and allows them to negotiate with others in the group.

Wiesenfeld (1996:338) also emphasizes the student must have feelings of belonging, of inclusion and an emotional bond. They are "set apart from *them* who are conceived as a *not us*". Although it is important students feel part of their student community the lecturers must not only treat them as such but also remember, that Community Social Psychology has emphasized the dynamic function of the persons as agents to their own evolution development (Wiesenfeld, 1996).

Students needed to choose a course which was compatible to them and to prepare for their part-time studies e.g. what modules they would be doing, costs, what support there was and where to find it, etc. If they were not skilled in choosing the appropriate course or did not know enough details about the course, the higher education institution needs to give them guidance and help because they were not taught these skills at school i.e. "to become skilled

choosers, make informed and responsible choices and make available resources to support informed selection", (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998:331).

Another pressing challenge is finances for mature, part-time students. Walters and Koetsier (2006), report the timing of when the students pay their fees is difficult for them. The festive season finds many students with depleted funds and the higher education institutions expect the payment of fees before students can receive their learning material. The students are thus faced with three months to finish half a year's work.

Not only are there more mature part-time students but there is a "growing trend for younger students to become part-time students" (Kember, 1999:111) and because of lack of financial support they too need to earn money to pay for their studies. Kember (1999) writes many Western governments are reluctant to finance higher education. A lot of students are therefore finding it necessary to work part-time to finance their studies. Carney et al. (2005) express the concern that students are largely unaware of what kind of financial help is available to them. Students, therefore, need to earn money doing part-time jobs and the extra stress affects their health. Carney et al. (2007) state it is more essential to inform students how to cope with time, to help balance both their studies and part-time work, and that they could augment the student knowledge by addressing part-time work challenges. Researchers (Carney et al., 2005) feel the students needed their higher education institutions to guide and help them where to find financial support. Students not only faced challenges with finances and time management but also with the institution's personnel.

Students had problems with making contact with the lecturers. The students wanted the lecturers to understand the realities in which they lived (Walters and Koetsier, 2006). Shirley Walters (1982), when she quotes I.H. Ferris, sums up the conflicting realities between the two groups: She states the two groups are so removed from each other it is extremely difficult for them to understand each others' context. She adds the university staff may be seen in the light that they do not know how the students function in the outside world or the amount of work a student is capable of doing because of his/her context. The university personnel are caught up in their own ethos. Walters (1982) added that if the lecturers gave the students support they fared better.

Cooper and Walters (2009) maintain the higher education institutions need to shift their mindset when it comes to their ethos. They are stuck in a rut as to how they do things. They

must realize part-time students find the learning experience very demanding. The experience challenges their self-concept and self-esteem. Cooper and Walters (2009) add to the predicament when they refer to a Human Science Research Council survey that sometimes, when students failed to manage their studies, the predicament was unsympathetically set aside as someone else's dilemma, or even if the students had problems with the university management, nothing was done about it. Students got the sagacity that they need to tolerate their dilemmas. Some students expressed the concern that lecturers are not in tune with reality.

Thomas, (in Lowe and Gayle 2007) emphasizes the following: the higher education institutions (lecturers) should welcome the diversity of part-time students and not expect them to be the same as full time students. They should respond to different groups of students in unique ways. The lecturers should embrace the "realities" of the students, Tett, (cited in Lowe and Gayle 2007:235), research provides substantiation "that students would value a culture of flexibility that extends beyond the temporal availability of the curriculum to offer the opportunity for each student to choose and negotiate a model of work/life/study balance that is compatible with his or her circumstances and preferences".

Scott et al. (1998) advances the following idea that mature students are often more interested in personal development and choose subjects that are of interest to them. They are hindered by set requirements for a qualification. They have life experiences, which give the subjects they choose a deeper meaning. They would rather choose subjects that are of value to them than take subjects just to pass to be qualified in a certain area. There is a need to adapt the curriculum for the mature student.

The aforementioned statement echoes the ideals of Inclusive Education. Cooper and Walters (2009) cite Astrid von Kotze, that research has found it is necessary that all the role-players, from grassroots e.g. learners, educators, to the directors of education be involved in curriculum development. Gouthro (as cited in Cooper and Walters, 2009) suggests those who educate adults should consider whether they must adhere to and champion educational movements that are commissioned by the government and corporate sector, or whether they have a vital role to play in evaluating the evolving purpose of adult education.

Luna and Medina (2005:22) found part-time students raised the following points/concerns: Because the students are independent and motivated to study they have certain requirements

from their higher education institutions i.e. correct information, the course must be delivered in its entirety; support must be available re course/assignments etc. The students expect they be treated not as consumers but as clients who deserve efficient service from the institution. They believe they have paid for a service and do not wish to be part of the bureaucracy. "These students are neither as understanding nor patient with the bureaucracy of the university as they are during their undergraduate programmes." Some may not have time to attend lectures or functions at the higher education institution, and the accustomed graduate exposure may not be looked for or wanted. They may prefer self-help support and tailored student gateways to facilitate student right of entry to information effortlessly and swiftly. One must remember that "students and supervisors are not merely functionaries in an instrumental system geared towards turning out products (theses) which meet the standards of quality control, but rather free participants in a highly esteemed academic enterprise" (Greene, as cited in Waghid, 2006:433).

Luna and Medina (2005) declare higher education institutions are often not accessible to students because they live far away. Transport is required to reach the higher education institutions. In some instances public transport is not available e.g. in rural areas. The class times are unsuitable because people are often tired in the evenings e.g. women who work and do housework as well.

Another factor, according to Scott et al. (1998), which may hamper mature students, is the selection process. The older student may be viewed as already having had his/her chance at getting a degree. The younger student must be given a chance and thus not deprive him/her of a chance to further his/her education to better his/her life. There may be a preconceived idea that mature adults who have not studied for a long period of time may drop out. If the university were to admit the older students under special provisos they may not be able to do the course because some of the stipulations may not be met by mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students.

There have been cases were institutions insist students upgrade modules they have done years before because the higher education institution feels they may not be equipped to further their studies. The institutions have not taken prior learning into account i.e. there is no practical, oral or entrance test available to ascertain the student's level of expertise so they may continue with their studies. The aforementioned was experienced by two of the research participants and the researcher. Fok (2010:308) believes that if the older students are enabled to acquire

new knowledge/skills and feel they can master the world their self worth increases. She adds that the world often stereotypes mature students, and they themselves, as "inflexible [and] disengaged".

Often people have life experiences that may equip them to be efficient in their studies. Cooper (2011:51) did a case study of a group of disability activists. The group were adults from disadvantaged backgrounds and their original motivation was to help the organization by getting the expertise to engage with academics on policy making. Mandla, one of the members of the group, "became deeply engaged in the course and was personally determined to succeed, despite having to juggle the stressful demands of study: academic writing and work". He succeeded in completing his degree because of his life experiences.

Therefore it is imperative to enable people to become lifelong learners and prior learning (experience) to be acknowledged. Students are not able to turn back the clock and begin at the beginning because they would need to relive their lives. They would perhaps only achieve what they are academically required to do at the end of their lifetimes. They are not able to expend many years on studies just to receive a certificate. Credits should be awarded for practical experience.

Students are still not being accepted because certificates of prior learning are required to do part-time studies. Gustavsson (as cited in Walters, 1997) states those higher education institutions should build upon the knowledge the student has learned through exclusive experience. The institution should be aware of what the student knows and incorporate that into a personalized learning programme for the student. Walters (1997) writes one is able to learn from the cradle to the grave. The aforementioned would be augmented if the students received career guidance which field they should enter in.

The most important denominator is the student's context that should be taken into consideration; otherwise the higher education institutions would not know how to give them ample support. Walters (1982) writes it is important for institutions to focus on the working class people and their needs because many are doing part-time studies. Scott et al. (1998) claims a graduate who succeeds despite family hostility may have support in other avenues e.g. amongst his fellow students and the institution's staff members.

2.5   FINANCIAL CHALLENGE

Financial support was a concern for many students. Women in particular, according to Warren (2004), had difficulty in being able to give their best at home and work. For many women the two most important domains are home and work. They have huge problems trying to balance the home and work domains, as they were required to put in much time and sensitivity in each domain. They also have problems in having enough funds to run a home especially if they are single parents. Carney et al. (2005) recommend that the University Support Services' objective is to address the financial challenges faced by the part-time student population. Financial obligations and the lack of support thereof is a grave concern for the part-time students. Carney et al. (2005:317) believe the higher education institutions should map out the financial requirements of attending higher education institutions so as to equip the students with the knowledge of what financial responsibilities they will face for the duration of their courses. There are financial support services available and they question whether the students are "unaware of these financial networks".

Kember (1999) makes one aware of the fact that part-time students compete for financial aid amongst the growing numbers of full time and part-time students in many countries. Richardson and King (as cited in Kember, 1999) have data, which shows the majority of students entering higher education in Australia, the UK and USA are now mature students. Kember (1999) states that governments encourage lifelong learning and people wish to continue studying because lifelong learning is now a recognised part of life. Most likely the numbers of part-time students will increase even further.

How are some of the students able to cope with all the demands made upon them? Much is to do with support.

2.6   SUPPORT CHALLENGE/HELP

As mentioned before, support may be extrinsic or intrinsic. Family, friends and work can give the students support, but the student must also be motivated to want to complete his/her studies. Some students returned to studies to compensate for the difficulties experienced at home. However Vaccaro and Lovell (2010:173) found in their research "no matter how demanding life was, women found effective ways to cope, manage, and succeed". Furthermore they found their family an inspiration and not "merely as a stressor". The aforementioned researchers coined the term "self-investment" which means women need to

value themselves and believe that "personal growth, learning, and education are needed and deserved especially in a society where "women, and the roles they play, are devalued". They also found older women are committed to education and personal growth. The students felt less stress if they were able to negotiate a regular study routine and a place to study with their partner/spouse.

Mature women, such as "housewives suddenly face an emptiness and abundance of time when their children grow up and move out of the family," some of these women want to find "meaningful activities to occupy their leisure time" and return to study (Fok, 2010:307). Women who have high levels of motivation found new roles to remediate their feelings of low self-regard caused by their difficult personal experiences (Scott, Burns and Cooney, 1998).

Motivation is often observed through a person's behaviour e.g. the tasks he/she chooses and the effort and persistence to complete these tasks. Mulenga and Liang (2008:291) define motivation as a "process in which goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained," and talk of "four motivation constructs, [namely] keeping up and fulfilment, intellectual stimulation, escape, social contact and adjustment". They summarise the motivational constructs as follows: wanting to keep up with the times, feelings of accomplishment, being able to do something of interest to them, being taken away from unpleasant experiences, and the least motivational construct for mature students was the need to socialize with their study group. "Intellectual satisfaction" and "inner fulfilment" were cited by Webber (2004:262) as important determinants for success in studies.

Anderson et al. (2008) believe the student needs to be an agentic person i.e. to be self-motivated, self-directed, tenacious, and persistent and possess the necessary academic skills to do well. The ideal would be a student saying "it is a masters course and you are suppose to 'master' things for yourself," as quoted in O'Donnell, Tobbell, Lawthom and Zammit (2009:35), but we read of many incidents where this is not the case. It is as if students are letting their contexts rule them.

Yum et al. (2005:307) mention that determination for a student is necessary to complete the course. Therefore what the student chooses needs to be supported by the student being prepared for it, having/developing "the necessary qualities for self-managed learning," and being motivated by intrinsic interest. They add that it is not uncommon for colleagues to have done the same course or to do the same course together. They would support each other

emotionally and academically. There were three students who came from the same school in the Masters course the researcher was doing.

The older students, who were concerned about their memory ability, were less confident in the effectiveness of their study strategies and their abilities to succeed and did not fare as well as those who were not as concerned (Justice and Dornan, 2001). Schofield and Dismore (2010:219) found that "older (students) were more likely to achieve higher grades". "Adult learners are characterised by a desire for personal development and take a different deeper approach to the subject matter than do younger students, leading to the achievement of higher grades" (Scott et al. 1998:222). Mature students required a "comprehension-focused approach to learning" as this is the preferred mode of learning for these students (Justice and Dornan, 2001:237) and if this pedagogy was used they might achieve higher grades.

When it came to higher education institutions, Stratton, O'Toole and Wetzel, (2007) noted that the raw numbers in their research showed part-time students were at risk of not completing their studies. They believe that higher education institutions should try to identify the students at risk and make counselling available to them so that more students could complete their studies. They also emphasize the fact that there are different student populations and the groups need to be considered as an entity so that each group's challenges may be highlighted and the necessary support systems put into place. O'Donnell, Tobbell, Lawthom and Zammit (2009) state institutions must not assume the homogeneity of postgraduate students and if they want them to engage in independent study, they should develop these skills if students have not acquired them.

Hill, Lomas and MacGregor (2003:16) say students found "enthusiastic individuals (lecturers) who cared about their learning and helped them as individuals to move their knowledge forward", motivating. They further state students "want to find meaning and significance in authentic personal experiences" and many mature students prefer that the course has "links with the workplace" (Hill et al., 2003:17). The aforementioned are motivational factors.

Yum et al. (2005) believe the part-time students established a sense of belonging if they were able to negotiate e.g. a regular study routine and a place to study with their partner/spouse. The researcers developed a sense of belonging index and they found evidence that lead them to believe a sense of belonging to a group, be it for example students, sport club etc., leads to improved calibre of learning outcomes. The improvement in learning outcomes was believed

to be because the students were able to collaborate and discuss complicated ideas. Furthermore, they found students who felt they were not part of the group, because of unpleasant involvement, did not feel they belonged. Persistence to complete the course is linked to a sense of belonging when the student received the necessary support, (Yum et al., 2005).

Yum et al. (2005) found that some part-time students found their workplace supportive of their studies and there were cases where the students were granted study leave so that they could pursue their studies. There were companies who also gave the students financial support. The researchers believed support from the part-time employers must mean a great deal to the students and would give them the necessary motivation to continue with their studies.

Coping mechanisms enable students to deal with the demands made upon them to alleviate stress. As mentioned previously the coping mechanisms are sacrifice, support and negotiated arrangements that could be used across the challenging domains particularly the self, work, family and social life. The self is an important domain in that it is affected by its context e.g. work, family, social life and the higher education institution, and which in turn impacts on its contexts (systemic theory). If the self, i.e. the student has not been helped by his/her parents and schooling to be agentic the student will need help to acquire the necessary skills. The higher education institution may be able to provide the necessary support to ensure a better educational future for such students.

O'Donnell et al. (2009:31) state "difficulties in the transition to postgraduate study were experienced as difficulties in the mastery of key skills or academic practices, suggesting that postgraduate students do not come 'equipped' for their studies in higher education."

A diagrammatic representation of the challenges faced by part-time students (fig 2.1) follows before the conclusion.

2.1   A Diagrammatic Representation of the Challenges faced by Part-Time Students

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                    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                    │       TIME CHALLENGES        │
                    └──────────────────────────────┘
                                  ⇧
                    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                    │    CONFLICTING CHALLENGES    │
                    │ Work  Social  Studies  Family  Social │
                    └──────────────────────────────┘
                                  ⇧
                    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                    │   INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES   │
                    └──────────────────────────────┘
                                  ⇧
                    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                    │   THE STUDENT HAS TO FACE    │
                    │       MANY CHALLENGES        │
                    └──────────────────────────────┘
                                  ⇩
                    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                    │     FINANCIAL CHALLENGES     │
                    └──────────────────────────────┘
                                  ⇩
                    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                    │      SUPPORT CHALLENGES      │
                    └──────────────────────────────┘
```
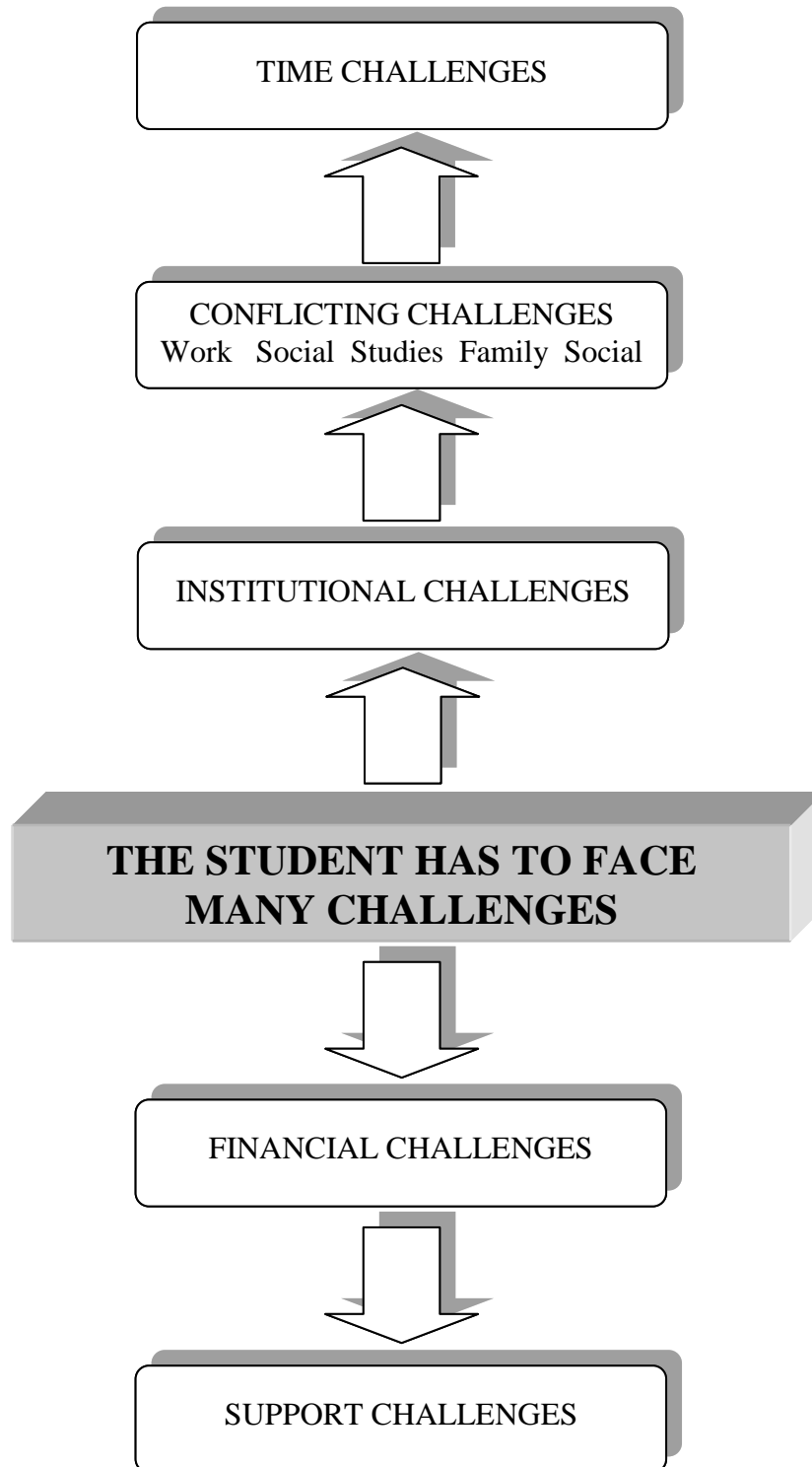
2.7   CONCLUSION

There are many challenges that part-time students face. The most salient of those that come across in the literature review are: not enough time, conflicting commitments: home/job/studies/social, institutions insensitive to the realities of the students, lack of support in the various challenges, and financial issues. Please note there are other challenges that may have been overlooked.

Students who were positive were "able to come to terms with family, friends, and workmates so that study could be integrated into the pattern of their lives" (Kember, 1999:120). Students were likely to be successful if they could get support in the various challenging domains, made sacrifices and negotiated with the relevant role players, whereas those students, according to Kember (1999:120) who were negative were "unable to harmonise the requirements of their course with their social setting" and tended to blame elements within their social environment for their resulting problems.

The literature review still reflects there is a dire need for support. Kember (1999:123) states because of the increasing proportions" of part-time students the "difficulties of part-time study should be given a higher priority than they are currently afforded." Giving the part-time students support and a sense of belonging in the institutions they attend, will encourage them to continue to be lifelong learners. According to Scott et al. (1998:237) "Another possible secret of the graduates who succeed despite family hostility may have been their finding support amongst fellow students and university personnel."

Interpretive, qualitative research will be used to collect the necessary data. The researcher will be using some challenges mentioned in the literature review to find out if these challenges were also experience by the students at their institution of higher education. Two questions, at the end of the interview schedule, will elicit other challenges/support to inform her of other challengers/support experienced by the students. The researcher has found more challenges that are of concern to the mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students. Suggestions for support systems to be put in place at the institution of higher education and further research topics will be proposed.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As mentioned the research question for the study is: What are the challenges and support needs of the mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students at a higher education institution? The researcher wishes to find as many challenges as possible that mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students have faced, as well as their understanding thereof at the higher education institution. With the challenging domains in mind, the researcher will recommend support her higher education institution can give mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students and more research that can be done on the topic. The aim was to collect data on the research participants' challenges they had faced or are still experiencing, as some are still busy with their theses, at the institution of higher education. The data would be their understanding of the challenges they experienced and would then be used to formulate suggestions for support measures to be put into place for future mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students.

The challenges the students faced during their journey to obtaining a Masters degree and how they experienced the challenges, are unique. Since it is difficult to quantify people's feelings, choosing a Qualitative Research Design would reflect the research participants' realities about their experiences.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The researcher chose the qualitative research design, because the qualitative design is flexible, so the research could evolve (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). It employs and inductive research strategy i.e. it builds abstractions, concepts, hypothesis, or theories. An inductive researcher "hopes to find a theory and the research findings are in the form of, themes, categories ...." (Merriam, 1998:7).

The research participants were in their everyday environment i.e. at home, at the office or at school when they addressed the research questions. The researcher gained knowledge of the research participants' realities (Marshall et al., 2006), that was required for her research. The qualitative design also allowed her to explore the domains (categories) in which little research has been done. The researcher was able to capture the reality of the participants' experiences i.e. an in-depth account of their experiences. She wished to explore the research participants' lived experiences, in a particular culture (student community) and communicate the challenges to the role players at the higher education institution.

The interviews were semi-structured, as the researcher asked the interviewees if there were any other challenges they faced or support they feel they needed, other than those dealt with in the interview. Those who lived far away or did not have the time to have face-to-face interviews had the interview schedule questions e-mailed to them.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Marshall and Rossman (2006) believe deeper perspectives can be captured through face-to-face interaction. People create their own reality through the meaning they give to people and events because of past experiences and important people in their lives.

Their realities have been shaped by what is called phenomenology interaction, which is the experiences and meaning making within the immediate setting: family and friends. Symbolic interaction may be said to be with society at large. The emphasis of interpretive qualitative research is on "putting oneself in the place of the other and seeing things from the perspective of others" (Crotty, 1998:76).

Neumann (2000) believes one finds it problematic to universalise results because humans are unique entities. We also cannot be sceptical about another person's perceived realities. Moreover he also states that when we work with human beings we cannot be disinterested in their subjective experiences. It is neither possible at times nor ethical to palm off others professed realities. Students are individuals who come from different contexts and have different personal experiences. Because of the nature of our research, we cannot be disinterested.

Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (1999:6), write that caring is being "empathetic" and taking what the students say or do as important is because we are showing an interest in them.

Terre Blanche et al. (1999) remind us not only do the research participants have their own distinct histories, experiences, morals and assumptions; so do the researchers. To be able to be objective has no place in the humanities. The researcher has her own viewpoint about what questions she will deem important to ask the research participants. Her social group, political inclination and who the researcher mixes with will also influence the questions she asks.

Qualitative Research Design is a subjective methodology of research because it allows you to find out the reality of the participants; what the participant has experienced, what he/she feels, and how he/she has made sense of the experience, (Sherman and Webb, 1988). The researcher's perspective must not cloud the realities of their experiences. Qualitative Research permits us to grow in understanding of others: their experiences and perspectives about the experience, their different contexts and how they influence them e.g. home and school. The participants in Qualitative Research should feel part of the research project and want to participate and respond freely.

The researcher needed to become a participant in the research project to be able to collect the necessary data. She was a fellow student of the research participants and so they had a commonality. Her questions were relevant to the here and now because most of the participants were still busy with their studies. The aforementioned applies to the research participants participating in the face-to-face interviews and those doing the e-mailed interview schedule.

The researcher would be listening to each participant's regaling of the challenges they experienced at their university. The body language of the participant and interpretation thereof were written down. Should the participant at any stage show signs of stress, the researcher would consider terminating the interview.

The researcher's questions needed to be pertinent i.e. what the researcher believed would elicit the relevant information for her research project. The researcher's perceptions and instinctive insight will be used to create a theory, i.e. the researcher used inductive research. "In contrast to deductive researchers who "hope to find data to match a theory, inductive researchers hope to find a theory that explains their data" (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984), (Merriam, 1998:7). Qualitative Research requires that the researcher is able to communicate well both written and orally. The researcher needed to describe in detail the observations and the conclusions of the

research project. The researcher needed to be adaptable and not be bound by controlled settings and structured results because things change in a subjective world.

3.4 RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used is a multiple case study i.e. there are seven research participants regaling their subjective experiences of the challenges faced by them at the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University. The researcher wishes to elicit in-depth descriptions of the small number of research participants' experiences with regard to their experiences of the challenges faced by them during their part-time Masters course. She will elicit the necessary data through face-to-face and e-mailed semi-structured interviews by using "exploratory and descriptive questions" (Mouton, 2008:149).

The qualitative case study can be described as a rigorous, holistic depiction and investigation of a sole unit i.e. mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters student at an institution of higher education, occurrence or social unit. Case studies are peculiar, expressive, and heuristic and depend a great deal on inductive interpretation in managing numerous data sources (Merriam, 1998).

The researcher thoroughly conducted her research by checking the data derived from the interviews i.e. the findings by going over the data collected several times, asking the research participants to verify their transcriptions and verifying some with previous researchers' results found in the literature review.

3.5 SAMPLING METHOD

The researcher made use of convenience sampling. Terre Blanche et al. (1999:380) write that convenience sampling is "taking cases on the basis of their availability" or termed "opportunistic" sampling". The students doing the course with the researcher were a convenient sample, because they were accessible and easier to recruit. The theoretical population consists of all mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students. The researcher chose associate students because they met with the criteria for the research group.

The researcher was exposed to similar challenges being one of the students and realized that mature, part-time, postgraduate Masters students needed support. The literature review

corroborated her concerns. She was looking for certain research participants that had faced similar challenges.

The students studying with her would fit the criteria for the study. Kanuha (2000:441) states: "being drawn to my own kind". By selecting her fellow students, the researcher hoped they would feel a closer tie to her i.e. be familiar with her and therefore more at ease when being interviewed. The researcher would be one of them and not an outsider who may not relate to their experiences at the higher education institution. The researcher hoped that they would allow her to participate in their realities and challenges as they experienced them. The researcher would distance herself from her "own kind" to bring to the fore their perceptions of the challenges they faced and not hers.

The research participants were all doing the part-time Masters course in Learning Support through the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch. Seven of the thirteen students agreed to participate in the research project. The youngest student was 30 years old and the eldest student was 51 years old. Most of the students fell between the ages of 39 – 48. Five were married and had children. Four had two children. Two were single and had no children. Four were females and three were males. Below is a table which summarises the demographics of the group.

NAMES OF STUDENTS	AGE	MALE/ FEMALE	SINGLE	MARRIED	CHILDREN
DAWN	39	F		√	B 16 G 9
JUNE	42	F		√	B 5 G 8
ANTHONY	46	M		√	B 5 G 8
ADRIAN	40	M	√		
ALBERT	48	M	√		
MOIRA	30	F		√	G 5 months old
ANN	51	F		√	B 31 G 24

The researcher had asked her allied students the previous year if they would be interested in helping her with her research project. A year later she contacted them by telephone or via e-mail. The researcher asked for or sent a letter requesting their participation. Those who agreed to take part either by face-to-face interviews or via e-mail were e-mailed the research proposal. Each participant was asked to answer the questions in the interview schedule and to sign a consent letter (Addendum H). The ones, who preferred to do the interview schedule via the Internet, were the research participants who consented to be part of the research project, but who lived too far away or faced time constraints. Essentially the data would be the same for both groups; interviews and e-mailed interview schedules because the same questions would be asked.

The researcher managed to get the consent of seven out of the thirteen students. They were all involved in education: six were educators and one worked as a school psychologist for the Western Cape Education Department.

3.6   DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

The researcher made use of face-to-face semi-structured interviews and e-mailed interview schedules (Addendum A) to collect her data. The challenging domains found in the literature review were used to draw up the interview schedule, and a domain called Other Challenges/Support was added by the researcher to gather data on any other challenges/support the research participants would like to air. The face-to-face interviews would be done in the comfort of their homes, if they so wished. The researcher was able to capture the understanding of participants' realities of the challenges they experienced at the higher education institution by using the interview schedule. Marshall and Rossman (2006) believe that the deeper perspectives can be captured through face-to-face interaction.

The researcher made use of a digital voice recorder to record the research participants' answers to the interview schedule's questions. The recordings, the notes made during the interviews and the e-mailed answers to the interview schedule would be used to collect the necessary data for her research.

The interview schedule had two sections: a demographic section in which the researcher gathered data on the participants' personal background and an open-ended questionnaire section which would give the researcher the data necessary to analyse what support was needed by the students in certain challenging domains e.g. family, work, higher education

institution. Other challenges and support not covered in the interview schedule was covered by the open-ended question concerning what other challenges they experienced and what support they would have liked to have received. The relevant data was noted down by the researcher (Addendum G).

The researcher first drew up a demographics sheet (Addendum D) to reflect the demographics of the research participants. Some personal data was captured for each research participant. The data was used to see the general age/gender of the participants and if they had additional challenges e.g. children or ailing parents etc.

A list of initial codes was created by the researcher, by using the letters of the alphabet for the challenge domains (Addendum E):

H = **HOME**

F = **FAMILY**

W = **WORK**

C = **COLLEAGUES**

S = **SOCIAL**

FI = **FINANCIAL**

I = **INSTITUTION**

O = **OTHER: CHALLENGES/SUPPORT**

The researcher would like to mention the above codes are merely starting blocks as it is difficult to rigidly demarcate the above challenging domains/support as they often overlap: work, family, social etc. and that the self is within and outside these domains. The overlapping or hazy boundaries between the challenging domains and support should not detract from the fact that useful information on what the students experienced will be noted. We need to remember the systems theory postulates we are influenced by our contexts and that we influence our context i.e. it is a visa versa process.

The researcher then drew up codes and terms used for support (Addendum F) that would reflect her appraisal of the support the research participants received. Everyday terms were used. It must be noted that these codes will be used by the researcher to interpret the amount of support and therefore it is a subjective appraisal. Interpretive Qualitative Research cannot be classified as an objective research method.

NS   =   NO SUPPORT

LS   =   LITTLE SUPPORT

AS   =   ADEQUATE SUPPORT

ES   =   EXCELLENT SUPPORT

The challenging domains were marked in blue and the support appraisals in pink. The researcher marked where they occurred in the columns next to the transcriptions and the e-mailed interview schedules (Addendums B and C). The data was summarised on a summary support data sheet (Addendum G).

The following diagram shows the data capturing process (fig. 3.6).

3.6   A Diagrammatic Representation of the Data Capturing Process

TAPED INTERVIEWS AND E-MAILED
INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

TRANSCRIPTIONS

**CODES FOR CHALLENGE DOMAINS AND TERMS AND
CODES FOR SUPPORT APPRAISAL DRAWN UP**

COLOUR CODED TRANSCRIPTIONS/ E-
MAILED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE ANSWERS

ALL RELEVANT DATA ENTERED ON
DEMOGRAPHICS SHEET

SUMMARY OF SUPPORT ENTERED ON
SUPPORT SUMMARY
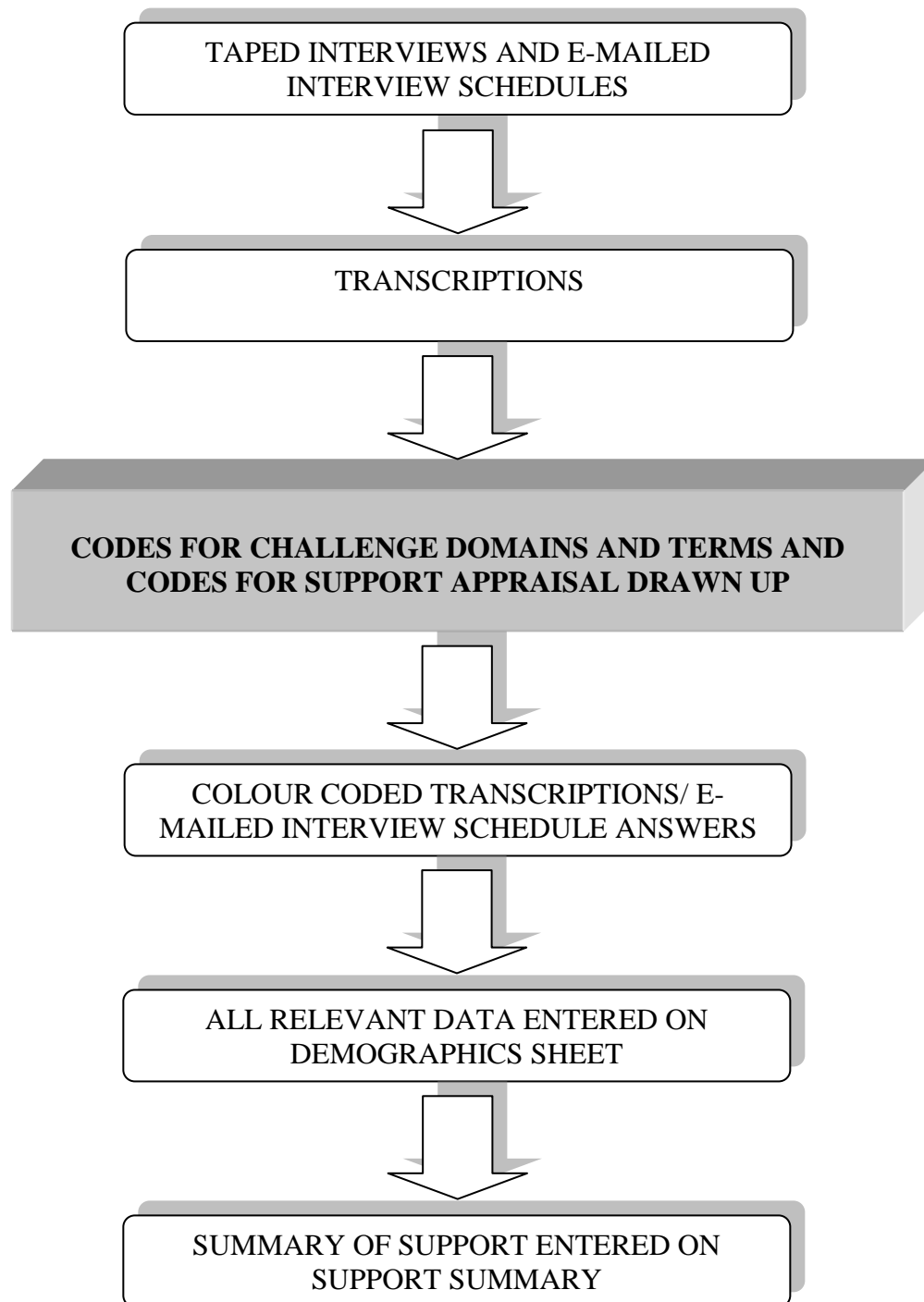
DATA IS NOW CAPTURED AND WILL BE USED IN CHAPTER FIVE
FOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.7   DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher was looking for, as Marshall et al. (2006:39) stipulates, "… the salient and ground categories of meaning held by participants in the setting". The articles and books read by the researcher revealed the common challenges (themes/categories) faced by part-time students. The challenging domains (themes/categories) gave the researcher the focal questions used in the interview schedule to which she added another domain of other challenges and support not covered in the interview schedule.

The researcher immersed herself in the details and specifics of the generated data to reaffirm and uncover the themes/categories (challenging domains) the students experienced. She used the challenging domains prolific in the literature review and included open ended questions to discover more. The data analysis informed her of what support may be given to future part-time students at the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University.

Each domain was used to ask students what challenges and amount of support they received. The interview schedule was comprised of questions based on the challenging domains and was used at the face-to-face interviews and was e-mailed to the other research participants. The answers supplied by the research participants would be used to draw inferences from, and then supportive suggestions would be made (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The data would also verify if fellow students also experienced the challenges/support or lack thereof mentioned by the previous researches and would reveal other challenges/support or lack thereof not mentioned by the previous researches.

As mentioned previously the researcher would be using content analysis. Mouton (2001) explains content analysis as the analysis of the content of texts. In the research project the content is the challenges and support the researcher will access as data from the transcriptions and the e-mailed interview schedules' answers. After transcribing the face-to-face interviews and receiving the answers back from the e-mailed interview schedules, the researcher coded the interview schedules for the challenging domains and support, using the colours, the codes and the terms drawn up.

The support summary data sheet with all the relevant data on gave the researcher a general impression of the support received under each support appraisal. There were five columns. Under the first column the challenge domains were listed i.e. Home, Family, Work, Colleagues, Social/Friends, Financial and Institution. Other challenges and support was

written up with Institution on pages 86 and 87 under Addendum G. The next four vertical columns were the support appraisal for each challenge domain namely, No Support, Little Support, Adequate Support and Excellent Support. Under each support appraisal the researcher entered the support appraisals from the interview schedules' answers; face-to-face interviews and e-mailed ones.

The main challenging domains for the research project were the institution and an extra domain: other challenges experienced and other support received or not received which they would have appreciated, which the researcher added. The aforementioned two domains were covered in more detail to recommend future support suggestions for students.

The demographics' sheet summarized the research participants' personal details e.g. gender, age, marital status, etc. that verified they were mature students and that there were more married than single interviewees.

3.8 VALIDITY

The researcher used convenience sampling i.e. the research participants were associate students and fitted the criteria of the research question i.e. mature, part-time, postgraduate Master students who had encountered challenges at their higher education institution. The sample was thus a refined sample which would reflect the salient data required to give the aforementioned students the necessary support. Although convenience sampling was used, there were many valid support suggestions made by the research participants that could be referred to the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch.

Although only seven research participants from a group of thirteen were used, the challenging domains, which were taken from the literature review, were similar to those expressed by the research participants. The last challenging domain/support and lack thereof question revealed other issues with regards to challenges and support which was pertinent to this group of research participants. Some research participants gave emotive understandings of the challenges and support they received, but this was tempered by the other respondents' responses and eventually a more rounded reflection of the experiences of the groups' understandings were given.

Most of the participants were married and therefore the researcher was able to collect a substantial amount of information regarding their challenges e.g. financial, family

commitments, children etc. Using content analysis the researcher was using "an unobtrusive method" which would not confound the results i.e. "errors associated with the interaction between researchers and subjects are avoided" (Mouton, 2001:166).

The researcher wanted her data to be trustworthy. She engaged in reflexivity to ensure her experiences of the challenging domains were not used to interpret the experiences of the research participants. Some of her experiences were similar to theirs which also confirmed, as did the literature review, the validity (trustworthiness) of the research project. The research project was thus defensible and did establish confidence in the research project's findings

The findings cannot be generalized to all the different faculties of the university, but they did confirm what other researchers deemed the most salient challenging domains and the support or lack of support in each. One of the strategies used to make the results more trustworthy is a literature review. Other strategies used for triangulation were recording students' answers to the interview schedule questions and keeping notes ensured that the researcher would obtain a measure of objectivity i.e. their transcriptions were what they said, Mouton (2008). The transcriptions were checked several times against the digital voice recordings and were member checked i.e. the research participants were asked to verify their transcriptions. The support appraisals were crosschecked several times.

Henning et al. (2004:149) believe that truth (validity) lies in action i.e. "the design has to be built in the possibility of action". We need to take the findings and use them – "pragmatic validity". The higher education system, the social environment, the methods of educating, the way the student processes the information etc. is part of the student's context and as each student is an individual it is difficult to universalise our results.

The higher education institution's Ethics Committee and the thesis supervisor also helped to ensured that the research project was valid and ethical because they gave input as how to improve these facets of the research project.

3.9   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The main purpose of research should be done for the benefit of society (Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter, 2006).

The researcher adhered to the general principles of ethics as set out by the Ethics Committee at her university in her research project. All material collected in the study was treated with

the utmost confidentiality. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of their interviews on the digital voice recorder, and the transcriptions and answers on the interview schedules. All recordings, transcriptions and data collected would be stored safely and a password and pin number would be necessary to gain access to the information.

The researcher asked for the research participants' written consent (Addendum H). They were contacted telephonically and were explained the purpose of the research and the researcher requested an interview from them. The research proposal had also been sent to them before they were interviewed or did the e-mailed interview schedule. They were told that they may withdraw at any stage from the research project, if they wished to do so.

The participants who had face-to-face interviews were given the opportunity to read over their transcriptions and verify them. The married couple (June and Anthony) were interviewed on their own and their transcriptions were verified by them from their respective schools where they had access to it via the school's computer using their own passwords. The completed research project will be given/e-mailed to each student who participated in the research and also to my supervisor once it has been passed by the external examiners.

The higher education institution's Ethics Committee has approved the research project: ethical clearance number: 448/2010. Should there be any reason for the researcher to make any changes to the research project, it will be done with the Ethics Committee and supervisor's consent. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) believe that research should revolve around a need in a community and benefit the community directly or indirectly. The aforementioned aims were central to this research project and the ethical protocol was followed as stipulated by the Ethics Committee.

The research participants were briefed about the research project a year ago and sent the research proposal via e-mail. They were given the opportunity to ask the researcher to clarify anything that they did not understand.

The researcher needed to be reminded by Marshall and Rossman (2006) that people give up their personal time and need to adjust their schedules to accommodate the researcher. Her presence may have infringed on the research participant's personal space. The researcher appreciated the fact that the research participants gave up some of their valued time to have face-to-face interviews and to fill in and send their e-mailed answers of the interview schedule questions.

Marshall and Rossman (2006:91), recommend the following; that researchers should not merely come for what they want i.e. data to complete their research project, but also to make contact with the research participants. One should listen to them and appreciate the fact that they have opened up their residences and personal experiences/feelings to you. You should at least tell them why you wish to do the study and the benefits there will be for society. One must make the research data available to them. She maintains that an essentially ethical researcher is "respectful of people and relationships". The study took heed of the recommendations made by Marshall and Rossman (2006).

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006) it is natural for some research participants to have feelings of resentment or a sense of abandonment and that the researcher may have feelings of separation, loneliness and loss after the completion of the research project. One should keep in mind that Qualitative Research is not about trying to validate hypothesis but about people i.e. their realities and feelings.

3.10 REFLECTION

The researcher used a Qualitative Research design because the questions asked required the research participants to reveal their perceived realities. A multiple case study of the understandings of how the mature students experienced the challenges and support or lack of support at the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University was done. A synopsis of the data collection techniques, data analysis, validity of study and ethical considerations were given.

The chapter that follows, namely, Chapter 4, gives the reader the full details of how the researcher implemented her study.

Chapter 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDY

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The researcher will give a detailed account of how the study was implemented: communication with the research participants, data collection, data analysis and a summary of the findings.

4.2   RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Seven of thirteen mature, part-time learning support Masters students doing their course through the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University (2008). The researcher was one of the mature, part-time Learning Support Masters students.

One and a half years is spent on doing the theoretical part of the course and then the student is required to do a thesis which contributes to 50% of the course's marks.

4.3   COMMUNICATION

The class of 2008 were contacted, more than a year after completing the theoretical modules in June/July 2009. Some students' telephone and cellular phone numbers had changed, therefore, they were unavailable. The researcher managed to get the verbal consent of four students to do face-to-face interviews and seven promised to answer the questions in the interview schedule. The four students who agreed to have the face-to-face interviews wanted to have them at their residences. A day and time was agreed upon for the face-to-face interviews.

Seven students preferred that the researcher e-mail the interview schedule and consent form to them. They were unsure of when they would have enough time for an interview. They wanted to do the interview schedule when time permitted them to do so. Eleven students lived far away from the campus e.g. Beaufort West, Mossel Bay and Upington. Of the seven students only three sent their interview schedule answers and consent letters back.

The researcher e-mailed the interview schedule, the consent letter and her research proposal to students she had contacted telephonically. Those students whose contact numbers were no longer valid received an e-mail letter from the researcher requesting their participation in the research project and only two replied stating that they would help the researcher with her research. The same documentation was also e-mailed to them.

Two of students e-mailed the researcher the answers to the interview schedule within two days of her sending it and one student sent it two and a half weeks later.

4.4   INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The researcher took the most important challenges mentioned in the literature review and as mentioned previously, added on another domain of Other Challenges/Support so research participants could add other challenges or support not covered in the interview schedule. The researcher was afraid that some questions about pertinent challenges would be forgotten; therefore it was put together as an interview schedule. The questions asked on challenges and support or lack thereof was necessary to collect the relevant data with regards to the research participants' understandings of the challenges faced and support received or not received. The interview schedule would enable the researcher to manage the available interview time efficiently.

The Interview schedule consisted of two parts:

Part 1: Demographics

Part 2: Research Questions

PART ONE:

The interview schedule started with the research participants' demographics. The researcher was able to get insight of the research participants' backgrounds, settings, routines and previous education. The information enabled her to have a better understanding of the research participant's context. The demographic questions would hopefully help the research participants to be more at ease and feel that the researcher was not only there to get her research project done but was also interested in them as people.

There were nine personal questions about the research participants, which would give her data on their ages, marital statuses, gender and information on their backgrounds.

PART TWO:

The questions drawn up were the most important challenges in the literature review. The semi-structured interview schedule would allow her to record the necessary data. The main domains were the challenges experienced at home, family, work, colleagues and the support or lack of support in each domain. The researcher allowed the research participants the freedom to mention and explore other challenges important to them that were perhaps not covered in the interview schedule.

Six questions concerning the challenges they experienced and their understanding of them and what amount of support was given, were asked. The last question would elicit from them if there were any other challenges/support or lack thereof important to them that had not been asked.

The main focus would be particularly on those challenges they faced at their higher education institution and what support may be put into place for prospective students. Any other challenges/support or lack thereof that came to the fore would also be noted and dealt with.

4.5   (A) INTERVIEWS: FACE-TO-FACE

The researcher phoned them three days before the interview to confirm the date, time, place of the interview and to get instructions as how to get to the various venues. The instructions how to get to the interview venue would allow the researcher to estimate how much time it would take to reach the destination. Two of students were interviewed at home and two were interviewed at a university residence.

All verbal interviews were recorded. The researcher needed to take a digital voice recorder with her to the interview. Notes were made on how the interview was proceeding and the emotional state and body language of the research participant was also noted.

4.6   CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEWS

After a brief introduction the confidentiality of the research was emphasized and the consent form was signed. The researcher asked the participants to stop her to clarify any question they were unsure of or were uncomfortable with.

During the interview, the researcher tried to avoid interrupting the research participant's regaling of her/his experiences of the challenges faced at the specific higher education institution. She participated in the interview with the minimum imposition. The researcher was patient at times when the research participants veered off the topic under question. The researcher listened empathetically to what each research participant said and tried to understand and respect the perspectives of each participant.

Here follows the understandings/perceptions of how they experienced the challenges they faced, and support or lack of support they received. It is their experienced realities and some may be emotive but these responses need to be reflected by the rest of the group to make a statement that more support is necessary in a certain area.

All quotes from the transcriptions of the research respondents will be done in italics. The page number where it is to be found in the respondent's transcription will be given at the end of each challenging domain in brackets. Some references to the literature will be given.

4.6.1   June's interview

(Pseudonyms have been given for students' names to protect their identity.)

4.6.1.1   *Demographics*

June is 42 years old, married to Anthony and has two children aged 5 and 8. She is an educator.

4.6.1.2   *Home/Family*

Yes, lots of challenges at home as I am a working mother and a student. I need to juggle between my house and my school work and university and I also need to make lots of sacrifices because of studying being so expensive and not getting any support or bursaries or something. I have to make lots of sacrifices in the case of not having somebody that helps me in the house that means I need to do everything myself. I must say my in-laws and my mother has been a tremendous support system because

whenever I need someone to take care of my children they would always be available to take care of then when we need to go to classes or do some activity – I could always rely on them. (Pg. 4)

Warren (2004:118) found in her research that there are women "experiencing problems in balancing the two major life domains (home and work) successfully and financially in particular" and (Lowe and Gayle, 2007:230) add that "female students still spent more time on domestic tasks and had less social time"

4.6.1.3   Work/Colleagues

Oh yes, no, at work I think that the biggest challenge at work was my principal. He has his favourites and unfortunately I am not one of them so when it comes to asking to leave a little earlier or to get to class on time it was always a problem for him and in that I have just decided that I am not going to ask him any favours anymore and I just have to get to class after school even if it was in a tremendous rush. (Similar sentiments were expressed during contact sessions by her other colleagues in our course group).

My colleagues – oh lots of negativity from a lot of people because I can actually say it is bitchiness amongst females because certain people feel that you can't achieve something in life but they don't know of all the sacrifices you need to make and but then there was the others who would ask you how it is and so on but I should say that I didn't enter varsity because of them. I went there because I have a need to find out more and to equip myself so that I could help the children and that was my focus and that is why I just ignored whoever was negative and even the Principal. He was so nasty. He did not even congratulate us when we finished our B ED. And nor did he congratulate us about being accepted into the Masters programme. (Pg. 5)

Yum et al., (2005) declare that students face the difficulty of conflicting loyalties between the place of employment and personal development and Mulenga and Liang (2008:308) have set forth that "older students are more influenced by intrapersonal than by interpersonal reasons", like June.

4.6.1.4   Social

I had to make a decision and I have come to the decision that my social life has actually boiled down to my immediate family. At the moment I only attend functions that involves my immediate family and the time I have available I try and spend with my husband and my children and parents. (Pg. 6)

Yum et al. (2005:313) support the aforementioned statement in that they write "it is relatively common for 'students' to sacrifice their social lives to gain time".

4.6.1.5   Financial

Challenges financially – in a household where two people that are studying and you must bear in mind that Anthony and I are only married ten years so that means we bought the house and whatever was needed in the house and we had two children – between Alan and Tracey we did our 4ᵗʰ year. The classic is when we went on to the M ED. programme. The M ED. programme is going to cost us about R17000 so for the past 5 year Anthony and I have seen absolutely nothing of our bonuses. (Pg. 7)

Because every year both go to Stellenbosch because when I get in January I pay 50/50 for us and when he gets in June he pays 50/50 and whatever we still owe must go in between so we can see that we have sorted it out.

I also need to make lots of sacrifices because of studying being so expensive and not getting any support or bursaries or something. The past 4 years that I have been studying I have never gone on holiday. I also try not to cut down like my children's birthdays. I always try and make their birthdays and Christmas special so I rather put my money there. Instead of going out for the evening and I'm going to spend this amount on that. No I haven't had that. (Pgs. 6, 7&8)

Lowe and Gayle (2007:236)) express the following concerning financial support available, "full time status confers financial advantages that are not available to all part-time students".

4.6.1.6   Institution

These challenges that I experienced initially when we started with our B ED. at Stellenbosch was that we were in the same class as full time B ED. students and we had come from a day's work with all the challenges and the travelling and whatever and we had to sit in class and the very same was expected of us. The other thing that was tough in the beginning was when we were at college we were faced with the how of teaching and the practical and when we got to varsity we were confronted with a lot of theory and a lot of articles and stuff and in the beginning it was tough to make that transition of interpreting and reading and analyzing and so on but I think I have grown.

Yes it took quite some time in the beginning because the first few lessons especially – like a bucket of water thrown in your face. You never gave the broader picture a thought and then coming to varsity you were like forced to think globally and to think wider and to think inclusive education but that was good because it made me go there. I would never have gone there if I wasn't forced to go there. So that I suppose is a plus because there is a lot of people that just don't think that way I think it would have been difficult because we were in a class with young students that were just out of varsity so if we were in a group where we were not with those children-that students, it would have helped but I also think we learnt from the students because they had this fresh new way of thinking and so in a way that supported it and I just think that the lecturers must also bear in mind that us coming back and studying after such a long time they must also just bear that in mind because it was difficult making that shift. We were forced

to get up and speak, presentations, in front of a group and so on. Even though I am a teacher I am not this person to speak in front of a group. (Pgs. 9&10)

Lore and Tait (2004:3) augment that "usually mature students often find it difficult to cope with various personal and work related demands made on the time available for study and professional development".

4.6.1.7   *Other challenges/Support*

Honestly I would have liked to be allowed to be able to take off for a while from the Department so that you don't have to juggle between everything. If they had brought the old system back where you got 3 or 6 months where you could take a break and where you can focus on your studies and I think in the end I would be less stressed and I would be more productive.

At the moment you must know when I get home from school about 4 pm then its tidying up and cooking – H. sees to the children then off to bed then get their clothes ready for the next day – I get up a 5:30 and have my shower, pack lunches etc. I leave at 6:30 because of traffic then actually miss out in the morning with my children.

I get home so late. If I could work at varsity from 9 – 3, I would be more productive. It happens that very often I read the children a story and then I fall asleep. Then at 11 or 12 I wake up and do varsity work and then shower and go to school. The Department is not prepared to thank you for making that sacrifice. We don't actually use contact time on our course. But I enjoy it and it is good but very tiring. (Pgs. 11&12)

Carney et al. (2005) also raise the point that students who stay at home have difficulty integrating into university life because of the fact that more students who stay at home or work do not have much time to socialize at the university. Vaccaro and Lovell (2010:173) also found in their research that "no matter how demanding life was, women found effective ways to cope, manage, and succeed. Furthermore they found their family an inspiration and not merely as a stressor".

4.6.2 **Anthony's interview**

4.6.2.1   *Demographics*

Anthony is 46 years old, married to June and has two children aged 5 and 8. He is an educator.

4.6.2.2   Home/Family

It is a very big challenge to study and to have work as well and a family to support and in my case my wife is also studying so that makes it more difficult so you must organize your time so that you can fit in all the bits and pieces but it is very demanding and sometimes it can be very frustrating also.

My wife and I support one another that is why we are doing it together and my late mom was a very good motivator – she loved to see her children become successful so that is also one of the great reasons. Parents are happy when their children achieve things. I have two sisters who also live close by so when we have to go to varsity they are always eager to look after the children and they fill in the parental support. (Pgs. 3&4)

Lowe and Gayle (2007:227) add "some consideration must be given to the pressures students might face through their family responsibilities", and that mature, part-time learning support Masters students were often not thought of in the sense that they had far more responsibilities and commitments at work and at home.

Arthur, Lore and Tait, (2004:1) further extend the point by expressing that "all (part-time students) fitted in studying when and where convenient, even if study time was not always easy to arrange – work in evenings, mornings, weekends or holiday times"

4.6.2.3   Work/Colleagues

At my school I get very good support because there are a few educators who also completed this masters course and they are not only colleagues but good friends as well so they support me in helping me and the principal is also very open for when his teachers go on further study so I don't have a problem when I need time to do work or if I have to stay at home – he is very supportive.(Pg. 4)

Anderson et al. (2008:42) are of the opinion, like Anthony, that "work colleagues 'could act' as useful sounding boards for testing out ideas and decisions".

4.6.2.4   Social

Yes, that is difficult because the little time we have – social time – we spend with our family so that is what we mainly do with our social time – birthday parties.

I don't think there is a way out now but in the future I will have my social life my way. We cannot go out much because it costs money and we have to use our money for studies and also investing for our children. (Pgs. 4&5)

Yum et al. (2005:306) believe that self-sacrifice is an integral part of being a part-time student: "something given up for the sake of study e.g. time or other activities are forgone".

4.6.2.5   Financial

The situation now is that as teachers we don't earn a lot of money in the first place and as students we are both studying so everything is times two so that is difficult so we don't get any financial support at this point in time and we are both busy with our fourth year of studying. Financially it is hectic and quite difficult. (Pg.5)

Carney et al. (2005) recommend the University Support Services' objective be to address the financial challenges faced by the part-time student population.

4.6.2.6   Institution

I must say in the first place when I entered Stellenbosch it was very difficult because I come from a difficult background because we as a coloured learner or student we did not study at a university like Stellenbosch because I only went four years back so to adapt to the environment was a difficult part especially for the unknown and all those things.

And the students we did the Honours course with – the full time students – they have all the time to do their assignments but we have to come from work go to class come back do the chores at home and still do the assignments. There was no difference – what they must do we must do also so it was very challenging. But the support from the university, especially the lecturers were quite good. In class situation it was a help. They were always available for you. You could ask if you did not understand something. (Pg. 6)

Merriam (2002) extends the concepts mentioned by the student in that she articulates that we must take note of their dense lives and the effect the challenges have on them i.e. the background from which they come.

Walters and Koetsier (2006) also declare that many higher education institutions have not made the mind shift from young part-time students to more mature part-time students who bring many life experiences and responsibilities with them to the lecture rooms.

4.6.2.7   Other challenges/Support

I would just say as a person gets older everything is getting slower and we have to really study hard. Sometimes the students you study with are 20 or 21 and they don't have the responsibility we have and that is a challenge in itself so I would say that until we are finished with this course, the challenge is always going to be there. That is internal and external – it doesn't go away but on the other hand there

are positives because I would not have had the success in the Honours so I think those difficulties and challenges we have to convert into positives in order for us to be successful. If I moan about everything I am facing I would not be able to complete the course.

To be honest I would have liked financial support because there are two studying together and it is very hectic and quite a burden. I took on the challenge so I have to go through with it – I cannot stop now. I invested so much in this and the reward is not financial but the reward is that when I am finished I can look back and say I have done that. (Pgs. 6&7)

Lore and Tait (2004) also claim in their research that students who were still in their twenties and still in study mode did better than students who were in their thirties and forties. Other researchers have the following to say. The older students who were concerned about their memory ability, less confident in the effectiveness of their study strategies and their abilities to succeed did not fare as well as those who were not so concerned (Justice & Dornan, 2001). Schofield and Dismore (2010:219) found "older (students) were more likely to achieve higher grades".

4.6.3   Dawn's interview

4.6.3.1   Demographics

Dawn is 39, married and has two children. She is an educator.

4.6.3.2   Home/Family

Challenges I face is it is difficult for me to pay for my children's fees so I can get better a better qualification therefore a better salary to accommodate the children I'm studying now so I could have been doing two to three part time jobs have dedicated this time to study the problem is I don't get extra funds for the children for the family for keeping them up. The other thing is I don't know if you say it is psychological. I start thinking of my family and children and sometimes I can't study because it affects me I'm thinking of my children my family. (Pg. 2)

One of the research participants in Vaccaro and Lovelle's (2010:165) research also echoed the aforementioned sentiment; "sometimes she felt she was physically but not mentally present at school [because] her mind often wandered to her home".

Yes, the family is supporting me they give me advice and at times sometimes they can support me some funds from a certain place – family friends and that is how I get supported. The family is not with me because why I decided to leave them then come and study here because if I had been there so a lot of responsibilities would give me a lot of responsibilities. In the community I come from if there is any event

then I must attend so if there is a funeral you must attend it. If there were a wedding, if I would have been there would have been already two knocks Dawn! Dawn!, so I have to distance myself from them that is why I have decided to move away so I can keep away from the family. (Pgs. 2&3)

Lowe et al. (2007) add their voices to the other research findings of the lack of financial support. They discovered that a third of the part-time students did not get financial support and a quarter did not get domestic support, which caused extra stress. However Vaccaro and Lovell (2010:173) found in their research "no matter how demanding life was, women found effective ways to cope, manage, and succeed".

4.6.3.3   *Work/Colleagues*

That is difficult even though it is part-time you have to complete a certain task and if your don't complete it in the working area you have to take it home and complete it using an excel form and then it disappears its very taxing, so sometimes it takes my time. I bring the work to home it becomes like homework I'm taking, but the work I did not complete maybe the assignment must meet a certain deadline. So if I don't finish it at work I have to bring it home. Switch on my computer so it's difficult. They don't give you any support because if they put deadline you must meet the deadline every time. So if you have to write letters to certain people you must do so. (Pgs.4&5)

Yum et al. (2005) support this student's sentiments that some employers expected employees to give their best at work even though they may have study commitments. We must be reminded of what Mulenga and Liang (2008:291&306) have to say about motivation which should sustain the student through her challenges. It is a "process in which goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained," and they talk of "four motivation constructs, [namely] keeping up and fulfilment, intellectual stimulation, *escape* and social contact and adjustment".

Ja, they (her colleagues) could have supported me. Like for instance the salary I receive is very minimal. Pays a bit of my rent. They give me R900 but because I am an international student they take off 25%. Like I'm left with R600 or something so I feel the administration should for a student like me who has financial difficulties be just left.

They should not take it, because at the end of the day you have to go to the SARS office and they give your money back, which is then just a waste of time. They could have supported me in that they could have spoken to other departments so that I could have gotten some other jobs, within the faculty. They are not doing that, they are just too busy or not considering that. (Pg.4)

Kember et al. (2008) also found part-time students would not allow themselves to work less at work for fear of repercussions and therefore had less time to study. Most of students also complained they have very little time to learn (Lore and Tait, 2004).

Carney et al. (2005:315) expressed the opinion "it would seem more important to educate students how to manage time, to help balance both their studies and part-time work", and that "they (the institution) can contribute to enhance the student experience by addressing part-time work challenge".

4.6.3.4   Social

My friends, because my friends don't get my support because its like I'm out of their lives because my friends depend on me to assist them in different situations because I'm not there so if they want advice to do a certain things or to do work. That affects my friends.

Yum et al. (2005) reiterate this point by saying it is relatively common that students sacrifice their social lives for extra study time.

The friends I have now are in the academic – in the university. If I want to they help me say the Internet. Say the emotional support, financially they, the friends I have are very supportive. (Pgs.5&6)

Scott et al. (1998:237) claim a "possible secret of the graduates who succeed despite family hostility may have been their finding support amongst fellow students and university personnel" and that is the case in this instance.

4.6.3.5   Financial

Only from a few friends support me. The bursary I could have got was for married person but I didn't get that one because my marks were slightly lower. I tried to persuade them but they didn't give it.

It is tough. It's only the tuition fee I get home and the accommodation I get from friends. They pay for my accommodation and the food also from friends, and aaam and electricity, and what else? Ja, it's difficult. If the institution could give me a bursary, that would be fine with me. If the bursary can cover tuition fee and accommodation at least, I could be happy with that. (Pgs.6&7)

Lowe and Gayle (2007) have made the same point: in their study a third of the part-time students did not get financial support and a quarter did not get domestic support, which caused extra stress.

4.6.3.6   Institution

Yes, in academics the difficulties. I find that I follow the procedures say of writing, I followed the procedures, I wrote very well, presented well but then I found out that the lecturers were not giving me what I deserved.

Now I don't know if it is a problem of where I come from or I don't know what the problem actually is. But I could sense I'm doing well but I'm not getting what I deserve. So I don't know what to say. They are discouraging me to work hard.

Maybe transport or staying on campus. You know the university houses: every time the university closes. That is a problem if you don't have fare to go home.

I think a, I think the lecturers should be a more easy when you approach them when you want say academic advice or something you want to do. I still find them putting you off. I don't know if they just busy or just putting you off. They should listen a bit. (Pgs.7, 8&9)

The following excerpts from various researchers support what the student is professing. Luna and Medina (2005) declare higher education institutions are not often accessible to students because they are far away.

Walters and Koetsier, (2006:105) stressed the importance of lecturers being immersed in the "real world". Shirley Walters (1982), when she quotes I.H. Ferris, sums up the conflicting realities between the two groups, the lecturers are too academic to be able to relate to students; almost like asking a rich person to imagine they were poor. Students wanted the lecturers to understand the realities in which they live (Walters and Koetsier, 2006).

4.6.3.7   *Other challenges/Support*

She had said all she needed to say and the researcher terminated the interview.

4.6.4   Adrian's interview

4.6.4.1   *Demographics*

Adrian is 40 years of age, single and an educator.

4.6.4.2   *Home/Family*

A big challenge that I find at the moment is that I am not fulfilling either one of the three (home, work and university).

Lowe and Gayle (2007:229) add that students "felt overloaded and there was often a conflict of interest"

At home there are responsibilities, which are lagging behind because of work and at school the responsibilities are also lagging behind because I have to attend lectures. At lectures there are things I

am not fulfilling because I have to do school work. I find myself in every area of the three. I am doing half -half.

Yum et al. (2005) add to this by advocating higher education institutions should take cognisance of the fact that the mature part-time Masters students not only face challenges when studying at their institution, but also in other domains e.g. home and work.

Yes the support is there but sometimes you can see that they fail to understand you that what kind of person is he now because you come late and you go out early. I would like moral support and if possible financial support. (Pgs.2&3)

4.6.4.3   Work/Colleagues

At work they always say I have to work full time although I am only part time. Practically you can see from others that you are almost made to do full time work and that is the practical part, which is very hard.

At the work place my colleagues view me like one who won't hide things he has a very high aspiration and I am leaving behind the basics so you can see the look from your friends at the same time you don't get the support you expected from them – they are not flexible to timetable. There are times I would like to swop periods but they say you are the one who decided to study and work so it is up to you. (Pg.4)

Kembler and Leung 2004:354) also reiterates the work domain "was so important that there was a limited leeway for manipulation" and that the part-time students "generally accepted they had to comply with work demands, and then see how part-time study could be accommodated within the remaining time"

4.6.4.4   Social

Friends and social life – because I am studying I have cut ties so I am not with them and have no social life. The friends say, Oh! Adrian you have changed your lifestyle – which is not good. No support at the moment. I want support but I am still studying so they say I will get back to their circle but they do encourage me to study.

I tell them that at the moment I am going to have this plan in my life they say good – but now I don't think that is support especially the support I expected as friends. So they are not saying okay Adrian is free at a certain time and we can meet up then to get together? (Pg.5)

Yum et al. (2005:354) state "self-sacrifice is something given up for the sake of study e.g. time or other activities are forgone" and in this case socialising.

4.6.4.5   Financial

Financially it is very challenging because at this level you have to pay for your own studies. You have to pay that from the small salary you get and at the same time you have to accept costs are going up. Yes I had to work for 3 years on extra time. I am a science teacher to I give extra lessons to make money. (Pg.6)

Carney, Mc Neish and Mc Coll (2005) add students are ignorant of where financial support can be accessed. If the student was aware of this the financial burden would have been lifted.

4.6.4.6   Institution

At Stellenbosch I remember before I came here my father asked me, "Are you going to study in South Africa" so I said, "Yes." But he asked me, "Do you know that those people have just come from?" I said, "That was 10 or 12 years ago." He said, "Do you think that time is enough for you to be accommodated." I said, "No they have changed." But when I came here my expectancy was quite opposite especially in Western Cape at Stellenbosch. I met a lot of challenges especially where I was rejected to be accommodated. There were all white Namibians and a few South Africans so I am black they were not ready they wanted to shift me to another house. I was not ready.

From there when I came to the institution the first challenge was Afrikaans. I tried my level best to learn but you can't pick it up that quickly. I also see tempers in groups – black, coloured and whites. It is still there you can see it so whatever you try you can see.

In the language yes the lecturer was also challenging. For one who doesn't understand Afrikaans then comes in and speaks Afrikaans for most of the lecture. In the second semester the class was sympathetic and they interrupted for my sake so I was very happy with their assistance. (Pg.7)

Rohleder et al. (2000:141) state the following with regards to the student's views: "the tendency in a short course to deny or gloss over real and painful issues of ongoing racism and discrimination. They further state that practice across boundaries of class and race should take into account the way language and discourse influence learning".

4.6.4.7   Other challenges/Support

I expected support from my friends and family but it is not happening. For instance when it is birthdays we all support one another but now I see my friends are not supporting me while I am studying.

Some (lecturers) gave support but some remained adamant. I think support is needed especially when it comes to assessing students – they have to give us a timetable and they have to be faithful to that timetable because I have a witness in that sometimes you see that the timetable has just changed and

before it was not like that and that is very disturbing. Secondly being adult students if they give you everything from the beginning it would be easier. All the material so you can carry on.

The challenge I have faced is that in a postgraduate level some work hard and some do not work hard and in our case I think the time has come where a student should be left to study at his own pace rather than doing it in a group.

People should be accommodating to those who are working faster - let them go. At that pace and those who are going slowly let them go instead of pressing them to go faster. (Pg.8)

Luna and Medina (2005:22) found the following points/concerns were also raised by part-time students in their research: "they are independent and self-motivated; they needed reliable and accurate information, course delivery and support in terms of their programs of study; they see themselves not merely as students but also consumers and they demand efficiency from the university i.e. they are neither as understanding nor patient with bureaucracy; they may not have time to attend lectures/functions and the traditional graduate experience may not be sought or desired; and finally they seek self-help/support and customized student portals to enable student access to information easily and quickly".

June's, Anthony's, Dawn's and Adrian's face-to-face semi-structured interviews were very informative. The questions asked were relevant to their experiences and the research participants were motivated to help future students. The interview came across as conversational and not as a conversation with a purpose in mind. The researcher restrained herself from adding her own challenges and opinions.

The research participants were cautioned that a second interview might be needed to clarify a point/s made in the interview or if other salient research questions arose from the research project.

4.7   (B) E-MAILED INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

The researcher checked her e-mail every day for replies from the participants. As mentioned before, contact was made with students regularly if responses were not received by e-mail or telephone. The researcher wanted to get as much feedback as possible so that the data collected would be a good reflection of students' challenges and the support they needed. They were asked to e-mail any questions regarding the interview schedule so that any question they were not sure of how to respond to, could be clarified.

Three of the participants, Moira, Albert and Ann responded by doing the interview schedule via e-mail. More had promised to do the e-mailed interview schedule for the researcher as soon as they could but they did not. The e-mail respondents wrote the following with regards to the challenges they experience and the support or lack of support they received.

4.7.1 Moira's response

4.7.1.1 *Demographics*

Moira is 30, married and has one child. She is an educator.

4.7.1.2 *Home/Family*

Ek het baie min uitdagings ervaar. My man was die meeste van die naweke weg as gevolg van sportverpligtinge dus was dit baie maklik vir my om oor naweke te werk of klas te loop. Ek het baie ondersteuning van my ouers en my man gekry. My man is ook koshuisvader by 'n skool en ek hoef daarom geen kos te maak nie aangesien ons kos in die koshuis. Baie ondersteuning van my ouers en familie. (Pgs.2&3)

Moira wrote she experienced very little challenges. Her husband often went away because of sport commitments over the weekends. She was able to work on her assignments or to attend lectures over the weekends, while he was away. She received much support from her parents, family and her husband. Her husband was in charge of the learners at a boarding school and she did not cook any meals because they got food from the school.

4.7.1.3 *Work/Colleagues*

Wiening uitdagings by die werk aangesien ek reeds 9 jaar in 'n leerondersteuningspos is bepaal ek my eie werkstempo en het ek nie soveel druk soos gewone onderwysers nie. Baie ondersteuning van my werk deurdat ek die dae wat ons klas gehad het die skool vroeer kon verlaat. Baie ondersteuning van kollegas deurdat hul my aangemoedig en ondersteun het. Hul het ook verstaan as ek weens my studies nie fuksies kon bywoon nie. (Pg.3)

Moira also had very few challenges at work. She has been a learning support educator for nine years and was able to work at her own pace. She said she did not have as much work pressure as the ordinary educator. The days she taught at school she was able to leave early. She received a lot of support at work.

Yum et al. (2005) believed, like this part-time student, those students who were able to negotiate developed a sense of belonging.

Kember (1999) declared some employers are highly supportive of study and allow time from work for study which supports Moira's statement.

4.7.1.4   Social

Aangesien ek die meeste van my werk naweke kon doen wanneer my man nie tuis was nie, was ek normaalweg voor met my werk. Dus kon ek steeds my vriende inpas. Baie ondersteuning deurdat die meeste van my vriende nagraads studeer. (Pg.4)

Because Moira was able to do most of her work over the weekends, when her husband was not at home, she was able to continue with her studies. By having the time to do her assignments and lectures over the weekends, she was still able to have time with her friends. Once again she was well supported by her friends because most of them were also doing postgraduate studies.

The students who were able to negotiate with the different domains, be it partner/spouse, family, friends and work were more likely to complete their courses (Yum et al., 2005).

4.7.1.5   Financial

Alhoewel die studies duur was het ek nog geen ander finansiele verpligtinge (bv. kinders) gehad nie en kon dit daarom bekostig. My skoonouers het my finale jaar se studies betaal. (Pg.4)

Moira wrote the course was expensive but she did not have any other financial obligations e.g. children, and therefore she could afford to study. Her parents-in-law paid for her final year of studies.

4.7.1.6   Institution

Ek was aan die begin by verward maar het geen kans verby laat gaan om uit te vind hoe dinge werk en wat ek moet doen nie. Ek het baie ondersteuning van biblioteekpersoneel, HUMARGA personeel gekry. (Pg.4)

Moira wrote in the beginning, when she began at the institution of higher education, she was very confused. She made sure that at every available opportunity she had, she would find out how things worked and what was expected of her. She received much help from the library and Information Technology personnel.

Anderson et al. (2008) believe, like this student did, the student needs to be an agentic person i.e. to be self-motivated, self-directed, tenacious, and persistent and possess the necessary academic skills will do well. Moira, like Hill, Lomas and Mac Gregor (2003:19) state, students "valued the higher education institution support networks".

4.7.1.7   Other challenges/Support

Die hoeveelheid werk was aan die begin baie oorwerldigend. Ek moes mooi kom bymekaar hou om nie deurmekaar te raak nie. Miskien sou ek aanbeveel dat ons eers een module voltooi alvorens ons met 'n volgende een begin. (Pg.5)

Moira found the amount of work she did was over-whelming. She tried to keep abreast of things so that she did not get bogged down. She suggested students complete one module before they start the next one.

Moira being a determined, agentic person echoes the characteristics and requirements of a good part-time student in the following researchers' research: Yum et al. (2005:316) mention determination to complete the course the student chooses, needs to be supported by the student being prepared for it, having/developing "the necessary qualities for self-managed learning," and being motivated by intrinsic interest. Lowe and Gayle (2007:234) state "students achieving good manageable work/life/study balance appeared to be their coping strategies and resilience and the quality of support received from their families, employers, fellow students and from the institution".

4.7.2 Albert's response

4.7.2.1   Demographics

Albert is 48 years old, single and a School Psychologist.

4.7.2.2   Home/Family

Living alone – have to do things on my own. Little support at home and enough support from my father. (Pg.2)

Albert like many part-time students, now and before need to take heed of what Kember (1999:110) has to say: "study, therefore, has to be accommodated alongside an existing web of ties, obligations and duties".

4.7.2.3   Work/Colleagues

Very little, if any support at work. My colleagues are not dependable. Not much support from them one or two may enquire. (Pg.2)

Kember and Leung (2004) found, like Albert, intrinsic and extrinsic support or the lack thereof a prominent issue.

4.7.2.4   Social

Do not have any close friends. Not much support. (Pg.2)

4.7.2.5   Financial

Extreme lack of support: No help from WCED or US. Forced me to quit. (Pg.3)

Carney et al. (2005) recommend the University Support Services' objective be to address the financial challenges faced by the part-time student population.

4.7.2.6   Institution

Travelling from B-West to US for contact sessions. Working, while studying. Finance. Support from my employer (WCED)-nil. Being in a Rural Area. Not doing the M.Ed (Psych) that I really want to or should do.

Luna and Medina (2005) also found in their research, like this student, higher education institutions are often not accessible to students because they live far away. Transport is required to reach the higher education institutions. In some instances public transport is not available e.g. in rural areas.

4.7.2.7   Other challenges/Support

Die WCED kon meer gedoen het om my te help om 'n "Registerd Ed Psychologist" te word, sodat ek 'n beter diens kon lewer namens hulle; bv. om studieverlof toe te laat, met finansiële hulp(Beurse). Beter erkenning van my kwalifikasies, ervaring en senioriteit. Beter samewerking tussen WCED en US om verdere studie vir werknemers in verafgeleë plekke moontlik te maak. Ek voel daar word nog sterk teen my gediskrimineer. I am still in the "Struggle." Ek is nou 14jaar in hierdie diens en 12jaar daarvan het ek geveg vir 'n beter bedeling, maar sonder sukses. (Pg.3)

Albert found the distance he travelled was very tiring. Working in a demanding, full time position and studying at the same time was another challenge. Albert found part-time studies

expensive: fees, accommodation, travelling expenses, etc. He received no support from his employer, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) and he felt some compensation was due because he lived in a rural area.

He was upset because he did not have the necessary qualifications according to the higher education institution to do his M. Ed. (Psych). He had his mind set on doing his M. Ed. (Psych.).

Walters (1982) writes it is important for institutions to focus on the working class people and their needs because many are doing part-time studies and she added if the lecturers gave the students support they fared better. Albert states that he did not receive such consideration.

Albert wrote he felt the WCED could have done more to get him registered as an Educational Psychologist. He felt he could have done excellent work for them. If they had granted him study leave and helped him financially with a bursary he would have found the financial assistance of great help. The higher education institution he felt should have recognised his qualifications, experience and seniority and allowed him the chance to pursue his dream.

Gustavsson (as cited in Walters, 1997) reiterates inclusion of students like Albert; one needs to build upon what the person has learned before and therefore the higher education institutions need to consolidate the student's knowledge with what they need to learn for the institution.

Gouthro (as cited in Cooper and Walters, 2009) suggests, those who educate adults should consider whether by adhering to maintain and champion educational movements that are commissioned by the government and corporate sector, or whether they have a vital role to play in evaluating the evolving purpose of adult education.

Thomas (cited in Lowe and Gayle, 2007) emphasizes the following: the higher education institutions (lecturers) should welcome the diversity of part-time students and not expect them to be the same.

Albert adds there should be communication between the university and the WCED to enable people in faraway areas to study.

He feels he was still being discriminated against. He felt as if he was still in the apartheid era. He had been working for the department for fourteen years and twelve of those years he had been fighting for a better dispensation but to no avail.

4.7.3 Ann's response

4.7.3.1 Demographics

Ann is 51 years old, married and a mother of two children aged 31and 24 who are independent and stay in another city.

4.7.3.2 Home/Family

> *It was very time consuming and expensive. My husband supported me very well. The support at home was excellent and my husband allowed me to continue with studies. Only me and my husband at home. (Pg.2)*

Fok (2010:307) states "housewives, like Ann, suddenly face an emptiness and abundance of time" and then they take up part-time studying.

4.7.3.3 Work/Colleagues

> *We are a private school and we have to manage our time very well with all our other activities as well. None of the management supported me or allowed me to study at work. The studies were all done in my private time at home. No support from colleagues. (Pg.3)*

Lore and Tait (2004) echo Amy's sentiment that most students gave priority to their jobs as many employers expected them to, even if the course they were doing was applicable to their workplace

4.7.3.4 Social

> *I had to manage my time very well and there were no time for social interaction with friends. The friends were always understanding and supportive. (Pg.3)*

Amy had to make sacrifices and Yum et al. (2005) state self-sacrifice is something a student gives up e.g. socializing, to enable him or her to have extra time for studying e.g. watching TV, going to matches, going to the opera, etc.

4.7.3.5   Financial

> *Very expensive to study for 5 years. I wanted to study remedial and my studies were not about that. No support, paid myself.*

DOE (2009) states: Students are not able to turn back the clock and start at the beginning because they would need to relive their lives and therefore, like Ann, they should be accommodated into the existing system. Gustavsson (as cited in Walters, 1997) adds that institutions should build upon the knowledge the student has learnt through exclusive experience.

Scott et al. (1998) advances the following idea, that mature students are often more interested in personal development and choose subjects that are interesting to them. They are hindered by set requirements for a qualification. They have life experiences, which gives the subjects they choose a deeper meaning.

4.7.3.6   Institution

> *The lectures were supportive during the Hons year, however during the M.Ed course the support was less. Because I live in Cape Town and it was very difficult to go to Stellenbosch for research and lectures. The library was not always accessible for me. Internet never worked. Support from my promoter was not there. I had to contact her for help. Not much help from the institution. (Pg.4)*

As previously mentioned, Cooper and Walters (2009) report the lecturers presumed that the student's dilemma was someone else's problem, maybe the student's but not theirs. The student was expected just to cope with the challenges.

4.7.3.7   Other challenges/Support

> *The course is too expensive. I need more time and time management. (Pg.4)*

Ann needed to take command of managing the time she had. "It's time management, not letting it master you but you master it." (Lore and Tait, 2004:13).

The researcher found the transcriptions and interview schedules' answers supported much of the research findings in the literature review and added to the previous researchers' data because of the extra domain other challenges experienced and other support received or not received.

4.8   SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW DATA

The face-to-face interviews yielded more general information re students' demographics, challenges and support. By interviewing the research participants face-to-face, one gets more in touch with their understandings of the challenges they faced and their realities i.e. their experience of their educational journey at the higher education institution.

The e-mailed versions conjured up a feeling of empirical research i.e. a questionnaire. The e-mailed interview schedule still managed, however, to capture relevant data of students' challenges and their experiences even though the process was much shorter than having had an hour interview and transcribing all the face-to-face interviews. The quality of the data from the two data sets was maintained through thorough content analysis.

4.9   DATA CAPTURING

The researcher summarise the personal details of the research participants to reflect the dynamics of the group and she drew up a Demographics Sheet.

4.10   TRANSCRIPTIONS

The transcriptions of the face-to-face interview were typed by the researcher. Three research participants sent the e-mailed interview schedules back: Moira, Albert and Ann. The students in a sense provided their own transcriptions. They answered the questions in a succinct manner, were quicker to process and do content analysis on. The reason for the quicker processing was that respondents who answered the e-mailed interview schedule questions, unlike the face-to-face interviewees, did not veer away much from what was asked.

The researcher used the codes, terms and colours to mark all pertinent data on the right hand side of the transcriptions and the e-mailed interview schedules' answers. All the appraisals on support were summarised on a summary support sheet. The researcher was able to get a good impression of the amount of support the research participants received in each domain by using the data collated on the summary support sheet. The summary support data sheet reflected the following:

4.11   AN OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN THEMES OF THE TWO DATA SETS

(A) Face-to-Face Interviews and

(B) E-Mailed Interview Schedules

4.11.1   Home

A & B: Many students felt they received no or little support, i.e. more help was needed; be it help from spouse, partners or domestic help. Help was needed to accomplish the multitude of household chores they did.

B: Moira was lucky because she did not have to cook as the place where her husband worked supplied them with meals. Albert had no support because he lived alone.

4.11.2   Family

A & B: Most students received adequate support from their families be it child minding, time to do their studies, moral support, etc.

B: Moira and Ann received good support. The foreign student fared worse because she had no family here to help her.

4.11.3   Work

A & B: The majority of students felt their employers were unsupportive and expected them to fulfil their obligations a hundred percent.

A & B: Moira and Anthony received ample support from their families.

A: "To leave a bit earlier was always a problem for him (principal)", said one of the participants. They were not morally supported and could not take time off from work for lectures or assignments. Dawn said: "Even if you had a part-time job you met deadlines.

"B: Ann said: "It was difficult to ask for help and none of the management supported me or allowed me to study at work."

4.11.4 Colleagues

A & B: Most found their colleagues were not supportive. Students felt they were shunned because they were studying at "their" age; "who studies at their age?"

A & B: Moira and Anthony were well supported by their colleagues.

A: One experienced "… lots of negativity from a lot of people. Certain people feel that you can't achieve something in life but they don't know of all the sacrifices you need to make".

4.11.5 Social/friends

A & B: The majority did not get much support from their friends.

A: There was no support from friends for June or Anthony, married students, because family and study commitments did not allow them to socialize. They often lost contact with their friends.

B: Ann wrote: "I managed my time very well and there was no time for social interaction with friends".

A: The foreign student, Dawn, had more contact with her friends because they lived together at the same residence. She had more contact with her academic friends because they required her advice and she was at residence with them.

A & B: Most of students only socialized with their immediate families.

B: Moira was able to see her friends because her husband was away over weekends for sport events and she did the bulk of her studies then.

4.11.6 Financial

A & B: Very little support was given in the financial domain be the support from the WCED, the institution of higher education, outside funding, from family or friends.

A: Financial support in the form of bursaries or otherwise was not available to the married couples. June said: "I only attend family functions that involve my immediate family instead

of going out for the evening. I'm going to spend this amount on that. – No, I've never had that".

A: The foreign student could not get a bursary because her marks were too low and she managed to get a temporary part-time job only, which paid a small salary.

B: Moira received financial aid from her in-laws in her final year.

A: Anthony said the WCED gave him a once off payment of R10 000, but it did not cover all the expenses of tuition for a number of years. He also said: "... as teachers we don't earn a lot of money".

4.11.7 Institution

A & B: The majority of students indicated there was little or no support from their higher education institution.

B: Albert stated lack of support from the "WCED and the institution of higher education forced me to quit".

B: Albert and Ann felt the university did not help them to do the course they wanted to do. Moira, Ann and Albert felt the course was too expensive. Moira said she got much support from the library and Information and Technology personnel.

The lack of support will be dealt with in greater detail in the section. The crux of the research project is: What support can be given to mature part-time student at the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch? – In which areas did students feel there was not sufficient support from the institution during their Masters' programme?

4.11.8 Support needs at the institution

Students raised the following concerns regarding support:

A: The context of student must be considered. There are different students together e.g. part-time/full time; single/married; young/ mature. They come from different environments and have had different experiences.

B: The higher education institution did not necessarily implement the educational policy that the institution advocated i.e. Inclusive Education. The institution should be following the ideal of Inclusive Education i.e. taking the student's context into consideration. The institution should be fostering lifelong learning.

A: Students felt they were being treated the same as full time students. Full time students did not face as many challenges and yet the part-time students are expected to do as well as them. The research participants felt the lecturers needed to make a mind shift: you cannot treat part-time students the same as full time students: same workload, etc. Mature part-time students cannot be expected to complete assignments in as short a time as full time students do.

A & B: The mature part-time students had more responsibilities and faced more challenges and the aforementioned were not taken into consideration e.g. work, household chores, travelling. One student travelled 840 km from home to the campus and back again. Some had difficulty in going to the campus for lectures and research. The library was not always accessible and one of the students could not access the Internet.

B: Students who lived in rural areas need their requests to be considered as well. There must be communication between the WCED and the institution of higher education to enable them to study.

A: The students adapted coming to university to begin his/her studies i.e. not only the administration, but the transition of interpreting, reading, analysing of new work especially if you have had a long break from studying. Students had to adapt to the unknown.

A: There was a lot of group work and some students were shy to speak in front of a group. "You should be able work at your own pace i.e. not according to the group's pace: some work hard and others don't and some work fast and others slow." One student said, "as you get older everything is getting slower - you are not in study mode anymore. I was confused – the pace was hectic and I tried to help myself".

A & B: Few or no bursaries are available for students for further part-time studies. You get discriminated against because some are awarded according to marks. "I did not get one because my marks were too low."

A: The part-time students who stayed at the university's residences did not get transport at night to and from campus to their residences. Their lectures ended late at night because they

were following the part-time course. Another concern of students staying at residence was that the university closes the residences during vacations. They were left with no place to stay. The airfare home was expensive. When one of the foreign students moved into his residence on campus, he experienced racial tension and moved to another residence.

A: The language of instruction was often not in the student's mother tongue i.e. lectures were given in Afrikaans and English.

A: One of the foreign students was worried about the mark allocation for assignments. The marks were discouraging.

A & B: Many had difficulty in making contact with lecturers for academic or personal advice. "Lecturers should be easier to approach: academic advice or something you want to do." They felt that contact time was important. "My promoter was not there – I contacted her for help."

A: Lack of personal contact time with the lecturers when seeking advice was also a concern: "I still find them putting you off. I don't know if they're just busy or just putting you off, they should listen a bit"" said one of the research participants.

B: "I found the lecturers less supportive during the Masters' programme". Ann felt the lecturers could have given support by giving more time to students. She also felt that a lecture or course in time management would help students.

A & B: The materials and yearly programme e.g. assignment dates need to be given early. There are too many changes and students did not know when their assignments were due for the year. If there was a "programme" it was often changed. "The study workload was heavy and I tried to keep ahead otherwise I would become confused." A suggestion would be to complete one module at a time.

A: One of the foreign resident students had difficulty finding part-time work. One of the professors did organize her something for a short while. Unfortunately she needed another job after that one. She felt maybe the professor could have enquired from other departments if they needed anyone. She went back to her home country to earn some money to continue her studies.

4.11.9   Other support needs

The research participants also raised the following support concerns after being asked the questions: Any other challenges you faced that were not covered in the interview schedule? And any support you received or would have liked to receive?

A & B: Many students felt that the Department of Education (WCED) should make more bursaries available for full time study for further education i.e. after a degree. The Department of Education does not give long leave or study leave any more except for the day before an examination and the day of the examination. Students felt they would be more productive being at university from 9am – 3pm, as they would not need to juggle/manage their times.

A & B: They were of the opinion that the university should also work with the Department of Education and let the department know what the needs of students are. They should also try to get more sponsors for the mature part-time students. The mature students have many financial commitments and cannot afford to give up their jobs for a few years to study. When you study there is no financial help for your children. The aforementioned institutions should work together to make lifelong studies a reality. Employers should make compromises for those students who live far away to study.

A: Part-time employment also requires you to give a hundred percent of your time and effort. Part-time work is often for meagre pay.

The results of the research project reflect that more support is needed from the domains of work/colleagues, finances and institutions.

A few support recommendations made, based on the above replies of the research participants, will be given in Chapter Five.

4.12   REFLECTION

The process that was followed for the implementation of the study was discussed in this chapter. The communication, the face-to-face interviews, electronic "interviews", the drawing up of the interview schedule, terms, codes, data capturing, an overview of the support summary sheet and a diagram of the data capturing process were given.

The support data collected from the research project reflected the salient challenge domains and supplied relevant support data to be used for support suggestions for the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University. The challenge domains in which students indicated that they had not received adequate support will be addressed in the following chapter namely Chapter 5. The researcher will be discussing the results and making recommendations for support and suggestions for further research based on the data that was collected from the transcriptions and the e-mailed answers from the interview schedules.

A diagram will be included to give a visual picture of the challenge domains especially the institution and other challenges and support domains. The institution and other support domains will reflect more information.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(Pseudonyms have been given for students' names to protect their identity.)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

A synopsis of the prior chapters will be given in this chapter. The researcher will also be dealing with the findings as reflected in the data. Recommendations for support will be made to the institution, and topics for further research will be suggested. The limitations of the study will be taken into consideration.

5.2 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 gave an outline of what the research project was about: what challenges mature, part-time Masters students faced and what support they received or did not receive in each challenge. The chapter informed us of the aim of the research project namely, what support structures can the institution put in place for future mature, part-time Masters students. A summary of what research has been done was given.

The researcher chose Qualitative Research, which is an interpretive method of researching. Data was collected from the face-to-face interviews and e-mailed interview schedule answers. The importance of ethics was covered and mention was made of a pilot study done on the research topic.

In Chapter 2 a literature review was done. From the literature review we gleaned that not much research had been done in this field and that there are a myriad of challenges facing students. They may receive or not receive support for the challenging domains. We were also made aware that higher education institutions in South Africa are not doing much to help students.

The literature review's sole purpose was not about how much research has been done in the field but also to make the readers aware of the challenges faced by students. The readers being referred to are the lecturers and the people who should consider giving students the necessary support. As one research participant said, "They have lost touch with the realities of the part-time students and are only aware of the full time students, who do not have as many responsibilities as we do."

Chapter 3 outlined the modus operandi of the research project. The researcher reiterated the research question and her aim. She made use of the interpretive qualitative research design to capture the realities of her research participants. The data collection techniques were face-to-face interviews, interview schedule questions and notes. The chapter also deals with how the data was analysed, the validity of the results and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 gave an overview of how the research project was implemented namely communicating with research participants telephonically or via the Internet. The researcher informed the reader how the interview schedule was drawn up and how the interviews would be conducted, how the transcriptions were coded and the data was collected. What follows reveals the findings that were reflected on the summary support sheet. The recommendations for support and further research topics will be dealt with in the chapter.

5.3 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHICS

The majority of the research participants' ages ranged from 40-50. Four were female and three were male. Four were married and two were single.

5.4 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The following challenge domains were used to collect the data and it was analysed. They were prevalent in the literature review and the extra domain created by the researcher to explore more issues namely other challenges and support the research participants wished to discuss. The challenging domains were used by the researcher in the interview schedule. Those pertaining to her research project will be marked with an asterisk.

5.5 TIME

Most of the research participants did not have enough time for their studies, their jobs, their family commitments and socializing. Therefore they found studying demanding and

frustrating in the sense that they wanted to do well in their studies but did not have sufficient time. They were expected to do the assignments in the same allotted time as full time students. Full time students generally had fewer commitments and they could focus more of their time on studies.

Students may benefit from a course in time management and the year's timetable on the course's assignments, examinations etc., so they could organise their other commitments around their studies.

One student suggested to complete one module at a time would afford the student opportunity of focussing on one module and completing that module thoroughly.

5.6   CONFLICTING COMMITMENTS

5.6.1   Home/Family

The married female students did not want to leave their children at home but they ultimately felt their children would benefit from their decision to study in the future i.e. job opportunities/promotion should bring in a better salary which could be used to better their education/lives. They often did not get sufficient support with domestic chores.

Students found it problematic to work, study and support their families. One student left his children with his sisters and they provided the parental support for his children. There was not enough time for them to go around fulfilling their obligations, and some people failed to understand their predicament.

Moral support from those who lived, worked and lectured the students would be appreciated by them. Their intimate families had a lot to do with motivating the student to continue with his/her studies.

5.6.2   Work/Colleagues

Most of the students were not supported by their employers or their colleagues. Dawn and Adrian were expected to complete their work and work hard even harder than the permanent staff even though they were only employed part-time. Adrian felt he worked harder because he was employed part-time. Only two students found their principals and colleagues very supportive. Both of them were allowed time to do their assignments and go off early to attend

lectures. Very few students were supported by their employer or by their colleagues. Only two received excellent support. The majority of students as stated before would benefit from moral support as well as time off for their studies.

5.6.3   Social

Most of students did not have or even had a social life; if they did it was limited. They used their time and money on studies. Only Moira was able to organize her study time to be able to meet with her friends.

Most students had put their social lives on hold whilst they were studying.

5.6.4   Financial

Many students gave up holidays, buying personal items, going out and spent their bonuses on their studies. Most did not receive any bursaries because they were part-time or because of their previous course results. One student wrote the "extreme lack of support from the WCED and the institution of higher education forced him to quit."

Moira was the only student who managed to meet her financial obligations without any stress because her in-laws helped her in her final year of studies and she did not have extra financial commitments e.g. children like June, Anthony and Dawn. Ann was able to pay for her own studies as her two children were financially independent and her husband also worked. She, however, made the comment; like some other students did she found part-time studies "too" expensive. Many students did not receive enough financial support. The majority of students bar one got little or no financial support.

The last two challenging domains are the ones prevalent to the researcher's research/study. It contains more details namely institutional challenges and any other challenges they might have encountered or support they would have liked to have received.

5.6.5   Institution

Two students found adapting to being academics and working with young full time students challenging. Both felt they had to cope with so much more than the full time students. The institution must take note of their multiplex lives.

Some students felt the lecturers expected the same from the part-time students namely amount and quality of work that the full time students did. June did not like the fact that she was forced to talk and make presentations in front of the class.

Anthony and Adrian found it a concern to fit in because of their cultures: Coloured and African. Adrian experienced racism and in his first semester the lecturer would only give lectures in Afrikaans. Albert felt as if he was still being discriminated against. As mentioned earlier, the issue of racism/discrimination is sensitive and may be glossed over according to research.

Dawn needed transport to and from campus at night because of safety and the weather. She was hoping that the university would award her a bursary. She was concerned because the residences closed during vacation times and there was no alternate accommodation so students had the extra expense of flying home, which they could hardly afford.

Adrian and Dawn wanted help with speaking/writing in Afrikaans/English and would have liked someone who was competent in Afrikaans/English to help them. Dawn wants "to ask questions or discuss something". Moira found at first she was disorientated and confused and she went out of her way to find out what needed to be done and how. She received much support from the library and Information Technology personnel.

Dawn felt that the lecturers should be approachable so she could ask "academic advice or something you want to do". She found them "putting you off". Dawn said, "They should listen a bit."

Albert felt he travelled so far for contact sessions and the WCED and the higher education institution would not help him find a solution to his problem. Ann had difficulty going to lectures and doing research at the library because of the distance from her home to the university. The library times also did not suit her. Ann found the support from the lecturers was less in her Masters course. Her promoter made no contact with her; she had to contact her promoter all the time. The majority of students felt they received little or no support from their higher education institution. Only one felt there was adequate support.

5.6.6   Other Support/ Challenges

Challenges and other support received or support they wished to receive was an added on domain in which students could voice what other challenges they faced and any support they

would have liked to have received. June would like the WCED to bring back study leave because she believes she could be more productive if awarded a bursary for full time studies.

Anthony said it seemed as you get older you get slower and you studied harder. He reiterated the fact that the mature student had more challenges to face. Ann found that she needed more time and therefore she managed the time she had very carefully. Moira found the workload was overwhelming; therefore she worked hard to keep up with the work. She recommended one module be done at a time.

Adrian would have like to have had more support from his friends. He wanted the lecturers to hand out a timetable of what they were going to do for the year and keep to it during the course of the year. He would have liked to have had all his materials at the beginning of the course and to be allowed to work at his own pace and do his own work. He felt that some students did not work hard and others worked too slowly.

Two of Albert's main challenges were travelling and financial. His employers or the institution gave no support in the aforementioned areas.

Albert and Ann were not following the course they wanted to because the institution had a set of criteria that were necessary to meet and they did not meet the criteria. Albert felt strongly that the university could have taken other factors into consideration viz. his qualifications, years of experience, and seniority.

The above two challenging domains will inform the researcher of suggestions for support she may propose to The Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University.

The above merely reflects what external requirements need to be met to make this group of students more productive and motivated to make a success of their studies. Their personal characteristics/dispositions and academic skills will assist them to succeed namely an agentic, persistent, tenacious and determined personality, together with study, self management, time management, academic writing skills, etc. will help them forge ahead. Moira seems to have the aforementioned and was making sterling progress. The other research participants had fewer coping skills and support but they had motivational factors that encouraged them to pursue their studies. They did the course for personal fulfilment, for their children, a student said his mother encouraged him to study further. One of the participants enjoyed gaining the knowledge to equip her to help children, getting to know their fellow students better and one

participant said that she had grown and was proud of what she and her husband had accomplished.

The crux of the matter is where the higher education institution can step in to support students who find it difficult to deal with the challenging domains.

A diagram follows that depicts the support in the various domains (fig.5.1).

5.1   A Diagram of Support Needs

HOME	FAMILY

WORK	COLLEAGUES

SOCIAL/FRIENDS	FINANCIAL

THESE TWO DOMAINS ARE THE FOCUS OF THIS RESERCH PROJECT

INSTITUTION
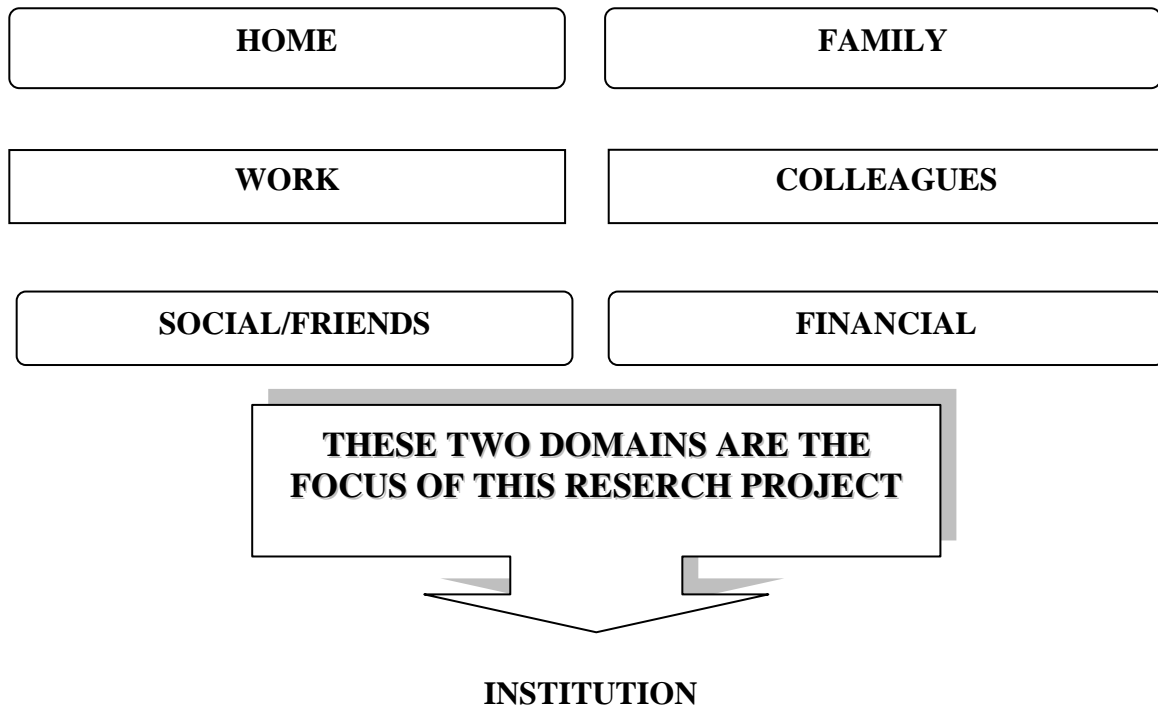
SUPPORT IS NEEDED IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- Students' contexts must be taken into consideration
- Different groups of students need to be treated differently
- Consider the challenges they face
- Contact time needed with lecturers
- Lecturers more approachable
- A systematic way of working through modules: e.g. one at a time
- Yearly programme/Learning materials earlier

- Work according to your pace/standards
- Lectures/courses on e.g. time management
- Transport
- Bursaries
- Language barriers
- Racial tolerance
- Accommodation during vacation
- Part-time work: on/off campus
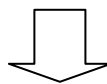
OTHER SUPPORT
NEEDED IN THESE AREAS:

WCED - full time bursaries - study leave
University and the WCED to work together to come up with solutions re distance education/bursaries/accommodation for part-time students
Requirements for mature students who want to further their studies i.e. prior learning/experience taken into consideration

5.7   POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS (POLICY)

The Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University should follow the ideal of Inclusive Education i.e. take the student's context into consideration and foster lifelong learning. They should as far as possible allow the student to follow his/her field of choice. At least two of students were not following their chosen paths of interest/career. They were pursuing others because their higher education institution did not take their prior qualifications, experience and seniority into consideration. An oral or written examination that could assess students' expertise should be drawn up. The Department of Education (WCED) should also make available a "nationally-available resource to support informed selection," (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998:331).

The institution should set aside more bursaries for students who want to continue studying after the completion of their degrees. The institution must also try to make available or access as many bursaries for mature, part-time students as possible. The university and the WCED need to organise a meeting and plan a path that allows future mature, part-time student's easier access to the courses they wish to follow and allow time for them to pursue them without much financial drain i.e. for full time study. They could also discuss the requirements of courses for mature students who have not studied for some time.

There needs to be an orientation day at the Department of Educational Psychology for mature part-time students who may have received their prior qualification from another university. The aim of the orientation day should not only be about the course he/she is taking but to acquaint the student with the campus. They may be shown around the campus, given a map and told about important things e.g. where to register and the office hours etc.

A booklet can be given to students that resembles the ABC of what kind of support is available to them, where to get the support, important telephone numbers, campus map, where one could go for part-time jobs, libraries available closer to their place of residence, where accommodation is available during vacation time, where to apply for bursaries, who to contact when encountering Internet problems, help with the writing of assignments and where one could get transport later at night etc. The booklet should be given with the yearbook on registration.

Some lecturers need to be reminded about Inclusive Education i.e. taking the context of the student into consideration and all the challenges (learning barriers) they may face during their educational journey. Most of the mature, part-time Masters students face more challenges and have more responsibilities and should not to be treated like young, full time students. A programme for the year e.g. when assignments are due, may be handed out at the beginning of the course and adhered to. A programme is necessary for students to plan how much time they have before they need to hand in an assignment and when they need to start studying. The option of registering earlier to obtain your study materials should be made available. To be able to register before the start of the course and to get their learning materials early would be better for these students. They would have sufficient time to acquaint themselves with things and maybe start working on their assignments. There should be some time set aside when students could phone or see the lecturers to discuss academic and even personal concerns.

The students were more negative towards their higher education institution and this could have been caused through the lack of sufficient preparation by their parents or in their earlier school years to be agentic i.e. encourage them to become skilled choosers, to take responsibility for their course choices, self management, time management, study skills, training in academic writing etc. The institution of higher education may deem it necessary to equip the students with the skills they are lacking to be able to continue with their studies with the necessary tools to make a success of it.

More language courses to help with written assignments should be available. A timetable where assignments are spaced out would be helpful. One student recommended that modules be done one at a time. Transport to and from the residence from campus should be provided at night. There is no doubt that more support could be given to the mature, part-time students and the support needs of the students should be researched by the institution of higher education. A questionnaire could be given to all the new students/ mature students – full time/part-time to get feedback on the support needs within a few months of starting at the institution of higher education.

The above are merely suggestions and not prescriptive of how the Department of Educational Psychology could make the educational journey for mature part-time students a more gratifying experience. They would need to do further research and decide for themselves what the important challenges are for them to focus on and how to address these challenges.

5.8   IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The literature review and the researcher's research project have revealed that a number of issues need to be addressed.

The necessity to have oral or written examinations to assess the knowledge and expertise of mature part-time students in order for them to continue with their studies without having to do previous course's module/s needs to be addressed i.e. the recognition of prior learning.

Female students have more domestic responsibilities than male students and steps need to be taken to alleviate some of the stressors encountered by female students.

Some students express the concern lecturers are not aware of the extra burdens they bare.

Higher education institutions should implement support measures for mature, part-time Masters students and see that they are well advertised.

There will be further issues not dealt with because of the focus of this thesis and these should prompt researchers to find out more about other contextual factors, as well as the student's disposition, how it effects/affects the students' ability to succeed or not to succeed at institutions of higher education.

5.9   LIMITATIONS

The researcher used convenient sampling i.e. part-time, mature, postgraduate Master students from a particular university, being from a particular university and the researcher using convenient sampling i.e. students with similar criteria for the study, limits the results i.e. the results cannot be generalized to all the part-time students at all the universities. The results of this study "must be viewed with some caution given the diverse population of the university population," (Carney et al., 2005:318). The research participants were allied students and the researcher was careful not to interpret their realities in the light of hers. She checked that her results reflected what was in the content analysis.

The study focussed on the experienced challenges of the mature part-time Masters students and may have given the reader the impression students' experiences are mainly externally caused challenges beyond their control and they cannot cope with them. The data reflected the research participants' perceptions of the experiences they had at their institution and cannot be

reflected in an unbiased way. Their perceptions can only be a guideline of what the institution can do for those like-minded students. Research informs us and we know that this is not realistic rendering of life, that the 'self' (student) if agentic can take control of these challenges. The researcher wished to reflect that there are a number of students who do not, for various reasons, cope at higher education institutions and that these (at-risk) students need to be supported. The research participants are/were all attending the same university and worked for the Western Cape Education Department. Because the participants are in education, they may be more like-minded and will reflect a similar mindset that may not be prevalent in the general student population.

The researcher would like to mention that it was difficult to demarcate the challenging domains/support as they often overlap: self, work, family, social etc. The overlapping or hazy boundaries between the challenging/domains and support should not detract from the fact that useful information on what the students experienced was noted. Although this was a small scale study and can only make a modest contribution to the knowledge basis its intention was also to open up issues and to prompt wider examination of the topic.

Data was collected from only seven of the thirteen students in her Masters course which would not have given a true reflection of what all fellow students experienced as challenges during their course. The results were biased in that the findings mainly reflected the five married research participants' challenges. In the research project there were only two mature, single participants. More mature single participants, would have no doubt, influenced the results in my research project. The results of the research project could not have fully reflected their specific support needs.

The research participants were from one department of the higher education institution and therefore the challenges faced by mature, part-time Masters students and suggestions of support for them may not be relevant to the rest of the student population. The results may not be generalized to all universities/student populations but interested parties may find the findings and some recommendations relevant or useful (Kicklighter, 1991). Each department would need to conduct its own research with regards to the research topic.

Each institution has its own unique ethos and will need to respond to its own challenges and solutions. Other factors that could have influenced the findings are; interpersonal factors, contexts, sex, age and the way the research participants were socialized. These factors were

not explored by the researcher because of her narrow focus on some of the challenges faced by students and the support they received or did not receive.

5.10   REFLECTION

The researcher felt it necessary to delve deeper into the research area and interview students to get a more global picture and to isolate the most important challenges that face mature, part-time students in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch.   Because circumstances continue to change, further research is required to uncover new challenging domains faced by part-time students and provide support for them.

Many of the challenging domains, mentioned in the thesis, need to be dealt with, so that the necessary support may be put in place for mature, part-time Masters students. With as many as possible support structures in place, the support should motivate students to become lifelong learners. With support structures in place, it should make the students' studies more pleasurable and meaningful to them.

Stratton et al. (2007) found in their research 52% of part-time students drop out. This is a high percentage of students who may have the potential to be valuable members in society.

The mere fact that the researcher found there are still challenges at the institution of higher education and that these are some of the factors that caused the students to flounder along the way, necessitates some support necessary for mature, part-time Masters students to achieve what they have set out to do and to do it well. The researcher will give the thesis to the role players who deal with support at the Department of Educational Psychology and hope they will implement some support recommendations and continue to research the needs of the students.

There are many questions left unanswered in this thesis: Moira received more support from the challenging domains and was an agentic person. Without support would her personal characteristics have enabled her to do well? The majority of the research participants were somewhat negative; could their upbringing, schools or the higher education institution help them achieve success? There are students like Moira who will rise above the challenges but we know as educators/lecturers that it is often up to us to equip and help learners/students when others have failed to do so. To put it in a nutshell the buck stops here; schools/institutions.

The researcher would like to end the thesis with the following quote from Scott et al. (1998:238),

"A flexible and sympathetic approach to course organisation that takes into account the life demands carried by mature age students is essential to improve chances of graduation amongst this population, as is the development and publicising of support services for the most at-risk groups."

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Addendum A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

REMEMBER TO DISCUSS:

1. Confidentiality and Consent Forms.

2. Talk about research project reasons and aims behind it.

3. Check to see that voice recorder is working.

4. Name of participant – Date – time of interview.

LEADING QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED

PART 1

DEMOGRAPHICS

I would like to start with finding out more about you.

1. What is your age?

2. Where were you born?

3. Where do you live?

4. Tell me about your family: Mother, father, and any siblings.

5. What are your parents' occupations?

6. What is your occupation?

7. What is your educational background?

8. Are you married?

9. Do you have any children? If so, tell me about them.

PART 2

DOMAINS

(CHALLENGES/SUPPORT)

I would like to enquire about the challenges you faced as a part-time postgraduate student. We will be also dealing with the support you got or the lack thereof.

1.	**Challenges at Home?**	
	Support?	
	Lack thereof?	
	Family?	
	Support?	
	Lack thereof?	
2.	**Challenges at work?**	
	Support?	
	Lack thereof?	
	Colleagues?	
	Support?	
	Lack thereof?	

3.	**Challenges Socially/Friends?**	
	Support?	
	Lack thereof?	
4.	**Challenges Financial?**	
	Support?	
	Lack thereof?	
5.	**Challenges Institution?**	
	Support?	
	Lack thereof?	
6.	**Any other challenges faced?**	
7.	**Any support you received or would have like to have received?**	

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

I MIGHT CONTACT YOU AGAIN IF THERE ARE

ANY POINTS I NEED TO CLARIFY.

Addendum B

AN EXAMPLE OF
A TRANSCRIPTION: CODED

R = RESEARCHER

A = ANTHONY

R.	I just want to ask you a bit about yourself. What is your age?	4
A.	I am 45 years old.	5
R.	Where were you born?	
A.	I was born in Somerset West.	Y
R.	Where do you live?	E
A.	I live in Firgrove.	A
R.	Tell me a bit about your family: your mother and father and do you have siblings?	R S
A.	Yes, I grew up with both my parents. My mom was a housewife and my dad was a bricklayer on a building site. There were six children – four brothers and two sisters.	O L D
R.	What is your occupation?	E
A.	I am an educator and I teach grade four.	D
R.	Can you tell me a bit about your educational background?	U C A T O R

A.   I studied after matric for 3 years at college for the diploma education and a few years later I completed my fourth year. I started off at Stellenbosch with the Honours course and now I am busy with the MB Ed. course.

R.   In your days it was 4 years and in my days it was three years.

Are you married?

A.   Yes.

R.   How many children?

A.   Two – 1 girl and 1 boy – 7 years and 4 years.

R.   I am going to ask you about what you are doing at the moment – the challenges you faced. I am going to ask you specific areas and what support you would have liked to received. Challenges at the home?

MARRIED

2

CHILDREN

A. It is a very big challenge to study and to have work as well and a family to support and in my case my wife is also studying so that makes it more difficult so you must organize your time so that you can fit in all the bits and pieces but it is very demanding and sometimes it can be very frustrating also.

R. Do you get any support from your family or spouse?

A. My wife and I support one another that is why we are doing it together and my late mom was a very good motivator – she loved to see her children become successful so that is also one of the great reasons.

R. Parents are happy when their children achieve things. The support from your family – your extended family i.e. brothers and sisters – what was it like?

A. I have two sisters who also live close by so when we have to go to varsity they are always eager to look after the children and they fill in the parental support.

R. Now I am going on to challenges at work – think about the setup and your colleagues – what support or lack of support did you get from them?

A. At my school I get very good support because there are a few educators who also completed this masters course and they are not only colleagues but good friends as well so they support me in helping me and the principal is also very open for when his teachers go on further study so I don't have a problem when I need time to do work or if I have to stay at home – he is very supportive.

R. With part-time studies do you have a social life and your friends, have you managed to keep a social circle?

A. Yes, that is difficult because the little time we have – social time – we spend with our family so that is what we mainly do with our social time – birthday parties.

H
LS

H

AS

C
ES
W
ES

S
NS

We cannot go out much because it costs money and we have to use our money for studies and also investing for our children. I don't think there is a way out now but in the future I will have my social life my way.

R.   You mentioned about financial challenges. Could you tell me more about it? What support you would have liked to get and what lack of support?

A.   The situation now is that as teachers we don't earn a lot of money in the first place and as students we are both studying so everything is times two so that is difficult so we don't get any financial support at this point in time and we are both busy with our fourth year of studying. Financially it is hectic and quite difficult.

R.   I want you to think about your university you are attending. What challenges you are facing there and what support you got and what support you would have liked?

A.   I must say in the first place when I entered Stellenbosch it was very difficult because I come from a difficult background because we as a coloured learner or student we did not study at a university like Stellenbosch because I only went four years back so to adapt to the environment was a difficult part especially for the unknown and all those things. And the students we did the Honours course with – the full time students – they have all the time to do their assignments but we have to come from work go to class come back do the chores at home and still do the assignments. There was no difference – what they must do we must do so it was very challenging. But the support from the university, especially the lecturers were quite good. In class situation it was a help. They were always available for you. You could ask if you did not understand something.

R.   Are there any other challenges you can think about besides the ones we have discussed?

A.   I would just say as a person gets older everything is getting slower and we have to really study hard. Sometimes the students you study with are 20 or

21 and they don't have the responsibility we have and that is a challenge in itself so I would say that until we are finished with this course, the challenge is always going to be there. That is internal and external – it doesn't go away but on the other hand there positives because I would not have had the success in the Honours so I think those difficulties and challenges we have to convert into positives in order for us to be successful. If I moan about everything I am facing I would be able to complete the course.

R. A., any other support you would have liked along the way?

A. To be honest I would have liked financial support because there are two studying together and it is very hectic and quite a burden.

R. Anything else you want to say?

A. No, I took on the challenge so I have to go through with it – I cannot stop now. I invested so much in this and the reward is not financial but the reward is that when I am finished I can look back and say I have done that.

R. Thanks very much for the interview and all the best.

LS

Fi

NS

Addendum C

AN EXAMPLE OF AN INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: CODED

DEMOGRAPHICS: I WOULD LIKE TO START WITH FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT YOU.

1. **WHAT IS YOUR AGE?**	51 years old
51 years	
2. **WHERE WERE YOU BORN?**	
In Breyten, a very small town.	
3. **WHERE DO YOU LIVE?**	
In Bloubergstrand, CapeTown.	
4. **TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FAMILY: MOTHER, FATHER, AND ANY SIBLINGS?**	
Both my parents are still alive, living in Pretoria. I have 2 children, oldest a boy, 31 years and a daughter 24 years old.	
Both my children live in Pretoria and are independent.	
5. **WHAT ARE YOUR PARENTS OCCUPATIONS?**	
They are both retired now.	
6. **WHAT IS YOUR OCCUPATION?**	Educator
I am a pre-school teacher at ………..	
7. **WHAT IS YOUR EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND?**	
HOD. Mus. and B.Ed Hons Learning Support.	
8. **ARE YOU MARRIED?**	Married, 2 children
Yes.	
9. **HAVE YOU ANY CHILDREN, IF SO TELL ME ABOUT THEM?**	
My son is an IT specialist and my daughter is busy studying B.Comm. Marketing.	

I WOULD LIKE TO ENQUIRE ABOUT THE CHALLENGES YOU

FACED AS A PART-TIME STUDENT. WE WILL ALSO BE DEALING WITH THE SUPPORT YOU GOT OR THE LACK THEREOF.

1. **Challenges at Home?**

    It was very time consuming and expensive. My husband supported me very well.

    Support?

    The support at home was excellent and my husband allowed me to continue with studies.

H

ES

Fi

Lack thereof? No

Family?

Only me and my husband at home.

Support?

Lack thereof?

N/A 2.

Challenges at Work?

It was very difficult to ask any assistant at school. We are a private school and we have to manage our time very well with all our other activities as well.

Support?

None of the management supported me or allowed me to study at work.

Lack thereof?

The studies were all done in my private time at home.

Colleagues?

No support.

Lack thereof?

No support

3. **Challenges Socially/Friends?**

    I had to manage my time very well. And there were no time for social

W

NS

C

NS

S

interaction with friends.

Support?

The friends always understanding and supportive.

Lack thereof?

No

4. **Challenges Financial?**

   Very expensive to study for 5 years. I wanted to study remedial and my studies were not about that.

   Support?

   No support paid for myself.

   Lack thereof?

5. **Challenges Institution?**

   The lectures were supportive during the Hons year, however during the M.Ed. course the support was less. Because I live in Cape Town and it was very difficult to go to Stellenbosch for research and lectures. The library was not always accessible for me. Internet never worked.

   Support?

   Support from my promoter was not there I had to contact her for help.

   Lack thereof?

   Not much.

6. **ANY OTHER CHALLENGES FACED?**

   Too expensive.

7. **ANY SUPPORT YOU RECEIVED OR WOULD HAVE LIKE TO HAVE RECEIVED?**

   More time and time management.

AS

Fi

NS

I

LS

O

THANK YOU SO MUCH

Addendum D

DEMOGRAPHICS' SHEET
(OF STUDENTS)

NAMES OF STUDENTS	AGE	MALE/ FEMALE	SINGLE	MARRIED	CHILDREN
DAWN	39	F		√	B 16 G 9
JUNE	42	F		√	B 5 G 8
ANTHONY	46	M		√	B 5 G 8
ADRIAN	40	M	√		
ALBERT	48	M	√		
MOIRA	30	F		√	G 5 months old
ANN	51	F		√	B 31 G 24

Addendum E

CODES FOR CHALLENGE DOMAINS'

H =   HOME

F =   FAMILY

W = WORK

C = COLLEAGUES

S =   SOCIAL

Fi = FINANCIAL

I =   INSTITUTION

O = OTHER

Colour used: Blue

Addendum F

CODES AND TERMS USED
FOR SUPPORT APPRAISAL

NS = NO SUPPORT

LS = LITTLE SUPPORT

AS = ADEQUATE SUPPORT

ES = EXCELLENT SUPPORT

Colour used: Pink

Addendum G

SUPPORT SUMMARY DATA SHEET: NUMBER OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS IN EACH APPRAISAL SUPPORT DOMAIN.

CHALLENGES	NO SUPPORT	LITTLE SUPPORT	ADEQUATE SUPPORT	EXCELLENT SUPPORT
HOME	TWO	THREE	ONE	ONE
FAMILY		TWO	THREE	TWO
WORK	FIVE			TWO
COLLEAGUES	FOUR	ONE		TWO
SOCIAL/FRIENDS	THREE	TWO	ONE	ONE
FINANCIAL	FIVE	ONE		ONE
INSTITUTION	THREE	THREE	ONE	

INSTITUTION:

COMMENTS MADE BY THE STUDENTS ABOUT SUPPORT NEEDED FROM THE INSTITUTION

Context of student, must consider. Different students together e.g. part-time/full time; single/ married; young/mature
Treated the same as full time students – more challenges – not taken into consideration e.g. work, travelling, household chores, responsibilities
Far distances to travel to campus e.g. 840 km x 2
Difficult to go to campus for lectures and research
Students in rural areas – plans need to be made
Library was not always accessible
Internet problems
Adaptation coming to university – studies: transition of interpreting, reading, analysing – long break – shy to speak in front of a group – get older everything is getting slower – confused – pace hectic
Helped myself
Bursaries: discrimination - according to marks
No bursary
Transport to and from campus
Language of instruction not home tongue: Afrikaans/ English lectures
Closing of residence during vacations – no place to stay – air fare expensive
Mark allocation for assignments. Discouraging
Difficulty in making contact with lecturers/academic advice

Mind shift: Treat part-time students the same as full time students: same workload etc.
Not still in study mode
Contact time important
My promoter was not there – I had to contact her for help
Accommodation – racial tension
Yearly programme e.g. assignment dates – changes: needs to be given early
Materials should be given earlier
Work at own pace – not according to group: some work hard and others don't
Lecturers more easy to approach: academic advice or something you want to do – putting you off – just busy - listen a bit
Lecturers less supportive during M.Ed. course
Study workload heavy – had to try to keep ahead otherwise would become confused
Complete one module at a time before one starts the other
Course too expensive
More part-time studies to be offered – couldn't do M.Ed. (Psyche.)
Inclusive education – policy – but not a reality at Stellenbosch University: crediting previous studies, experience and seniority at work
Part-time work – try to organize for students: on/off campus
Difficulty in getting part-time jobs
More support from lecturers by giving more time and time management

OTHER:
COMMENTS BY STUDENTS ABOUT OTHER SUPPORT THEY REQUIRED
Department of Education(WCED): Bursaries for full time study
Study leave – work at varsity 9 – 3, would be more productive
Bursaries difficult to obtain for further studies after degree: WCED and the institution of further education
The aforementioned institutions to work together to make lifelong studies a reality
Employers to make it possible for students who live far away to study
Low salaries
Part-time employment also requires you to complete work/work 100%/ meagre pay is given
Studying – no financial help for children

Addendum H

CONSENT LETTER

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Research Topic:

Challenges and Support Needs of Mature Postgraduate Part-time

Students at a Higher Institution for Education

Dear Part-time Postgraduate Student

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Joy-Anne Visser, a Masters in Educational Support student from the Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University. The results will be reported in a thesis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you possibly face many challenges as a mature, part-time postgraduate student.

1. **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The researcher wishes to investigate the challenges faced by mature part-time postgraduate students and what support their higher education institution could give to them. The research will be used towards the completion of a Master's degree.

2. **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher would request the following from you:

i. Set up an interview at a suitable time and venue for you and

ii. a maximum of an hour of your time.

iii. You may be contacted for a follow up interview in the event that you may be able to clarify or add to information obtained from the first interview.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

If at any stage of the interview you should feel uncomfortable, you may discuss it with the researcher and if you are not put at ease you may terminate the interview.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This research should benefit future mature part-time postgraduate students coming to the higher education institution. The researcher wishes to advocate that various support structures be put into place for them to lighten their academic journey. It is further hoped that other interested parties would take these findings further so that other institutions will give more support to their students.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Research subjects will not be paid for their participation in this study.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of:

i. using of a pseudonym for your name

ii. the name of the institution will not be given

iii. interviews will be erased from the digital voice recorder

iv. transcriptions can only be accessed by the researcher by using a password on the
    computer and

v. hardcopies will stored in a drawer to which only the researcher has keys. The data will be destroyed/erased immediately after the examination process has been completed

vi. the researcher's supervisor will be assessing the research project.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be part of the study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer and still remain part of the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact
 the researcher at:

The researcher

Joy-Anne Visser at:

Cellphone number: 0835642445

Home number: 0214349293

e-mail: rnew@sun.ac.za

The Supervisor

Prof. Rona Newmark at:

Cellphone: 0824400726

Office number: 0218084812

e-mail: 14975882@sun.ac.za

9.   RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact

Ms Malene Fouche (0218084622, e-mail: mfouche@sun.ac.za, office: Admin B, room 3218) at the Division for Research Development, University of Stellenbosch.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to ……………………………………………………………….. by Joy-Anne Visser in Afrikaans/English and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Subject/Participant

…………………………………………………………………………………………

_____

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

_____   _____

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

………………………………………………………………………………………….

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ _____. He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in Afrikaans/English and no translator was used.

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   **Date**