ASSESSING LEARNER NEEDS FOR STUDENT ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN COLLEGE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION (SACTE)

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DECLARATION

I, THE UNDERSIGNED, HEREBY DECLARE THAT THE WORK CONTAINED IN THIS THESIS IS MY OWN WORK AND HAS NOT PREVIOUSLY IN ITS ENTIRETY OR IN PART BEEN SUBMITTED AT ANY UNIVERSITY FOR A DEGREE.

SUMMARY

SACTE is a distance education provider for practising educators in the Republic of South Africa. As a distance education provider, SACTE has to rely on teaching and learning media other than the tutor for providing service to its students. Study manuals are the main means of subject delivery the college employs. The college, however, cannot always reach its students through the media used, which in this instance is the study manual. This conclusion was reached after numerous telephone calls and letters from students requiring urgent assistance in connection with their studies. The researcher therefore felt that a need existed to find out the type of problems students encountered that prevented them from optimal performance as students and as teachers.

The purpose of this study was to determine learner needs in the department of Early Childhood Education, and how they can be dealt with to improve the academic performance and the classroom practice of its students. The premise the researcher worked from, was that students of SACTE experience learning problems, thus they are unable to attain good academic performance, and this affects their classroom practice.

A research survey was carried out to determine the type and the nature of problems that existed amongst the students. Two questionnaires were sent out to the ECE students and the academic staff. The following key questions were posed in the questionnaire for students:

- What type of educational background do students have?
- How long have students been registered with SACTE?
- To what extent do they benefit from a tutor system if they have access to it?
- To what extent are the study manuals 'accessible' to them?

- If study manuals are not accessible, what are the problems and what suggestions do students have to eradicate those problems?
- What type of intervention would they like to have from SACTE?

The aim in asking these questions was to probe the root problem which might exist, to analyse the responses and to make appropriate conclusions and recommendations based on the data gathered.

The questionnaire for the ECE academic staff was based on the following aspects:

- The academic staff's experience in teaching teachers;
- The academic staff's experience in distance education;
- What the academic staff regard as problems inhibiting students from effective learning;
- Suggestions and recommendations on how to deal with the problems identified.

The questionnaire for students was sent out by mail with a self-addressed envelope included for the return mail. It took almost two months before the responses reached the sender. Almost 70% of the responses reached the sender.

Data analysis was done by the Statkon Service of Rand Afrikaans University. The conclusions reached from the data analysis were divided into the following categories:

Social background of students: Students do not have study rooms, thus they use dining-rooms and bedrooms as study places. An average household has more than ten members. This type of a situation does not promote effective learning.

Educational background of students: Almost 90% of the respondents studied in the former Department of Education and Training (DET). Their

highest qualification is M+2 (matric plus two years of professional training), which implies that 56,3% of teachers are not fully qualified to be teaching, as the minimum requirement is M+3.

Experience of students at SACTE: Students expressed their desire for the upgrading of the total learning environment in order to enhance learning and classroom practice. Students wanted contact sessions with tutors as they felt that they do not benefit much by studying on their own without external assistance

Recommendations made on these conclusions were the following:

SACTE must establish Regional Learning Centers (RLC) to alleviate the students' problem of studying in overcrowded homes. RLCs, besides being places to study at, would also serve the purpose of being resource centres as well as discussion places where study support groups can meet.

Study manuals should be written with the needs of the learner in mind. The language of the study manual, examples given and the context in which they are written, should reflect the learner and not the lecturer.

The 'distance' between the student and the lecturer, that is created by the physical distance, can be narrowed by introducing interactive media.

Based on the survey findings, it can be concluded that there is a need to establish student support measures at SACTE that would provide for students by answering to their needs as learners and educators.

OPSOMMING

SACTE is 'n afstandsonderrigvoorsiener vir praktiserende opvoeders regoor die RSA. As 'n afstandsonderrigvoorsiener moet SACTE, behalwe vir tutors, ook staatmaak op onderrig- en leermedia vir diensverskaffing aan sy studente. Studiehandleidings is die hoofwyse waardeur vakinhoud oorgedra word. Die kollege kan egter nie altyd studente deur middel van studiehandleidings bereik nie. Hierdie gevolgtrekking is bereik na vele oproepe en briewe van studente wat dringende hulp ten opsigte van hulle studies benodig het. Die navorser het dus gevoel dat 'n behoefte bestaan vas te stel watter soort probleme wat studente ervaar, verhoed dat hulle optimaal kan presteer as studente en onderwysers.

Die doel van hierdie studie was om leerderbehoeftes in die Aanvangsonderrigdepartement te bepaal en om vas te stel hoe die akademiese prestasie en klaskamerpraktyk van sy studente verbeter kan word. Die navorser se aanname was dat SACTE-studente leerprobleme ervaar, wat veroorsaak dat hulle nie goed op akademiese gebied presteer nie, wat dan hulle klaskamerpraktyk beïnvloed.

'n Opnamenavorsing is uitgevoer om die tipe en aard van die probleme wat tussen studente bestaan, vas te stel. Twee vraelyste is uitgestuur, naamlik een vir Aanvangsonderwysstudente en een vir akademiese personeel. Die volgende sleutelvrae is in die vraelys vir studente gevra:

- Watter tipe onderwysagtergrond het studente?
- Hoe lank is hulle al by SACTE geregistreer?
- Tot watter mate trek hulle voordeel uit die tutorstelsel, as hulle toegang daartoe het?
- Tot watter mate is die studiemateriaal 'toeganklik' vir hulle?
- Indien nie, wat is die probleme wat hulle ervaar en watter voorstelle het

hulle om die probleme op te los?

- Watter tipe ingryping wil hulle graag van SACTE hê?

Die doel van hierdie vrae was om die wortel van die probleem te ontbloot, om die response te ontleed en toepaslike gevolgtrekkings en aanbevelings, gebaseer op die data wat ingesamel is, te maak.

Die vraelys vir die Aanvangsonderrigdosente is op die volgende aspekte gebaseer:

- Die akademiese personeel se ervaring in die onderrig van onderwysers;
- Die akademiese personeel se ervaring in afstandsonderrig;
- Wat die akademiese personeel as probleme beskou wat keer dat studente effektief leer;
- Voorstelle en aanbevelings oor hoe om die geïdentifiseerde probleme te hanteer.

Die vraelys vir studente is, tesame met 'n geadresseerde koevert deur die pos uitgestuur. Dit het amper twee maande geneem voordat response terug ontvang is. Byna 70% van die vraelyste is terug ontvang.

Data-analise is deur die Statkon-diens van die Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit gedoen. Die gevolgtrekkings uit die data-analise is in die volgende kategorieë verdeel:

Sosiale agtergrond van studente: Studente het nie studeerkamers nie, daarom gebruik hulle eetkamers en slaapkamers as studeerplekke. 'n Gemiddelde huishouding het meer as tien lede. Hierdie tipe situasie moedig nie effektiewe leer aan nie.

Opvoedkundige agtergrond van studente: Byna 90% van die respondente is deur die voormalige Departement van Onderwys en Opleiding opgelei.

Behalwe hiervoor, is hulle hoogste kwalifikasie M+2 (matriek plus twee jaar professionele opleiding), wat impliseer dat 56,3% van die onderwysers nie ten volle opgelei is om onderwys te gee nie, aangesien die minimum-vereiste M+3 is.

Ervaring van SACTE-studente: Studente het die begeerte uitgespreek om die totale leeromgewing te verbeter om sodoende leer en klaskamerpraktyk te verbeter. Studente wil kontaksessies met tutors hê, aangesien hulle voel dat hulle nie voordeel trek uit selfstudie sonder eksterne bystand nie.

Aanbevelings wat uit hierdie gevolgtrekkings gemaak is, is die volgende:

SACTE moet Streekstudiesentrums (SSSe) vestig om die probleem van studeer in oorvol huise, te verbeter. SSSe kan as studeerplekke en hulpbronsentrums dien, sowel as 'n plek waar studie-ondersteuningsgroepe bymekaar kan kom vir besprekings.

Wanneer studiehandleidings geskryf word, moet die behoeftes van die leerder voorrang geniet. Die taal in die studiehandleiding, sowel as die voorbeelde en die konteks waarin dit geskryf is, moet die leerder en nie die dosent nie, weerspieël.

Die 'afstand' tussen die student en dosent, wat deur fisiese afstand geskep word, kan deur middel van die bekendstelling van interaktiewe media verminder word.

Gebaseer op die bevindings, kan daar afgelei word dat daar 'n behoefte bestaan om studente-ondersteuningsmaatreëls by SACTE te vestig wat in die behoeftes van studente, as beide leerders en onderwysers, sal voorsien.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

SACTE	South African College for Teacher Education
CCE	College for Continuing Education
CESA	College of Education for South Africa
ECE	Early Childhood Education
RLC	Regional Learning Centres
HDE	Higher Diploma in Education
DE	Diploma in Education
FDE	Further Diploma in Education
PTC	Primary Teacher's Certificate
M+0	Matric without professional certificate
M+1	Matric plus one year of professional qualification
M+2	Matric plus two years of professional qualification
M+3	Matric plus three years of professional qualification
M+4	Matric plus four years of professional qualification
HE	Higher Education
DE	Distance Education
TELI	Technology Enhanced Learning Initiative
ASP	Academic Support Programmes
AD	Academic Development
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
COTEP	Committee on Teacher Education Policy

SAIDE	South African Institute for Distance Education
DUSSPRO	Distance University Student Support Programme
UNISA	University of South Africa
RSA	Republic of South Africa

CHAPTER 1

1. ORIENTATION TOWARDS THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Student academic development is a central task of higher education, especially if learning is seen in terms of potential for lifelong growth and effective citizenship (Altbach, 1997: 6). Student development is important to maximise individual potential. Students want learning that is useful and has some personal meaning for them. What then is student development, and why is it so important for institutions of higher learning? Arnold and King, writing in Altbach (1997: 8), define development as a 'process of human growth and change'. They go on to explain that this growth and change should result in positive student outcomes. It is not only the student who should benefit from academic development and support, but employers, government and the general public alike demand that students demonstrate positive outcomes as a result of college attendance.

The context of this study is based on the distance mode of learning. Distance education is explained as a mode of teaching and learning that serves dispersed student populations with minimal reliance on face-to-face teaching (Ruggles, 1982: 10). The student is freed from the constraints of time, space, and often age, which are normally associated with the conventional contact teaching (Sahoo, 1993: 1-2). Writing on support to distance learners, Gous says that while distance education offers educational opportunities where they might otherwise be impossible, it presents particular problems in the area of student support (1996: 49). In compliance with the above statement, Adey (1996: 44) writes: '...*studying in isolation may have a profound effect on*

a student's motivation, feedback and personal contact with the learning situation'.

Discussing the positive effects of distance education in India, Sahoo maintains that learning at a distance gives individuals access to learning that might otherwise be denied them. In India, distance education has played an important role in meeting the needs of different learners by providing educational opportunities to learners in different parts of the country, to older age groups and to employed persons (1993: 159).

Sahoo singles out student support services as being the most influential factor of success in distance education (1993: 8). However, needs analyses should always precede academic support and development. Academic support should differ according to the needs of various target groups. Academic support and development cannot be slavishly copied and applied, but should be preceded by thorough scientific evaluation to assess the needs of the target group (Scholtz, 1989: 44). Basson and Nonyogo, supporting the need for needs analyses, write on Distance University Student Support Programme (DUSSPRO) tutorials that face-to-face contact does not necessarily reduce the transactional distance, but that factors inherent in tutorials shape the dialogue and its impact upon students (1997: 194).

Distance education can only be meaningful if it is coupled with student support, thus reducing the distance between the learner and the tutor, which is characteristic of most forms of the distance mode of teaching. Gous views this distance between the learner and the tutor as impersonal and alienating (1996: 50). This alienation can be compensated for by using a variety of strategies of which, according to the researcher, student support intervention is one. Gous further states that in order for the student to overcome loneliness, alienation and anxiety, student support is both necessary and imperative (1996: 50).

Academic support and development for students in South Africa has been practised over the past 20 years (Moyo, Donn and Hounsell, 1997: 5).

However, there has been a shift in the ideology underpinning student development interventions in terms of reasons behind the establishment, and the form student development should take (Moyo, Donn and Hounsell, 1997: 5). A great deal of criticism has been levelled at student development programmes as being cosmetic and peripheral without addressing the fundamental issues that affect students' learning problems.

It is these factors that have compelled the researcher to carry out a scientific study on learning problems experienced by SACTE students, so as to inform intervention measures to assist learners in overcoming problems that inhibit them from performing optimally in their studies and as classroom practitioners.

1.2   NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

The South African College for Teacher Education (SACTE) is a distance education institution for practising teachers drawn from across the country.

SACTE's learners come from diverse backgrounds. They differ in a number of aspects such as their educational backgrounds, economic status and residential areas. Agar, writing on the necessity of academic support for black students, says that the majority of the black population could not enter and study at higher education institutions during the apartheid era because of poor matriculation results. A large percentage of those who managed to go to universities dropped out, thus necessitating some form of intervention to bring them on par with the rest of the students (1992: 93). Wood, in support of the above statement, concedes that students from disadvantaged backgrounds continue to be disadvantaged despite recent social and political changes, which started making inroads as early as the 1990s. He further states that 'these disadvantages are well-understood poor socio-economic conditions, a legacy of inferior schooling, studying through a medium of a foreign language' (1998: 89). Moyo, Donn and Hounsell, writing on the findings of an audit on Academic Development and Strategic Change in Higher Education in South

Africa, maintains that the establishment of academic development in English universities in South Africa coincided with the intake of black students in these institutions (1997: 4). In her unpublished thesis, Cuthbertson writes that bridging courses introduced as a way of addressing problems experienced by black students were never popular, but instead were seen as perpetuating the inferior status of the blacks they were designed for, hence they were abandoned (Cuthbertson, 1992: 25). Academic support and academic development for students in South Africa became synonymous with scholastic and academic deficiency and not necessarily with entrenching and supporting learning. The Higher Education Act of 1997 stipulates that in supporting students academically, there has to be a shift from a *'narrow focus on access and bridging courses to the integration of academic development in the mainstream'* (RSA, 1997: 21).

SACTE, like the rest of higher education institutions in the country, is going through a period of transformation. The consequences of transformation are numerous and impact directly on education provision. Some of these consequences are increasing student numbers, learner diversity, language of instruction and other issues brought about by democratisation and massification (RSA, 1997: 15). The question that arises for institutions of higher learning in the country, is how they are to deal with the consequences of transformation such as large numbers, learner diversity and the language of instruction.

1.3   BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

The South African College for Teacher Education (SACTE) was established in March 1996. It came into existence to be in line with the new constitution, which outlawed racial practices, including institutions of learning based along racial lines. SACTE was conceived after a merger between the College of Education for South Africa (CESA), which was previously a white institution, and the College for Continuing Education (CCE), which was previously a

black institution. At the time of writing the new institution was under the control of the Gauteng Provincial Government.

In accordance with the recommendations of the Higher Education Act of 1997, teacher education countrywide is already making its way into the Higher Education arena in the country (RSA, 1997: 27). Like other colleges of education in the country, SACTE is in the process of moving towards entering the higher education arena, either as an autonomous college, or as part of a university or technikon, as stipulated by the Higher Education Act. The Act supports a move by colleges towards higher education. This move will *'promote the provision of a coherent set of quality programmes on a single qualifications ladder, limit the fragmentation and duplication of teacher education proviso; ensure that local and regional teacher education needs are taken into account...'* (RSA, 1997: 27).

SACTE is a distance education institution for practising teachers only. It draws its clientele from the teacher corps throughout the country and from some neighbouring states such as Namibia and Botswana. The active student complement of the college is 10 340 of which 37% are registered for the Early Childhood Education Courses (SACTE, 1999b). Out of a total of 12 departments, the Early Childhood Education Department is one of the largest departments of SACTE in terms of student numbers. The focus for the new college is mainly in upgrading teachers' qualifications in the categories of unqualified, under-qualified and qualified teachers.

Unqualified teachers are teachers without any professional teaching qualifications and a minimum academic qualification of standard eight, who have been teaching for over five years. They are mainly from primary schools in rural villages and farming communities. The majority of students register for the ECE qualification, which ranges from the teaching of pre-primary level to grade three level.

Under-qualified teachers are teachers with professional qualifications but who do not enjoy the benefits of professional teachers. These teachers are

mostly from black communities, and have only a standard eight academic qualification. Their professional qualification, known as the Primary Teacher's Certificate (PTC), allows them to teach only in the Foundation phase (Junior primary classes) which ranges from grade one to grade three. These teachers are mostly registered for the Diploma in Education DE (upgrading). According to the new category scales, they are rated as M+2. The new requirement for a properly qualified teacher is now M+3 (RSA, 1998a).

Qualified teachers are teachers with proper qualifications to teach but who wish to upgrade their qualifications and skills in a certain direction or area. These teachers are registered for the Higher Diploma in Education (HDE), and Further Diploma in Education (FDE), which is a one-year specialist diploma (SACTE, 1999c: 5-6).

The composition of the college is largely from the previously disadvantaged black communities, and a small percentage of previously advantaged whites (SACTE, 1999a). Both groups receive the same type of tuition and undergo the same training, despite the fact that they were exposed to different educational systems in their secondary years. Students from black communities tend to be disadvantaged by this sameness and equality in the education proviso largely as a result of their inferior educational background. Mason and Dovey (cited by Dovey, 1996: 354) describe the conditions prevailing in black schools then as lacking in motivation and not designed for academic advancement of any nature; hence they have led to the high failure rate amongst the black communities.

According to the SAIDE report for the National Audit on Teacher Education Offered at a Distance in South Africa (1995: 6), *'in terms of both demography and teacher populations, an unusually high proportion of students are African (86%) and female (70%). Only 3% are over the age of 50 years, while 57% are under 35'.*

Deducing from the research done by SAIDE, it can be concluded that female students far outnumber male students in distance teacher education (SAIDE, 1995: 8). The majority of these students are of African origin. Distance education has been hailed as a bridge towards offering its services to the previously marginalised and to those for whom contact teaching was unthinkable and beyond reach (Willis, 1998: 58). While the quoted SAIDE figures may be four years old, the present scenario in teacher education training has not radically changed from what it used to be.

Figure 1 shows the present SACTE student composition (SACTE, 1999b: 10). There is a remarkable resemblance to the survey conducted by SAIDE in 1995. This shows that the composition of teacher distance education has not changed radically from what it used to be. The majority of the students are still female, and of African origin.

Figure 1.   SACTE's breakdown of students according to:

Figure 1.1   Gender

| | Female 70% | | Male 30% |

Figure 1.2   Race

| | African 95% | | Indian/Coloured 1% |
| | White 4% | | |
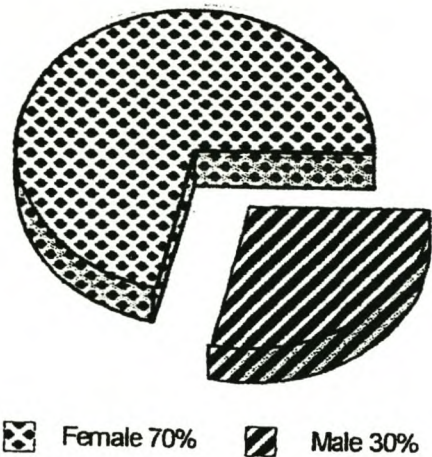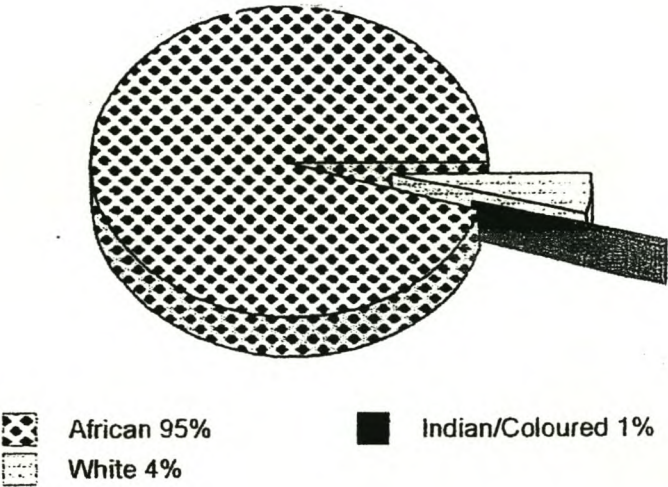
Adapted from SACTE's student data (2000)

Dovey asserts that disadvantaged students' educational background 'does not fulfil the preparatory requirements for success at schools and tertiary institutions which set standards of performance that are compatible with first world, international standards' (Dovey, 1996: 354-355). Therefore, if the

institution aims to be on par with international standards, it becomes a given that an institution of learning that has no form of academic support and development, is a non-starter. SACTE, like other tertiary institutions in the country, is faced with the disadvantaged majority, who are expected to compete on the same level as the rest of the world, despite their inferior educational background.

1.4   THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

The scenario expounded in the introductory section informs this research in finding ways and means to promote effective classroom practitioners and life-long learners who can be facilitators of change (Bagwandeen, 1994: 15). This study is concerned with identifying learner support and developmental needs of SACTE's Early Childhood Education (ECE) students. The needs of these students, most of whom are full-time teachers themselves, have not been explicated and recorded before. It appears, therefore, to be difficult for an institution like SACTE to provide the services and interventions that might enable these students to perform to the best of their academic and professional abilities if learner needs are not addressed in those interventions.

Within the parameters of the problem as outlined, four sets of factors have been isolated to articulate the problem of student needs identification, namely:

- infra-structural
- language
- assessment
- tutor-student relationship issues.

These factors have been operationalised in two survey instruments utilised by the researcher for data generation to determine student academic

development and support needs and to identify possible ways of restructuring learner support services and interventions at SACTE.

1.4.1 Infrastructure at SACTE

SACTE has a well-defined and well-grounded infrastructure that could be utilised more fruitfully. It has 17 Regional Learning Centres (RLCs) throughout the country, which, amongst others, serve as centres for tutorial lessons (SACTE, 1999a: 6).

By means of the questionnaire, the researcher shall determine the extent to which RLCs are fully utilised by students.

1.4.2 Language as medium of instruction and communication

Tuition at SACTE has always been through the medium of written study materials supplemented by contact sessions. The medium of instruction is English and to a lesser extent Afrikaans.

Written study materials alone have proved to be ineffective in turning students into effective classroom practitioners, let alone efficient learners. At the same time contact sessions by lecturers have, in some instances, proved to be so unpopular and inconvenient to students that these sessions have been discontinued. Supporting students with written materials and assignments has been hampered by the unreliable and erratic postal system.

1.4.3 Assessment methods

Lecturer effectiveness and student competency are measured and evaluated solely by means of formal examination, which, if used alone, is not wholly reliable. Assignments and projects form part of assessment methods used. The promotional mark is, however, based on the examination performance only.

This study will ascertain whether or not the lack of variety of assessment methods is responsible for poor performance by students or not.

1.4.4 Tutor-student relationship

SACTE as a distance institution is removed from its student complement. Face-to-face contact between SACTE students and the lecturing staff is curtailed since students are dispersed throughout the country.

The change of focus for the college, from being an in-service institution to a pre-service one, has meant that students can no longer come to the college, but instead, their learning and teaching are home-based. Contact between lecturers and students has gradually decreased, and closing this gap is the concern of this research.

1.5 THE PURPOSE AND APPROACH OF THE RESEARCH

From the stated problem, the purpose of the study was to investigate problems students encounter in carrying out their learning and professional tasks. These learning problems informed the need to establish interventions on the part of students.

In this study, the researcher firstly reviewed relevant literature on student academic support in similar or different situations, indicating how they can be relevant in helping the researcher understand her own situation. Through a survey approach among students and lecturers (cf Denscombe, 1998) the researcher established the extent and degree to which infrastructure, language, assessment and tutor-student relationship issues in the college play a part in promoting and supporting students' learning. The quantitative research method was employed in this study and the questionnaire was the main tool for generating data.

Based on the survey findings, the researcher made conclusions and recommendations which informed the need and necessity for possible student academic support interventions.

1.6 DELIMITATION OF THE FIELD OF STUDY

The focus of the research was confined to students at the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Department of the South African College for Teacher Education registered and studying for the following programmes in both Pre-primary and Junior primary (Foundation Phase):

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- Diploma in Education (DE) initial training (M+0 - M+3)

- Higher Diploma in Education (HDE). The programme is offered on a M+4 level, i.e. only after the completion of the DE.

Diploma in Education (DE) is initial training towards a teacher's qualification. Students who register for this course are relatively new in the teaching field, thus they need reassurance and evaluation on a regular basis to ensure them of their progress.

HDE students, on the other hand, are more experienced teachers than the DEs. However the researcher, took them on board in order to get as broad as possible views from different perspectives so that they be representative of both the inexperienced and the experienced. In choosing this group, the researcher hoped to avoid impartial findings that would not necessarily represent all ECE groups, i.e. both experienced and inexperienced teachers.

The survey was directed towards a random sample of students registered for the above-mentioned ECE programmes countrywide.

1.7   NEED FOR THE RESEARCH

SACTE'S qualifications are based on the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and were temporarily registered with COTEP until June 2000 when the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) took over the task. In some cases, this has meant scaling down entry requirements to accommodate people who have been teaching for years, without proper professional qualifications (especially from the pre-school sector). The admission requirements for the Diploma in Education were scaled down to Grade 10 (SACTE, 1999c: 5-6).

Compared to face-to-face learners, distance learners experience lower levels of self-confidence and are on average over the age of 25 years. According to Kahl and Cropley (1986: 32-33), distance learners are prone to the dropout syndrome; thus only a very small percentage are likely to graduate. This assertion is proved true by the Rector's report (SACTE, 1999a: 7), which claims that SACTE has a registered student population of 26 727 of which only 18 340 are active participants in all the activities of the college, which include writing of assignments and the examination. The difference between the active and the registered is unaccounted for. This difference is the missing link the college needs to woo back into its fold.

This research will benefit students and lecturing staff in that course designers will understand the needs of their clientele and thus address such needs in their course packages. Most importantly it will help course designers review their teaching approaches and adapt them to the prevailing needs. It will also help SACTE personnel to develop an academic support and development programme suited to the needs of the students.

1.8   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is a process of knowing or understanding which involves systematic inquiry that is designed to collect, analyse, interpret, and use data to understand, describe, predict or control educational or psychological phenomena in order to empower individuals in such contexts (Mertens, 1998: 2-3). Research has a strong connection to theory. This enables research to establish relationships with previous work of the same nature, or establish theories, which can be translated into knowledge (1998: 2).

Mouton likens research to a quest for truth. In searching for this truthful knowledge, the research needs to employ reliable instruments that will eventually yield knowledge to the best approximation to truth (1996: 111).

Objectivity is important in data gathering, and therefore one has to observe in a dispassionate and objective manner. *'Observation on its own, is theory laden, but the construction of sophisticated and scientific apparatus and procedures for data presentation, usually involve explicit and implicit acceptance of well-developed scientific theories, over and above theories being tested'* (Mertens, 1998: 7).

1.8.1 Survey as a research strategy

The survey was employed as a main tool for data generation in order to achieve the best approximation to truth (Mouton, 1996: 110). Implicit in the notion of survey is the idea that research should have a wide coverage and that it will view comprehensively and in detail. Surveys strive to generate data that is as representative as possible of the area under study. Surveys assist in generating the latest data, by using empirical research methods capable of quantifying data generated by measuring and recording such data. Because the researcher was able to access data sources first hand, time spent on the surveys was shorter as compared to other strategies (Denscombe, 1998: 6-7).

Despite the strengths mentioned above, surveys have shortcomings. Surveys tend to sacrifice depth of information and data gathering to breadth. However, data can be treated and explained in more detail to reduce its lack of depth. The accuracy and honesty of responses are often sacrificed in favour of wide and inclusive coverage. Questionnaires are expensive, more so if one has to verify data by sending another questionnaire to respondents. The significance of data can be lost in surveys. Data is often left to speak for itself without the implications of such data being shown. Questionnaires unfortunately tend to have a cold reception from the recipients. A small proportion of the actual number of questionnaires sent out eventually find their way back to the sender. Data generated is unlikely to represent a true cross-section of those being surveyed in terms of age, sex, and social class (Denscombe, 1998: 8).

In using the questionnaire as a tool for data generation the researcher was aware of its limitations. One pertinent weakness pointed out by authors is that fewer than the original number of responses mailed, may find their way back to the sender (Denscombe, 1998: 28). However this weakness was curtailed by extending the period for returns of completed questionnaires by an extra one month.

1.8.2 The questionnaire as data generating instrument

In this study, the questionnaire was the main research instrument for data generation. Respondents to questionnaires covered a wide geographical area of South Africa. The use of the questionnaire increased the validity of this research, since the results could be translated into figures and were thus recorded (Mertens, 1998: 8).

Two sets of questionnaires were developed for this study. One was aimed at SACTE Early Childhood Education students and the other at the ECE academic staff.

Data generated through these questionnaires was calculated and documented mostly in tabulated form. The information derived from data was used to inform whether student intervention measures might be necessary or not.

1.8.3 Sampling of the research population

Since sampling is often a route towards a fair chance of participation, sampling of the main target group (in this case ECE registered students), was the criterion used to get closer to affording each member of the target population group a fair chance to respond (Mouton, 1996: 138). Since it is not possible to collect data from everyone who is in the categories mentioned earlier in the text (paragraph 1.7), the researcher employed random sampling of the target group.

Social researchers are frequently faced with the fact that they cannot collect data from everyone who is in the category of being researched. Random sampling was therefore used for the student population only, and questionnaires were sent to a selected target group who were representative of the whole ECE population group. The questionnaire for the academic staff of the Early Childhood Education was, however, sent to all members.

The target group was chosen in the alphabetical order of appearance in the ECE register list:

- The first hundred names on the ECE register list
- The hundred names in the 'M' category of surnames
- The last hundred names on the ECE register list.

These names made up a target group list to which questionnaires were mailed. The methodology of data generation will be dealt with in detail in chapter 3.

1.8.4 College documentation

College documentation was used in defining the research problem and also in helping to solve the research problem.

Qualitative data drawn from college documentation was used in analysis of the quantitative data obtained through the two sets of questionnaires. Qualitative data is set to focus on details and the quality of individuals, which is beyond the limits of the quantitative approach (Lemmer, 1992: 294). A qualitative approach affords researchers an opportunity to understand people in terms of their own definition of the world. The focus shifts to inside perspective as opposed to outside perspective (Mouton, 1996: 130).

Data from the following college documentation was used in the analysis of the main data obtained through the ECE student clientele and the ECE academic staff questionnaires:

- College brochures and reports (1997-2000)
- Audit report by SAIDE (1999) on the SACTE Diploma in Higher Education (Junior Primary)
- The Administration Department data-base concerned with different population groups, gender and geographical residence
- Minutes of the ECE department and the Heads of Departments' Council (HODC) meetings.

Since documentation is not the main focus and the tool for data generation, but was used to understand and clarify the problem statement, it will not be analysed in this study.

1.9   RESEARCH PLAN

The research has been conducted and will be presented as follows:

Chapter 1 deals with the historical background to the problem, the nature of the problem and the problem statement. The methodology for data collection and reasons for its choice are explained.

Chapter 2 explains the different concepts used in the study, their relevance and contribution towards understanding the research problem, and the context in which the research will be conducted. The literature review that helped in informing this study is dealt with and forms the basis on which the survey is based.

Chapter 3 will give an overview of the steps taken towards finding a solution to the problem (methodology). The research methodology will be dealt with in detail and will include motivations on why certain methods for data generation have been given priority over the others.

Chapter 4 will be an analysis of the results of the survey, and its implication for the future of the college and in particular the academic development of students.

Chapter 5 will focus on the conclusions and the recommendations emanating from the results of the empirical survey.

1.10 CONCLUSION

Academic support and development are indispensable interventions in any teaching and learning situation, more so in a distance education mode of learning, where there is obvious physical separation between learner and learner, learner and the learning content and learner and teacher. Academic

support and development become even more imperative for SACTE with its diverse clientele in terms of their educational background and socio-economic status.

In the next chapter, attention will be focused on the explanation of key operational concepts, the context of the research and the literature overview of studies done related to the problem statement under study.

CHAPTER 2

2 KEY OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS AND LITERATURE OVERVIEW

2 INTRODUCTION

For a clearer understanding of key concepts and their relationship with the research topic, explanation of such key concepts is imperative in research. The aim is also to provide a better perspective of the research problem at hand. Explanation of the research context will expose the reader to problems that prompted the researcher to initiate the study, and give the reader an overview of the problem to be researched, and of how it emanated over a period of time.

2.2 SACTE AND ITS MISSION AND VISION STATEMENT

SACTE as an institution of learning has a mission and vision statement, which amongst other things determines and directs its activities for the present and for the future. By stating the mission statement of the college, the researcher intends to provide an overview of the state of the present and future aims of the college. The research which is to follow will take place within the precincts of these aims, thus making it important to be stated. The college, in its mission and vision, commits itself to

- improving classroom practice
- facilitating life-long learning opportunities for the educator

- promoting a culture of learning and teaching through appropriate knowledge, values and skills
- enhancing the educator's professional capabilities by providing relevant, quality-assured, purposeful courses, and
- providing for community learning opportunities.
  (SACTE, 1999a)

In order to meet its mission and vision as a leading distance education institution striving to remain at the cutting edge of this rapidly developing medium of tuition, the college has to meet the needs of its clientele and other stakeholders by offering relevant programmes (SACTE, 1999a: 1). This research is aimed at assessing learner needs, to ensure that they are adequately addressed in the quest by the college to be a leading teachers' training institution in the country.

2.3 LEARNER NEEDS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

The establishing of a new, democratic government in the country in 1994 meant that a number of changes in the South African way of life were imminent and unavoidable. All existing practices, institutions and values were viewed anew, and rethought in terms of their fitness for the new era and way of life. The education arena was not spared the changes affecting all walks of life in the country. Being basic to human life and to the entire economy of a country, the education arena was at the centre and forefront of change. Hofmeyr, writing prior to 1994, agrees that teachers are the most *'critical and expensive resources for education in any country. Competent teachers are key to quality education, and teachers are the prime implementers of change. Without their support, change initiatives are doomed'* (Interfund, 1993: 39). Hofmeyr further writes that over 75% of the national budget on education goes towards payment of teachers; it is therefore imperative that the academic staff is used profitably to gain desired results as far as students are concerned.

Student support at SACTE, with the focus on the Early Childhood Education department, became imperative and unavoidable since national changes on the educational level affected it in the same way as all the other institutions of learning in the country. The following factors play a major role in explaining why the college has to support its students to facilitate their becoming effective teachers:

- The introduction of outcomes-based education, especially in the ECD (Foundation phase), meant a radical mind-shift from the old way of teaching, which was content and input-based, to the new way, which is skills and output-based (RSA, 1998b/4: 6-19). If SACTE has to produce teachers competent in using the outcomes-based method, it has to revisit its programmes, course presentation (packages), and facilitation of the developed courses for the benefit of the students.

- Outcomes-based education is set to be a transformative and emancipatory model allowing access to lifelong learning for practitioners in the field (RSA, 1998b/4: 19). SACTE, as a teacher education institution, has to aspire towards empowering teachers to be competent, and to be in total control of their classroom activities.

- The Norms and Standards for Educators mentions one of the weaknesses in teacher education as inadequate training of teachers, particularly in communication, maths and in overcoming barriers to learning (RSA, 1998a: 7). It further states that there seem to be no clear links between pre-service and in-service education and training, and an **over-emphasis on pre-service training**. This implies that competent teachers can only be produced if more attention is focused on classroom competency rather than pre-service training. More contact between lecturers and students is imperative in order to evaluate the competency of the lecturer and the effectiveness of the study package in classroom practice.

- SACTE has, as its principal aim, the upgrading of teachers' qualifications through enhanced learning. SAQA describes a qualification as *'offering benefits to society and the economy by enhancing their citizenry, increasing productivity both socially and economically, providing specifically skilled and or professional people and transforming and redressing the legacy of inequity in our society'* (RSA, 1998a). The college, therefore, has a challenge in the form of redressing this inequity emanating from the past, which disadvantages the majority of the student population to be effective as learners and teachers.

- The majority of SACTE students have to learn through the medium of English, which to many is a second language, spoken only in academic circles, and seldom used as an ordinary medium for communication. Moulder (1991: 8-10), describes English as the language to acquire knowledge, or to open doors of learning. Study packages and all forms of communication to students are provided in English. To attain success in the academic work, a good command and conceptualisation of English is necessary. Boughey, writing on problems of learning in a second language, challenges institutions of higher learning to move away from *'forms and structures of academic text that have largely been determined over ages by groups of people who have found themselves in dominant positions in society…those forms and structures must now also be examined against a background of a changing society and world of work'* (1998: 170).

To have an in-depth understanding of the nature of the problem under the spotlight, one must have an understanding of the context in which it takes place. In the next section, the terminology will be explained.

2.4   DISTANCE EDUCATION

The term **distance education** does not appear in the research topic, but it is important to explain what it entails, especially in the context in which it is being used in this research. It is defined as a term 'which denotes the forms of study not led by teachers present in classrooms but supported by tutors and an organisation at a distance from the student' (Sewart, Keegan and Holmberg, 1988: 6). The concept **distance education** is sometimes used as synonymous with independent study and correspondence education, because of the absence of the teacher. These are but some of the features of distance education, and they cannot function in isolation, but have to complement each other. Perraton (1993: 1) defines distance education as '*an educational process in which a significant proportion of teaching is conducted by someone removed in* space *or time from the learner*'. This definition presupposes the absence of physical contact that is reminiscent of face-to-face contact teaching, which places both teacher and learner, and learner and learner, within easy access of one another.

Tinto (cited by Commander, 1996), stresses the importance of group interaction and reliance for knowledge and success in academic improvement. Since distance education implies the absence of learners from the environment of learning, reliance on learners and learners, and learners and lecturers, diminishes with the distance between them.

Distance education presupposes that the following activities are indispensable:

- development of self-instructional materials for the students
- teaching at a distance by comments in writing, or telephonically, on work submitted by students
- counselling and general support of students' work by the same distance mode of study.
  (Commander, 1996)

In using the distance education mode for teaching, the South African College for Teacher Education has an advantage over most resident institutions. In supporting distance education as a mode of teaching, Willis (1998: 57-59) maintains that distance education is about

- increasing access, especially to historically under-served and under motivated populations;
- assuming nothing, but basing decisions on definable problems and tangible customer needs. A poorly defined problem has an infinite number of solutions, which may never work. A thorough assessment of needs is the way to go; and
- sharing assumptions with the stakeholders, including students. Decisions made should include inputs by those impacted by the distance education initiative, which are students.

This study was done within the distance education context. Its main aim and brief was to make a needs analysis focusing on learning problems and inhibitions students have towards realising their optimal success academically, and as efficient classroom practitioners.

2.5   STUDENT ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

Academic support and development programmes are measures designed to facilitate students' learning at a distance or in a face-to-face set-up with the purpose of alleviating and eradicating problems related to learning and upgrading students' skills in certain vital areas of their learning. The notion of academic support, however, is associated with helping the under-prepared students or those with inferior education to bridge the gap between the knowledge and skills they possess and the knowledge they are expected to master to attain success in a particular course. Academic support programmes are therefore bridging instruments offered to bring learners to a required level to do a particular course.

The notion of academic support and development on the other hand, suggests an integrated programme of assistance within the existing programmes offered at an institution of learning (Cuthbertson, 1992: 6).

In this research, the two terms, i.e. academic development and academic support, are used synonymously. They are referred to as integrated assistance within the mainstream courses, and not as additional courses designed specifically for the underachievers. Hofmeyr and Spence (1989: 37-48), in their critique of the Academic Support Programmes (ASP), show the failure of the academic support programmes (bridging courses) by the English liberal universities during the apartheid era. These programmes were perceived as being racist because they were designed solely for disadvantaged blacks who were considered not able to cope with the high academic standard these institutions offered (Agar, 1992: 98). The Higher Education Act of 1997 stipulates that, in supporting and developing students academically, there has to be a shift from bridging courses to courses integrated with the rest of the academic work an institution offers (RSA, 1997: 21).

Academic support and development programmes are said to '*encourage student choice in their mode and content of study and emphasise the learner rather than the teacher*' (Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck, 1995: 70). This implies that student academic and development measures should recognise the development and social needs of the learners in consultation with those learners. The individuality of learners should be of paramount importance in that learners bring individual understandings of tasks that need to be handled differently from those of others. Learner academic support and development implies a '*service that will have a role in helping individuals, but also in developing subject lecturers' ability to interpret learning, distinguish between different kinds of error, use them as diagnostic tools and engage in timely intervention with appropriate resources*' (Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck, 1995: 71).

2.6   UPGRADING

According to the Collins Cobuld Dictionary (1993: 882), to upgrade means to *'change in status, so that the person becomes more important or receives more money'*. This implies that progress is made, and things or matters look better than before. SACTE's courses and programmes are aimed at improving the status of students who register with them in terms of academic development and classroom competency. A change in status may be understood in terms of having a favourable disposition for a promotion post, and in terms of acquiring better knowledge and skills.

In this research, upgrading will be viewed as a step forward towards advanced qualifications and skills towards greater competency not only in mastering one's studies but also in one's teaching.

2.7   ASSESSMENT

Assessment is defined as a procedure to determine the degree to which an individual or situation possesses a certain attribute with the purpose of gaining an understanding of an individual or situation at a particular instance or time (Ashcroft and Pallacio, 1996: 68-70). Assessing is tantamount to passing judgement on things and ideas, and this process defines a standpoint in any given situation. The purpose of assessment is to improve something, in this instance to improve the student's academic performance and classroom practice (Atkins, Beattie and Dockrell, 1996: 17).

Rowntree (cited by Ramsden, 1992: 181), claims that assessment is about getting to know students' involvement and the quality of their learning. It concerns the quality of teaching as well as the quality of learning, and it involves tutors learning from their students, effecting positive change for themselves as well as for their students (Ramsden, 1992: 182). Assessment is not just about

what students can do, but meaning they ascribe to work done. In assessing students' needs, the researcher will try to find out what learning means to them. Is it an end in itself, or does it lead to better knowledge?

Assessment involves a process of defining, designing, collecting, analysing, interpreting and using information to increase students' learning and development (Ashcroft and Pallacio 1996: 70).

Assessment however, is a process, and this process involves defining what has to be assessed, designing the process of assessing, collecting data to enable one to give judgement, and interpreting such data to benefit the students (Atkins, Beattie and Dockrell, 1996: 128). The assessment in this research will be on learner needs. The aim of this study is to assess student learning needs in the Early Childhood Education Department with a view to improving learning and thus to improve teaching itself. The needs assessment and its relevance to this research will be discussed briefly.

2.8   NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Witkin and Altschuld (1995: 4) define needs assessment as '...*systematic procedures undertaken for the purpose of setting priorities, and making decisions about program or organisational improvement and allocation of resources....*' These priorities are based on identified needs. They further state that a need is a discrepancy between what is, i.e. the present state of affairs' and what should be, which is the desired state of affairs. In needs assessment, the researcher seeks to determine such discrepancies, by examining the nature and causes, in order to set priorities for future action.

Needs assessment is conducted to derive information and perceptions of values in order to inform policy-making or programme decisions that will benefit specific groups of people (Witkin and Altschuld, 1995: 5). Needs assessment, in this

research, will be geared towards deriving information based on learner needs to inform a change in the course content and the methodology, as a means of supporting students in their learning.

Matiru, Mwangi and Schlette (1995: 40) state that needs assessment is a necessary part of any planning for university teaching: '*If at the outset you do not understand the educational needs of students or those of the society from which they come, you may address them wrongly.*' They state that needs assessment should play an integral part in designing educational activities, and in reviewing and evaluating their effectiveness, always in co-operation with students, colleagues and the administration.

An educational need, in broad terms, can take the form of a discrepancy between an existing set of circumstances and some desired set of circumstances. These needs can be in terms of knowledge, attitude, performance and setting (Matiru, Mwangi and Schlette, 1995).

Needs assessment should lead to a change in knowledge, attitude, performance, and setting of both the student and the lecturer. Needs assessment should also lead to the reviewing of the teaching methods and strategies in order to realise the desired changes. The latter will form the basic component of this research.

Needs assessment is a process and has to be reviewed on a regular basis. It is dynamic and closely related to changes taking place in the educational arena in the rest of the world.

Assessing needs in an educational situation is an ongoing process on which changes in the wider society will impact from time to time. As long as the wider society is dynamic, it stands to reason that the education arena too will be in a transitional stage towards fulfilling the requirements of an ever-changing world.

Needs assessment generally takes place in three phases, namely:

- A pre-assessment phase. This is an exploratory phase. In this phase the researcher identifies issues and major areas of concern. The researcher further has to identify potential sources of data, and how the data will be used.

- A main assessment phase. In this phase, all data regarding the identified area of concern, is gathered. Data gathering is based on opinions regarding the identified needs.

- A post-assessment phase. Data gathered in the second step is used to set priorities and criteria for solutions regarding the identified area of concern to the researcher. In this step (phase), alternatives are weighed to formulate an action programme for change or some form of intervention (Witkin and Altschuld, 1995: 14).

This study was based on the needs assessment phases expounded above. Employing needs assessment in this study helped the researcher identify gaps that exist between the present state of affairs concerning SACTE students, and the desired state, in order to produce competent and efficient learners and teachers.

2.9   LITERATURE OVERVIEW

2.9.1   Theories on learning and student development

Student support and development have received extensive attention all over the world in the last two decades. Theories on student development have been the basis for the American student-affairs profession since the beginning of the 1960s. These theories explain the processes of human growth and change. It is through the student development theories that one can begin to understand how individuals and groups experience higher education and the factors that interact

with their satisfaction, achievement and persistence (Altbach,1997: 5). Theories on student development were greatly influenced by the works of Piaget and Freud. Both theorists, in their research, acknowledged environmental influences as important in shaping human development and growth. If environment is as important as it is purported to be, how can it be structured to influence student growth and change toward valued individual and societal goals?

Fromm (cited by Vygotsky, 1978) concurs with the theorists above on the importance of environmental influences in shaping human growth and development. He agrees that the concept of potentiality has no meaning if conditions suitable for its growth are non-existent. Student learning difficulties must therefore be understood as problems of access to and mastery of the ground-rules of a particular academic discipline within the higher education context (Vygotsky, 1978). If the learning environment is not structured to promote effective learning, then it is impossible to realise any substantial learning. Blocher (in Newton and Ender, 1980) devised three ecological principles that encourage sustained growth for participants in a learning environment:

- The learning environment must be structured in such a way that participants achieve success and mastery of tasks given.
- The learning environment must encourage networking of participants, to help them cope with the learning content, manage stress and meet challenges.
- Participants must be rewarded for good work done. The reward may be both intrinsic and extrinsic .

Blocher (in Newton and Ender, 1980: 53), emphasises the fact that practitioners have to realise that 'developmental processes do not just happen, but rather must be purposefully triggered and carefully nurtured by the environment if full potential for growth is to be reached'.

Higher education in particular has been criticised for giving little attention to student learning and personal development. Writing in Altbach (1997: 4) on the importance of higher education to rededicate its energies towards student development, Arnold and King claim that against the '*backdrop of high tuition, scarce grant aid and a tight professional labour market, consumers of higher education are demanding that faculty devote more time to undergraduate teaching, advising and mentoring*'. The government, the general public and parents demand that institutions of higher learning be accountable for demonstrating positive student outcomes that will help them engage in life-long learning.

Student development theory is based on student involvement in learning. Student involvement is regarded as the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience (Astin in Altbach, 1997: 251). The term **involvement** has behavioural meaning. Involvement has to do with what the individual does, and how she or he behaves. Astin postulates three theories on student development.

The first theory he calls **subject-matter theory**. According to this theory, student learning and development depend on exposure to the right subject matter. Learning content is very important in motivating students' development and learning. Students have to relate to the learning content for them to be active participants in their learning.

The second theory he calls the **resource theory**. If resources in an institution such as libraries, human resources and physical facilities are brought together into one place, student development and learning will occur. This theory has both qualitative and quantitative values for students' learning. If increasing both high quality teaching personnel and a large quantity of physical facilities are introduced, students' learning and involvement will increase. This theory, however relevant, is lacking in intensity by failing to explain the use or deployment of such resources to maximise student involvement in learning.

The third and last theory is the **individualised theory**. This theory attempts to identify the curricular content and instructional methods that best meet the needs of the individual student. Taking into consideration the diversity of the student population found at any institution, more so in the South African context, whereby students come from disparate educational and socio-economic backgrounds, this theory may prove difficult and expensive to implement.

2.9.2 Academic student development and distance education

Holmberg (1997), identifies three essential characteristics of distance education :

Firstly, distance education is viewed as a form of study where the educator and the student are not together in the same classroom or on the same premises. Secondly, he maintains that this teaching and learning process must have the full support of the institution for its survival. Lastly, distance education is possible if a variety of media such as print material and communication is employed in the delivery of information. This interpretation and analysis of distance education is taken further by Keegan (1993: 1) who claims that distance education is privatisation of learning, in that learning occurs away from the group and is influenced positively or negatively by the institution in charge.

Mackintosh concurs with Holmberg by stating that distance education is simply not possible without technology (1999: 141). Distance education (DE) means that time and space separate the processes of teaching and learning. This time-space separation in DE means that the processes of teaching and learning are technologically mediated. Mackintosh refers to this technology as knowledge base in its practical form. This holds true only if students understand how to use the technology, and also if the technology is designed with the user's needs in mind. Holmberg agrees with the above statement when he confirms the needs and conditions in which DE occurs as of importance in exerting decisive influence on practice. *'Market research and corporate planning are required to secure real knowledge about relevant circumstances'* (Holmberg, 1997: 68).

Distance education can only succeed if students' support services are in existence and are used to enhance student learning (Sahoo, 1993: 8). Mackintosh, writing on the challenges that face DE in the country, concurs with Sahoo by arguing that alienation of the teaching-learning processes due to time-space separation, amplifies the need for student support (1999: 147). Scholtz (1989: 40) agrees with Sahoo and Mackintosh on the importance of academic support by arguing that student learning can be successfully addressed by instituting academic development measures.

The researcher agrees with the views on distance learning expressed by the writers cited above, but would like to add an additional dimension, namely that distance learning presupposes learning in isolation. The student is not only physically removed from the institution of learning, but he or she is also removed from the learning content. Reconciling the student and the learning content becomes a big task if there is no support or intervention measures on the part of the student to break up this state of isolation.

Student support requires appropriate structures and delivery systems, especially at the infra-structural level. Good policies and practices of an institution should ensure that student support is integrated in the study packages produced for students (Mackintosh, 1999: 147). Academic development should not be developed as an adjunct skill, but instead it should be engaged with learning in the mainstream (Langer, 1987).

2.9.3 Development of student academic support in South African higher education

Distance education practice is not new to higher education in South Africa. Since the late 1940s, the University of South Africa (UNISA) has been offering correspondence courses which have been refined over the years to qualify as distance learning (Mackintosh, 1999). Contact sessions between lecturers and students became a means by which UNISA bridged the gap or distance between the lecturing staff and the students. In some instances, these fell far short of their

purpose. The South African Committee for Higher Education Trust (SACHED), acting independently of UNISA and other universities, has since the 1960s been involved in student support programmes designed to narrow and eventually reduce the gap between the students and their teachers (Basson and Nonyogo, 1997: 97). Basson and Nonyogo argue that student support is crucial for student success despite the fact that their programmes may have had some limitations (1997: 97-98).

Since the 1980s, with the advent of the open-door policy, black students were for the first time allowed to study at white universities. The admission of blacks into white institutions of learning precipitated academic support programmes (ASP) which became 'unavoidable and necessary because of the educationally disadvantaged clientele who made entry into their shores' (Starfield, 1996: 155-158).

Boughey (1998: 170) writes that the establishment of academic support mainly for African students was established to assist them come to grips with the demands of university study. Boughey, writing on the Language and Disadvantage in South African Institutions of Higher Education, states that *'outside the racist labels of innate cultural and cognitive differences of apartheid, the obvious characteristics of apartheid, of these students was that they were second language students, learning at a tertiary level in English, which was not their mother-tongue...a move to a second-language frame was adopted in rejection of the view that problems which black students experienced in white institutions were due to innate racial differences in cognition or thought'.*

Agar (1992: 93) maintains that the majority of white universities adopted academic support programmes (ASP), due to the *'disadvantaged educational background of black students and consequent high drop-out rate at university, as well as the response to the projected increase in the numbers of such students who would register with universities'*, in order for black students to be on the same academic footing as the rest of the student clientele of such an institution.

After visiting institutions with well-established Academic Development (AD) centres in the Eastern Cape, Eastwood, writing on the establishment of AD in the Border Technikon, found that academic development is one of the programmes with a responsibility to ease the transition by helping lecturers teach more effectively and students learn more effectively (1997: 129-134). This conclusion was reached, based on the fact that transformation was taking place. A means had to be found to deal with all its concomitant problems. The rationale for needs assessment was one of the guiding forces he found imperative in establishing academic development measures for students.

Supporting students in order to enhance learning has been central to the tasks of the Department of Education. The Technology Enhanced Learning Initiative (TELI) of the Department of Education has, in the past five years, worked on a project to come up with a broad-based policy framework concerned with technologies that could be used to support and enhance teaching and learning (Butcher, 1999). The government has come to realise that students need to be supported if learning is to be made easier and worthwhile.

The South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) has conducted research to identify strategies for the design and delivery of distance teacher education that could lead to improved teaching in the classroom. This project which was listed under the Presidential Initiative, was conducted in 1998. It looked at programme design, course materials, assessment design and student support of the Further Diploma in Education (FDE) offered by Wits University. The project revealed that there was consonance between the abilities that the programme set out to develop, what the students said about those abilities, and what was done to translate them into practice. The project also revealed however, that it is important to integrate school-based activities into teacher development if any change and impact are to be made with regard to the teaching habits of teachers (Butcher, 1999).

Student support and development is not a cause for concern for education in South Africa only, but for the whole of higher education world-wide. The western world, especially Britain, made inroads into distance learning in 1966 with the establishment of the Open University (Ruggles, 1982). Student support programmes became part and parcel of their programmes, since it was realised that support to students was indispensable if any worthwhile learning was to take place.

McNamara and Harris (1997: 173), writing on overseas students in British higher education and, focusing mainly on the learning problems they experienced when studying at British universities, make succinct remarks that approaches to learning affect learning outcomes. They state that '...*there is far greater awareness today that learning outcomes reflect not just individual student characteristics of particular teaching methods, but the socio-cultural context in which learning takes place'*.

The concessions expounded above made the researcher reflect on the context in which the research was carried out, and establish by means of a survey whether this holds true for SACTE students or not. Is the performance of SACTE students affected by their socio-cultural background or is it simply the problem of the teaching methods they are subjected to?

2.9.4 Relevance of the literature overview to the study

From the literature overview, the researcher concluded the following:

- Academic student development goes hand in glove with the learning environment. Factors such as motivation and the learning content play a role in how students grow towards acquiring skills and knowledge.

- Theories of student development assisted in identifying primary focus areas of student growth and development. The learning environment,

the learning content, and resources are basic to student development and growth.

- Experiences of historically white universities in academic development helped in appreciating deficiencies and strengths in the academic development programmes they followed.

This literature overview helped to inform the problem description and concentrate on those aspects that impact on the immediate environment of SACTE students. The literature overview guided the researcher towards a better understanding of the field of academic student support and development, as well as problems related to the field and the magnitude of challenges relating to SACTE and its concomitant problems. Theories on human development and learning informed the researcher to understand how learning occurs, and what contributory factors might facilitate effective learning.

2.10 CONCLUSION

Concept explanation contributed towards the conceptualisation of the problem, while understanding the context in which the research was being carried out was important in informing the researcher about the design to be employed in data-gathering. The literature overview informed the researcher concerning various researches done, especially in the field of student academic development and support. The research design is addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this study, the researcher identified problem areas that students encounter both in their studies and as classroom practitioners, so as to inform intervention in the form of academic student support and development measures. The researcher also examined the presence and effectiveness of any student support measures presently available at SACTE. Both sets of data were generated by means of a set of questionnaires aimed at college student clientele and the academic staff in the Early Childhood Education Department (ECE). College documentation was used to supplement and clarify the quantitative data.

3.2 NATURE OF THE RESEARCH

This study employed a survey methodology that is capable of quantifying and recording data. Documentation was used to supplement the survey mainly to get clarification on aspects assumed to have been overlooked by the survey. Qualitative method, according to Brennen (24: 1992), is used to supplement the quantitative method by acting '*as a source of hypothesis which the quantitative method may go on to test',* and it has a covert usage in the interpretation and clarification of such quantitative data.

The premise the research departed from is that students in the ECE Department experience problems related to their studies. This premise was drawn from the number of queries related to studying and teaching, which were directed at the lecturing staff in the form of telephone calls, personal visits and letters. This premise was also drawn from an unacceptably high failure rate, which is attributed to lack of understanding of the examination questions (SACTE: 1999d). Moving from this point of departure, the researcher compiled two questionnaires: one for students and the other for lecturing staff to determine the nature of the problems. The following key questions were posed in the questionnaires for students:

- What type of educational background do students have?
- How long have they been registered at SACTE, and what is the reason?
- To what extent do they benefit from the tutor system if they have access to it?
- To what extent are the study manuals accessible to them?
- If not accessible (bullet 4 above), what are the problems and what suggestions do they have to eradicate those problems?
- What type of intervention would they like to have from SACTE?

The aim of the questionnaires was to probe the root of the problem which, the researcher believes, exists, in order to analyse the responses and to make appropriate recommendations to the responses given.

3.3   RESEARCH APPROACH AND DATA GENERATION

3.3.1 Research approach

This study employed a survey approach to data generation. The questionnaire was used as the main tool of data generation in this study (cf pages 15 - 16).

According to Denscombe (1998: 11) a survey approach to research implies wide and inclusive coverage of the area under research. The data thereof can be quantified or qualified according to the method employed. In this respect, a survey approach was used in both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

A questionnaire was distributed by mail to students in order to collect and generate data from the target group. Subsidiary to this was the questionnaire aimed at the Early Childhood Education (ECE) academic staff. Questionnaires were used because of their capacity to produce data that can be quantified and expressed numerically. The questionnaire as a survey instrument enabled the researcher to cover a wide area of students, thus making the data more representative of the target group.

The questionnaire as a survey instrument is an expensive means of data collection. Nevertheless it proves to capture data from a wide range of respondents. The questionnaire is therefore the best instrument to use if the target group is of heterogeneous nature, as is the case with the SACTE student clientele. According to Brennen (1992: 62) quantitative research is used to close the gaps in a qualitative study. These gaps arise due to the fact that the researcher cannot be in more than one place at the same time.

3.3.2 Documentation analysis

The use of the documents for data generation is considered to be of both an implicit and an explicit nature. It is implicit in the sense that it acted as a premise and a foundation for this study, but it is also explicit in that it helped in the analysis and understanding of questionnaire generated data by bringing to the fore problems previously experienced by SACTE. The researcher conceived the research problem from qualitative investigation done prior to the study being carried out. This study was prompted by problems expounded by students through telephone calls, letters and analyses of SACTE results by the Assessment Department. The Assessment Department indicated that

there is a high failure rate among SACTE students. This fact demands some attention if it is to be halted or controlled (SACTE, 1999a).

A qualitative study was used to explain factors underlying the broad relationship established in data analyses obtained through questionnaires. Some recommendations were guided by information obtained from the college documents. Data analyses will be dealt with in detail in chapter four.

3.4   FACTORS THAT INFORMED THIS STUDY

Data was collected through a set of two different questionnaires: one for students and another for the ECE lecturing staff (see 3.1). The main questionnaire, which was to be completed by students, was based on the following factors:

- Infrastructure
- Language
- Assessment
- Tutor-student relationship.

The choice of the questionnaire as the main tool for data collection was informed by the need to obtain a variety of responses from as many students as possible, since the student clientele of the College is dispersed throughout the country. It would have been difficult to use the telephone as a tool for interviewing since, according to the students' data system, a large percentage do not own telephones (SACTE: 1999a). In addition, interviewing students on the telephone would have been expensive, as they are from different parts of the country, and the interviewer would have to spend a great deal of time with each interviewee. The quantitative method was found to be appropriate because it would enable the researcher to quantify the results. The researcher would be able to determine the exact number of responses out of the total of the sample group and the extent to which it is representative of the target

group. Questionnaires were used to obtain objective and personal information that might have been difficult to obtain with other data gathering tools (Hopkins, 1976).

The questionnaire data for students were captured and analysed by Rand Afrikaans University Statkon Services of the Department of Statistics. The results of the analysis will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter.

The researcher analysed the questionnaire completed by the ECE Department personnel. Out of a total of 13 academic staff members in the department, only 10, excluding the researcher, completed the questionnaire. The rest of the academic staff who could not answer the questionnaire, were on long leave from the college when the research was being carried out.

The questionnaire for the academic staff was based on the following aspects:

- The academic staff's experience in teaching teachers
- The academic staff's experience in distance education
- What the academic staff regard as problems inhibiting students from effective learning
- Suggestions and recommendations on how to deal with the problems identified.

The analysis of this questionnaire will be dealt with in the next chapter as subsidiary to the main questionnaire to students.

The other important measure of data collection was SACTE documents.

- SACTE administration personnel provided the information on the ECE student profiles. In order to carry out the study, the researcher needed to know the number of students who would be involved in the research and where they resided.

- The minutes of the Heads of Departments of the College, the curriculum committee minutes and documents, as well as the ECE department minutes were consulted in order to determine if the subject under study had ever been addressed. The researcher discovered that the topic had been dealt with unsuccessfully on a number of occasions. It seemed, however, that the problem had been tackled from the College perspective only. This meant that the students' input on what their problems were, and suggestions on how to deal with those problems, were never considered.

3.5 SAMPLING PROCEDURE

The target group for the research was drawn from the Early Childhood Department of SACTE. Mouton says that the most significant aim of sampling is to get a sample that is as representative as possible of the target population (110: 1996). The researcher, in pursuit of this, carried out a random sampling of the ECE students by posting questionnaires to names chosen randomly on the ECE list in the following order:

- One hundred names starting from letter 'A'
- One hundred names in the 'M' category (Most surnames especially of the black population start with the letter 'M')
- One hundred last names on the ECE register list.

Sampling of the target group involved 10% of the total of the target group. Translated into figures, 300 students out of a total of ±3000 students were sent questionnaires to complete and return. The respondents had to return completed questionnaires within a period of ±1 month. It took most of the respondents up to two months to return the responses. Most respondents ascribed the delay to the Post Office and Telkom strike and to the fact that some of them live in outlying areas of the country where postal service is erratic. Despite the fact that some received the questionnaires long after the return date, they still completed them, and attached a letter of apology for late

arrival. Almost 70% of the responses were finally returned to the researcher. Data analysis following in chapter 4 is based on the responses received.

3.6   LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process contained a number of problem areas to be highlighted. The College data on the ECE student list was not always correct. Some questionnaires were returned due to unknown addresses. Some questionnaires were not completed because respondents were no longer registered with the College, despite the fact that their particulars are still registered in the College data.

The erratic postal services, aggravated by the workers' strike, delayed the receipt of questionnaires from the respondents for up to three months. However, the researcher extended the return date by an extra month. In that extra month, a large percentage of completed questionnaires made their way back to the sender.

Despite the difficulties encountered, it seemed as if students had long been hoping for an investigation of this nature. Most students took this opportunity to raise issues with the College that had bothered them over a period of time. These problems were both administrative and academic. Among the issues raised were problems of non-receipt of study materials and pleas to be offered question papers of previous years in order to revise for the examination. Since these issues were not part of the research study, they will not be dealt with here. However, by raising such issues, the researcher wanted to draw the attention of the reader to the fact that the study evoked issues other than the one under scrutiny only, but contributory towards understanding the context of the study.

3.7   CONCLUSION

This chapter gave an exposition of the research process and the methods used. Choosing the quantitative research method as main method for data collection in this study was motivated earlier in this chapter. In the next chapter, the researcher will present an analysis of the questionnaires and their implications for the student, the ECE academic personnel and SACTE as a whole.

CHAPTER 4

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The system of academic development and support for students is nothing new in the South African Higher Education arena, but has been ongoing for over a decade (Moyo, Donn and Hounsell, 1997). Academic development and support in Higher Education enjoy the support of the government as being legitimate in redressing and addressing students' academic problems (RSA: 1997).

In this chapter, the researcher will analyse survey findings of the questionnaires sent to students and academic staff of the Early Childhood Education Department of SACTE. The problem addressed by the research was to find learning needs of ECE students that would warrant an academic development and support service by helping students to perform to the best of their abilities academically and professionally. The study, however, will only analyse the needs expounded by students and the ECE academic staff, and will refrain from translating those needs into an academic development programme. This may form part of a further study.

4.2. RESEARCH METHOD

The survey method implemented in the form of questionnaires for data generation was aimed at both the ECE students and academic staff of SACTE.

4.2.1 Questionnaire for Early Childhood Education students

Questionnaires were dispatched to 300 out of a total of approximately 3000 ECE students countrywide. Random sampling was used in the selection of students (cf chapter 3). Students were given a period of one month in which to return the questionnaires. This period was further extended by one month. At the end of an extra month, over 210 out of a total of 300 (70%) completed questionnaires were received from respondents.

Most students answered all the questions, but some questions were returned unanswered. In the questionnaire analysis that is to follow, that discrepancy will be indicated since this type of irregularity does have a negative bearing on the results, thus limiting their reliability.

4.2.2 Questionnaire for academic staff

The ECE department at SACTE has a staff complement of 13 lecturers. At the time of the research only 10 lecturers were present, while the remainder were on long leave. All 10 lecturers who were present, excluding the researcher, completed the questionnaire.

4.2.3 Timing effectiveness

Since 1995 a moratorium banning admission of new students to SACTE existed (SACTE, 1999a). Since 1996 no new students were admitted to SACTE. At the time of this research all students had been registered at SACTE for at least two years. The time spent at SACTE, and the experience

acquired in the interim, were sufficient to enable students to answer the questionnaire in an honest and open way.

4.3 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA FOR ECE STUDENT COMPLEMENT

The questionnaire sent to students covered the following aspects:

- Infrastructure. Are there any Regional Learning Centres available for studying and for referencing purposes? Are these resource centres available also for facilitation and learning of students?

- Language. Can students fully comprehend the language of communication and instruction used at the college? Do they find study materials easy to follow and 'accessible' in spite of their being written in English? Can they relate to the study materials? What are students' perceptions regarding study materials?

- Assessment. How long have students been enrolled for the course for which they are registered? Are they happy with the way in which they are being assessed at college or not? What is the nature of problems students regard as stumbling blocks in achieving effective learning?

- Student-tutor relationship. Are they able to contact their lecturers for help? What are students' perceptions of the existing student support structures if any exist?

Recommendations by students on measures the College should introduce to enhance learning and teaching of its students, were also covered in the questionnaire.

4.4 STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The findings of the student questionnaire will be treated below in tabular form. Some aspects in the questionnaire that are similar or related to one another, have been condensed for the purpose of analysis and will be treated collectively and not individually. The analysis will be done in the order in which questions appear in the questionnaire.

4.5 PERSONAL DETAILS

Table 4.5.1
Gender

	Gender	
	Count	%
Male	29	13.8%
Female	181	86.2%
Total	210	100.0%

Responses show that female students far outnumber male students in the Early Childhood Education department. However, this is in line with practices in the primary school field. There are more female teachers in the primary schools than males.

Table 4.5.2

Home Language

	Home Language	
	Count	%
Sepedi	15	7.1%
IsiZulu	69	32.9%
IsiXhosa	17	8.1%
Ndeble	14	6.7%
Siswati	20	9.5%
Setswana	33	15.7%
Xitsonga	11	5.2%
Tshivenda	11	5.2%
Sesotho	9	4.3%
English	4	1.9%
Afrikaans	7	3.3%
Total	210	100.0%

IsiZulu-speaking students are the largest respondent student group registered in the ECE programme. The second group is the Setswana-speaking students. This information concurs with the college information that the concentration of SACTE students is largely in Northern Kwa-Zulu Natal and Northern Cape areas, where these languages are predominant (SACTE, 1999a).

Table 4.5.3

Marital Status

	Marital Status	
	Count	%
Married	113	54.9%
Single	55	26.7%
Divorced	14	6.8%
Widow/Widower	23	11.2%
Living together	1	.5%
Total	206	100.0%

Table 4.5.3 will be treated together with Table 4.5.4

Table 4.5.4

Number of members of the household including own children

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	210	22	57	37.37	6.23
Number of children	198	0	8	2.40	1.43
Age of child 1	187	1	33	13.75	5.99
Age of child 2	142	1	25	10.70	5.59
Age of child 3	82	1	21	9.01	5.31
Age of child 4	39	1	20	8.62	5.40
Age of child 5	16	1	23	9.19	6.64
How many people live with you including your family?	44	1	12	6.23	2.47
How many people live with you including your family?	17	1	6	3.94	1.34
How many people live with you including your family?	10	3	20	12.30	4.22

Table 4.5.3 shows that a high percentage of students are married. Of significance also is the relatively high percentage of single students. Table 4.5.4 shows that out of a response of 210, 198 indicated that they have children. This means that a significant number of single students have children. Besides being teachers and students, students still have the responsibility of looking after their children. This responsibility is compounded for single parents who have to assume the double roles of mother and father.

Responses to this question (table 4.5.4) show that a large number of students have a household of more than 10 people, which is a large number, especially if one has to study at home. The fact that 38% study in dining-rooms, and 35% study in bedrooms (table 4.5.8), aggravates their situation.

Table 4.5.5

Residence

	Where do you live?	
	Count	%
Town	14	6.7%
Township	85	40.7%
Informal settlement next to a township	13	6.2%
Village next to a town / township	16	7.7%
Village in a remote rural area	53	25.4%
Farm	28	13.4%
Total	209	100.0%

A high percentage (40.7%) of students live in townships. A significant number also live in remote rural areas (25.4%) and on farms (13.4%). The latter figures put together make a significant percentage (38.8%). These are students removed by distance from towns and cities where Regional Learning Centres are to be found. They do not have easy access to the information and books in the libraries of the RLCs The main campus of the college at Groenkloof, Pretoria, does not have a resource centre, therefore students rely on RLCs for most of their learning and studying needs.

Table 4.5.6

Source of power

	What source of power do you use at your home?	
	Count	%
Electricity	149	71.0%
Gas	14	6.7%
Paraffin / candles	46	21.9%
Other	1	0.5%
Total	210	100.0%

A high number (71%) of students use electricity as their source of power. However, there is a significant number (21%) who still rely on candles and paraffin as source of power. This group of students, like the rest of the students, are full-time teachers who are at work during the day. The only time

for them to study is at night. It is obvious that they are highly inconvenienced by this type of lighting.

Table 4.5.7

Study place

	Where do you normally study?	
	Count	%
Home	181	86.2%
Library	7	3.3%
School	19	9.0%
Regional Learning Centre	2	1.0%
Other	1	.5%
Total	210	100.0%

Most teachers prefer to study at home (86.2%), probably because they do not have a Regional Learning Centre where they could study (table 18). In the question on the availability of an RLC, a large majority (86%) replied 'no' to availability of an RLC as against 14% who replied in the affirmative.

Table 4.5.8

Study place at home

	If you study at home, where in your home?	
	Count	%
Kitchen	28	15.2%
Dining-room	70	38.0%
TV room	4	2.2%
Bedroom	65	35.3%
Study	17	9.2%
Total	184	100.0%

Of the respondents, 38% claim to use the dining-room as a study. This is followed by 35% who study in the bedroom and 15.2% who study in the kitchen. A very low 9.25% use the study for the purpose of studying. Lack of studies in most houses compels students to use other rooms in the house to study in. Studying in overcrowded homes (table 4.5.4) and in communal rooms does not promote success in learning.

4.6   SCHOOLING BACKGROUND

Table 4.6.1

Type of schooling

	What type of schooling did you receive?	
	Count	%
Department of Education and Training (Black Education)	169	82.4%
Provincial Education Department (White Education)	10	4.9%
Department of Education and Culture (Coloured and Indian Education)	5	2.4%
Homelands	19	9.3%
Other	2	1.0%
Total	205	100.0%

Table 4.6.1 provides information about the schooling background of the student complement of SACTE. Of the students, 82.4% have a Department of Education and Training (DET) background. The Department of Education and Training was a department for black education country-wide in the old dispensation. Adding the 9.3% from the homelands, almost 91.7% of the student population are blacks of African origin. The college can therefore be described as predominantly black.

Table 4.6.2

Academic qualifications

	What academic qualification do you possess?	
	Count	%
Standard 8	4	1.9%
Standard 10	196	94.2%
BA or equivalent	8	3.8%
Total	208	100.0%

Table 4.6.2 will be analysed together with table 4.6.3

Table 4.6.3

Professional qualifications

	What professional qualification do you possess?	
	Count	%
M+1	47	24.5%
M+2	108	56.3%
M+3	34	17.7%
M+4	3	1.6%
Total	192	100.0%

Table 4.6.2 shows that the standard 10 qualification (94.2%), currently grade 12, is the highest academic qualification for most students. Table 4.6.3, on the other hand, reveals their professional qualification as falling between unqualified and under-qualified. An M+1 qualification implies that the student has done only one year of professional qualification after matriculation, and is still as yet not qualified. M+2 implies that the student has done two years of professional qualification after matriculation, or she or he has a Higher Primary Teacher's Certificate that has to be upgraded to the level of a diploma. Most teachers fall within the categories M+1 and M+2. If these two categories are added together it makes up 80.8% of the ECE student population, who are either unqualified or under-qualified. M+3 is regarded by the Department of Education as a minimum professional qualification for teachers in the country (RSA, 1998a).

Table 4.6.4

Where do you teach?

Table 12	Where do you teach?	
	Count	%
Pre-school	19	9.3%
Primary school	176	86.3%
Secondary school	2	1.0%
Not attached to a school	7	3.4%
Total	204	100.0%

Table 4.6.4 will be analysed together with table 4.6.5

Table 4.6.5

Position at school

Table 13	What is your position at school?	
	Count	%
Teacher	138	71.1%
Private teacher	32	16.5%
HOD	6	3.1%
Principal	18	9.3%
Total	194	100.0%

Of the respondents, 86.3% teach in primary schools, followed by 9.3% that teach in pre-schools (table 4.6.4). Despite the fact that the majority of students are unqualified or under-qualified (M+1 and M+2 = 80.8%, according to table 4.6.5), 71.1% of teachers occupy permanent posts. This shows how important it is for teachers to be trained to become properly qualified and competent classroom practitioners.

Table 4.6.6

Type of school shelter

	What type of shelter is your school?	
	Count	%
Brick	160	82.5%
Bus	2	1.0%
Containers	6	3.1%
Prefabs	21	10.8%
Under a tree	2	1.0%
Other	3	1.5%
Total	194	100.0%

Table 4.6.6 will be analysed together with table 4.6.7

Table 4.6.7

Number of children in class

	How many children are there in your class?	
	Count	%
Fewer than 20	7	3.6%
Between 20 - 30	42	21.3%
Between 40 - 59	120	60.9%
60 and above	28	14.2%
Total	197	100.0%

Physical teaching conditions seem to be relatively good. As shown in Table 4.6.6, 82.5% of schools are made of brick while less than 10% have shelters other than brick. Schools differ from one situation to the other, especially with regard to factors like facilities, teacher competency and the learners' readiness to learn. It is evident from Table 4.6.7 that although a high percentage of schools are brick structures, the learners are too numerous to be handled effectively, more so by unqualified teachers (table 4.6.3). Classes of between 40 and 60 learners are the largest at 69.9% as compared to ideal classes of between 20 and 30 that make up only 21.3% of responses.

4.7   EXPERIENCE AS SACTE STUDENT

Table 4.7.1

Programme registered for

	What programme are you registered for?	
	Count	%
Diploma in Education (DE), Pre-Primary/ Foundation Phase	72	35.0%
Diploma in Education (former CCE)	114	55.3%
Diploma in Education (HDE), Pre-Primary/ Foundation phase	20	9.7%
Total	206	100.0%

Table 4.7.1 will be analysed together with table 4.7.2

Table 4.7.2

Duration of programme

	What is the duration of the programme?	
	Count	%
Six years	112	56.6%
Three years	72	36.4%
One year	14	7.1%
Total	198	100.0%

A high composition of the ECE student population of SACTE is made up of former College for Continuing Education (CCE) students (55.3%). Former CCE students are to be found mostly in rural areas and on farms. These were unqualified teachers who were in the employ of the former Department of Education and Training. The duration of the CCE diploma is six years as opposed to three years for the former College of Education for South Africa (CESA) diplomas. There is a correlation between the type of programme students have registered for, and the duration of the course.

Table 4.7.3

Duration of students' stay in the programme

	How long have you been registered for the course?	
	Count	%
Between 1 and 3 years	50	24.2%
Between 3 and 6 years	129	62.3%
Between 6 and 8 years	26	12.6%
Over 8 years	2	1.0%
Total	207	100.0%

The length of registration for SACTE courses by students seems normal for both the three year and the six year courses. It is still a matter of concern for the college that some students have stayed on a course for a six to eight year

period. This group makes up 12.6% of the respondents, which is a large percentage that cannot be ignored.

When asked to furnish reasons why it took them longer to complete the programme, (question 22 of the questionnaire), respondents brought forward various reasons. Among the reasons, the most predominant one was that the college programmes have too many modules, thus it is impossible for them to complete the programmes within the prescribed period. The second reason, following closely on the first one, was that students do not have enough money to register for modules as they are too expensive and students do not earn enough to pay their fees.

Table 4.7.4

Existence of Regional Learning Centre (RLC)

	Is there a Regional Learning Centre next to where you stay?	
	Count	%
No	172	86.0%
Total	200	100.0%

It is evident from the above responses that there are few RLCs for students. An overwhelming majority of 86% indicated that they do not enjoy the benefit of having a resource centre in the form of an RLC. Students indicated in table 4.5.7 that they study at home, but would like to study as groups or pairs. This could only be possible if there were enough RLCs that could provide such a place. Absence of RLCs for the majority of the respondents may be due to the fact that the majority of students are to be found in rural and farm areas (table 4.5.5), whereas RLCs are to be found in towns and cities. The absence of RLCs impacts directly on the students' learning in that they cannot access the information needed to produce work of high quality.

Table 4.7.5

What do you use the RLC for?

	If yes, what do you use it for?	
	Count	%
Referencing sources	8	16.3%
Enrichment sources	2	4.1%
Leisure reading	4	8.2%
Doing assignments	27	55.1%
Studying	8	16.3%
Total	49	100.0%

Students who have access to RLCs use them for doing assignments (about 55.1%). As indicated in the table above, it is evident that it is only a small minority (49 out of a total of 210 respondents) that have access to the RLC. The presence of RLCs would provide students with a better chance of studying in pairs or groups and for sharing ideas. In table 4.7.7, about 72.3% say they would prefer to read with other students. RLCs would afford students an opportunity to use available reference materials for college work and for own school-work.

Table 4.7.6

How do you study?

	How do you study?	
	Count	%
Alone at home	139	67.5%
With a study group	30	14.6%
With a friend	37	18.0%
Total	206	100.0%

Students study alone at home (67.5%). One of the contributory factors may be lack of common centres such as RLCs (table 4.7.4) where they could meet regularly. Presently RLCs are few and situated only in towns and cities. Unfortunately there is a large percentage of college students who live in the rural and farm areas who are certainly in need of the service of the RLC (table 4.7.5).

Table 4.7.7

Do you need a study group?

	If studying alone, do you need a study group?	
	Count	%
Yes	115	72.3%
No	44	27.7%
Total	159	100.0%

From the above analysis, 72.3% of respondents would like to have a study group. Study groups provide learner support and can be used by students to plan their school work and to share ideas, especially on outcomes-based teaching. Study groups serve as academic support for students and thus help them in doing assignments and other college projects. Since the students live far away from the college, and it is not always possible to contact lecturers, the presence of other students becomes imperative as a source of reference.

Table 4.7.8

Suggestions on forms of learning interventions

	If you do need a study group, what do you suggest as an intervention to help with your studies?	
	Count	%
More lecturer intervention	67	45.6%
Clearer study materials	34	23.1%
Tutoring	36	24.5%
A wide variety of study material	10	6.8%
Total	147	100.0%

The response to this question seems to have come from both groups of those who would prefer the study groups and those who would not. Besides indicating study groups as being of importance in enhancing students' learning, some 45.6% of respondents showed preference for lecturer intervention. This is followed by a need for tutoring (24.5%) and a need for clearer study materials (23.1%). It is clear that students prefer to have

personal contact with lecturers rather than face their study materials alone. Interpreting study materials alone is a difficult task that can only be alleviated by either the study group, lecturer or tutor intervention.

Table 4.7.9

Tutor system

	Do you have a tutor system in your area?	
	Count	%
Yes	44	22.0%
No	156	78.0%
Total	200	100.0%

About 45.6% of students indicated that they would prefer to have lecturer intervention to deal with their academic problems (table 4.7.7). About 78% still maintain that personal contact between themselves and the tutor is the way to achieve academic success, which emphasises the need for lecturer or tutor intervention in enhancing learning.

Table 4.7.10

How useful is the tutor system?

	If you have a tutor system in your area, do you find it useful?	
	Count	%
Very worthwhile	29	50.9%
Not very worthwhile	15	26.3%
Quite worthwhile	13	22.8%
Total	57	100.0%

Over 50.9% of respondents who enjoy the benefit of tutoring, rate the current tutoring system as being useful and beneficial. At present, tutoring, where it is being done, is conducted in RLCs. A significant percentage of respondents (26.3%), regard tutoring as not very worthwhile. The college needs to view the sentiments of this group very seriously if tutoring is to be made worthwhile to all SACTE students.

Table 4.7.11

How often do you attend tutoring sessions?

	If worthwhile, how often do you attend the tutor system?	
	Count	%
Once a month	23	41.1%
Every Saturday morning	8	14.3%
Once a quarter	5	8.9%
Once a year	4	7.1%
If you request for it	16	28.6%
Total	56	100.0%

The frequency of attending tutoring sessions varies from once a month (41.1%) to requesting for tutoring (26.6%). Tutoring differs from area to area and from subject to subject according to the difficulty of the subject as reflected in student's results.

Table 4.7.12

Is the tutoring time suitable to you?

	Is the time for tutoring suitable to you?	
	Count	%
Yes	45	76.3%
No	14	23.7%
Total	59	100.0%

Students prefer the times agreed upon with their tutors for tutor sessions. An overwhelming majority of some 76.3% are comfortable with times chosen. Tutoring for the college is done on Saturdays only and never on weekdays. Students are comfortable with the weekend sessions.

Table 4.7.13

Time for studies

	How much of your time do you set aside for your studies in a normal / typical week?	
	Count	%
+- 2 hours	51	24.5%
+- 10 hours	121	58.2%
Seldom	28	13.5%
Never, only in preparation for the examination	8	3.8%
Total	208	100.0%

Ten hours for studying can be translated into two hours per day per week. Students who study for 10 hours per week make up 58.2% of respondents. This is followed by a group (24.5%) who study for only two hours per week, which is not sufficient to carry out the college work in a satisfactory manner. A significant group of 13.8% indicated that they seldom study, which may mean that they only study when there is a task to complete, whilst 3.8% study in preparation for the examination only. The two latter groups cannot be ignored. Improving the way they relate to their study materials will certainly make them more involved in their studies, and this may have a positive impact on their academic achievement.

Table 4.7.14

Rating of study manuals

	How do you rate the study manuals for the programme registered for?	
	Count	%
Very difficult	22	10.6%
Fairly difficult	78	37.5%
Fairly easy	99	47.6%
Easy	9	4.3%
Total	208	100.0%

Students seem not to agree whether study manuals are difficult or not. Of the respondents, 47.6% rated study manuals as easy. Contrary to this group are those who rated manuals as very difficult (10.6%), and fairly difficult (37.5%), therefore a total of almost 47.11% find study manuals difficult. This reaction might be attributed to 'confusing' results they get from the college on their assignment and examination performance.

Table 4.7.15

Are the study manuals useful?

	Do you find the information in the study manuals ...	
	Count	%
Very valuable	77	37.2%
Not very valuable	15	7.2%
Quite valuable	114	55.1%
A waste of time	1	.5%
Total	207	100.0%

This question shows that a majority of some 55.1% find the study manuals quite valuable. This is followed by the 37.2% who find study manuals very valuable. In general, students find study manuals for the ECE programmes valuable. Despite this finding as indicated in table 4.7.8, students still lack tutor or lecturer intervention to have complete understanding and ability to demonstrate what was learned (cf table 4.7.7).

Table 4.7.16

How difficult or easy are the study manuals?

	When reading the study manuals, do you find them ...	
	Count	%
Easy to understand	40	19.3%
Fairly easy to understand	96	46.4%
Very confusing	10	4.8%
Not very confusing	61	29.5%
Total	207	100.0%

Students find it fairly easy to understand study materials (46.4%). Table 4.7.14 however, states that students perceive study manuals as difficult. This response sends confusing signals on the state of the study materials. The results in table 4.7.14 and 4.7.16 indicate either the confusion students experience when learning, or the confusion brought about by study materials, or the disparity in their educational backgrounds which makes their learning problems unique to each area of residence.

Table 4.7.17

Handling learning difficulties

	When you encounter difficulties in your studies, do you consult ...	
	Count	%
A friend	67	32.1%
A lecturer	43	20.6%
A colleague	84	40.2%
No one	15	7.2%
Total	209	100.0%

It appears from table 4.7.17 as if it might be easier for SACTE students to contact a colleague (40.2%) or friend (32.1%) in connection with academic matters than a lecturer. The reason might be that colleagues and friends are within reach of students. The question arises why lecturers are not contacted as frequently as colleagues and friends, despite the fact that they can be reached by telephone. The reasons might be that the lecturers cannot be reached each time they are needed, or that they are unapproachable or that access to telephones might be difficult for students.

Table 4.7.18

Do you benefit from such a consultation?

	Do you benefit from such a consultation?	
	Count	%
Very helpful	64	31.8%
Fairly helpful	106	52.7%
Not very helpful	31	15.4%
Total	201	100.0%

Students seem to be satisfied with the type of help they receive (52.7%). However, this question has its limitations in that it does not specify the area of help, whether it comes from colleagues, friends or lecturers. However, if 'fairly helpful' is matched with 'support from colleague and friend' in table 4.7.17, then it means that this support and consultation must be promoted and encouraged for the benefit of the student.

Table 4.7.19

Do you use SACTE materials for class preparation?

	Do you use SACTE study materials to prepare for your class?	
	Count	%
Yes	151	76.3%
No	47	23.7%
Total	198	100.0%

Table 4.7.19 will be analysed together with table 4.7.20

Table 4.7.20

Reasons for not using SACTE materials for teaching

	If No, what then could be the reason?	
	Count	%
The content is irrelevant	15	31.3%
The content is far above the standard I teach	6	12.5%
Examples in the study guides are out of context of my situation	6	12.5%
The content is too difficult for the standard I teach	21	43.8%
Total	48	100.0%

As it can be seen from table 4.7.19, an overwhelming majority of 76.3% claim to use SACTE study materials in their classes as against 23.7% who do not. Of those who do not use study materials 43,8% claim that the content is too difficult for learners (table 4.7.20). It is doubtful that after an almost equal number of respondents showed indecisiveness regarding the difficulty of study materials in table 4.7.16, they should find it easy to use them in class as shown in table 4.7.19.

Table 4.7.21

Recommendations from students

Type of response	Count in %
• Importance of student-teacher contact	30%
• User-friendly study materials	25%
• Study materials should be structured in outcomes-based fashion	20%
• Revision using previous question papers+	25%
Total	100%

The table above indicates written responses by respondents on how their learning could be improved. This last question of the questionnaire dealt with recommendations from students on improving their learning. Teacher-student contact was rated very highly. This was followed by the recommendation that accessible or user-friendly study manuals that could be followed with ease would be welcome. These study manuals should be outcomes-based, so that they can be of use in class. An unusually high percentage of students are in favour of revising for examinations by using previous question papers. This is an indication that students learn for examinations and not necessarily to be competent teachers.

4.8 ANALYSIS OF DATA FOR THE STAFF OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

The questionnaire for the academic staff of the Early Childhood Education department consisted of 14 questions which were based on the following aspects:

- The academic staff's experience in teaching teachers
- The academic staff's experience in distance education
- What the academic staff regard as problems inhibiting students from effective learning
- Suggestions and recommendations on how to deal with the problems identified.

The purpose of this questionnaire was to support the main student questionnaire by helping to clarify aspects the researcher felt might not be quite explicable from the student's perspective. Aspects such as problems that are responsible for ineffective learning and teaching, and recommendations in dealing with such problems, were contained in both sets of questionnaires.

QUESTION 1: How long have you been at SACTE?

About eight lecturers indicated that they had been at SACTE for between two to five years. SACTE was established in 1995 after the merger between the College of Education of South Africa (CESA) and the College for Continuing Education (CCE). Only two people had been at SACTE for fewer than two years.

QUESTION 2: Type of institution taught at before coming to SACTE

Six lecturers had previously been employed at a college. Of these, four had been at a distance college, and two at a contact college for teachers. Two academic staff had previously been at a pre-school and another two at a junior primary (foundation phase) school. Prior to joining SACTE, six had been at a college, and are therefore familiar with adult learner needs.

QUESTION 3: How long were you attached to the institution mentioned in 1.2?

Of·those who indicated college, the past teaching experience acquired ranged from six to 10 years. The junior primaries ranged from 10 to 20, and the pre-primaries from five to 10 years. All ECE staff have extensive experience, especially those who taught at junior primary schools.

QUESTION 4: Since coming to SACTE, have you been in contact with your present students?

QUESTION 5: What form did the contact take?

All ECE staff claim to have had contact with students. Eight of the lecturers indicated that the most frequently used medium of communication is the telephone. Whilst the others do not dispute this fact, they claim that the common form and medium of communication with students are the

assignments. Personal contact and contact sessions rate very low. It is apparent from this data that personal contact with students is insufficient. Students, however, in their questionnaire (table 4.7.8) pointed out the importance of establishing personal contact with lecturers through contact sessions and tutorial sessions as a valuable element in achieving academic success. Faceless contact in the form of assignments and projects is unacceptable as far as students are concerned.

QUESTION 6: How would you rate this contact you had with students?

Out of a total of 10 lecturers, seven indicated that the form of contact they use is not beneficial to students. Only three indicated that they believe students do benefit from the contact they have with them. From this analysis, it can be concluded that there might be a need for better methods of contact with students. The methods presently used appear to be inadequate in meeting the academic needs of students. In this regard ECE staff concur with students that academic support and development is imperative if students are to cope with their responsibilities both as learners and as teachers.

QUESTION 7: Would you maintain the line of contact indicated above or change it? Explain.

All ECE staff agree that contact sessions are the best means of enhancing students' learning. Students' stated preference of method for enhancing learning is contact sessions with tutors or lecturers (table 4.7.7). Both ECE staff and students agree that contact sessions might be extremely important.

QUESTION 8: If your answer is change in 1.7, what kind of changes would you bring about?

The academic staff, when asked about changes they would bring about that would improve student performance, still maintained that introducing contact sessions is the best route to follow. Students and staff concur on the

importance of contact sessions as the best method for enhancing their academic performance.

QUESTION 9: Do your students reveal any understanding concerning your subject?

The ECE academic staff, seem to agree that students have a very shallow understanding of their study materials. The manner in which students answer the examination and assignment questions, reveals gaps in their understanding of study materials.

QUESTION 10: If no or very little understanding is recorded, what kind of weaknesses do students have?

Eight cite lack of conceptualisation as basic to the students' lack of understanding, whereas two put blame on the lack of a general understanding of the learning content as contributory to poor academic performance and inefficient teaching.

QUESTION 11: Do you feel students need some form of assistance not provided for by the college?

All 10 ECE academic staff are in favour of giving assistance to students to help them cope with their responsibilities as students and teachers.

QUESTION 12: If yes, what kind of assistance would you recommend?

The form of help recommended by five of the ECE academic staff is to conduct contact sessions on a regular basis, and not only when requested. The second most popular form of assistance is to help teachers right inside their classrooms.

ECE students indicated their desire to have contact sessions to help them solve their academic and classroom problems. Both students and the

academic staff agree that the best way to help students overcome their learner problems is to have contact sessions on a regular basis.

QUESTION 13: Do you regard your learning materials as classroom-based?

Only six of the academic staff said that their learning materials are classroom-based, while four were undecided. They indicated both 'yes' and 'no' at the same time. Reasons given were that some study materials are indeed classroom-based, while the others are not. It is only the newly written and rewritten study materials that are written for use in the classroom. This group maintain that study materials are not all classroom-based, and they go on to suggest that the best way to present them to students is to present them as hands-on guides.

QUESTION 14: If yes, in what way can you describe them as classroom-based?

Those who claim that their study materials are outcomes-based, describe them as written from a classroom perspective with a step-by-step explanation of the practical aspects. If study materials are written in the manner described above, it might be questionable why students still experience difficulties with learning and teaching. Responses to question 10 of the academic staff questionnaire indicated that students' lack of understanding is due to poor conceptualisation and a general lack of understanding of the learning content. Even if study materials are well written, if students cannot interpret them well, they defeat their own ends.

4.9   CONCLUSION

This chapter gave an analysis of the survey findings conducted by means of questionnaires for both students and the staff of the Early Childhood Education department.

The academic staff gave their own exposition in regard to the study materials they develop for students, and the problems experienced by these student teachers. Both the academic staff and the students agree that students need to be academically supported throughout their entire training period. This support should take the form of regular contact sessions, assisting teachers right inside the classroom to be better teachers, and providing clear study materials that could be used inside their classrooms.

The next chapter will deal with conclusions and recommendations reached based on the analysis of the survey findings. These conclusions and recommendations will also inform what needs to be done in order to address students' academic needs.

CHAPTER 5

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The problem statement was explained in Chapters 1 to 3, thereafter its concomitant problems were elucidated. The context in which the study took place was defined, and the research approach and methods were described.

In chapter 4 a descriptive analysis of the survey findings was made. This analysis strove to compare and contrast findings of questionnaires for ECE students and the academic staff of the ECE department.

In this chapter, conclusions on the findings in chapter 4 will be made. Based on these conclusions, recommendations aimed at addressing conditions of learning for SACTE students will be offered.

5.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study as expounded in chapter 1, was to investigate learning needs of the SACTE Early Childhood Education students which might result in the establishment of an academic development and support service to help them perform to the best of their abilities academically and professionally as practising teachers. The researcher chose this study because of numerous factors that are expected from institutions of higher education (HE) and from students at those institutions.

Craig (1989) writes that institutions of HE in South Africa are challenged to develop effective and independent learners. This is the sentiment held by writers such as Fisher (1995), Bertram (1999), Altbach (1997) and Hall (1993). Students need to acquire not only the knowledge and information pertaining to the course registered for, but they need understanding and the ability to interpret and apply the acquired knowledge.

South Africa finds itself in a difficult situation where large numbers of teachers are involved in distance education, but the programmes provided do not appear to be addressing the needs of the education system, nor of the teachers (Bertram, 1999: 58). This state of affairs compels teacher education providers to reflect on their teaching methods, policies and practices that govern their institutions. This study, in alliance with sentiments expressed by Bertram, took a closer look at learner needs at SACTE with the aim of exposing those problems so that problem areas that inhibit effective learning could be revealed to all stakeholders in order that the plight of teachers might be addressed.

5.3   CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SURVEY FINDINGS

A number of important issues emerged from the data analysis that was done in chapter 4. These issues will be dealt with collectively but under different sub-headings. They will not be dealt with individually as was done in chapter 4.

5.3.1 Conclusions from the students' data

5.3.1.1   *Social background of ECE students*

The data analysis revealed that a significant number of the ECE respondents to the questionnaire are all from large families of over 10 people in a household (table 4.5.5). These homes serve as study places (table 4.5.8),

since only 1,0% of respondents claim to have Regional Learning Centres, which are utilised for studying and for reference work (table 4.5.7). Whilst it is understood that learning takes place in their homes, the majority of the respondents (38%) indicated that they use dining-rooms and bed-rooms (table 4.5.8) as places where studying and learning takes place as most homes do not have studies.

Despite the fact that the majority of respondents are married (54.9%), students in the group of unmarried students seem to have own children, according to the data analysis (table 4.5.4). This implies that they to play the roles of a mother and father, besides their responsibilities as students and educators. This leaves them with very little time to attend to their studies.

From the generated background information it might be concluded that studying in an overcrowded home with numerous responsibilities is not an easy task. Academic performance of students is affected by the adverse conditions they live in, which do not promote effective studying and learning (tables 4.5.4 and 4.5.5). What role then can SACTE as an institution of learning play in alleviating these social problems which affect students' learning?

5.3.1.2   *Educational background of ECE students*

Data from the ECE student questionnaire revealed that students come from the educational background of the former Department of Education and Training that catered for blacks only. Over 90% of respondents, including those who studied in homelands, claim to have studied in black education (table 4.6.1). A great proportion of these respondents are female (tables 4.6.4 and 4.6.5), and they reside in rural and farm areas away from the Regional Learning Centres, where tutoring takes place (table 4.5.1). This is evidence that a great proportion of the ECE student population is disadvantaged by residing far away from useful resources. Lack of basic amenities such as Regional Learning Centres (RLCs) makes studying a difficult task to accomplish.

From the data analysis in chapter 4 it can be concluded that a high percentage of ECE teachers (56,3%) are not fully qualified as teachers (table 4.6.3) as they are classified as M+2. According to Norms and Standards for Educators (RSA, 1998a), qualifications for a fully qualified educator are Matriculation plus three years of professional training (M+3).

Data also indicated that very few of the respondents to the ECE questionnaire are graduates (3,8% in table 4.6.2). This is an indication that a large percentage of over 90% of the respondents are not graduates, and are still in the process to obtain their first professional qualifications.

5.3.1.3   *Experience as SACTE ECE students*

ECE students expressed the desire for the upgrading of the total learning environment to enhance learning and classroom practice (table 4.7.21). Blocher (1987) points out the importance of the learning environment in the students' academic experience. In developing human potential, it is important to understand the learning environment, and to be concerned with the factors in the environment that sustain growth.

ECE students seemingly have basic problems of understanding simple college brochures. Some students do not know the period for completion of the diplomas they registered for (SACTE, 1999b). There appears to be a total breakdown of communication within certain sectors of the college student population and the college (SACTE, 1999d). All forms of communication to students, including brochures, have to be simplified and contextualised in order to reach students.

Some suggestions put forward by students included the following: A variety of teaching and learning aids, such as audio-cassettes, video-cassettes and printed teaching and learning aids, should be available to them. Study manuals should be written in an outcomes-based mode so that they can readily be used in the classroom. Of importance in all suggestions made was

that a high percentage of students demanded that they be provided with examination scope prior to writing the examination. This indicates that the college curriculum assigns students a passive role. Students have to be active participants and responsible for structuring their own learning environment. Programme and subject outcomes should be made known to students. Examinations should not be used to eliminate students, but should be a leverage whereby students prove their worth and ability to demonstrate acquired skills and knowledge. Students should know on what are they to be examined, and how they are to be examined. Students must be able to relate to learning content by internalising the content, and making it part of their lives.

Student responses (table 4.7.18), also indicated that consultation with the ECE academic staff of SACTE is preferred by students, and thus should be promoted. ECE students are in need of the tutor system, and they feel that it is the appropriate method for enhancing their learning.

SACTE's Early Childhood Education students indicated in their responses that they use study manuals for teaching in their own classes (table 4.7.19). It might therefore be appropriate to say these study manuals are perceived as of importance to them both as students and in their professional lives.

Respondents of the ECE questionnaire indicated their desire to receive previous question papers to revise for their examination (table 4.7.21). This indicates that students are examination focused instead of being focused on attaining knowledge and skills to be competent students and educators.

Studying in groups was another alternative preferred by a large number of students (72.3% in table 4.7.7). Students prefer to share ideas with others, to compare notes, and to ascertain whether they are on the correct path or not.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC STAFF DATA

The majority (6) of the ECE academic staff, are experienced in teaching adult learners (question 2 of the academic staff questionnaire). This implies that they understand adult learners and are therefore in a position to handle their problems.

The ECE academic staff data indicated that it might be true that students of SACTE have no real understanding of the learning content (questions 13 and 14 of the academic staff questionnaire). This affirms that there is a gap between the learning content and students, and that it is impossible for them to relate to the learning content and to be involved in their learning.

Students indicated in their questionnaire (table 4.7.13) that about 24.5% of them study for only two hours a week and 3.8% indicated that they only study for the examination, whereas 13.5% indicated that they seldom study, which might imply that studying is done only to complete a given task, and never for the purpose of acquiring and refining the acquired knowledge. This confirms the findings from the ECE academic staff that students might be experiencing problems with the learning content, hence they do not give their studies the time and attention they deserve. Student involvement and success should be measured by the ability of students to relate to the learning content, by applying it in different situations, especially in classroom teaching. Lack of such ability on the part of students is an indication that the learning materials are not as effective as they should be, and therefore have to be revised. This study however did not address type of learning materials that could be used to address stated problems experienced by students from the academic staff perspective. This area might form part of further investigation.

The telephone seems to be the most frequently used medium of communication with students (questions 4 and 5). Contact sessions and tutorial sessions are almost non-existent, except when students request them (table 4.7.9). Lecturers seem to be of the same opinion as students that

contact sessions are the best method for enhancing learning, and therefore should be reinstated.

5.5   RECOMMENDATIONS

Arnold and King (in Altbach, 1997: 8), write the following with regard to student development:

'...fostering student development is a central task of higher education when learning is broadly construed in terms of potential for lifelong growth and effective citizenship.'

SACTE students deserve the right to be educated for lifelong growth, and this growth should be nurtured through conditions suitable for encouraging competence. Hall (1993: 45) concurs with the idea of the development of competence by suitable conditions, by insisting that competence can only be valid if the conditions required for its actualisation are suitable for its growth. This is a challenge for SACTE as a distance education institution to see to it that conditions promoting learning are effective and nurturing.

5.5.1 Social background of ECE students

Conclusions reached from the research study on the social background of ECE students, is that most students are deprived of effective learning due to overcrowded conditions in their homes. SACTE, as an institution of learning, does not have control over the conditions and standards of living of its students. SACTE, however, has a significant role to play in promoting effective learning that would counteract the adverse conditions in which students live.

Regional Learning Centres must be established throughout the country so as to serve both as resource and learning and studying centers. The data analysis (table 4.7.4) indicated that the majority of students are without RLCs,

and that they are in need of the centres. The college can indirectly alleviate social problems students experience through well-equipped learning centres which are within reach of all students and not only of some, as is the position at present.

Study groups have been recommended by students as one way of enhancing and improving their learning. Study groups are recommended in order to help students break the isolation in which they find themselves. Study groups can be of benefit to students, as the problems they find difficult to understand can become clarified through discussion and debate. Learning can be enhanced through study groups, especially since sharing is central to this form of learning.

Study groups involve groups of students studying for the same course, and living in the same area, coming together for the sake of learning and studying. Acceding to the students' proposition of having student support groups will enhance students' learning. This view, held by Arnold and King (in Altbach, 1997), is shared by Vygotsky (1978) when he states that learning grows out of social dialectical interaction. He explains that what an individual learns, becomes internalised with the help of another person, and this type of learning brings about internal transformation within an individual.

King (in Altbach, 1997: 15) argues that *'models of student development need to go beyond a Eurocentric perspective of focussing on individuals to include attention to the development of community-oriented goals of interdependence and altruism'.* Study groups are therefore important for they allow interdependence, sharing of ideas and knowledge amongst students to take place.

Student support groups can be arranged by the college for students since it is the college which has access to students' data profiles with regard to subject choice and residence.

5.5.2 Educational background of students

Conclusions reached on data analysis made is that SACTE students are not only disadvantaged socially, but also educationally, as over 90% indicated that they studied in the former Department of Education and Training which offered inferior education as compared to the other education departments in the country. Conclusions made in this regard indicate that this background of inferior education, brought to the college by the students, is responsible for their poor academic performance and ineffective teaching in their classrooms. Poor educational background, therefore, might have implications with regard to how students understand and interpret their study materials. Failure to interpret the study materials correctly can lead to failure to apply the content correctly.

The problem of lack of understanding of the study materials by students can be addressed in the following ways:

- When study materials are written, the needs of the target group should be borne in mind. The ECE academic staff (question 13 and 14) agree that their study materials are not classroom based, and that they do not offer teachers opportunities of using them for teaching purposes. Since the ECE academic staff are aware of the shortfalls of their learning materials, **they should see to it that study materials change according to the needs of the learners.** Study materials should reflect changes in the overall curriculum for schools. Students using outcomes-based study materials will find it easy to apply them in their own teaching situation. All study materials for SACTE should reflect the changes occurring in the school curriculum. Taking account of these changes could assist the teacher in becoming efficient and effective in content delivery in the classroom.

- Subject content should be delivered at a level at which students can understand and relate to that content. In preparing subject content, the compiler should always bear in mind the cultural differences that exist

among students and take into account that the study materials should reflect such differences. Knowledge that cannot be actualised is useless.

- Educating students to regurgitate facts does not allow for growth, but instead stifles learners in such a way that they become dependent for the rest of their lives. If SACTE is committed to its mission and vision of producing teachers of a high quality, then the study materials should become accessible to all. **Accessible study materials are the ones students can understand and identify with without difficulty. The language of the study materials has to be within the understanding of the users**, otherwise they defeat their own ends. The examples used should be contextualised so that they become compatible with students and become easy to understand and relate to.

5.5.2.1   *Experience as SACTE ECE students*

SACTE students want an upgrading of the total learning environment in the college to enhance learning and classroom practice. This includes teaching strategies involving different media such as audio and video cassettes being made available to students. Distance education does not mean studying in isolation, but instead the isolation can be avoided by introducing different interactive media so that the student does not become a castaway, but becomes part of the programmes offered.

It is not possible to have tutoring all the time as it is sometimes expensive (SACTE, 1999d), but this should not be a reason not to offer contact teaching to students. Interactive teaching and learning media can be used effectively in the absence of the tutor. SACTE should therefore consider the usage of interactive media, not as a substitute for the tutor, but in order to reinforce the work done by the tutor.

The satellite is widely used as a teaching medium in the country. Unisa and Technikon SA, (Mackintosh, 1999) to mention but two, have developed

satellite teaching based around the country at different centres specifically for its students. This could become an option SACTE can look at in order to bridge the distance between the tutor and the student by either establishing its own satellite based teaching, or by entering into a working agreement with an institution with established satellite facilities.

Inferring from the conclusions made, it appears that SACTE is more examination oriented than process oriented. In one of the open questions, (table 4.7.21), students indicated their desire to receive question papers of previous years for revision purposes. SACTE needs to change its focus and emphasis as far as examinations are concerned. Teachers desperately need to become effective and efficient practitioners rather than to perform well in their examinations. This however, does not imply that good performance in the examination is not necessary; instead good examination performance must be accompanied by good teaching practice if it is to be regarded as worthwhile. The focus should change from examination orientation to teaching practice orientation.

Changing the focus from examination orientation to teaching practice orientation implies change in a number of ways in which the college is being run. Assignments need attention if they are to meet the requirements of promoting practice teaching. Assignments should be classroom practice based rather than promoting recall of facts from study manuals. Principals and heads of departments could be drawn in, by assessing teachers in their schools to ensure that the way the student teachers teach, complies with the standards set by the Department of Education.

5.6   RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING ACADEMIC STAFF

The ECE academic staff, like SACTE students, are of the same opinion that the learning content is difficult to understand, hence students fail the examinations. Simplified study materials in a language students can easily

understand, are recommended. The college does not necessarily have to deviate from using English, which is the language of communication and instruction at SACTE (SACTE, 2000), but simplified English that is understood by all students, would be welcomed. Subject terminology could be explained in a glossary so that the students are able to understand and use it.

If the study manuals are easy to understand and use, time set aside by students for studying will probably increase. If students enjoy what they do, and relate well to what they learn, they will give their studies more attention than previously done.

Contact sessions are essential and should not be viewed as a privilege to SACTE students. If the college wants to upgrade the standard of learning of its students, it has no option but to introduce contact sessions in all its subjects and not a selected few as is the practice.

5.7   CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate learner needs of SACTE students in the Early Childhood Education Department, with the intention that an academic support service might be established to help students improve their academic performance and classroom practice. This research was accomplished through a survey approach and by means of two questionnaires: one aimed at the ECE students, and the other at the academic staff in the ECE department.

When compared to available college documentation and relevant literature, a number of conclusions could be drawn and a few recommendations made to SACTE as an institution, ECE academic staff and ECE students.

In retrospect, it appears that SACTE students have learning needs which are obviously not being properly addressed. If these learning needs are not met,

the level of learning might deteriorate. Moreover, if students are not in a position to interpret what they have studied, and apply the knowledge in the classroom, then that knowledge is redundant and useless. Bertram (1999: 58) agrees with this observation when she says that '*teachers emerge from their studies with formal qualifications, but not necessarily with knowledge, skills and competence which they need to ensure that quality learning happens in their classrooms*'.

Students, and in particular ECE students, need to be supported throughout their studies at SACTE if their learning is to bear any positive fruit for themselves and the general public, including schools. SACTE academic staff has to be constantly reminded of their responsibility towards the student, the government and the general public in carrying out their duties. The government's subsidy towards tuition of students implies demands on any college to ensure that their product (student) be of such quality where it can readily be employed in the classroom without further training in the short term. This study has hopefully made a contribution towards this end.

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ADDENDUM   1

A Set of Questionnaires for Early

Childhood Education Students

SOUTH AFRICAN COLLEGE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

Leyds Street South
GROENKLOOF 0181
Tel: (012) 422-8000
Fax: (012) 343-9893

Private Bag X460
PRETORIA
0001

Rector
Ref.

12-07-1999

Dear Student

I am doing a research on "Learning needs for student academic support and development in the Early Childhood Education Department at SACTE".

I have enclosed with this letter, a questionnaire which I would like you to complete and send back to me. The aim of this questionnaire, is to find out from you if you experience any learning problems related to the ECE programme you have registered for. The responses will help the college to develop an academic support programme suited to your needs, which will assist you to cope with your studies at SACTE, as well as being a teacher in your classroom.

Please send back your responses to me as soon as possible, by using the following address: *Mrs. N.C. Phatudi*
P.O.Box 5876
Pretoria (0001)

Please try to be as honest as possible, because your responses are going to be used to benefit you and not against you. Do remember not to write your name so that each response is treated as anonymous as possible. I will be grateful if you can respond by the *5th of August 1999.*

N.C. Phatudi
HOD (Department Early Childhood Education)

An assessment of the learner needs of the ECD Department of SACTE

Questionnaire Number:

Please mark boxes where provided. Circle the code of the option applicable to you. Answer in full where written responses are required.
Ensure that all questions relevant to you are answered.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

(1 – 3)

A. GENERAL PERSONAL DETAILS

1. Gender

Male	1
Female	2

(4)

2. What is your home language?

Sepedi	1
IsiZulu	2
IsiXhosa	3
Ndebele	4
Siswati	5
Setswana	6
Xitsonga	7
Tshivenda	8
Sesotho	9
English	10
Afrikaans	11

(5)

3. Marital status:

Married	1
Single	2
Divorced	3
Widow widower	4
Living together	5

(6)

4. How old are you?

(years)

(7 – 8)

e.g. 44 years :

4	4

5. How many children do you have? E.g. 3 children, complete as follows:

0	3

(9 – 10)

6. What are their ages? (**To the nearest year**). {e.g. 3 and 1 years, complete as follows:

Child 1	0	3
Child 2	0	1

Child 1			(11 – 12)
Child 2			(13 – 14)
Child 3			(15 – 16)
Child 4			(17 – 18)
Child 5			(19 – 20)

7. How many people including your family, live with you?

More than 5, less than 10	
Less than six	
More than ten	

(21 – 22)
(23 – 24)
(25 – 26)

8. Where do you live?

Town	1
Township	2
Informal settlement next to a	3
township	4
Village next to a town / township	5
Village in a remote rural area	6
Farm	

(27)

9. What source of power do you use at your home?

Electricity	1
Gas	2
Paraffin / candles	3
Other (please specify):	4

(28)

10. Where do you normally study?

Home	1
Library	2
School	3
Regional learning centre	4
Other (please mention):	5

(29)

11. If your answer is Home, in 10, then proceed with question 11.
    Where about in the house do you study?

Kitchen	1
Dining-room	2
TV room	3
Bed-room	4
Study-room	5

(30)

B. EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

12. What type of schooling did you receive?

Department of Education and Training (black education)	1
Provincial Education Department (white education)	2
Department of Education and Culture (Coloured and Indian education)	3
Homelands (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei)	4
Other	5

(31)

13. What academic qualification do you possess?

Standard 8	1
Standard 10	2
B.A. or equivalent	3

(32)

14. What professional qualification do you possess?

M + 1	1
M + 2	2
M + 3	3
M + 4	4

(33)

C. OCCUPATION DETAILS

15. Where do you teach?

Pre-school	1
Primary-school	2
Secondary-school	3
Not attached to a school (**do not answer 16**)	4

(34)

16. What is your position at school?

Teacher	1
Private teacher	2
HOD	3
Principal	4

(35)

17. What type of shelter is your school?

Brick	1
Bus	2
Containers	3
Prefabs	4
Under a tree	5
Other	6

(36)

18. How many children are there in your class?

Less than 20	1
Between 20 – 30	2
Between 40 – 59	3
60 and above	4

(37)

D. EXPERIENCE AS SACTE STUDENT

19. What programme are you registered for?

Diploma in Education (DE) Pre-Primary: Foundation phase	1
Diploma in Education (former CCE)	2
Diploma in Education (HDE) Pre-primary: Foundation -phase	3

(38)

20. What is the duration of the programme?

Six years	1
Three years	2
One year	3

(39)

21. How long have you been registered for the course?

Between 1 and 3 years	1
Between 3 and 6 years	2
Between 6 and 8 years	3
Over 8 years	4

(40)

22. Can you furnish reasons why it took you more than the average time to complete the course registered for.

....
....
....
....
....

23. Is there a Regional Learning Centre next to where you stay?

Yes	1
No	2

(41)

24. If yes, what do you use it for? **(tick more than one)**

Referencing sources	1
Enrichment sources	2
Leisure reading	3
Doing assignments	4
Studying	5

(42)

25. How do you study?

Alone at home	1
With a study group	2
With a friend	3

(43)

26. If studying alone, do you need a study group?

Yes	1
No	2

(44)

27. If you do not need a study group, what do you suggest as an intervention to help with your studies?

More lecturer intervention	1
Clearer study materials	2
Tutoring	3
A wide variety of study material	4

(45)

28. Do you have a tutor system in your area?

Yes	1
No	2

(46)

29. If you have a tutor system in your area, do you find it

Very worthwhile	1
Not very worthwhile	2
Quite worthwhile	3
A waste of time	4

(47)

30. If worthwhile, how often do you attend the tutor system?

Once a month	1
Every Saturday morning	2
Once a quarter	3
Once in a year	4
If you request for it	5

(48)

31. Is the time for tutoring suitable to you?

Yes	1
No	2

(49)

32. How much of your time do you set aside for your studies in a normal / typical week?

± 2 hours	1
± 10 hours	2
seldom	3
never, only in preparation for the examination	4

(50)

33. How do you rate the study manuals for the programme registered for?

Very difficult	1
Fairly difficult	2
Fairly easy	3
Easy	4

(51)

34. Do you find the information in the study manuals ...

Very valuable	1
Not very valuable	2
Quite valuable	3
A waste of time	4

(52)

35. When reading the study manuals, do you find them ....

Easy to understand	1
Fairly easy to understand	2
Very confusing	3
Not very confusing	4

(53)

36. When you encounter difficulties in your studies, do you consult ...

A friend	1
Lecturer	2
A colleague	3
No one	4

(54)

37. Do you benefit from such a consultation?

Very helpful	1
Fairly help	2
Not very helpful	3

(55)

38. Do you ever use SACTE study materials to prepare for your class?

Yes	1
No	2

(56)

39. If No, what then could be the reason?

The content is irrelevant	1
The content is far above the standard I teach	2
Examples in the study guides are out of context of my situation	3
The content is too difficult for the standard I teach	4

(57)

40. Any comments you would like to make regarding the study materials, or any aspects of your study to help the college make your learning easier.

....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND COOPERATION IN COMPLETING THESE QUESTIONNAIRES

ADDENDUM   2

A Set of Questionnaires for Early Childhood Education Academic Staff

SOUTH AFRICAN COLLEGE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

Leyds Street South
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Private Bag X460
PRETORIA
0001

Rector
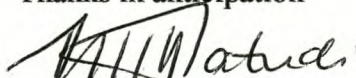Ref.

August 1999

Dear colleague

I am taking the liberty to approach you for assistance with my research. Enclosed is a set of questionnaires. I would much appreciate it if you would complete them and return them to me. You need not identify yourself so please be as truthful and honest as possible.

These questionnaires have been formulated with a view to establishing the impact of your study packages on your students. Do your students exhibit and reveal any change in their attitudes, in their skills and teaching techniques, which make them better and more confident teachers? Do your students realise the connection between what they learn as students, and what they teach in classes if indeed such connection is made in your study materials, or do they study in order to obtain a certificate?

I need this information for my M.Phil (Higher Education), which is based on the assessment of learner needs and how these can be used as a premise for preparing a teaching-learning situation, and most important in compiling study packages for the distance mode of learning, in order to bridge the "distance" between the learner and the tutor, and the learner and other learners.

After completing these questionnaires, please return them to me as soon as possible.

Thanks in anticipation

Nkidi Phatudi

Indicate your answers to the following questions by either making a tick ✔ or responding in writing as required.

1.1   How long have you been at SACTE?

        1-2yrs
        2-5yrs
        Less than one year

1.2   Type of institution taught at before coming to SACTE

        Pre-primary school
        Junior-primary school
        Secondary school
        College
        University

1.3   How long were you attached to the institution mentioned in 1.2?

1.4   Since coming to SACTE, have you had any contact with your present students?

        Yes
        No

1.5   What form did it take? (You can tick more than one)

        Contact sessions
        Assignments
        Telephone and faxes
        Personal calls

1.6   How would you rate this contact you had with the students.

        Beneficial to both the student and the teacher
        Not quite beneficial
        No impact on either the student and the teacher

1.7   Would you maintain the line of contact indicated above or change it? Explain.

1.8   What is your perception of your students regarding your study manuals? Do they understand them?

No real understanding
Enough understanding
Deep understanding
Shallow understanding

1.9   If very little understanding is recorded, what kind of weaknesses do students have or reveal?

Lack of conceptualisation
Lack of contextualisation of the learning material
Lack of general understanding of the learning content
Inability to relate to the learning content (cultural divides)

1.10   Do you feel your students require some form of assistance or intervention not provided for by the College?

Yes
No

1.11   If yes, what kind of assistance would you recommend?

1.12   Do you regard your learning material as class-roombased?

Yes
No

1.13   If yes, in what way can you describe them as classroom -based?

1.14   If no in 1.13, what is the reason for your study manuals not being suitable for use in the classroom?

They are not didactics based.
They deal with school governance.
They are too abstract to be contextualised.
Other reasons not mentioned. (Please mention them here.)

Many thanks for your co-operation.