

**AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS
OF SERVICE DELIVERY AND SERVICE QUALITY AT AN INSTITUTION
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING WITHIN A PROVINCIAL
GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT IN THE WESTERN CAPE**



Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MAGISTER COMMERCII

in the

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY

at the



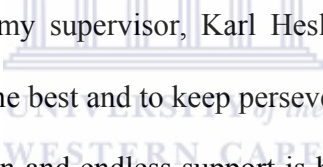
SUPERVISOR: KARL HESLOP

MAY 2011

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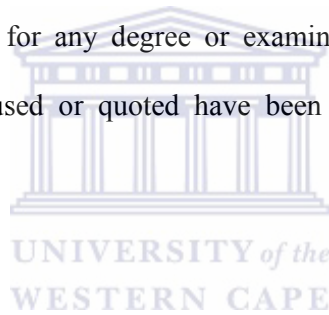
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DECLARATION

I declare that the study titled: *An investigation of students' perceptions and expectations of service delivery and service quality at an institution for Higher Education and Training within the Provincial Government of the Western Cape* is the result of my own work, which has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university or campus, and that all sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.



Kim-Lee Wentzel

Signature:

Date: May 2011



KEYWORDS

- Students' (customers) perceptions/expectations
- Higher education and training
- Service delivery
- Service quality
- Public service
- Public sector
- Public servants
- Provincial Government
- Quality of service
- SERVQUAL/SERVPERF

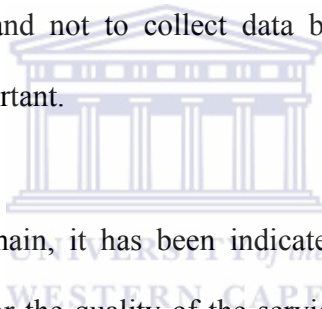


ABSTRACT

Government departments as recognisable public institutions are charged with the responsibility of delivering services to the public. Service delivery is regarded as the foundation of city governance and includes access to water, trash collection, solid waste disposal, wastewater collection and treatment, and electricity connection. The Republic of South Africa (1997) states that the primary responsibility and most tangible result for which the community will hold their respective elected officials of local government accountable, is the reliability, quality and cost efficiency of equitable services to all areas of the city including the wealthy and the poor. Sahney, Banwet and Karunes (2004) state that quality is derived from the Latin word *qualis*, meaning, “what kind of”. Definitions of service quality focus predominantly on meeting customers’ needs and requirements, and furthermore evaluate how well the service delivered matches the customers’ expectations.

According to Gbadamosi and de Jager (2009), quality in education is determined by the extent to which students’ needs are assessed and their expectations are satisfied. It can

furthermore be seen that traditional students as well as their needs are constantly changing. In our current environment and society, higher education students' comprise not only of the young and mature students, but include the more working class people, more women, and more part-time students (Gbadamosi & de Jager, 2009). These students are thus more demanding in terms of service delivery and service standards that need to be met. Oldfield and Baron's (2000) research postulates that there is an inclination to view service quality in higher education from an organizational perspective. The issue of what constitutes a quality service within higher education is therefore an emotive one. It is important for institutions to now look at what their students want and what students consider to be good service and not to collect data based upon what the institution perceives its students find important.



Within the public service domain, it has been indicated that communities have been protesting against the lack of or the quality of the services that they are receiving from different public institutions (Matshabaphala, 2008). Garnett and Garnett (2009) postulate that research has indicated that a customer's evaluation of service quality was affected by not only the end service received but also by the service delivery process itself. It can thus be deduced that service delivery and service quality directly have an impact on one another. Customers will remain loyal to a service organization if the value of what they receive is determined to be relatively greater than that expected from competitors (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996).

The primary aim of this thesis was to undertake research in a Higher Education and Training Institution in a Provincial Government Department in the Western Cape to determine which variables affect the services that are being delivered and the quality of the services and how these services could be improved. The population selected for the purpose of the research was a large number of students at a Higher Education and Training Institution in a Provincial Government Department in the Western Cape. A research sample represented by a subset of participants from this organisation was selected. A biographical questionnaire and the SERVQUAL questionnaire were administered to a sample of 130 students enrolled at a Higher Education Institution in the Western Cape. The results indicate that there are significant relationships between selected biographical variables and perceptions of service quality. Moreover, there were also statistically significant differences in perceptions on the variables Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Tangibles and Empathy. Tentative conclusions can be drawn from the results and recommendations regarding future research are highlighted.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Title page	
Acknowledgements	1
Declaration	2
Key words	3
Abstract	4
Table of contents	7

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1	Introduction	13
1.2	Motivation of the study	17
1.3	Aims and objectives	19
1.4	Hypotheses	19
1.5	Delimitations of the study	21
1.6	Outline of the Chapters	22
1.7	Summary of the chapter	23



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	Introduction	24
2.2	Service Delivery	25
2.3	Principles of Public Service Delivery	28
2.4	Service Quality	32
2.4.1	The definition and dimensions of service quality	36

2.4.2	Factors which affect perception of quality	38
2.5	The relationship between service delivery and service quality	39
2.6	Summary of the chapter	42

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1	Introduction	43
3.2	Research problem	43
3.3	Research objectives	43
3.4	Population and sample	44
3.5	Research design	45
3.5.1	Sampling procedure	46
3.5.1.1	Convenience sampling	47
3.6	Data collection methods	47
3.7	Research instruments	48
3.8	Biographical information	49
3.9	Psychometric properties	49
3.9.1	Reliability and validity of the measure	49
3.10	Procedure	50
3.11	Data analysis techniques	51
3.11.1	Descriptive statistics	51
3.11.1.1	Frequencies	51
3.11.1.2	Measure of central tendency	52
3.11.1.2.1	Mean	52
3.11.1.2.2	Standard deviation	52



3.11.2 Inferential statistics	53
3.11.2.1 T-tests	53
3.11.2.2 Correlations	53
3.12 Ethical issues to consider	54
3.13 Summary of the chapter	55

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction	56
4.2 Descriptive statistics	56
4.2.1 Biographical information	57
4.2.2 Measures of central tendency and dispersion	61
4.3 Inferential statistics	90
4.4 Summary of the chapter	96



CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction	98
5.2 Descriptive results	98

5.3	Inferential statistics	99
5.3.1	Statistical relationship between service quality and biographical variables	99
5.3.2	Differences in service quality based on biographical variables	100
5.3.3	Differences in Perceptions of Service Quality	101
5.4	Discussion	103
5.5	Limitations	106
5.6	Recommendations	107

REFERENCES

113



APPENDICES

Appendix 1:	Cover letter	120
Appendix 2:	Biographical Questionnaire	122
Appendix 3:	Biografiese Vraelys	123
Appendix 4:	SERVQUAL Questionnaire	124

LIST OF TABLES

	PAGE
4.1 Means, Standard deviation, Minimum and Maximum scores for the students' expectations of service delivery	62
4.2 Means, Standard deviation, Minimum and Maximum scores for the dimensions of the service delivery questionnaire	63
4.3 Pearson correlation between perceptions of service quality and biographical variables	90
4.4 ANOVA: Biographical data and service quality	92
4.5 ANOVA: Tangibles and Perceptions of Service Quality	93
4.6 ANOVA: Reliability and Perceptions of Service Quality	94
4.7 ANOVA: Empathy and Perceptions of Service Quality	94
4.8 ANOVA: Assurance and Perceptions of Service Quality	95
4.9 ANOVA: Responsiveness and Perceptions of Service Quality	95
4.10 Reliability of the Service delivery Questionnaire	96



LIST OF FIGURES

	PAGE
4.1 Gender of respondents	57
4.2 Age of respondents	58
4.3 Race of respondents	59
4.4 Language of respondents	60
4.5 Year of study of respondents	61
4.6 – 4.31 Perceptions of Service Delivery	64-89



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Since 1994 higher education institutions have experienced dramatic changes, both in their funding and in student numbers. Competitive advantage was a concept alien to the higher education sector prior to the 1990's, but it is important now for institutions to accept that they are in a "market". O'Neill and Palmer (2004) express a view that higher education has proceeded from a niche service consumed by a small elite, to a mass-market service in which increasing numbers of students are catered to by an increasing number and diversity of providers. Furthermore they state that the provision of higher education has typically gone from being a centrally planned service to one in which resources are allocated by market forces. They point out that as this market matures, it is service quality that will differentiate one higher education institution from another.

Measuring service quality at higher education institutions worldwide is a common phenomenon (Aldridge and Rowley 1998; Athiyaman 1997; Oldfield & Baron 2000). De Jager and du Plooy (2006) maintain that over the past decade the educational environment has not only become more competitive but also more commercialised. Traditionally institutions assumed that students have relatively homogeneous needs and expectations and this has resulted in the provision of uniform services. This approach has

undergone a metamorphosis since perceptions of services and service expectations change over time.

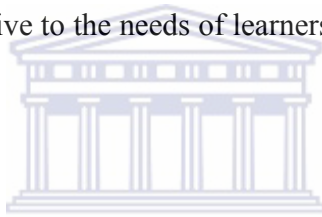
Hill's (1995) study reveals that service delivery and customer satisfaction in an educational environment is dependent on personal interaction between students and staff. In respect of service delivery students are not interested in organisational hierarchies and expect all staff (irrespective of academic or administrative personnel) to work together to represent the institution in their service delivery (Oldfield & Baron, 2000). Increasingly, quality as a component of service delivery dominates as one of the major aspects impacting on student decision-making for education (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007). The quality of the overall experience for students is crucial to the success of programs.

Universities in South Africa have experienced stagnating and declining budgets and simultaneous pressures to increase enrolments (Samoff, 2001). Since the late nineties South African universities have experienced a gradual decline in student numbers translating in more choice and increased pressures on service delivery by students. Pressures also built up in respect of technological advances and skills with some institutions and staff delivering and using sub-standard computer technology (Miji 2002; Zaaiman, Van der Flier & Thijs, 1998; De Jager & Soontiens, 2009).

This research provides a conceptual foundation for investigating service quality. Singh (2002) points out that South Africa is a late entrant in the quality assurance world where longstanding systems already operate in countries like the United Kingdom, the

Netherlands and New Zealand. Countries like India and others in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in Latin America are in the process of consolidating relatively new quality assurance systems and may very well have very valuable lessons for the Higher Education Quality Committee as it develops a quality assurance system in a developing context.

In South Africa the formation of the Council on Higher Education's Quality Assurance Committee (HEQC), states in its founding document that a quality assurance system is intended to ensure that higher education and training programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels are responsive to the needs of learners, employers and society at large (Singh, 2002).



The approach to quality assurance by the HEQC supports the view that the primary responsibility for the quality of provision and appropriate mechanisms to assure that quality, rests with higher education providers. Higher education institutions face competition for scarce funding. The quality of the Department of Management's service is thus under scrutiny and forms part of a university wide recapitalisation process. The process entailed amongst other things a decrease in the cost of delivering education while improving programmes and services quality for students (Singh, 2002).

Service quality measures can also serve as a management tool. Brown and Koenig (1993) recommend that customer evaluations of the quality of their education should be an integral part of Total Quality Management (TQM) programmes in business education.

Indeed, a better understanding of how customers form impressions of quality can provide valuable information to management for designing service delivery systems that enhance customer satisfaction (Seymour, 1992) and for adapting the university environment to the students' needs (Hampton, 1993). In the design of quality improvement programmes, it is thus the customers' definitions of quality which count, since management may make the wrong assumptions as to how customers actually assess service quality (Cited in LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1997). Service quality can be assessed along several criteria. Student perception is one such criterion.

Service satisfaction has been related to a number of factors. Service quality of an academic department can be influenced by a number of factors both intrinsic to the perceiver as well as to the perceived performance of the academic department and administrative support. This study will explore some of these factors. The ultimate perception of the quality of an educational institution is the subsequent performance of its students in their business or work environment. The corporate business and societal opinion of a university develops as a result of this performance and it is the ultimate criterion of the service quality provided by that educational institution. This is however, a long term goal and not part of this study.

Furthermore, research conducted by Mammen (2006) states that six factors have been identified as those that may reduce both satisfaction with the conditions of service and job satisfaction. These factors can be represented by uncertainty about the continuity of the institution; inefficiency or dissatisfaction with poor management and problems with

senior management staff of the institution itself; problems with financial administration, weak research support, unhappiness with lack of promotion opportunities; and finally the high workload.

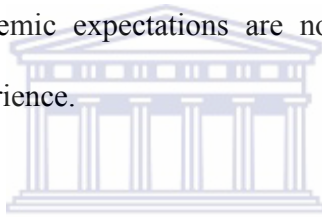
1.2. Motivation for the study

Higher education institutions in South Africa have experienced dramatic changes, in their structuring, funding and student numbers. As a result of governments' policy to transform higher education in South Africa and the challenges brought about by globalisation and internationalisation, tertiary institutions are facing new challenges. More recently, these challenges include various mergers and the transformation of Technikons into Universities of Technology. This transformation has not only brought about a change of status for these institutions but also the merging of intrinsically different institutions. The broadening of access to higher education in South Africa under the present government policy has also seen a growth in the number of applications to tertiary institutions (Cloete & Bunting, 2004).

According to Cooper and Subotzky (2001), South Africa has experienced a 'revolution' regarding the increase in the number of black student enrolments for tertiary education where the majority have been black since the middle 1990s. Mutula (2001) states that the decrease in subsidies affects the quality of teaching and research and has led to overcrowding in many universities which results in deteriorating physical facilities and a

lack of resources for text books, educational materials, laboratory consumables and maintenance.

Ivy (2001) states that as competition for the same students' increases and funding decrease universities need to create and maintain a distinctive image in the market place. Paramewaran and Glowacka (as cited by Russel, 2005) conclude that higher educational institutions need to maintain or develop a distinct image to create a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive market (De Jager & du Plooy, 2006). A study by Ben-Ami (2005) determined that almost a third of South African students across ten institutions indicate that academic expectations are not met, thus confirming a gap between expectations and experience.



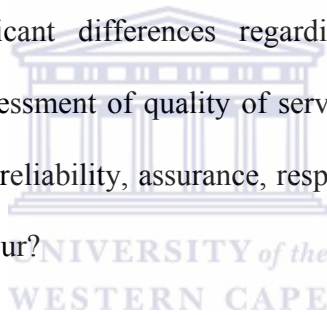
Continuous improvements of existing standards and increased students' satisfaction have been key issues in service quality at higher educational institutions in South Africa. Both levels of satisfaction and perception of quality will likely determine students' retention at higher education institutions. Reduction in public sector funding, increasing oversupply of university capacity and increased levels of consumerism has forced the higher education sector to become more competitive in its approach to attracting and retaining students (O'Neill, 2002).

The motivation for this study is to determine what students are with respect to the provision of services as well as to determine their evaluations and perceptions of service quality within a high education institution in the Western Cape.

1.3. Aims and objectives

A primary aim of this research is to determine the perceptions and expectations of students with regards to service delivery and service quality levels. When examining the level of service delivery as well as the quality of the services received, the Provincial Government Department's Higher Education and Training Institution should consider the following:

- Are the students satisfied with the service delivered by the Higher Education and Training institution?
- Are there any significant differences regarding students' perceptions and expectations on the assessment of quality of service in the academic setting and on which dimensions - reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, tangibles- do these differences occur?



1.4. Hypotheses

Sekaran (1992:79) states that a hypothesis can be defined as “a logically conjectured relationship between two or more variables expressed in the form of testable statements”. The author further postulates that relationships are deduced on the basis of the network of associations established in the theoretical framework formulated for the specific research study.

The following hypotheses were generated to investigate students' expectations and perceptions of service delivery and service quality within a Higher Education and Training Institution:

Hypothesis 1

There is a statistically significant relationship between service delivery and biographical variables.



Hypothesis 2

There are significant differences in perceptions of service quality provided to students based on gender, race, year of study, age and home language.

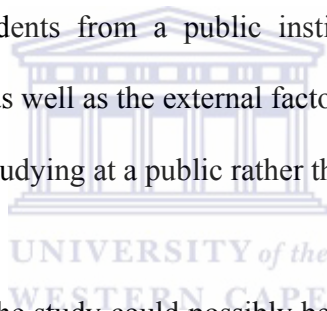
Hypothesis 3

There are significant differences in the perceptions of service quality received by students with respect to the tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy respectively.

1.5. Delimitations of the study

A primary limitation of the study is the size of the sample that was selected for this research. The sample used for this study is limited to one Higher Education and Training institution at a single Provincial Government Department. This sample comprised 130 students. The sample that was selected may not be a representative sample of the entire population of students at Higher Education and Training institutions within the Western Cape. Subsequently, this may lead to a less accurate study and may be less effective.

This study only included students from a public institution and does not take into consideration private colleges as well as the external factors affecting students such as the lack of adequate resources of studying at a public rather than at a private institution.



Another factor that may limit the study could possibly be the fact that the study does not contain a sample that includes respondents and is representative of all students from all cities or provinces and is only representative of one public college in Cape Town. This study may then minimize the true reflection of the population represented.

Another important limitation of the research is that only questionnaires and no other data collection methods are being used.

The use of a non-probability sampling design namely convenience sampling was another important limitation. Although this design method was considered appropriate for the

purposes of the study, the results that are gathered from the study cannot be extrapolated to the general population, but it may only be representative of the organisation at which the actual study was conducted.

The reluctance of students to participate in the study could be another limitation. The study also focuses on students from various years and courses of study which may serve as contaminating or confounding variables.

1.6. Outline of Chapters

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on service quality and its dimensions in general. It proceeds to focus on the literature which pertains more specifically to service quality expectations and delivery within an educational setting.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, research design and methodological aspects of the study. More specifically, the population and sample are described, the data collection procedure, measuring instrument and data analysis techniques which were utilised to test the hypotheses are outlined and their suitability and application, are highlighted.

Chapter 4 presents the most important research findings which emerged, provides a general feel for the data, and interprets the descriptive and inferential results which were obtained.

Chapter 5 provides an insight into how the results may be juxtaposed against other similar research, presents a critical engagement of previous research findings relative to the current research, and makes recommendations with respect to future research.

1.7. Summary of the chapter

This chapter highlighted the primary objectives of the research, the motivation for the current research, as well as the hypotheses that were generated for the purposes of answering the research questions that were investigated. The limitations of the study are defined to clarify areas that may need to be improved on, in order to enhance the scientific quality of the research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

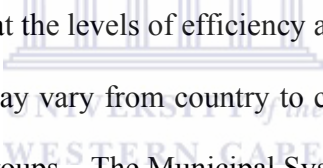
2.1. Introduction

O'Neill and Palmer (2004) hold the view that, like many service industries, higher education has tended to focus on technical dimensions. This is manifested in a plethora of statistics, indices and league tables covering such issues as student progression rates, the proportion of students receiving higher grades and the quality of teaching staff, as measured by their qualifications and research performance. Less effort has been spent in probing the functional aspects of quality that impact on students.

Service quality also has a tangible element. Customers cannot see a service but they can see and experience various tangible elements associated with the service. They see service facilities, equipment, employees, uniforms, pamphlets, leaflets, and these are referred to by Zeithaml et al. (1992) as “clues” and, as advocated by Shostack (1977), it is possible to “manage the evidence” using the clues. A prime responsibility for the service marketer is the management of available tangibles so that the proper signals are conveyed about the service (Berry, 1980 cited in Oldfield, 2000).

2.2. Service Delivery

Government departments as recognisable public institutions are charged with the responsibility of delivering services to the public. Service delivery is regarded as the foundation of city governance and includes access to water, trash collection, solid waste disposal, wastewater collection and treatment, and electricity connection. The Republic of South Africa (1997) states that the primary responsibility and most tangible result for which the community will hold their respective elected officials of local government accountable, is the reliability, quality and cost efficiency of equitable services to all areas of the city including the wealthy and the poor.

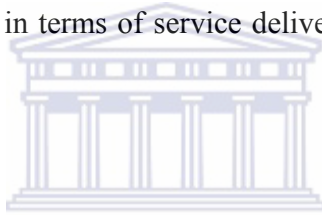


Matshabaphala (2008) states that the levels of efficiency and effectiveness on the delivery of public goods and services may vary from country to country and even within various departments, units, or among groups. The Municipal System Act 32 (2000) states that in relation to the provision of a municipal service, service delivery means the provision of a municipal service in a manner aimed at ensuring that the risk of harm to the environment and to human health and safety is minimized to an extent reasonably possible under the circumstances. Venter, Van der Waldt, Phutiage, Khalo, Van Niekerk, and Nealer (2007) postulate that the delivery of services relates to both the provision of tangible public goods and of intangible public services themselves.

It is essential to note that these services are provided to clients. Service delivery can therefore be seen as an encompassing activity aimed at promoting the general welfare of

the community. Further emphasis is placed on basic municipal services by arguing that service delivery is limited to water supply, electricity supply, refuse removal and sanitation, and to the exclusion of other non-core services that are delivered by a municipality (Van Donk, Swilling, Pieterse & Parnell, 2008).

The Department of Public Service and Administration (1996) states that improving the delivery of public services means redressing the imbalances of the past, and while maintaining continuity of service to all levels of society, focusing on meeting the needs of 40% of South Africans who are living below the poverty line and those who have previously been disadvantaged in terms of service delivery, such as black women living in rural areas.

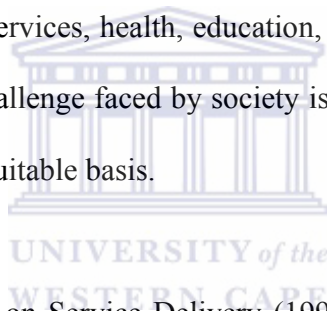


Naidoo (2005) further indicates that there are a number of interrelated variables which are hampering the effectiveness of public servants to render services. These include human resource and financial constraints, the lack of technical skills, the lack of coordination, ineffective intergovernmental relation (IGR) among the three spheres of government, ineffective policy implementation and the lack of effective monitoring and evaluation systems. The lack of effective leadership also poses a serious challenge in the South African public service which negatively impacts service delivery as well (Naidoo, 2005).

The University of Fort Hare (1997) additionally states that in South Africa, the concern for service delivery reform stems directly from democracy and the promise made by

newly elected government of a better life for all, especially the most historically-disadvantaged sectors of society. Furthermore, the public service was seen as the principal vehicle through which this promise of a better life was to be accomplished.

Service delivery therefore depends on the quality of administration practised by public institutions (Mfene, 2009). The extent to which the community is satisfied with the goods and services provided and rendered by the public service remains a problem. It can be noted that prior to the democratic elections in 1994, some communities were denied access to particular government services. Mfene (2009) illustrates that these services included differentiated social services, health, education, housing, and transport services. In South Africa, the current challenge faced by society is improving the delivery of such services to its citizens on an equitable basis.



According to the White Paper on Service Delivery (1997), the improvement of service delivery implies redressing the imbalances of the past (Republic of South Africa, 1997). Additionally the Republic of South Africa (1996) states that within the framework of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, these services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably, and without bias. It is imperative to note that service delivery will not be successful without sound public administration. Mfene (2009) postulates that in order for public administration to be effective and efficient, it has to deliver services to the community in accordance with their needs and expectations.

According to the Department of Public Service and Administration (1996), a guiding principle of the public service in South Africa will include the service that is rendered to the people. The public service is being transformed to fulfil its role effectively by implementing government principles according to the policy framework contained in the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (WPTPS). The principles can be referred to as the eight transformation priorities and are as follows: i) rationalization and restructuring the Public Service; ii) institution building and management; iii) representativeness and affirmative action; iv) transforming service delivery; v) democratizing the state; vi) human resource development and training; vii) employment conditions and labour relations; and viii) the promotion of a professional service ethos.

2.3 Principles of Public Service Delivery

Batho Pele is a Sotho translation for 'People First' and is an initiative to get public servants to be service orientated, to strive for excellence in service delivery and to commit to continuous service delivery improvement. It is a mechanism which allows citizens to hold public servants accountable for the level of services they deliver (Batho Pele Handbook - A Service Delivery Improvement Guide, n.d.).

Batho Pele is therefore a way of delivering services by putting citizens at the centre of public service planning and operations. Batho Pele illuminates eight key principles in the transformation of local government and its role in service delivery. These principles include the following:

1. Consultation: citizens should be consulted about the level and quality of public service they receive, and where possible, should be given a choice about the services, which are provided.
2. Service standards: citizens should know what standard of service to expect.
3. Access: all citizens should have equal access to the services to which they are entitled.
4. Courtesy: citizens should be treated with courtesy and consideration.
5. Information: citizens should be given full and accurate information about the public services they are entitled to receive.
6. Openness and Transparency: citizens should know how departments are run, how resources are spent, and who is in charge of particular services
7. Redress: if the promised standard of service is not delivered, citizens should be offered an apology, a full explanation and a speedy and effective remedy, and when complaints are made citizens should receive a sympathetic, positive response.
8. Value-for-money (VFM): public services should be provided economically and efficiently in order to give citizens the best possible value-for-money.

In order to ensure that service delivery is constantly improved, national departments as well as provincial administrations would need to outline their short, medium and long-term goals for service provision (Department of Public Service and Administration, 1996). It is pivotal to note that a transformed Public Service can be judged via its effectiveness in delivering services which meet the basic needs of all South African

citizens. Naidoo (2005) additionally states that a traditional African leadership, transformational leadership, team leadership and the strengthening of governance form the basis for effective leadership and governance framework. The author further postulates that a shift in leadership is pivotal in ensuring that improved service delivery is a dynamic social activity out of which socio-economic, cultural and political imperatives are integrated within the leadership and governance framework in the South African public service.

Coetzer (2009) makes reference to a report by a rating agency called Empowerdex in which it is stated that South African municipalities score an average of 59.77% for service delivery across five key indicators. The research conducted by the agency measured 231 local municipalities, 46 district municipalities and six metropolitan authorities against three indices namely: a status index based on the current proportion of households which has access to a particular service; an improvement index measuring the percentage change of households with access to a particular service; and an overall score out of 100, with each service equally weighed at a maximum of 20 points. The report deduced that there is a need for alternative service-delivery models and an increasing pressure for improved delivery in areas where there are particularly weak municipalities.

In an article by Burmeister (2010), it is hypothesized that public servants should be given tools for a high performance culture as this will assist with effective service delivery. It is further stated that service non-delivery is not only about having good people, but it is often about having structures, policies, and processes that are not conducive to delivery.

Competent public sector employees therefore face difficulty as they may not have the necessary tools and authority to perform their desired tasks and fulfil their responsibilities.

The improvement of service delivery cannot be achieved in isolation from other fundamental management changes within the public service. The University of Fort Hare (1997) stated important guidelines and steps developed by the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) to implement a service delivery programme. These include: i) identifying the need of the customer; ii) establishing customers' needs and priorities; iii) establishing the level of service currently provided; iv) identifying the improvement gap between what the customer expects and level of service that is being provided; v) setting service standards; vi) gearing up for delivery in order to ensure that the organisation is able to deliver on what it promises; vii) telling the customers about their standards and viii) monitoring delivery against these results and publishing the results.

Nengwekhulu (2009) postulates that the demand for effective delivery of services such as housing and social amenities especially in formerly underprivileged areas will continuously be a challenge in local and provincial authorities in the future. Transformation from apartheid to democracy carries little meaning if the majority of people do not receive expected services and this has implications for political problems in the country. Furthermore there are serious problems in the provision of services to the majority of people in the Western Cape (Nengwekhulu, 2009).

2.4. Service Quality

Sahney, Banwet and Karunes (2004) state that quality is derived from the Latin word *qualis*, meaning, “what kind of”. Service quality furthermore has a wide variety of meanings and connotations attached to it. There is therefore no consensus definition and quality has been defined with different perspectives and orientations. Definitions of service quality focus predominantly on meeting customers’ needs and requirements, and furthermore evaluate how well the service delivered matches the customers’ expectations.

Venter and Dhurup (2005) postulate that the most relevant approach in defining and measuring service is thus the user-based approach, that is from the customers’ perspective affirming that the human element forms an integral part in the rendering of a service. Service quality can also be defined as being a multi-dimensional concept with multi-attributes, and may mean different things to different people (Jayasundara, Ngulube & Minishi-Majanja, 2009).

Kachoka and Hoskins (2009) state that service quality is therefore based on the Gap theory which was first developed by Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml in 1985. The theory postulates and describes the differences between customers’ expected service and perceived service delivered.

Service quality theorists have furthermore defined service quality in various ways. Nitecki and Franklin (1999, p.484 in Kachoka & Hoskins, 2009) define service quality in

terms of “reducing the gap between customers’ expectations of excellent service and their perceptions of the actual service delivered”.

Kachoka and Hoskins (2009) as well as Parasuraman et al. (1985) propose that “service quality is the difference between users’ expectations and perceptions of users’ on performance”. The concept of service quality has also been used interchangeably with customer satisfaction. In the research of Oldfield and Baron (2000), it is reported that much of the published work on service aspects of higher education concentrates on course delivery mechanisms and the quality of teaching.

When evaluating the quality of a service as opposed to the quality of goods, the quality of a service is even more insubstantial because of the unique features that differentiate services from goods. Due to its generic nature, defining quality can be seen as a complex and difficult task as well (Jayasundara et al., 2009). Boshoff (1990; Bitner, 1992; Lovelock, 1983; Zeithaml et al., 1985) suggest that measuring service quality poses difficulty for service providers due to its unique characteristics. These characteristics include: intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity, perishability and variability and are the four well-documented features of services acknowledged and recognized in the service marketing literature. The measurement of service quality in specific service industries still remains a challenge due to these unique features that have been identified (Babakus & Boller, 1992).

According to Gbadamosi and de Jager (2009), quality in education is determined by the extent to which students' needs are assessed and their expectations are satisfied. It can furthermore be seen that traditional students as well as their needs are constantly changing. In our current environment and society, higher education students' comprise not only of the young and mature students, but include the more working class people, more women, and more part-time students (Gbadamosi & de Jager, 2009). These students are thus more demanding in terms of service delivery and service standards that need to be met.

It can further be deduced that much of the published work on service quality aspects of higher education has concentrated on effective course delivery mechanisms, and the quality of courses and teaching. Oldfield and Baron (2000) state that the mechanisms for measuring service quality of courses and programmes often rely on research instruments (for example, student feedback questionnaires) devised by representatives of the higher education institutions to provide data that address various externally set audit criteria.

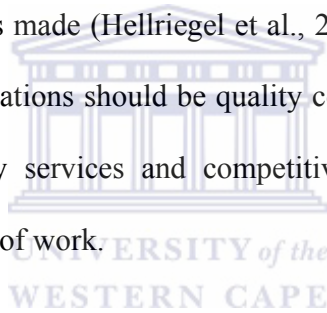
Liebenberg and Barnes (2006) furthermore state that quality is not only limited to the content of the academic programmes, the nature and the level of research or the number of articles published by the institution. Quality therefore also relates to the levels of service that the customer receives.

Oldfield and Baron's (2000) research postulates that there is an inclination to view service quality in higher education from an organizational perspective. The issue of what constitutes a quality service within higher education is therefore an emotive one. It is important for institutions to now look at what their students want and what students consider to be good service and not to collect data based upon what the institution perceives its students find important.

The identification of the dimensions that signal quality and the achievement of excellence in business education have emerged as key issues. Business schools and academic institutions like many other organizations must also now be concerned with market share, productivity, return on investment and the quality of services offered to their customers. Gronroos (1988) states that service quality can lead to excellence in business education and can have lasting effects on the institution and the students it serves.

Furthermore judgments made about services are often subjective rather than objective. Kotler (1982) postulates that providing a consistent service is difficult as factors such as the interpersonal skills of contact staff and the demeanour of consumers (students) can be crucial and may thus confound both inter and intra group comparisons. These conditions necessitate that institutions should address the issue of quality, not only through the traditional routes of accreditation and course review, student feedback questionnaires on the quality of course delivery and teaching, but also through evaluating what students themselves consider elements in service quality (Kotler, 1982).

Quality is a relatively new viewpoint as it only started to gain formality from the nineteen seventies (Hellriegel, Jackson, Slocum, Staude, Amos, Klopper, Louw, & Oosthuizen, 2004). Research indicates that contemporary organisations are dynamic and whether they are small or large they face difficult challenges. The challenges may include pressure from customers and competitors to deliver high-quality services on time, reward ethical behaviour of employees, and to develop plans to manage highly diverse customers and workforces alike. It is imperative to note that customers demand for high quality services may be the dominant theme for the foreseeable future. Quality therefore can be defined as how well a service does what it is supposed to do and how closely and reliably it satisfies the specifications to which it is made (Hellriegel et al., 2004). It can thus be argued that managers in successful organisations should be quality conscious and should understand the link between high quality services and competitive advantage to function as a competitive entity in the world of work.

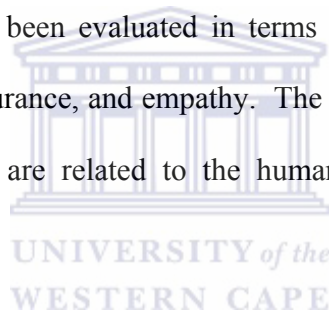


2.4.1. The definition and dimensions of service quality

O'Neill and Palmer (2004) address the issue of service quality evaluation within the higher education sector and stress the need to develop measures that are both psychometrically and practically sound. Measures, which are user friendly and easy to interpret, will support the aim of continuous improvement as well as rapid feedback for students who seek improvements in the department's service quality.

Security, Consistency, Attitude, Completeness, Condition, Availability and Training of service providers are believed to adequately embrace the concept of service quality (Kitchroen, 2004). Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1993) hold the view that their SERVQUAL (service quality questionnaire) items provide the basic framework underlying service quality that can be supplemented with context specific items when necessary. SERVQUAL has five dimensions: Reliability, Assurance, Responsiveness, Tangibles and Empathy.

Research according to Long and McMellon (2004), as well as in Bebko (2000) state that service quality has frequently been evaluated in terms of five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The majority of the scale items used to measure these dimensions are related to the human interaction aspect of service delivery.



Bebko (2000) further defines these five dimensions by which consumers evaluate service quality as follows:

- *Tangibles*: The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communications material.
- *Reliability*: The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
- *Responsiveness*: The willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
- *Assurance*: The knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.

- *Empathy*: The caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers.

2.4.2. Factors which affect perception of quality

Reviewed literature has illustrated that that gender influences the perception of service quality. Le Blanc and Nguyen (1997) have shown that male students are more likely to focus on social value during service consumption, while females are more critical of the price/quality relationship as it relates to value. Gender furthermore impacted on value perceptions whereby female students were found to give less importance to social value. The results further indicated that as female students' progress in their area of specialization; they tend to believe that the price/quality relationship deteriorates at their business school (Le Blanc & Nguyen, 1997).

Levels of a student's maturity are also expected to influence the perception of service quality. Research conducted by Oldfield and Baron (2000) conducted in a UK University and management faculty examined student perceptions of service quality and highlighted the need to recognize that not all students' needs are the same. Their study compared the perceptions of first and final year students. Their argument indicates that while it is recognized that undergraduate student views of course/programmes will vary over the three or four years of study according to the modules taken, it is largely assumed that the generic elements which make up service quality (for example, the physical environment, or the availability of academic staff) are perceived in a similar way by students of all years.

According to Lovelock (2004), competition for students also has an impact on service quality. Lovelock (2004) posits that different service firms vary widely in their abilities to serve different types of customers. Hence, it is imperative to note that each firm should adopt a strategy of market segmentation, identifying those parts, or segments, of the market that it can serve best. The implication is that a service quality tool must now be developed for each environment to address and satisfy the needs of these diverse customers.

Cultural influences on service expectations were cited as a contextual factor as well (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). Masculinity and femininity are dominant sex role patterns in the vast majority of both traditional and modern societies. It can be noted that masculine societies value assertiveness, performance, ambition, and independence, whereas feminine societies value nurturance, quality of life, service, and interdependence. The authors point out that, marketing efforts will perform better when matched with cultural characteristics.

2.5. The relationship between service delivery and service quality

Governments that are more market-orientated tend to focus more on competitive growth and development while more redistributive-orientated governments emphasise regulatory functions and caring for the poor (Cloete, 2008). These services and facilities do not only include, for example, the provision of sectoral education, housing, or health services, but also efficient and effective general administrative support services by governmental

agencies, like the quantity, quality, and user-friendliness of the services in those specific agencies (for example, the Batho Pele principles of good services delivery in South Africa). Cloete (2008) furthermore states that a contributing factor to bad services delivery is the weak quality of municipal councilors and general political leadership and management at local government levels.

In all organisations, continuously improving the delivery of services and customer driven service quality has become a top priority. It is pivotal to note that even amongst individuals within the same organisation; the quality of services rendered may vary. The quality may be attributed to the organisational culture that predominates within an organisation as well as how these services are rendered (Naidoo, 2005). An important element to note whilst conducting the study is that high service quality will result in higher customer satisfaction with the service being rendered or delivered.

Parasuraman et al., (1991) argues that perceptions of quality are based on a customer's expectations about quality and the actual service delivered. However, there is evidence that, while quality evaluation may be strictly cognitive, satisfaction gauges customers' feelings towards the service performance. When a product/service falls below consumers' expectations, they display negative emotions; if, on the other hand, the offering is perceived to meet or exceed expectations, customers respond with positive emotions.

Smith (2002) states that when rendering a service, the service provider is required to deliver an excellent service and often need to satisfy the needs of both the customer and

the organisation. Furthermore, quality management practices need to ensure that organisations are more customer focused and hence deliver services that are efficient and of a high quality. It should also be noted that it may be impossible for a service to achieve 100% perfect quality as the human element forms part of the production of a service. Essentially with the development of technology, less emphasis will now be placed on interface interaction between personnel and customers and the challenge to the service provider would entail increasing the chance of 100% service delivery and quality (Smith, 1992).

Within the public service domain, it has been indicated that communities have been protesting against the lack of or the quality of the services that they are receiving from different public institutions (Matshabaphala, 2008). Garnett and Garnett (2009) postulate that research has indicated that a customer's evaluation of service quality was affected by not only the end service received but also by the service delivery process itself.

It can thus be deduced that service delivery and service quality directly have an impact on one another. Customers will remain loyal to a service organization if the value of what they receive is determined to be relatively greater than that expected from competitors (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). Service quality has proved to be an essential ingredient to convince customers to choose one service organization over another, however many organizations have realized that maintaining excellence on a consistent basis is imperative if they are to gain customer loyalty. Smith (2008 as cited in Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996) postulates that better quality municipal decision-making and management

practices, equitable sharing of national resources, and alternative service delivery strategies like outsourcing, joint ventures, public-private community partnerships aimed at providing small scale services delivery results have the potential for improving service delivery in South Africa as a whole. These strategies are said to improve the delivery and provide better quality public services and facilities and also enhance governance outcomes at all levels in South Africa.

According to Kroukamp (2005), governments are looking for alternative ways of delivering high quality services to as many citizens as possible. In contemporary public administration and management, emphasis with this approach is placed on how citizens can be served better in local government and how the production of public services should be organized, how and by whom service delivery systems should be managed and conducted. Furthermore, partnerships are now being introduced to produce practices that improve the quality of life of citizens in public service delivery within all spheres of government.

2.6 Summary of the chapter

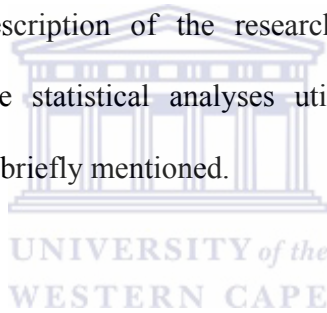
This chapter has provided a comprehensive review of the literature relating to and defining the concepts of service delivery and service quality and specifically what these concepts mean to students. Where possible, reference is made to areas in which research has previously been conducted in relation to the same context.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The following section deals with the objectives of the research design issues involved. A description of the research sample is provided with reference to the selection procedure adopted and in terms of the essential sample characteristics. The procedure followed in executing the research, a description of the research instruments (data collection methods) and the quantitative statistical analyses utilised are also presented. The objectives of the study are also briefly mentioned.



3.2 Research problem

To determine the perceptions and expectations of students with regards to service delivery and service quality levels and to make recommendations as to how to cope with these pertinent issues in order to improve the overall service delivery and quality.

3.3 Research objectives

When examining the level of service delivery as well as the quality of the services received, the Provincial Government Department's Higher Education and Training Institution offers, should consider the following:

- Are the students satisfied with the service delivered by the Higher Education and Training institution?
- Are there any significant differences regarding students' perceptions and expectations on the assessment of quality of service in the academic setting and on which dimensions - reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, tangibles- do these differences occur?

3.4. Population and sample

According to Sekaran (2001), a population can be defined as a group of individuals or items that share one or more characteristics and include all of the people inhabiting a specified area or study. Sekaran (1992, p. 225) further defines population as “the entire group of people, events or things of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate”. The population that is included in this particular study is students at a Higher Education and Training institution within a Provincial Government Department.

It may not be possible for both practical and cost reasons to obtain information about the entire population that exists for this specific research. For this reason, a subset or sample of the population is usually selected for the purpose of a study. Sekaran (1992, p. 226) regards a sample as “a sub-set of the population. It comprises some members selected from the population.” A sample can be clarified as a selection of individuals drawn from the target population which intends to reflect the same population's characteristics in all significant respects. Sekaran (2001) proposes that sample sizes of between 30 - 500 are sufficient for research purposes. For the purposes of this study, a sample size of 130

students was obtained. The reason for using this sample is that it is representative of the chosen population and for convenience and accessibility purposes.

3.5. Research design

A research design is the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. Research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted, and whereby measurement and analysis of data takes place. It is furthermore defined as being the way the researcher formulates the problem and designs a project to address the client's issues.

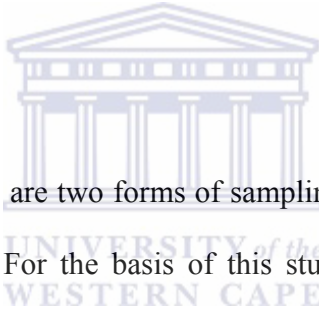
Research design further consists of the essential parameters of a research project, including factors such as its basic approach (qualitative, quantitative or some combination); the sample or target to be interviewed or observed; numbers of interviews or observations; research locations; questionnaire or discussion outline; tasks and materials to be introduced; and so on (Sekaran, 2003).

The research design focused on in this research is a cross-sectional research method. Cross-sectional research is a research method often used in developmental psychology, but also utilized in many other areas including social science and education (Sekaran, 2003). This type of study utilizes different groups of people who differ in the variable of

interest, but share other characteristics such as socio-economic status, educational background and ethnicity.

Cross-sectional research differs from a longitudinal research in that cross-sectional studies are designed to look at a variable at a particular point in time. While longitudinal studies involve taking multiple measures over an extended period of time, cross-sectional research is focused on finding relationships between variables at a specific point in time (Sekaran, 1992).

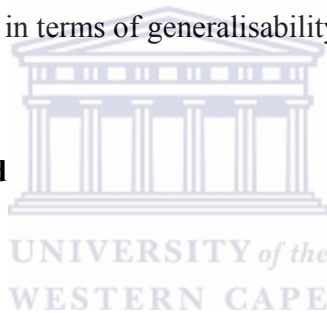
3.5.1. Sampling procedure



Sekaran (2001) states that there are two forms of sampling namely: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. For the basis of this study, a non-probability sampling method with reference to convenience sampling procedures will be used. According to Sekaran (2001), non-probability sampling occurs in situations where the sampling techniques or elements do not have a known or predetermined chance of being selected as subjects. Typical non-probability situations include those where there is an absence of a sampling frame, where the population is so widely dispersed to the point that probability sampling would be insufficient. There are also various types of non-probability samples such as: purposive sampling, quota sampling, convenience sampling, and snowball sampling.

3.5.1.1. Convenience sampling

Convenience sampling involves collecting information from members of the population who are most easily accessible and conveniently available who are able to provide the desired and relevant information. This form of sampling is quick, convenient, and less expensive than most other sampling techniques (Sekaran, 1992). According to Sekaran (2001), the advantage of using a non-probability and convenience sampling procedure is that it is the best way of getting some basic information quickly and efficiently. It can be noted that a disadvantage of convenience sampling is that it is considered the least reliable of all sampling designs in terms of generalisability.



3.6. Data collection method

Data can be collected in a variety of ways, in different settings, and from a variety of sources. Sekaran (2001) states that data collection methods include face-to-face interviews, telephonic interviews, questionnaires, and observation. For the purpose of this study, the data collection method used is a questionnaire. Sekaran (2001, p. 233) defines a questionnaire as a “pre-formulated written set of questions to which respondents record their answers, usually within rather closely defined alternatives”.

3.7. Research instruments

The method of data collection that will be used in this study is a questionnaire. The questionnaire aims at investigating the levels of service delivery and service quality among students at a Higher Education and Training Institution. The SERVQUAL questionnaire measures the performance across five dimensions and uses a seven point Likert scale measuring both customers' (students') expectations and perceptions. These five dimensions include reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles and are depicted by 22 attributes. The SERVQUAL instrument therefore consists of two sections: one for identifying the customer's perceptions of performance of the 22 attributes, and the other for identifying customer's expectations of the same attributes. It has however been found that SERVPERF, a subset of SERVQUAL, may additionally be used as the measuring instrument as it has 22 items and addresses actual performance of individuals only. Additional questions will be added to assess and determine service delivery employed by the institution as well as questions related to the biographical details of the participants. The Biographical details include the following information: gender, age, year of study, and course of study.

The rationale for using this questionnaire as a method of data collection is due to the following reasons namely; a questionnaire allows for the opportunity to build rapport with the candidate and motivate them to fill in enthusiastically and honestly. A questionnaire can also be seen as a less expensive instrument when administering to a group of respondents and almost a hundred percent response rate is assured. This

questionnaire also allows for high anonymity of respondents (Sekaran, 2001). Furthermore, alternate reasons for using this technique are also because it was previously used in empirical studies and can be seen as a convenient way of assessing expectations and perceptions with regards to various determinants of measuring service quality in industry. The instrument that will be used can also be seen as valid and reliable.

3.8. Biographical information

The biographical details of the respondents include the following information: gender, age, race, year of study, and course of study.



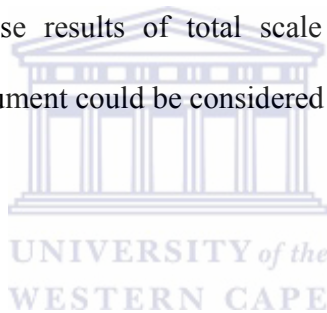
3.9. Psychometric properties

3.9.1 Reliability and validity of the measure

Sekaran (2001) states that the reliability of a measure indicates the stability and consistency with which the instrument is measuring the concept. There are various types of reliability that exists namely; test retest, split halves, equivalent forms, inter-rater as well as item analysis reliability

The validity of a measure refers to whether a test measures what it is supposed to measure and not something else (Sekaran, 2001). The various types of validity include: criterion related, predictive and construct validity. The instrument used in this particular study can be seen as valid and reliable.

According to research conducted by Tyran and Ross (2006), the scale reliability for each of the SERVQUAL scales were good and displayed values for Cronbach's alpha for the dimensions ranging from 0.74 to 0.89. Furthermore literature illustrates Cronbach alpha values of 0.920 (Parasuraman et al., 1988), 0.900 (Croning & Taylor, 1992), and 0.927 (Frost & Kumar, 2001). These results of total scale for the developed instrument therefore indicate that the instrument could be considered to be reliable.



3.10. Procedure

The researcher personally approached top management to obtain permission for the research to be conducted and to assist with the distribution of the questionnaires. A cover letter was attached to each questionnaire and handed to the respondents. The cover letter assured the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents in the research. A total of 137 questionnaires were distributed and administered to the students at the institution participating in this endeavour. Thereafter the responses received to the questionnaires were processed and analysed using the SPSS system.

3.11. Data analysis techniques

The data analysis techniques used in this study involves both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics include frequencies and measures of central tendency (means and standard deviation), and inferential statistics which for this study will include the use of t-tests and correlations. The hypotheses that were generated for this study were determined by utilising the statistical procedures outlined below.

3.11.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics involve transformation of raw data into a form that would provide information to describe a set of factors in a situation (Sekaran, 2001). This process is conducted by means of ordering and manipulation of raw data collected. Sekaran (2001) states that descriptive statistics are provided by frequencies, measures of central tendency, and dispersion. In this study, quantitative data in terms of frequencies depict the descriptive statistics utilised.

3.11.1.1. Frequencies

Frequencies refer to the amount of times various sub-categories of a particular phenomenon occur, which in turn allows for the percentage and cumulative percentage of the occurrence to be calculated (Sekaran, 2001). Frequencies are utilized on nominally scaled variables and are organized in numerous non-overlapping sub-categories, such as

in the case of gender (Sekaran, 2001). Furthermore, inferential statistics will be used and can be seen as important to make inferences about the data collected.

3.11.1.2. Measures of central tendency

Measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion enable the researcher to get an idea of the characteristics of the sample, or a feel for the data (Sekaran, 2001). For the purpose of this study the measures that are considered relevant are the means and standard deviation.



3.11.1.2.1. Mean

The mean is a measure of central tendency that illustrates a general picture of data, by providing an average value for the data (Sekaran, 2001). Furthermore, the mean of a set of values is the sum of all the values divided by the total number of measurements. This measure of central tendency will most frequently be utilised and referred to as t-testing is the primary statistical procedure utilised to compare the responses of students.

3.11.1.2.2. Standard deviation

The standard deviation is a measure which can be calculated as the square of the variance (Sekaran, 2001). It is also the standard measure of variability from the mean and the measure of dispersion among the scores obtained. The standard deviation as a measure of

dispersion was used in this study to determine the extent to which students differ in their overall satisfaction with services rendered at the institution.

3.11.2. Inferential statistics

Inferential statistical analyses are considered important for the study as the researcher is interested in establishing the differences that may exist between different sub-groups that is gender. This type of statistics allows for inferences to be drawn from the sample to the population. The type of test that is primarily used is the t-test (Sekaran, 2001).



3.11.2.1. T-tests

According to Sekaran (2001), a t-test allows the researcher to confirm whether significant mean differences exist between two groups of people with regards to a specific variable of interest. Furthermore the author indicates that t-tests at the same time are used with nominal data which are divided into two sub-groups.

3.11.2.2. Correlations

Sekaran (2001) defines correlations as the relationship between any two variables among the variables utilized within the study. For the purpose of the study, a Pearson correlation matrix will be used as it is able to indicate the direction, strength, and significance of the bivariate relationships within the study. In the present study, the relationship that will be

analysed is whether service quality is dependent on the service delivery or service being delivered.

3.12 Ethical issues to consider

The researcher has the responsibility to conduct research in such a way as to respect and maintain subjects' rights and to ensure the protection of subjects from any possible physical and/or psychological harm such as stress and anxiety as social research should never injure the people being studied (Sekaran, 2001). Subsequently, it should be noted that participants have particular rights, which a researcher has to respect. This study has therefore been structured in such a way that it does not have any psychological or physical harm toward the respondent. Protecting the respondent's well-being and interests may also concern the respondent's identity. This study respects both the anonymity, privacy and the confidentiality of the respondent and does not disclose any of their information publicly or with anyone else. It also involves the omitting of any names of the respondents and will involve the process of assigning numbers to them instead, for the sake of anonymity (Sekaran, 2001). Permission will furthermore need to be obtained from the College and participants involved in this study.

It is essential to note that people should not be subjected to research of any nature unless they agree upon it. This study therefore involves voluntary participation of respondents and provides them with the choice to refuse to divulge any information about themselves as well as being exposed to both the negative and positive aspects of the study. Sekaran

(2001) states furthermore states that the study should not directly or indirectly impact on the respondent's career in any way and does not allow for the loss of self-esteem of the respondent. This study also does not allow for any unethical practices and uses of information that will be gathered as a result of the research being conducted.

For the purposes of this study, informed consent, confidentiality, freedom from harm or exploitation, and voluntary participation were pertinent (Sekaran, 2001). Prior to conducting the research at the institution, permission was obtained from the Lecturers, Managers and the Head of Department.

3.13 Summary of the chapter



This chapter has served to elucidate and identify the primary objectives of the research, the research design issues involved, a description of the research sample and a description of the pertinent sample characteristics. Moreover the procedures that were followed in executing the research, a description of the research instruments (data collection methods) and the quantitative statistical analyses which were utilised, were presented.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results that were obtained after applying the statistical techniques outlined in chapter 3. The results of the statistical analysis, determined through the application of descriptive statistics (measures of central tendency and dispersion) and inferential statistics (correlation, analysis of variance, and regression), are presented in the forms of tables, and graphical representations. The study analyses student perceptions and expectations of service delivery and service quality at an institution for Higher Education and Training within the Provincial Government in the Western Cape. The level of statistical significance for null hypothesis testing was set at 5%, with all statistical test results being computed at the two-tailed level of significance in accordance with the non-directional hypotheses presented (Sekaran, 2001).

4.2 Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics computed for the study are presented first in an outline of the characteristics of the sample with regards to the variables included in the study. Thereafter, the analyses of the constructs relevant to the study, that is, perceptions of service quality and expectations of service delivery, are presented with the aid of

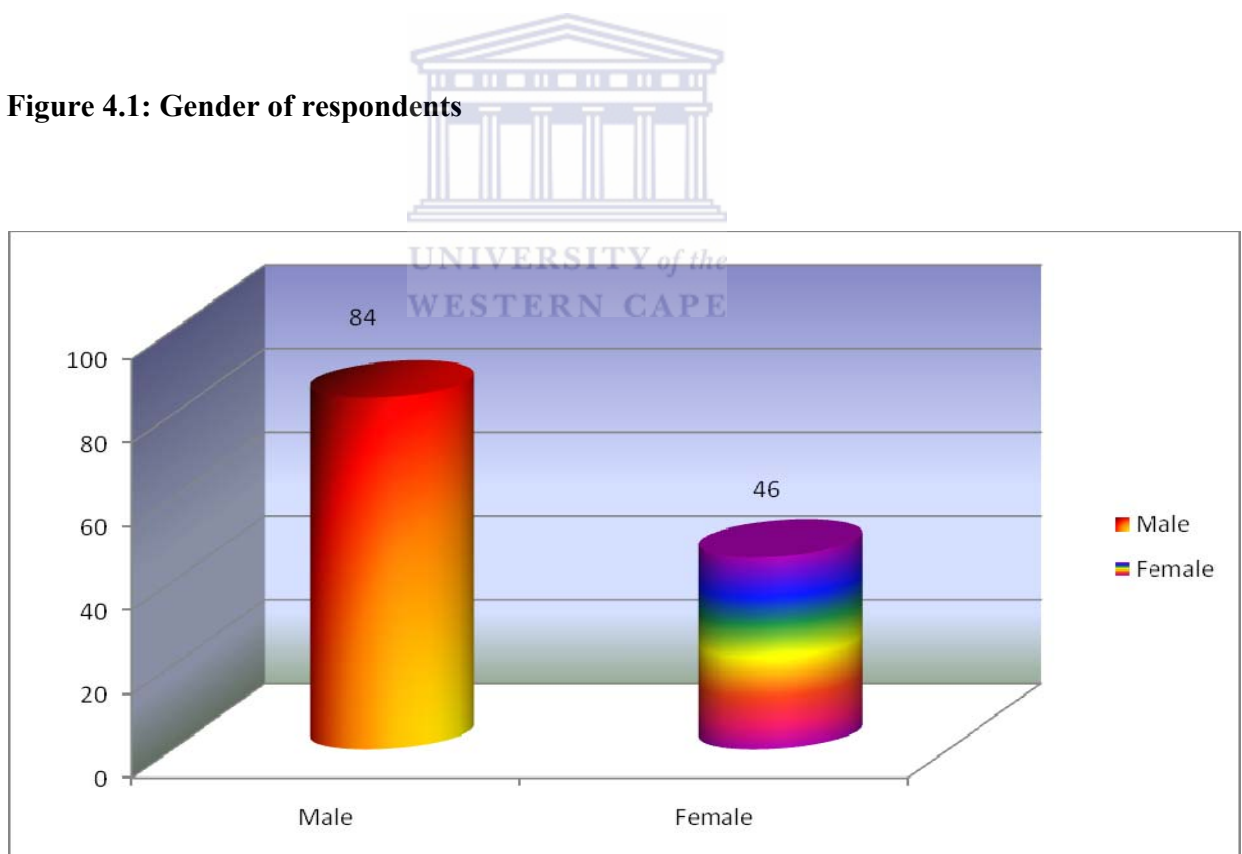
inferential statistical procedures. Conclusions are then drawn on the basis of the obtained results. Finally, the chapter concludes by providing some suggestions and recommendations that may prove fruitful in future research projects of a similar nature.

The information provided and discussed in the previous chapters will serve as a background against which the contents of this chapter will be presented and interpreted.

4.2.1 Biographical information

Figure 4.1 provides a depiction of the gender distribution of the sample.

Figure 4.1: Gender of respondents



The sample comprised of 65% (n = 84) male respondents, while females only comprised of 35% of the sample (n = 46).

Figure 4.2: Age of respondents

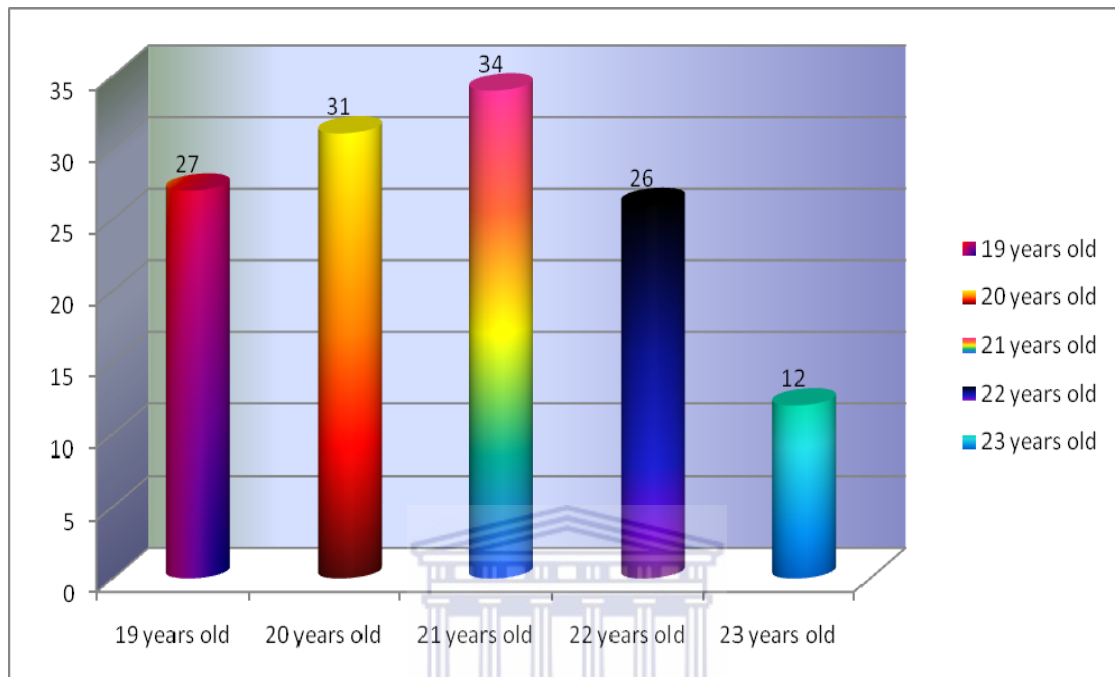
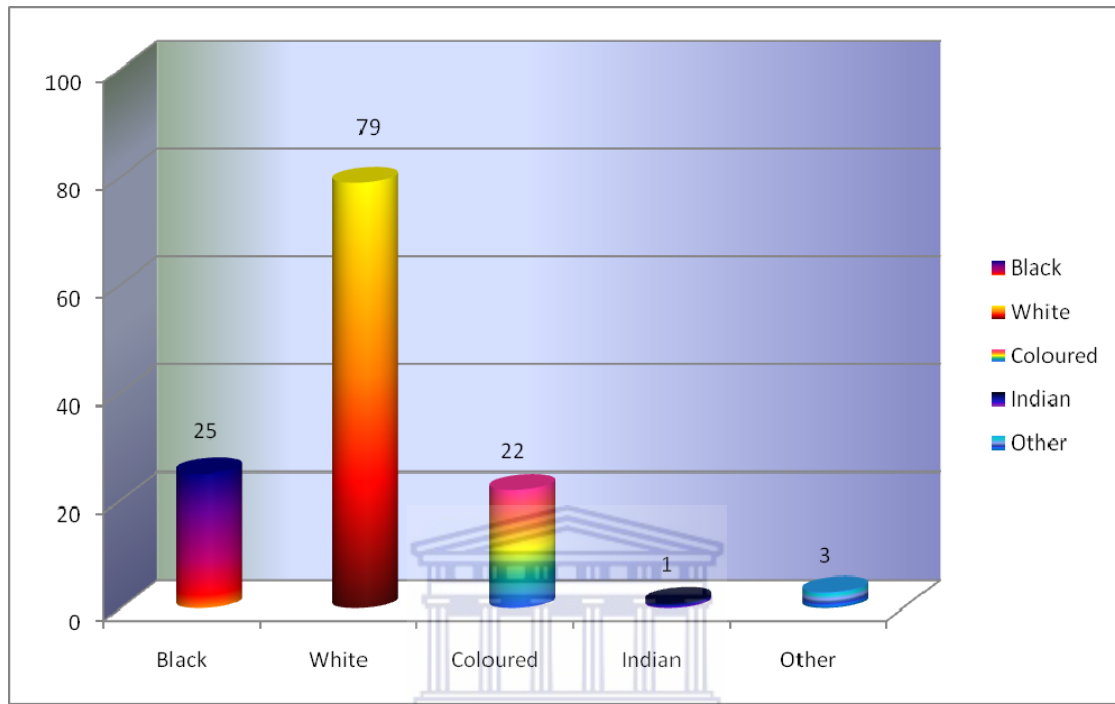


Figure 4.2 indicates that the majority of the respondents ($n = 34$ or 26%) are 21 years old, followed by those that are 20 years old ($n = 31$) comprising 24%. Respondents that are 19 years old constituted an additional 21% ($n = 27$) of the sample, with 20% being 22 years old ($n = 26$) and the median age of the respondents was 21.2 years.

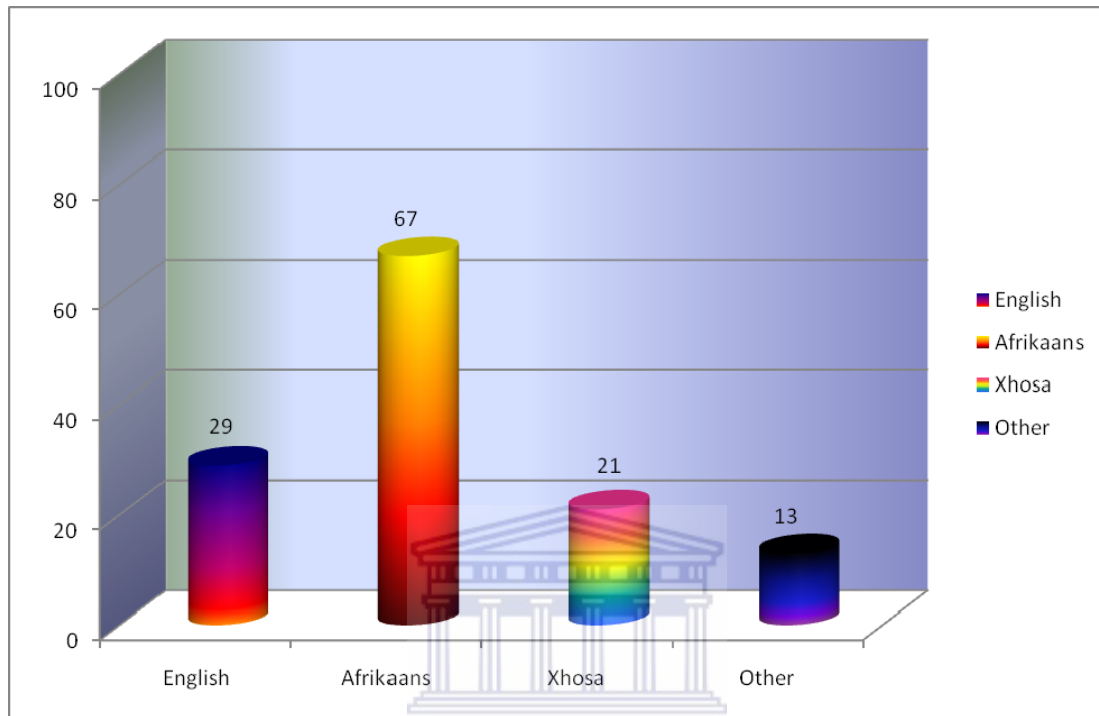
Figure 4.3: Race of respondents



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Based on Figure 4.3, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents is White, comprising 61% of the sample ($n = 79$), while Black respondents constituted 19% of the sample. Seventeen percent ($n = 22$) of the respondents were Coloured. Indian and those classified as other, represented less than 1% of the respondents ($n = 4$).

Figure 4.4: Language of respondents



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Figure 4.4 depicts the home language of the respondents. In terms of Figure 4.4, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents ($n = 67$), or 52% of the sample was Afrikaans speaking, while a further 22% ($n = 29$) were English speaking. Sixteen percent ($n = 21$) indicated Xhosa as their home language while only 10% ($n = 13$) respondents indicated their home language as other.

Figure 4.5: Year of study of respondents

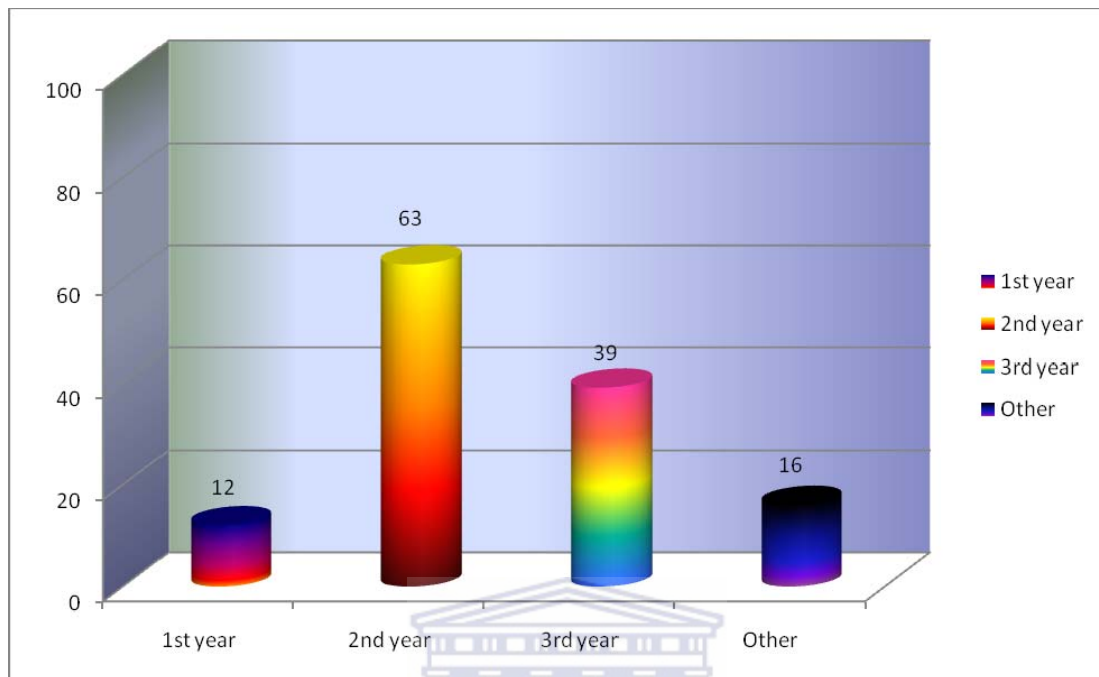


Figure 4.5 shows that the majority of the respondents, that is 48% (n = 63) are in the second year of study, while 39 respondents or 30% are in their year of study. Respondents that are in other years of study constituted 12% (n = 16) of the sample, while the remaining 12 students comprised an additional 9% of the respondents.

4.2.2 Measures of central tendency and dispersion

This section outlines the descriptive statistics calculated on the basis of the variables included in the questionnaire. The measures of central tendency and dispersion for students' expectations of service delivery are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Means, Standard deviation, Minimum and Maximum scores for the students' expectations of service delivery

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. dev.
Perceptions and Expectations of service delivery	130	1	5	2.74	.78

The mean score (Mean = 2.74) for students' expectations of service delivery indicates that respondents show a moderate level of satisfaction with service delivery. However, they are more inclined to agree that service delivery warrants improvements in several areas. The standard deviation (sd = 0.78) shows little variation in the perceptions that students have of the services delivered within the selected organisation.

Table 4.2 Means, Standard deviation, Minimum and Maximum scores for the dimensions of the service delivery questionnaire

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. dev.
Tangibles	130	1	5	2.44	.35
Reliability	130	1	5	2.30	.42
Responsiveness	130	1	5	2.23	.24
Assurance	130	1	5	3.08	.67
Empathy	130	1	5	2.96	.83

The mean score (Mean = 2.44) for tangibles indicates that student tend to show slightly below average satisfaction with the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials.

The lack of reliability, that is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately was rated second lowest (Mean = 2.30). However, students perceived the responsiveness of the institution to be the most problematic with respect to service delivery (Mean = 2.23). Hence, while they may have an expectation that their queries will be resolved efficiently and effectively, they did not experience a willingness on the part of staff to assist them and provide prompt service. They did, however, report a higher rating of the individualized attention that they received and rated empathy higher (Mean = 2.86). They perceived the dimension of assurance more positively (Mean = 3.08).

Figure 4.6: Perceptions of Service Delivery

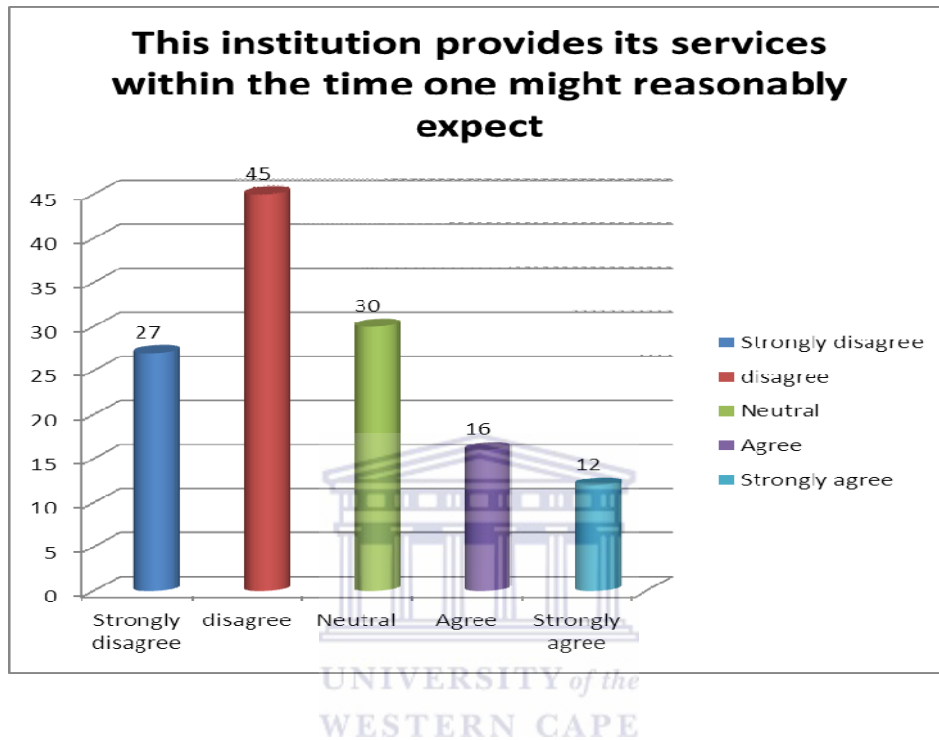
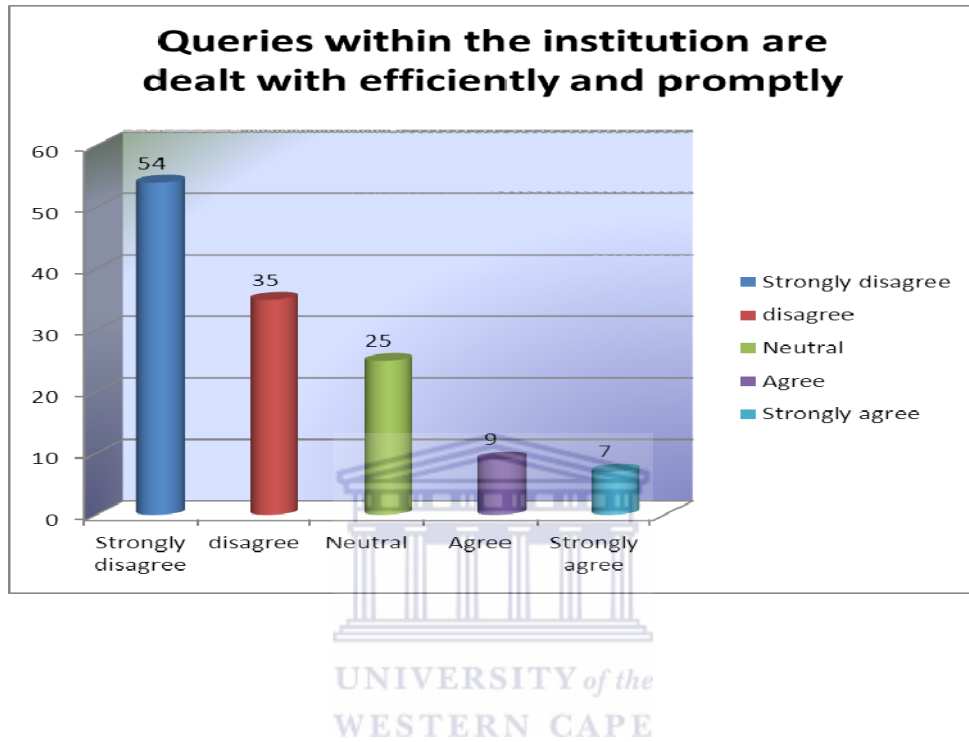


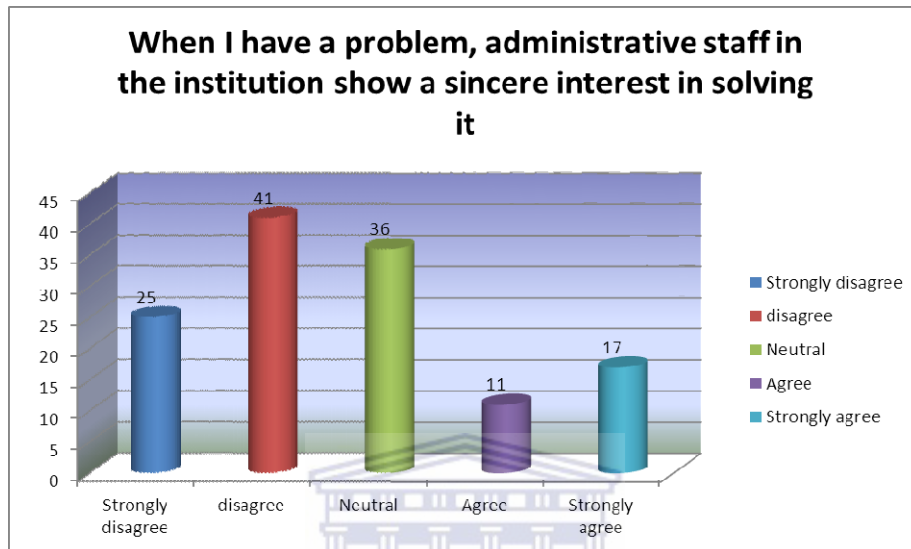
Figure 4.6. indicates that approximately 53% (n=72) of the respondents did not feel that the institution provides services within the time that students considered appropriate. Only 20% of the respondents (n=28) agreed or strongly agreed that services were timeously delivered.

Figure 4.7



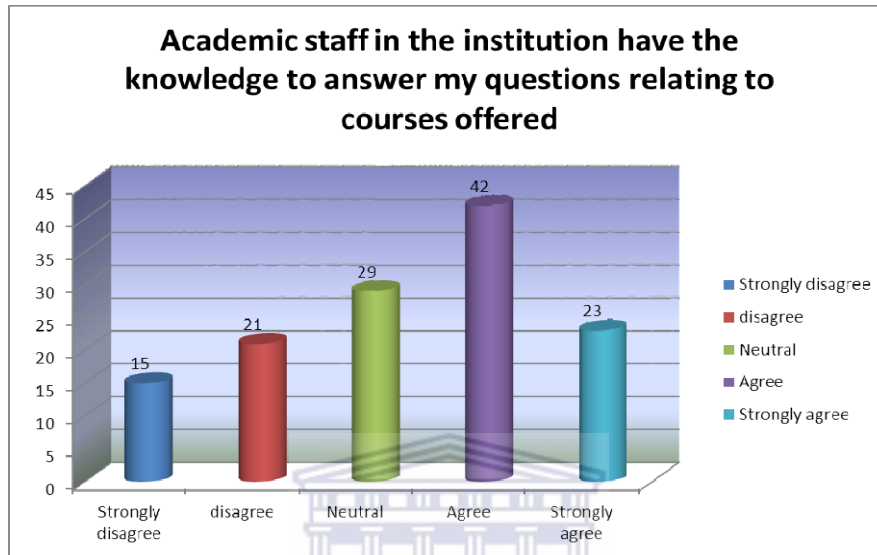
Approximately 65% of the respondents (n=89) strongly disagreed or disagreed that queries are dealt with efficiently or promptly, while only 16 respondents or 12% experienced queries as being efficiently addressed.

Figure 4.8



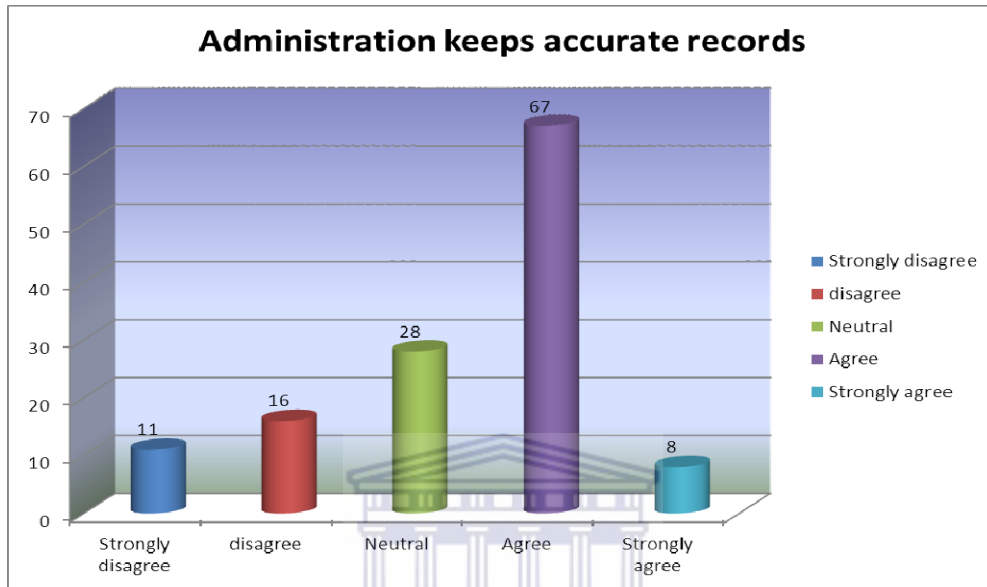
Of the respondents, 48% felt that administrative staff attempted to resolve student issues in a sincere manner.

Figure 4.9



Forty-seven percent of students (n=65) reported that staff have the knowledge to assist and advice them with respect to courses offered at the institution.

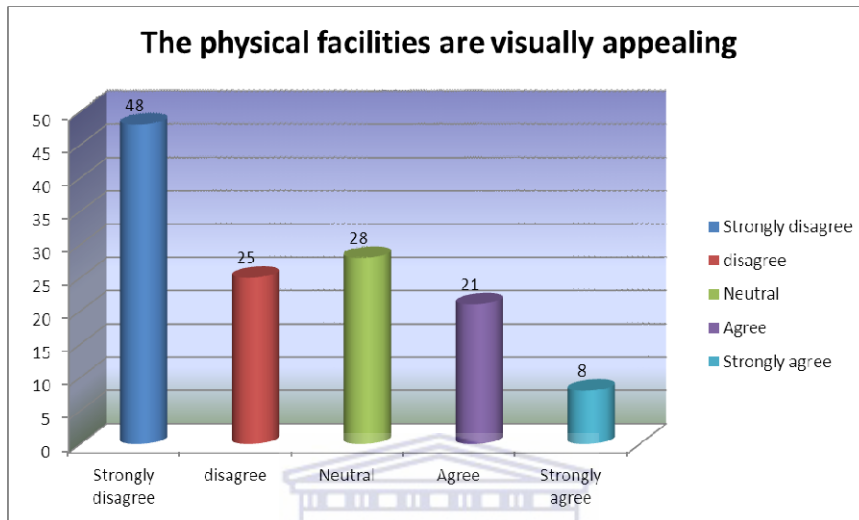
Figure 4.10



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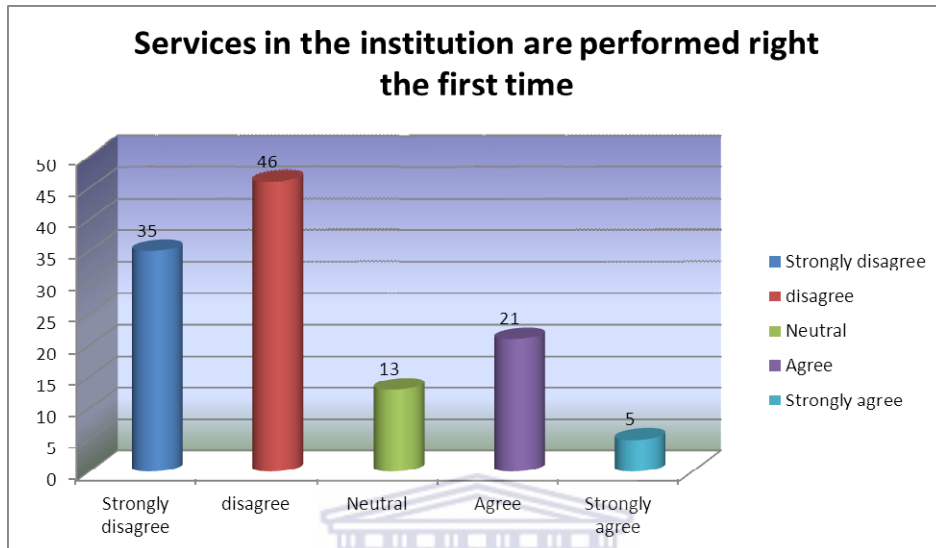
Fifty-five percent of the respondents (n=75) reported that they regarded administration as keeping accurate records.

Figure 4.11



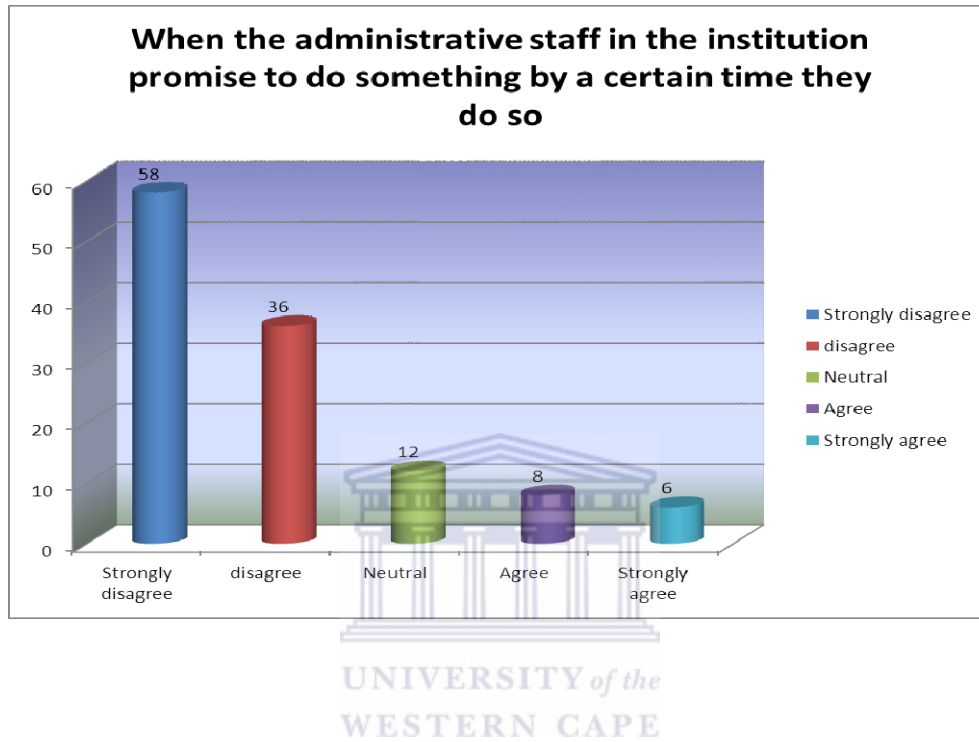
With respect to physical facilities, 53% of the students (n=73), did not find their physical facilities appealing and only 21% (n=29) perceive their physical facilities to be appealing.

Figure 4.12



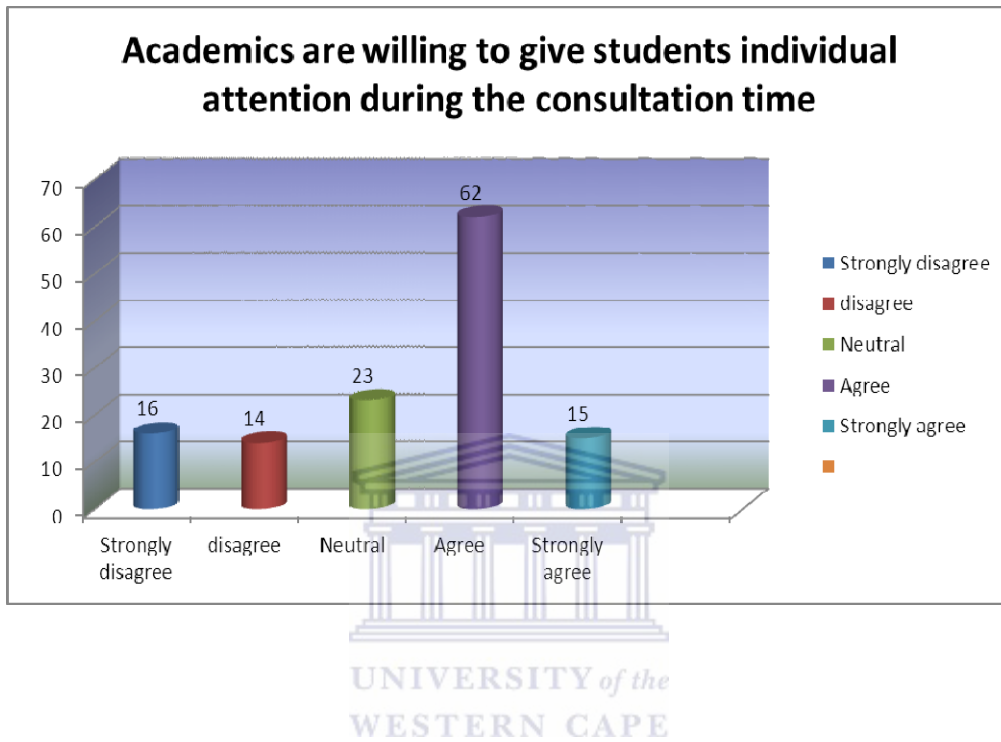
Fifty-nine percent (n=83) of the respondents report that they did not feel that services were performed right the first time. Only approximately 19% (n=26) of the students felt that services were delivered right the first time.

Figure 4.13



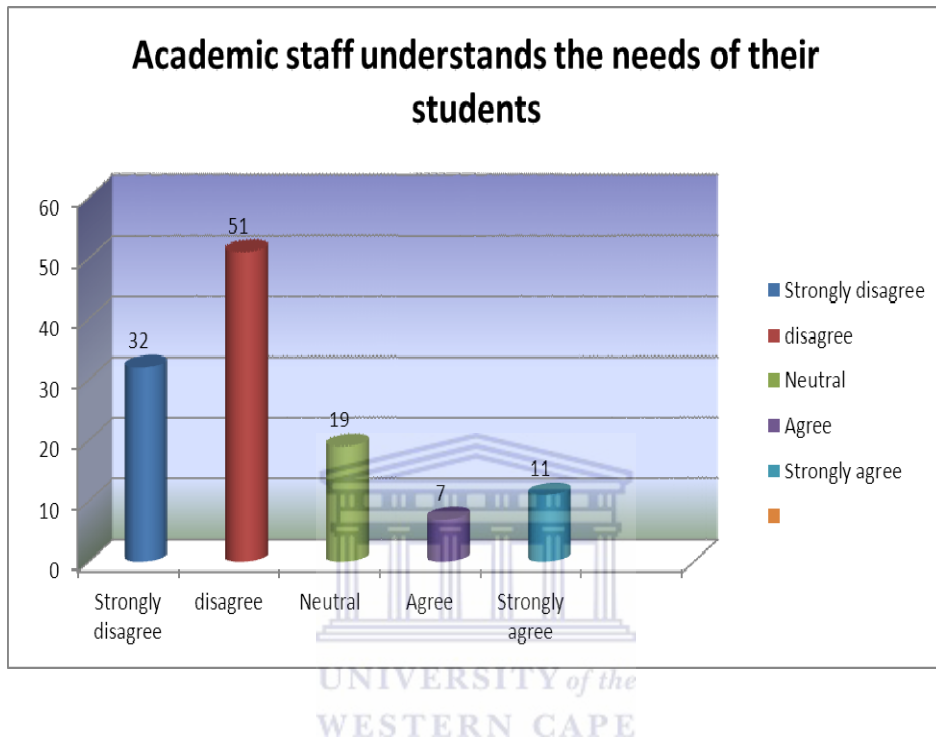
Almost 69% of the students that participated in the survey (n=94) indicated that administrative staff's delivery or implementation on promises did not always materialise in accordance with their promises.

Figure 4.14



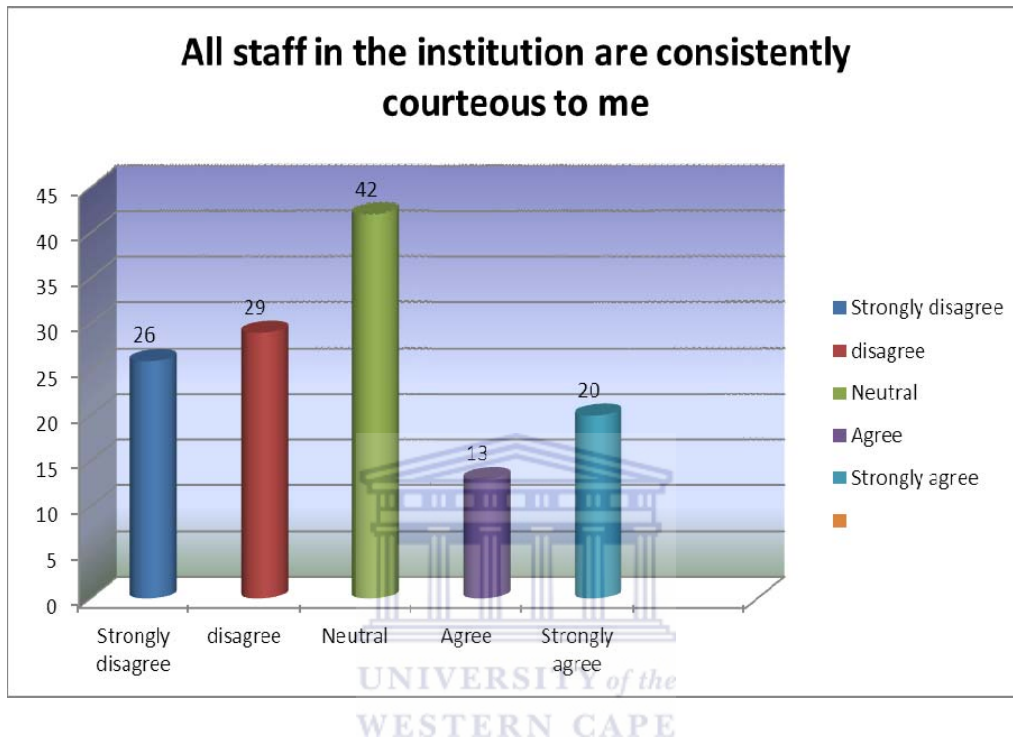
The majority of the students, that is 56% (n=77) reported that academics provided individualised attention during consultation.

Figure 4.15



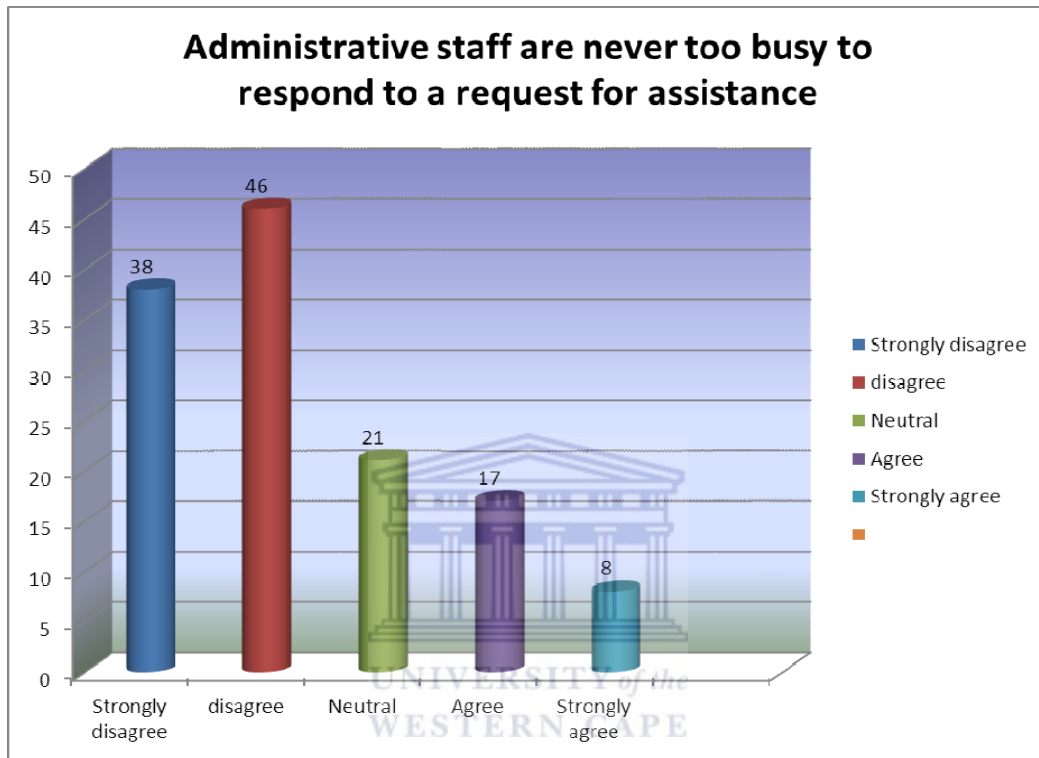
Of concern is the fact that approximately 61% (n=83) of students perceived academic staff not to be able to understand students' needs.

Figure 4.16



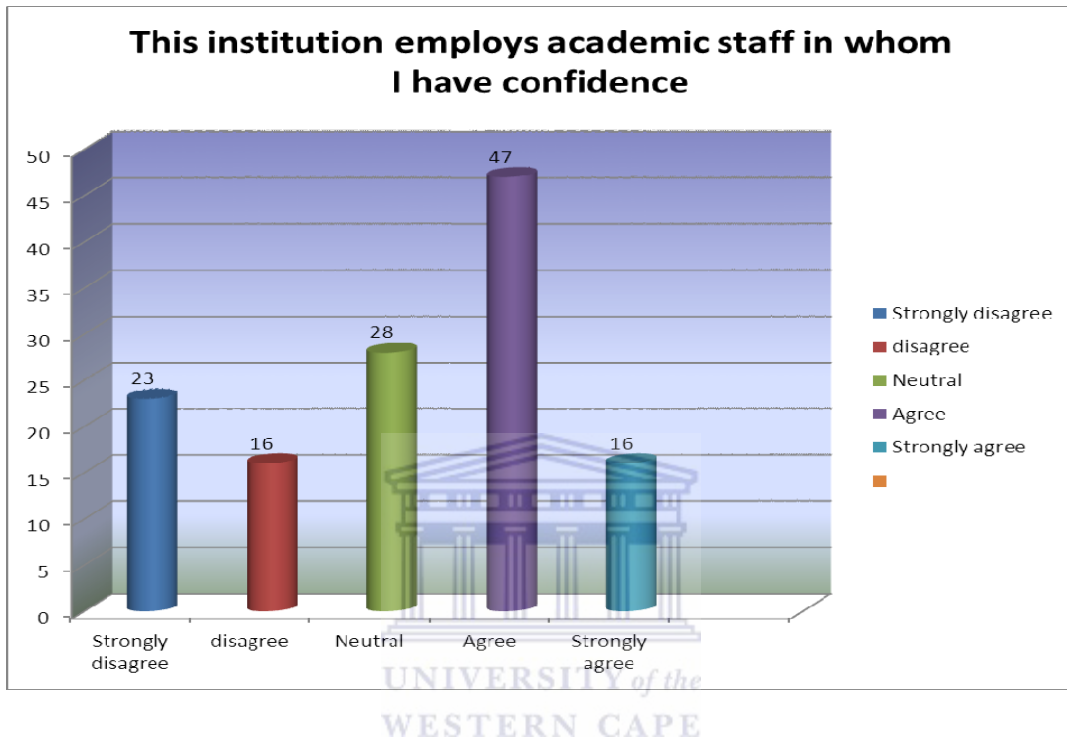
While 40% (n=55) of the students perceive staff as consistently courteous to them, 24% (n=33) report this was not the case. The remaining 42 students (31%) remained neutral.

Figure 4.17



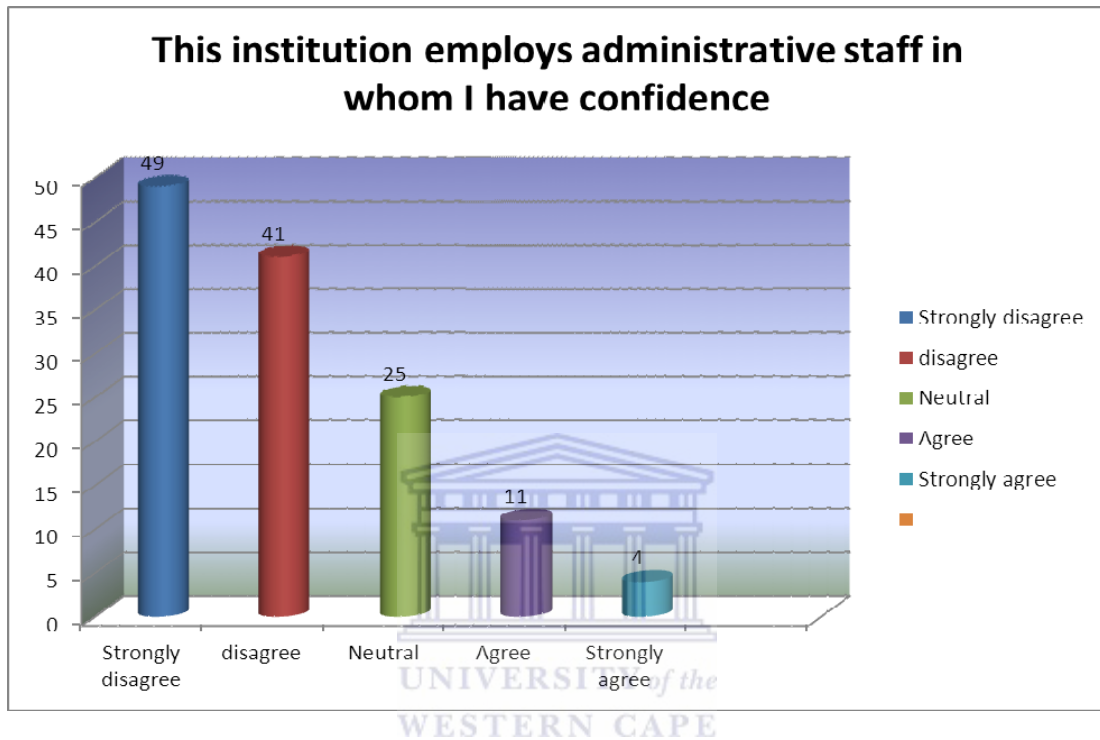
Approximately 61% (n=83) of students did not perceive administrative staff as being available to assist them due to how busy they are.

Figure 4.18



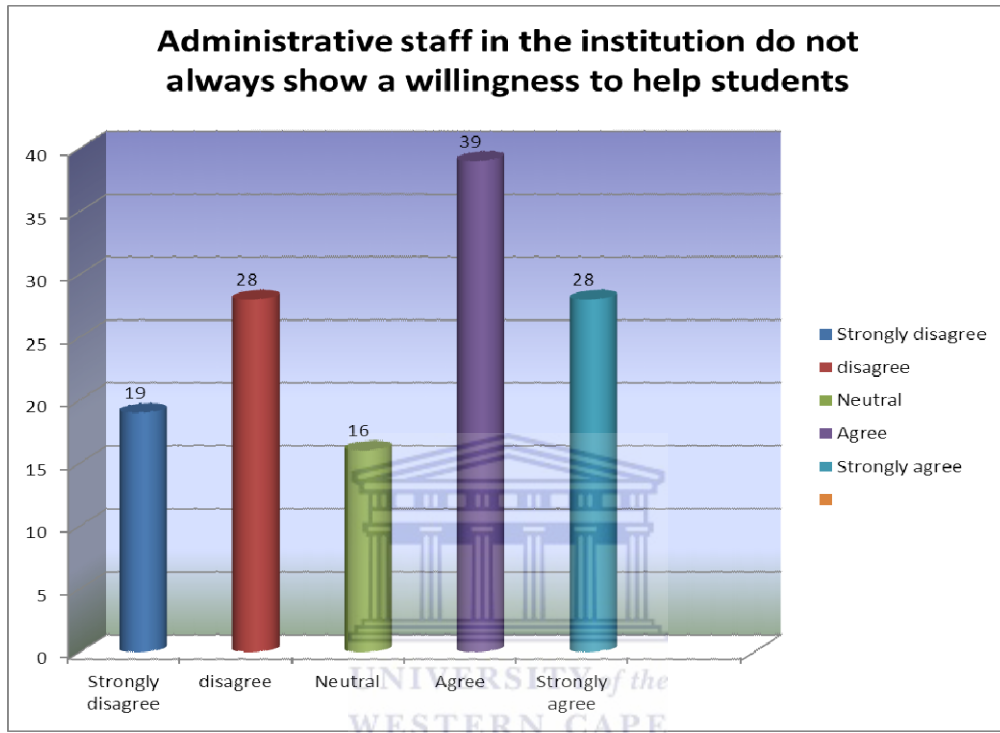
63 of the students agreed that they have faith in the academic staff members which the institution has employed.

Figure 4.19



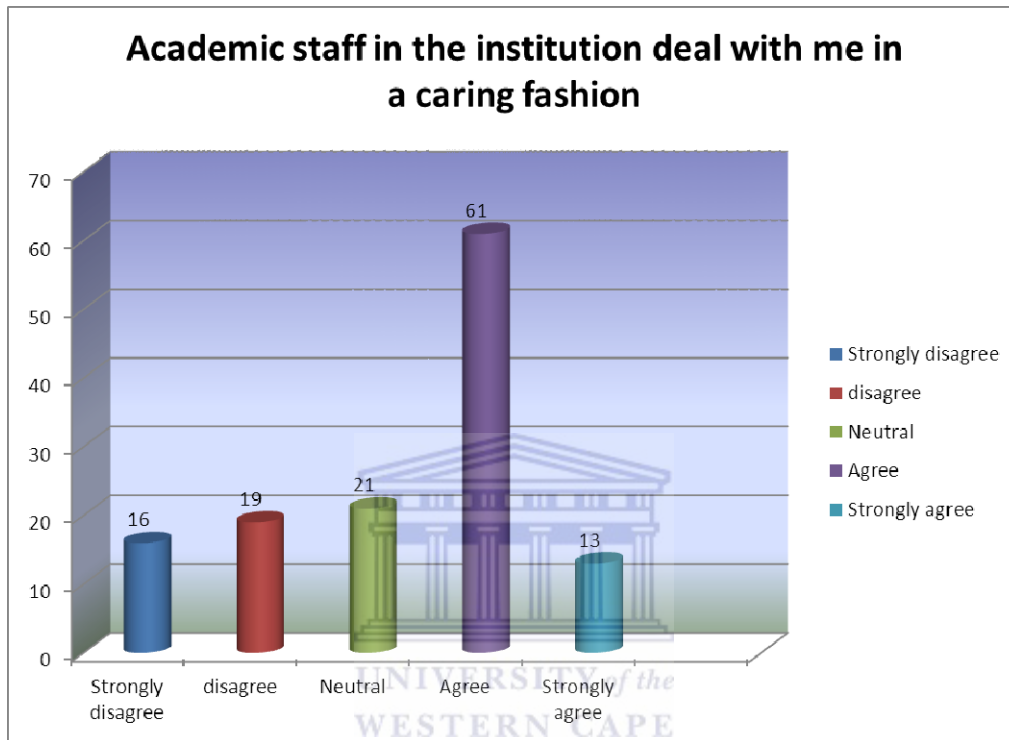
90 of the respondents did not have confidence in the administrative staff which the institutions has employed.

Figure 4.20



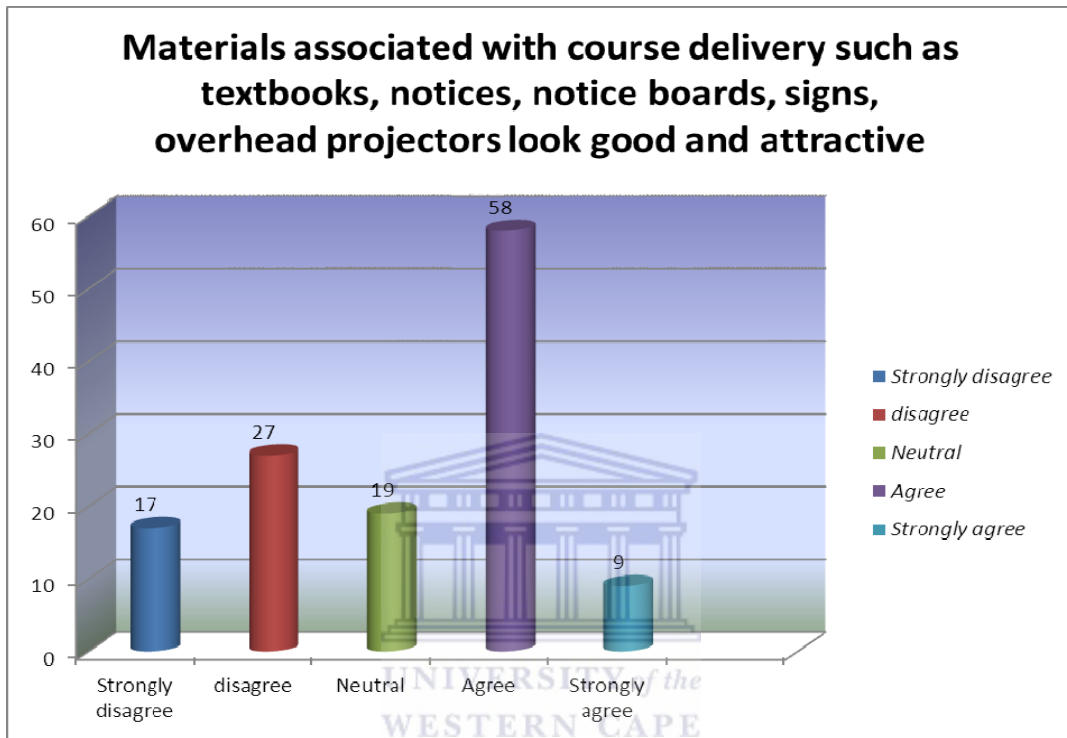
67 of the students perceived administrative staff as not always showing the willingness to assist them.

Figure 4.21



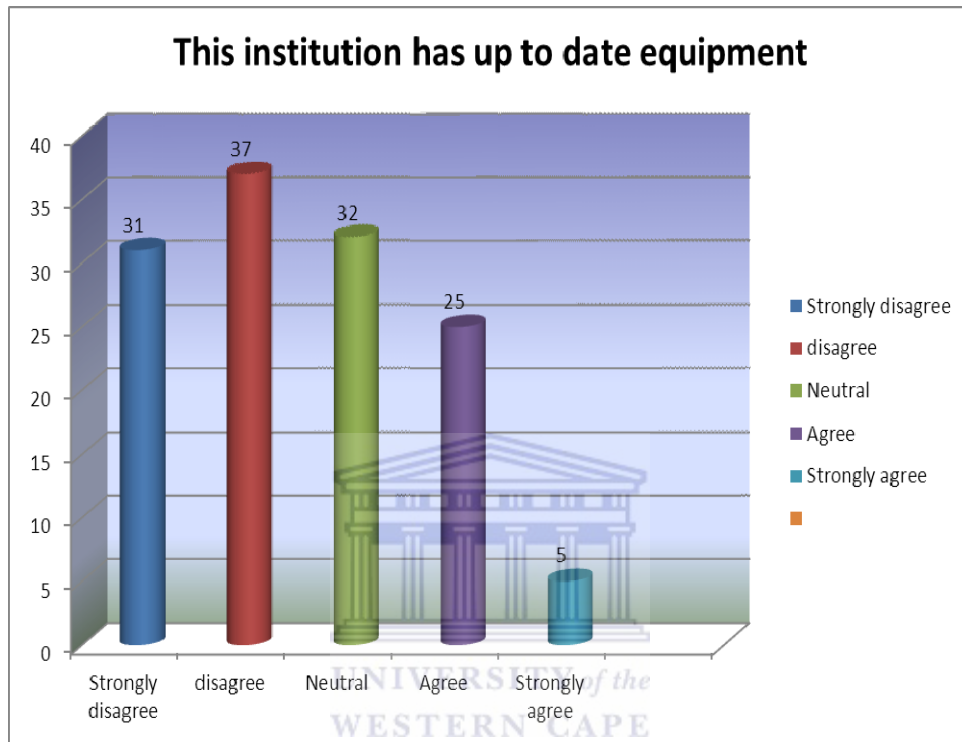
74 students perceived academic staff as dealing with them in a caring manner.

Figure 4.22



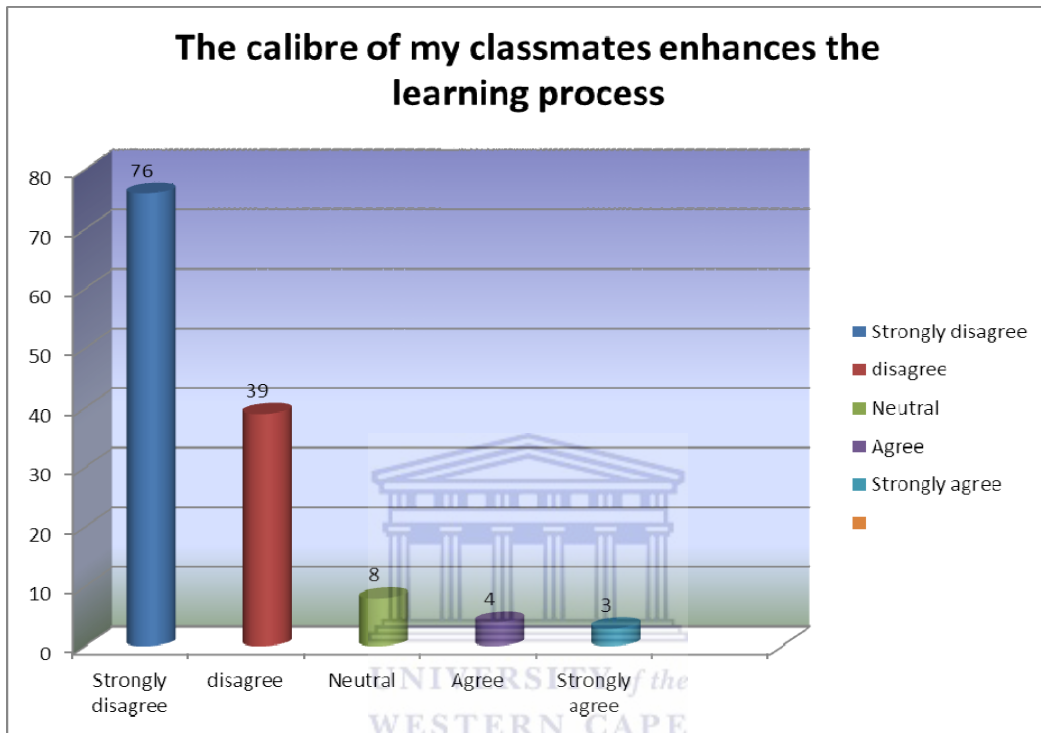
67 students perceived materials as being attractive.

Figure 4.23



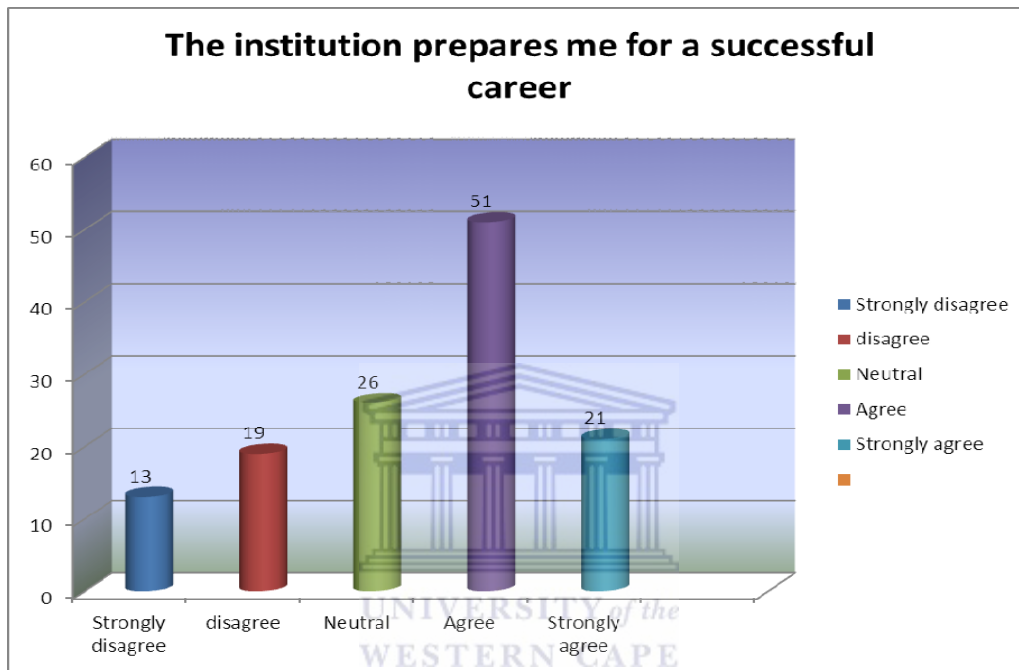
68 students felt that the institution does not have up-to-date equipment and facilities.

Figure 4.24



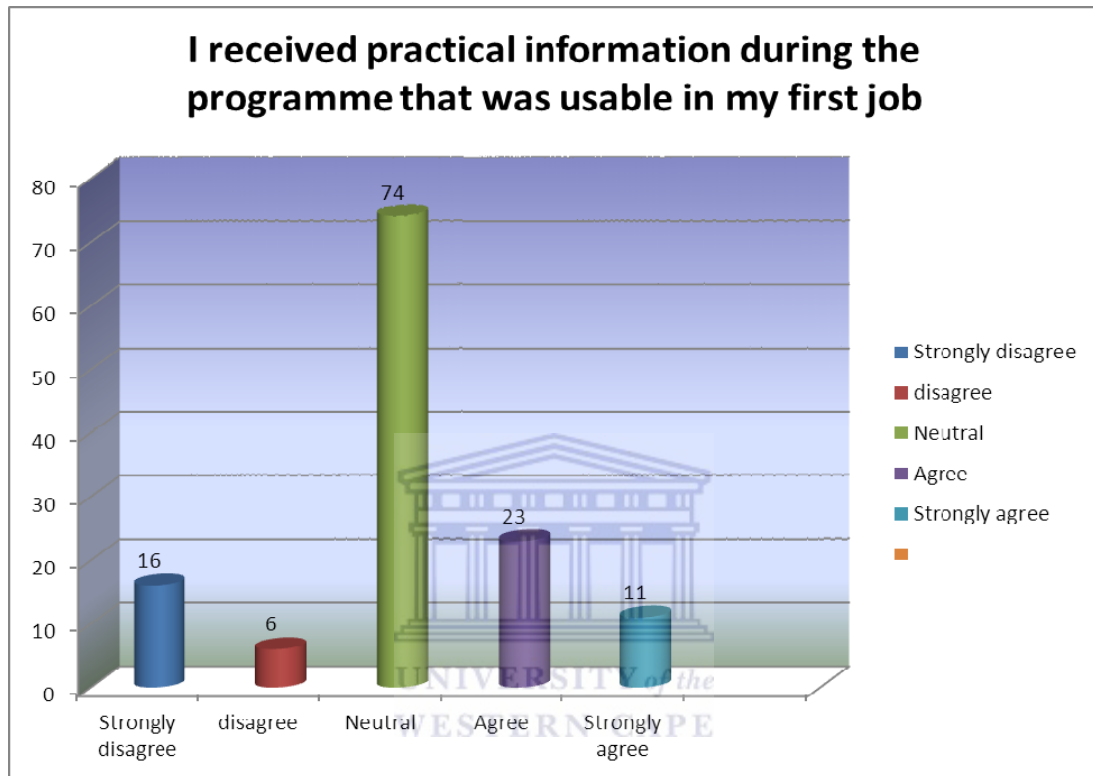
115 of the students did not feel that the calibre of their classmates enhances the learning process.

Figure 4.25



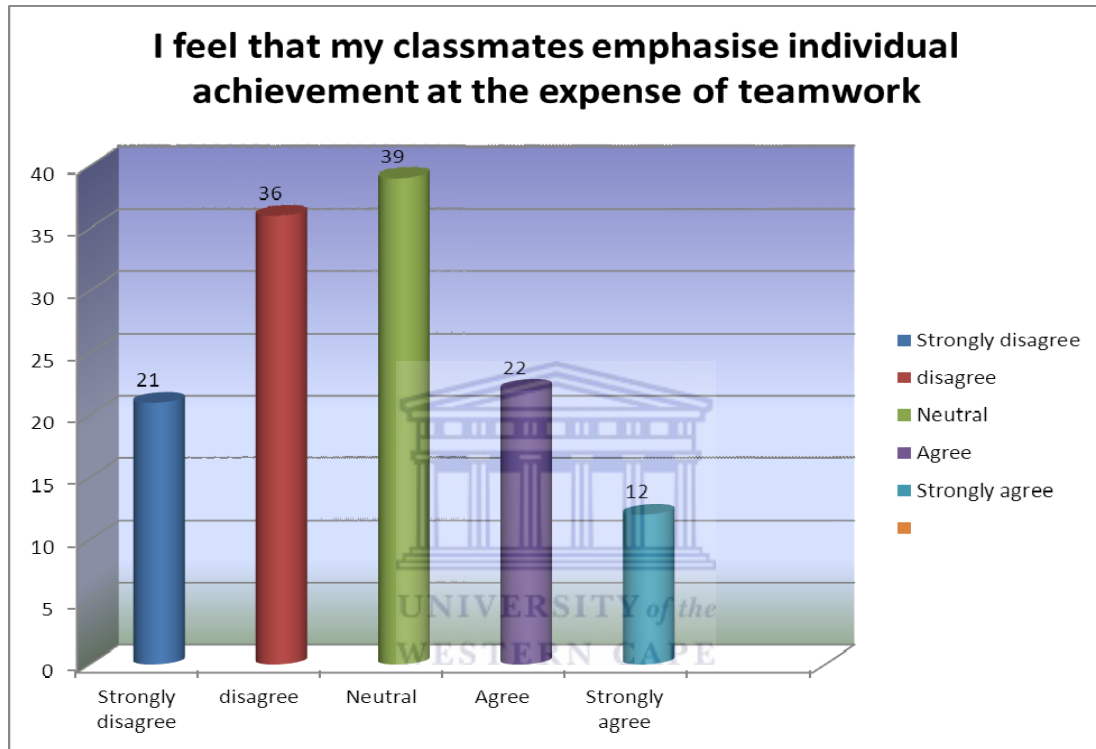
63 students indicated that the institution prepares them for a successful career.

Figure 4.26



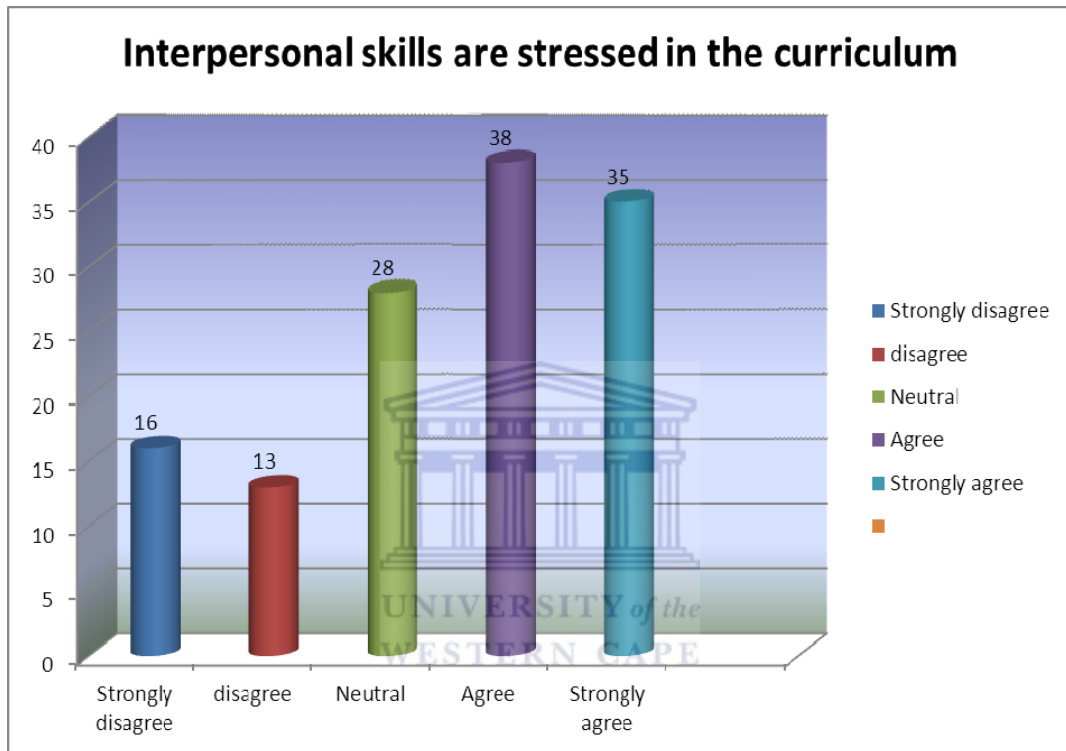
The majority of the respondents (n = 74) indicated that they received practical advice which could be useful in their first job.

Figure 4.27



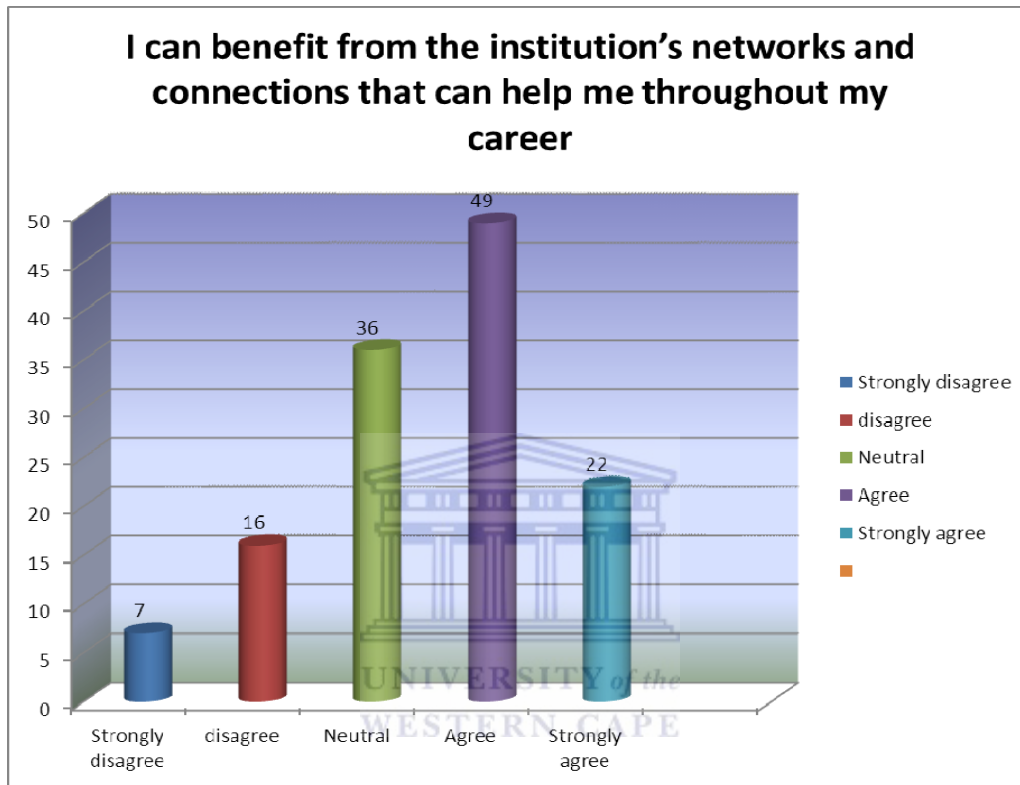
57 respondents indicated that class members did not emphasise individual achievements at the expense of team-work.

Figure 4.28



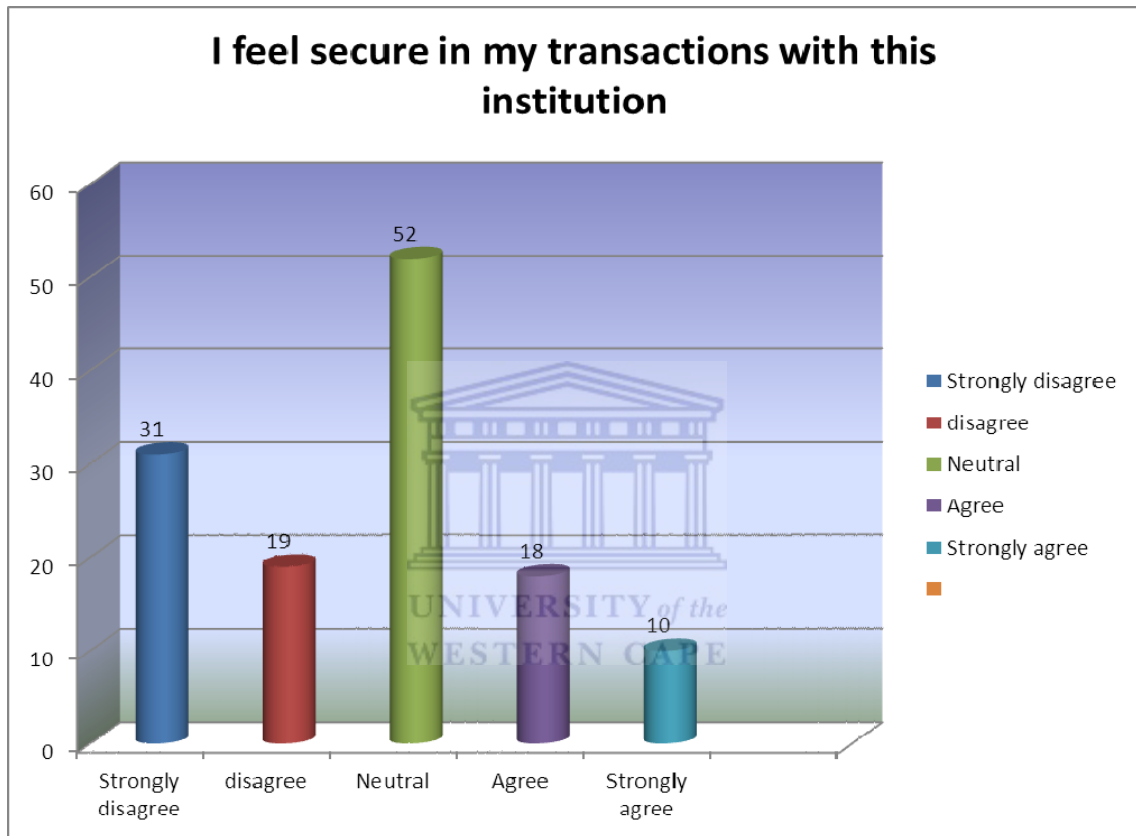
73 students indicated that interpersonal skills were not stressed as part of the curriculum.

Figure 4.29



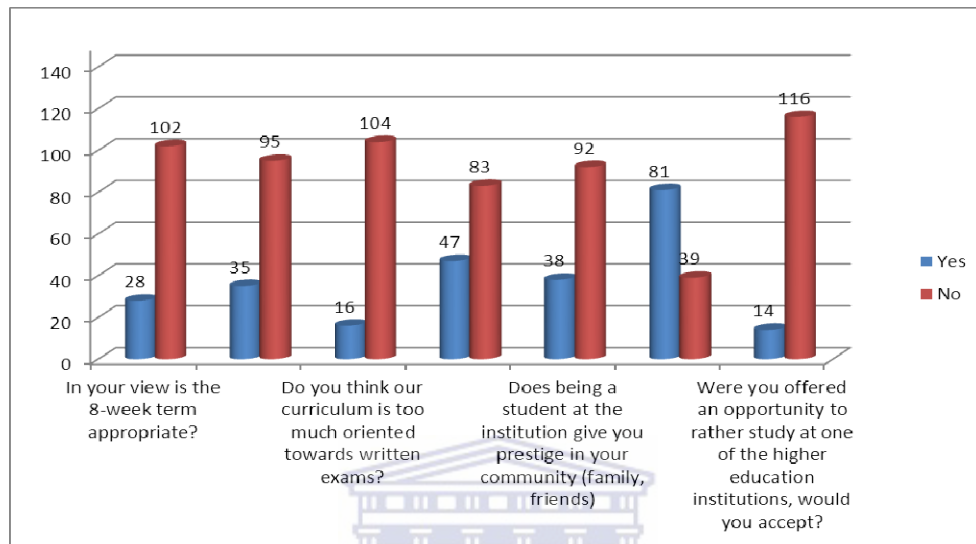
71 students felt that they could benefit from the institutions' networks and connections which could assist them in their future career.

Figure 4.30



52 students indicated that they were unsure if they feel secure in their transactions with the institution. 40 respondents disagreed and only 28 agreed.

Figure 4.31



When asked to indicate whether how they perceived certain aspects of the institution, students indicated the following:

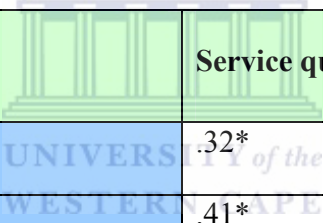
- Seventy-eight percent (78%) felt that the 8-week term is inappropriate.
- 73% felt that the work load is unfair for the 8-week term
- 80% felt that the curriculum is too oriented towards written examinations
- 64% agreed that oral examinations should not be included as an assessment tool.
- 71% regard being a student at the institution as giving them prestige in their community
- 62% are happy studying at the institution; and
- 89% indicated that, if they were offered an opportunity to rather study at one of the other higher education institutions, they would not accept.

4.3 INFERENCE STATISTICS

Hypothesis 1

There is a statistically significant relationship between service delivery and biographical variables.

Table 4.3 Pearson correlation between perceptions of service quality and biographical variables



	Service quality
Gender	.32*
Race	.41*
Year of study	.47**
Age	.29*
Home language	.24

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

Table 4.3 indicates the relationship between the respondents' biographical characteristics and service quality. The results indicate that the strongest relationship exists between

year of study and expectations of service quality ($r = 0.47, p < 0.01$). There are also significant relationships between race and perceptions of service quality ($r = .41, p < 0.01$), gender and service quality ($r = .32, p < 0.05$), age and service quality ($r = .29, p < 0.05$).

There was no significant correlation between home language and service quality ($r = .24, p > 0.05$). *Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.*

Hypothesis 2



There are significant differences in perceptions of service quality provided to students based on gender, race, year of study, age and home language.

Table 4.4 ANOVA: Biographical data and service quality

	Service quality	
	F	P
Gender	2.332	.034*
Race	1.762	.022*
Year of study	3.348	.008**
Age	4.316	.000**
Home language	1.342	.674

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

Table 4.4 indicates that there are statistically significant differences in service quality based on the biographical characteristics of the respondents. There was a significant difference in service quality based on gender ($p < 0.05$), race ($p < 0.05$), tenure ($p < 0.01$), age ($p < 0.01$) and job level ($p < 0.05$). There was no statistically significant difference in service quality based on home language, respectively ($p > 0.05$). **Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.**

Hypothesis 3

There are significant differences in the perceptions of service quality received by students with respect to the tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy respectively.

Table 4.5 ANOVA: Tangibles and Perceptions of Service Quality

Source	D.F.	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob
Between groups	5	89.96	14.99	3.26	0.01
Within groups	125	243.77	4.60		
Total	130	333.73			

From Table 4.5 it can be concluded there is a significant difference between tangibles and perceptions of service quality. The null hypothesis is hence rejected at the 0.05 level of significance.

Table 4.6 ANOVA: Reliability and Perceptions of Service Quality

Source	D.F.	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob
Between groups	5	402.23	67.04	2.70	0.02
Within groups	125	1316.35	24.84		
Total	130	1718.58			

From Table 4.6 it is evident there is a significant difference between the perceptions of service quality with respect to reliability. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 4.7 ANOVA: Empathy and Perceptions of Service Quality

Source	D.F.	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob
Between groups	5	79.08	13.18	3.33	0.01
Within groups	125	209.90	3.96		
Total	130	288.98			

Table 4.7 indicates there is a significant difference between the empathy and the perception of service quality. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Table 4.8 ANOVA: Assurance and Perceptions of Service Quality

Source	D.F.	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob
Between groups	5	674.11	112.35	1.77	0.12
Within groups	125	3372.07	63.62		
Total	130	4046.18			

The results in Table 4.8 indicate there is no significant difference in students' perceptions regarding assurance and service quality. This implies the null hypothesis is substantiated.

Table 4.9 ANOVA: Responsiveness and Service Quality

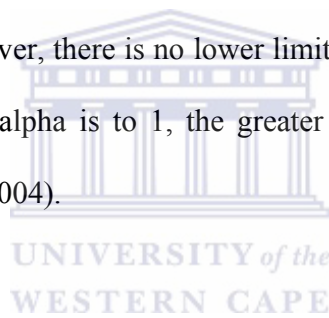
Source	D.F.	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob
Between groups	5	255.59	42.60	3.82	0.00
Within groups	125	590.34	11.14		
Total	150	845.93			

Table 4.9 indicates there is a significant difference in responsiveness in terms of service quality. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected at the 0.05 level of significance.

Table 4.10 Reliability of the Service delivery Questionnaire

Number of items	N	Cronbach
26	130	0.82

Cronbach's Alpha is viewed as an index of reliability associated with the variation accounted for by the true score of the underlying construct (Cronbach, 2004). It is argued that Alpha coefficients range in value from 0 to 1 and may be used to describe the reliability of factors extracted from dichotomous and or multi-point formatted questionnaires or scales. However, there is no lower limit to the coefficient, however, the closer Cronbach's coefficient alpha is to 1, the greater the internal consistency of the items of the scale (Cronbach, 2004).



The scores obtained for the service delivery questionnaire which was administered can be regarded as satisfactory in terms of the reliability of the instrument. George and Mallery (2003) argue that coefficients above 0.8 can be considered to be good indicators of the reliability of an instrument. As all coefficients were above 0.7, they can be regarded as acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

4.4 Summary of the chapter

This chapter objectively presented the results of the study using descriptive statistics to describe the results and inferential statistics to make inferences about characteristics of

the population based on the sample solicited to participate in the study. This enabled the researcher to identify significant relationships and differences between the variables in the study.

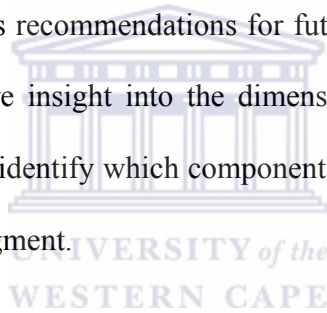


CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the most important findings of the research that was conducted. Furthermore the chapter includes conclusions that can be drawn from the research, limitations, as well as recommendations for future research. The main purpose of this study was to gain more insight into the dimensions that students could use to evaluate service quality and to identify which components of the service delivery process are most important in their judgment.



5.2 Descriptive Results

The mean score (Mean = 2.95) for tangibles indicates that student tend to show slightly below average satisfaction with the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials. The lack of reliability, that is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately was rated second lowest (Mean = 2.45). However, students perceived the responsiveness of the institution to be the most problematic with respect to service delivery (Mean = 2.33).

While students may have an expectation that their queries will be resolved efficiently and effectively, they did not experience a willingness on the part of staff to assist them and provide prompt service. They did, however, report a higher rating of the individualized attention that they received and rated empathy higher (Mean = 2.96) and perceived the dimension of assurance most positively (Mean = 3.28).

5.3 Inferential Statistics

5.3.1 Statistically significant relationship between service quality and biographical variables

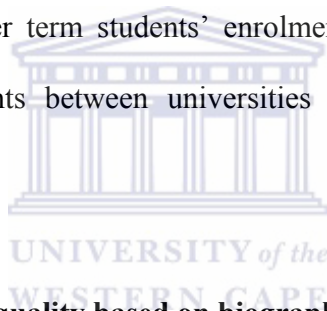
Hypothesis 1:



There is a statistically significant relationship between service quality and biographical variables.

The results which emanated from the current research indicate that the strongest relationship exists between year of study and expectations of service quality ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$). There are also significant relationships between race and perceptions of service quality ($r = .41$, $p < 0.01$), gender and service quality ($r = .32$, $p < 0.05$), age and service quality ($r = .29$, $p < 0.05$). There was no significant relationship between home language and service quality ($r = .24$, $p > 0.05$). **Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.**

A useful insight from the current study is that, the longer students stay at a university, the more tolerant they perhaps turn out to be, hence becoming less critical and more trusting in management as they start to appreciate the extent of some of the problems that management tackles and deals with. Another important finding is intention to leave, which is lower with increasing trust in management, perception of readiness for change and overall satisfaction with the university. Unlike the broader consumer market, however, students cannot easily change the supplier of their product by switching universities immediately, when they become unhappy with service delivery. While this may be a safety valve for the management of higher education in the short term, the likelihood is that in the longer term students' enrolment may drop or perhaps in the future, the transfer of students between universities may become more prominent (Gbadamosi & de Jager, 2009).



5.3.2 Differences in service quality based on biographical variables

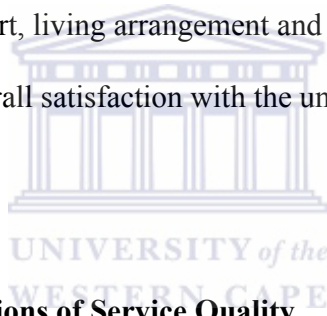
Hypothesis 2:

There are significant differences in the quality of service provided to students based on gender, race, year of study, age and home language.

Table 4.4 indicates that there are statistically significant differences in service quality based on the biographical characteristics of the respondents. There was a significant difference in service quality based on gender ($p < 0.05$), race ($p < 0.05$), tenure ($p <$

0.01), age ($p < 0.01$) and job level ($p < 0.05$). There was no statistically significant difference in service quality based on home language, respectively ($p > 0.05$). **Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.**

A study by Gbadamosi and de Jager, 2009) examined differences between two universities used as case studies as well as gender differences in addition to other key issues discussed above. Results indicated differences in both universities and gender but the differences did not manifest in variables that were more critical to the research. Nevertheless, it is interesting that perceptions of readiness for change, intention to leave, trust in management and support, living arrangement and academic performance emerged as significant predictors of overall satisfaction with the university, explaining up to 30 per cent of the variance.



5.3.3 Differences in Perceptions of Service Quality

Hypothesis 3:

There are significant differences in the perceptions of service quality received by students with respect to the tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy respectively.

The results emanating from the research indicate that there is a significant difference between tangibles, reliability (the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), empathy, responsiveness and perceptions of service quality ($p < 0.05$). The

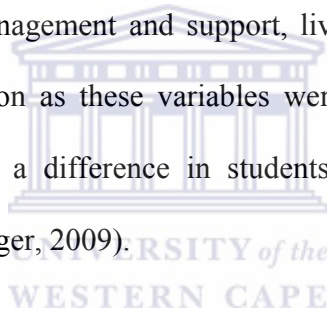
null hypothesis is hence rejected at the 0.05 level of significance. However, there was no statistically significant difference in assurance and perceptions of service quality ($p > 0.05$).

The results from the study by Gbadamosi and de Jager (2009) revealed that the students' perceived experience is significantly lower than their considered importance of service delivery at their universities. Particular areas of highest concerns for the students lie in problems with registration which is linked with reported poor support from administrative staff. Timing of registration, use of temporary support staff at peak registration period, and pre-registration training for administrative staff may be useful remedies that the university management may consider. Similarly, securing available scholarships and support fees, and computer facilities are other sources of students' concern. These are important funding related issues and may need to be examined from more visible university-private sector participation for maximum benefit to the overall higher educational system. Equally interesting is the finding that issues such as an attractive campus, social activities/night life, student population and attracting foreign students were the lowest in terms of importance-experience gap to the students (Gbadamosi & de Jager, 2009).

According to the research by Gbadamosi and de Jager (2009), one of the questions prompted by these findings is how ready the higher education sector in South Africa are for the required changes and can the management of higher education drive the change? The same question is however apt elsewhere because higher education is expected to be

changing according to its environment which is dynamic and always changing. Universities and funding sources must be able to meet and collaborate on the issues that are most relevant to the world as it operates (Freeman & Thomas, 2005).

There are a number of other practical implications from the above findings and discussion. Education has long been recognised as the means to achieve change, create new ideas, and initiate new practices that move a country towards increasing prosperity (Wheatley, 2001). Given these findings, there is need for management of higher education in South Africa to ‘flag’ variables such as perceptions of readiness for change, intention to leave, trust in management and support, living arrangement and academic performance for closer attention as these variables were linked with those that could ensure that universities make a difference in students’ overall satisfaction with the university (Gbadamosi & de Jager, 2009).

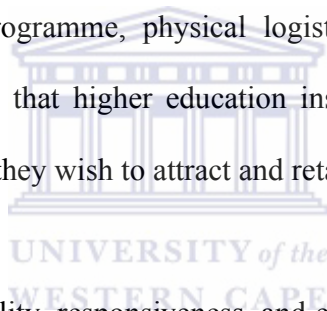


5.4 DISCUSSION

Despite two decades of study and much lively debate, conceptual work on service quality can best be described as divergent. At the core of the debate are two competing perspectives, termed the Nordic and American schools (Asubonteng, McCleary, & Swan, 1996; Lam & Woo, 1997; Mels, Boshoff, & Nel, 1997). The point of contention is that the former defines service quality using overall categorical terms, whereas the latter uses descriptive terms. Both perspectives highlight important aspects of service quality, but neither fully captures the construct.

There is evidence that customers form service quality perceptions on the basis of their evaluations of three primary dimensions: outcome, interaction, and environmental quality. The first two are adapted from the Nordic school, in particular Gronroos's (1982, 1984) seminal idea that service quality is assessed according to customer evaluations of outcomes as well as interactions with service employees. The third primary dimension reflects the influence of the service environment on quality perceptions.

Saunders (2005) reports that seven factors that influence service quality in higher education, namely: quality of lecturers, lecturing arrangements, support systems, support facilities, manageability of programme, physical logistics and intellectual value. He maintains that it is imperative that higher education institutions need to focus quality delivery on all seven factors if they wish to attract and retain good students.



Results indicate that the reliability, responsiveness, and empathy of service providers are important to the provision of superior service quality, as is suggested by the American school (Parasuraman, et al., 1985; 1988). It is argued that these are modifiers of the sub-dimensions, as opposed to direct determinants. The implication is that they represent how each sub-dimension is evaluated (reliable or not, responsive or not, and so on), whereas the sub-dimensions answer the question as to what about the service should be reliable, responsive, and empathetic. This is of particular significance since a high level of service quality is associated with several key organizational outcomes, including high market share (Buzzell & Gale, 1987), improved profitability relative to competitors (Kearns &

Nadler, 1992), enhanced customer loyalty, the realization of a competitive price premium, and an increased probability of purchase (Zeithaml, et al., 1996).

Universities are educating those who will create and shape the future world as well as inform today's world. This makes the role of education crucial in today's rapidly evolving environment. Within this role, universities have a responsibility to many, including the students who are educated in this environment (Freeman & Thomas, 2005 in Gbadamosi & de Jager, 2009). From a marketing perspective, students' perceptions and satisfaction are thus important in the service delivery that affects them. Overall, the findings of this study identify some of the variables that contribute to high service quality in higher education and predict overall satisfaction with the university.

According to Johnston (1995), an underlying assumption is that critical incidents during a service lead to a feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. It is possible that the sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are indeed things other than critical incidents. It could be that a service process that is provided just below the satisfaction threshold, giving no critical incidents and thus never crossing this threshold, could lead to an overall feeling of satisfaction. It could be that an overall feeling of satisfaction could have little to do with the service process itself or expectations of it, but in fact be a function of the customer's personal disposition on entering the system.

5.5 LIMITATIONS

This study used quantitative data only. Using a mixed-methodological approach would have allowed both quantitative data (surveys) and qualitative data (focus groups, interviews) to be collected and analysed. The qualitative data would have complimented the quantitative data and allowed a more in-depth analysis of the issues under consideration (Denscombe, 2002). Philip and Hazlett (2001) reported that the evaluation of service quality should not be made solely on fixed-choice questions but that customers should also be provided with the opportunity to comment on all aspects of the service they received. In order to assist in the implementation of changes, focus groups of stakeholders (staff, student, industry representatives) could be set-up.

One of the primary limitations of this study relates to the fact that only immediate users, that is students' perceptions were sampled. Creating a favourable impression on students and on various stakeholder groups such as prospective employers, government and research agencies, alumni, individuals and organisations, which have vested interests in the institution, should be a key objective of management. Future surveys should sample these stakeholders' views as an important extension of management's view of the quality of their service.

Another important limitation pertains to the survey instruments such as SERVPERF and SERVQUAL which were developed in cultural settings different from the African context. Accordingly, there is a need to revisit each of the dimensions used in this survey

and compare its continued relevance in more current literature. This should also lead to future appraisal of each item within the dimensions so as to ensure that the factors which make up the service quality construct have a sufficient number of items that allows for valid and reliable analysis. The number of items (questions) in the tangibles and particularly empathy dimensions were low and will likely require more items in order to improve measurability for future research. Careful item analyses needs to be done in order to remove items which do not really discriminate on the construct it purports to measure.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

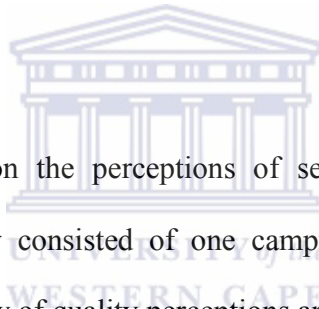


There is a need to expand this study to other support units and to determine the suitability of the generic evaluation criteria indicated and the development of further specific criteria in such instances. There is a need for higher education institutions to implement self-evaluation in support units and to monitor the improvement plans developed as a result on a regular basis. It is important for quality and support staff to be trained in implementing plans and evaluating their outcomes against the suggested criteria.

Moreover, future research could model the dynamics of service quality attributes over time, using a longitudinal research design so as to eliminate any interpersonal bias in the results. Nevertheless, a longitudinal design could introduce a number of disadvantages to

the research design, such as the need to control for exogenous service factors that could include any major shift in the service process.

In addition, regular presentation of the findings should serve as a basis for discussion in the department in order to begin to cultivate a culture of service quality. In order for surveys such as these to be meaningful it should be periodically administered so as to track performance and to determine whether changes made have been successful in improving quality. Accordingly, the results could be used to facilitate discussion within focus groups with students which could lead to a further refinement of the service quality determinants.



This research only focused on the perceptions of service quality of students. The convenience sample also only consisted of one campus, while time constraints also limited the study to a static view of quality perceptions and prohibited a longitudinal view of changing perceptions over time.

Sappington (2005) presents a cogent argument by suggesting that ideal regulations vary according to the information that is available to the relevant parties, including the regulator, the service quality suppliers, and consumers. Ideal service quality regulations also vary according to consumer preferences, the extent and nature of industry competition. A corollary of this conclusion is that the design of service quality regulation is not straightforward even when realized service quality is readily observed by regulators and consumers alike (Sappington, 2005). Empirical research might analyze the efficacy

of service quality regulations that are commonly practiced, for example. Such analysis could help to identify the elements of regulatory policies that are best able to avoid serious service quality problems in practice.

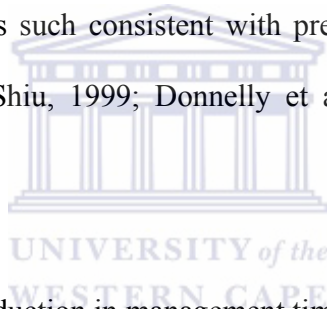
There are several implications for further research. Although there have been useful attempts to understand the relationships between service quality and expectations, satisfaction, and service value, additional work is required. However, questions remain as to whether customer perceptions of the quality of interactions, the service environment, or outcomes dominate overall service quality perceptions, as well as such issues as customer willingness to revisit or offer positive word-of-mouth endorsements.

Tait and de Jager (2009) report that image and marketing are critical components which influence the academic reputation of the institution and the academic reputation of an institution. In addition, the reputation of the lecturers could influence propensity to study at an institution. There is increasing pressure by students on Higher Education institutions to provide for a wide variety of study areas in order to make provision for employment in a diversified labour market.

The implications of the results presented highlight the obvious importance of both service quality and consumer satisfaction in the management of service organizations such as education institutions. While the provision of high quality services is undeniably a proper and important part of the strategic efforts that can be employed to enhance the satisfaction of customers, it is clearly not the only means of increasing consumers'

satisfaction with a service provider. Managers, therefore, need to consider all of the possible determinants of the satisfaction of their current and potential customers, and attempt to determine which of these will have the greatest positive influence on the future purchasing plans of these individuals (Tait & de Jager, 2009).

Parasuraman et al.(1988) reported that in the private sector customers mostly want Reliability. Zeithaml et al. (1990) explained that customers were consistent in ranking the service quality attributes; Reliability was usually the most important dimension and Tangibles the least important. This study also observed that Reliability is the most important dimension, and is as such consistent with previous studies performed in the public sector (Donnelly and Shiu, 1999; Donnelly et al., 1995; Brysland and Curry, 2001).

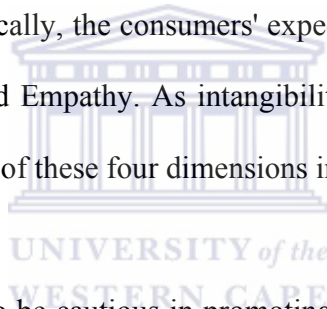


Reliability should result in a reduction in management time spent dealing with complaints and justifying service levels to senior management. However, it is important not to rush into redefining business processes to improve service quality, but to concentrate on a continual slow effort (Iacobucci et al., 1994). Service quality gap scores were found to be negative in all dimensions of service, with high perception scores in all areas being matched with even higher expectations.

Reliability seems to be one of the most important factors influencing students' perceptions of service quality. This implies that the institution needs to invest in monitoring employees in order to make a trustworthy impression on the customers, both

in the case of the general service encounter, as well as in the handling of customer complaints. Employees should strive to find out what customers expect in terms of accuracy, expertise, complaint handling and proactive suggestions which implies that an extensive and continuous training programme be considered (Tait & de Jager, 2009).

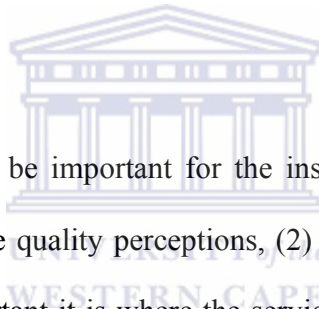
These research results suggest a need to better understand the effects of intangibility on consumers' expectations for service quality. This research considers the characteristic of tangibility as a key factor affecting consumer service quality expectations. It recognizes the importance of tangibility as a classifying criteria of services without adding multiple alternative dimensions. Specifically, the consumers' expectations increase for Reliability, Assurance, Responsiveness and Empathy. As intangibility increases, we also know that the relative importance of each of these four dimensions increases.



However, organisations need to be cautious in promoting their reliability. Overstating or exaggerating claims concerning reliability can have the effect of raising consumer expectations. Businesses should work on being reliable first, then work on letting the consumers know about it. Insuring reliability means a management commitment to service quality. It would appear that increasing the number of satisfying experiences is a relatively easy and self-supporting recipe for success. There is a need to engender a helpful, caring, friendly and committed approach in staff. Additional satisfaction can also be gained by providing the service more quickly than expected. Responsiveness has been shown to be an important factor, supporting previous work by, for example, Berry *et al.* (1985), Bitner *et al.* (1990) and Avkiran (1994). This would suggest that an effort to

increase the speed of processing information and customers is likely to have an important and positive effect on customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, it is suggested that it is more important to ensure that these dissatisfiers are dealt with before the satisfiers. Having polite and courteous staff is little consolation for a customer who feels highly dissatisfied because of an integrity- or security-type error, for example. More straightforward areas which would have a positive though not as great impact on satisfaction are flexibility, friendliness, courtesy, communication and competence. These are areas where well-designed routines and responses could be used to gain maximum impact.



In the final analysis, it would be important for the institution to focus on three basic issues: (1) what defines service quality perceptions, (2) how service quality perceptions are formed, and (3) how important it is where the service experience takes place. These three factors require managerial attention in efforts to improve consumer perceptions of service quality.

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APPENDICES
UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

Appendix 1: Cover Letter

Dear Student

I am a Masters Student at the University of the Western Cape, *and* conducting research for my thesis on: “An investigation of students’ perceptions and expectations of service delivery and service quality at an institution for Higher Education and Training within the Provincial Government Western Cape.”

Service quality is a critical issue when evaluating standards within the public service. The attached questionnaire contains questions about different aspects of service quality and service delivery. The research is aimed at developing how the institution can improve services to their students. The content of this study is for academic purposes and is endorsed by the University of the Western Cape.

It would be appreciated if you could allocate approximately 20 minutes of your time to complete these questionnaires. Your answers are strictly anonymous. Even if you have not personally been in contact with the various services, please tick the number you feel would apply.

I would like to thank you in advance for participating in this research.

Yours sincerely

Kim-Lee Wentzel

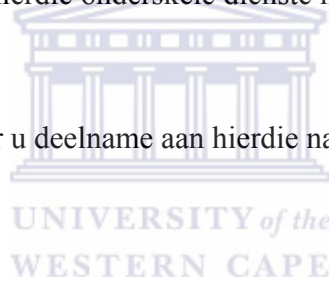
Beste Student

Ek is 'n Meestersgraad student aan die Universiteit van die Wes-Kaap, en is besig met navorsing vir my tesis: 'n Onderzoek van studente se persepsie en verwagtinge van dienslewering en dienskwaliteit by instansie van Hoër Opleiding en Onderrig in die Provinsiale Regering: Wes-Kaap.”

Dienskwaliteit is 'n kritiese aangeleentheid wanneer standarde in die Staatsdiens geëvalueer word. Die aangehegte vraelys behels vrae oor die verskillende aspekte van dienslewering en dienskwaliteit. Die navorsing is gerig op die ontwikkeling van hoe die instansie dienste kan verbeter aan hul studente. Die inhoud van hierdie studie is vir akademiese gebruik alleenlik en is gemagtig deur die Universiteit van die Wes-Kaap.

Dit sal waardeer word indien u ongeveer 20 minute van u tyd kan gebruik, om hierdie vraelys te voltooi. U antwoorde sal as streng anoniem hanteer word. Indien u nie persoonlik in kontak was met hierdie onderskeie dienste nie, merk asb. die nommer wat u voel sal toepaslik wees.

Ek wil u byvoorbaat bedank vir u deelname aan hierdie navorsing.



Vriendelike groete

Kim-Lee Wentzel

Appendix 2:

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA QUESTIONNAIRE

Please indicate your choice with a tick [✓] against the responses for the following information.

GENDER

Male	Female
1	2

AGE

RACE

Black	White	Coloured	Indian	Other
1	2	3	4	4

LANGUAGE

English	Afrikaans	isiXhosa	Other
1	2	3	4

YEAR OF STUDY

1st	2nd	3rd	Other
1	2	3	4

COURSE OF STUDY

Appendix 3:

BIOGRAFIESE DATA VRAELYS

Dui asseblief u keuse met 'n regmerkie [√] teenoor die gekose inligting.

GESLAG

Manlik	Vroulik
1	2

OUERDOM

RAS

Swart	Wit	Kleurling	Indiër	Ander
1	2	3	4	4

TAAL

Engels	Afrikaans	isiXhosa	Ander
1	2	3	4

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

STUDIE JAAR

1^{ste}	2^{de}	3^{de}	Ander
1	2	3	4

STUDIE KURSUS

Appendix 4:

SERVQUAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete the following questionnaire. Your sincere response will be used to improve the services within the institution. / Voltooi asseblief hierdie vraelys. U eerlike antwoord sal meewerk om die diens binne die instansie te verbeter.

Please note/important, this is an anonymous survey ensure that you do not put your name and student number onto the questionnaire. / Let wel: Hierdie vraelys word anoniem ingevul.

Read each of the statements below. / Lees elkeen van die stellings hieronder.

Circle 5 if you strongly agree with the statement. Circle 1 if you strongly disagree. If your feelings are not strong, please circle a number between 1 and 5. There are no right or wrong answers. / Merk 5 as u heelhartig saamstem met die stelling. Merk 1 as u sterk verskil. Indien u nie so sterk voel oor die stelling nie, merk die getalle tussen 2 en 4. Daar is geen regte of verkeerde antwoord nie.

Only one questionnaire must be completed. / Voltooi slegs een vraelys.

- 1 = Strongly disagree / Verskil sterk
- 2 = Disagree / Verskil
- 3 = Neutral / Neutraal
- 4 = Agree / Stem saam
- 5 = Strongly agree / Stem heelhartig saam

Nr.	Statement / Stelling					
1	This institution provides its services within the time one might reasonably expect. / Hierdie opleidingsinstansie lewer dienste binne verwagte tydsraamwerke.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Queries within the institution are dealt with efficiently and promptly. / Navrae binne die instansie word onmiddellik en effektief hanteer.	1	2	3	4	5

3	When I have a problem, administrative staff in the institution show a sincere interest in solving it. / Wanneer ek 'n probleem ondervind, toon die administratiewe personeel opregte belangstelling om dit op te los.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Academic staff in the institution have the knowledge to answer my questions relating to courses offered. / Akademiese personeel beskik oor die nodige kennis om my vrae in verband met kursusse wat aangebied word, te beantwoord.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Administration keeps accurate records. / Administratiewe personeel hou noukeurig rekord.	1	2	3	4	5
6	The physical facilities are visually appealing. (i.e. building and surroundings). / Die fisiese fasiliteite is visueel/esteties aantreklik. (d.w.s. geboue en die ligging).	1	2	3	4	5
7	Services in the institution are performed right the first time. / Dienste gelewer in/deur die instansie word die eerste keer reg uitgevoer.	1	2	3	4	5
8	When the administrative staff in the institution promise to do something by a certain time they do so. / Wanneer die administratiewe personeel onderneem om iets binne 'n sekere tyd te doen, doen hulle hul belofte gestand.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Academics are willing to give students individual attention during their consultation time. / Akademiese personeel is bereid om hul volle aandag aan studente te verleen gedurende individuele konsultasies.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Academic staff understands the needs of their students. / Akademiese personeel het begrip vir die behoeftes van hul studente.	1	2	3	4	5

11	All staff in the institution are consistently courteous to me. / Alle personeellede van die instansie behandel my deurlopend met hoflikheid.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Administrative staff are never too busy to respond to a request for assistance. / Administratiewe personeel is nooit te besig om op n versoek om ondersteuning te reageer nie.	1	2	3	4	5
13	This institution employs academic staff in whom I have confidence. / Hierdie instansie stel akademiese personeel aan wat my vertrou inboesem.	1	2	3	4	5
14	This institution employs administrative staff in whom I have confidence. / Hierdie instansie stel administratiewe personeel aan wat my vertrou inboesem.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Academic staff in the institution do not always show a willingness to help students. / Akademiese personeel van die instansie toon nie altyd bereidwilligheid om studente te help nie.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Administrative staff in the institution do not always show a willingness to help students. / Administratiewe personeel van die instansie toon nie altyd bereidwilligheid om studente te help nie.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Academic staff in the institution deals with me in a caring fashion. / Akademiese personeel van die instansie behandel my met sorg.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Materials associated with course delivery such as textbooks, notices, notice boards, signs, overhead projectors) look good and attractive. / Kursusbenodigdhede wat ge-assosieer word met die kursusaanbieding (bv. handboeke, uitdeelstukke, kennisgewings, kennisgewingsborde, tekens sowel as oorhoofse projektors vertoon goed en professioneel.	1	2	3	4	5

19	This institution has up-to-date equipment. / Hierdie instansie beskik oor moderne toerusting.	1	2	3	4	5
20	The calibre of my classmates enhance the learning process. / Die kaliber mede-studente versterk my leer-proses.	1	2	3	4	5
21	The institution prepares me for a successful career. / Die instansie berei my voor op 'n suksesvolle loopbaan.	1	2	3	4	5
22	I received practical information during the programme that was usable in my first job. / Ek het praktiese inligting gerurende die opleidingsprogram ontvang wat bruikbaar was in my eerste pos.	1	2	3	4	5
23	I feel that my classmates emphasize individual achievement at the expense of teamwork. / Ek voel my klasmaats heg soveel waarde aan individuele prestasie dat spanwerk benadeel word.	1	2	3	4	5
24	Interpersonal skills are stressed in the curriculum. / Interpersoonlike vaardighede word beklemtoon in die kurrikulum.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I can benefit from the institution's networks and connections that can help me throughout my career. / Ek kan baatvind by die instansie se netwerke en verbintnisse regdeur my loopbaan.	1	2	3	4	5
26	I feel secure in my transactions with this institution. / Ek voel gemaklik met my interaksie met die instansie.	1	2	3	4	5

Tick either "Yes" or "No" for the following / Merk "Ja" of "Nee" tov die volgende stellings:

Nr	Statement / Stelling		
27	In your view is the eight-week term appropriate? / In jou opinie, is die agt-week kwartaal voldoende?	Yes/ Ja	No / Nee
28	Do you think that the workload is fair for the eight-week term? / Dink jy dat die werkslading is regverdig vir die agt-week kwartaal?	Yes/ Ja	No / Nee
29	Do you think our curriculum is too much oriented to written exams? / Dink jy die kursus-inhoud is te veel gerig op geskrewe eksamen?	Yes/ Ja	No / Nee
30	Do you think our curriculum should include oral exams? / Dink jy die kourses behoort mondelinge eksamens in te sluit?	Yes/ Ja	No / Nee
31	Does being a student at the institution give you prestige in your community (i.e. your family, friends etc)? / Word prestige-waarde in jou gemeenskap (familie, vriende, ens) gekoppel aan student-wees by die instansie?	Yes/ Ja	No / Nee
32	Overall are you happy studying at the institution? / In die breë gesproke, is jy gelukkig om by die instansie te studeer?	Yes/ Ja	No / Nee
33	Were you offered an opportunity to rather study at one of the other Higher Education institutions (i.e. Cape Peninsula University of Technology, University of Stellenbosch, or University of Cape Town), would you accept? / As jy 'n geleentheid gegun is om eerder by 'n ander Hoër opleidingsinstansie te gaan studier? (i.e. Cape Peninsula University of Technology, University of Stellenbosch, or University of Cape Town), sou jy dit aanvaar?	Yes/ Ja	No / Nee

Thank you for your participation. / Dankie vir u deelname.