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A Comparative Case Study of the Academic Development and Student Support Initiatives and Programmes in Two Schools at the University of the Witwatersrand

Aneshree Nayager

A research report submitted to the WITS School of Education, Faculty of Humanities; University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education by combination of coursework and research, Johannesburg, 2017.

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Abstract

Student success at university is dependent on various academic and non-academic factors. Some students may face barriers to their success due to these factors. Academic development for students and staff, as well as student support programmes can play an important role in helping students to overcome the barriers they may be experiencing. This study aims to differentiate between different forms of academic development and student support, and their functions as well as to understand how these types of programmes or initiatives were conceptualised and operationalized at WITS. An important aim was to understand the provision of academic development and student support from the top-down, through examining WITS's policies on these issues.

This was done through a comparative case study of two Schools in different Faculties at WITS. A series of interviews was conducted with practitioners working within programmes, at Faculty and School-level, and those who have had extensive experience within the field. What emerges from this research is that there are different programmes or initiatives in place in both Schools. These include teaching and learning development initiatives, student academic development programmes and student support programmes. However, without a policy or guidelines, the nature of academic development and student support tends to be uneven and each of the practitioners had varied perspectives based on their experiences in the field. There are various challenges faced by the programmes, but these are navigated differently by the practitioners given their context and agency. This unevenness and the varied experiences of the practitioners in this study tend to suggest the need for a policy to guide the implementation of academic development and student support.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been properly acknowledged.

Aneshree Nayager

15 February 2018

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

ANA	Annual National Assessments
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CLTD	Centre for Learning and Teaching Development (at WITS)
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
NBT	National Benchmark Test
PG.Dip. (HE)	Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education
SoTL	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
TDG	Teaching Development Grant
UCD	University Capacity Development Grant
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of this Study

Academic development and student support measures within universities work towards ensuring student success. Academic development refers to any steps taken to improve teaching and learning within universities, and this could target the institutions or students (Boughey, 2007; 2010). Institutionally, academic development works at a systemic level and involves reviewing and improving teaching and learning practices, curricula and staff development. Student academic development means providing students with opportunities to develop their academic literacy practices within their disciplines.

Student support works to assist students in more holistic ways, working on various non-academic and/or academic factors influencing student success at university (Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004). There is an emphasis on addressing issues that individual students may experience at university that could act as barriers to their success. This includes material factors such as finance and housing; affective factors such as students' emotional health (Scott, Ndebele, Badsha, Figaji, Gevers & Pityana, 2013), and students' transition and adjustment into higher education (Lotkowski et al., 2004).

Universities are institutions in which knowledge is disseminated, worked with, created and challenged (Boughey, 2010). However, despite all students having equal access to admission into universities, not all students have full access to these ways of working with knowledge. This is important because, without this access, students are not able to fully participate or be included within the structures of the university. Academic development, institutionally and for students, has a role to play in creating an awareness of these issues of access and an understanding of how to resolve some of them, as well as in bridging the gaps in practices that may exist. Student success is not just dependent on academic factors, because there are numerous other factors which impact on whether or not students succeed at university, and so student support also has an important role to play within universities today, especially in South Africa.

The role of academic development and student support is critical within the context of South Africa's social and education systems, where there are wide gaps in the educational, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of students. This means that there is a diverse

range of needs that exists within universities today and they must be able to understand and try to meet the needs of all their students (Scott et al., 2013). Compounding this situation is that universities are faced with a growing number of students and shrinking funding.[1] In addition, as Christie (2008) notes, the South African school system is largely dysfunctional. As a result, many students coming out of the school system are underprepared for the academic and social demands at university level (Scott et al., 2013). Given this context, it is clear that there is a need for both academic development and student support within higher education institutions in order to make these institutions more inclusive and to ensure student success.

Academic development and student support are clearly broad areas that may cover a number of activities within different contexts. The ways in which academic development and student support are conceptualised and practised are shaped and influenced by a number of factors. There is the influence of the broader university context and the perceived needs of the students within that context as well as staff training and development.

Other influences on the ways in which academic development and student support initiatives and programmes are conceptualised and implemented by practitioners could include the amount of funding available, and whether the universities' academic staff understand the problem, have been trained to improve their practices and whether they are committed to this improvement. In addition, the move towards research-intensive universities creates more pressure on staff, and there is a tendency to prioritise publishing

[1] Based on statistics from the CHE Vital Stats Reports (CHE, 2014; 2017), from 2007 to 2015, earmarked funding for universities has grown by 247% to approximately R9.8 billion. The majority of this increase has been allocated to NSFAS (increased from approximately R1.1 billion to approximately R4.1 billion, or 268%). However, funding as a percentage of state budgets has remained relatively constant at about 2.4%. It appears that as a result of this, the growth of block grants allocated to universities has slowed down to about 5.8%, in comparison with the 12.5% growth over the previous four-year period. Coupled with increasing student enrolments, this may put strain on universities' financial resources. According to the National Development Plan (National Planning Commission, 2012, p. 69), student enrolments are projected to reach 1.62 million students enrolled in universities by 2030 which is a 70% increase from 2010 enrolments.

over the improvement of their teaching and learning practices (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Boughey, 2009).

The University of the Witwatersrand (hereafter referred to as WITS) is a well-known, respected institution that has a long history of being involved in the research and practise of academic development. However, there has been little investigation into the ways in which academic development and student support initiatives and programmes have been conceptualised and operationalised in different Schools, particularly from a policy and practice perspective. For this reason it is important to understand the factors that influence the formulation and operation of programmes within the university.

This research studied the academic development and student support initiatives and programmes in two Schools, from two different Faculties at WITS. The initiatives or programmes in place include teaching and learning development initiatives, student support programmes and student academic development programmes.

1.2 Problem Statement

Academic development has an important role to play within the context of higher education today. It must consider the development of teaching and learning, curriculum and staff. Providing opportunities for students to develop their academic literacy practices must also be considered. Student support also has an essential role to play in helping students with barriers to their success, given the difficulties many students experience materially, affectively and, to an extent, academically. Both academic development and student support are needed to meet some of the challenges faced by the higher education system in terms of enabling epistemological access for students and increasing student success.

Academic development and student support find themselves in an interesting position in South African universities that are today caught in the struggle to find a balance between efficiency and equity, as well as to remain internationally competitive while still trying to redress the imbalances of a discriminatory past. The context of higher education remains complex and the needs of the students and the university system are multilayered. The increasing student numbers at universities and the accompanying increase in student

diversity have put a strain on the universities' financial and human resources (Scott et al., 2013). Despite this strain, there are increasing demands to produce a higher number of graduates, even though many students come to university underprepared because of the many dysfunctional schools in the basic education sector (Scott et al., 2013). South African universities need to find ways of catering to these students' needs, especially if the demand for graduates is to be met.

Added to this is the trend in South African universities of striving to remain in line with global trends by becoming research-intensive universities, and for academic staff to publish research in addition to performing their traditional teaching and administrative duties (Altbach et al., 2009). This puts additional strain on already tight human resources at universities, who have to decide which activities to prioritise (Knapper, 2016; McKenna, 2016).

To assist universities in the provision of academic development opportunities for staff and students as well as student support, the Department of Higher Education and Training (hereafter referred to as the DHET) began allocating Teaching Development Grants (hereafter referred to as TDG) in 2009, as financial assistance to improve teaching and learning and improve student throughput (Boughey, 2010). In return, the DHET expected institutions to account for how they spent this money, to justify the grants given to them. As a result, this could influence the ways in which academic development and student support is structured and operationalised in universities. This raises several questions. Are academic development for staff and students, and student support a priority within this demanding context? How are academic development and student support practices affected by the pressures and demands placed on higher education?

This research aims to examine the position of academic development for staff and students, and student support from an institutional perspective within the context of competing priorities at WITS. This means trying to find out how WITS as an institution conceptualises the role of academic development and student support, within the University structures. In order to understand how this conceptualisation is operationalised within WITS and the factors that influence these processes, the academic development and student support initiatives and programmes in two Schools from different Faculties at WITS have been studied for comparison purposes.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

This research aimed to examine and compare the ways in which academic development and student support are conceptualised within two Schools, in a comparative case study. I therefore attempted to first examine University policies on academic development and student support to gain some perspective of what WITS envisions as a way forward in providing academic development for students and to improve teaching and learning, as well as student support opportunities. Secondly, I looked at two Schools in two different WITS Faculties to examine how their existing academic development and student support initiatives or programmes have been conceptualised and operationalised within their context. This is meant to provide insights into the dominant discourses around the issues of academic development and student support, how the factors influencing academic development and student support are mediated and how the programmes or initiatives are implemented in these two Schools and at Faculty level. I further investigated how each programme or initiative worked within the funding and structures of WITS, as well as other enabling or constraining factors in meeting student needs.

Research Question

My main research question is:

How are student academic development and student support initiatives or programmes conceptualised and operationalised within two Schools in different Faculties at the University of the Witwatersrand?

Research Sub-questions

In order to answer my main research question, these research sub-questions need to be answered:

1. What University policies are in place to inform the ways in which academic development and student support are conceptualised and interpreted within WITS, and within the two Schools?

2. What programmes or initiatives are in place in these two Schools to meet student needs, why have these initiatives been constructed and operationalised in the way they are and how is their effectiveness measured?
3. How does funding, and more specifically the provision of the TDG from the DHET, impact on the ways in which these programmes or initiatives are conceptualised and operationalised?
4. What are the similarities or differences in the conceptualisation, practices, support and funding of these programmes or initiatives, and what are the reasons for their similarities or differences?

1.4 Rationale for this Study

My research could be valuable for the field of higher education because it provides some insights into the ways in which academic development and student support are currently conceptualised and enacted within two WITS Schools. The study of academic development in South Africa has increasingly been an area of interest for practitioners from the 1980s onwards (Boughey, 2010). Research is being done into academic development and student support at university level (Boughey, 2010) but much of the research has been conducted from a student or a pedagogical perspective rather than with a policy focus. A policy focus is useful because it could provide a way to understand the institutional perspective on academic development and student support, and how this has impacted on the students' experiences and lecturers' pedagogical practices within WITS.

This research aimed to understand the process of academic development and student support provision from the top down; from policy to implementation and the implications of this on the practices on the ground. However, given the lack of a formal WITS policy on academic development and student support, it was even more important to understand the thinking behind the initiatives or programmes in the two WITS Schools, why these have been selected above other options and how they operated within a policy-less context.

In the end, it hopes to provide some valuable insights into the ways in which academic development and student support practitioners work within their existing constraining contexts. The focus on the academic development and student support initiatives or programmes in the two Schools is a slightly different perspective because it examines the

ways in which these initiatives or programmes work within the structures of WITS, and how these structures enable or constrain the ways in which academic development and student support are practised. Besides some research done by the practitioners themselves, there has been little independent investigation into these academic development and student support structures, and so it may provide some interesting new perspectives.

I believe that it is crucial to understand the issues around policy and the key internal and external factors that influence the operation of the academic development and student support initiatives and programmes, as well as the ways in which the practitioners mediate these factors. The higher education sector and the students within it are faced with many challenges. This research begins to understand the ways in which these challenges are being dealt with within two WITS Schools.

Although this is a Master's research report, I hope it will contribute to the body of research on academic development and student support approaches at WITS. It may also provide some useful information for the Schools and motivate for more research into the provision of academic development and support opportunities for students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Given the aim of this research study, it is important to have an understanding of what academic development and student support actually entails and how it has changed over time, as well as some of the imperatives of higher education in South Africa within a context of fiscal constraint and high demands. This literature review examines some of the wealth of literature on academic development and student support. It begins by examining academic development and academic literacies, their changing nature over time, and the different areas of work referred to under the term academic development, including student support. Next, the imperatives of higher education in South Africa are explained and finally the issues of policy and the shift to research-intensive universities in the South African context are discussed.

Literature Review

2.1. Academic Development and Academic Literacies

Universities are spaces wherein the ways of working with knowledge, challenging existing knowledge and the creation of new knowledge are specialised (Boughey, 2010). There are important academic skills and competencies that are needed for university students to have access to this knowledge, or what Morrow has called 'epistemological access'. Morrow (2007, as cited in Lange, 2010) distinguishes between 'formal access', which is access to the institution itself and 'epistemological access', which, in this case, means access to the structures of working with knowledge.

Despite having formal access to institutions, not all university students gain epistemological access and this could be for a number of reasons, such as student under-preparedness (Scott et al., 2013) or complex and exclusionary institutional structures (Boughey, 2010). Academic development is a field that attempts to understand and address the various barriers to teaching and learning within universities. It can be defined as:

> … an open set of practices concerned with improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education … (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004, p. 58, as cited in Boughey, 2010, p. 4)

As per the above definition, academic development as a field focuses on the improvement of teaching and learning within universities (Boughey 2007, 2010; Luckett, 2012; Case, Heydenrych, Kotta, Marshall, McKenna & Williams, 2015). This can be done in different ways such as: 1) improving teaching and learning by providing staff with professional development opportunities in order to improve their practices; 2) improving the institution's curricula so that they are more relevant to a greater number of students; and 3) through student academic development which refers to providing students with the opportunity to develop their academic practices to better engage with academic knowledge conventions.

These academic practices include students' 'academic literacy' practices, or the ways of reading, writing and working with knowledge within the academic domain. These have been defined in different ways. Taylor et al., (1988; as cited in Leibowitz, Goodman, Hannon & Parkinson, 1997) define academic literacies as:

> The link between students' entry into disciplinary communities and their acquisition of the formal conventions associated with the academy, such as the manner of organising concepts, the practices and methods of enquiry central to academic disciplines … (p. 5).

In a simpler definition, Lea and Street (1998) state that academic literacies include "… reading and writing within disciplines …" (p. 1). These definitions suggest that academic literacies are situated-types of knowledge that are specific to particular disciplines, and understanding how to work with these specialised types of knowledge and practices. Each discipline has its own literacy practices and conventions (Lea & Street, 1998). Reading and writing academic work are central to participation within universities' structures. However, not all students come to university equally prepared to work within their chosen specialised disciplines, and so there is a need for academic development to assist with the development of the necessary practices that would enable this engagement.

The focal point of these academic development efforts is to ensure that students succeed within the university context. Scott et al., (2013) explain that literature both locally and internationally indicates that "… success and failure in higher education is the result of a complex interplay of factors …" (p. 54), and these factors relate to the academic practices within universities as well as those of students. Furthermore, Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali

& Pohlert (2003–2004) state that factors such as self-esteem, social adjustment, parental support and approval as well as socio-economic factors may have an impact on student success. In a similar way Lotkowski et al., (2004) discuss factors such as student self-confidence, motivation and support, to be amongst the non-academic factors influencing student success.

Scott et al., (2013) identified three types of factors affecting student success: academic, material and affective. They explain that academic factors refer to those that influence the academic performance of students and their ability to pass, including their level of preparedness for university. Material factors refer to the socio-economic factors that leave students in difficult positions in university, such as the lack of finances to pay for fees, housing, food, clothing and transportation (Scott et al., 2013). This affects students' ability to attend and cope at university. Affective or emotional factors include students' negative feelings, anxiety and lack of motivation or discipline that affect the ways in which students perform at university. Clearly, there are a variety of factors that impact on the ways in which students are able to adjust and cope within the university context, or not.

Given the various factors impacting on student success, there is a need for different types of measures to be put into place to address these academic and non-academic factors. This is the place of student support programmes within universities, which involves a range of activities that work in areas such as "… careers counselling, financial aid and personal and social skills …" (Scott et al., 2013, p. 163). There are also programmes which integrate academic development and non-academic support (Lotkowski et al., 2004).

In the 2016 CHE report reviewing higher education in South Africa, McKenna (2016) explains that there is much literature showing that "… students' physical, financial and emotional wellbeing and a positive and supportive university environment are key to student success" (p. 175). McKenna (2016) also argues that there is usually little alignment between the academic and support aspects within South African universities, and suggests that a more coordinated approach is needed for programmes that aim to address the various academic and non-academic barriers to student success.

South African students, especially students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, face many barriers to their success within universities. Factors such as socio-economic disadvantages and a poorly performing basic education system (Scott et al., 2013) as well

as a lack of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1976; Scott et al., 2013) often create barriers to student success. There is a need for strong student support services within South African universities that help to address these barriers in order to aid student success. This will also have an institutional advantage if this results in an increase in throughput rates and student retention. Academic development opportunities are also needed to work with students on their practices. Finally, the institutional structures and teaching and learning practices within universities need to be re-examined to understand the ways in which these could be creating barriers to some students gaining epistemological access (Boughey, 2010).

This multifaceted approach to understanding students' needs within the university context has developed over time. It is therefore important to understand the history of academic development in the South African context, and how and why the thinking surrounding what students need and how to meet these needs has changed.

2.1.1 History of Academic Literacies and Academic Development

The thinking around the concepts of both academic literacies and academic development has changed over time. According to Lea and Street (1998), on the basis of research done, there are three models of academic literacies that have developed over time: the study skills model; the academic socialisation model and the academic literacies model. These models are not completely distinct from each other as each model builds and improves on the previous one.

Boughey (2007; 2010) identifies three phases through which academic development has passed: academic support, academic development and institutional development. These three phases are not necessarily distinct from each other but have different dominant discourses that reflect the popular beliefs and understandings of what society and students need and how these needs should be met. This explains why the dominant academic development practices tend to differ in each phase. Some practices from previous phases may overlap with those in the current phase, as Boughey (2010, p. 2) explains: "… the practices which characterised each phase (or each discursive formulation) have co-existed in many cases and, in some, continue to do so alongside dominating practices …". In her study of the evolution of academic development in one South African university, Luckett

(2012) suggests that the academic development discourses and the ways in which academic development is practised within universities is also influenced by the political and social conditions and changes within society during particular periods.

The first academic literacies model, the 'study skills' model, involves training students on particular writing skills in a decontextualised manner. These generic skills were seen to be applied or "transferred" automatically to different subjects (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 2) and "… the theory of language on which it is based emphasises surface features, grammar and spelling …" (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 2). This model has since been widely criticised as ineffective because it did not take into consideration the complexities of language and learning. This led to the development of a second model, the 'academic socialisation' model.

The 'academic socialisation' model seeks to socialise students into the ways of doing things at the university or into the institutional culture (Lea & Street, 1998). Like the 'study skills' model, this model recognised that there are particular skills and practices that students needed to learn in order to work and succeed within the university. However, these practices were viewed as particular to the context of a university and perceived as unchanging. So, the 'academic socialisation' model aimed to induct students into the university's culture by teaching them the dominant practices. According to Lea and Street (1998), this approach was equally problematic because it assumed that the university as an institution retains the same culture throughout, and that students could gain epistemological access by simply learning the university's academic norms and cultures. It also did not take into consideration the ways in which power relations played out within the university and the latter's different discourses when understanding learning.

Some of the practices associated with the 'study skills' and 'academic socialisation' models of academic literacies can be seen in some of the dominant practices of the 'academic support' phase of academic development in South Africa. The 'academic support' phase emerged in the early 1980s during the Apartheid regime. According to Hunter and Starfield (1989) and Boughey (2007; 2010), despite the government attempting to prevent this, in the early 1980s there was an increase in the number of black students entering some white universities. These universities were eager to resist the government's pressure and continued to admit some black students, with the aim of contributing to an

'equality' agenda.

At the time, the Bantu Education system for African students, the so-called 'coloured' education system, and to a lesser extent the Indian education system, were purposely designed by the Apartheid government to be of poor quality (Christie, 2008). The Bantu education system was the worst, in terms of funding and quality of education. As a result, many of the best black students coming out of this system were not adequately equipped with the skills necessary to cope within higher education, and especially within historically white institutions. Due to their poor educational backgrounds, these students were regarded as 'underprepared' and were seen to be at a disadvantage compared to white students (Hunter & Starfield, 1989; Boughey, 2010). To rectify this situation and in line with their equality goals, some historically white universities decided to develop and implement academic support programmes that would equip these students with the necessary academic skills. However, despite these good intentions, the programmes often had negative effects on black students, often leading to feelings of inadequacy and exclusion (Boughey, 2010).

According to Luckett (2012), Boughey (2007; 2010) and Hunter and Starfield (1989), the political context of South Africa was changing at the time, with resistance against Apartheid growing stronger, and with historically white universities beginning to admit an increasing number of black students despite legislation against this. Within universities, opinions were split, with some academics supporting the changes while others resisted them because of "… what this would mean for 'standards', that is, the traditional curriculum and its mode of delivery, which was taken as given …" (Scott, Yeld, McMillan, & Hall, 2005; as cited in Luckett, 2012, p. 343). Luckett (2012) argues that white universities tried to work with these changes, inspired by liberal ideologies of trying to 'help' black students while still maintaining the same culture and traditional ways of doing things (Boughey 2010; Luckett, 2012).

According to Boughey (2010), during the first 'academic support' phase, the dominant forms of support were separate and additional to normal academic coursework. Academic support came in the form of additional general skills development tutorials that students were expected to apply to their subjects or disciplines, or foundational courses that extended the length of the first year of university to two years. Many of these support

initiatives were funded by external donors and contributors. Some of these had voluntary attendance (Boughey, 2010), while others used streaming mechanism to place their students into programmes. Boughey (2010) argues that there were some major flaws in this approach. While some foundational programmes were discipline-based and tended to be more effective, others taught decontextualised skills and, as a result, students could not easily apply them or transfer them effectively throughout their curriculum. Furthermore, these programmes did not lead to significantly improved results. Students in extended curriculum courses tended to fail once they moved on to mainstream classes and no longer had the high levels of support that the academic support courses had offered (Boughey, 2010; Luckett, 2012).

There were also some negative social effects on black students in these programmes (Boughey, 2010). Firstly, students who participated often felt stigmatised because of their association with these programmes. They were seen to be lacking in something or 'not good enough' for university education and so, despite the aim of trying to combat discrimination, these programmes left students feeling as though they were, indeed, being discriminated against. Secondly, the impact of these programmes was not obvious and in some cases could be said to be ineffective because they had a predominantly negative impact on students' well-being, especially since many of these students still struggled to cope once they had left the programmes. Some students felt that they had been successful in coming through a poor schooling system that was constructed for them to fail but, when they arrived at university, they were labelled as 'not good enough' (Boughey, 2010).

This is close to what is called a 'deficit' model which positions students as lacking in something, because of their disadvantaged socio-educational backgrounds. In positioning the students in this way the assumption was that the students were the sources of the problems and the university with its culture and structures were adequate (Boughey 2007; 2010). Luckett (2012) contends that academic development in this early phase largely located itself in struggle discourses against Apartheid and positioned black students as "… victims … of apartheid and of 'disadvantaged' state schooling. This was a consequence of its origins as a political and moral project linked to the anti-apartheid struggle and the right of access of oppressed black students …" (p. 349).

Within these deficit discourses, if students failed it was assumed that it was because they did not have what was needed in order to pass, and therefore needed to be assimilated into the existing structures and culture by changing themselves. However, the criticisms of this phase and its dominant practices led to the questioning of whether the students alone were responsible for their success or failure, or whether there were institutional practices or factors that had also contributed to this (Boughey, 2010). Importantly, black academics within historically black universities became loud voices against the practices within this phase (Boughey, 2010).

In South Africa in the late 1980s, perceptions shifted towards recognising that university culture had an effect on students' academic performance, and the negative effects of the academic support programmes were increasingly being discussed (Boughey, 2010). This was the beginning of the shift into the second phase of academic development, called the 'academic development' phase. With increasing student enrolments in the 1990s, there was a greater demand to provide for a more diverse range of students (Boughey 2010; Case et al., 2015). Within the academic development field, there was an increasing recognition that more black students had formal access to all universities but that the structures of the historically white universities were not 'equally' open or conducive to all students. With this recognition, the dominant institutional culture and the power relations at play within universities started to be questioned. As a result, the discourses in academic development thus shifted from a focus on changing the students to fit the university, to the universities having to adapt to the (black) majority of students, in line with a new political order. This meant, inter alia, transforming curricula, teaching methodologies and teaching and learning practices (Boughey, 2010).

Moving away from the 'deficit' model, the 'academic development' phase questioned the meritocratic assumptions behind the notion that equal formal access gave all students equal opportunities to succeed. According to Bourdieu (1976) meritocracy cannot exist because of the way in which the education system is structured, in terms of its dominant values, norms and selected knowledge that reflect the interests of the dominant groups or upper- to middle-class groups in society. The dominant groups are given an unfair and privileged position within the education system and are more likely to succeed because they possess 'cultural capital' and 'social capital', and understand how to work within the system (Bourdieu, 1976). In the case of South African universities, the structures of universities

were and continue to be Western-oriented, English-speaking and middle-class and this favours these particular groups of people. The discourse of this second phase was an important shift in that it acknowledged that students' success at university may lie not only in students' agency, but may also depend on the many factors external to them, such as the universities' biased power and culture (Boughey, 2010).

Within academic literacies, there was also a shift in thinking around the ways in which students are positioned within institutions, and how this positioning affects their success. This explains the emergence of the third academic literacies model, also called 'academic literacies'. This model is favoured by Lea and Street (1998) and Boughey (2009; 2010) and understands academic literacy and learning as social practices. Rather than trying to develop isolated skills or simply socialise students into the existing culture, as advocated by the other two models, the 'academic literacies' model positions itself at the level of epistemology and epistemological access. It takes into consideration the ways in which students learn and apply knowledge within different contexts and different disciplines, and understands reading and writing as social practices that involve making meaning, with the recognition that there are conflicts within these practices (Lea & Street, 1998). Beyond understanding the ways of working with knowledge, students must also be empowered to position themselves in relation to the particular knowledge within their discipline. This involves moving beyond simply socialising students into an institutional culture towards a deeper understanding of the practices within a discipline.

With the emergence of a new democracy, new legislation and the accompanying new ideologies, the academic development field experienced a shift. Boughey (2007; 2010) sees a third academic development phase called the 'institutional development phase' emerging in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The imperatives during this period were to ensure equity and redress, but also the need for efficiency given the fiscal constraints at the time. This meant that all students should have equal opportunity of access and that those who were previously disadvantaged and excluded from the system had to be given greater opportunity to succeed. At the same time efficiency under fiscal constraints meant a reduction in spending within the higher education sector and a need for universities to become more efficient in using their resources, as well as in improving their throughput rates (Boughey, 2010). Osman and Hornsby (2016) explain, there is a "… National Plan for Higher Education (DOE, 2001) that commits universities to become cost-effective,

streamlined institutions that compete for school-leavers who qualify for admission …" (p. 1836).

In addition, there was a globalisation agenda, which pushed universities to align themselves with international trends and standards in order to produce quality graduates who could participate within the global economy. According to Gopinathan (2007) this is common in developing countries and the purpose and structure of education systems are increasingly determined by global needs. Yet, the problem of a poor schooling system continues to exist in South Africa with many underprepared students entering universities from poorly resourced, underperforming schools (Scott et al., 2013). Academic development, during this third phase, started to be dominated by discussions around institutional transformation regarding curricula, teaching and learning methods and improved assessment methods (Boughey, 2010), as a means of enabling fair institutional and epistemological access for students, especially those from previously disadvantaged groups.

According to Boughey (2010, p.16) "… in recent years, terms such as 'success rates', 'graduation rates' and 'throughput' have increasingly become part of institutional discourse as institutional leadership and management teams have tried to manage performance in order to maximise subsidy income …". This discourse has translated into the field of academic development as "… practitioners often construct their work within the need for improved efficiency measured by increased throughput and success and graduation rates …" (Boughey, 2010, p. 16). Academic development has come to be perceived as a tool not so much for redress and equity but for better institutional efficiency.

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), a quality assurance body linked to the CHE, has "… stressed the use of institutional data in managing quality in its audit processes …" and emphasised "… the idea of 'tracking' which is increasingly gaining prominence …" (Boughey, 2010, p. 16). This is done using a database and looking at the pass rates of students and courses and then implementing interventions to enable higher pass rates or using tracking systems to look at students' academic performance and "… the criteria used to admit them to the university in order to validate those criteria …" (Boughey, 2010, p. 17).

There is also an overlap with the second 'academic development' phase, as much of the work is still directed at curriculum change and staff development. However, in the third academic development phase, quality assurance mechanisms were introduced to improve the teaching and learning practices within universities (Boughey, 2007; 2010). Boughey (2010) concludes that the challenge faced by academic development practitioners, is to research and design more effective 'best practices' in university teaching and learning that are suited to the new South African student body, which needs high order skills to face the challenges in the world of work.

In the 'institutional development' phase, academic development practices aimed to enable student epistemological access at different levels, which is similar to the objectives of the 'academic literacies' model. This was done by working on the institution itself, including the teaching and learning practices of academic staff and curriculum development, as well as providing students with development opportunities (Boughey, 2010). This will be discussed in the next two sections.

2.1.2 Teaching and Learning Development and Staff Development

Within the 'institutional development' phase, there is an emphasis on enabling students' epistemological access through systemic change. This involves restructuring curricula, as well as examining and improving the teaching and learning practices used by academic staff within lectures and in assessing students (Boughey, 2010).

Foundational programmes, or extended curricula, are seen to be examples of curriculum development from this perspective (Scott et al., 2013). This would entail extending the length of undergraduate degrees by spreading the subject modules out over a longer space of time, so work could be done to develop students' practices within their disciplines in an embedded and contextualised way. These types of programmes were implemented within WITS in the 1980s (Hunter & Starfield, 1989).

According to Schmitz (1998), "… transformation processes at higher education institutions in South Africa, as in the rest of the world, have challenged traditional approaches to education, calling into question the fundamental assumptions upon which academic staff built their disciplines and curricula …" (Schmitz 1998a, as cited in Fourie, 1999). This

accompanies massification and an increasingly diverse student population that requires curricula to be more inclusive and teaching and learning practices to be more varied (Fourie, 1999; Osman & Hornsby, 2016).

An example of the types of diversity found within modern university classes, that lecturers need to consider, is the learning style and needs of students from the millennial generation. Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil (2004) discuss the development of teaching and learning in a university context where the students are cross-generational, but primarily from the millennial generation or those "… born in or after the year 1982 …" (Oblinger, 2003; as cited in Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004, p. 194). They explain that, for students who tended to have different expectations and are more exposed to technology, more "learner-centred approaches" are advocated, as well as the inclusion of more technology within the lectures (Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004, p. 195). This blended-learning approach would also need to be pedagogically driven.

Today, there is also the need for an approach that looks at applying skills learned at university within the real world context and more interactive, engaging lectures. Interestingly, Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil (2004) have the view that, in the Australian context, millennials are highly technological and this is a preference in terms of learning. In the South African context, this type of approach could be questioned for a number of reasons. There are big gaps in the socio-economic and schooling backgrounds of students in South Africa, with students who have had varying levels of access to resources, entering universities together (Scott et al., 2013). The university context within South Africa is becoming increasingly massified, stretching resources thin (Scott et al., 2013; Osman & Hornsby, 2016). This means that there may be varying degrees of access to, and the ability to use, technology, as well as big groups of students to work with. As a result, lectures within this context may have to include methods that work across levels of access and with very large groups of students, representing a major challenge for the improvement of teaching and learning.

This improvement involves examining the practices in place, to differentiate teaching methods to be more inclusive and cater for the diverse range of students. Teaching and learning within South African universities tends to be considered a means of working towards redress and addressing inequalities (CHE, McKenna, 2016, p. 144). Indeed,

teaching and learning has the potential to include or exclude students as well as teach particular types of knowledge that could potentially be transformative. In the context of massification of education, there is also a need to understand how to teach to larger classes (Osman & Hornsby, 2016), as well as to classes with students of varying linguistic and educational backgrounds (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007)

To do this effectively, academic staff need development and training on how to develop their curricula and more effective teaching and learning methods, as well as continuous support to develop their practices (Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004). This could be in the form of structured programmes for staff development, such as the WITS Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (hereafter referred to as the PG.Dip. (HE), or could be done informally. Interestingly, when they conducted research into the issue at WITS, Osman & Hornsby (2016) found that, "early-career academics" (p. 1835), "… get no direct and explicit support for teaching …" or formal training for teaching but instead "… draw the greatest support from disciplinary colleagues at departmental level but this support is spontaneous and ad hoc …" (p. 1848).

Osman & Hornsby (2016) also explained that more faculties at WITS are starting to move towards creating centres for teaching and learning development. Recognising the need for teaching and learning development at faculty-level, the WITS Faculty of Science has a "… well-established centre for teaching and learning that is considered by those interviewed as a good place for advice …" (Osman & Hornsby, 2016, p.1848). Indeed, many South African universities have centres dedicated to the development of teaching and learning (Osman & Hornsby, 2016). Centres such as these could aid in the development of teaching and learning by dedicating staff and resources towards this cause.

There are two main obstacles to the improvement of teaching and learning. Firstly, the pressure placed on academic staff by universities to publish research within their disciplines which leads to competing demands for lecturers' time (Knapper, 2016; Osman & Hornsby, 2016). There is also resistance from academic staff that poses a challenge because they may be reluctant to reflect on, or change, their practices, because they do not find any fault with their standards and practices or they are not equipped with the skills needed to implement these changes (Knapper, 2016). Interestingly, this willingness to adapt teaching and learning methods tends not to be age-dependent, but it is rather a

personal choice (Poindexter, 2003; as cited in Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004).

2.1.3 Student Academic Development

Student academic development involves working with students in order to develop their academic literacy practices, which are the ways of reading, writing and working with knowledge within disciplines (Lea & Street, 1998). In this endeavour the 'academic literacies' model seems to be favoured because it acknowledges the social nature of literacy practices (Lea & Street, 1998) and learning (Boughey, 2009).

"To be 'literate' does not simply mean having acquired the technical skills to decode and encode signs and symbols, but having mastered a set of social practices …" (Archer, 2010, p. 2). According to this quote from Archer (2010), becoming literate is a process of learning a set of practices, not just reading and writing. Instead, students need to be able to engage with the knowledge in their disciplines (Lea & Street, 1998; Archer, 2010). So, to be literate in the sense of academic literacies is very different to common sense understandings of literacy, involving simply understanding how to read and write in general.

In order to develop these academic literacy practices, Boughey (2007; 2010) advocates an embedded approach to academic development and explains that any efforts to provide students with development and support should be contextualised within a discipline in order for it to be effective. If academic skills are grounded within a discipline, it becomes easier for students to understand and apply them within their own studies and disciplines. Boughey (2010) shows that, as far back as the 1980s, decontextualised approaches to student academic support were proven to be ineffective because students were not able to transfer or apply these generic skills into their disciplines.

2.2 The Imperative of Academic development and Student Support in South African Universities

The aim of this section is to provide a description of the context, and some of the challenges faced in South African higher education. There are many demands placed on universities, with increasing numbers of students and decreasing financial resources. Academic

development and student support can play a role in helping to meet these demands, yet they also have challenges of their own to overcome.

The South African university landscape has changed rather quickly since the early 1990s. Not only has the legislation shifted towards redress and equity but student numbers have also increased through the "… massification of higher education …" (Altbach et al., 2009, p. 9). Added to this, in the twenty-first century, universities are expected to provide a skilled, thinking workforce to fulfil the needs of the rapidly changing economy and society by contributing to fostering economic and social development (Vally & Spreen, 2006).

Higher education in South Africa today faces many dilemmas. The numbers of students at universities have increased exponentially since the end of Apartheid but universities are still not producing enough quality graduates for the economic growth that was envisioned (Scott et al., 2013). This is partly due to the high drop-out and repetition rate of students, which suggests that formal access does not guarantee success.

Since 1994, by law every South African has been given equal access to enter any university or what is known as equal opportunity of access. However, in reality this is not always possible. The effects of the skewed, discriminatory system and deeply entrenched inequalities inherited from the Apartheid regime are still seen and felt today. Broadly speaking, the status quo remains in terms of the people who are able to attend, benefit from, succeed and graduate from universities, since mainly white, middle-class people are still privileged (Boughey, 2013; Scott et al., 2013). South African universities, and others around the world, face difficulties in providing quality higher education to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Altbach et al., 2009, p. 9). This exponential growth in student numbers was accompanied by an increase in student diversity which stretches over socio-economic and educational backgrounds, cultures, languages, and competence (Scott et al., 2007; Scott et al., 2013). All of this results in the university having to change and adapt to cater for different student needs.

One major factor is that the majority of schools are producing learners with poor quality education. According to Christie (2008), up to 80% of South African schools may be dysfunctional. An indication of the poor quality of the education system can be found in the results of the standardised Annual National Assessment tests (ANAs), which began in 2011. In 2013, less than 50% of Grade 9 learners were able to achieve a 50% score in their

ANA tests in Mathematics, Home Language and First Additional Language (Department of Basic Education, 2014). In addition, many learners matriculating with a Bachelor admission remain underprepared for university study because they lack many of the competencies necessary to complete their degree. Using statistics from 2006, Scott et al., (2013) show that 40% of all students dropped out of university without completing their degree or diploma, and 33% of first year students left university. Only one in four students finished their degree in the regulated time, with the completion rate of white students remaining much higher than that of black students.

There are also institutional challenges faced by universities, especially related to funding. In South Africa and across the world, funding for student support and academic development is limited (Lotkowski et al., 2004), and few extra initiatives can be put into place to assist university students and develop academic staff. To that effect, there has been grant funding provided by the DHET, in the form of the TDG and more recently the University Capacity Development (UCD) grant, both of which are directed at improving teaching and learning within universities (Boughey, 2013; Ballim, 2016) and increase throughput and pass rates (Boughey, 2010).

Universities then have the challenge of meeting both students' needs and government needs for qualified workers, within a context of fiscal constraint and great student diversity. However, South African universities are following global trends towards becoming research-intensive universities which involves making research and knowledge generation a key part of academic staffs' work. Although it ensures that universities remain internationally competitive, becoming a research-intensive university puts more pressure on academic staff at a time when teaching and learning practices need to be improved.

In the South African literature (Boughey, 2007; 2013; Luckett, 2012), academic development encompasses more than better teaching and learning, extending towards student development and finding a way to address the redress agenda. So, academic development today has to strive for a balance between efficiency and meeting the needs of students coming from often difficult, impoverished contexts. The sense of social justice that formed the basis for academic development in the past seems to be less emphasised as the discourses of efficiency, pass rates and throughput and the complications of working within universities in the twenty-first century become dominant.

It is argued that "… a previous passion for political activism, visible in accounts from early pioneers in the profession, now is 'erased in current debates about teaching and learning' …" (Lee et al., 2010, p. 317; as cited in Roxå & Mårtensson, 2016, p. 2).

Yet academic development practitioners gained more space and increasing power within universities and can exercise their agency in balancing the demands placed on them and in shaping academic development and student support measures, to resist the pressures of efficiency and influence the path of academic development within universities. This includes "… values, ideologies, and our own beliefs about what higher education should be ..." (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2016, p. 2).

The importance of agency is evidenced in the roots of modern academic development in the early 1980s, where, despite the objections to change, the academic support practitioners agitated for the inclusion of black students (Boughey, 2010; Luckett, 2012). This continued later when the thinking around academic development changed, and black lecturers and students were vocal about the need for institutional development (Boughey, 2010).

In the 'institutional development' phase, this effect tends to be minimised in the scramble for international competitiveness, efficiency and higher throughput. From the start, the position of academic development practitioners' within universities has been unstable and tenuous because their employment depended on the availability of funding (Boughey, 2010). By exercising their agency, academic development practitioners have had an influence on shaping aspects of higher education and the provision of academic development. The importance of practitioner agency needs to be recognised as a central part of shaping academic development and student support measures within this research.

2.3 Research-intensive Universities – A Game of 'Catch-up'

In the twenty-first century, there has been an increasing shift in more countries moving towards becoming knowledge-driven economies (Simpson & Gevers, 2016). In this process, universities are seen as centres for the creation of knowledge and innovation and for developing countries, education has long been seen as the key to development (Vally & Spreen, 2006).

In their report to the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, Altbach et al.,

(2009) examined the changes in higher education from 1998 to 2008. They explained that, globally, there is a movement towards universities becoming research-intensive, with universities in developing countries trying, often unsuccessfully, to be at the same levels or standards of universities in more developed countries. This is a bid to become internationally competitive and 'catch-up' to the highly-regarded and developed universities worldwide. In South Africa, there is a historical and racial dimension to this, because the more research-intensive universities tend to be historically white universities that had received better funding and support during Apartheid than universities for other race groups, which have had a much greater challenge in implementing this shift to 'catch-up' (Lange & Luescher-Mamashela, 2016, p.92).

It would be expected that the primary function of a university is to educate its enrolled students. However, in the twenty-first century, universities have multiple missions such as "… teaching, research and public service …" (Altbach et al., 2009, p. 139). There are tensions between these missions, with universities having to make "… hard choices in setting priorities and allocating resources …" (Altbach et al., 2009, p. 139; McKenna, 2016). These priorities are influenced by the universities' vision and mission as well as government imperatives. According to Osman and Hornsby (2016), WITS has historically been research-oriented and intends to remain so.

In developing countries, it is more difficult for universities to become research-intensive because of complex local contexts (Altbach et al., 2009). In South Africa, for example, the context of higher education is difficult, because of the high level of socio-economic inequalities and differences in educational background among students (Scott et al., 2013). Students come from various backgrounds and so effective teaching and learning practices, student development and student support within universities are important because of the needs of a diverse student population. Yet "… in South Africa, public funding for universities is tied to research output, which in part explains this motivation …" to move towards a research-intensive focus (Osman & Hornsby, 2016, p. 1840). In her study of five South African universities, Boughey (2009, p. 61) explained that one of results of a research-driven approach is "… light touch with respect to the management of quality in teaching and learning and of academic staff themselves …". Clearly, there are competing demands on universities in South Africa.

There is increased pressure on academic staff who have an increased workload due to the massification of higher education and attempting to meet the needs of a diverse student body and the need to publish more research (Knapper, 2016; Simpson & Gevers, 2016). Lecturers may find it difficult to balance these competing demands (Altbach et al., 2009; Knapper, 2016; Osman & Hornsby, 2016). Priorities may have to be chosen and the improvement of teaching and learning practices may not take precedence, because of the "… the academic reward system, which is strongly perceived (and correctly so, in many cases) to emphasise research and publications rather than teaching accomplishments …" (Knapper, 2016, p. 109).

One possible solution to ease the pressure of lecturers' competing demands could be the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) (Osman & Hornsby, 2016). This means that lecturers could meet both research and teaching and learning demands by focusing their research efforts on teaching within their discipline rather than locating their research within the discipline itself. Osman and Hornsby (2016) draw on Shulman (2000, as cited in Osman & Hornsby, 2016) to explain that the SoTL could enable teaching informed by research and developing teaching and knowledge within the discipline, and "… sharing our work with our peers and professional communities with an intention to build new knowledge about our field or discipline" (Osman & Hornsby, 2016, p. 1837).

Although the shift to a research-intensive university is important in terms of knowledge generation, in South Africa and other developing countries the drive to become internationally competitive may lead to the marginalisation of local needs and the contextual demands of meeting diverse student needs.

2.4 Putting Policies in Place

One way of ensuring that particular problems are addressed as priorities is by creating a policy that outlines a plan on how to address issues within a specific context, such as a university. In their presentation of their framework for analysing the policy-planning process within the educational sector, Haddad and Demsky (1995, p. 18) defined policy as "… an explicit or implicit single decision or group of decisions which may set out directives for guiding future decisions, initiate or retard action, or guide implementation of previous decisions …". This tends to suggest that creating a policy means deciding on a

path to resolve particular issues and setting parameters for addressing the issues or problems as well as an implementation plan. Colebatch (2002, p. 2; as cited in Maguire, Hoskins, Ball & Braun, 2011, p. 597) explains that, "… policy involves the creation of order, that is, shared understandings about how the various participants will act in particular circumstances …". Considering this, it could be said that policies also act as a means of guiding the ways in which various people affected by the policy will behave and guide the decisions that they make.

There are also different types of policies described by Haddad and Demsky (1995), and each of these is based on the types of issues that need to be addressed, with the scope of the policy decisions depending on the issue in question. These include: issue-specific policies which address specific areas of concern; programme or multi-programme policies which work within the area of single programme and competing programme design, respectively; and then much broader strategic policies which include a plan for resource allocation for the problems being addressed (Haddad & Demsky, 1995, p. 18).

Christie (2008, p. 122) explains that some policies may be symbolic in nature. Symbolic policies are those which may not be implementable but represent the intentions or thoughts of the particular organisation. Although it does not seem to be an effective means of meeting the need identified, this type of policy may represent an attempt to bring attention to particular issues and "… play an important role in marking out ideals and values …" of organisations (Christie, 2008, p. 122). Symbolic policies are not necessarily intended to be implemented and so may not have a plan for implementation or be practical.

According to Haddad and Demsky (1995) and Henry (1992), the policymaking process tends to be more political rather than rational in nature. Christie (2008) explains that the policymaking process is based on an interaction of various factors and the interests of the groups of people involved in the policymaking process rather than being more rational, need-based, and "… as a consequence of evaluation …" (Haddad & Demsky, 1995, p. 34). This suggests that particular issues may be prioritised over others due to the interests of role players in pushing these to the fore, and that policymaking involves the exercising of power. Although it would be logical that the most important or urgent issues would receive attention first, this is not usually the case because there are power relations in play, where those interest groups with more influence tend to skew the process of policymaking

towards issues that are in their interest. As a result, important social or educational issues may not be addressed despite the urgent need to do so.

If the existence of a policy is a means of prioritising, planning and implementing solutions to particular problems or value statements representing the organisation's position on particular issues, then not having a policy in place is equally telling. The silence implied by a lack of policy tends to suggest that an issue may not be a priority, especially if the often unequal power relations in the policy process mean that the interests of those in power lie elsewhere. Hence the complete absence of a policy may suggest that the issue in question is not seen as important or that the organisation may not be ready to take a position on it.

The creation of a policy on a particular issue is important because the issue in question is being recognised as problematic or in need of change. Policies are a means of laying out a course of action, even if it is for much further into the future, and to bring the understanding that action will eventually be taken (Haddad & Demsky, 1995). They could also guide the thinking and decision-making of people working within the area that the policy addresses (Colebatch, 2002; as cited in Maguire et al., 2011). However, it must also be recognised that a policy is not a guaranteed solution and there can be tensions in the planning and implementation of the policy that would need to be resolved (Haddad & Demsky, 1995). Still, the policy process and an analysis of whose interests are being served, and why particular policies do or do not exist, are important in understanding an organisation's priorities and interests as well as its orientation and values.

Within this research, I aimed to explore the policies on academic development in place at WITS in order to gain an understanding of the institutional position on issues surrounding academic development and student support. What emerged was that there were no policies on these issues that could be found. In relation to the literature discussed above, it could indicate that there is no position taken by WITS as an institution, neither is there a future plan for this area.

This argument could also be extended to universities in terms of understanding how and why policies are created and how to analyse them because universities are also influenced by broader political and socio-economic contexts as well as less broad internal contextual factors and levels of resources. The studies by Haddad and Demsky (1995) and Christie (2008) provide useful insights into the thinking behind creating, or not creating, a policy.

The exploration of policies on academic development in place at WITS can provide an understanding of the institutional position on academic development and student support.

2.5 Conclusion

While academic development and student support are broad concepts that refer to a range of activities aimed at ensuring student success, it is clear that within the current university context academic development and student support are real imperatives. The literature indicates that there are various discourses and challenges in providing academic development and student support as well as different ways of providing these. Both academic development and student support need the support of academic staff and need to take into consideration the context in which they are to be implemented to make meeting students' needs an important redress priority.

The next section will use the information distilled from the literature review to develop a conceptual framework with which to analyse the data collected during this research.

Conceptual Framework

The framework used to analyse the data collected during this research study draws together the key concepts surrounding academic development and student support from the literature presented in Chapter 2. It offers a means of analysing the issues influencing the provision of academic development and student support, and how these are mediated by the academic development and student support practitioners to produce particular practices within their specific contexts.

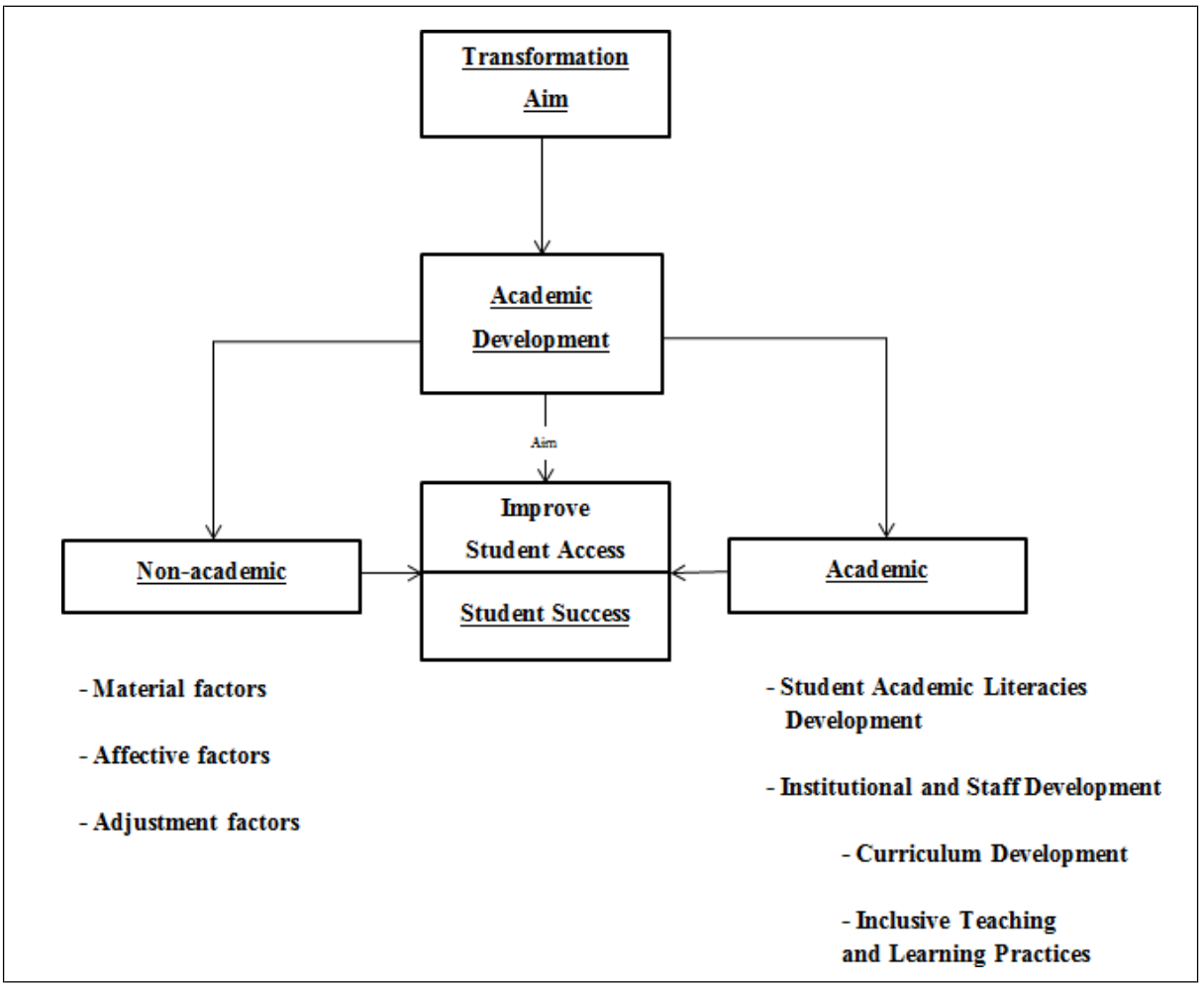
Academic development and student support are difficult issues that are often subjective or relative. Each set of students and academic staff is different, and so is the educational, ideological and financial context of each university. It is important to recognise that the context of higher education in South Africa is complex and student needs are multilayered and varied. This means that the various initiatives or programmes that are implemented need to work at different levels in trying to meet students' needs. There is also the need to move away from the traditional Western and middle-class university structures and culture, which enhance the access and success of a minority of privileged students, towards

transformed university structures and culture that will enable a greater number of students to have access to, and succeed within, the knowledge-creation and dissemination structures of universities.

From the literature on academic development there is a push for institutional change and development, where aspects of the universities are closely examined and altered in order to facilitate epistemological access for a more diverse student population. This includes altering the curriculum so that it is more relevant to the majority of students, and/or changing teaching and learning and assessment practices to include practices that recognise the diversity of students within the classroom context. In addition, approaches that promote the development of the academic literacy practices that the students require within the university context need to be used. This needs to be combined with efforts to develop staff skills, to enable them to adapt their practices to cater for student diversity.

To recap on the influences on university student access and success, let us remember that Lotkowski et al., (2004) suggest that there are academic and non-academic factors affecting student success at university. These include material and affective factors (Scott et al., 2013). This means that student support measures need to be put into place to assist students with all these issues. The aims of academic development and its influencing factors can be summarised and represented as follows in Figure 1:

Figure 1: The Scope of Academic Development

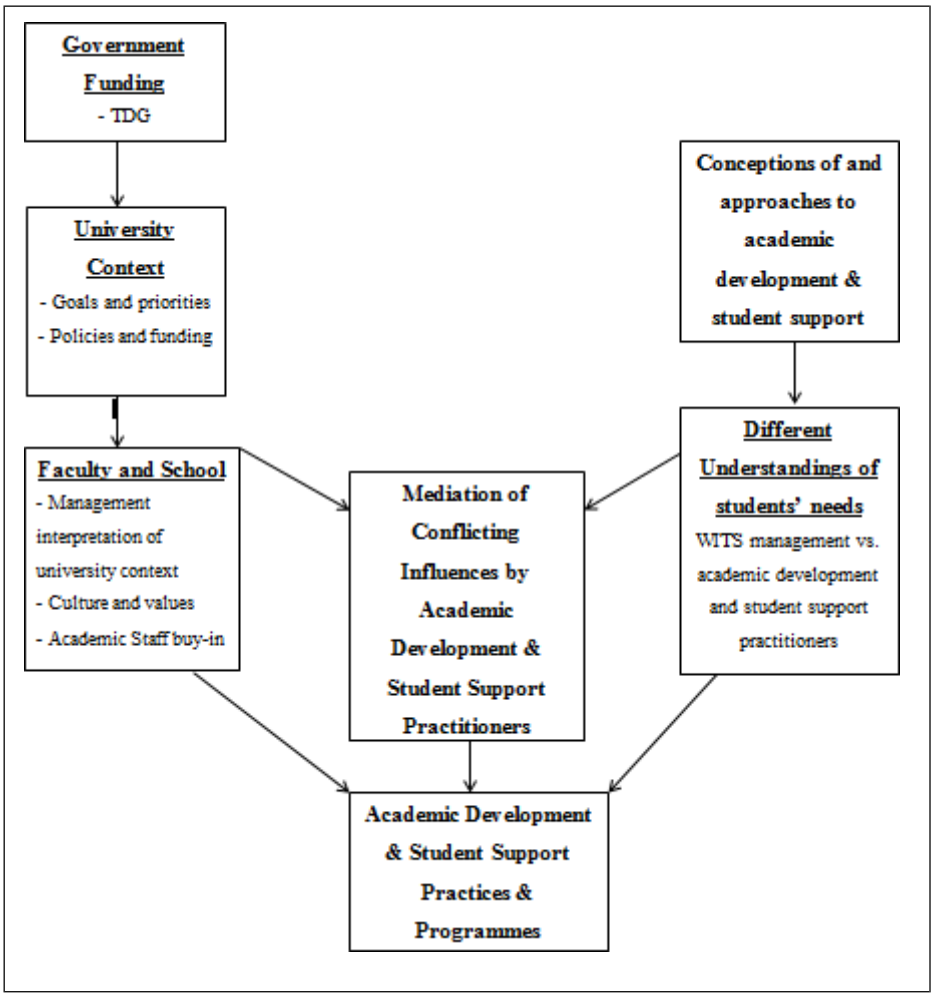


To review the structure, provision and enactment of academic development and student support at WITS, there are several influencing factors: contextual factors such as resources and funding; government requirements; university demands or needs; diversity of student needs; and discourses and enacted practices within the field. As a result, a holistic approach must be taken towards understanding how all of these factors work together to produce particular academic development and student support priorities and practices as well as their conceptualisation and operationalisation of academic development within specific contexts.

The following framework was developed to understand the various enabling and constraining factors influencing the conceptualisation and practices of academic development and student support programmes or initiatives. This will inform the data

analysis and findings of this research study.

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework



The left-hand side of Figure 2 shows the government funding received in the form of the TDG, which impacts on the provision of academic development and student support due to possible expectations and conditions that have to be met. Next we see the importance of the contextual factors within the university itself including its goals, priorities, policies and funding, which influence the ways in which academic development may be viewed and enacted. These were conceptualised to have been communicated through the presence or absence of policies as well as how the university decides to allocate funding for academic development and student support initiatives based on these priorities. This can either enable or constrain effective practices. In turn, these contextual factors from the wider structures of WITS administration and the government have to be mediated by Heads of School or Dean of Faculties, who need to interpret the policy or mandates provided, and

adapt these to the requirements of the School or Faculty context.

The overall culture and academic staff in the Schools and Faculties also have an influence on the ways in which academic development and student support work, especially in terms of how the initiatives or programmes and the work that they do are perceived and whether they are recognised. This could affect the reach and effectiveness of the initiatives or programmes implemented. All of these influences can be contradictory in themselves or across each other because they are subjected to their multiple agendas and goals, as well as various interpretations.

Looking at the right-hand side of Figure 2, it is argued that the various conceptions of and approaches to academic development and student support, as well as the dominant discourses, influence the ways in which academic development and student support practitioners understand how best to meet both institutional demands and student needs. Past academic development initiatives or programmes and the experiences of the practitioners also inform the conceptualisation and models of academic development, based on what was perceived to be effective or ineffective. There may be some differences between the practitioners' and WITS managements' understanding of students' needs and how best to meet them.

Within this process of the conceptualisation and operationalisation of student support and academic development, the role of the practitioner is seen as central. The ways in which academic development is practised and programmes are developed within universities are a direct result of the decisions taken by the practitioners, who have a role to play in shaping academic development and student support. Despite policy imperatives, dominant discourses and practices within the field and the contextual demands, the agency of the practitioners is important in influencing the course of actions to take that measure to prioritise and address how to meet the demands and constraints of the institution as well as the needs of the students. Academic development and student support practitioners can also decide whether to meet policy imperatives or to subvert them, how to improve their programmes or projects given their expertise and understanding of the evolution of, and lessons from, the field and the various research studies.

Considering the various pressures and considerations that must be taken into account, the agency of the academic development practitioner is important. Decisions must be made

about which requirements to prioritise and how to work with the academic development theory within their context. These issues may be in conflict at times and these tensions need to be mediated by the practitioner. The decisions that are made will result in the particular practices and the formation of the programmes in place at Faculty level and School level.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter explains the research methodology applied in conducting this research, including: the research approaches used; sampling techniques; data collection and analysis strategies; ethical considerations; and the limitations to this study.

3.1 Qualitative Interpretive Approach

This research is qualitative in nature and based on the interpretive research paradigm. According to Yin (2011) qualitative interpretivist research provides a way of gaining understanding about the ways in which people experience their world and the things that are happening in their lives and how those people create meaning within their specific contexts.

A qualitative interpretive research model was seen to be appropriate because this research aimed to understand how and why people central to the provision of academic development and student support at WITS work within their contexts and constraints in order to produce particular practices within particular spaces. Qualitative interpretive research goes beyond statistics or rhetoric and is appropriate for an in-depth study of the ways in which people experience their worlds (Yin, 2011) to uncover the lived reality of people within contexts to understand the reasoning behind the decisions they have made. This information is invaluable and can only be retrieved from the people involved.

Although "… qualitative findings are longer, more detailed, and variable in content; analysis is difficult because responses are neither systematic nor standardized… the open-ended responses permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents …" (Patton, 2002, pp. 21–22). Understanding the perspectives of the participants in this research was seen as central to understanding the programmes and practices in place, and this research attempted to capture the richness of their experiences. Qualitative interpretive research was useful for this purpose because it allowed for a focus on people and the ways in which they make meaning within their contexts.

A limitation to the use of qualitative interpretive methodology which must be acknowledged and made provision for, is the researchers own perspectives in conducting

research and interpreting research data. Due to the fact that the researcher is actively involved in the research process, and is the source of the data interpretation, there is a risk of over-interpreting, and being skewed in terms of the researchers' own perspectives, which influence the interpretation (Atieno, 2009). For this reason, researchers must be aware and conscious of their own views and potential bias by acknowledging this and working towards ensuring that this bias is recognised and has as little effect as possible.

3.2 A Comparative Case Study

Yin (1994, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 27) defines a case study as "… an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context…". Comparative case studies examine more than one case and compare the experiences of people or the same phenomenon within different contexts, which will provide information about why particular contexts have led to specific practices and understandings within them (Merriam, 1998). This allows for a more accurate description of the phenomena being studied. For this reason, this approach was seen as appropriate to study the academic development and student support initiatives or programmes available in two WITS Schools in order to examine and understand their different approaches to academic development and student support as well as the programmes that they have created.

The results of case studies cannot be generalised (Bell, 2005). This is due to the situated nature of a case study that examines a phenomenon within a specific context. If the context were different, the outcomes may also change. Comparing case studies, however, is important because it provides a means of verifying experiences and understanding practices to see what is common or different and why. This accuracy and detail tends to assist in establishing better validity than a single case study (Merriam, 1998). Within this research, the two case studies conducted provided valuable information about the similarities and differences in the thinking and experiences of the participants in this study. The results of this study are representative of the two Schools that were studied, and cannot be generalised to the whole of WITS as an institution. Rather than trying to generalise the results of a case study, it may be more pertinent to focus on relatability, according to Bassey (1981, p. 85, as cited in Bell, 2005, p. 11) who stated that:

> "… an important criterion for judging the merit of a case study is the extent to

which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision making to that described in the case study. The reliability of a case study is more important than its generalizability."

3.3 Sampling

This research made use of purposive sampling by selecting two Schools in different Faculties which had similar programmes or initiatives to provide academic development and student support, which were conceptualised and operationalised in different ways. Purposive sampling was used to select research participants who worked within these initiatives and programmes and/or had extensive experience within the fields of academic development and student support.

WITS University

WITS was the institution in which this study was conducted because the researcher has studied in the institution and has previously worked within an academic development programme at WITS. WITS is also an institution which has a history of researching, developing and implementing academic development and student support initiatives and programmes for decades. As a result, there has been a progression to the development of academic development and student support as well as extensive experience and history in the field, which was a rich source of information.

The Two Selected Schools

The two Schools, Schools A and B in this research, were selected because they are both producing professional graduates and have different layers of academic development and student support in place at different levels and similar types of initiatives or programmes at each of these levels. Although similar types of initiatives were in place, their approaches tended to differ. So a comparison was not only possible but interesting and informative in terms of their approaches to and work on academic development and student support to understand how the initiatives or programmes were constructed, the ways in which they operated, and the reasons for enacting academic development and student support in particular ways.

The Participants

The participants in this research study were selected based on their involvement in the initiative or programmes in place, and on their expertise and/or experiences with academic development and student support.

Initially, this study aimed to conduct research on the initiatives and programmes in place by including more participants playing various roles within the WITS academic development and student support realm. This included participants at a management level within the Schools and other WITS managers working in the area of funding planning and allocation, to provide a more complete picture of academic development and student support planning and enactment within the Schools and at Faculty level, as well as the organisational structure of the plan for academic development and student support from an institutional perspective. It was not possible to gain access to interview some of the participants.

The chosen participants included the Centre for Learning and Teaching Development (CLTD), linked in part to the Teaching Development Grant (TDG) allocation as well as staff development, as it emerged. This perspective could not be obtained as the participants were not available for this research. The staff member in charge of handling the TDG funding allocated to WITS was also approached, as were the Heads of Schools initially selected in order to gain an understanding of the role that they played in mediating the various factors impacting on academic development and student support, and their impact on the initiatives or programmes in each of the Schools. However, due to various factors, it was not possible to gain these perspectives that perhaps would have provided a more holistic perspective. This affected the focus of the research, which resulted in some perspectives missing from this study.

This resulted in the need to change one of the selected Schools. As a result, and due to time constraints, the number of participants that could be approached in School B was limited, and the Head of School B could not be interviewed. This meant that more participants from School A were interviewed, than from School B.

The eight participants who were interviewed were selected based on their direct involvement within the planning and enactment of the academic development and student

support initiatives and programmes in place. Two experts were also selected based on their extensive experience in teaching and learning, and academic development.

Table 1: Research Participants from each School

	School A	School B
Faculty level	T&L Development Practitioner A	T&L Development Practitioner B
	Student Support Practitioner A	Student Support Practitioner B
School level	Student Academic Development Practitioner A	Student Academic Development Practitioner B
	T&L Expert A	
	Academic Development Expert A	

Table 2: Research Participant Profiles

	Work at Faculty level or School level	Student Support or Academic Development	Years at WITS	Years in Current Position	Years of University Experience
T&L Development Practitioner A	Faculty	Academic Development	-	2.5	-
T&L Development Practitioner B	Faculty	Academic Development	-	2	-
Student Support Practitioner A	Faculty	Student Support	2	2	10
Student Support Practitioner B	Faculty	Student Support	3	2	9.5
Student Academic Development Practitioner A	School	Student Academic Development	20	6	20+
Student Academic Development Practitioner B	School	Student Academic Development	2	2	20+
T&L Expert A	School	Academic Development	20	3	20 +
Academic Development Expert A	School	Academic Development	27	-	30

3.4 Data Collection

The main research instrument used in this research study was semi-structured interviews. Formal interviews were conducted with each of the participants. According to Fossey et al., (2002) and Yin (2011), interviews can provide in-depth information about the experiences of people within their contexts. Through the use of interviews, a better understanding can be gained about the lived reality of people within the system on which they work, and the reasoning behind the decisions they make as well as the influences on these decisions.

This research aimed to capture the experiences and insights of the participants of the academic development and student support system that they were part of, and as a result interviews were seen as the most appropriate and useful research instrument. A series of elite interviews was conducted with people who are directly involved in or with extensive experience in academic development at WITS in order to gain in-depth insights into the ways in which academic development and student support is conceptualised and enacted and how funding is provided and spent within two Schools in WITS.

According to Hochschild (2009), elite interviews refer to those conducted with participants who have been "…chosen by name or position for a particular reason, rather than randomly …" and the "… purpose of elite interviews is to acquire information and context that only that person can provide about some event or process …" (p.124). Within this research, participants who are or were involved in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of academic development and student support within the two selected Schools and at Faculty-level have been interviewed.

Different interview schedules were constructed for each group of participants (See Appendices 2 to 6 for the full interview schedules). Each participant is listed in Table 1 (subsection 4.2). "Interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge …" (Patton, 2002, p. 1), and these quotations, presented in Chapter 5, provide a valuable source of information and help to ensure that the data presented is as accurate as possible.

The use of interviews does have limitations because they reflect the perspective, interpretations and experiences of the people being interviewed. Therefore, the same point

that makes interviews valuable also limits them. Interviews, especially on a small scale, cannot produce generalised findings and may be biased in their content because the responses that are given and the phrasing of these responses reflect the particular views of the participants (Atieno, 2009). Further, interviews cannot provide an objective measure for aspects such as the value of programmes in place, but only provide perceptions of these points. However, it is precisely these different perspectives, experiences and perceptions that this research aims to understand. These interviews can be triangulated by interviewing participants in different positions with different perspectives, or through document analysis, to corroborate the participants' perceptions described during the interviews (Yin, 2011).

The second source of data was document analysis. Merriam (1988, p. 118, as cited in Bowen, 2009, p.29) states that: "Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem …". One of the major advantages of analysing documents is that they remain constant throughout the research process and can present a stable view of the issues with which they deal (Bowen, 2009). The aim of combining document analysis with interviews is to try to provide a more thorough understanding of the ways in which the initiatives or programmes in place are conceptualised and experienced as well as for triangulation purposes, in order: "… to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources and methods" (Bowen, 2009, p.28).

The documents used for this research included:

1. A document outlining the first-year intervention that is part of the student academic development programme in School A.
2. An outcomes statement discussing the plans and research conducted for the academic development programme in School B.
3. WITS Teaching and Learning Plan 2015–2019.
4. School A Teaching and Learning Committee Portfolio.

These documents provide valuable information on issues surrounding the planning and operation of the student academic development measures in place in both Schools, as well as the Teaching and Learning Committee's work in School A. The limitation of document analysis is that often documents do not always reflect the realities of the issues being

discussed and the actual experiences of people on the ground, and reflect ideals rather than realities. As a result, using interviews of differently positioned participants in conjunction with document analysis aims to provide a more complete picture of the issues in this research.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

In conducting qualitative research, there are a number of issues that can arise in terms of generalisability, validity and reliability. The advice of Patton (2002) was taken in trying to ensure the reliability and validity of this study, which is to "… do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study …" (p. 433). This has been done in a number of ways.

Joppe (2000, as cited in Golafshani, 2003, p. 299) states that "… validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are …". This includes the research instruments used to conduct this research. The schedules allow for the probing of the responses of participants to gain more clarity and accuracy in understanding their perspectives. This helped to improve the validity of the results because it reduced the interpretation done by the researcher and the influence of the researcher's views. These responses were also recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting of the responses. As far as possible, the data was triangulated through comparing case studies but also through using document analysis to corroborate the empirical data collected.

As stated in subsection 4.1, case studies present particular challenges in the sense that the results of a case study cannot be generalised through different contexts, because they study particular phenomena with specific contexts (Bell, 2005). The use of a comparative case study is an attempt to improve the validity of the results because comparing two different contexts to find areas of convergence and divergence may lead to more accurately described phenomena (Merriam, 1998).

According to Patton (2002), "… in qualitative research data the researcher is the instrument" (p. 14). This means that analysis and interpretation of the data is reliant on the researcher and the researcher's own bias may affect the analytical validity of the study. Therefore it is important, on the part of the researcher, to recognise possible bias and work

to mitigate the effects of this bias to ensure that this does not affect the results of the research. There has also been an attempt to remain as neutral as possible throughout the research process.

Reliability in research is about testing whether the results of the study may be replicable if the study were to be repeated under the same conditions by different researchers (Golafshani, 2003). With a qualitative case study approach, this is less of a problem because the aim is not to create a law-like statement regarding the operation of the phenomena, but rather to understand the particular phenomenon within its context. However, steps have been taken to try to ensure the reliability of this study, including the use of semi-structured interviews for different groups of participants as well as purposive sampling to select participants for this study.

As mentioned previously, the perspective of the researcher within an interpretive paradigm must be acknowledged and accounted for within the study being conducted. It must be stated that I, the researcher, have worked within the student academic development programme in School A and, as a result, have first-hand experience within academic development and one of the programmes in this study. In order to improve the reliability of this study, this perspective is acknowledged and a conscious effort has been made to remain in a more neutral position in the collection and interpretation of the data, and to be more aware of the potential influence of my own perspective, making a conscious effort to work with and interpret the data as it has been presented. The work I have done has made me better equipped to understand the work being done within the field at WITS, as well as to be more aware of my own habits and perspectives in relation to others. This independent research project was initiated and conducted partly because of my own interest within the field, and the fact that there is a gap in the literature that I felt was important to try to fill.

In order to attempt to improve the dependability of this study, which "… refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings and the degree to which research procedures are documented, allowing someone outside the research to follow, audit, and critique the research process …" (Sandelowski, 1986; Polit et al., 2006; Streubert, 2007; as cited in Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams & Blackman, 2016), steps were taken to ensure that the process of data collection and analysis was transparent and the analysis methods were appropriate for the purpose of this study. Each step of the collection

and analysis of the data was documented. Transparency was ensured by documenting each step of the data collection process, such as sampling and collection of interview data. In securing the transparency of the data analysis, many quotes were included within Chapter 4 (Data Presentation) in order to ensure that the participants' views are presented as accurately as possible. This also assists in working towards avoiding over-interpretation by the researcher.

3.6 Data Analysis

The dominant analysis method used within this study was content analysis, which "… refers to analysing text (interview transcripts, diaries, or documents) rather than observation-based field notes …" and "… any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies, and meanings …" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Once each interview was transcribed, the data was coded in order to find the common themes or patterns across the data and then the data from the two case studies were compared to find areas of convergence or divergence in the data (Patton, 2002).

In this analysis, a meaning-focused approach was employed, which involved analysing the data by looking for common themes based on the data aims and objectives while still being open to new themes emerging from the data (Fossey et al., 2002). This also contributed to ensuring validity of the data presented by working with both the aims of the study, while not allowing these aims to restrict the results of this study.

3.7 Challenges and Limitations of the Study

There were two main challenges in conducting this study. The main challenge faced, as mentioned in Section 3.3 on Sampling, was accessing key participants within the area of funding allocation and policy development at the University-level and School management level. These participants were unavailable, and as a result, some perspectives are missing from this research. There was also some difficulty in gaining access to participants from a chosen School, which meant that a different School needed to be selected. This limited the number of participants from the new School (School B) that were approached given the time constraints. As a result, more participants were interviewed from School A than

School B.

Further, the student protest action in October 2016 proved to be a challenge. The Fees Must Fall protests caused delays because research could not be conducted at WITS, and some participants were not able to participate within this study due to the challenges and delays in the teaching programme caused by the protests which needed to be catered for. As a result, some perspectives are missing and more time was required to collect data and complete this study.

Another challenge faced was my own preconception, as the researcher, of WITS University. I had perceived WITS's administration, Faculties and Schools as constituting one coherent, united entity, but the reality that emerged was that it was more fractured and separate in terms of the Faculties and Schools, to whom much authority was devolved. As a result, perspectives and measures adopted were more varied, without a real unified perspective. My (mis)conception was challenged and fell away to enable me to present more insightful and accurate research findings.

A shift in perspective that was experienced was that in Faculty A, School A tended to work on its own. This means that they did not necessarily need to make use of the academic development and student support initiatives and programmes available at Faculty level and could implement their own programmes or initiatives. It is important to recognise that although the Faculty-level assistance was available to the School, it was not necessarily utilised by School A. In School B, this was not necessarily the case with the Faculty-level programmes being used by students within School B.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

An application for ethics clearance was submitted to the WITS School of Education's Ethics Committee, before this research was started. This application was approved (Protocol Number: 2016ECE34M). A letter was sent to the Committee for the change of the name of this study before the research was conducted. Please refer to Appendix 1 for the ethics clearance letter and change of name letter for this research. The key ethical issues considered in conducting this research were regarding the rights of the participants in this study, specifically ensuring anonymity and confidentiality as well as informed consent.

Firstly, each of the interviews was conducted at the convenience of the research participants, in terms of scheduling and venue. This was to ensure that the participants were not inconvenienced when they chose to participate. Each of the participants was provided with an information sheet outlining the nature and purpose of this study and before each interview began, the participants were informed that participating within this study was entirely voluntary and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any point should they have felt that they needed to.

A coding system was employed to try to preserve anonymity, with each participant being allocated a code within my research and no personal pronouns being used when referring to the participants. To try to preserve confidentiality, all pertinent information about the participants was kept confidential. Measures were also taken to ensure the security of the data and protect the participants; this included the interview data consisting of interview recordings and transcripts as well as documents. All of the digital data is stored on a password-protected computer and the material data is stored in a safe at the researcher's home. This data will be kept in secure storage and destroyed after three to five years, whereupon the digital data will be erased and the material data shredded.

3.9 Conclusion

This section aimed to outline the methodological reasoning behind planning and conducting this research in specific ways, in order to best achieve the purpose of this research which examined the ways in which academic development and student support are conceptualised and operationalised by the people who are or have been directly involved within these processes. Qualitative interpretive research theories formed the basis for this methodology. The processes followed have been documented to ensure that this research is reliable and valid, and was conducted in a systematic and reasoned manner. Despite the challenges in finding participants to be interviewed, a wealth of data was collected and is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: School Profiles and Research Data Presentation

This section presents a summary of the research data collected. It first presents profiles of the Schools studied, and then a summary of the interview and document data are presented under the main conceptual ideas of this research.

School Profiles

School A

School A is one of five Schools in Faculty A. It is a professional School that offers degrees for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. In 2017, it had an average first-year count of 578 students and approximately 677 second-year, 546 third-year, and 731 fourth-year students. In the first-year compulsory core theoretical course students are split into different lecture groups, the first with 355 students and the second with 223 students. There are some tutorials for this course, but the number of tutorials is being reduced due to increasing fiscal constraints. There are two additional compulsory courses for first-year students; these tend to have more tutorial groups because it is deemed necessary to teach these courses in smaller groups of students.

Fees for School A average between R30 000 and R35 000 per year. There are more bursary opportunities that are available for students entering this particular degree. In order to be admitted to School A, students need 36 ASP points[2]. Students who score between 30 and 36 points may be put onto a waiting list. This is one of the lowest entry requirements of all the WITS Schools.

School A aims to equip their students for the world of work by teaching theoretical and methodological courses, and require students to apply this through a practical component that forms part of their curriculum. According to T&L Expert A, three-quarters of the students entering the School have "… intermediate levels of academic literacy as measured

[2] The APS (Admission Points Score) points are calculated using students' final matric marks. Points are allocated per subject and according to the percentage obtained in these subjects. The different University Schools require different point scores for students' entry into their programmes.

by the NBT[3] scores …". As a result, teaching and learning development, and modelling effective teaching and learning practices are emphasised by the School administration. There is also a requirement for lecturers to conduct research and specifically research into teaching and learning within the field is encouraged.

There are various academic development and student support measures available. At Faculty level, there is a T&L Development Practitioner tasked with assisting all Schools within Faculty A to improve teaching and learning practices, including curricula. This initiative could be classified as academic development. There is also a Faculty-level student support programme in place that aims to assist students with various academic and non-academic areas of need. This support programme runs an intervention programme for first-year students at risk of failing their courses. The Faculty-level teaching and learning development initiative and the student support programme are available to assist School A, but the School tends to work independently on these areas, with their own staff and goals. This is could be as a result of the level of decentralisation at University and Faculty level.

In School A, there is a Teaching and Learning Committee that is responsible for examining teaching and learning issues within the School and promoting and producing research on these issues. Lastly, there is a student academic development programme in School A that is aimed at improving the academic literacy practices of students within the particular discipline. This programme works with students in contact sessions, in addition to running their own first-year intervention programme for students within the School who are at risk of failing their courses.

[3] The National Benchmark Tests (NBT) are standardised tests measuring students' levels of preparedness for university. "They are designed to measure a candidate's levels of proficiency in Academic Literacy (AL), Quantitative Literacy (QL) and Mathematics (MAT) in relation to the demands of tertiary study (le Roux & Sebolai, 2016, p. 3)". There are three bands into which students may fall based on their results: Basic - students may not be able to cope with demands; Intermediate - students may need support to cope with demands; and Proficient: students will be able to cope with demands (Le Roux & Sebolai, 2016). These tests are often used to stream students for support purposes or into suitable courses at South African universities (Le Roux & Sebolai, 2016; Boughey, 2010).

School B

School B is one of six Schools in Faculty B. It is also a professional School that offers degrees for students, including a graduate-entry programme. This means that students require a first degree to enter this second-degree course. As a result, the types of students in this School may be more experienced than those entering School A. There are two streams: a two-year course or a three-year course, both of which have an entry requirement of a first degree with a qualifying mark of 60% in that degree. There are two main courses within those streams with a student count of 327 (Stream 1) and 522 (Stream 2). The students in Stream 1 are divided into three classes, with an average of 109 students per class, and the students in Stream 2 are divided into four classes, with an average of 131 students per class. The student enrolment numbers for second- and third-year students could not be obtained. Fees for School B average between R40 000 and R47 000 per year.

School B aims to develop students' thinking on issues within the field, and offers both theoretical and practical courses to allow students to apply the theory that they have learnt. There are also opportunities for students to gain experience through work in the field, which is facilitated by the School. Producing research within the field is described as a priority for School B, and lecturers are required to produce research. However not much is mentioned about research into teaching and learning, beyond their task of equipping students with the necessary skills and thinking needed to be leaders in their field.

There are various academic development and student support measures available for School B. At Faculty level, there is a T&L Development Practitioner tasked with assisting all Schools to review and improve teaching and learning practices, including curricula. This initiative can be classified as academic development. There is also a Faculty-level student support programme in place that aims to assist students with various academic and non-academic needs. It also runs an intervention programme for first-year students at risk of failing their courses consisting of skills development tutorial classes that are structured into the students' timetables. This programme is available to all Schools in Faculty B.

In 2014, the Head of School B identified the need to develop students' academic literacy practices. A student academic programme was initiated and funded at School level to work with students' practice development. This programme works with students directly, both in

contact sessions and providing feedback online. It is also working increasingly with lecturers and within lectures, with a student focus.

Data Presentation

Six student support and academic development initiatives or programmes in place were studied, three from each School. There were two types of Faculty-level initiatives or programmes. The first is an initiative that can be classified as academic development that was implemented across all WITS Faculties, and tasks staff members assisting with the development of academic staff's teaching and learning practices and curricula; these Faculty-based practitioners are referred to here as T&L Development Practitioners.

The next Faculty-level programmes are classified as student support and are in place to assist students with various needs with an emphasis on assisting students 'at-risk' of failing and/or courses with high failure rates. These programmes worked to address the academic and non-academic barriers faced by students. These Faculty-based participants working within the student support programmes are referred to here as Student Support Practitioners. The third set of programmes studied was the School-level student academic development programmes. These discipline-based programmes aimed to develop the academic literacy practices of students within each School and these practitioners are referred to as Student Academic Development Practitioners.

Two other participants were also interviewed. Firstly, Teaching and Learning Expert A from School A (hereafter referred to as T&L Expert A) has been involved in academic development and teaching and learning development at WITS for over 20 years. T&L Expert A provided insights into another measure in place at School level, namely the Teaching and Learning Committee, which was tasked with examining and researching issues of teaching and learning within School A. Secondly, an Academic Development Expert A from School A (hereafter referred to as AD Expert A) was also interviewed. AD Expert A has worked in and around the field of academic development at WITS and other universities in Southern Africa for more than 30 years. Unfortunately, similar experts in School B or Faculty B could not be accessed.

This presentation has been structured in order to address the four research questions posed in this study. It will also discuss additional issues that have arisen during this research that are important in understanding academic development and student support in the two Schools. These include: the meaning of academic development and student support; policies in place; the conceptualisation, operationalisation and evaluation of the initiatives or programmes in place; issues around funding of the initiatives or programmes; and challenges and constraints identified by the practitioners in each programme.

4.1 Meaning of Academic Development and Student Support

One of the main issues around academic development and student support is the discourse used to describe the types of initiatives or programmes in place, their functions and practices. The ways in which a programme is described can hold positive or negative connotations, depending on the context and the way in which they are used. As a result, it was important to establish the perceptions of each of the participants interviewed, especially those who were involved directly in the various initiatives and programmes. The responses received from the participants tended to differ, generally according to their experience and their positions.

4.1.1 Teaching and Learning Practitioners

The T&L Development Practitioners were asked questions regarding their understanding of the terms ‘academic development’ and ‘academic support’ and the difference between these terms. From a staff and teaching and learning development perspective, the practitioners tended to view the distinction between these terms differently. T&L Development Practitioner A perceived the differences between student academic support and academic development in relation to the work around the improvement of teaching and learning practices within WITS. They stated that:

> I would suggest in my own sort of understanding, academic development looks more at things like the types of assessments that are utilised, academic development looks at what actually works, does research around what works in terms of student learning, effective practice in terms of pedagogy and delivery of courses and course

> content. So it's much more on the learning side of it whilst academic support is much more on the side of helping lecturers develop skills, effective skills and at the same time sort of figuring out what are the needs in relation to the academic staff complement.

T&L Expert A perceived these differences along similar lines to T&L Development Practitioner A but in almost the opposite way, explaining that academic support is focused on ensuring students have epistemological access to the university through using appropriate and effective teaching and learning practices,

> … what I see as academic support is enabling them to access the knowledge goods of the curriculum… So, making sure that one is teaching at an appropriate level, that one is providing the scaffolds that one needs, one's not assuming that they all have access to the terminology… really checking that the readings are appropriate, that they are made accessible, that the concepts are made out in clear ways, in ways that the students can find accessible.

Academic development, on the other hand, was seen by T&L Expert A, to be related to developing students' practices and involved "… inducting them into the knowledge practices of the university… when they've got access, to take them further… ". This includes various academic practices that help to develop the students' academic literacy practices, from working with evidence and arguments to "… engaging with research …".

T&L Development Practitioner B perceived of the differences between academic development and academic support differently, mentioning that these were "fairly similar" and related to students. They viewed support as "… more aimed at trying to fix or remediate or lessen problems … so there are difficulties and the support is to help them with those difficulties …". Academic development "… is actually about not looking so much at difficulties as such but looking at a level or a place we'd want to get to and working towards that with interventions …". This suggests that support is more geared towards finding solutions for issues that students might be facing, while development serves the purpose of furthering students' skills or practices.

4.1.2 Student Academic Development Practitioners

The student academic development practitioners were also asked questions regarding their understanding of the terms ‘academic development’ and ‘student support’ and the difference between these terms.

Both of the student academic development practitioners differentiated between these terms in relation to the history of research into academic development. The term ‘support’ was associated with the ‘academic support’ of the past. Academic development carried a different meaning, where it included various institutional activities that worked towards the students’ success within the institution. Student Academic Development Practitioner B explained:

> I think the notion of student support is based on a deficit notion of students. This notion that somehow our students are lacking and that they need to be fixed in order to be the kind of students we want them to be. I think it's problematic in many ways, I think it's fairly counter transformation… Whereas academic development… I think it's more about the sense that the whole institution needs to develop ways of ensuring that students are able to access the university in meaningful ways.

It was the discourse within the academic development community surrounding the terms ‘development’ and ‘support’ that may have caused some discomfort with the ways in which the academic development programmes defined themselves, and how their work was viewed. In the past, academic support “… used to be more a kind of working with students, who required additional support and help coming into university from schools that perhaps hadn't prepared them for university, so that was the old remedial add-on model …” (Student Academic Development Practitioner A). Student Academic Development Practitioner A described a shift over time, which increased the scope of academic development today:

> … the whole field of academic development is much more all-encompassing and broader now and it includes… because I think that there was a shift in seeing the problem as one just with students and what they brought to university but more about courses, the way courses are designed … assessment … the teaching and

> learning environment which is enabling or not enabling their learning… the notion of academic development has now extended to working with staff on the way they teach, on the way they assess, on the way they work with students always foregrounding student learning. Not that one doesn't work with students anymore, but I think it's a much more multifaceted kind of approach, so staff development, student development and curriculum development.

Student Academic Development Practitioner B also suggested that the term "development" can also be problematic, "… I mean even the word development has notions of, you know, being raised to a place of where you should be, so I suppose it does imply some deficit notions as well …". This suggests that terms that are used to describe the programmes and their practices can be important because of the ways in which they position students, as well as how they are perceived by students.

Student Academic Development Practitioner A suggested that the differences between the terms 'support' and 'development' were as a result of some generic 'academic support' programmes that were run by WITS in the past, whereas academic development was associated with more contextual, discipline-based programmes:.

> The old academic support programme, the connotations are more sort of general, more generic, more add-on but I think it depends on the context, whereas development is more contextual, in the context of a particular discipline, that one is developing the requisite competencies and skills required by the discipline.

Thus the student academic development practitioners revealed their understanding of academic development during the 1980s where Academic Support Programmes (ASP) were seen to position students as lacking skills. According to AD Expert A, these programmes were regarded as negative and people "… used to mock the ASP and they used to call it 'African Students Programme' …" because of how these measures seemed to target mainly black students within historically white universities. So the "… notion of support was like an add-on thing …".

The emergence of the term academic development towards the 1990s signalled a change in practices as well as in the ways in which the measures in place were perceived. AD Expert A stated that "… the notion of academic development is something that is for everybody.

So it's more universal and sort of democratic, if I can use that word …". It was important to move away from the 'academic support' discourses of changing students, to changing some aspects of the institution. AD Expert A concluded in this way: "I think it's mixed because, within the university, you'll find some people who strongly support the institution should adapt and then you've still got those people who think these students, we've got to change them to fit in the institution …". This shows that it takes a long time to replace the 'deficit' discourses of the past, with the idea of academic development as systemic change.

4.1.3 Student Support Practitioners

The student support practitioners were asked questions regarding their understanding of the terms 'academic development' and 'student support' and the difference between these terms.

The student support practitioners in both School A and School B identified their primary role as providing student support. From their perspective academic development related to students and only dealt with academic factors that enabled or constrained student success. Student Support Practitioner A said that, to them "… student support is vast, academic development is narrow …". Student support was seen as more holistic than academic development because it aims to assist students with solving problems in numerous areas of need, such as: physical needs like accommodation and food; psychological needs such as counselling; careers counselling; assistance on how to navigate the university systems in place; and academic needs in the form of more generic skills courses that helped with skills such as time management and study skills. Student Support Practitioner A continued to describe the difference as follows:

> Academic development focuses on academics, so it's developing the academic skills that students need in order to be successful. Our role is to support the development of those skills but students' academic performance is impacted by so much more than just being able to read and write for a higher education setting. It's about does the student have a place to sleep, do they have food to eat, basic needs are met, so it's finding out what those needs are and how students can find the assistance in order to meet those needs.

Importantly, Student Support Practitioner A explained that "… more than just the academic skills, it's the whole person and I think we sometimes tend to forget that". Student Support Practitioner B tended to agree:

> I want to emphasise that our programme is a non-academic holistic support programme but it absolutely speaks to academic because what we've learned is that… time management, study skills, etcetera, are very important to help students manage their academic success.

This suggests that non-academic factors can also impact on students' academic success "… because if that isn't in place, if they don't know how to go through a week, how to prepare for a class, how to revise, how to study, then obviously their academics will suffer …" (Student Support Practitioner B).

4.2 WITS Academic Development and Student Support Policies in Place

Another focus area of this research was to understand how WITS envisioned and conceptualised academic development for their students through their policies, and how these policies in turn, influenced the ways in which academic development and student support initiatives were structured and operationalised at Faculty and School level. Each of the participants in this study was asked about how their programmes were initiated, whether this was guided by WITS policies or vision. It was interesting to note that none of the practitioners referred to a governing policy or a set of guidelines from WITS.

Five practitioners – T&L Development Practitioners A and B, Student Support Practitioner A and Student Academic Development Practitioners A and B – stated that they were not aware of any policies in place to govern their work:

> "[there are] no formal policies except for what is existing… we don't have a policy about that but we have a practice." (Student Support Practitioner A)

> "…in terms of academic development, I'm not aware of one at all. In fact, I'd love to see one if there is one…" (Student Academic Development Practitioner A)

> "Are there any policies? No, I don't, not that I'm aware of…" (T&L Development Practitioner A)

> "Not that I'm aware of." (T&L Development Practitioner B)

Perhaps one of the most interesting responses was given by Student Academic Development Practitioner B:

> … you know we were really given sort of carte blanche to develop our [programme] in any way we saw fit … I hope that what we've developed is responsive and takes cognisance of the research in the field but we could have suggested something entirely inappropriate and there didn't seem to be any policy to guide us to say 'No, you can't do that'.

These participant responses confirm that there do not seem to be any formal, over- arching University policies or guidelines to govern academic development and student support. In fact, the researcher tried in vain to find a formal policy to this regard whether at University, Faculty or School level.

In that sense, academic development and student support at WITS have been widely decentralised and each Faculty seems responsible for their own programmes. The term "ad hoc" was used by three of the six practitioners to describe the nature of academic development and student support at WITS. T&L Development Practitioner A explained that:

> So, we're looking at different interventions but again it's happening in a haphazard sort of way, very ad hoc, per Faculty very different. Now one can argue that's beneficial because it's more local and more focused but again if you had a centralised approach that was well-funded and appropriately funded, you could still do the same thing …

Student Academic Development Practitioner A confirms that "… it's still too ad-hoc ... I think that you're going to find pockets of support all over the place. There's support here, there and everywhere …". The quality of the programmes in place were questioned by Student Academic Development Practitioner B who revealed that "… when I started here I was surprised that there seemed to be so many ad-hoc and disconnected attempts to support

students that didn't necessarily seem to be drawing on the research that's been done in the field, in South Africa in the last 30 years …".

The absence of a University-wide policy and strategy seems to contribute to a lack of coherence and consistency of the approaches used by different Faculty- and School-level practitioners. There was no certainty in terms of what was expected from an institutional perspective, and no guidelines as to what may constitute acceptable or favourable practices that practitioners could promote. Student Academic Development Practitioner A provided some insight into the nature of academic development and student support at WITS:

> There are five Faculties at the University and I think that each one has a different model and so you'll find that some focus more on students at-risk, others focus more on staff development and how they can change their courses to accommodate diversity and more on how do I improve my teaching and learning and assessment practices. Other Faculties have these massive student support functions where students can get all sorts of things, reading programmes, writing programmes, it's all sort of layered on like Health Sciences. So, I think it depends on the Faculty.

There may be some benefits to the lack of a University-wide policy. As noted by T&L Development Practitioner A, a more "localised" approach to student development and support is important because it can be done within a Faculty or a discipline in an embedded way, and can cater for the specific needs of their student body. This perspective was shared by all six practitioners.

AD Expert A suggested that WITS may only take a position on academic development if there were resources available to support that position, because "… the other policies in earlier times came about because they could get funding …". Currently, the resources do not seem to be available for WITS to be able to support a given position. Fiscal constraints also affected the provision of academic development and student support opportunities. T&L Expert A believes that a lack of funds is one of the reasons for the closing of bridging programmes and foundational courses in the early 2000s. This interestingly happened at the same time that WITS decided to prioritise a research-intensive agenda.

Student Academic Development Practitioner A disagrees with this because they know that all these courses were closed even though some still had access to money. This money was

recalled by WITS. Furthermore, it had been a conscious decision to no longer provide financial aid to students with lower than required entry requirement point scores, and to close the programmes and courses that were in place.

4.2.1 WITS Teaching and Learning Policy

According to T&L Expert A, WITS does have a Teaching and Learning Policy "… in which it is expected that staff do what they need to do to make courses accessible to students …". Both T&L Expert A and Student Academic Development Practitioner A mentioned that there were policies dealing with aspects of teaching and learning, such as an assessment policy and a plagiarism policy. These types of policies work towards improving teaching and learning practices with the intention of ensuring fairness and evenness of practices throughout the university.

There is also a discussion draft of the "*Teaching and Learning Plan 2015 – 2019*" which "… sets out the University's strategic approach to its core business of education over the coming years …" (WITS, 2014, p.3). This document, referred to below as the *Plan*, is one of six that lay out an "Academic Plan", including Principals of Teaching and Learning; Academic Aims & Values: A Commitment to Scholarship; Student Access Principals; Admissions Policy; and The Strategic Research Plan (WITS, 2014, p.4). This plan establishes WITS's intentions with regards to the improvement of teaching and learning practices within the University, and the direction in which teaching and learning is envisioned to develop. This document outlines the need to improve practices in order to ensure that teaching and learning is comparable to that of international universities, and ensure redress objectives in South Africa by recognising the diverse backgrounds of students at WITS and "… broadening participation and provide[ing] support …" for previously disadvantaged students.

This document emphasises that "Wits is a research-intensive university with a strong research agenda …". It mentions the scholarship of teaching and learning by lecturers, and the need for professional development for lecturers within the institution. The plan identified six priority focus areas. First, there is a planned decrease in undergraduate enrolment "… which will concomitantly be supplemented by an increase in postgraduate enrolments … to achieve a 50/50 split between undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments

by 2022 …" (p. 7), further highlighting WITS's commitment to a research-intensive agenda.

The second priority, "access with success", aims to "… address the transition from school to higher education; selection and admissions management; effective and innovative pedagogical practices; and planning and monitoring practices …" (p. 8). This refers specifically to assisting students' transition from school to university, providing support services that have a foundation in research as well as improve teaching and learning practices for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Priority three deals with the professional development of lecturers in order to improve teaching and learning, including training and career needs of lecturers, institutionalised evaluations for courses and lecturers, and the encouragement of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) at WITS. The fourth priority focuses on curriculum and teaching improvement, including a curriculum review in order to ensure that WITS graduates are sufficiently skilled to meet the needs of "civil society and the workplace" (WITS, 2014, p. 9). Teaching methods have to also be aligned with these goals.

The last two priorities focus on the use of technology. Priority five discusses the move towards blended learning and e-Learning as teaching and learning strategies, while priority six emphasises the need for increased access to technology and resources which can aid students' learning. Priority six also recommends more spaces within the university that are "welcoming" (WITS, 2014, p. 10) and conducive to learning.

These priorities have been highlighted as important areas for development. However, the *Plan* does not have any indication of how it is supposed to be implemented; nor does it mention an allocation of resources towards achieving these resources. Given the fiscal constraints within the University and the additional responsibilities placed on staff by the research-intensive agenda, there may not be the financial or human resources to implement this *Plan*.

4.3 The Conceptualisation and Operation of Academic Development and Student Support Initiatives and Programmes

In order to understand how the programmes were conceptualised and the types of work that they did, each of the participants involved in the student support programmes at Faculty level and in the academic development programmes at Faculty and School level were asked about their operation, structure and practices. The previous section argues that without a University-wide policy to guide or govern the student support and academic development programmes, the design of the programmes and practices in place were largely left to the expertise and prerogative of the practitioners.

4.3.1 Initiatives or Programmes in Place

At Faculty level

For both School A and B there were opportunities available at the Faculty level for the improvement of teaching and learning practices, as well as student support programmes.

Teaching and Learning Development – Staff Development

Although it cannot be called a programme, there were initiatives in place to help staff improve their teaching and learning practices, where this was needed. In each Faculty, there was a staff member appointed to assist lecturers with this. Their assistance was on a voluntary basis, so if lecturers felt that they were in need of assistance, they could approach T&L Development Practitioners A or B for assistance. Alternatively, the practitioners could initiate this process by approaching lecturers. These leaders would be able to assist lecturers or suggest ways for them to improve their individual practices. In both Faculties, the assistance provided was in the areas of lecture planning and delivery as well as assessment practices. This was aimed at trying to create more inclusive teaching and learning practices which catered for the diversity of the student population and to improve student learning opportunities.

T&L Development Practitioner A explained that with an increasingly "massified model" within universities, lecturers faced the challenge of teaching larger classes of diverse students, with different levels of preparedness for academic work. This entailed finding ways to work effectively with large groups of students and they were "… trying to figure out ways to adapt and teach larger classes in ways that account for the different ways that students learn but in a large class environment… How can we achieve the Socratic Method but in a large class dynamic …".

According to T&L Development Practitioner A in Faculty A there was a concerted effort to improve teaching and learning and work towards finding ways of enabling epistemological access for all students. This effort appeared to be largely supported by these Faculty lecturers who were willing and eager to find ways of developing their skills, improving the curriculum and creating more inclusive practices within the Faculty. Faculty A was also exploring blended-learning models and e-Learning as means of extending the reach of the lecturers by working with students in contact sessions as well as online.

In Faculty A, the approach to improving teaching and learning also extended to issues of curriculum transformation. According to T&L Development Practitioner A,

> Transformation in this country is really important and how are our pedagogical approaches influencing transformation and I mean transformation in the context of decolonisation and the notion that we are privileging a Western type of canon over other types of canons, other types of information that are available… how we can forefront African knowledge, non-Western knowledge whilst at the same time also giving students a good basis in what are traditional canons, that is Western thought, so that students can compete and be involved in the international dynamics …

T&L Development Practitioner B in Faculty B explained that students today have different levels of preparedness when entering university access because of their widely diverse educational or socio-economic backgrounds. As a result, teaching and learning should help to increase access for less-privileged students. There was a need to develop these teaching and learning practices and, in T&L Development Practitioner B's experience, few lecturers were inclined to review or change their practices.

This type of Faculty-based initiative suggests that there is the recognition of the need to develop lecturer and tutor skills to improve teaching and learning practices within WITS, to create more inclusive practices and assist with improved student success rates. However, improving teaching and learning practices and professional development at Faculty level was entirely voluntary. This means that the academics who are interested in improving their courses and their teaching and learning practices, are the only participants in these efforts. This leaves many staff members who are not willing or interested in reviewing and adapting their practices.

Student Support

In each Faculty there are practitioners to provide student support in various areas and run interventions for first-year 'at-risk' interventions for students. The terms 'at-risk' refers to students who were at risk of failing their academic courses. This intervention could also extend to courses that had high failure rates. These positions were created with TDG funding received from the DHET, with the aim of increasing student pass rates and throughput. The TDG will be discussed in more depth later on in this chapter.

The Student Support Practitioner B confirms that these interventions were put in place "… with the idea of providing students with additional support to prevent them from being excluded. The ultimate goal was to improve Faculty and University throughput and pass rates, that's what they were aiming for …". Since previous attempts to intervene and improve WITS pass rates were not as successful as expected, the administration decided to hire practitioners to work on this specifically. These practitioners were given the freedom to create programmes within their Faculties to meet these objectives. According to Student Support Practitioner A, the plan for employing student support practitioners within Faculty A was "… to support on-going [student] support …" and "… to assist with the throughput of students …".

T&L Development Practitioner B explained that there was University-wide planning for the implementation of these types of support programmes at Faculty level, and "… when the grants were originally decided on, a lot of work went on centrally across all the Faculties in terms of what would happen and how they'd do it …". Once all this was decided at Faculty level the student support practitioners were given "carte blanche" to use

their expertise to decide on the structure and operation of their programmes. According to Student Support Practitioner B, when the practitioners were hired by the grant holders, "… they said this is what the outcomes should be; we would like to see how you facilitate that …".

Student Support Practitioner A explained that their role "… exists to identify the students that are at-risk, to put in mechanisms and support structures to help them succeed so that our retention rate is increased and our throughput is increased …". To fulfil this role, both student support practitioners said that they drew on research done within their field both locally and internationally to identify best practices to meet student needs.

Student Support Practitioner A mentioned that their programme tried to ensure that they stayed abreast of and were responsive to the needs within the Faculty by consulting with the lecturers, Teaching and Learning Committees as well as talking to students. The approach that they took was informed by these factors, but there were no real guidelines or policies to guide them, much of what they did was based on trial and error and learning from experience:

> So we look and see what has been done elsewhere, a lot of it is by gut based on what we're hearing from students. It's a nice creative position as well so we can come up with ideas and see if they can work... you've got lives in your hands so you want to make sure your solutions are… going to have some meaning, they're going to have some effect and just hope for the best and then research afterwards and say did it work or not and then based on that try a different approach or a new approach or tweak it and … broaden it.

Student Support Practitioner B understood the need to:

> … engage with action research as we go on, so we try something, if it doesn't work, we change it immediately, we see how it goes this week... and especially in the beginning, that was what happened quite a lot. Now that we're a little more settled obviously we've got greater projects and greater plans for the programme …

Both student support practitioners wanted to provide holistic support, which meant assisting students not only with their academic needs but in a range of other areas, such as

curriculum and careers planning; advice for students who were facing various difficulties, such as food security issues; and guidance with navigating WITS's procedures and processes.

Students at any level of study could approach them for assistance, and if the practitioners were not able to assist directly, they would refer the students to the various support structures on campus, such as the CCDU which specialised on careers, psychological trauma counselling, and financial aid as well as to the lecturers where necessary. Support Practitioner A explained: "… we've got a lot of resources on campus. I don't think students are always adequately aware of what resources are available. We try and make them aware."

The aim of these student support initiatives is to work towards improving "student success" and help students work towards a successful experience within the university. However, the primary reason for the programmes was "… to identify the students that are at-risk, to put in mechanisms and support structures to help them succeed so that our retention rate and our throughput is increased …". Computer systems were designed to flag first-year students in the Faculties who were in need of intervention. This involved drawing a report that identified those at risk of failing a course. These students were then approached directly by the student support practitioners to determine the barriers that they were experiencing and identify the assistance they needed. Although there were similarities between the programmes, their approach and programme design were different.

In Faculty A, the work that the student support practitioners did was varied and extensive in nature. The student support practitioners performed many different jobs even if their primary task was the first-year intervention programme. According to Support Practitioner A: "When we were employed it was to work with the different Schools to identify the students that are at-risk and to see what we can do in order to buffer them and develop the skills that we do …". This was done at the end of the first term and the first semester.

Their other work depended on the students' needs and included assistance with study skills or essay writing skills. This type of skills development can be called generic because it is not based within specific disciplines or subjects but rather general skills development. Further opportunities to develop these skills were extended to the students in Faculty A by offering workshops, usually held during students' lunch breaks. The programme also

worked with other departments to coordinate joint efforts to provide development and support opportunities for students, such as "… social workers at the School we're working with, we've got the Language School working with the weaker students as such, to develop their language skills and their reading, writing and critical thinking and so on …". Many of these had to be paid for by the programme.

Furthermore, Student Support Practitioner A explained that they worked with lecturers to find ways to improve teaching and learning, and conducted peer reviews for lecturers on their teaching. There are three student support practitioners working together in Faculty A, and "… (colleague 1) and myself are more focused on the learning, so it's the student support side and then the teaching side is (colleague 2), she focused more on developing the academics skills, so their teaching skills, peer reviews and so on …".

The student support programme in Faculty B, had a more structured programme, and the approach was identified as more 'proactive'. The programme in Faculty B was structured into students' timetables rather that scheduling separate times for development. Tutorials conducted for skills development in areas such as study skills and time management were offered to all students. This is voluntary for most students; however students who had failed the previous year and were being readmitted were required to attend these support sessions as part of their re-entry conditions.

Instead of only targeting a specific group of students who were not performing well, Student Support Practitioner B explained that they had extended the opportunity to participate within the programme, to all students. First-year students were the primary target group and students who were flagged by the system were approached to join the programme. There was a concerted effort to move away from the term 'at-risk' in relation to students, a move which Support Practitioner A also mentioned, because of the negative connotations of the term. This term tended to disturb students and practitioners because "… if someone refers to you as at-risk, you don't want to be identified as that, absolutely not …".

The programme in Faculty B employed tutors to work with students and also runs its own food bank to assist students struggling with food security issues. It aims to become "self-sustainable", by looking for their own funds and creating a programme which ran independently to ensure their survival within the University.

At School level

At School level, both Schools had student academic development programmes focusing on developing students' academic literacy practices. The Teaching and Learning Committee of School A, which examines issues of lecturer practices and student learning, will also be discussed.

Teaching and Learning Committee (School A)

There are Teaching and Learning Committees in the two Schools that discuss issues around the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in the School. According to T&L Expert A, in School A "… it's seeking, what can we do to make teachers teach better, staff members to teach better and students to learn better?". This Committee examines issues around lecturers' practices, being a lecturer within the particular field and student learning within the discipline. Aspects of teaching and learning that are examined include induction and mentorship and the needs of the lecturers: "… it's looking at things like when new staff come in, what kind of induction and mentoring in terms of being a (profession) educator, being a university lecturer, working in this institution, do they need in order to be able to teach properly …".

Research is also conducted by members of the Committee into issues such as "… how much did they (students) actually learn in a large class lecture… what are they learning, what aren't they learning, where are they falling flat and what are the implications for us as a staff …". This research then informs some of the actions that are taken within the School to improve teaching and learning and lecturers' practices.

T&L Expert A explained how the Teaching and Learning Committees usually operate,

> … we don't want to be a policing organisation that says you must do this … we also recognise that there are huge, huge differences in content, in lecturer background, in lecturer intention and so we can't just say this is the way it's going to be. We've got to look at the range of practices and see what is appropriate for these courses with this lecturer, for that purposes. So, what we normally do… we've put out a document for discussion… and then at the end there are questions for the staff to

> discuss and think about this in terms of their own practices and then we have a follow-up session where staff can engage and explore and take further and then staff responses get fed back to the Teaching and Learning Committee and then we make a set of recommendations or proposals… it's very much … an iterative process between research and teaching and learning.

The model used by the Teaching and Learning Committee to improve teaching and enable epistemological access for students is one that seeks to provide support for all students, because they recognise that there are many layers of student diversity and student needs. T&L Expert A notes that there is an attempt to try and consider these needs when planning lectures and tutorials,

> …we assume that people don't have access and then what do, we do to make that access for everybody because we know that there's a range of student difficulties that... some kids struggle to read, some are not coping, are experiencing English as a medium of instruction for the first time, some maybe experience learning difficulties, some students have occupational difficulties, some students need writing help, some are not as computer literate as others … there's layers and layers, working with the disability unit … so the idea is that we are aware of all those layers from the outset and plan lectures in a way, tutorials in a way, choose readings in a way, tutorial tasks, whatever it is.

An important task for the Teaching and Learning Committee was to reduce the reliance on external programmes, and provide development opportunities for students within lectures, making it the responsibility of lecturers,

> So at the moment it's very much about what can we do in the course to develop the students as opposed to being reliant on outsiders, on outside help which, in the current context, we simply don't have the funding for … the other thing is that once, if there's outside help … tutors or academic support programme or academic development programme … the problem is then that it's very easy for lecturers to say, 'oh it's not my problem it's the academic development tutor or the learning support person, it's their problem … it's not my problem'. Whereas when you know that the academic support has got to be offered as a package within the course and available to all, then the onus is on the lecturer and the tutors to make it happen.

Student Academic Development in School A and B

School A and School B have academic development programmes in place at School level. These student academic development programmes were initiated within School A and School B thanks to the initiative of individual staff members, who identified the need to develop students' academic literacy practices within their disciplines. Both Schools have similar programmes which work to help students develop their academic literacy practices through embedded, discipline-based and contextualised approaches. These programmes are similar in their focus but differ in some aspects of their operation.

School A

The student academic development programme in School A was initiated in 2009. According to Student Academic Development Practitioner A, the need for the programme was identified by the students:

> … there was a lecturer here in (School A) who recognised the need for a [student academic development programme] and the then Head of School thought it was a great idea and that (future professionals) really needed to be proficient and confident as writers… so we raised money, the university has never given us money for that and my post was created. But it was a decision at the School based on needs … in fact students … were the ones who flagged it, who came forward and said we need a (programme).

Student Academic Development Practitioner A is the Head of the programme, and runs it with an administrative manager. Senior students are employed as tutors to work directly with students. This student academic programme is designed to meet student needs in two different ways.

Firstly, there is a targeted intervention programme that works with the NBT scores of first-year students entering the School, to identify those who are likely to need assistance based on their marks. According to Student Academic Development Practitioner A, "… it started off identifying students at-risk and putting them in small groups where they would get specialised support …". These weekly sessions were facilitated by tutors who worked with

students on the development of their literacy practices by using various materials designed by Student Academic Development Practitioner A. These materials were based on the students' course content. These sessions were therefore embedded within a discipline and the core compulsory first-year course. This initiative was voluntary, although students identified as likely to need assistance were contacted directly.

The work of this intervention extends into the academic programme as the tutors and Student Academic Development Practitioner A have assisted tutors of the first-year course in tutorial sessions. This was done because

> … all students actually need more support in this …[course name], which is their first year theoretical course, and they need help with reading and writing, understanding concepts, vocabulary development and so on. So we try to bring in a lot of the writing work into the tutorials for the benefit of all …

Additional workshops on assignments were also conducted, where requested by lecturers.

Secondly, all students in the School can book appointments on an individual basis or in groups where they can work with a tutor on the areas in which they require assistance. Student Academic Development Practitioner A described it as follows:

> It's very much…a space where students bring their essay drafts, either in small groups or individually and they talk to a … senior student who's trained to listen and work in a very dialogic way so that the students are able to start almost diagnosing their own issue when they read their essays out loud for example in a consultation; they will be alerted to certain things about their own writing, and it's really just an opportunity for students to get some feedback, not just written feedback … in a space where they feel that they can ... make improvements and reflect on their writing in a non-threatening environment.

School B

The academic development programme in School B was initiated in 2014. Student Academic Development Practitioner B explained that the then Head of School recognised the need for this type of programme and it "… was really our previous Head of School who

conceptualised a kind of in-house (programme), who pushed for it, who found the money for it, who hired us …".

The programme targets the development of students' academic literacy practices within the School in two ways: by working with staff in their courses and by working with students. Student Academic Development Practitioner B explained that the programme uses the 'academic literacies' approach to literacy development, and favoured this approach's "… conception of students and the relationship between students and staff and the need for kind of more horizontal dialogic engagements rather than reinforcing hierarchies, I think that, that very much underpins what we do …". Two practitioners run the centre and tutors who are senior students within the School are employed to work with students.

Student Academic Development Practitioner B said that the programme viewed writing as "… something that's intrinsically linked with thinking and kind of becoming part of the discourse community and so our approach as far as possible is very much embedded writing development, so embedded in the (course) curriculum …". As a result, "… the bulk of our work is more embedded in the courses themselves …". The programme often works with lecturers, to "scaffold" writing development within the courses, and to "… assist with pedagogy, with developing authentic assessments; we assist in the courses themselves with unpacking expectations and doing the so-called writing development inside the courses rather than as a stand-alone …". They also assisted with training course tutors on working with students on their literacy development. In addition to this, where needed, the practitioners conducted workshops for particular assignments and were guest lecturers in the courses to advise on assignment writing if needed.

Secondly, this programme also works with students. In the same way as the programme in School A, students are able to consult with one of the practitioners or a tutor on an assignment or work that they need assistance with. In a dialogic way, the tutor and the student work on students' writing and the development of their practices. The programme also assists students with an online forum called SAKAI, a WITS website, where the students are able to submit their writing and receive feedback from the tutors or practitioners. This programme also tried to create a safe space for students to develop their skills in a respectful, conducive environment. Student Academic Development Practitioner B said that:

> … we attempt to meet them with great respect and acknowledgement of what they do bring as well; as the struggles that they are having … the majority of feedback that we get from students is that they really do appreciate that kind of … respectful space in which we engage as … fellow writers on a journey.

4.3.2 Support and Training

For the Student Support Programmes at Faculty level

In terms of support and training, the two student support practitioners agreed that they received the necessary training when it was requested, and this was done through the Centre for Learning and Teaching Development (hereafter CLTD). This included training on working with students in distress, software training and advanced health training. Student Support Practitioner B said that they felt well supported by the Dean of the Faculty, who stayed abreast of the programme's work, and had a good relationship with the lecturers within the Faculty. Student Support Practitioner A wanted more recognition of the work that their programme did, by being included in meetings and to report on the work that they did.

The two student support practitioners also mentioned that that they worked with colleagues from other Faculties, for support, advice and information sharing. Student Support Practitioner A said,

> … when we have an experience that we don't know how to deal with, we get in touch with each other and say, you know this happened now, I'm not sure what I should be doing. What would you guys do? And then they'll say, try this and try that based on their experience. That's quite helpful.

Student Support Practitioner B had the same view, "… we work closely together, we've got a community of practice. We often sound off, we've got WhatsApp groups, we meet on a regular basis because of the difficult things that we engage with …".

For the Student Academic Development Programmes at School level

There were differences in the practitioners' experiences as far as the support and assistance they received from their School, and this affected the practitioners' perception of how their programmes were valued and recognised. In School A, Student Academic Development Practitioner A noted a complete lack of support, training or assistance from School A's administration. They get "Nothing, the answer is no. Nothing". This tended to put more pressure on Student Academic Development Practitioner A to keep the programme alive and gain recognition for their work.

Conversely, Student Academic Development Practitioner B said that "… the School has been massively supportive of us …". This is because the previous Head of School initiated the programme, and there has been a continuation of support for the programme and recognition of their work.

Both practitioners found sources of support and information in other student academic development practitioners who ran programmes such as theirs, and were able to request assistance and share information on their programmes, practices and experiences. This was done informally, in the sense that the practitioners chose to collaborate with their colleagues.

4.4 Measuring the Effectiveness of the Initiatives in Place

The two teaching and learning development practitioners, the student support practitioners and the student academic development practitioners were asked how they measured the effectiveness of their initiatives or programmes, specifically the effectiveness of the practices they were using.

T&L Development Practitioner A stated that in Faculty A "… we're looking at the turnaround of students who were failing, who are now not failing … they're being successful. So, all these sorts of things are making a big difference. We're seeing a turnaround, so we're seeing less students failing; we're seeing our retention rates increase …", but T&L Development Practitioner A qualified this as follows:

> … I think that these interventions are working really, really well. We need to recognise that by looking at retention is one way … I think we do need to broaden it out to look at perhaps the quality of learning that's taking place, and whether or not we're affecting particular skills. You know, we can have an 84% retention rate but if it's all just based on rote learning and memorisation, is that actually a quality environment? That's another question. I would not say so. So I think we need to broaden it out to see, are these students that we're making these interventions with actually gaining in terms of skills and transferable skills that they can then utilise moving forward.

T&L Development Practitioner B discussed the difficulty in creating and ensuring measures of effectiveness, especially because teaching and learning development was only part of their job requirements. Measuring the success of staff development initiatives was important but it was "… more difficult to actually follow and measure people. So to measure the staff and what they're doing for me would be very difficult …".

The student support practitioners at Faculty level used statistical analysis as a measure of effectiveness, such as pass rates and retention rates for the students that they had helped. The support practitioners used their "intervention system" to track the progress of students that they had helped. According to Student Support Practitioner A

> … when we meet with the student we're supposed to capture the data onto the system and then we can use it to draw a report and see, these are the students who were identified … they were successful or they weren't successful …

Based on this report, they met with students to receive feedback directly from them. Student Support Practitioner B explained that in Faculty B, there were also qualitative evaluations conducted. Feedback was received directly from the students and tutors in the programme, through reflections. These were sometimes done online on SAKAI. In addition,

> … we like to run symposia … at the end of last year we had a tutor symposium … all our tutors from last year had to do a 5 minute presentation about the thing that they felt last year stood out to them or something that was a problem that needs to be addressed and how they feel it needs to be addressed or what they see for the

future of the [programme].

Student Support Practitioner B felt that "… evaluation is vital … we constantly have to give feedback …" which links back to the need to account because of the TDG funding received. Evaluations were formative and informed the practices that continued or changes in the programme "… for us, there's no point in continuing with an intervention if it's not working. Then you're wasting time and resources, you need to find something new then to do …".

The student academic development programme in School A, uses both quantitative and qualitative methods of evaluation. To assess the first-year intervention, quantitative evaluation was done by analysing students' pass and drop-out rates. Qualitative evaluations, Student Academic Development Practitioner A explained, were also conducted and were important: "… to get feedback, I think you need focus groups, you need qualitative things, you need student reflections, you need a whole variety of ways of understanding students experiences of the [programme]".

In School B, Student Academic Development Practitioner B stated that the requirement on the programme was to meet the broad mandate of supporting student development within the School, and as a result evaluation was "… a little tricky, because it's very hard to measure that with so many variables so any sort of evaluation of whether we're fulfilling our mandate is quite difficult …". However, qualitative data was collected from students. Workshop participants were given forms to provide feedback, and they also "… speak to lecturers, we kind of engage in reflective groups after all of our engagements …" in order to receive feedback. Student Academic Development Practitioner B was more sceptical about evaluation:

> I mean it's all reported so it's people's perceptions of the value. In terms of measuring actual value, lecturers will sometimes go, 'Oh the students seem to do much better in this assignment ..' but again it's perceptual data … I mean you can look at throughput rates, you can look at pass rates, but I truly I think there are too many variables to claim that because we were involved in that course that is why the pass rate went up. So we don't even go there, we don't even try and do that.

Student Support Practitioner A and Student Academic Development Practitioner A had similar views about measuring the effectiveness of the programmes because of the many variables which affect student success and failure. It was not really possible to isolate the effect of the one programme on the students' performance. As a result, although statistics were used, they could not confirm causation between seeking assistance and student success. However, both Student Support Practitioner B and Student Academic Development Practitioner A suggested that there is a possible link between students' attendance and their higher pass rate, Student Support Practitioner B said that "… we can't claim correlation but there's a definite link between throughout or pass rate and attendance …".

4.5 Funding of the Programmes

Each participant involved in student support and academic development programmes was asked questions about how the programmes were funded and the impact of funding on their practices.

4.5.1 Student Support Programmes at Faculty level

The Faculty-level student support programmes were funded by the TDG received from the DHET. The student support practitioners felt that funding does affect the ways in which they run their programmes but this affected them in different ways.

Student Support Practitioner A stated that the TDG funding was very restrictive because for two years far less money was allocated than was requested in their funding proposal:

> Last year, we asked for the amount of 250k (R250 000) because we were told that in the region of 200k (R200 000) was available but we got 95 (R95 000). This year, we had a whole lot more projects identified… we asked for 500k (R500 000) and we got 70k (R70 000).

As a result, the planned measures needed to be scaled down, as mentioned by Student Support Practitioner A:

> …things cost, even though it's internal, like the Language School course… we wanted to offer it to a lot more students and we were able to focus on one School or one department … and could only offer it to them and for limited number of students. There were probably more students that needed it ... you've got to become quite clever with the way in which you deal with money; you've got to learn to prioritise and juggle.

For this reason, the student support programme in Faculty A was not able to extend their support as widely as was needed.

Student Support Practitioner A also mentioned that the funding allocation process was "not very transparent" and did not provide the applicants with information about the limits for which they could apply to plan their programmes accordingly. This resulted in planning being done for more than they would be able to receive, and they had to restructure their plans when a lesser amount was granted. Student Support Practitioner B did not describe funding for the programme as a major challenge but mentioned that funding affected the programme because of the budget that they had to adhere to.

Another area for which funding was important was job security for the student support practitioners. Given that their positions were dependent on the continuation of TDG funding, the practitioners felt that they were in a difficult situation, because less funding could jeopardise their positions and their programmes. Student Support Practitioner A noted that "… hopefully it continues, we don't know, it depends on grant funding if we're going to be around …".

As a result of not being able to implement all their projects, Student Support Practitioner A said that they attempted to use research and treat the project as a "pilot project" to motivate for additional funding for the project the following year. This was done in the hopes of receiving more money for the programme.

4.5.2 Academic Development Programmes at School level

The student academic development programmes in each School were funded in different ways. In School A, Student Academic Development Practitioner A was responsible for sourcing funding and explained that their programme's funding was received from

different sources: "… the CHE gives a little bit and I've always managed to get some funding from the TDG ...". This funding was used for the programme's operational costs and training for programme tutors. The reach of the programme was shortened by the fiscal constraints and some initiatives had to be cancelled. Student Academic Development Practitioner A explained:

> … if I had more funding I could do a fortune. I'd have much more training ... I wouldn't want the consultants to work longer hours but we'd just have more facilities; if we had better computers, we could do more online stuff... I still believe in the face-to-face but we could access more resources, we could do all sorts of things. I mean the possibilities are endless…

The programme in School A operated on its own, and was not directly linked operationally to the School. No funding came directly from WITS or the School, and WITS administration and the School management did not directly influence the ways in which the programme was structured and operationalised.

In School B, the academic development programme was part of the School. The School administration did not influence the ways in which the programme was run, other than its broad mandate to work on writing development for students in School B. Student Academic Development Practitioner B explained that the reason for this was probably that "… I think basically, our previous Head of School … did his own fund raising…".

As a result, there was short-term funding available for the programme from the School B budget. The fact that the programme was part of the School meant that there tended to be more security in the practitioner's position. Student Academic Development Practitioner B stated that they were "… a little bit more stable in that at least our posts are institutionalised …". The practitioners in School B were hired on a contractual basis, which added an element of uncertainty as their position depended on available funding and the commitment of the School B administration.

4.5.3 Teaching and Learning Development at Faculty level

T&L development practitioners at a Faculty level were also lecturers, which meant that they were employed by their respective Faculties to work with staff to develop their

teaching and learning practices, when they were needed. According to T&L Development Practitioner B, staff could attend courses for their professional development at WITS and this was funded through the Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development (CLTD). T&L Development Practitioner A also said that "… the money generally comes from TDG, it's been provided by the DHET and then internally that's then split up into different ways …".

4.6 Impact of the Teaching Development Grant on the Faculty-level and School-level Programmes

What is the TDG?

According to the Ministerial Statement on University Funding 2014/15 and 2015/16 (DHET, 2013) "… the main purpose of teaching development grants is to enable the implementation of teaching and learning development activities that will lead to improvement in student success, indicated at the highest level through the university's *average student success rate* in all courses from one year to the next year …" (p. 14). This funding is available for all universities in the country. In return:

> Progress reports with reliable performance indicators which measure easily, and which could be audited as well, are required annually. The average FTE student success rate in all courses presented at a university fits these criteria, and is therefore the most appropriate measuring instrument to compare teaching outputs from one year to the next year (DHET, 2013, p. 14).

This grant can be used to improve facilities, curricula, teaching and learning, and first-year experience. According to Student Support Practitioner A and Student Academic Development Practitioner A, the target of the TDG funding at WITS is programmes to target 'at-risk' students, or those who are at risk of failing, in order to prevent this from occurring. The funding may be extended to any programmes that are working towards the same purpose. To receive funding, proposals must be submitted to the university, detailing the measures they would like to put in place for students and a forecast of the cost of these measures. Funding is then allocated to the programmes by a WITS administrative leader tasked with this duty.

The Effect of the TDG on the Programmes

The TDG was used to fund the two Faculty-level student support programmes and comprised a portion of the operational funding for the academic development programme in School A. The TDG greatly influenced the operation of the Faculty-level student support programmes which depended on TDG funding for their existence. Student Support Practitioner B stated that the programme was initiated to target "… the students at-risk within a Faculty, namely the most … academically at risk of being excluded …".

TDG funding contributed to the operation of the academic development programme in School A. Student Academic Development Practitioner A said that the first-year intervention "… was originally set out just for risk, student at-risk …". Yet, the three practitioners believed that support and development measures should reach all students to prevent them from becoming 'at-risk'. As a result, the funding they received was not only used for students at risk but allowed their programmes to be extended to other students in need of assistance. Support at Faculty level was available for any students who needed or wanted the support. In School A, the programme had been extended to all first-year students with work being done in subject tutorials. Student Support Practitioner B agreed with this because "… we don't want to focus on students who are at-risk, we'd rather be preventative, pre-emptive rather than waiting for them to be at-risk and then trying to fix whatever the issue may be …".

The provision of the TDG funding also resulted in another limitation in terms of the scope of the research done by the Student Support Practitioners. Student Support Practitioner A explained that:

> … lecturers will say what about studying the students who are being successful and let's find out what they're doing well so that we can try and develop the others' skills. Those who aren't being successful could learn from those who are doing well and develop those skills in the others… and then we'll say to them sorry we can't do that because it's not an at-risk project, we've got to identify those who are failing specifically and those projects are those we can work on.

So, it seems as though the TDG funding enabled the creation of student support programmes and assisted the operation of the student academic development programme, but it also constrained the scope of some of the work being done in these programmes.

4.7 Challenges, Constraints and Possible Improvements to the Provision of Student Support and Academic Development

4.7.1 Challenges and Constraints

Each of the participants was asked about the greatest challenges and constraints to the operation of their programmes and student support.

Faculty-level Programmes

For the student support programmes at Faculty level, the major concern for the practitioners was the "continuation" or the "sustainability or permanence" of the programmes (Student Support Practitioner B) as well as "the continuation of our role" (Student Support Practitioner A).

> The big concern is that this is just … a three year project, which is very limited and it comes to an end. Our project comes to an end at the end of next September so we've got about a year left and so there is the next round of funding to be applied for although we're still waiting for that call to come … (Student Support Practitioner B).

Both the student support practitioners felt that they were still learning about the practices that worked and how to address student needs. They argued that much more time was needed to develop their programmes. The uncertainty of the future affected long-term planning, but also raised concerns about how the needs of students would be met, should the projects come to an end. Student Support Practitioner A explained "… you sometimes wonder about the level of commitment to student success, are we doing it because it's the right thing to be seen to be doing because we've got to be seen to be doing something …".

Raising awareness about the work that they did was also identified as a challenge by Student Support Practitioner B. Staff awareness was important, so that they could refer students to the programme. In addition, regular student attendance in the programme was a challenge, because the course was not compulsory.

For T&L Development Practitioner A, the two main challenges were:

> The difficulty that our Faculty faces is economic … because we are so intensive in terms of a model, engagement-intensive … It's about access to tutors, access to resources to enhance the learning environment, so learning management systems that work really well and that are sufficiently flexible … then also access to technologies that will help us and then obviously a willingness on the part of colleagues to take it up. So, there's economics, finances and then on the other side willingness amongst colleagues to… adapt their approaches. I'd say those are the two biggest challenges.

Another major challenge identified by T&L Development Practitioner B, was working with the academic staff. Lecturers had a heavy workload, and "… to get people to prioritise their teaching is difficult …".

> … if they (lecturers) don't see it as being a problem and see it as something they should be focused on, they're not going to do anything about it. When you try to also shift, particularly people who've been here for a long time, into doing things a different way they're not interested. So, you walk into [School B] and say, you really should be thinking about assessing other than an essay in the exam… it doesn't necessarily test knowledge in the way it's actually going to be used one day … it's not an authentic assessment … they will fight that and say, no that's the best way because it's a way of actually getting students to bring everything together… people are quite reluctant to move out of their comfort zone and admit that they could do things differently.

T&L Development Practitioner B also discussed the increasing pressure for lecturers to conduct and publish research, to the point where research takes precedence over developing effective teaching and learning practices:

> … it takes time to renew a curriculum, to rethink assessment and teaching and learning, especially if you're going to have it aligned because then you're going to have to shake up the whole thing... You've actually got to make sure it's aligned and coherent. So that does take a lot of work and people turn round and say, 'So if I do this, so what? What will I get out of it?' You know? 'What do I get for this level of activity because it takes away time I could be spending on research and if I take time from research, I'm going to be in trouble'… Why should somebody give up time really? … If they don't, there's no penalty.

School-level Programmes

Student Academic Development Practitioner A described their main challenge as sourcing sufficient funding for the operation of the programme, and this was problematic and time-consuming. Another important challenge was recognition from School A management of the work and the value of the programme:

> … [it is important] that people recognise the importance of what you're doing. It's the credibility; it's the way that it's weighted. I mean I've noticed … I almost have to push the [programme] to the front to sort of give it attention. If I want it to be visible, I need to talk, I need to say to the Head of School, 'Can I please report on it?' or otherwise it will just be completely invisible. So, it needs to be a recognised and visible part of the operation of [School A].

For Student Academic Development Practitioner B, one of the major challenges faced was finding 'appointable' undergraduate tutors for the programme. The restructuring of the course to a graduate entry programme meant that there were fewer students with the necessary skills or experience to act as tutors. A time-consuming challenge was also the use of the online platform SAKAI to interact with students because it did not work efficiently all the time.

4.7.2 Possible Improvements

As mentioned previously, the increasing dominance of research over teaching emerged as a contentious issue for the practitioners. The two student support practitioners and T&L

Development Practitioner B identified this as an area that they would change. Student Academic Development Practitioner B and T&L Development Practitioner B acknowledged that lecturers have heavy workloads so the demands on them are many and varied.

As a viable solution to meet research demands, and improve teaching and learning practices, there has been encouragement for lecturers to research and publish on their teaching and learning. T&L Development Practitioner A and T&L Expert A agreed that, for them, researching and publishing on teaching and learning not only met their research mandate but also helped to strengthen their own teaching practices through being better informed. The support practitioners also recognised that the importance given to research at WITS has led to lecturers focusing more on research. According to Student Support Practitioner A:

> I would give teaching the same emphasis as I would research because I think the struggle for academics comes in on how they're recognised and how they're promoted. So, if I'm getting recognised on my research and I'm getting promoted on my research, that's where I'm going to focus most of my attention, I'm not going to focus my attention on my teaching… I've chatted to academics about this and one gave me very insightful feedback. She said, 'I'm committed to teaching and learning and the whole academic project… and then we try and encourage the scholarship of teaching and learning, so go and write research, go and write up about your teaching. You can still get recognised for it and you're developing your teaching practices as well as your research, right?' She says, 'but if I'm going to publish in an academic journal based on my discipline versus the scholarship of learning and writing, my academic journal has a higher impact factor than any scholarship of teaching and learning journal has. So where am I going to get the most recognition? In my academic discipline so that's where I'm going to focus. It's all very well saying, yes write a SoTL but I'm not going to get the same recognition I need'.

So, recognition of research within the disciplines is regarded as important and publishing SoTL may be easier for some disciplines than others. Student Support Practitioner B suggested that, instead of enforcing the same mandates, flexibility is needed to allow

lecturers to choose whether to focus on research, teaching, or both because "… the research mandate is something that many people latch onto and they say, 'Why should I focus on teaching, my promotion, my success, my everything is geared at research and publication?' It's not necessarily the academics fault but it's the system that needs to be changed …".

The reticence of staff members to change their practices mentioned by T&L Development Practitioner B and Student Support Practitioner B is an area that negatively impacts on the provision of academic development and student support. T&L Development Practitioner B suggested that an institutional commitment to improving teaching and learning as a priority would be one way of working towards the goal of improved teaching and learning practices:

> I think that if it's prioritised, and seen as expected, so if teaching and learning is valued and we are expected to do good things and people are looking to see development and … that curricula are being revised and made better for students, I think that would help… also being measured because I think that if people aren't measured they just revert to either meeting the measurements that are expected or to their comfort zone … So it can't just pay lip service to it, it has to be a real priority.

The need to educate lecturers on pedagogy and how to work with students also emerged as an important improvement area. According to Student Support Practitioner B, a proficiency in teaching is needed because "… there is a general consensus or an agreement that if someone is an expert in their field they will be good teacher … and I know that, that's not the case ...". Lecturers need to be trained to teach because:

> … how can you expect people to teach appropriately if they do not have any understanding of the types of things that are involved in that with the students? But in order for that to happen, there needs to be a more balanced view of research and teaching in our university structure …

Student Academic Development Practitioner A proposed to "… institute a programme throughout the year for teaching staff for helping them address issues of diversity, language, literacy, academic literacy and so on …", which would improve students'

epistemological access to the institution.

Recognition of the student support and academic development practitioners, and the need for their programmes, was also an area identified for improvement. Student Academic Development Practitioner A said that academic development practitioners and academic development programmes in place need to receive recognition for the work that they do within the Schools, because they feel marginalised within their context. Related to this was the improvements that Student Support Practitioner B suggests that "… it would be fantastic if everyone could take it more serious … our students really face horrible circumstances and I would like people to just be a little more aware of that and to be a little more understanding …".

Student Academic Development Practitioner B and Student Support Practitioner A explained that academic development is too often viewed in general as "somebody else's problem". Student Academic Development Practitioner B explained that:

> I would like to be able to blow up the myth of and the tendency towards outsourcing academic development… I mean to some extent, academic development within [School B] is now outsourced to [the programme] but equally I think that this kind of notion of you can kind of send students off somewhere else for the problem to be dealt with, I think if we could change that, there would be huge shift … I'm not judging academics because I think they have multiple ways of things to be dealing with but I think if there was more a sense of this is everyone's issue that we need to be grappling with rather than saying we can start a little programme and send students off to be fixed and then you keep carrying on as business as normal. I think if we could shift that I think it would be quite profound.

Student Support Practitioner A agreed that staff within the University usually viewed student support practitioners as the people who "fix" the problems experienced:

> … the lecturer said 'Oh you're the people with a magic wand' ... because the perception is that you've got this magic wand and you're just going to fix everything and it's impossible, because it's like a chair with 3 legs, you've got teaching and learning and then you've got the support and if one of those legs are missing the chair is unstable and it's not going to happen. So, as much as we're

> saying, the problem is lying with the student… it's their issue, they're under-prepared, the system is failing us, they're sending through the wrong students or we don't have the quality that we had, as much as we're saying that, we've got to look at … the support structures that we have to assist that student and what are you doing in your teaching to assist that student as well, and if one of those legs aren't there, the chair is going to fall over and the student sitting on it.

According to T&L Development Practitioner B, if they were able to change anything about student support provision at WITS, they would ensure that there was

> … proper teaching and learning centre in this Faculty [B]… we would do is take student support and grow it so that it handles student support and development and staff support and development because as I say, they really are tied together … So, I think if we had a teaching and learning unit within the Faculty staffed by people whose job that is, whether it's their job full time or part time that hours are put aside to be part of that. So, I think that would create sense of a legitimate space and legitimate time to be doing those things …we need things like teaching portfolios and proper staff evaluations that … does proper peer and reflective review… it's just about prioritising teaching and learning officially and properly. Not just lip service …

T&L Development Practitioner A also said that a more "centralised unit" for holistic student support would be an improvement. This includes developing students' skills and knowledge as citizens and for the workplace:

> I think we think very narrowly around disciplines and that students are here to get a disciplinary knowledge base and then to leave as opposed to actually thinking no, actually this is about personal development as well … we're creating the citizens of tomorrow, those who are going to contribute to and shape society. So actually how do we get them to think differently or think about society and participate in it… so I think one of the challenges and one of the criticisms I would lob (hurl) at a lot of my colleagues is that they just focus on their disciplinary information, which is going to become irrelevant in two years as opposed to thinking about what are

some of the skills that our students need to learn so that they can then continue to be relevant within our disciplines but also within society.

Stable funding sources would also contribute to improving support provision, and, instead of relying on TDG funding it is imperative to find alternative sources of fund for student support. For example, "American universities have done this through fund-raising, like TUCS university that got a huge amount of money. $100 000 000 back in 2005, from the Meyer Foundation, which is eBay people… because they created a college of citizenship, it's all based on community engagement …".

4.8 Conclusion

From the data presented, there are many areas in which the various academic development and student support practitioners' perspectives and experiences are similar. These include their belief in the importance of their initiatives or programmes and the work that they do, their drive to meet the needs of students within constraining contexts, and their experiences of the challenges that they face within their initiatives or programmes such as the need for recognition of their programmes and their work.

However, points of divergence exist for the various practitioners such as the approaches of their programmes; some of their practices; the support and recognition of the work; funding challenges; and staff buy-in and willingness to change their practices.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

This chapter presents an analysis of the research data by drawing on the literature on academic development and student support, in order to answer the four research sub-questions of the study. This discussion will go through the main focus areas of: the lack of a policy on academic development; student support and teaching and learning development discourses on academic development and student support; funding of the initiatives or programmes in place; the discourses surrounding academic development and student support; the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the initiatives or programmes in each School; and how the TDG has influenced the operation of these programmes. A comparison between the initiatives and programmes in place in/for each of the Schools will also be done.

5.1 University Policies (or Lack Thereof)

Haddad and Demsky (1995) explain that policy is "… an explicit or implicit single decision or group of decisions which may set out directives for guiding future decisions, initiate or retard action, or guide implementation of previous decisions …" (p. 18). Policies can be said to reflect the views of the policymakers on specific areas of concern, and may provide the impetus for action on particular issues or reflect the goals of the policymakers on how they envision the future resolution of an issue (Christie, 2008). They also reflect the interests of the dominant groups namely the policymakers and other powerful and influential role players within the organisation in terms of what the priorities and areas of concern are (Henry, 1992; Haddad & Demsky, 1995; Christie, 2008). It is therefore a value-based activity that entails negotiation between the role players and reflects the power relations within the process. Not having a policy in place could be just as telling, because that is also a value-based decision that can indicate the priorities of the institution.

Teaching and Learning Plan 2015–2019

Teaching and learning development at WITS is considered in the Teaching *and Learning Plan 2015–2019*. This *Plan* was a statement of intent regarding the direction in which WITS would like to take teaching and learning and was a means of working within

the institution to create better, more inclusive teaching and learning practices. Although not a formal policy, it does provide an outline of the views of the University and represents their intentions and values. It must be considered whether it could be called a 'plan' as such because it did not explain how these changes and improvements would take place, and tended to be a bit vague on the implementation of the changes to teaching and learning. The *Plan* did not mention ways of enforcing the intentions put forward; neither did it suggest a means of evaluating whether these efforts were being implemented and their effect.

As a result, it could be debated whether this *Plan* is more symbolic in nature (Christie, 2008) as opposed to being a serious and authentic means of ensuring the development of better practices. A 'plan', as opposed to a policy, tends to lack authority and is not a concrete commitment to change. While it may provide a source of guidance for practitioners and lecturers who are looking to improve their practices by outlining the types of change that are favoured, it does not provide information on the process of how to accomplish this change. As a result, WITS's commitment to improving teaching and learning could be questioned.

Decentralisation of Academic Development and Student Support: Advantages and Disadvantages

In the two Schools studied, none of the participants were aware of a University-wide, overarching policy that governed academic development and student support at WITS, let alone the work that they do. Instead, the management of the various aspects of academic development, for staff and students, and student support had been largely decentralised to the various Faculties, which had autonomy in decisions regarding these areas. These decisions included: 1) how student support and academic development would be enacted within the Faculty and its Schools; 2) the focus and scope of programmes in place; and 3) funding frameworks. Decentralisation also extends to School level, with programmes being initiated for additional, more focused approaches to addressing student needs and student success.

There were some benefits to the decentralised nature of academic development and student support. The Faculties and Schools were able to customise their programmes and could

work in a more contextualised manner. This is in line with the literature that suggests the importance of a discipline-based, contextualised approach to academic development and student support (Taylor et al., 1988 as cited in Leibowitz et al., 1997; Lea & Street, 1998; Boughey, 2010). The practitioners within the academic development and student support programmes were able to exercise their professional expertise in conceptualising and structuring the programmes that they were involved in. This includes the T&L Practitioners responsible for assisting staff members to improve their teaching and learning practices and curricula; the student support practitioners running first-year 'at-risk' interventions, and with various other non-academic barriers to student success; and the student academic development practitioners in programmes that targeted the development of students' academic literacy practices. Boughey (2010) stresses the importance of recognising practitioners as professionals who should be part of the Faculties and Schools rather than being located in a separate entity. This reinforces the notion that academic development and student support are part of the core activities of the University.

Despite these benefits, the absence of a policy coupled with decentralisation creates other issues that need to be addressed. While decentralisation provides the space for dedicated practitioners to exercise their professional capacity, decentralisation without a policy or any type of guidance leaves space for the implementation of practices and programmes that may be considered less effective within the fields of academic development and student support. Student Academic Development Practitioner B suggested that this may already be the case at WITS, with some (unnamed) programmes that did not seem to be "… drawing on the literature of the past 30 years …". As Student Academic Development Practitioner B said, "… we could have suggested something entirely inappropriate and there didn't seem to be any policy to guide us …". Effective institutional evaluation could be a means to reduce this problem but it was left to the Faculty or School to decide how this would be done which could lead to similar problems.

Decentralisation without guidance or regulation does not promote a systematic and consistent approach to academic development, for staff and students, or student support. Instead the provision of academic development and student support tends be more 'ad hoc' in nature, as described by three of the six practitioners interviewed. Each practitioner interviewed had different experiences in performing their jobs, which reflects the

lack of consistency in the implementation of the various academic development and student support initiatives and programmes.

The importance of a contextualised approach is expounded within the literature support (Taylor et al., 1988 as cited in Leibowitz et al., 1997; Boughey, 2010) However, it is important to recognise that there are some practices which are regarded as ineffective and even detrimental to students' development such as those within the 'academic support' and 'academic development' phases of academic development (Boughey, 2007; 2010). It is therefore important to ensure that the measures that are in place are governed well, and are as effective as possible. It is also crucial to ensure that the work that already has funding is done efficiently and effectively to be of maximum impact in assisting students' development in the long term. As a result, some guidance would be useful for practitioners. One possible way to do this is through the development of an academic development and student support policy. This suggests that while some aspects of academic development can be decentralised, there is a need for more central governance in other areas.

Possible Reasons for the Absence of a WITS Policy

Possible reasons for the lack of an academic development or student support policy could include, fiscal constraints preventing its implementation or that it is not considered a priority to address. Alternatively, it may also indicate the absence of a serious commitment to academic development and student support because its interests may lie in other academic or research areas.

AD Expert A agreed that a central policy would require an institutional position on particular issues and the creation of a plan to address these issues (Haddad & Demsky, 1995; Christie, 2008). If there is no funding available to support and implement a policy, it may not be wise to advocate a particular position on academic development and student support. So, it could be posited that the effects of the shrinking of funding, coupled with increasing massification and increased student diversity and need, may have had a constraining effect on the administration around academic development and student support within WITS.

Student Academic Development Practitioner A tends to disagree with AD Expert A because of their first-hand experience with the dismantling and closing down of the foundational courses and other discipline-based tutoring programmes at WITS in the 1990s and early 2000s. This was seen to be an administrative decision because funding had been allocated to programmes and was recalled because it had not been fully spent. A decision was also made that students scoring below certain entry point requirements would not be eligible for financial aid, and this affected the many students who were eligible for bridging programmes and foundational courses.

While it may seem sensible that students with higher scores receive funding first, there is a meritocratic assumption behind this – that students with higher scores are better equipped for university. Yet, this is not necessarily the case because students' matric results may not reflect the potential of students, especially those coming from disadvantaged schools (Scott et al., 2013). Additionally, there are still very high drop-out rates for students in university despite those students having the requisite point requirements to enrol within university courses (Scott et al., 2013).

Having been part of the student support programmes at WITS from the 1990s, T&L Expert A explained that there was a shift away from external programmes and the closure of bridging and foundational courses, around the time that WITS decided to pursue a research-intensive agenda. T&L Expert A confirmed that there was also a financial motive behind this decision, because there was not enough money to continue the programmes. Symptomatic of the discourses of efficiency and becoming internationally competitive in the third phase of academic development (Boughey, 2010) the intention was then to increase throughput and pass rates. This gave rise to the examining of teaching and learning and embedding development opportunities within lectures, rather than relying on external programmes.

The decision to shift the responsibility for student development and support to lecturers at the same time as the decision to pursue a research-intensive agenda is an interesting one. It increased lecturers' workload in two ways: by expecting more from lecturers in their teaching and learning and then increased pressure in terms of research production demands. The focus on institutional development that became dominant towards the early 2000s could be another possible reason that WITS did not develop a policy on academic

development or student support. This again tends to be problematic because of the clear need for additional student academic development and student support, as evidenced by the existence of the programmes in place. This shift seems to signal that WITS was somehow distancing itself from and abdicating its responsibility for student support and academic development, and transferring this responsibility to the Faculties, then focusing its efforts on projects more valued by the institution.

Implementing an Academic Development and Student Support Policy

Whatever the reason for it may be, the result of not having a University-wide policy or guidelines for academic development and student support is that its provision rests largely in the hands of individuals in the Faculties and Schools. This means that the types of academic development and student support opportunities and how they are structured, supported, funded, monitored and evaluated are decided at Faculty and School level, even when the efforts are University-wide and occur within all the Faculties as in the case of the student support programmes.

Developing and implementing a policy or guidelines could be useful in improving the provision of academic development and student support in clearly specifying the purpose of different initiatives and programmes for more consistency in implementation, as well as formalising the structures through which these operate, including funding mechanisms. This could assist with the difficulties of the practitioners' varied experiences in executing their duties, and also provide institutional backing and authority for practitioners to enforce their position, especially in terms of teaching and learning and staff development. T&L Development Practitioner B, Student Support Practitioner B and Student Academic Development Practitioner A agreed that resistant academic staff were a challenge to effective change, because there was no requirement for academic staff to improve their practices despite the availability of staff, courses and resources designed to do so. A policy, with the accompanying monitoring mechanisms and consequences in the form of evaluations to ensure accountability, could make this process easier for the people in charge of these initiatives and assist in the even implementation of WITS's vision for teaching and learning development.

It must be acknowledged that there are difficulties in trying to implement a University-wide policy on academic development and student support, while still maintaining the benefits of decentralisation. The lack of adequate funding may make a larger university project more difficult, and monitoring every academic development and student support initiative or programme in place across WITS would be a mammoth task. One possible solution for this is to centralise academic development and student support, locating the efforts in one place.

Centralisation as a Solution: Academic Development and Student Support Centres

T&L Development Practitioners A and B suggested that a more centralised approach could be beneficial for teaching and learning development. This idea could be expanded to creating a centre that housed the different academic development and student support measures. The two T&L Development Practitioners, Student Academic Development Practitioner A and Student Support Practitioner B agreed that it may be beneficial to have a centre to coordinate the academic development and student support initiatives, with appointed staff tasked to work in partnership with the Faculties and Schools to maintain a contextualised approach.

More formalised structures to guide the operation of the programmes may provide more stability in terms of their continuation and sustainability. These structures may result in a more coherent and co-ordinated approach to the academic development and student support work done within WITS. As a result, there could be some benefits to the centralisation of some aspects of academic development and student support.

In contrast, Student Academic Development Practitioner B, argued against the idea of centralisation, maintaining that there is a need for development and support to be embedded in their specific disciplines. They explained that, rather than full centralisation in the form of a centre, it could be valuable to have a University-wide policy in place. Another pitfall to centralisation is that it could remove the responsibility from some lecturers or academic staff, as it locates the source of students' development opportunities elsewhere. This is detrimental to the notion of academic development being systemic in nature.

According to Osman and Hornsby (2016) there are many South African universities that have centres dedicated to the development of teaching and learning. At WITS, the CLTD is designed as a central coordinating structure for aspects of staff development, such as induction, and professional development in certain competences and activities around teaching and learning (Osman & Hornsby, 2016). Student academic development and student support could also benefit from some centralisation and organisational structures that would work across WITS's Faculties and Schools to assist with a more consistent approach to academic development and student support, and better coordination between the programmes and initiatives in place.

At the level of programme practitioners, there is some informal coordination to share information; discuss and develop their practices; conduct research; and provide and receive support from colleagues. For example, Student Academic Development Practitioners A and B share information on their programmes and collaborate on some projects. Student Support Practitioners A and B do the same, and work closely together and with other student support practitioners from different Faculties by sharing information and providing a source of support for each other. In other words, it seems that communities of practice have developed which, according to Osman & Hornsby (2016), can be an important source of development opportunities, information sharing and a means of further developing knowledge within particular fields.

However, there does not seem to be much coordination across the academic development and student support initiatives and programmes at Faculty and School level, even though some of their focus areas overlap. This is not uncommon, according to McKenna (2016) as there is not much alignment between the academic and support aspects within many South African universities. Yet, alignment may be beneficial to address the various barriers to student success which requires a more holistic approach with the programmes addressing various areas working together (Lotkowski et al., 2004; Boughey, 2010; Scott et al., 2013). Coordination and alignment could also improve efficiency by reducing the overlap in the programmes' work. Some form of centralisation may be useful in this aim.

5.2 Funding Challenges and the Effect of the TDG

The lack of adequate funding for higher education is a global issue, and South Africa is no different (Altbach et al., 2009). In the *Report of the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Funding of Universities,* it is explained that "… all of the country's universities cite inadequate funding as the main cause of the higher education system's failure to measure up to its potential and fully realise the transformation agenda of our country …" (DHET, 2013, p. 1). Indeed, funding is an immense challenge and profoundly affects the decisions and ways in which universities prioritise areas that they might view as important. Funding was also a challenge for some of the academic development and student support programmes in this study, and affected the operation and reach of those programmes. Each of these programmes or initiatives had different experiences with regards to funding.

To recap, the programmes and initiatives in this study were funded through different mechanisms. Firstly, the T&L development practitioners are lecturers employed by WITS in both Faculties. This is also the case for the members of the School A Teaching and Learning Committee. The development of teaching and learning is just one of their duties. The funding used for the necessary staff development was allocated from TDG funding.

Secondly, the student support programmes in Faculty A and B were funded by the TDG. Funds from WITS's TDG allocation were requested by programmes through proposal submissions and were distributed by a WITS administrative manager. Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview the administrators or decision-makers involved in this process, and so more detailed information on how this is done could not be obtained. Lastly, the student academic development programmes were funded in different ways. The programme in School A sourced their funding from various professional bodies, and received some funding from the TDG. The student academic development programme in School B was funded through money raised for its implementation and operation by the School.

The position of the teaching and learning initiatives seemed to be more stable because they were institutionalised. T&L Development Practitioner A identified a shortage of funding in Faculty A as a challenge because their model was "engagement-intensive" and needed resources to ensure that they were able to work with students as effectively as possible. If

more funding was available then more could be done. So, it could be said that a shortage of funding did affect teaching and learning activities for Faculty A.

Student Support Practitioner B and Student Academic Development Practitioner B did not identify funding as a constraint to their respective programmes' operation. Out of the two student academic development and two student support programmes studied, the student academic development programmes in School B was the only one funded internally. As a result, Student Academic Development Practitioner B's experience with regards to programme funding was different. The continuation of their programme was dependent on the future availability of funding, but their current position was more stable because they did not have to source funding, or depend on a TDG allocation.

The Effect of the TDG on the Operation of the Programmes

The TDG was an important source of funding for and had a significant impact on the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the student support programmes. Firstly, these programmes were developed based on the availability of TDG funds and were conceptualised to meet the funding conditions of the TDG. This is evidenced by the primary task of the programmes, which is to run a first-year intervention programme targeting students 'at-risk' with the aim of increasing student throughput and pass rates. The TDG also enabled the operationalisation of the student support programmes, including the employment of the practitioners and the implementation of the programme, and their work was made possible by TDG funding. The student academic development programme in School A also received TDG funding. As a result, this programme was able to develop their own intervention programme for the first-year 'at-risk' students in School A.

The continuation of the TDG funding to these programmes was not guaranteed. This instability was problematic for different reasons. Firstly, the continuation of the student support programmes and the employment of their practitioners were dependent on the continuation of TDG funding. This tended to be restrictive because Student Support Practitioners A and B felt that they were not able to engage in long-term planning because their future, and that of their programmes, was not certain. The situation of these practitioners is reminiscent of the 'academic support' and 'academic development' phases,

where practitioners were often employed on a temporary or contract basis because of funding constraints, and their positions depended on ‘soft funding’ (Boughey, 2010).

The instability of funding also affected the student academic development programme in School A, because Student Academic Development Practitioner A had to actively source funding from different professional bodies to keep the programme in operation. As a result, the continued operation of the programme depended on the ability of Student Academic Development Practitioner A to find sources of funding.

Student Support Practitioner A and Student Academic Development Practitioner A agreed that insufficient funding was a major constraint to the operation of their respective programmes. While this was related to sourcing funding in School A, in Faculty A Student Support Practitioner A explained that they usually received less money than they had requested through the proposal process, from WITS’s allocation of TDG funds. For these programmes, this meant that they had to scale back on the measures that they felt were needed for the students within the School or Faculty, shortening the reach of the programmes.

5.3 Phase of Academic Development Associated with WITS Practices

When analysing the academic development and student support available for and within these two Schools against Boughey’s (2007; 2010) description of the stages of academic development, it could be said that they tend to reflect more features of the third stage of academic development, known as ‘institutional development’. According to Boughey (2007; 2010) each phase builds on the previous one and there may be an overlap of practices from the previous phase. Some overlap between the ‘academic development’ and ‘institutional development’ phases is present, but the features of the third stage appear to be dominant. This can be said for a number of reasons.

Characteristic of this phase is the increasing ambition to become internationally competitive in a globalised world, while still ensuring equity and redress for students within constraining financial conditions (Boughey, 2010). Institutional transformation is a focus during this phase including improving curricula, teaching and learning methods and assessment practices as well as ensuring institutional efficiency by increasing the numbers

of students passing through the university. Within the *WITS Vision 2022 Strategic Framework* (WITS, 2010) as well as the *Teaching and Learning Plan 2015–2019* (WITS, 2014), there is an emphasis on the need to ensure that the University was internationally competitive in terms of becoming a research-intensive university as well as using effective, modern teaching and learning practices that can be "benchmarked" against international standards (WITS, 2014, p. 3). Also stated within the *Framework* (WITS, 2010) is the aim to increase institutional efficiency by increasing student throughput. Within these statements, WITS's orientation towards an efficiency-driven outlook can be seen because of the emphasis on measuring outcomes and pass rates, a focus on throughput, and the desire to be internationally competitive.

There is also the intention of improving teaching and learning practices and curricula in order to facilitate better learning with the aim of redress for previously disadvantaged groups of students and again the ultimate goal of improving throughput, which seems to be emphasised. This intention is evidenced by the *Teaching and Learning Plan 2015 – 2019* (WITS, 2014) and the work of the T&L Development Practitioners in Faculties A and B, who are lecturers appointed to assist with teaching and learning development. Linked to this is the movement towards embedding development opportunities for students within the courses and lectures that are offered within the Schools, making it the lecturers' responsibility. This is done at both Faculty and School level and could be seen as a means of reducing spending by not implementing additional programmes but using the resources within the University more efficiently, a kind of 'insourcing'.

One characteristic of the third phase of academic development that was not evident was the absence of quality assurance mechanisms for teaching and learning improvement. Student Support Practitioner A explained that there are evaluations of lecturers teaching through peer assessment and feedback, but the results of these did not have to be acted on. T&L Development Practitioner B said that in Faculty B, there were no serious consequences to not improving teaching and learning. The *Teaching and Learning Plan 2015–2019* (WITS, 2014) does mention evaluation of teaching and learning, but how this will be conducted or implemented is not discussed.

5.4. Discourses around Academic Development and Student Support

It is important to understand the intricacies of the discourses surrounding academic development and student support and how these influence the ways in which the programmes and the practitioners are positioned within the University.

Academic Development vs. Student Support

The aim of academic development measures is to ensure student success within the university context, as well as help students to gain epistemological access to the university structures (Boughey, 2010). Within the literature, various activities that related to the development of institutional practices, student literacies development and assisting students to overcome barriers to their success, are referred to under the umbrella term 'academic development'. However, it is important to distinguish between student support and academic development. The student support practitioners in Faculties A and B positioned themselves as working within the area of non-academic student support, rather than academic development.

What emerged from this research is the importance of the discourse around academic development, academic literacies and student support, because it can affect how the programmes and their work are perceived, as well as the ways in which students who are assisted are positioned in relation to the programmes and their practices (Boughey, 2010). Boughey (2010) explained that the discourses within academic development had the potential to position students as 'less than' or 'deficient' instead of within the socio-historical and university context. In South Africa, the terms 'development' and 'support' can be colloquially referred to as 'loaded' terms. This is due to the ways in which these were used in the past (Boughey, 2010).

These complexities appear to be reflected in the different ways in which the student academic development practitioners and student support practitioners defined these terms. The student academic development practitioners tended to associate the term 'support' with the concept of academic support, and differentiate between academic support and academic development in line with Boughey (2007; 2010). Academic support has negative connotations because it is associated with a period of academic development in South

African universities that positioned students as underprepared and having a 'deficit', and the need to 'fix' these students by teaching them the skills that they needed for university, often in a decontextualised way (Boughey, 2010). In South Africa in the 1980s this had also a racial dimension because these students were predominantly black students within historically white universities (Boughey, 2007; 2010). Students within these programmes were also stigmatised in that Academic Support Programmes (ASP) were called the 'African Student Programmes', a derogatory and derisive name (AD Expert A).

For the student academic development practitioners, the term 'academic development' tended to refer to more systemic change, moving away from the 'deficit' views of the 'academic support' phase, towards looking at the ways in which the traditional, Western, middle-class universities constrain (or enable) full epistemological access for most South African students (Boughey, 2010). This includes examining and changing the teaching and learning practices and curricula, as well as working with students whose different experiences of learning and literacy are respected and acknowledged (Lea & Street, 1998; Boughey, 2009).

'Student support' as a field has more positive connotations of assisting students with various aspects of their well-being within the university context. The student support practitioners in both Faculties, regarded academic development as narrow and limited to academic issues whereas student support was more holistic in nature because student success at university depends on a combination of academic and non-academic factors (Lotkowski et al., 2004; Scott et al., 2013). So, by positioning themselves and their programmes within the domain of "non-academic" student support, and specifically as 'not academic development', the student support practitioners are moving away from the purpose of student academic development – which is to develop the academic literacy practices of the students – towards focusing on a combination of other factors influencing student experience and success at university, such as general skills needed for university, food security, life skills and understanding university processes and procedures which aids the adjustment of students to university life (Grant-Vallone et al., 2003–2004).

Teaching and Learning Practitioners: Academic Development vs. Academic Support

The teaching and learning development practitioners also had different perceptions of 'academic development' and 'academic support', and defined these terms in relation to teaching and learning. First, T&L Development Practitioner A defined academic development in line with Boughey (2010) in terms of examining the curriculum, assessments and effective teaching and learning practices, while academic support was defined in terms of developing lecturers' skills and developmental needs. Second, T&L Expert A viewed academic development as inducting students into the disciplines' knowledge practices while academic support refers to the improving the teaching and learning practices that enable students to gain epistemological access. However, T&L Development Practitioner B, viewed academic development as aiming to prepare or equip students with skills for the future, while academic support was aimed at remediating or fixing the issues that students may currently be experiencing. None of these definitions reflect a negative connotation of the terms 'development' and 'support'.

The Importance of Discourse

The different views on the meanings of 'academic development', 'academic support' and 'student support' and the ways in which they are defined by different participants within this study suggests that practitioners in different positions tend to view these terms in relation to their own perceptions and experiences. The perceptions of these terms for the two student academic development practitioners in Schools A and B and the two student support practitioners in Faculties A and B, tended to be the same for practitioners in the same types of programmes and reflect the same thinking around discourses within their fields. However, the T&L practitioners and experts, at Faculty and School level all had different perceptions of academic development and academic support, yet they had all structured their definitions in relation to teaching and learning.

This could mean that the practices associated with each of these terms may be different for different people in different areas of academic development and student support. A question that arises from this is, what would this mean for the perceptions, and resultant

practices, of academic development and student support practitioners across the many Faculties and Schools within WITS?

5.5 Academic Development and Student Support Programmes in Place

In line with the definition of academic development of Volbrecht and Boughey (2004, as cited in Boughey, 2010), academic development refers to practices aimed at improving teaching and learning. In the two Schools studied, there were initiatives in place that could be referred to as academic development that sought to improve:

1. lecturers' teaching and learning practices and promote staff professional development at Faculty level (teaching and learning development); and

2. programmes to develop students' academic literacy practices at School level (student academic development.

There were also student support programmes in place at Faculty level that provided various types of support and assistance barriers preventing students' success within the university context. Despite the difference in the level of experience of students entering their programmes, School A and School B had the same types of academic development and student support programmes in place.

The point of intersection between all the academic development and student support initiatives and programmes studied in both Schools and Faculties was that each programme had the intention of working towards student success and well-being within the university context, even though their approaches to achieving this aim were different.

The Improvement of Teaching and Learning Practices

There were initiatives in place in Faculties A and B to assist academic staff to improve their teaching and learning practices. In each Faculty, staff members were appointed to assist with the development of teaching and learning practices and curricula within the various Schools. Teaching and Learning Committees were established within each School and at University level to reflect on teaching and learning issues. There was also a *Teaching and Learning Plan 2015–2019* (WITS, 2014) developed, that outlines the

direction envisioned for teaching and learning development in various areas.

In each Faculty, a staff member was appointed to assist with the development of teaching and learning, and curricula. This meant assisting lecturers to develop and implement practices that were more inclusive and catered to the needs of the majority of students within the lectures, as well as in developing authentic and varied assessment methods. However, it was not mandatory for lecturers to work with the T&L development practitioners, or to develop their practices. As a result, the practitioners experienced varied levels of cooperation from lecturers in their endeavours to improve teaching and learning practices.

The School Teaching and Learning Committees are also aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning practices as well as encouraging academic staff to think about how this can be done more effectively. In School A, the Committee produced research on key issues around effective teaching and learning within the School. The Committee was able to reflect on how to improve teaching and learning in a more contextualised manner and find solutions for their own School context, an approach favoured in the literature (Leibowitz et al., 1997; Boughey, 2010). Unfortunately, I was not able to gather similar information on the Teaching and Learning Committee in School B.

According to Student Academic Development Practitioner A and T&L Expert A, there are policies in School A dealing with fair assessment, plagiarism and other issues to better guide teaching and learning practices. The *Teaching and Learning Plan 2015–2019* (WITS, 2014) was developed to influence the direction in which teaching and learning development was envisioned to move University-wide. This included prioritising professional development for staff; curriculum improvement; support for students; increasing the use and availability of technology for students; and ensuring that there are spaces conducive to learning available to students within the University. However, what could not be found was an implementation plan or staff evaluation assessments to put pressure on academic staff who did not work towards improving the goals set out by the *Teaching and Learning Plan 2015–2019* (WITS, 2014). As a result, the commitment to the ideals of this *Plan* could be questioned.

Staff Development

Given the severe socio-economic inequalities and vast differences in the educational backgrounds of students (Scott et al., 2013), effective and inclusive teaching and learning practices are a crucial part of development for higher education institutions to aid in closing these gaps (McKenna, 2016). Staff training and their development as teachers may be regarded as important in meeting the aim of improving teaching and learning practices and WITS has acknowledged that the professional development and evaluation of its academic staff needs to receive more attention (*Teaching and Learning Plan 2015– 2019*). However, the data from this study revealed that there was no University-wide mandate for staff to be trained as teachers or even to have a teaching qualification. They seemed to be recognised as mainly experts within their fields who could conduct and publish research.

Staff development is seen as important in ensuring the improvement of teaching and learning, and classroom practices because of the context of massification and high levels of student diversity in the student body (Fourie, 1999; Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004). There are greater demands on lecturers today with this increased student diversity and lecturers need better professional development opportunities to enable them to review and improve their teaching and learning practices (Knapper, 2016).

As mentioned earlier, the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Higher Education), or PG Dip.(HE) course was structured to develop university lecturers' skills in areas such as teaching and learning, curriculum design and assessment practices, as well as develop lecturers pedagogical reasoning (Dison, 2016). Lecturers are encouraged to take this course to develop their teaching skills but it is not mandatory. According to Student Support Practitioners A and B and T&L Development Practitioner B, the academic staff that were already interested and involved in developing their skills utilised the initiatives and programmes in place, attended symposia and conferences, and used professional development opportunities such as the PG Dip.(HE). Student Support Practitioner B usefully described this as "preaching to the converted". This tended to be more prevalent in Faculty B, with both T&L Development Practitioner B and Student Support Practitioner B mentioning this issue, whereas in School A it tended to be less prevalent due to the existing culture of a commitment to the modelling of good teaching and learning practices.

It may be pertinent to ask why, in 2017, there does not seem to be a requirement for

lecturers to have a formal teaching qualification to more effectively teach the diversity of students within their lectures. The commitment of WITS to improving teaching and learning as a priority can be questioned, because there was little University-wide impetus for this change, no mandatory obligation to be trained as a teacher or any serious consequences for those who were not working towards this goal. According to T&L Development Practitioner B, at most "… you might get moaned at if something goes horribly wrong but nothing else will happen …".

Staff buy-in across the University is an important factor in improving teaching and learning, because some academic staff are resistant to changing their practices. This comes through quite strongly from the perspective of T&L Practitioner B. Even though some academic staff were approached to discuss new methods or changes to assessment methods, they generally preferred to retain their traditional methods, such as assessing students using essays rather than more varied assessments that can better facilitate the inclusion of different types of students.

According to T&L Development Practitioner A, although some staff were resistant, many of the academic staff in Faculty A appeared to be more willing to adapt and improve their practices, and look for ways to work within the changing contexts of the University to meet the needs of increasing numbers of diverse students. In line with Poindexter (2003; as cited in Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004) the willingness to change seems to be based on personal choice.

The resistance to change in Faculty A and B and School A and B, is not uncommon, because according to Knapper (2016) many academic staff do not recognise the need for improvement of their methods because they do not see any problems with traditional practices or are not equipped with the skills needed to implement changes or policies. At WITS, there are many formal and informal opportunities to develop these skills, and to receive support in their development from the T&L Development Practitioners. Thus, the opportunity to develop these skills is available but needs to be recognised and acted on by lecturers, or by WITS's management who can motivate lecturers to take this step. While the T&L development practitioners may be able to suggest improvements to teaching and learning methods, the inability to enforce these through official structures means that there is no real way of ensuring that the aims of the university with regards to teaching and learning will actually be carried out. The decision for staff to become better educators is a

matter of exercising their agency even if the institution does not seem to prioritise this.

Even though there were options available for academic staff to obtain academic qualifications as well as support from staff members, some were still not open to change, and the voluntary approach to improving teaching and learning remained problematic. Knapper (2016) and Altbach et al., (2009) add that there is also a strain on academic staff from heavy workloads which means that improving teaching and learning may not be seen as their priority or may be difficult for lecturers to do given these competing demands. One of the factors that may be contributing to the lack of staff buy-in may be WITS's research-intensive focus. Let us examine the new demands and their impact on lecturers' priorities.

Research vs. Teaching: A Battle of the Titans

The intention of WITS to become "… an internationally-leading research-intensive institution …" has been articulated clearly and explicitly in the *WITS Vision 2022 Strategic Framework* (WITS, 2010, p. 3). This move is in keeping with international trends (Altbach et al., 2009). Universities such as WITS are seen as generators of new knowledge within increasingly knowledge-driven economies (Boughey, 2009; Simpson & Gevers, 2016).

Becoming a research-intensive university seems to have resulted in competing demands on the academic staff (Altbach et al., 2009; Boughey, 2009; Knapper, 2016; Osman & Hornsby, 2016; Simpson & Gevers, 2016). This is because it has also committed to improving teaching and learning practices – a need also expressed in relation to international standards – in the *Teaching and Learning Plan 2015–2019* (WITS, 2014). However, there are no consequences or rewards for not improving teaching and learning, whereas there seemed to be consequences for not publishing sufficient research which affected lecturers' tenure and promotions as well as their recognition within the field (as mentioned by Student Support Practitioners A and B, and Student Academic Development Practitioner A).

While teaching objectives are formally part of the requirements for promotion, research appears to be weighted more heavily (according to Student Support Practitioners A and B, T&L Development Practitioner B and Student Academic Development Practitioner A). According to Knapper (2016), the perceived value of the competing demands tends to skew the decisions made by lecturers about what to prioritise. This means that if discipline-

based research is perceived to be more highly regarded and rewarded, that is most likely to be the priority that lecturers will select. The implication here is that it is believed that lecturers who are poor teachers may be promoted because their research publication tends to carry more weight.

Worth noting is that academic staff are also encouraged to conduct research into teaching and learning within their fields to align research and teaching demands. This was advocated by both T&L Development Practitioner A and T&L Expert A. What has also emerged from the data is that academic staff received more recognition from publishing research within their discipline than research on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). As a result, this may not necessarily be a viable solution for all lecturers. However in some Schools, the production of research on teaching and learning may be equally recognised because these Schools promote the research of teaching and learning within their fields.

In her study of five South African universities, including WITS, Boughey (2009, p. 61) explained that one of results of a research-driven approach is "… light touch with respect to the management of quality in teaching and learning and of academic staff themselves …". The data from this study tends to suggest the same: that an effort to compete on international standards means that research is now the main focus, while teaching and learning seems to fall by the wayside. Boughey (2009) questions what the place of teaching and learning is within a research-intensive university. This is an important question because, as the proverbial 'goalposts' shift in a bid to keep up with international trends, what is the place of teaching and learning and what are the contextual demands being pushed aside to privilege international competitiveness?

There is a final important question, raised by Student Support Practitioner A, of where future postgraduate students will come from, if undergraduate academic development and support are not a priority and there is only a rhetorical commitment to undergraduate teaching and learning. It may be prudent to question whether WITS should not be grooming their undergraduate students to become postgraduate students through the ways in which the courses are structured and equipping them with the necessary practices to move on to postgraduate study. Academic development for students and staff combined

with student support could play a role in working towards increased student retention and an increased number of viable postgraduate candidates.

School-level Student Academic Development Programmes

Within School A and School B, there were similar types of programmes to develop the literacy practices of students within the specific discipline. However, the approaches to meet their aim differed. Despite a shift towards an institutional development focus, there was still a need identified in both Schools to directly target the development of students' academic literacy practices and the acquisition of the academic discourse within their disciplines. This approach is in line with the literature (Leibowitz et al., 1997; Lea & Street, 1998; Boughey, 2007, 2009, 2010).

Each of the student academic development programmes emerged at different times: in School A in 2010 and in School B in 2014. The two programmes were similar in terms of their conceptions of academic development. Both programmes favoured an academic literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998) based on a more dialogic approach to working with students. Their approach was not prescriptive and did not aim to teach students skills, but rather to work with students to develop practices to engage and work with the knowledge within their specific disciplines.

Recognising the social nature of learning and the fact that each student came from a different social and educational background was important, in order to understand, work with and build on the different types knowledge that students bring with them (Lea & Street, 1998; Boughey, 2009). Indeed, in the past the nature of learning was ignored without the understanding that sometimes student success may also lie outside of the student (Boughey, 2010). This was an important move in positioning students away from the 'deficit' model and towards an approach which works together with students to develop their practices in a contextualised, embedded way.

Concerning the approaches taken by the two programmes, in School A the focus was on working with students. This was done individually or in groups of students working with the same task. There was also a first-year 'at-risk' intervention in place for a more structured, focused approach needed to target first-year students coming into School A,

specifically those whose literacy and comprehension levels tended to be problematic, based on NBT scores. Students' progress was tracked throughout the year in their compulsory course.

Interventions for students 'at-risk' of failing was discussed by Boughey (2010) as being associated with a push for more efficiency and to increase the student pass rate throughput. The NBT test is a tool used by some universities order to identify which students need assistance and the levels of assistance that are needed (Boughey, 2010). This intervention has also created more possibilities for academic development practitioners to work within lectures to develop better teaching and learning practices in line with students' developmental needs.

Other work done in the student academic development programme of School A was to assist lecturers in developing materials and embedding literacy development in some tutorial material for first-year students, and tutors assisting students in some tutorials. Workshops, predominantly for first-year students, were conducted on request for particular assignment topics. This is in line with the shift towards examining the practices within the university as an institution, and working towards improving teaching and learning practices not only to help develop students' disciplinary literacy practices but also to make the tutorial more accessible for more students (Boughey, 2010).

The student academic development programme in School B also works with students as well as in tutorials and in lectures, but to a different extent. Firstly, as with School A, students were able to see tutors on a one-to-one basis and work with the tutor on the tasks they needed assistance with, or get assistance online on SAKAI. The School B student academic development programme worked more with lecturers than in School A, to embed the development of academic literacies within the courses themselves, developing more effective assessments and scaffolding the development within lectures. Workshops were also presented, on request, within particular classes on assignment topics.

Student Academic Development Practitioner A acknowledged the need for greater systemic change in School A because addressing students' needs was not seen as sufficient to facilitate epistemological access for students. More lecturers in School B seemed to be willing to explore options of change because Student Academic Development Practitioner B explained that most of their work was related to lectures.

According to Student Academic Development Practitioner A, the lecturers in School A tended to be more resistant to accepting outside assistance. Despite the emphasis on modelling effective teaching and learning practices in School A and the large amount of research conducted into teaching and learning, some lecturers were not interested in accepting help because they feel that they do not need it. One of the reasons for this could lie in the position of the programmes within the School as it operates almost independently from the School administration, with little integration. The need for this programme in School A was identified by students and a lecturer who initiated the programme.

In School B the programme was put into place by the then Head of School, who raised funds for that purpose. The programme is conceptualised and structured as part of the School. The support and recognition of the programme was therefore greater in School B than School A, giving it more legitimacy. In School A, Student Academic Development Practitioner A felt that they did not receive recognition for the work that they did in the School and they had to ensure that the programme received attention. This was not the case in School B, where Student Academic Development Practitioner B said that they felt well-supported.

The Student Support Programmes in Place

The student support programmes in Faculty A and Faculty B are part of a University-wide initiative to implement interventions targeting first-year students 'at-risk' of failing their courses and/or courses with low pass rates. Both programmes have the same mandate of providing ongoing support for students in order to increase student retention and success, but had a different scope and structure.

The student support programmes in the two Faculties aimed to assist with issues that contribute to students' poor academic performance. Tracking systems were put into place to identify the students who needed assistance; then the student support practitioners within the Faculty directly contacted the students to assist with their issues, and tracked their progress throughout the year. The student support practitioners could then direct students to the support structures available within WITS for assistance but they assisted the students as much as possible within their capacity before referring them elsewhere. Students at all levels of study were also able to reach out to the programmes in

their respective Faculties for assistance or advice.

The student support practitioners mandate was broad, and this allowed them to decide on the scope, structure and practices of their programmes, given the capacity, resources and context. In Faculty A, the scope of the programme was extensive and they assisted in a wide range of areas. Besides working with students, it also worked with lecturers and conducted peer reviews. It assisted lecturers in one School in Faculty A to embed skills development within the course content. They did not do much work with School A, although they were available to assist on request.

The student support programme in Faculty B worked only with students. They had a structured skills development programme in place that consisted of generic skills courses such as study skills, time management and note-taking which were scheduled into the students' timetables. They also had their own food bank that assisted students in Faculty B with food security issues, but also catered for students from other Faculties who were referred by their student support practitioners. The programme in School B tended to be very clear in defining the parameters within which they worked. They hoped to incorporate working within lectures into their range of activities in the future.

There is no doubt that this type of assistance is needed, to address the non-academic factors affecting students' academic success (Lotkowski et al., 2004; Scott et al., 2013). McKenna (2016) explains the importance of a holistic approach in ensuring student success because "… students' physical, financial and emotional wellbeing and a positive and supportive university environment are key to student success …" (p. 175). From the account of some students' experiences by the practitioners, countless WITS students were in difficult financial and material positions as many did not have a place to live or access to food on a regular basis.

Both of these programmes focused on students' material and affective challenges. They assisted students with adjusting to the university environment and understanding the structures of the University such as how to gain readmission to University if they had failed, and careers planning advice. Students also had some cultural and social difficulties in negotiating in the transition to university (Christie, 2008; Scott et al., 2013). Issues such as these can be a source of anxiety for students (Grant-Vallone et al., 2003–2004). Beyond adjusting to the university environment, students needed to build up confidence and self-

assurance (Lotkowski et al., 2004). These factors also impact on students' academic performance, so addressing them in conjunction with academic factors is critical (Grant-Vallone et al., 2003–2004; Lotkowski et al., 2004; Scott et al., 2013). This is part of the job carried out by the student support programmes in Faculty A and Faculty B, which could both be considered as integrated support programmes because they seek to assist students with a combination of academic factors, because of the skills courses that they provide, as well as various non-academic factors (Lotkowski et al., 2004).

What is interesting to note is that both student support programmes provided skills development in the form of generic academic skills courses not located within any particular discipline. This type of skills development, characteristic of the first phase of academic development, and the 'study skills' model of academic literacies, is not considered to be as effective as discipline-based development (Lea & Street, 1998; Boughey, 2007, 2009, 2010). In fact, both the student support practitioners and the student academic development practitioners agreed that a more embedded approach would be preferable where it was possible.

However, there is another perspective to consider. Firstly, working at Faculty level, it may be more difficult to work in a contextualised way in specific disciplines, because some Faculties are comprised of multiple disciplines. If this type of skills development is not available or not sufficient within the Schools, the opportunity to learn these skills could be useful. Student Support Practitioner A did have an effect at School-level by working with lecturers to embed skills development within their specific disciplines, however this was limited to those who requested it. Secondly, the practitioners specifically described their role as non-academic and student support, distancing the programmes from the field of academic development. The question emerges as to whether, given the history of academic development, the same aims, theories and best practices can be applied to these support programmes. Perhaps these are new types of programmes within the South African context that will develop their own conventions, aims and practices. Undoubtedly, the work done by these programmes is important and needed.

What came through quite strongly from these practitioners is the extent of the problems faced by many students and the need for assistance, support and guidance in various forms

within the WITS financial austerity constraints. Yet, the student support practitioners were committed to doing their best to ensure that the students that they assisted were successful. According to them, this was not necessarily true for most academic staff members who did not always realise the extent of the challenges some students faced and so were not able to consider that, in the ways in which they dealt with students or in their teaching practices. This in itself tended to be less inclusive because of the difficulties of teaching without knowing about the possibility of students within classes experiencing barriers and trying to make provisions for that.

Measuring the Effectiveness of the Programmes

The teaching and learning development initiative in Faculty A used statistical data such as student retention and pass rates within the Faculty to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures in place. T&L Development Practitioner A felt that the interventions in Faculty A were working well because they had high pass and retention rates, but there that there might be a need to extend this and evaluate the quality of learning that was taking place. T&L Development Practitioner B explained that, for them, measuring the effectiveness of their work on teaching and learning was difficult because of their heavy workloads, time constraints and the difficulty in monitoring the work the staff were doing.

T&L Expert A also discussed the use of quantitative data such as pass rates and throughput to measure the effectiveness of the improvements to teaching and learning within School A. For T&L Expert A, pass rates and student marks exceeding the averages of a bell curve meant that their teaching and learning improvement efforts had been successful.

The two student support programmes used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate their programmes. The quantitative data included statistics on the pass rates of the students who had participated in or used the programmes, which they were able to track through their computer systems. Interviews and reflections of these students and, in School B, the programme tutors, formed their qualitative evaluation data. Student Support Practitioner B explained it was not possible to claim causation but there did seem to be a connection in that a majority of students who made use of the programme in Faculty B had passed.

Similarly, the student academic development programme in School A also made use of statistical data, such as student pass rates, as well as student and tutor reflections to evaluate the success of their first-year intervention programme. Although the impact of the programme on students' success could not be isolated, Student Academic Development felt that the pass rate of students who had participated regularly in their intervention was higher and the same view was expressed by Student Support Practitioner B about their student support programme.

The student academic development programmes in School A and B both made use of qualitative reflections to evaluate the effect of their programmes. In School A, this data included reflections of students who had participated within the programmes and their tutors. In School B, this was similar and also included lecturers' perceptions of the programme's work. Student Academic Development Practitioner B mentioned the difficulty in definitively measuring the effectiveness of the programme, because even interviews were "perceptual data" and so may not be an accurate measurement of effectiveness.

The student academic development programme in School B did not make use of any statistical data to assess their programme, because Student Academic Development Practitioner B felt that it would not be an accurate means of measuring the effect of the programme on students' success. The difficulty of using statistics such as pass rates and retention rates is in isolating the effect of one particular programme or intervention in the success of a student, which Student Academic Development Practitioner A and Student Support Practitioner A also agreed with. There are many variables affecting student success or failure (Grant-Vallone et al, 2003-2004; Lotkowski et al, 2004; Scott et al, 2007; Scott et al, 2013). As a result, evaluating the exact impact of each of the programmes on student success tended to be difficult.

The use of descriptions such as student "success" and "throughput", as well as the use of student pass rates to measure the effectiveness of the programmes reflect the discourses around increased efficiency, and the use of statistical data to monitor students' progress and evaluate the programmes in place (Boughey, 2010, p.16). These types of discourses are especially evident where TDG funding has been used to implement first-year intervention programmes, with statistics also being used to justify the grants being given to them for this purpose.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to answer the questions of 'how' and 'why'. Why are academic development and student support enacted in particular ways? How are resources allocated to particular measures and why? How can the provision of academic development and student support be improved, and the main challenges overcome? In essence, how were academic development and student support practised within the two Schools and what were the reasons for these practices? This was done by looking at the various influencing factors.

On the question of a WITS policy on academic development and student support, none of the practitioners were aware of any overarching policies that guided their work and nothing was found by the researcher. The provision and oversight of academic development and student support were largely decentralised to the Faculties and Schools, with little central governance or guidance from the University administration. This decentralised approach allowed for more contextualised development and support opportunities, but also left space for the implementation of programmes and practices that were less effective. As a result, a more centralised approach and/or the creation of a guiding policy could have been a positive step in ensuring the consistent and effective provision of development and support opportunities for students.

There are some areas of teaching and learning covered by University policies such as assessment and plagiarism, but there were no direct policies regarding the improvement of teaching and learning, despite this having been identified as areas for improvement by WITS. The *Teaching and Learning Plan 2015–2019* (WITS, 2014) outlines the direction for this improvement, but there was no actual implementation plan linked to this. It was also not mandatory for lecturers to follow this plan, and no real consequences existed for not improving practices. As a result, this *Plan* seems to be more of a symbolic statement of intent.

There were also School-level Teaching and Learning Committees in place. In School A, this Committee was focused on issues of teaching and learning within the School and the discipline. It was a discussion forum, and also conducted research into issues of teaching and learning within the School. The aim was to inform teaching and learning through

research and in particular, research focused on teaching, and teaching and learning.

WITS's research-intensive focus was identified as another possible influence on the seeming neglect of the development of teaching and learning. Publishing research within the disciplines was seen to be weighted more heavily than teaching obligations with few consequences for not improving according to T&L Development Practitioner B. So, research seemed to take priority over lecturers' professional development. This was identified by T&L Development Practitioner A, the student support practitioners in both Faculties and Student Academic Development Practitioner A. In a context where there are various competing demands on the lecturers, teaching and learning did not seem to be a priority, especially where there is no formal requirement to review and improve practices.

The academic development and student support at WITS tended to reflect the characteristics of the 'institutional development' phase of academic development, with an emphasis on efficiency, throughput and pass rates. There is also a focus on development of teaching and learning and curricula. This is reflected with the initiative in place at Faculty level, which can be classified as academic development, appointing staff members in each Faculty to assist staff with the development of teaching and learning practices and curricula. The purpose of this was to create more inclusive practices. Despite this, the T&L Development Practitioner A had a better experience with staff that were seemingly more willing to review and adjust practices to cope with a massified environment. T&L Development Practitioner B described their job as difficult because staff were reticent to change.

There were student academic development programmes in place in both Schools that were focused on the development of students' academic literacy practices within their disciplines. They both worked with students in a dialogic way to develop their reading and writing practices, in a contextual manner. Although the theoretical basis for their programmes was the same, there were operational differences. School B's programme operated as part of the School, and the practitioner felt well supported. In School A the programme operated independently, and the practitioner did not feel supported in the least. The programme in School A worked mainly with students and ran a first-year intervention programme based on the requirements of TDG funding. In School B, work was done with

students both in person and online, but the programme worked more with lecturers. The programmes were also funded in different ways: in School A funds were sourced from various professional bodies whereas programme in School B was funded through money raised by the previous Head of School.

There were two Faculty-based student support programmes in place for the Schools. The practitioners in these programmes located themselves within student support, and away from academic development discourses. Such student support was viewed as holistic in nature and the programme sought to assist students with their various academic and non-academic barriers to success. Both programmes operated mainly as an intervention for first-year students at risk of failing their courses. These programmes were made possible due to TDG funding.

The main difference within these programmes was around the structure and the limits of the work that they were doing. The programme in Faculty B focused on working with students, and conducted skills-development tutorials that were structured into students' timetables. The programme in Faculty A did not have a structured programme but focused on the same skills with individual students and conducted workshops. They also worked with lecturers to embed skills development within lectures, and conducted peer reviews. The practitioners in both programmes felt that they received the necessary training for this work. The practitioner from the programme in Faculty B felt well-supported by their Faculty Dean, whereas the practitioner from Faculty A felt less supported and less recognised.

It could be said that the TDG did have an impact on the programmes in place, both enabling and constraining the operation of the programmes in different ways. On one hand, the student support programmes would not exist without the TDG funding, and the student academic development programme in School A would have to find another source of funding. On the other hand, the need to target first-year students at-risk or courses with high failure rates, tended to constrain the focus of the programmes and types of work that they were able to do.

Measuring the effectiveness of the programmes was done in different ways. The Faculty-level teaching and learning initiative in Faculty A, both student support programmes and

School A's student academic development programme all used pass-rates, student retention and throughput rates to measure the effect of their programmes. Both student support programmes and both student academic development programmes also used qualitative evaluations through reflections by the students involved with the programmes and their tutors. The student academic development programme in School B also spoke to the lecturers that they worked with, in order to find out their perceptions of working with the programme.

T&L Development Practitioner B said it was not easy to monitor the work being done in the Faculty. Further, even with these evaluations being done there were difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of the programmes, because it was difficult to isolate the effect of the programmes on a student's success. As a result, it was not possible to claim causation. Yet, Student Academic Development Practitioner A and Student Support Practitioner B indicated that there appeared to be a link between attendance and success because the majority of the students who their programmes regularly passed their courses.

To conclude, it is clear that academic development, for both staff and students, and student support have important roles to play at WITS and in higher education in general. Yet, this study reveals that navigating academic development at WITS is clearly a difficult endeavour. There was little to no guidance, support and enforcement of authority for academic development and student support from an institutional perspective. This affected the provision of academic development and student support because, without a University-wide understanding of what is expected and how this should be done, the existing provision tends to be ad hoc and uneven, lacking coherence in terms of implementation as evidenced by the different experiences of the practitioners within their programmes. Despite this, the academic development and student support practitioners on whose shoulders the structuring of the programmes fell, were committed to finding ways of providing effective academic development and student support within their specific areas. This shows that they exercised their agency the best way that they could, given the constraints of their context.

The next chapter of this report will use the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 to draw conclusions to the research questions of this study by analysing the provision of academic development in two Faculties and Schools at WITS.

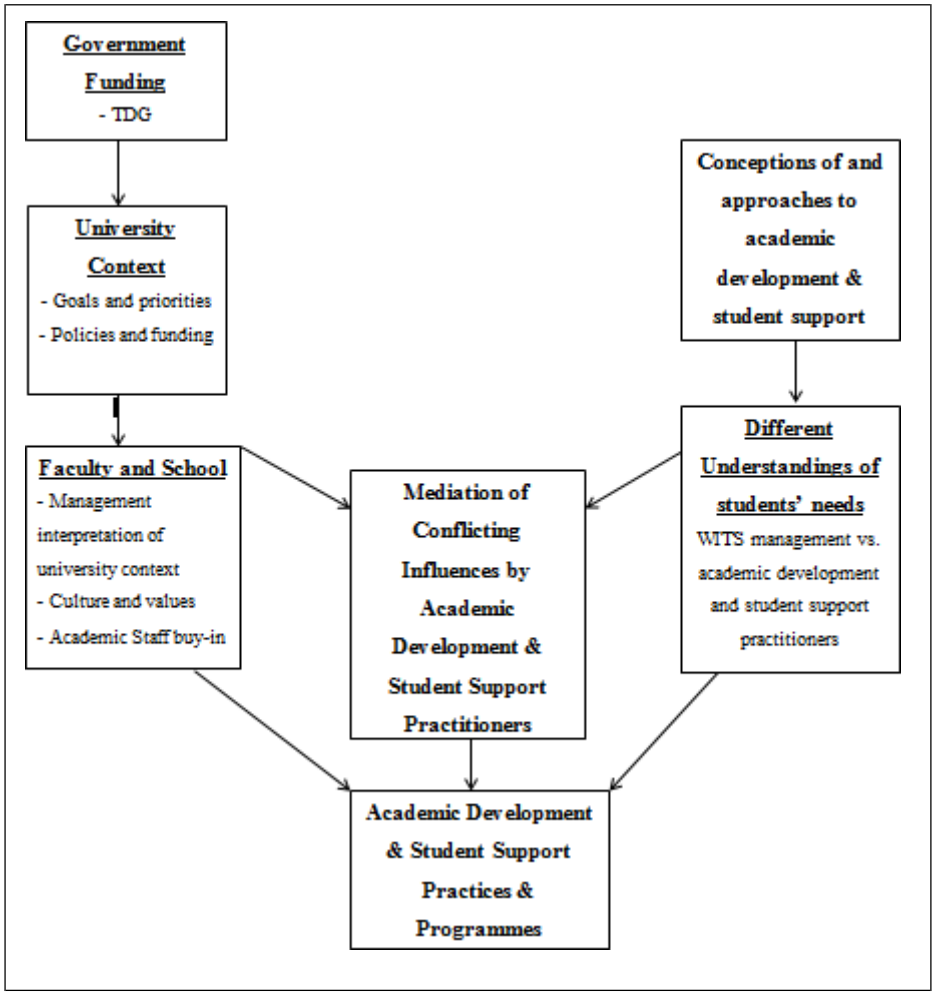
Chapter 6: Findings and Recommendations for Further Study

This chapter aims to bring together the different aspects of the data collection and analysis by using the conceptual framework to account for the key factors that influence the conceptualisation and operationalisation of academic development and student support in the two selected Schools and their Faculties. A comparison between these initiatives or programmes in place will be done to examine their similarities and differences and why these exist. Within academic development and student support, there are many factors impacting the formulation of initiatives and programmes, as well as their enacted practices. Of key significance is the role of agency at different stages in the planning for and operation of the initiatives or programmes, and this is true for within the Schools or Faculties and within the programmes themselves.

When this research was conceptualised, "the practitioner" was seen as important in mediating the various structural factors influencing the academic development and student support initiatives or programmes. These factors included understanding the different approaches suggested by the literature in the field; selecting and implementing the approach best suited to their students' needs as well as their context; the availability of resources and support; and requirements from funders as well as from the Faculty or School administration. The practitioner needs to interpret, understand and mediate these factors and influences, and exercise their agency in order to produce particular programmes and practices that are effective and most suitable given the constraints of the context. This is especially important within constraining contexts as individuals always have some power to influence the academic development and student support provision and practices.

Thus, the main structural factors in the conceptual framework were identified as having the most influence on the provision and operationalisation of academic development and student support, and the practitioner has been positioned at the centre. The conceptual framework is presented again below to aid in the analysis.

Figure 3: Conceptual Framework



6.1 University Policies and Funding

Considering that there were no direct policies addressing the issues of academic development and student support at a University level, there were no official position or directives from WITS administration on the governance or implementation of the academic development and student support initiatives or programmes in the two Schools. Funding from the DHET, in the form of the TDG, did have an influence on the provision, scope and operation of the academic development and student support programmes in place. This was due to the conditions attached to the TDG provision that the funding be used to improve teaching and learning with the goal of improving students' throughput and pass rates. According to the practitioners in this study, they were required to do this by implementing interventions for first-year students at-risk or target courses with high failure rates with the

intention of improving student pass rates and throughput. This approach, favoured by the DHET in addressing student needs, leans towards practices within the 'institutional development' phase of academic development with a focus on institutional efficiency, pass-rates and throughput within institutions (Boughey, 2010).

The TDG funding seems to both enable and constrain the provision of academic development and student support. Without the TDG the student support programmes may not exist and the student academic development programme in School A would certainly have been undermined without this major source of funding. As a result, it can be said that the TDG funding was enabling. However, by targeting students 'at-risk' – a term that is not viewed favourably by the student support or student academic development practitioners due to its 'deficit' connotations – or courses with higher failure rates, this approach also restricted the types of work being done. This could be considered a constraint on the types of academic development and student support provided.

6.2 WITS's Financial Constraints and Goals

The University context, both financial and ideological, also had an influence on the ways in which academic development and student support were viewed and enacted in the two Schools. The funding shortage at WITS seems to have led to a push towards finding ways to maximise the resources it already had. Evidence of this can be seen in the appointment of existing members of staff to assist with the development of teaching and learning within all the Faculties. On the surface, this could be seen as a commitment to improving teaching and learning within the University, but analysing this more deeply raises questions about the level of the University's actual commitment to this goal. Indeed, teaching and learning development was only one of the duties of the practitioners, along with various others such as teaching and research. This could make it difficult for practitioners to provide their full attention to this important issue. This issue was experienced by T&L Development Practitioner B, but was not mentioned by T&L Development Practitioner A, which may speak to the unevenness of the experiences of practitioners in a policy-less context. Both T&L development practitioners agreed that more development is needed in this area.

Linked to the fiscal constraint was the aim to embed the necessary development opportunities for students within lectures rather than providing separate programmes to

work with students (T&L Expert A). The onus was on lecturers to develop their teaching and learning practices to meet the needs of a growing, diverse student population and work within a more massified context. T&L Expert A explained that there was a need for lecturers to understand and accept that working academically with students was their responsibility, and not 'somebody else's problem'. This could be reason for WITS's emphasis on teaching and learning development, rather than on student development. The problem with this approach is the lack of staff ownership according to Student Support Practitioner A in Faculty A and Student Academic Development Practitioner B identified in Faculty B and School B.

The acceptance of the TDG and the resultant implementation of University-wide programmes to target students 'at-risk' and courses with high failure rates, seems to indicate an ideological standpoint associated with institutional efficiency. This is interesting because T&L Expert A explained that there is an emphasis on internal solutions to improve student success, such as developing lecturers' teaching and learning practices, rather than relying on external programmes that target students. This reveals more of a move towards different programmes rather than none at all.

6.3 WITS Priorities: Teaching vs. Research Responsibilities

The CLTD is responsible for the management of staff development at WITS, with regards to teaching and working with the objectives of the *Teaching and Learning Plan 2015–2019* (Osman & Hornsby, 2016). This could indicate a move towards a more centralised approach to managing the improvement of teaching and learning. The full extent of the work done by the CLTD was not part of this study but, according to T&L Development Practitioner B, the funding for staff development through internal courses, such as the PG.Dip. (HE) and induction for new academic staff are examples of the CLTD's responsibilities in this area. The CLTD also facilitated the necessary training for the student support practitioners within this study.

However, the voluntary nature of staff development and the lack of a University policy to formalise the needed improvement of teaching and learning was problematic. Osman & Hornsby (2016) explain that meeting teaching and learning objectives are part of the requirements for promotion of lecturers, yet the participants in this study (T&L Practitioner

B, Student Support Practitioners A and B, and Student Academic Development Practitioner A) argued that teaching and learning development aims were not weighted as heavily as producing discipline-based research. This affected staff promotion and recognition, thus making teaching and learning improvement aims appear to be more symbolic than a real, rewarded commitment.

WITS's shift towards a more research-intensive focus affects the ways in which the work of its lecturers and WITS itself is done. WITS values its role as a knowledge producer and there are plans to increase postgraduate students enrolment to 50% of the total enrolments at WITS and it has explicitly stated its intention to become a research-intensive university by 2022 (WITS, 2010). This is a major influencing factor in the institutional culture of WITS, its Faculties and Schools in terms of what is valued and prioritised and what is not. As a result, academic development activities tend to be less of a priority.

6.4 Faculty and School Management and Culture: Mediation of WITS Goals and Priorities

Given the financial constraints, goals and priorities of the University, the Heads of the Schools or the Deans of the Faculties can play a role in the mediation of these contextual factors. The ability of the Heads of the Schools or the Deans of the Faculties to recognise and exercise their agency is an important influence in finding a balance between what is prioritised at University level and what is needed at Faculty and School level. An important part of this is establishing a School culture which reflects its values and priorities. This can have an enabling or constraining influence on the provision of academic development and student support.

Unfortunately, the views of the Heads of Schools themselves are not reflected in this study. Instead the experiences of the academic development and student support practitioners with Faculty and School management provide some valuable insights. Student Support Practitioner B felt supported by the Dean of the Faculty, who recognised the value of the work done by the programme. In Faculty A, Student Support Practitioner A felt less recognised and supported, and had to push to be included in particular meetings or to report on the programme. This difference could be explained by the more integrated nature of the student support programme in Faculty B, and the enabling influence of the Dean.

Indeed, a more supportive Head of School or Dean of Faculty can enable more effective functioning of the programmes in place, and result in more recognition and legitimacy.

The Head of School can play an important role in academic development, like in School B, where the Head of School initiated the student academic development programme. This was despite WITS's emphasis, at the time, on greater institutional efficiency and the development of teaching and learning rather than focusing on student development. Positioning the programme as part of the School was also an important consideration in providing it with a more legitimate position. Student Academic Development Practitioner B felt that that the programme was well supported and recognised within the School.

The experiences of the practitioner in student academic development programme in School B is in contrast to those of the practitioner in School A, which was perceived to be at the periphery of the School's activities. There was little to no involvement of the School management in the initiation and operation of the programme, or in providing any administrative, financial or training support. Student Academic Development Practitioner A explained that they had to fight for the continuation and visibility of the programme and to report to the School Executive on the programme's work and achievements.

The reach of the student academic development programmes in the two Schools also shows, in more subtle way, some differences between the programmes. In School A, most of the work was done with students, while in School B more work was being done with lecturers and extending further in that direction. This could be due to the ways in which the programmes were positioned, given the better inclusion and legitimisation of the programme in School B than the programme in School A. Thus the Head of School is important in providing an endorsement of the student academic development programmes and can influence their operation through recognition and support.

The culture of the Faculty or School, which is linked to management, influences the values and norms of organisations (Davidoff & Lazarus, 2000). This includes the perceived importance and value of academic development and student support programmes, and especially teaching and learning development (Osman & Hornsby, 2016). The issue of staff buy-in is intrinsically linked to the culture and values of their organisation.

6.5 Academic Staff Buy-in

Staff buy-in emerged as an important factor influencing the scope and effectiveness of the programmes and the efforts to improve teaching and learning. When lecturers are more receptive to change and to improving their practices, efforts may be more effective within the School or Faculty. There were differences in the two Faculties and Schools in this area. Despite the same reasons for the teaching and learning development initiative being put in place, and the same focus (improving of teaching and learning practices), the T&L development practitioner in Faculty A reported wide-ranging and better received measures than the T&L development practitioner Faculty B, which seemed to be linked to staff buy-in.

In Faculty A, the T&L Development Practitioner A reported more willingness by Faculty staff to adapt and find new solutions for a changing university context and to meet the needs of their students. In contrast, Student Academic Development Practitioner A explained that lecturers in School A appeared less willing to adapt or ask for assistance to improve their practices. This was despite the commitment of School A to modelling and conducting research into effective teaching and learning practices. In this case, it could be suggested that staff did not want to work with external programmes but felt that they were able and preferred to work on their own.

In Faculty B, the T&L development practitioner reported reluctance by many lecturers to change their traditional practices and adapt their teaching and learning practices to changing student needs. This was partly because of the absence of consequences for not changing, according to T&L Development Practitioner B. This lack of staff buy-in at Faculty level frustrated the teaching and learning development efforts and change seemed to be slow. However, in School B more lecturers were beginning to seek assistance in improving their teaching and learning practices from the student academic development programme. This could indicate that a more discipline-based approach to teaching and learning development was appropriate and preferred by staff in School B.

Given the differences in staff-buy-in at Faculty and School level, it could also be concluded that more coordination and communication between the various Faculty-level and School-level initiatives and programmes may be useful, especially in areas of overlap

such as the development of staff teaching and learning practices.

6.5.1 Staff Agency

Staff agency emerges as a key issue because staff can choose whether to use the opportunities available to them to improve their teaching and learning practices. Lecturers' willingness to review and consider different approaches is important, given the lack of a formalised policy, and the absence of organisational impetus to change. Despite the competing demands and pressures resulting from working within an increasingly research-intensive university, some academic staff members chose to work on their teaching and learning practices by asking for assistance from the academic development or student support practitioners, and/or using the professional development opportunities offered by the PG.Dip. (HE) for a formal qualification.

However, the Faculty-level student support practitioners suggested that the willing and committed staff using the development opportunities provided were already keen to improve as teachers. This meant that the academic staff resistant to change would remain so, despite the development opportunities available, because they did not recognise the need for such improvement.

Finally, School culture and values are important, because they can influence the work that academic staff prioritise and see as important. This includes their attitudes towards the development of teaching and learning practices, whether research is prioritised and whether or not the SoTL is accepted as a valuable endeavour. In School A, the modelling of good teaching and learning practices and the promotion of research into teaching and learning can be both positive and negative, because some academic staff may not want to accept assistance on teaching and learning development because they feel that they are professionals who know what to do. This is not necessarily the case, according to Student Academic Development Practitioner A.

6.6 Conceptions of and Approaches to Academic Development and Student Support

On the right-hand side of Figure 2 are the conceptions and approaches to academic development and student support which form the theoretical basis for the programmes in

place and influence the practitioners' understanding of how to meet students' needs. The academic development and student support practitioners decide on the scope, structure and operation of their programmes and select appropriate practices to meet the broad mandates from the administration or the TDG funding requirements. The contextual factors described in the previous sections had an influence on the outcome of these decisions.

For the Faculty-level teaching and learning development initiative, the approach to academic development focuses on changing the practices within the institution. Student needs were seen in relation to changing practices, where the aim is to increase student success by using more inclusive teaching and learning practices that consider the diverse needs and educational backgrounds of the student body. In Faculty A, there are also efforts to improve the curricula with a transformation agenda (T&L Development Practitioner A). This reflects the thinking and practices dominant within the 'institutional transformation' phase of academic development (Boughey, 2007; 2010), in which the discourses of efficiency, access and redress are dominant.

There are challenges with this approach to teaching and learning development for a number of reasons: the first is that it relies on the willingness of academic staff to participate with little institutional impetus to enforce this, leading to varying levels of cooperation. Secondly, this job is part of a portfolio of duties assigned to the practitioners, who are responsible for the entire Faculty. With between four and five Schools in the Faculties, the practicality of this approach tends to be questionable. The difference in experience between Faculties A and B tends to suggest that the nature of teaching and learning development appears to lack consistency in its implementation across the Faculties, which does not suggest a strong commitment to changing T&L but rather a "lip- service" to the goal (T&L Development Practitioner B).

The student support programmes at Faculty level are a University-wide initiative, so they are similar in terms of the ideological basis for their implementation, their aims and their mandate. The student support programmes positioned themselves outside student academic development in the area of student support. This meant that the focus was broader, working on areas outside of the development of academic literacies. Their approach was aligned with the view that there are a multitude of factors influencing student success outside of academia, because student needs were multilayered and complex. Thus a more holistic, all-

encompassing approach to understanding and assisting students is needed.

The practitioners addressed their primary mandate of assisting first-year students 'at-risk', in different ways. This was based on their understanding of where best to allocate available resources to meet students' needs. The programme in Faculty B was focused on the area of student support and had a more structured programme in place. In Faculty A, the student support programme worked with students in a less-structured programme, and had also branched out into working with lecturers.

The School-level student academic development programmes also had similarities and differences at an operational level. The programmes in both Schools favoured an 'academic literacies' approach (Lea & Street, 1998), which was seen as more effective (Lea & Street, 1998; Boughey, 2010). This approach focused on the social nature of learning and on developing students' practices in a contextual manner (Lea & Street, 1998), which is reflected in their dialogic way of working with students in their respective Schools. Operating at School level meant that it was possible for the programmes to adopt a discipline-based, contextualised approach to working with students.

The differences emerging between School A and B tend to lie in their focus and funding. Firstly, although both programmes worked with students and in lectures, the extent of this work differed as there was more work done with lecturers in School B than School A. Further, the programme in School B worked with students though SAKAI, and the programme in School A did not. Secondly, the programmes were funded in different ways. Both student academic development programmes operated within the same university context of fiscal constraint, and an emphasis on institutional transformation. In School B, there tends to be more stability in funding for a period of time, because funds were raised for the programme's operation. However, the programme's practitioners were employed on a contract basis, the renewal of which was dependent on the availability of funding. In School A, the position of the programme seemed more tenuous because the programme was responsible for sourcing its own funding.

6.7 Practitioner Agency

The role of academic development and student support practitioners emerged as more

important than previously thought or noted in the literature for a number of reasons. Firstly, in a policy-less context, with few guidelines by which to operate, the practitioners were responsible for the decision-making within the programmes. They, in essence, could do what they felt was correct, in terms of the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the programmes. The student support and academic development practitioners within this study ensured that their practices were underpinned by sound theory and they considered how to find the best solution for their contexts and their students. This was important because, without any real means of monitoring the real effect of the programmes, it was possible to implement ineffective or uninformed measures.

The agency of the practitioners was also important in working within funding constraints, especially in the case of Student Support Practitioner A and Student Academic Development Practitioner A, both of whom identified funding as a major constraint. Both of these practitioners as well as Student Support Practitioner B, explained that their programmes were for all students who needed assistance. They believed that academic development and student support opportunities should be extended to all students, not just to those who were identified as needing assistance. In the Faculty-level student support programmes and the academic development programme in School A, the TDG funding allocated for first-year 'at-risk' interventions enabled the programmes to stay in operation and extend their services to other students in need. This was possible because of the practitioners' decisions to do so.

6.8 Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Study

Conclusion

It is clear that the provision of academic development and student support is not a simple process, and it is influenced by many different factors. The nature of this provision in the two Schools tends to differ, with each of the practitioners having different experiences of their work, despite having a similar theoretical basis. This inconsistency is important because it suggests that there is a need for a regulatory mechanism such as a policy or guidelines to assist with a more even approach to academic development and student support provision. This could help to ensure appropriate decisions are made, and provide

institutional impetus for change or improvement. This could also help to ensure that appropriate programmes or initiatives were implemented. Within this study, it was fortunate that the practitioners were committed and able to ensure an informed approach to their work, taking into consideration the theory, their students and their context, to produce the best type of programmes within sometimes challenging circumstances.

On the one hand, the flexibility of a policy-less approach to academic development and student support allows for a more contextualised approach, customised to the needs of the Faculty or School in question. On the other hand, less informed practitioners may produce programmes that are ineffective. The reliance on the expertise of practitioners will result in various approaches being used, and are not necessarily well monitored for effectiveness.

Some type of governance, especially in the case of improving teaching and learning but also for academic development and student support, would be useful. This would assist in achieving a sense of consistency and a more coherent approach to academic development and student support provision at WITS to build on for their own Faculties or Schools. It would also aid in giving practitioners more authority to ensure that change is affected, especially in the area of teaching and learning. This is not to say that a prescriptive approach must be taken, but guidance from and consultation with peers is important in ensuring effective practices throughout WITS.

The recognition of the agency of various participants within the provision of academic development and student support has also emerged as an important factor. Managers have the potential to enable or constrain the functioning of the programmes, by providing support and recognition for the academic development and student support practitioners and their programmes. The academic staff or lecturers need to recognise their agency within a high-pressure and difficult environment in order to effect change from within the classrooms. Finally, there are the academic development and student support practitioners whose agency has played a role in shaping the measures in place despite the constraints they face and the often difficult contexts they work in.

This chapter aimed to show how specific influencing factors described in the conceptual framework impacted on the operation of the programmes studied, and how the practitioners within the programme mediate these factors to produce particular practices within their contexts. Emerging strongly from this analysis is the importance of educated, informed and

professional academic development and student support practitioners, committed to operating programmes which are in the best interests of students and work towards student success within a policy-less context. As a whole, this research study indicates that there are many areas to examine for the role of WITS as a potential regulator for academic development and student support. Rather than providing final answers, more questions have been raised in terms of the commitment of WITS to teaching and learning development and whether the research-intensive focus is one more factor preventing this development from occurring.

Recommendations for Further Study

This research has provided some perspectives into the academic development and student support programmes and initiatives within the two Schools studied and how they are practised and has resulted in some valuable insights. However, it has barely scratched the surface of the state of academic development and student support in WITS and the reasons for this. As this research progressed, there were an increasing number of questions that came up. The fact that academic development and student support provision were different in each School or Faculty, and that there was so much being done meant that it was almost impossible to cover all of these aspects and perspectives in just one Masters' research report. So, there are many ways in which this study could be followed up.

This is especially true considering the devolved and fragmented nature of academic development and student support at WITS. There are five different Faculties at WITS and 33 Schools altogether within those Faculties. Each of these Faculties is responsible for its own academic development and student support. As a result, this study could be expanded into other Faculties or Schools in order to understand and compare the approaches taken to academic development and student support within various disciplines and the reasoning behind these. Further research can also be done into the same Schools and Faculties to expand this study to include a wider range of participants and their pedagogical models and perspectives, such as lecturers and even students.

A valuable extension of this study may lie in the perspectives that are missing from this study. As mentioned in Chapter 4, under 'Limitations and Challenges of the Study', participants within the area of funding allocation and policy development at a University

level were unavailable or did not respond to requests to participate within this research. The Heads of Schools were also unavailable or could not be interviewed due to time constraints. However, it is precisely these perspectives that would provide more information on these key issues from the people who are directly involved in decision-making processes. This would provide more information on the institutional perspective on why particular decisions may have been made about the structure and provision of academic development, and issues such as funding and the lack of a policy framework. These perspectives would be most valuable in providing a more holistic understanding of academic development and student support from the top-down perspective.

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Appendix 1: Ethics Clearance and Change of Title Letter

Wits School of Education

27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Tel: +27 11 717-3064 Fax: +27 11 717-3100 E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za Website: www.wits.ac.za

24 June 2016

Student Number: 482245

Protocol Number: 2016ECE34M

DearAneshree Nayager

Application for ethics clearance: Master of Education

Thank you very much for your ethics application. The Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the Senate, has considered your application for ethics clearance for your proposal entitled:

The conceptualisation and enactment of academic development measures at the University of the Witwatersrand: A case study of the School of Education Writing Centre

The committee recently met and I am pleased to inform you that clearance was granted.

Please use the above protocol number in all correspondence to the relevant research parties (schools, parents, learners etc.) and include it in your research report or project on the title page.

The Protocol Number above should be submitted to the Graduate Studies in Education Committee upon submission of your final research report.

All the best with your research project.

Yours sincerely,

M Mabeta

Wits School of Education

011 717-3416

cc Supervisor - Dr Francine De Clercq

Date: 12 October 2016

From: Aneshree Nayager

To: The Ethics Committee

RE: Notification of change of the title of Master's research report title (Reason: Additional Evidence Needed)

I am writing to notify the committee of the change of the title of my M.Ed. research project from: *The conceptualisation and enactment of academic development measures at the University of the Witwatersrand:* [redacted].
(Protocol Number: 2016ECE34M).
to:
The conceptualisation and enactment of student academic development and support at the University of the Witwatersrand: A comparative case study of academic development programmes in two Schools.

I began to think of my research as a case study of the [redacted] with a small section on the [redacted]. However, there is a need to extend this to become a comparative case study in order to provide a more comprehensive view of different interpretations of academic development support within two Schools at the University. This change will help me to improve the validity of my research and provide a better understanding of academic development within the University.

This means that I will be interviewing people in the same positions in both Faculties, using the same interview schedules as per my first ethics application, starting with the [redacted]. See attached the information sheet and consent forms for this participant who will point me to the relevant people in the Faculty and School.

I have already requested consent for this research from the Head of the School of [redacted].

Thank you for your consideration.

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule for T&L Development Practitioners

Interview Schedule: T&L Practitioners

Profile of Interviewee

All of the following information provided is only for the researcher's records. It will be kept confidential under all circumstances and destroyed after 3 – 5 years. Your personal details will also be kept confidential, and you will remain anonymous within the research report.

*Position:

*Department:

*Qualification:

*Years in current position:
Code of participant in research:

Academic Development Issues

1. What do you understand by the terms 'academic development' and 'academic support'?
    - Is there a difference?

2. In your view, or perhaps from a University perspective, what is the purpose and aim of academic development or support?
    - Or the policies in place?
    - Are there any University policies in place to govern steps taken?

3. What do you think students need in order to be supported or for academic development?
    - To allow access to the structures of the University and the creation of knowledge?
    - What types of support does the University advocate?

Provision of Academic Development/ Student Support

4. From the University perspective, who is responsible for academic development and student support (ensuring student success and throughput)?
    - Who is responsible for developing and implementing initiatives?
    - Which types of initiatives are endorsed?

5. What types of measures or approaches has your Faculty decided to use to improve teaching and learning?
    - Why have these particular measures been selected?
    - How effective are these in reaching students who are in need of support/development?
    - Who do these aim to target?

6. In your view, are the measures in place effective in providing students with development opportunities and enable epistemological access?
    - How do you measure your effectiveness or effect on the students?

Institutional Structures

7. Are there any requirements from the University, in terms of a mandate that has been given to you to fulfil?
    - Are there any policies governing what measures are in place and the practices used?

8. Is support provided by the University in developing these efforts?
    - Training or support?
    - If yes, what types of support or assistance is received? If no, why not?
    - Does this affect the ways in which the programme/initiative operates?

9. How is this initiative funded?

10. Are there constraints and/or challenges in the provision of academic development opportunities or enabling access for students within the University?
    - Financial or otherwise?

- What would enable you to overcome these constraints/ challenges?

Institutional Transformation

11. In your view, is addressing the needs of the students sufficient to enable epistemological access?
    - Are there institutional factors which enable/ constrain epistemological access?
    - Are there structural factors which need to be changed/ challenged in order to facilitate epistemological access?

12. In your view, what could be done to improve the process of enabling epistemological access and academic development/ support opportunities?
    - Whose responsibility is this?

13. If you could change anything about the process or provision of student academic development/ support opportunities, what would you change?
    - To enable full access to the institution?
    - From your experience working within the provision of these?
    - Understanding, expectations, implementation?

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule for Student Academic Development Practitioners

Interview Schedule : Student Academic Development Practitioners

Profile of Interviewee

All of the following information provided is only for the researcher's records. It will be kept confidential under all circumstances and destroyed after 3 – 5 years. Your personal details will also be kept confidential, and you will remain anonymous within the research report.

*Position:

*Department:

*Qualification level:

*Years of university lecturing experience:

*Years at the University:

*Years of Working with academic development/ student support:
Code of participant in research:

Academic Development Issues

1. What do you understand by the terms 'academic development' and 'student support'?
    - Is there a difference?

2. Are you aware of any academic development or student support policies or guidelines which exist to govern the development of initiatives around the university?
    - If they are, how have you experienced the implementation of these?

3. In your view, or perhaps from a University perspective, what is the purpose of academic development or student support?
    - Has this changed over the time you have worked here?

Creation of the Programme/Initiative

4. Is there a University/Faculty/ School policy according to which this programme was established?

5. Do you have mandate from the University/Faculty/ School, in terms of the purpose and operation of this programme/initiative?

6. When was this academic development initiative created?
    - What were the processes you followed, in terms of creating this programme/initiative, in terms of the bureaucratic process?
    - What informed the foundation of this programme/initiative?
    - Were there any difficulties experienced in creating this programme/initiative?

Operation of the Programme/Initiative

7. Is this programme based on any particular model? If not, which model does it operate under?
    - How does it work?
    - Why have you selected this particular model?

8. What types of students does this programme aim to target?
    - What are the needs of the various students who you assist?
    - How are these needs determined?

9. What type of measures does this programme take, in order to assist students with their development?
    - Why have these specific measures been selected?

10. How would you describe the role of this programme within your School?
    - Has this changed over time?

Institutional Structures

11. How is this programme funded?

- Does funding affect the operation of your programme?

12. Does this programme receive support or assistance from the University?
    - If yes, what types of support or assistance is received? If no, why not?
    - How does this affect the ways in which the programme/initiative operates?

13. Does the University, its policies, guidelines assistance or support, influence the ways in which the programme operates in assisting students, and the work it does?
    - If so, how? If not, then why not?

14. What are your main challenges in providing student academic development?
    - Where do these challenges originate?
    - What would allow this programme/initiative to overcome these challenges?

15. How do you measure the effectiveness of your programme?

16. If you could change anything about the process or provision of student academic development opportunities, what would you change?
    - To enable full access to the institution?
    - From your experience working within the provision of these?
    - Understanding, expectations, implementation?

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule for Student Support Practitioners

Interview Schedule: Student Support Practitioners

Profile of Interviewee

All of the following information provided is only for the researcher's records. It will be kept confidential under all circumstances and destroyed after 3 – 5 years. Your personal details will also be kept confidential, and you will remain anonymous within the research report.

*Position:

*Department:

*Qualification:

*Years of university lecturing experience:

*Years at the University:

*Years of Working with student academic development/ student support:
Code of participant in research:

Academic Development Issues

1. What do you understand by the terms 'academic development' and 'student support'?
    - Is there a difference?

2. In your view, or perhaps from a University perspective, what is the purpose and aim of student support?
    - Or the policies in place?
    - Has this changed over the time you have worked here?

3. Are there any University policies in place to govern this?
    - Does the University advocate any particular types of assistance for students who are struggling academically?

- To improve the ways in which students experience University structures, gain more than just formal access to the University?

4. From your experiences what do you think these students need in order to be supported?
    - To allow access to the structures of the University and the creation of knowledge?

Provision of Academic Development/ Student Support

5. As a [redacted], what role do you and your division play in providing students with development/support opportunities?
    - Why/ by who was it established?

6. What types of student support does your programme provide?
    - What is the purpose of these measures?
    - Is this different to other measures in place?

7. What types of students does this programme aim to target?
    - What are the support needs of the various students who you assist?
    - How are these needs determined?

8. Why has this particular approach to student support been selected?
    - What guided this process of development?
    - Does the University provide a guideline or a way of helping to determining a course of action?
    - Is the availability, implementation or conceptualisation of these efforts monitored by the University administration?

9. How do you measure the effectiveness of your programme or its effect on the students?

Institutional Structures

10. Is support provided by the University in developing these efforts?

- Training or support?
- If yes, what types of support or assistance is received? If no, why not?
- Does this affect the ways in which the programme/initiative operates?

11. How is your programme funded?

12. Are there constraints and/or challenges in the provision of support opportunities for students?
    - Financial or otherwise?

Institutional Transformation

13. In your view, is addressing the needs of the students sufficient to enable epistemological access?
    - Are there institutional factors which enable/ constrain epistemological access?

14. Are there structural factors which need to be changed/ challenged in order to facilitate epistemological access?

15. In your view, what could be done to improve the process of providing students with academic development/ support opportunities?
    - Whose responsibility is this?

16. If you could change anything about the process or provision of student support opportunities, what would you change?
    - From your experience working within the provision of these?
    - Understanding, expectations, implementation?

Appendix 5: Interview Schedule for T&L Expert A

Interview Schedule: T&L Expert A (Teaching and Learning Committee)
Profile of Interviewee

All of the following information provided is only for the researcher's records. It will be kept confidential under all circumstances and destroyed after 3 – 5 years. Your personal details will also be kept confidential, and you will remain anonymous within the research report.

*Position:

*Department:

*Qualification:

*Years in current position:

* Years of working with academic development/ student support:
Code of participant in research:

Academic Development Issues

1. What do you understand by the terms 'academic development' and 'student support'?
    - Is there a difference?

2. In your view, or perhaps from a University perspective, what is the purpose and aim of academic development or support?

Provision of Academic Development/ Student Support

3. Are you aware of any academic development or student support policies or guidelines which exist to govern the development of initiatives around the university?
    - Or policies to enable effective access to knowledge creation (epistemological access) for students?

4. From the University perspective, who is responsible for academic development and student support (ensuring student success and throughput)?
    - Who is responsible for developing and implementing initiatives?
    - Which types of initiatives are endorsed?

5. Does the University advocate any particular types of assistance for students who are struggling academically?

6. What is the role of the Teaching and Learning Committee?
    - What type of work does it do?
    - How does it contribute to enabling epistemological access for students?

7. In your view, are the measures in place effective in providing students with development opportunities and enable epistemological access?
    - How do you measure your effectiveness or effect on the students?

Institutional Structures

8. Are there any requirements from the University, in terms of a mandate that has been given to you to fulfil?

9. Is support provided by the University in developing these efforts?
    - Training or support?
    - If yes, what types of support or assistance is received? If no, why not?
    - Does this affect the ways in which the programme/initiative operates?

10. How are these efforts funded?
    - Is this enabling or constraining?

11. Are there constraints and/or challenges in the provision of academic development opportunities or enabling access for students within the University?
    - Financial or otherwise?
    - What would enable you to overcome these constraints/ challenges?

Institutional Transformation

12. In your view, is addressing the needs of the students sufficient to enable epistemological access?
    - Are there institutional factors which enable/ constrain epistemological access?
    - Are there structural factors which need to be changed/ challenged in order to facilitate epistemological access?

13. In your view, what could be done to improve the process of enabling epistemological access for students?

14. If you could change anything about the process or provision of student academic development/ support opportunities, what would you change?
    - To enable full access to the institution?
    - From your experience working within the provision of these?
    - Understanding, expectations, implementation?

Appendix 6: Interview Schedule for Expert Practitioner

Interview Schedule: Expert Practitioners

Profile of Interviewee

All of the following information provided is only for the researcher's records. It will be kept confidential under all circumstances and destroyed after 3 – 5 years. Your personal details will also be kept confidential, and you will remain anonymous within the research report.

*Position:

*Department:

*Years of university lecturing experience:

*Years at the university:

*Years in current position:

*Years of working with academic development/ student support:
Code of participant in research:

Academic development issues

1. What do you understand by the terms 'academic development' and 'student support'?
    - Is there a difference?

2. In your view, or perhaps from a University perspective, what are the purpose/ aim of academic development or student support (initiatives and programmes)?
    - Has this changed over the time you have worked here?
    - Who is responsible for the provision of academic development opportunities?

3. What do you think these students need in order to be supported or for academic development?

- To allow epistemological access?
- Do you feel that the University is able to meet these needs?

Provision of Academic Development

4. What types of help or assistance does the University advocate for students who are struggling academically?
    - Has this changed over time?

5. Are you aware of any academic development or student support policies or guidelines which exist to govern the development of initiatives around the university?
    - Have there been policies in the past?

Academic Development at Wits in the Past

6. In the time that you have been at Wits, have the approaches of academic development changed over time?
    - In terms of the ways in which academic development is thought about: purpose and aims; how students are positioned, dominant practices?
    - If so, how and why?

7. From your experience, what types of programmes/ approaches to academic development/student support have worked well in the past?
    - Why were these effective?
    - What was WITS's role in shaping these programmes/what was done?
    - Did the WITS support these programmes (funding/training)?

Academic Development Today

8. From your experience, has the conceptualisation and understanding of academic development/ student support and how to provide these, changed over time?
    - If yes, how has it changed and why?
    - How has this affected the role of AD practitioners?

9. Has the role of the University as an institution, in providing students with

development/support opportunities changed over time?

10. Do you know of any academic development programmes that are in place currently?
    - Do you feel that these programmes are effective?

11. Are there constraints/ challenges to providing academic development to students?
    - Have these changed over time?

12. From your perspective, what could be done to improve the process of providing students with academic development opportunities, or support?
    - Who would be responsible for this?
    - Or improving epistemological access?

Institutional Development

13. In your view, is addressing the needs of the students sufficient to enable epistemological access for students?
    - Are there institutional factors which enable/ constrain epistemological access?
    - In your view, does institutional transformation have a role to play in the ways in which academic development is constructed and implemented at the university?

14. Do you feel that the teaching and learning practices at the University, lend themselves to academic development opportunities for students or enabling epistemological access?

15. If you were able to change anything about the ways in which academic development is viewed, understood, implemented, or even the expectations of this process, what would you change?
    - Why?