

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEW DATA OBTAINED FROM LECTURERS AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to elicit the attitudes and perceptions of staff and students in the Engineering Faculty at TUT to academic development classes. The research is based on a series of semi-structured interviews with a range of participants: lecturers, Academic Development Practitioners, 1st and 2nd year students, and two focus groups consisting of students.

In this chapter the responses of the lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners to the semi-structured questions asked in the interviews are recorded. The researcher works through the interview questions in a systematic way by first presenting the interview questions and following them by a discussion of the responses from the lecturers and the Academic Development Practitioners. The discussion of the individual responses includes quotations from the interview data and limited references to the literature review in order to substantiate the points being made. It is followed by specific findings that emanate from the responses to the interviews. In the final discussion of this section the researcher attempts to summarise the overall findings from these interviews.

4.2 Presentation of the semi-structured interview data

Question 1: *In your opinion, what do you think academic development classes are for?*

The first question explores the actual purpose of academic development classes and the targeted group - or beneficiaries - of the programme.

a) Responses from lecturers

In response to this question, three out of five lecturers said that they thought these classes were intended to develop lecturers' skills. One lecturer emphasised the development of skills among the academic staff. He made four references to the idea that lecturers also need to be equipped with skills in order to develop their students. He commented that academic development is "to develop me to give better service to my students and to TUT in general." Another lecturer said academic development is "to uplift us, to sort of make sure, to check on what we are doing." A third lecturer said academic development is "to help academics impart knowledge to students."

b) Responses from Academic Development Practitioners

In response to the same question, 50% of the Academic Development Practitioners said that academic development provides help to both the students and lecturers. Another Academic Development Practitioner said that for him academic development classes were there "for supporting students" and "to help lecturers to identify students who are not performing well." Three Academic Development Practitioners felt that academic development is there to provide students with "coping skills." Another Academic Development Practitioner said that academic development gives students "the necessary support to cope and come up to expected level." One Academic Development Practitioner commented that academic development is "maybe to help the students who have some inefficiencies to cope with the amount of work."

The responses from the different groups are not the same. The lecturers in the Engineering Faculty focused on staff development and Academic Development Practitioners focused on staff and student development. Both Academic Development Practitioners and lecturers were in agreement that academic development plays a supportive role for two types of learners. The first group of learners are those who are underperforming for various reasons, and the second group of learners are those who “are on the right path” and who need to improve their level of performance - as one Academic Development Practitioner observed. Another Academic Development Practitioner said, “Academic development is to help students reach their full potential as far as academic studies are concerned”, while one of the lecturers said, “Academic development is maybe to help students who have some inefficiencies to cope with the amount of work.”

There is a general awareness among both the lecturers and the Academic Development Practitioners that some students enter tertiary institutions less prepared and that they lack the necessary skills that will enable them to cope well with their studies. In the view of some Academic Development Practitioners, academic development classes are “remedial” because they provide an intervention for the under-prepared learners. One Academic Development Practitioner commented that “academic development classes are remedial in a way because we’re trying to fix problems that schools didn’t diagnose and fix.”

The main focus for the Academic Development Practitioners is that academic development classes should develop the students’ academic skills and also address the needs of staff so that lecturers are also equipped to offer these skills during their own teaching. This concurs with the views of the lecturers and the teaching and learning policy which states that the Department of Teaching and Learning Development is responsible overall for the development of academic staff in academic related fields and that the Academic Development Practitioners are responsible for catering for the needs of academics. Of the five lecturers that were interviewed, four of them strongly felt that they needed help with their own teaching. This was in contrast to the Academic Development Practitioners - of the six that were interviewed, only two made mention of the need to also equip the staff with the skills to provide academic development in their own classes. An interesting comment was made by one lecturer

who said that “classes are *mainly* to uplift us.” The use of “mainly” indicates that some lecturers feel that the main focus of academic development should be on lecturers, themselves, in that they feel that they need assistance in terms of making sure that their students succeed.

Question 2: *What do you think are some of the teaching and learning issues that we need to deal with in relation to these classes?*

This question explores the pedagogical issues related to academic development and what teaching and learning actually means for these two groups of people. The issue of integrating academic development into main stream courses appears to be crucial for both the Academic Development Practitioners and lecturers, and this seems to be a major problem in the institution where there is no clear link between academic development and main stream subjects.

a) Responses from lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners

Most of the Academic Development Practitioners and lecturers indicated that there is “no relationship” between what lecturers do in the classroom and what the Academic Development Practitioners do with learners. One lecturer commented that “students must be aware that besides lecturers, there are other people who are going to help them.” The need to integrate academic development into mainstream courses appears to be crucial for both the Academic Development Practitioners and the lecturers, and this seems to be a major problem in the institution where there is no clear link between academic development and mainstream subjects. Another lecturer expressed a feeling that for him academic development was non-existent in the institution. He made an interesting comment: “I feel it is there, in a way it’s not there, it feels like nothing is happening.” This comment poses a serious challenge for the integration of academic development into mainstream courses - if some lecturers do not even acknowledge the existence of academic development or “feel it is there” but do not have a strong sense of what it is there for or doing.

For one lecturer a major concern is the need for Academic Development Practitioners to be visible in the classrooms. He made six references to this and made comments,

like “there should be enough visibility” and “Academic Development Practitioners should be seen in the classroom set ups.” For this lecturer, visibility could mean that he would like to see Academic Development Practitioners more often in class in order to have an impact on the students’ performance. Lecturers have the perception that they are actually subject specialists and not “teachers” (whatever this means for this lecturer), and that this - in a way - implies that they should not be expected to include academic development because they are not trained as teachers. On the other hand, there is a contradiction in this regard because some lecturers say that “we come straight from industry and we walk into a class and we think we can teach.” Another interesting comment was made by another lecturer who said: “You guys are outside Architecture, you guys are outside Electrical, and what is it that you guys can tell us?” From this comment it is possible to conclude that there is an attitude of “us and them” in the sense that lecturers may not see academic development as part of their own problem and responsibility, but that of the Academic development practitioners. If this is the case, then teamwork among lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners may be negatively affected which – in turn – will, surely, have consequences for students’ learning.

At least 75% of lecturers recognised the gap that exists between high school and higher learning. They, therefore, saw academic development as bridging the gap between the Further Education and Training band and the Higher Education band. They also felt that it was the responsibility of the Academic Development Practitioners to bridge this gap so that students could adapt and cope with tertiary education. One lecturer said that students “need someone who can help bridge the gap” while another lecturer also commented that “we need people who can help to bridge the gap for them.”

Question 3: *Do you think that academic development classes are succeeding in achieving their objectives? Why? Why not?*

The third question looks at the success rate of academic development classes among the Engineering students.

a) Responses of lecturers

In answering this question whether the academic development classes are meeting their objectives, four out of six lecturers had the perception that academic development was seen as 'failing to reach its objectives'. Others made comments, like: "Students are aware of the existence of teaching development, but you are not seen, I've not seen any results, the tide has not turned, we still see real problems that the students have."

One lecturer stated clearly that he was not sure what, exactly, the objectives of the academic classes are.

The group of lecturers also felt, strongly, that there was lack of teamwork among Academic Development Practitioners and lecturers and that people tended to work in isolation from each other. One lecturer said that, "we work in our pockets", while another lecturer commented that "that link is not there. For me, that link is missing." Another lecturer - who happened to be a Head of Department of one of the courses in the Engineering Department - put it very clearly that academic staff are very negative about academic development. He said that "even encouraging students doesn't happen because if lecturers are negative and they are the ones who are supposed to encourage the students, there is no way the programme can succeed." According to this lecturer, if lecturers, themselves, do not have a positive perception about the programme, he did not see them encouraging students to attend academic development classes with their negative attitudes. Interestingly, Academic Development Practitioners also saw academic development classes as not achieving the intended objectives. One Academic Development Practitioner felt strongly about the problematic nature of academic development in the institution citing various problems, like: "Students do not take it seriously - they feel there are other subjects because they are going to be tested on it we do not achieve the amount of students that we would like to reach. The biggest problem in our institution is AD is not recognised as a credit bearing course."

b) Responses from Academic Development Practitioners

A major problem is the fact that the programme is not credit bearing and, therefore, students do not take it seriously. This was the view of the majority of Academic Development Practitioners. One Academic Development Practitioner made a comment that “in most cases they just fill up the timetable.” The question would be: Whose responsibility is it, then, to see to the success of the programme? The institution’s teaching and learning policy clearly states that students should be exposed to intensive supplementary academic development. The idea may be well articulated in policy documents, but the implementation of these policies is another matter. This raises serious problems about the impact that academic development classes have in the institution. Lecturers may be expected to contribute to the success of the Academic Development Programme while they, themselves, are not sure what the objectives of the programme are. If there is an element of uncertainty about the programme among the lecturers in the Engineering Department, how relevant is the programme to faculties like Engineering?

Question 4: *Have you referred any students for academic development? If yes, why? If no, why not?*

a) Responses of lecturers

In spite of the perceptions amongst the lecturers that academic development classes were problematic and “irrelevant”, in response to this question four out of five lecturers had referred students for academic development. One lecturer made four references to the need for academic development to address the psychological needs of the learners. He said that he had referred students “for some kind of psychological help or intervention.” Another lecturer raised a concern about not knowing the services that are provided by the Academic Development Unit. He said that “we need to know what services are provided at the end of a proper programme.” Such comments imply that some lecturers have their own specific understanding of academic development, and this may mean that some lecturers do not refer their students because they do not know what services are provided. One lecturer had never referred any students before. She said that, “it was gonna be difficult for me to send

students on an individual basis.” A comment like this confirms the concern raised earlier on by a lecturer who felt that some of the lecturers do not know what services are provided by the Academic Development Department, and this poses a serious challenge for the department as a whole. A lecturer, with whom this researcher happened to have a venue clash, commented that their meeting had been “a blessing in disguise” - as he put it – because, he said, “I didn’t know that you guys existed” (Personal communication, 8 January 2005).

One lecturer raised a serious concern about the actual structuring of the Academic Development Programme. Referring students for academic development was problematic because, he said, “it’s a question of how we structure it administratively within the institution.” He added that “it’s all about administrative processes which are not clear.” These comments point to structural issues within the institution, itself, which determine the roles and uses of the Academic Development Programme as a whole.

Another lecturer felt strongly about the students’ lack of reading skills and for him this was a serious issue. He made the following comments:

Students come out of the school, they don’t know that you must sit down, read half the question. They don’t read the question, they read half of it, they think they know it. Students have got the knowledge but to put it on paper...

It is clear that if this lecturer refers students for academic development, he would expect them to be assisted with reading and writing skills, amongst other things.

Question 5: *What role - if any - should lecturers play in academic development in their own classes?*

a) Responses from lecturers

In response to this question, two lecturers were of the opinion that academic development was problematic for lecturers. Of the five lecturers interviewed, two felt that academic development was “not their job.” One lecturer emphasised the idea that

lecturers are subject specialists and, therefore, implied that they should be “excused” from academic development. He made comments, such as “we’ve got the knowledge about our subjects” and “we are not specialists in teaching, in academic support.” Another lecturer shared this view when he said, “We have to understand what does academic development stand for.” A third lecturer acknowledged the fact that lecturers need not only focus on their content subjects, but that “you don’t just teach a person a subject or subject matter, you teach a person as a whole.”

For one lecturer, the main focus of the Academic Development Practitioner should be to “help students not in the course content but in things like how to do a good presentation, presentation style, how to plan.” This lecturer strongly emphasised the use of group work as a helpful mode of learning which indicates a slight shift from the normal teacher-centred learning to the more active involvement of learners during the process of learning.

Another lecturer felt that there should be links between academic development and their department by saying that “lecturers should liaise with the Department of Academic Development and Support.” This would encourage a strong working relationship between academic departments and the Academic Development Unit. He also felt that “the department together with the mainstream lecturers should do something about it.”

b) Responses from Academic Development Practitioners

The responses of the Academic Development Practitioners raised important questions in relation to lecturers and academic development. One Academic Development Practitioner felt that some lecturers had a negative attitude to academic development. He said, “Lecturers think AD programmes don’t work - they’re just a waste of time, that’s all.” Another Academic Development Practitioner felt that some lecturers “come from industry” and “haven’t got this educational background.” His added comment - that “the attitude to become teachers is their primary task, not their secondary task” - is an idea that should be inculcated into lecturers. One Academic Development Practitioner thought that it was the lecturer’s task to “encourage students to utilise classes of AD.”

Question 6: *How do you think these classes should be structured - from a curriculum perspective?*

a) Responses of lecturers

The lecturers' responses to this question indicated a strong feeling that academic development should be part of the mainstream courses and that it should be accredited. One lecturer emphasised this idea. He made comments, such as "it should form part so that the students can be given a mark" and "students must feel that it contributes towards their qualification." Another lecturer shared the same idea when he commented that academic development should be "part of the whole curriculum for a degree or diploma - it must be linked."

In response to this question the main concern for one lecturer was the need to provide additional help for the students. He said that there was a "strong need to design some extended curriculum to help them go along", and also the "need to design extra classes." He made four references to the idea that students need to be exposed to various types of help. Clearly, this lecturer sees a great need for student support to help students manage the curriculum.

For another lecturer, the need to change teaching pedagogy is relevant to the structuring of the curriculum. He said:

Lecturers should cut down a bit on chalk and talk - they should put more on good discussion. Some students are shy. They are afraid to approach the lecturer. If students are given enough time to operate in groups, their progress can be monitored from the point of academic development.

A reference made by one lecturer to the learner's prior knowledge was of interest to the researcher when he commented that "the knowledge that the student brings along" has an influence in the learner's process of learning. Related to this idea, Shulman (1999) in Catterall (undated Internet source:40) states that for successful teaching to take place, it is necessary to understand that learners "construct meaning out of their

prior understanding” and that new learning “must connect with what learners already know.” In support of this idea, the MEG feels that courses need to acknowledge students’ starting points, prior knowledge and literacies, since these can be both valuable and serious stumbling blocks for both students and teachers (Multimedia Education Group, 2003). Courage (2001:491) adds an interesting discussion on the school versus non-school literacy debate and it is his belief that without exploring the non-school dimension of our students’ literacy experiences, we operate what in Bartholomae’s pedagogy is referred to as “a rather thin conception of student culture.”

Another lecturer made four references to the study guide and it clearly seemed as though the lecturer placed a great deal of emphasis on the study guide. He said that the study guide “has to be informative”, and that lecturers must “make sure that it helps the students to go through.”

b) Responses from Academic Development Practitioners

The responses of some of the Academic Development Practitioners focused on the relationship between what goes on in mainstream classes and academic development. One Academic Development Practitioner stated clearly that “if these classes are to work, there should be a very strong relationship between academic development and the curriculum that is offered and the mainstream curriculum.” Another Academic Development Practitioner said that academic development “must be in the curriculum” and that if this is not the case, then the” students will tend to see it as add on.” He continued by saying that “there must be synergy between student development and what goes on in the classroom.”

For another Academic Development Practitioner, his main concern was the actual learning environment. He said:

Students need an environment outside the classroom conducive for learning. Here, that kind of an environment outside the class is lacking. Learning relates to the physical environment - the atmosphere in the institution. How the students relate to one another should be engineered in such a way that it promotes an atmosphere of studying; of learning; and of interaction.

This comment adds an interesting dimension in terms of the kind of environment that should prevail in a tertiary institution. For this Academic Development Practitioner, the curriculum of the institution has a bearing on the learning environment of that institution.

Another Academic Development Practitioner observed that academic development was not taken seriously by the students, and that they would rather attend classes on subjects that they are assessed on. He commented that “students don’t take it seriously” and that “some don’t come when they have exams to write - some test to write.”

Yet another Academic Development Practitioner raised the issue of integration - which had come up earlier in the discussion - as a serious curriculum issue. He said that things could improve “if the two departments AD and any specific unit or academic subject group can work together to integrate.” He had also felt that the situation could improve if lecturers “are using outcomes and not subjects.”

One Academic Development Practitioner expressed a concern about inadequate time allocated for academic development. He felt that this was a disadvantage for the learners because “by the time you come back they have forgotten what you have told them about.” For this Academic Development Practitioner “only one period a week per class” did not seem to be enough. He thought that academic development needed to be a registered, fee-paying course so that if students “pay a little money they might see the commitment to come to class.” Most of the Academic Development Practitioners emphasised the need for a strong relationship between academic development and the curriculum that is offered in the mainstream courses. It should be noted that lack of student commitment to academic development classes may be linked to issues of “structure”, “marketing”, accreditation” and “non-fee paying.”

4.3 Discussion of key findings arising from the lecturers' and Academic Development Practitioners' responses to the interviews

In this section, I will discuss what I understand to be key themes and issues - which arose from the interviews with the lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners. These key themes have been identified and are discussed one-by-one.

4.3.1 *Differing perceptions around what academic development classes are for*

The majority of the lecturers strongly expressed the view that academic development is for their own benefit. Boughey (2003) and Starfield (1994) note that academic development is no longer focusing on the students' "deficiencies" but on the fact that academic staff have their own "deficiencies" which need to be addressed through curriculum development. The term "deficient" has - in itself - become problematic in the area of academic development, and there is now a shift towards using terms that do not label people in a negative sense.

Fifty percent of the Academic Development Practitioners felt that academic development provides help not only for students, but for lecturers as well.

Both lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners are in agreement that academic development is not only for students who are not performing well, but also for those who are doing well.

Lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners have an awareness that some students enter tertiary institutions ill-prepared for the task ahead and Academic Development Practitioners emphasised the view that academic development classes are "remedial" as they provide an intervention for the under-prepared learners. Shaughnessy in Zamel and Spack (1998:21) explores the term "remedial", and she traces its origins to law and medicine. She says that

...teaching bears a resemblance to the practice of medicine. Like a successful physician, the good must be something of a diagnostician. The physician by means of a general examination singles out the individuals whose physical defects require a more thorough testing. He critically scrutinizes the special cases until he recognizes the specific troubles. After a careful diagnosis he is able to prescribe intelligently the best remedial or corrective measures (1998:21).

This comment has implications for what is meant by academic development. If it has to serve as a “remedial” tool, then it means that Academic Development Practitioners - like people in the medical field - have a task to diagnose students’ problems, and then offer the appropriate means of addressing the problems.

4.3.2 Issues of teaching and learning which should be dealt with in the academic development classes

In terms of the relationship between academic development and mainstream courses, both groups of interviewees felt that there was no clear integration of academic development into mainstream courses. This points to a perception that there is a lack of teamwork between lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners. However, this situation is not unique to this context or study. Tema (1998:31) mentions the experience of the Wits Zoology Academic Support Programme where this challenge was addressed by lecturers attending lectures with the students. Lecturers were, then, able to perceive the students’ problems as well as formulating their own. This may be one way of fostering links between academic departments and the academic support department.

According to Van Tonder (1996:4), in the case of the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU), their Academic Development Programmes took cognisance of the wide gap that exists between students’ levels of expertise when they come in to university and where they need to be when they enter mainstream tertiary education.

An important distinction was made in the interviews between lecturers’ subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. An Academic Development Practitioner who had worked for some time with lecturers from the Engineering Faculty made the

observation that lecturers “still think they are specialist in Chemistry and Engineering, rather than focusing on teaching.” In other words, they see themselves as subject specialists first and foremost, rather than as teachers of the subject. Another Academic Development Practitioner reinforced this perception when he said that

...when lecturers come here, they don't see themselves as teachers. The first thing we must focus on is to make them aware that they are teaching in the first instance.

Ferman (2002:146) has noted that most university lecturers are not trained as teachers - the result is that their knowledge of pedagogy tends to be patchy. Ferman further argues that it is important to acknowledge that academics possess varied knowledge bases and that one valuable source for informing the design of creative and effective programmes of staff development may be found in the insights, experiences and knowledge of the academics themselves.

An issue of concern for one Academic Development Practitioner was student learning. In his view, how students learn appears to be a big issue. He emphasised this by saying, “Most students don't know how to learn”, and “they need to be taught how to learn.” It was his view that it was the responsibility of the lecturers to focus on learning. The researcher's view on this matter is that student learning should be a joint effort between lecturers - as specialists in their content subjects - and Academic Development Practitioners to equip students with the necessary skills that they need for successful learning and also to help lecturers with curriculum strategies that can better enhance student learning.

4.3.3 Perceptions on whether academic development classes are succeeding in achieving their objectives

Most of the Academic Development Practitioners feel that academic development classes are not achieving their intended objectives. Although there is a general belief from both groups that academic development is important, lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners agree that some improvements need to be made so that they reach the objectives - as mentioned by Niezen and Soer (undated article:11).

4.3.4 Support for academic development from lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners

The responses of the Academic Development Practitioners to the same question were varied. Some of them had referred students for academic development, while others had handled the problems themselves because they felt that that was their job. One Academic Development Practitioner simply said, “No, I’m supposed to be giving academic development.” However, in response to this question, one Academic Development Practitioner talked about how academic development is “marketed” in the institution, suggesting, “the marketing strategy has been very poor - the marketing strategy is definitely failing us.” These comments show that questions of marketing cannot be de-linked and are seen to be intricately linked to the success or failure of the Academic Development Programme.

Another Academic Development Practitioner commented, particularly, on reading skills. He had found out that “when you ask them questions, of course they don’t know how to answer questions simply because they can’t read.” Again, it is of interest that Academic Development Practitioners do not seem to think that reading and writing development is important. Most of the lecturers had not referred students for academic development because they seemed to be unsure about the services available.

4.3.5 The role lecturers play in academic development

The comments of some lecturers and some Academic Development Practitioners show different perspectives on the role that lecturers should play in academic development. There seems to be some uncertainty and confusion among lecturers about the purposes and intentions of academic development and this does not appear to be unique to TUT. Dison and Rule (1996:85) point out that the focus on developing academic skills as the primary function of Academic Development Practitioners is also, potentially, reductive. In other words, this approach suggests that the function of the Academic Development Practitioner only goes as far as skills development and nothing else.

While some lecturers think that academic development is solely the duty of Academic Development Practitioners, some Academic Development Practitioners feel that lecturers need to play a vital role in terms of encouraging the students to attend academic development classes. As mentioned in the literature review, Engel and Flemming (2001:1) consider Academic Development Practitioners as mediators of students' understanding of the varying demands of the academic communication process. If this is the case, then it means that Academic Development Practitioners have a duty to mediate between lecturers and students in terms of the teaching and learning processes so as "to enhance the capacity of students to develop as successful independent learners both within their disciplinary contexts and in transferring core academic language and learning skills outside their disciplines" (Berghout-Vanderwal *et al*, undated Internet source:3).

Most of the literature that is available on the subject stresses the importance of a good working relationship between lecturers - who are subject specialists - and Academic Development Practitioners who - according to Catterall (undated Internet source:40) - can contribute explicit pedagogical knowledge so that, in partnership with the subject specialist, a strong explicit subject knowledge can be formulated. Catterall further observes that in certain cases lecturers may be inexperienced and have insufficient pedagogical knowledge or may be implementing common sense notions that are not supported by current teaching and learning issues. This notion relates to the comments of some lecturers who - possibly because of their own relationship to current teaching and learning trends - may end up believing that academic development is not part of their job. Dison and Rule (1996:85) comment that

...AD tutors often develop an institutional identity as 'skills people'. As such, they play a valuable role in challenging the mainstream emphasis in processes of curriculum development, where mainstream staff assume that they have nothing besides skills to contribute.

The above comment indicates that Academic Development Practitioners should be part of the process of curriculum development without, necessarily, acting as "watchdogs" over lecturers. They should to be at the forefront of developing the

theory and practice of disciplinary learning and should not restrict themselves in an exclusive way - as Dison and Rule (1996:85) caution.

4.3.6 *Perceptions on how to structure the curriculum*

Both groups of interviewees agree that academic development should be integrated into the mainstream curriculum and should be an accredited course. They also agreed that there has to be a shift in the teaching pedagogy so that it is learner-centred rather than teacher-centred.

Academic Development Practitioners felt strongly that students did not take academic development seriously - a point that was not observed by the lecturers. This may indicate that attitudes and perceptions are complicated entities in that two individuals may not react in the same way to a particular object. The students' lack of seriousness to academic development classes was a major issue with Academic Development Practitioners, whereas this did not seem to be the case with lecturers.

The interviews with lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners on the Academic Development Programme in the Faculty of Engineering point to major problems at multiple levels in the Faculty. These include problems related to differing perceptions on its structural position; a lack of agreement on its purpose and function; as well as curriculum issues.

4.4 Concluding remarks

In the Council for Higher Education's *Improving Teaching and Learning Project* (2003:50), it is mentioned that academic development refers to curriculum development in its widest sense - including the design of content and forms of delivery and staff development. In a sense, this implies that when one talks about academic development, one has to include staff development in terms of how lecturers can, then, design their curricula to meet the needs of under-prepared students. It becomes imperative that academic development should, therefore, include

lecturing staff so that they are better equipped to deal with the skills that are needed by such students.

Starfield (1994:16) maintains that the aim of academic support in the 1980s was to assist students from the black school system to succeed in a context in which students and faculties were, traditionally, first language speakers of English from white, middle-class backgrounds - reasonably well-prepared for tertiary study as a result of their privileged schooling. The situation may be slightly different in the case of the Soshanguve Campus of TUT in the sense that the student population is one hundred percent black, second language speakers of English who come from disadvantaged school backgrounds, while lecturers consist of a mix of all population groups, but with the majority being black. The students still have a definite need for support programmes because of their high school backgrounds and this has been confirmed by the comments of the various lecturers who see these as playing a supportive for the students.

The history of academic development in the institution shows - beyond doubt - that there is a definite need for supportive intervention in this Faculty but, as one lecturer observed, “in some cases it’s totally irrelevant.” If there is a clear working relationship between lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners, then lecturers will be able to identify students’ problems in the classroom and communicate these to the Academic Development Practitioner. The programme can then be customised for the needs of the learners in the Engineering Faculty.

The comments on reading and writing are relevant to this study, because at tertiary level reading and writing are key skills that the students need to be acquainted with. As Lillis (2001:20) states, writing is a key assessment tool with students passing or failing courses according to the ways in which they respond to - and engage in - academic tasks. According to the responses of the lecturers, reading and writing seemed to be a key issue for only one out of the five lecturers that were interviewed. This suggests that reading and writing are not perceived as a priority or as a visible skill which needs attending to.

Tisani (1996:2) cites an interesting example of a case at Rhodes University where there was a realisation that there was a need for staff to develop in their teaching practices and that teaching and learning were seen as interrelated activities. If this is the case, then lecturers need to be equipped with academic development skills so that they are able to transfer these during their normal day-to-day lecturing so that students see this as one integrated whole.

Lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners have different views about the role that lecturers should play in terms of academic development during their own classes. In fact, lecturers seemed to be confused and unsure about the role that they need to play in terms of academic development. In a survey which explores staff perceptions on issues around students' academic skills - conducted by Newell-Jones *et al.* (2005:8) - it was noted that a degree of confusion was expressed about whom students could approach for support in academic skills and there was a fear that the teaching staff were too busy. In their view, this confirmed that teaching staff were unclear about their roles; unable to allocate the required time; or lacked the confidence to take on this role.

The key findings that have been discussed in this section confirm the fact that there are major problems related to academic development in the Faculty of Engineering at levels of structure, marketing, accreditation and the fact that it is non-fee paying.

In the next chapter, Chapter 5, an analysis of the data collected from semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 1st and 2nd year students from the Faculty of Engineering is given.