

**Exploring first-year students' demands from the perspectives of student support structures: A world café study**

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## COMMENTS

The following should be kept in mind:

- The editorial, style as well as the references referred to in this mini-dissertation, follow the format prescribed by the Publication Manual (6<sup>th</sup> edition) of the American Psychological Association (APA). This practice is in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University (Potchefstroom) to use the APA style in all scientific documents as from January 1999.
- The mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of a research article. The editorial style specified by the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology (which agrees largely with the APA style) is used, but the APA guidelines were followed in constructing the tables.

## DECLARATION

I, Jonél Jordaan, hereby declare that this dissertation titled **“Exploring first-year students’ demands from the perspectives of student support structures: A world café study”** is my own work. The views and opinions expressed in this research study are my own, as well as relevant literature references as shown in the reference list.

Furthermore, I declare that the contents of this research study will not be submitted for any other qualification at any other tertiary institution.



JONÉL JORDAAN

NOVEMBER 2015

## DECLARATION FROM THE LANGUAGE EDITOR

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I hereby confirm that the dissertation '*Exploring first-year students' demands from the perspectives of student support structures: A World Café study*', by Ms Jonél Jordaan was edited and groomed to the best of my ability, including some recommendations to improve the language and logical structure as well as enhance the presentation.

Rev Claude Vosloo  
Language and knowledge practitioner and consultant

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*Don't think outside the box, reinvent the box*

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## SUMMARY

### **Title:**

Exploring first-year students' demands from the perspectives of student support structures:  
A world café study

### **Keywords:**

First-year students, demands, hindrance's, challenges, difficulties, university, higher education, world café, student support structures

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa are characterised by an absence of relevant knowledge on how to assist students who struggle in this environment. Students in South Africa do not receive the guidance and support they need to meet the challenges and demands they are facing, as they typically suffer from multiple problems and are referred from one service to the next. The result is students who underperform, which impacts negatively on their success rate within HEIs in South Africa. For this reason, the main objective of the present study was to contribute to a theoretical framework that will assist the student support structures in predicting and managing the demands that first-year students face in an integrated way. The theoretical model that was used as a framework was the Job Demands and Resources (JD-R) model, focusing on the demands aspect of the model. The JD-R model has been used successfully in the work context many times, but there was a need to adapt it to the student environment to make it specific and relevant for the HEI context. There was a critical need for the development of a theoretical framework to guide support services for students and practitioners within the South African university setup.

The present study entailed a qualitative research. The researcher conducted the study from the epistemological stance of Constructivism. This approach is based on the principal that an objective reality does not exist. By taking such a constructivism stance, the ontological approach chosen was relativism. Relativism can be explained and made relevant to this study by the presupposition that reality is not static, and that each person creates his or her own reality. Seeing that reality is unique to each person the researcher's attempt is to understand the construct of reality provided by the participants. Finally, as a qualitative study, the emic-etic stance has also been incorporated.

The research setting was based at a HEI in South Africa. The participants ( $N=36$ ) included members of various support structures on the particular campus, the Dean of Students, Student Representative Council, Centre for Student Guidance and Development, House Committee members and hostel parents. Three rounds of World Café sessions were hosted with 12 participants in each round. During the sessions, the discussions were recorded and notes were made by the researchers. Together with the literature, these recordings were coded using the programme ATLAS.ti.

From the literature study and findings from the World Café sessions it was evident that there are five broad and distinctive themes of demands which describes first-year students' experience. These include: academic obstacles, financial stressors, career obstacles, social disengagement and personal hindrances. Within these themes unique findings came to the fore. The unique findings of the present study within the themes of academic obstacles, financial stressors, career obstacles, social disengagement and personal hindrances, led to three re-emerging concepts or patterns, namely uncertainty, pride and ignorance.

This research study aims to contribute to the literature and provide assistance to HEIs on the demands experienced by first-year students, according to feedback from student support structures. In this regard, the study provides a theoretical framework for student support services and the university about expected outcomes. The present study contributed to research on the demands section of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model that was adapted for the South African HEI context.

## OPSOMMING

### **Titel:**

'n Verkenning van eerstejaarstudente se eise uit die perspektief van studente-ondersteuningstrukture: 'n Wêreldkafee-studie

### **Sleutelwoorde:**

Eerstejaarstudente, eise, hindernisse, uitdagings, probleme, universiteit, hoër onderwys, Wêreld-kafee, studente-ondersteuningstrukture

Hoëronderwysinstellings (HOI's) in Suid-Afrika word gekenmerk deur 'n gebrek aan toepaslike kennis oor hoe om studente te help wat in hierdie omstandighede sukkel. Studente in Suid-Afrika ontvang nie die leiding en ondersteuning wat hulle nodig het om die uitdagings en eise wat hulle in die gesig staar die hoof te kan bied nie. Die rede is dat hierdie studente gewoonlik te kampe het met 'n veelheid probleme en van een diens na die ander verwys word. Dit lei tot studente wat onderpresteer en het 'n negatiewe uitwerking op hulle sukses binne HOI's in Suid-Afrika. Daarom was die hoofdoel van die huidige studie om by te dra tot 'n teoretiese raamwerk wat die studente-ondersteuningstrukture sal bystaan in die geïntegreerde voorspelling en bestuur en van die eise wat die universitêre omgewing vir eerstejaarstudente inhou. Die teoretiese model wat as raamwerk ingespan is, is die "Job Demands and Resources (JD-R)", met die fokus op die vereistes-aspek van die model. Die "JD-R" model is reeds suksesvol aangewend binne die werksopset, maar daar was 'n behoefte om dit vir die studenteomgewing aan te pas en dit spesifiek en relevant te maak vir die HOI-konteks. Daar was 'n dringende behoefte aan die ontwikkeling van 'n teoretiese raamwerk om ondersteuningsdienste vir studente en praktisyns binne die Suid-Afrikaanse universiteitsopset te begelei.

Die huidige studie het van kwalitatiewe navorsing gebruik gemaak. Die navorser het die epistemologiese standpunt van Konstruktivisme ingeneem. Hierdie benadering is gebaseer op die veronderstelling dat daar nie 'n objektiewe werklikheid bestaan nie. Deur 'n konstruktivistiese houding in te neem, was relativisme die gekose ontologiese benadering. Relativisme kan verduidelik en vir die huidige studie toepaslik gemaak word deur die veronderstelling dat werklikheid nie staties is nie, en dat elke persoon sy of haar eie

werklikheid skep. Aangesien die werklikheid vir elke persoon uniek is, was die navorser se taak om die konstruk van die werklikheid te verstaan wat deelnemers weergegee het. Laastens, omdat dit 'n kwalitatiewe studie is, is die “emi-etic” benadering ook in ingespan.

Die navorsingopset was in 'n HOI-konteks binne Suid-Afrika. Die deelnemers (N=36) het lede ingesluit van verskeie ondersteuningstrukture op die spesifieke kampus, die Studentedekaan, Studenteraad, Sentrum vir Studentevoorligting en ontwikkeling, Huiskomiteelede en koshuisouers. Drie rondes van die Wêreldkafée-sessies is aangebied met 12 deelnemers in elke ronde. Tydens die sessies is die besprekings opgeneem en het die navorsers aantekeninge afgeneem. Die opnames is saam met die literatuur gekodeer met behulp van die program ATLAS.ti.

Uit die literatuurstudie en die bevindings verkry vanuit die Wêreldkafée-sessies het duidelik geblyk dat daar vyf breë en eiesoortige temas is oor eise wat eerstejaarstudente ervaar. Dit behels die volgende eise: akademiese hindernisse, finansiële stressors, loopbaanstruikelblokke, sosiale onttrekking en persoonlike hindernisse. Elke tema het unieke bevindings opgelewer. Die unieke bevindings wat die huidige studie afgelei het onder die genoemde temas van eise, het drie herhalende konsepte, of patrone, na vore gebring. Dit was die konsepte van onsekerheid, trots en onkunde.

Hierdie navorsingstudie wil dus 'n bydrae lewer tot die literatuur en bystand bied aan HOI's oor die eise wat eerstejaarstudente ervaar volgens die terugvoer van studente-ondersteuningstrukture. In hierdie opsig verskaf die studie 'n teoretiese raamwerk vir studente-ondersteuningsdienste en universiteite oor verwagte uitkomst. Die huidige navorsing het verder gehelp om navorsing uit te brei oor die uitdagings-afdeling van die “JD-R” model, wat vir die Suid-Afrikaanse HOI-konteks aangepas is.

# **CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION**

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The focus of this mini-dissertation is on the stressful demands that first-year students experience according to the perspectives of the various student support structures. Support structures in this study include the Dean for Student Affairs, the Student Representative Council, Student Support Services, House Committee members and hostel parents.

Chapter 1 outlines the problem statement, followed by a discussion of the research objectives in which the general objective and the specific objectives are stated. The research method is discussed and the chapters divided accordingly.

### **1.1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

There is a sense of cautiousness with regard to the sub-standard performance of students in Higher Education in South Africa (Scott, Yeld, & Hendry, 2007). South African Higher Education Institutions (hereafter abbreviated as HEI) are characterised by low graduation success rates: 74% in 2010 compared to a desired national norm of 80%. This indicates a graduation rate of 15%, which is well below the national norm of 25% for students enrolled in a three-year programme. The scenario here is one of thousands of students who struggle at tertiary level, wasting state as well as personal resources (The Department of Higher Education and Training, 2012).

There also are an insufficient number of graduates in much-needed career fields (HESA, 2014; Ramdass, 2009) and a need to equip and support students in order to support their learning process to receive a comparable education (HESA, 2014). HEI in South Africa, however, seem incapable of supporting students in order for them to be successful in their studies, especially at the very time when they need support to meet the challenges and demands they face at university/college (Shkulaku, 2013). Being unable to cope with the demands placed on them results in negative attitudes towards learning as well as psychological strain (Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). According to Buckley et al. (2006), a student's decision to change, or to continue studying for a university degree is formed by the level of integration that they experience which, in turn, is defined by their ability to cope with the demands of

university/college.

HEI in South Africa attempt to find solutions for the challenges they face (including access to higher education, student retention, diversity and student success) in order to keep up with global competition and economies (Higher Education of South Africa, 2010). Unlike international universities, however, South African universities are unable to display evidence-based practices in the development and management of first-year students. One can find resources available, but there is no concrete model to facilitate this process. In South Africa, each university approaches its management of student affairs by considering local needs and challenges and because of this approach, there is no standard South African model to support first-year students and monitor their experiences (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

Mdepa (2012) reaffirms the fact that many students are forced to leave university, the highest number being students from less-privileged economic backgrounds. Leaving university without a qualification, but with a huge debt is a tragic situation for many students (Fischer, 2007; Speckman & Mandew, 2014). Mdepa (2012) clarifies the problem by stating that within diverse societies, problems are often compounded and students are likely to experience conflicts of interest in their roles as a student.

Action needs to be taken to identify the key factors that influence education programmes in order to plan preventative actions (HESA, 2014). The challenge, therefore, is to provide a framework to help understand the demands made on first-year university students, but one tailored to the South African context. Such a framework should give in-depth insight into what students experience and how negative consequences can be prevented. It is a goal for Higher Education in South Africa to continue with the development of academic programmes, through the use of student support structures, which will assist students who are challenged by the various demands of higher education (Higher Education of South Africa, 2010). One of the goals of the National Plan for Higher Education is to increase the output of graduates (Jeffrey, 2013).

Looking at available research, it is clear that the university environment is filled with students who are confronted with several challenges when they leave home to attend university. They are required to become more independent, develop new relationships and take responsibility for their own lives. The transformation to university life also includes several first experiences and



exposure to self-management activities such as controlling finances, time-management and independent living. Students may find these academic, emotional and social circumstances extremely stressful, resulting in possible poor functioning (Darling, McWey, Howard, & Olmstead, 2007). According to Pierceall and Keim (2007), the university setting has been described as stressful for young adults, and that students experience episodes in which they feel overwhelmed. Research indicates that as many as 80% of first-year students experience moderately stressful situations while nearly 12% experience highly stressful situations in their first-year. This figure escalated to 52% who reported high levels of stress owing to their having to adjust to the university structure and environment (Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, & Miller, 2009).

The literature suggests that the significant number of demands made on students and the consequent stress they experience is a concern that needs to be addressed promptly, as it could have various adverse effects on students' first-year experience and their academic performance (Pierceall & Keim, 2007). The effects of continuous stressful demands may result in cognitive deficits, such as a lack of concentration and attention difficulties, illness, increased amounts of depression and anxiety, and reduced life-satisfaction. Ill health has also been linked to increased levels of stress (Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, & Miller, 2009).

Not being able to cope with the demands of university life may mean low academic performance and high psychological distress (Abdullah, Elias, Mahyuddin, & Uli, 2009). This may result in students losing confidence in their new relationships, while at the same time, attempting to manage the intense academic demands that confront them (Abdullah et al., 2009). Research by Ong and Cheong (2011) has shown that some of the demands first-year students experience could lead to, or aggravate, student problems. Ongoing issues concerning academic and social change have been reported as the main cause for low-function (Freitas & Leonard, 2011; Gill, Tibrewala, & Poczter, 2010), while academic demands were specifically linked to time or subjects. This explains why various studies have reported that students often list academic demands, such as workload, time availability, aptitude, examinations, grades and responsibilities as their major stressors. International students rated academic demands as the highest (63%), interpersonal relationships demands (17.5%), intrapersonal relationship demands (13%) and environmental demands (2.5%) (Ong & Cheong, 2011).

From the above-mentioned regarding the demands made on first year students, one can see the importance of developing a framework to predict and manage these demands. Together with an understanding of their background, one must also take into account the research done in this regard. Studies concerning the demands of students in the previous 25 years have limitations. The most evident limitations is that numerous studies focus on specific subject areas, with a high field-specific component, such as a focus on medical students, and the health and social care fields of study (Robotham, 2008). In spite of numerous research efforts, limited facts are available on the causes of students' inability to cope with the demands of university in South Africa (Scott et al., 2007; Karp, 2011; Robotham, 2008). From this, one can understand that there is an absence of effective behaviour and knowledge to be able to respond to the demands and challenges which first-year students experience (Freitas & Leonard, 2011). This absence of effective management is of great concern, especially as most of the research conducted made use of self-measures which can lead to a subjective reflection of a student's experience and perceptions and not a full representation of the reality (Serena & Allison, 2012). One, therefore, also needs other objective viewpoints on the experience of first-year students. Mdepa's (2012), observation that problems are often compounded in diverse societies tends to be missed in analyses which have a specific focus.

In order to gain insight into the ways that the demands on students can be compounded, one must look beyond the 'self-reported' experiences of first-year students. Student support structures on campus are an appropriate resource for such information. Having an understanding of the demands made on first-year students, they will be able to provide thorough and objective view and insight. This can add to the understanding of the stressful demands made on first-year students and which can possibly impact on their well-being, academic performance and success. Being professionals from different academic backgrounds (including psychology, education, theology,), their knowledge can be applied to develop a much-needed theoretical framework. They display an integrated understanding of the development, experience and performance of students within a university context (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

Student support structures have the advantage of a strategically, well-positioned role in managing and dealing with the experiences of first-year students. The professional support display a great understanding of the demands and struggles that these students face on a daily basis, and therefore, they should also be included as interpreters of first-year university student's experience (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). According to Speckman and Mandew

(2014), student support structures are linked directly to affective, social- and environmental factors and academic concerns influencing students on an academic and education level. The link is even stronger for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who have to manage the university environment (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

Of particular concern for student support structures is the fact that students who do not effectively integrate into the university environment and who lack resources, are viewed in relation to the profits of the university as a whole (Brown & Schrader, 2008). The goal for any university still remains to increase its graduation and throughput rates in order to produce a successful and well-rounded student. By identifying the demands made on first-year university students, a theoretical framework needs to be developed, enabling one to cluster the variables, so as to make it more manageable, to provide support and to predict and, therefore, prevent negative outcomes. The need for this model to be tailored to the South African context and the relevant HEI is of great importance because it will ensure a smooth application as well as being able to adapt it to other HEI in South Africa, seeing it is relevant to the current state and demographics of HEI in South Africa. There is a lack, however, of well-integrated theoretical models, or frameworks which could be used to examine first-year students' experiences in a systematic way.

One model that has recently been applied to examine student experiences is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Friedman, 2014). This model is an insightful and widely-used framework which looks into the demands and resources that are available in the workplace and the impact, structure and management thereof. The JD-R model states that job demands result in health impairment, whereas job resources stimulate the motivational process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Bakker and Demerouti (2007), indicate that the combination of high demands and low control is a significant predictor of psychological strain and illness. Continuous exposure to coping with, or dealing with, constant job demands results in lowered personal energy and creates feelings of exhaustion (Van den Broeck, Nele, Hans, & Maarten, 2010).

A key component of the JD-R framework is demands, which is also the focus of this study. In the context of the JD-R model, demands can be divided into two types, namely challenging demands and hindering demands (Bakker & Sanz-vergel, 2013). Challenging demands can result in constructive outcomes such as enhanced task performance and motivation. These are

difficulties that can be resolved. Although they consume energy, they are stimulating and create opportunities for psychological needs and satisfaction (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Hindering demands, in contrast, can lead to depression, anxiety, social dysfunction and suicidal intentions (Ong & Cheong, 2011). These hindering experiences drain one's energy and provoke emotional coping. They relate negatively to one's functioning when looking at attitude, constructive behaviour and well-being (Van den Broeck et al., 2010).

There are instances in which the JD-R model has been applied to students, where the student's studies have been treated as a 'job'. An apt example is the study done by Wolff, Brand, Baumgarten, Lösel, and Ziegler (2014) on the misuse of substances to improve a student's cognitive functioning. They found that the JD-R model was suited to their study and the context in which they functioned, but suggested that future studies need to be done in order to discover possibilities to adapt the model to better fit the university context (Wolff et al., 2014). Emotional demands are an example in this case. The workplace and a university are vastly different environments (Friedman, 2014). The strain that first-year students experience is characterised by situations that they have never faced before, as was mentioned earlier (Ong & Cheong, 2011), whereas workplace demands are known to the person experiencing it. This supports the need to develop a JD-R model tailored to the university context with specific and unique demands and resources.

With the above explanation in mind, the aim of this study is to expand on the research and provide information in order to develop a sound framework for analysing the demands faced by first-year university students in South Africa, as perceived by the student support structures, using the JD-R model as a framework. Analysing the student needs and stressors in a qualitative manner will help recognise the impact that these demands have on academic success and student retention (Freitas & Leonard, 2011). The challenge, therefore, is to develop a framework that will enable the university to predict and manage the demands experienced by first-year students in order to enrich these students' university experience.

When taking the above-mentioned into account, it is clear that there is a need to develop a theoretical framework that supports and manages the first-year student experience. This newly-developed model, therefore, will help the student support structures to predict and manage the demands that the university environment presents. As stated by Speckman and Mandew (2014), there is a critical need for the development of a theoretical framework to guide student support

services and practitioners in the South African university context.

Based on the research problem and according to previous research, the following research questions are formulated

1. What are the demands experienced by first-year university students, according to the literature?
2. What are the demands that first-year university students experience from the perspective of the student support structures in the university?
3. What recommendations can be made for future research

## **1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The research objectives are divided into a general objective and specific objectives flowing from it.

### **1.2.1 General objective**

The general objective of this research is to explore the demands of first-year student in a Higher Education Institution (HEI) from the perspectives of student support structures.

### **1.2.2 Specific objectives**

The specific objectives of the research are the following:

1. Establish the demands experienced by first-year university students, according to the literature.
2. Determine the demands that first-year university students experience from the perspective of student support structures in the university.
3. Make recommendations for future research.

## **1.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **1.3.1 Research approach**

The present study follows a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is known to understand better and to challenge problems, or occurrences that do not only result in identification, but provide in-depth insight, especially in the field of social science (Bitsch, 2005). Qualitative research is further seen as a systematic approach to providing clarity and understanding of a specific occurrence, in a certain context (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). As this study aims to provide clarity on the demands, challenges and stressors that first-year students experience in a HEI a qualitative approach explores the opinions, beliefs, personal reactions and approaches that the student structures, student representatives council and student support services have about this topic. As Brantlinger et al. (2005) state, qualitative research is used to produce evidence-based research on the investigation of a certain context and specific people and not for the end goal of generalisation. This is why this study takes a qualitative approach.

### **1.3.2 Research strategy**

In order to provide a thorough research design, one must work from a specific research paradigm, which relates to one's beliefs about Reality. This will provide clarity on the epistemological stance of the study. The epistemological stance chosen by the researcher is Constructivism, which states that there is no pure objective reality. Instead, realities are developed by each individual, through social construction, with each person creating his or her own meaning and reality. Also unique to Constructivism is that the individual is seen as an expert in the present topic with a vast range of knowledge (Doucet, Letourneau, & Stoppard, 2010; Tsai, 2008). Looking at this meaning, or reality, the researcher explores the intricacy of the perspectives received from the student structures, student representative council and student support services.

Taking a constructivist stance, allows for the use of relativism as the ontological approach. This can be explained and made relevant to the present study by assuming that reality is not static and that each person creates his or her own reality, because reality is unique to each person. By implementing the relativist approach, the researcher attempts to understand the information

provided by the participants in this study (Doucet et al., 2010).

The Emic-Etic stance in a qualitative study has also been taken into account. 'Emic' refers to an insider's view, or personal experience of a certain culture, or society. 'Etic' means having an outsider's perspective, that is, someone who does not have a personal link to, or has no experience of a particular culture, or society (Young, 2005). This approach is relevant to this study because it provides both an insider and outsider perspective on the research question.

### **1.3.3 Research method**

#### **1.3.3.1 Literature review**

At the outset of the study, a review of the available literature was done. The focus was on the demands, challenges and stressors experienced by first-year student in HEI. The keywords used included; first-year students, stressed experiences, stressors, demands, HEI, challenges, universities, colleges, third world country education. The sources included accredited academic journals (these were mostly found using the Ferdinand Postma Online Library Search, Google Scholar, ResearchGate and Mendeley); books; published articles (Internet, published academic journals); theses and doctoral studies as well as other relevant academic sources.

#### **1.3.3.2 Research setting**

The research setting was based at a HEI in South Africa. The Dean of Students, the Student Representative Council and the Student Support Services, House Committee members and hostel parents participated. The use of World Café sessions ensured thorough insight into the research setting of the specific HEI in which the research took place.

Consent forms were used to provide permission for the researchers to collaborate with the student support structures for the World Café sessions. This ensured confidentiality and no personal data were misplaced, or used without a participant's knowledge. The researchers did not provide any information that could identify a participant.

With the World Café sessions, the structuring of the appointments and the process in which it took place was extremely important. Thorough planning was needed to ensure all the participants were accommodated in the process. Meetings were scheduled at a suitable time in a

conference room that suited most of the participants on campus. Invitations were sent electronically to the participant and included a brief description of the research project. The World Café sessions were done in a group setting, with a focus on confidentiality and security.

### **1.3.3.3 Entrée and establishing researcher roles**

Access to the research field, which is the HEI, was negotiated and access was granted. A meeting with the relevant stakeholders was arranged and further details on the study were provided. Information regarding the research project was made available and explained. Appointed times and specific venues at the HEI were arranged with stakeholders to conduct the World Café sessions. Permission and consent were also obtained at this time.

The World Café sessions were conducted with the participants. The role of the researcher was to facilitate and guide the World Café sessions according to the schedules. The researchers posed the questions and made field notes, which contained the required information obtained from the answers. They also informed the stakeholders that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any repercussions. The role of the stakeholders as voluntary participants was to supply the necessary information for the study.

### **1.3.3.4 Sampling**

Owing to the qualitative nature of the study, purposive voluntary sampling was used especially for the World Café environment. Participants were selected on the basis that they shared key characteristics that relate to the topic (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2011). They participated willingly and gave their consent to participate. The criteria used for selecting the participants were to the following:

1. They must be in contact with, and work with first-year students on a regular basis.
2. They must have grounded evidence of the stressors and demands that first-year students experience.

The 36 participants selected were from the office of the Dean of Students, the Student Representative Council and the Student Support Services, House Committee members and hostel parents. There were three rounds of World Café sessions with an average of twelve



participants per round making the  $N= 36$ . The number of participants in each round is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1

*Number of Participants According to Each Round ( N=36)*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Round 1</b>	<b>Round 2</b>	<b>Round 3</b>
Office of the Dean of Students	2	1	
Student Representative Council	2	2	1
Student support services	3	3	
House Committee members	3	3	11
Hostel parents	2	3	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>

### 1.3.3.5 Data-collection methods

The main goal was to identify, explore and discuss the demands that first-year students are faced with, in order to develop a theoretical framework relevant to the South African context.

The source of data was the World Café sessions. These were used because it is an effective method for collecting information and, consequently, useful for this study. The World Café method requires participants to be placed in small groups to form conversation clusters of five to six people at a table similar to the setting in a café, or coffee shop. Participants are asked a relevant question which they then talk about and debate the answer collaboratively. After the first session, the participants rotate between the clusters. A new form of collective knowledge is then developed (Hurley & Brown, 2009). The unique setup lends itself to developing a multiple perspective on the topic, or issue, formed by the participants themselves (Hornett, State, & Valley, 2007). The conversation is thereby extended and links are formed between the different clusters of participants. This in turn creates broad and innovative thinking on a single relevant question (Schieffer, Isaacs, & Gyllenpalm, 2004). The World Café method can be applied within a limited period of time and where it creates a sense of comfort to converse (Stollkleemann, 2008). This unique form of data collection was especially applicable to the participants selected for this study, because they had to collaborate, share, be innovative and answer the question posed (Ritch, 2009).

The World Café method is based on a few principles which have to be followed for the method to be successful (Homer, 2014). These are:

1. Setting the context. The focus and the goal of the sessions must be clear. Understanding the goal and context enables the process to be more structured, which in turn creates clearer conversations and themes.
2. Creating a hospitable space. Creating a welcoming, safe and inviting setting is of great importance. This will ensure that participants are more open to talk, creative and to be willing to listen to others. The physical setup is a key aspect in creating the correct atmosphere.
3. Exploring questions that matter. Through the discussion, knowledge will emerge. Having the right questions will facilitate the right energy, insight, and flow of information. This will help to delve deeper into the answers and the knowledge gained in order to reach clearer insight.
4. Encouraging contribution. People in general want to see that they make a contribution, or difference. It is important, therefore, to encourage participants to share their insight and knowledge, as well as getting them to listen to the other participants' perspectives.
5. Connecting diverse perspectives. The unique setup of World Café allows it to create possibilities for incorporating diverse perspectives. The rotation between groups enhances this possibility because perspectives can be shared again, creating improved possibilities for insights and knowledge.
6. Listening for patterns and insights. Listening is key to the World Café method. To be attentive and listen supports the identification of themes and patterns which connect to the broader picture. Participants need to be encouraged to listen to what is being shared.
7. Share collective discoveries. The last phase of World Café is 'harvest'. This involves making the patterns and perceptions that have come to the fore visible to the larger group of participants. Time must be provided for the participants to reflect on the discussions at a deeper level and to communicate those results again to the larger group.

To begin the World Café, rapport was established with the participants. Only one question was posed, namely:

*“We want to learn more about how students experience their first year at university. Can you tell us about the different demands and resources you perceive first-year students to have? We ask you to not only focus on structural factors at the university, but any demands and resources in first-year students’ lives.”*

After the completion of the World Café sessions, the data was sorted, analysed, evaluated and interpreted. All that had been observed was documented formally, including everything that was heard, seen and experienced during the World Café sessions. After the sorting of the data, patterns, circumstances, themes and consequences were identified.

The data obtained from the World Café sessions was captured in the form of electronic recordings which were then analysed. Data analysis involved both content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis is a process of arranging information in categories linked to the research question. Thematic analysis is more focused and cautious, it involves re-reading the data after the reviewing has taken place (Bowen, 2009). From here, the process of coding started. It is the principal analytical tool that assists in the discovery and creation of themes (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2006).

According to Bowen (2009), in order to integrate the sources of data, the same codes can be applied to the literature review as well as to the World Café sessions. This will ensure that the data is represented and analysed in a sensitive and fair manner.

#### **1.3.3.6 Recording of data**

The data-collection method used in this study included the making of field notes during the World Café sessions, including the physical audio recordings. These methods of data collection were the best and most convenient, according to the available resources, training, participants and setting. The World Café sessions had to be done in a scheduled manner.

During the World Café sessions, an audio-recorder was used to capture the data emanating from the answer to a given question. The researcher was equipped with additional batteries, paper and

pencils, if needed. During and after the World Café process, the researcher made field notes that contained the required information as well as the dynamics of the group, which included the key concepts of what was observed and identified.

According to De Vos et al. (2011) the notes should contain the following aspects:

1. seating arrangements;
2. the order in which people speak to avoid voice recognition;
3. non-verbal behaviours, for example, eye contact, gestures, or posture.
4. themes that emerge;
5. highlighting as much of the discussion as possible.

The notes remain with the researcher and will not be made available to any external source, particularly due to the fact that it contains confidential information. The information is stored securely in a safe, or a locked cabinet in the WorkWell Research Unit. The notes and recording were anonymous, so it cannot be organised in alphabetical order. By having it filed in the different folders according to the different stakeholder groups, it is easy to revisit the information when further data is required. Copies of all the data were made and organised in the same manner.

### **1.3.3.7 Data analyses**

Coding data is the principal analytical tool for discovering themes as was noted previously. There are three basic forms of codes, namely open, theoretical and constant comparative. Open coding is the first step in analysing and creating codes. This is central to developing a core category. Theoretical codes are developed to create relationships between categories and their constructs. The last form of code is that of constant comparative. This is focused on integrating the open and theoretical coding (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2006).

A software program, ATLAS.ti, was used to facilitate the coding process. This is a qualitative data-management programme, which assists in the management and organisation of themes and codes (ATLAS.ti, 2014). ATLAS.ti has the ability to code un-transcribed digital segments of interviews (Dicicco-bloom & Crabtree, 2006). ATLAS.ti is particularly effective in the social sciences (Hwang, 2008). The use of ATLAS.ti supported the process of coding and also helped

identifying themes. It assisted the researcher in coding the data, with the retrieval of text-based key words and the renaming of existing codes without interfering with the other codes. ATLAS.ti furthers the process by developing concepts of codes and in-between codes. It automatically logged the changing of codes, which assisted with the process of analysis (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

As categories of themes and meanings emerged, there was a search for both internal convergence and external divergence. The first level of coding was done through a combination of identifying the themes of 'demand' and 'stressors' that first-year students experience and then coding these. The second level of coding was to interpret the meaning of the categories that had been labelled in the first level. The different themes were labelled, and thereafter, the themes and concepts were grouped. Each category received a clear name and theme in order to make it easier to write the report. Open coding was used to examine, compare and conceptualise the themes of the demands, challenges and stressors that first-year students experiences. Axial coding was used to make connections between categories. Selective coding was used to select the core categories.

As already stated, the coding aimed to identify the demands, challenges and stressors that a first-year student experiences. Preliminary typologies included different stressors in the various categories of the first-year student experience. Attention was also paid to the dynamics of the group. After the analysis, the data was placed in table format in order to distinguish the categories and the themes that emerged according to the various background influences.

#### **1.3.3.8 Strategies employed to ensure quality data**

Quality assurance is extremely important. Brantlinger et al., (2005) identify factors that ensure the production of quality data. With World Café, for example, appropriate participants needed to be selected, identified and be representative of the population. Suitable instruments needed to be used to record and transcribe data. Participants had to be addressed in a sensitive manner and reported on fairly, confidentiality needed to be ensured at all times.

Furthermore, a pilot study in the World Café method was conducted to determine the overall feasibility of the study. Data-analysis methods were supported by a literature review to ensure that quality was maintained throughout the study. Conducting a pilot study confirmed the

feasibility of the research method that had been selected.

The pilot study helped to identify the type of influence the researchers had on the quality of data. If necessary, the chosen research setting could have been improved. The questions were tested to obtain the validity and reliability of the study. Audio recorders were used in the World Café sessions to capture raw data from the participants; therefore, the quality of the data will less likely deteriorate. If the pilot study was successful, the main research study should produce quality data. A co-coder was used to analyse the data and ensure that no information was missed or misinterpreted.

### **1.3.3.9 Reporting**

The report was written carefully to ensure credibility. The content had to be descriptive and attention needed to be given to definitions, themes and concepts. Owing to the sensitive nature of the study, namely, studying the demands that first-year students may experience, the report was written with the utmost care.

In the report, the researcher's own experience was included, to make it more complete and to convey the importance and implications of the study. The researcher wrote the report in the manner of being both the interpreter and transformer. Models of organising the report included themes, which meant structuring the report around the themes of the demands that a first-year student may experience as well as portraits, providing a clear setting on what the background entails and how these factors impact the demands faced by a first-year student.

### **1.3.3.10 Ethical considerations**

On account of the number of stakeholders involved in this study, it was crucial that the different parties were contacted and their permission requested. An explanation was given about the nature of the study, its purpose, what questions would be asked during the World Café, documents needed and the amount of time it will take. Once permission had been granted, the purpose of confidentiality was explained thoroughly. The names of the study leaders and their contact details were included to answer any enquiries, or questions about the study. Once all these steps had been taken and the required permission granted, the study was conducted.

Correlating with the ontological principals of ethics – autonomy, preventing harm, freedom of

choice to participate and self-determination (Gilgun, 2006) – the following were also added:

- Participants: The study focuses specifically on the demands, challenges and stressors of a first-year student in a HEI.
- Using educational institutions with specific laws and rules: Many parties are involved in the study and will have to grant permission before the research can continue. Parties must not be misled when permission is requested. Parties include: The support services, leadership structures, House Committees and House parents and HEI personnel).
- Discrimination: participants must be treated equally with no discrimination on any grounds.
- Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be key at all times, ensuring a secure environment for information to be provided and handled.
- The main approach is to do no harm. The participants further have the freedom to withdraw at any time.
- The aim is to contribute to first-year student life in such a way that students will benefit from the study and the HEI will have a better success rate with first-year students.

#### **1.4 CHAPTER DIVISION**

There are three chapters in this mini-dissertation. Chapter one consists of the introduction, Problem statement and Research method. Chapter two comprises the research article and chapter three includes the conclusions, limitations of the study and recommendations.

#### **1.5 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

The findings of the research objectives are discussed and displayed in the form of a research article in Chapter 2. The conclusion, limitations and recommendations of this research study are discussed in Chapter 3.

#### **1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The problem statement and research objectives are explained in this chapter. The data collection and the research method used were explained, followed by an overview of the chapters to follow.

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## **CHAPTER 2: ARTICLE**

## **Exploring first-year students' demands from the perspectives of student support structures: A world café study**

**Orientation:** The demands made on first-year students need to be explored from the perspective of student support structures in order to contribute to existing research and theoretical frameworks.

**Research purpose:** To explore the demands that first-year students experience from the perspective of student support structures.

**Motivation for the study:** There is a critical need for the development of a theoretical framework to guide Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in understanding the demands that first-year students experience.

**Research design, approach and method:** The present study is qualitative in nature. The epistemological stance of the researcher is constructivism. By taking a constructivist stance, relativism was the ontological approach. Lastly, the Emic-Etic stance has also been incorporated. The research setting was based at a HEI in South Africa. The participants ( $N=36$ ) included the Dean of Students, the Student Representative Council, the Centre for Student Guidance and Development, House Committee members and hostel parents.

**Main findings:** It is evident that there are five distinctive themes of demands that first-year students experience from the perspective of HEI support structures. These include academic obstacles, financial stressors, career obstacles, social disengagement and personal hindrances. Each category has key subfactors that support the main theme.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Having an understanding of the demands that first-year students experience, more effective management and resource structures can be implemented which focus on the major themes that emerged from this study.

**Contribution/value-add:** This research is a contribution to the existing literature on the demands that first-year students experience according to student support structures, because it provides information for student support structures and the university as to what can be expected from first-year students.

**Key words:** First-year students, demands, hindrances, challenges, difficulties, university, higher education, world café, student support structures

## INTRODUCTION

There is a critical need for the development of a theoretical framework to guide student support structures and practitioners in the South African university context (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). This need arises from the sub-standard student performance in Higher Education in South Africa (Scott, Yeld, & Hendry, 2007). South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are confronted with low graduation success rates: 74% in 2010, compared to a desired national norm of 80%. This indicates a graduation rate of 15%, which is well below the national norm of 25% for students enrolled in a three-year programme (HESA, 2014). This is disastrous for thousands of students who struggle, wasting state resources as well as personal resources (The Department of Higher Education and Training, 2012). As HEIs in South Africa are characterised by an absence of relevant knowledge about how to assist struggling students effectively, these students do not receive the guidance and support they need to meet the challenges and demands that they are facing (Shkulaku, 2013).

Given the background of the South African HEI, first year student entering the HEI environment struggle as they are faced with numerous institutional demands, lacking resources and experience a sense of under-preparedness on an academic level (Ogude, Kilfoil, & Du Plessis, 2012). South African students perform poorly compared to international assessment measures, contributing to the experience of a challenging HEI environment (HESA, 2011). Strydom, Mentz and Kug (2010) confirm this by describing that HEI have very little influence on the academic preparedness of students entering their institutions. HEI are also challenged as they have limited resources on the one side, but more students entering from diverse backgrounds on the other side. This diverse background and challenging context include students from different cultures, separated from their families and friends, financial demands and social-economic needs (Mudhovozi, 2012). This brings forward a great challenge for not only the students, but also the HEI.

For the first year student, this is a major challenge as they need to adapt and embrace a vast range of information, knowledge and concepts (Nehemia, 2009). Additionally, for most South African students financial concerns and funding needed for studying is the most prominent challenge (Deen & Leonard, 2015). This process of transition is critical and need to be effectively managed as it has a direct impact on their academic achievement and embracing student life (Nehemia, 2009).

Compared to international universities, the development and management of first-year university students in South African universities is not evidence-based. One will find resources available to help understand first-year students' experience, but there is a lack of a concrete model, or framework to facilitate this process. There is no informed South African model for supporting and monitoring the experiences of first-year students (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). Seeing that such a best practise model for South Africa does not exist, each university treats its student affairs only by considering local needs and challenges, thereby dealing with problems in isolation. In a context where students suffer from multiple problems and face several adaptations and challenges, finding and exploring existing resources is a challenge for students. Furthermore, there is little information available explaining why some South African students find it difficult to cope with the demands of the university setup (Brown & Schrader, 2008; Karp, 2011; Robotham & Julian, 2006). From this, one can understand that there is need for further research on the demands and challenges that first-year students experience, in order for student support structures to gain relevant knowledge and a sense of understanding (Freitas & Leonard, 2011).

For a better understanding of the demands made on first-year students, it is necessary to look beyond their own reported experiences. Student support structures on campus are an appropriate resource for such information. As professionals, and with an understanding of the background of what the experiences for a first-year student entail, individuals from these support structures will be able to provide a thorough and objective view and insight. This can add to the understanding of the stressful demands made on first-year students that could possibly impact on their well-being, performance and success. As professionals from different academic backgrounds (psychology, education, theology, etc.), their knowledge can be applied to develop a theoretical framework. Furthermore, they can provide information that will enhance an integrated understanding of the development, experience and performance of first-year students at university (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

Brown and Schrader (2008) stated that it was of particular concern for student support structures that students who do not effectively make the transition into the HEI context, or those who lack resources, are impacting the profits of the HEI. It is the goal for any HEI to see a growth in graduation and throughput rates which, in turn, produces a successful and well-rounded student. There is a need for a theoretical framework to be developed that can help identify demands that first-year students experience. Having a framework will promote the management of demands,

provide support and guide the prediction of demands, which could prevent negative outcomes. Taking into account the current state and demographics of HEIs in South Africa, the need to develop a framework tailored to the South African context and the relevant HEI is of immense importance, ensuring a smooth application and integration of such a framework.

A model that has recently been used in the HEI context to explore student experiences is the Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. This is a well-researched and established framework that focuses on the demands and resources that are available in the workplace, and on the impact, structure and management of these demands and resources. The JD-R model proves that job demands contribute to health impairment, while job resources help build the motivational process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Bakker and Demerouti (2007) specify that the combination of high demands and low control is a significant predictor of psychological illness and strain. Being constantly faced with stressful job demands results in less personal energy and stimulates feelings of exhaustion (Van den Broeck, Nele, Hans, & Maarten, 2010). As the present study focuses on demands, the framework of the JD-R assisted in exploring the experience of multiple demands.

The JD-R model has been applied to organisations with great success and it seems to be a potential useful model to explore first-year students' experiences. Although some studies have started to use this model in the HEI context, the JD-R model needs to be tailored to the university context, with specified and unique demands and resources relevant to the experiences of first-year students in the HEI environment. Previous studies using the JD-R model have been done in the HEI context, where the 'job' implied the student's studies. For example Wolff, Brand, Baumgarten, Lösel, and Ziegler (2014) made use of the JD-R model in their study, but indicated that future studies must be done in order to adapt the JD-R model to better fit a HEI. In the present study, an effort was made to purposefully catalogue the demands that first-year students experience, thereby contributing to tailoring the JD-R model for HEIs.

Taking the above into account, the present study intended to contribute to the development of a sound theoretical framework for analysing the demands faced by first-year university students in South Africa as perceived by the student support structures, using the JD-R model as a framework. Exploring and analysing the demands which students face in a qualitative manner will assist in identifying the impact of these demands on the academic success and, in the end, student retention (Freitas & Leonard, 2011).



## **Research purpose and objectives**

The general objective of this research is to explore the demands made on first-year students in a HEI. This will help provide information to students regarding the challenges that they could face, as well as the information about which resources they should utilise to deal with the demands. The results could also assist HEIs with information about interventions that can help students cope with challenges during their first year which, in turn, could assist them in completing their studies successfully. Owing to the limited research conducted on the demands, challenges and stressors that first-year students experience, particularly in South Africa, this study aims contribute to the building of a comprehensive framework on the demands that students experience.

## **What will follow**

The structure of the rest of the chapter is as follows:

Firstly, an overview of the literature will be given. Secondly, the explanation of the research design, particularly the research approach and strategy will be provided. Thirdly the research method follows (consisting of the research setting, the role of the researcher, the sampling method, data collection, recording and analysis) and strategies used to ensure quality data. Fourthly, the findings will be presented and the discussion on the findings will follow. Fifthly, the conclusion, recommendations, limitations and suggestions will be given for further research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The South African Higher Education setting**

South African HEIs find themselves with unique cases of students entering first-year at university, often students who are not prepared for the challenges of university (Cross & Carpentier, 2009). These students come from a wide range of social and cultural upbringings, including different educational backgrounds, academic abilities and diverse life experiences. This leads to different expectations of what the university experience will be, and will command specific resources (Fraser & Killen, 2003). Darling, McWey, Howard and Olmstead (2007) state that the academic, emotional and socially unfamiliar conditions that students experience may result in poor health, increased stress and reduced well-being. This is a concern that needs to be

addressed promptly, because it could have adverse effects on students' first-year experiences and their academic performance (Pierceall & Keim, 2007).

### **Demands experienced by first-year students**

To understand the literature on demands, one must understand the concept of a demand. The idea of a demand can be separated into two forms, namely challenging and hindering demands (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013). A challenging demand can result in positive or constructive outcomes, such as achievement and motivation. Although such demands require energy and input, they are stimulating and produce satisfactory results, or outcomes (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Hindering demands, however, lead to depression, anxiety, social dysfunction and suicidal inclinations (Ong & Cheong, 2011). Hindering demands consume a person's energy and require emotional coping. It negatively impact a person's functioning, attitude, constructive behaviour and wellbeing (Van den Broeck et al., 2010)

An extensive literature review was done for this study, working through more than a thousand national and international articles. The process of literature reviewing was done using ATLAS ti which is a research tool that enables the researcher to work through data in a structural manner. A key component of this process is the coding of the literature. While reviewing the articles, the researcher allocated codes to sections of the literature which mentioned, or described a demand that first-year students experience. As there were many minor mentions of demands and some very specific demands, it arranged for the allocation of sections under subthemes. These sections of the subthemes were then categorised and formed the final subthemes. The subthemes were again related to a broader main theme. The five major themes are: academic obstacles, financial stressors, career obstacles, social disengagement and personal hindrances.

It will be impossible to include and describe every subtheme and its aspects. The results section (see later) has a complete structure of the subthemes and major themes found in the literature, where it was described in conjunction with the findings of this study. The following is a brief overview of the five major themes that emerged from the literature review, including examples from the literature.

### *Academic obstacles*

Academic obstacles include: a lack of interest in their studies, academic issues, not attending classes, dissatisfaction with the class environment and lack of motivation (Charkhabi et al., 2013).

The lack of academic support and social obligations contribute to the students' experience of academic demands. Academic demands feature prominently because many students have a misconception about the amount of energy, time and input required for academic activities at university level. In many cases, the students are not prepared to take on the academic challenges of university studies (Brown & Schrader, 2008). This misconception and under-preparedness easily progresses into work overload (Clark, Murdock, & Koetting, 2009). Work overload increases the student's lack of self-regulation and impact negatively on the student's adaption process (Seyedfatemi et al., 2007).

The combination of work overload and a lack of self-regulation can result in student burnout, or dropout (Moneta, 2011; Uluda, 2010).

### *Financial stressors*

Contributing to academic demands are financial stressors. Financial stress around studies and the impact it has on students' families affects the academic stress students face (Phinney, Haas, State, & Angeles, 2010). More than half the average student population finds itself in constant distress over financial aspects related to their studies and contributing factors (Dzokoto, Hicks, & Miller, 2007; Round, 2005). Experiencing financial difficulty has a far-reaching effect as it impacts student commitment to study, social interaction and involvement in student-life activities. This hinders the transition and adaption process of first-year students (Round, 2005).

Factors that could assist in this financial distress (e.g. bursaries and funding) are limited and will unlikely meet the current demand. This is a concern for students because study debt is a worrying factor that will be present even after they have finished their studies (Dyrbye et al., 2010). Students feel that they are not informed beforehand about the extent of the financial impact they will experience while studying. As a result, students develop a sense of pessimism towards their studies and the institution (Round, 2005). Taking the South African context into account, financial concerns are even more of a challenge for students originating from

disadvantaged backgrounds with limited financial means (Robotham & Julian, 2006). These students have a higher propensity for dropping out of higher education because they are not able to keep up financially, and thus cannot afford to stay on at university (Beck, 2011; Tinto, 2007). The majority of students in South Africa will experience a sense of financial limitation throughout their studies (Robotham & Julian, 2006). What is of critical importance is helping students manage their financial stress and obstacles.

### *Career obstacles*

The demands placed on a student by career obstacles are closely related to that of career uncertainty. Students have concerns about their chosen career direction and whether they will reach their desired career aspirations (Gibbons, Dempster, & Moutray, 2007). There is a great deal of pressure on students to perform in order to obtain sufficient income and provide for their families (Collins, Coffey, & Morris, 2010). The process of transitioning into the university context includes a phase of uncertainty and lack of commitment with regard to career direction, or field of study (Willcoxson, 2009). These are important obstacles that need to be managed. Guidance has to be provided on career direction and addressing student concerns (Gibbons, 2010). It is interesting to note that the literature states: more than two-thirds of students differ from, or are sceptical about the quality and advice provided on career-related topics from education institutions (James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010).

Contributing to possible future careers as a demand and imposing on study success, is the fact that these personal barriers are only realised once the student has already begun his/her studies. Certain students may then realise that they are not in the right field of study, experience psychological barriers, or realise that their personality does not match the profile of their study choice (Beck, 2011). Parental pressure has also been found to be a factor causing career stress (Dietrich, Kracke, & Nurmi, 2011). As a result, students often find themselves alone, depressed and emotionally agitated when faced with their career obstacles and indecisions (Roderick, 2010).

### *Social disengagement*

Social support is explained as a quality that persons experience in a secure social network that assists them as needed, as well as being satisfied with the help they received (Shankland, Genolini, Riou França, Guelfi, & Ionescu, 2009). Students' academic and social support

influences their commitment towards their studies. Research indicates that students who experience more social support from their families, friends, or the institution are more likely to succeed (Pitt, Powis, Levett-jones, & Hunter, 2012). The contrary is also true. The lack of effective support and guidance results in disengagement in the student's studies and commitment (Willcoxson, 2010). Experiencing a lack of support is aggravated by the fact that students feel that they are unprepared for the non-academic aspects of being a first-year student (Round, 2005).

First-year students are inclined to struggle because they are in a period of transition. Many students leave their homes and secure support systems for the first time, such as parents and friends (Seyedfatemi, Tafreshi, & Hagani, 2007). Being without their safe and secure environment has a negative impact on their academic achievement since they experience academic pressure and they may not necessarily know where to find sufficient resources, or facilities to help them cope (Charkhabi, Abarghuei, & Hayati, 2013).

Many social activities were noted as an area of concern, or problem, resulting in a feeling of disengagement (Beck, 2011). Brown and Schrader (2008) state that people working with first-year students noted that these students experience a general lack of motivation and commitment towards their responsibilities and social obligations. Furthermore, literature shows that the lack of, and the need for support, results in an inability to cope, especially for first-generation students, since they do not feel included, or well prepared for university studies (Phinney et al., 2010). This results in the student experiencing a lack of control, which is problematic and further hinders effective coping (Gibbons et al., 2007).

An additional factor contributing to social disengagement is the exposure to new cultures and beliefs. Students are exposed, some for the first time, to cultures, beliefs and values with which they are not familiar (Seyedfatemi et al., 2007). Due to this experience, the student might feel excluded and not integrated into university life, where research shows that the lack of integration results in less-engaged students (Myers, 2013). There is a need to explore the factors associated with the social component of university life, taking into account the unique backgrounds and upbringings of students, in order to understand the adaption process through which first-year students go (Cole, 2012).

### *Personal hindrances*

Personal hindrances can be described as stress-related and the psychological results of stress. This can entail depression, suicide ideation, actual suicide and substance abuse (Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013). Included in personal hindrances are emotional problems, comprising the lack of confidence, anxiety and lack of cognitive ability (Beck, 2011). Contributing to the student's struggle is the challenge of effective time management. Because students are unfamiliar with the amount of work they need to do, with social activities as well as a new routine, they struggle to prioritise and adjust to their environment (Mirzaei, 2012).

Lin (2005) point out that the lack of social skills, time management, not being loved and insufficient interpersonal communication skills were personal challenges reported by students. The higher levels of stress and exhaustion that students experience, the higher the level of depression, hence psychological factors will emerge. This results in students looking for alternative, or avoidant coping strategies, which are almost always negative (Dyson & Renk, 2006). These coping strategies include unhealthy behaviours such as eating junk food and excessive drinking, both of which can lead to feelings of internal conflict. This creates a vicious circle of mental fatigue, depression and guilt (Oswalt & Riddock, 2005).

Apart from the challenges mentioned above, there are also other personal attributes related to the demands made on first-year students. As a result of the stress they experience from frustration, pressure and change, their personal well-being and survival instinct wither (Hamaideh, 2011). Students find themselves faced with episodes of emotional exhaustion, cynicism and lowered efficacy as their devotion and willingness to learn decreases (Uludag & Yaratan, 2010). Another personal hindrance found in the literature is students originating from disadvantaged backgrounds. They struggle to adapt to the new style of teaching and interaction and are more inclined to feel overwhelmed by the transition (James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010). Student's exhaustion and ill functioning due to personal hindrances presents itself as a serious problem (Law, 2007).

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Research approach**

This study follows a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is focused on a better understanding of problems and situations, providing a comprehensive understanding, especially in the field of social sciences (Bitsch, 2005). Qualitative research consists of a systematic approach focusing on grasping specific situations in a given environment (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Seeing that the present study aims to provide clarity on the demands, challenges and stressors that first-year students experience in a HEI, the use of a qualitative approach assisted in exploring the ideas, reactions and attitudes of the student support structures. Furthermore, a qualitative approach concentrates on creating evidence-based research on the investigation of a specific environment with certain people but not on producing evidence for generalisation (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

### **Research strategy**

One must work from a certain research paradigm to ensure sound research, which relates to one's beliefs about reality. This will provide clarity on the epistemological stance of the study. For the present study, the epistemological stance of the researcher is Constructivism which is based on the principle that there is no objective reality. Furthermore, it states that realities are developed by each individual, through social construction, with each person creating their own meaning and reality. Unique to constructivism is the perspective that the individual is seen as an expert in the present topic with a vast range of knowledge (Doucet, Letourneau, & Stoppard, 2010; Tsai, 2008). From this focus, the researcher explores the intricacy of the perspectives received by the student structures, student representatives council and student support services.

By taking a constructivist stance, relativism as the ontological approach is most suited. Relativism can be explained and made relevant to this study through assuming that reality is not static, and that each person creates his, or her own reality, as reality is unique to each person and the researcher attempts to comprehend the information provided by participants (Doucet et al., 2010). Being a qualitative study, a combined Emic-Etic stance has also been incorporated. This approach is applicable to this study, seeing that it combines both insider and

outsider perspectives on the research question, where the emic approach refers to the idea of having an insider's view, or personal experience of a certain culture, or society and the etic approach refers to general models that capture the phenomena in a more distal light (Young, 2005).

### **Research method**

The research method consists of the research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, research procedure, data-collection methods, data recording, strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity, ethical considerations, data analysis and reporting style.

### **Research setting**

The research was conducted at a HEI in South Africa. The participants included the Dean of Students, the Student Representative Council, the Student Support Services, House Committee members and hostel parents. In order to gain insight into the research setting, World Café sessions were chosen for the HEI. Permission was provided through consent forms to collaborate with the selected student support structures. The researchers did not provide any information that identified a student, or participant. This guaranteed that confidentiality was kept and no personal data got misplaced, or used without the participant's permission, or knowledge. The structuring of the appointments and the process in which it happens were extremely important for the World Café sessions. Thorough planning was needed to ensure that all participants were accommodated in the process. Meetings were scheduled at a relevant time at a conference room that suited most of the participants on campus. Invitations were sent electronically to each participant, including a brief description of the research project.

### **Entrée and establishing researcher roles**

The first role the researcher took on was to act as negotiator in order to gain access to the research field which was the HEI. Access was granted and meetings were arranged with the stakeholders where information and details were provided and explained regarding the study. Arrangements were made for the appointed times and venues for the World Café sessions.



Table 1

*Number of Participants According to Each Round ( N=36)*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Round 1</b>	<b>Round 2</b>	<b>Round 3</b>
Office of the Dean of Students	2	1	
Student Representative Council	2	2	1
Student support services	3	3	
House Committee members	3	3	11
Hostel parents	2	3	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>

Permission and consent were also obtained in this case. The role of the researcher with the World Café sessions is to facilitate and guide each session according to the schedules. The researcher provided the questions for the participants, made field notes and informed the stakeholders that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any repercussions. The role of the stakeholders as voluntary participants was to supply the information and data necessary for this study.

Finally, the researcher took the on the role of data analyst and coder. The data were analysed and coded, according to the themes and subthemes found in literature.

### **Research participants and sampling methods**

Purposive, voluntary sampling was used due to the qualitative nature of the study, especially for the World Café sessions. Participants were selected because they have similar key characteristics that relate to the topic (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2011). The participants took part voluntary and provided consent for their inclusion in the study.

A total of thirty-six (36) people took part in the World Café sessions. There were three rounds of World Café sessions with an average of 12 participants per round.

## **Data-collection methods**

The source of data was the World Café sessions. The approach of these sessions was chosen because it is an effective method for collecting the information that the present study is targeting. The unique set up of World Cafe lends itself to developing a multiple perspective on a topic, or issue formed by the participants themselves (Hornett, State, & Valley, 2007). The World Café method can be applied in a limited time-frame, where it creates a sense of comfortableness to talk (Stoll-kleemann, 2008). The main goal was to identify, explore and discuss the demands that first-year students face, in order to develop a theoretical framework suited to the South African context. This goal was reached through three rounds of World Café sessions. Each round consisted of three rotations of the groups. The rotation enables thorough discussion and brings about a concrete basis for knowledge and information. The duration of each rotation was between ten to thirty minutes. With three separate sessions, this led to a total of five hours of discussion.

## **Data recording**

The data-collection methods used in this study were the making of field notes in the sessions and the real-time audio recordings from the World Café sessions. These methods of obtaining the data suited the research setting, participants and available resources. The World Café sessions were conducted in a scheduled manner, i.e. a question was asked that provided a platform for discussion. These discussions were captured through audio recorders. During and after the process of the World Café, the researcher made field notes that contained the required information as well as the dynamics of the group, and included the key concepts of what was seen and identified.

Owing to the fact that the notes contain confidential information, it will remain in the possession of the researcher and not be shown to outside sources. The notes were allocated anonymously and grouped according to similar themes and codes. Furthermore, the information was stored securely, which ruled out the possibility of a participant being identified. Copies of the data were made and organised in the same manner.

## **Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity**

Ensuring quality data was of extremely important for the researcher. Brantlinger et al. (2005) identify certain factors to ensure quality data and analysis. These factors states that findings need to be coded in an orderly and meaningful manner, structure is given to the report, reliability of methods used is clear, the researcher is aware of his/her influence, or perception towards the data, conclusions include substantive quotations from the participant and lastly that the literature is integrated with the findings and connections are created.

By means of the World Café, appropriate participants were identified and selected. The instruments suited the method of data collection as well as the transcription of the data. Confidentiality was ensured at all times during and after the process of data collection. This was enforced by the informed consent the participants provided. Furthermore, a World Café pilot study was conducted to determine the overall feasibility of the study. Methods of analysing data were supported by a literature review to ensure that quality was maintained throughout the study. Conducting a pilot study confirmed the feasibility of the research approach that was initially chosen. The questions were also tested to obtain their validity and thus the reliability of the study. In the process the researcher also became aware of her perception and influence towards to the process, so that later in the actual sessions she could avoid these.

## **Data analysis**

The principal analytical tool to discover themes for this study was coding. The coding process consisted of two levels namely first- and second-level coding. First-level coding was done through a combination of identifying themes of the demands and stressors that first-year students experience, and then coding them. Second-level coding was done to interpret the meaning of the categories that had been labelled in the first step. In order to support the researcher in the coding process and identifying themes, ATLAS.ti was used. This is a qualitative data-management programme, which guided the management and organisation of themes and codes (ATLAS.ti, 2014). ATLAS.ti assisted the researcher in coding the data, the retrieval of audio-based key words and the renaming of existing codes without interfering with the other codes. The different themes were labelled, and the themes and concepts then grouped. Each category received a clear name and theme, in order to make it easier to report on.

## **Reporting style**

The research findings are reported on and presented in table format. Relevant literature and the results from the World Café sessions were categorised according to major themes and subthemes. In the discussion to follow, direct reporting and quotations from participants are included to support the results. Followed by the discussion, will be the conclusion, recommendations, limitations and suggestions for future research.

## **FINDINGS**

The main objective of the present study was to explore the demands made on first-year student in a HEI from the perspectives of student support structures. The demands that were found in the literature and also in the present study were categorised under two headings, namely major themes and subthemes. The major themes included academic obstacles, financial stressors, career obstacles, social disengagement, personal hindrances and unique factors. The subthemes that emerged gave deeper insight into the codes that were used, which also provided a richer description of the data from the World Café's.

The results are presented in table format. Each main theme has a table with its own subthemes as found in the literature and subthemes uniquely gathered from the World Café. Each table consists of four columns. The first column indicates the findings from literature as well as from the World Café sessions. Furthermore, it indicates the findings that were unique to the World Café sessions for each main theme. The second column indicates the main theme, and the third column indicates the subthemes that were found under the main theme. The last column presents the frequency count of each subtheme as found in the World Café sessions. Table 2 below displays the main themes and subthemes for the first major theme – Academic obstacles.

Table 2

*Summary of Themes Found in the Literature and World Café Sessions on Academic Obstacles*

Main themes and subthemes	Associated keywords	Frequency in World Café's
<b>Correspondence between themes found in the literature and World Café sessions</b>		
<u>Negative factors impacting the course</u>		<b>33</b>
Work overload/stress	Too much work; work pressure; not able to get through work; academic stress; too much work at once; academic pressure; high academic load	24
Managing a sufficient grade point average	Competition with class mates; not doing as well as expected by parents and peers	3
Academic underachievement	Not receiving the marks they aimed for; not passing tests and assignments; lack of motivation to study	2
Challenging coursework	Challenging work; teaching and studying methods are different compared to secondary education; not comprehending the work; lack of insight into work	2
Unpreparedness for course/class	Not taking responsibility for academic work; not preparing for class; not having the required academic skills to prepare and study the course work	2
Examination stress	Stress before and during exams due to high amount of work to study for; not having sufficient study skills compared to time available to study; difference in examination method from school to university	0
<u>Dysfunctional learning environment</u>		<b>16</b>
Inadequate academic support	Insufficient support from academic advisors such as lecturers / mentors / facilitators/ peers in residence	11
Language barrier	Not having lectures in home language; exposure to new languages; text books in second language	2
Inadequate facilities	Classrooms are not equipped for the work that needs to be done (e.g. laboratories do not provide the space required or facilities needed); sharing equipment with other students; broken equipment; not enough equipment for the number of students per class	2
Dissatisfaction with learning environment	Feelings of exclusion from classmates as some are not naturally included in the group; reporting systems not in place to refer students for study assistance; methods of class presentation are not suitable or known by the students (e.g. never done group discussions before); facilitation sessions are not effective or helpful	1
<b>Unique to World Café sessions</b>		<b>29</b>
Reading and writing ability is substandard	Students are not able to read and write at tertiary level; lack of effective reading skills and academic writing skills	10
Study methods/skills not in place	Not having an appropriate study method; not knowing how to study; not able to understand work through studying	5

Table 2 Continued

*Summary of Themes Found in the Literature and World Café Sessions on Academic Obstacles*

Sub theme	Associated keywords	Frequency in World Café's
Students need to be spoon fed (lack of pro-activity)	Not taking responsibility; students portray attitude that everything should be done for them; having a passive attitude	4
Skill shortage: Computer usage	Insufficient computer skills to complete assignments and exams correctly	3
Lack of technology knowledge	Unable to make use of technology needed for academic purposes e.g. tablets	3
Lack of study resources at home	No internet access at home; not having computers to work on at home; lack of resources such as books and stationary	3
<b>Total:</b>		<b>78</b>

As can be seen in Table 2, two major themes emerged from the literature and the World Cafés with regard to academic obstacles, namely negative factors impacting the course and a dysfunctional learning environment. Regarding the negative factors impacting the course, the strongest theme that emerged was work overload and stress, related to the amount of work that students need to master. This theme was mentioned 24 times by participants and related to factors including too much work, work pressure and academic stress. It is clear that this is a major concern for participants, as is evident from the following statements:

*“Now they have to be independent and there is a mass load of academic work”* and  
*“There are masses of work that is new.”*

Concerning the dysfunctional learning environment, the subtheme of inadequate academic support from academic advisors such as lecturers, mentors, facilitators and peers had the highest frequency of 11. As an example, the following was mentioned in the World Café sessions:

*“The learning environment they were used to are not the same anymore– the volume of work and support shifted.”*

From the World Café sessions, unique demands emerged that were not found in the literature. The subtheme with the highest frequency (of 10) was that students’ reading and writing ability was unacceptable and not up to standard. The related factors explained that students arrive with a poor level of academic reading ability and are not able to write at a tertiary level. For

example, one participant mentioned that:

*“The level of education they (first-year students) arrive with at the university is not sufficient” and “Reading and writing ability is a big problem.”*

The theme with second highest frequency (of 5) was that: study methods and skills are not in place, as mentioned:

*“The study methods they used in school are no longer effective, the amount of work, time available and difficulty is much different.”*

Students try to employ the same method of studying for their tertiary studies as they did in high school. This proves ineffective and they struggle to find a new and different way of studying in a limited amount of time. Thirdly, students have to be spoon fed (with a frequency of 4). There is a lack of pro-activity in the students’ approach towards their studies. They are not willing to take on the responsibility and adopt a passive attitude. As stated in a World Café session:

*“They inherit the idea from school, where everything was done for them.”*

From the results of the first major theme, it is evident where the main academic obstacles of first-year students lie.

Table 3 below displays the main themes and sub themes for financial stressors.

Table 3

*Summary of Themes Found in the Literature and World Café Sessions on Financial Stressors*

Main themes and subthemes	Associated keywords	Frequency in World Café's
<b>Correspondence between themes found in the literature and World Café sessions</b>		
Financial pressure	Not having enough money to buy necessities; unforeseen expenses; poverty; expenses are more than foreseen; frustration with financial demands	22
Financial stress (debt)	Stress about debt and student loans; problems with paying study debt	1
Cost of extra-curricular activities	Social activities require money they do not have; taking part in an activity has financial implications (e.g. buying sports gear, or attending camps)	1
Financial independence	Not being financially independent; need money to survive; not wanting to ask for money	0
Traveling costs	High travelling costs to commute to the university; excursions are expensive	0
<b>Unique to World Café sessions</b>		<b>5</b>
Shortage of bursaries	Lack of bursaries; need for more bursaries; bursaries being cancelled; allocations of bursaries are too specific, or field related; not qualifying for bursaries	3
Using bursary money for family needs	Sending money home; supporting family with bursary money; feeling guilty about money received	1
Not having money for books	Not able to buy books needed for studies	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>29</b>

From Table 3, it is clear that there is one major subtheme that is mentioned many times, viz. financial pressure with a frequency of 22. Financial pressure is a common theme in the literature as well as in the World Café sessions. The discussions focused on students not having enough money to buy necessities; expenses they did not plan for, poverty, or unplanned expenses which results in frustration with the financial difficulties they experience. For example:

*“A big concern is the poverty among students” and “Lack of finance is a problem, not only study fees, but all the other things they can’t live without, like food and personal hygiene necessities, books and stationery.”*



In this case as well, unique subthemes emerge that were not previously mentioned in the literature. The subtheme with the highest frequency was a shortage of bursaries with a frequency of 3. Many students struggle to find bursaries allocated to their field of study, not qualifying for bursaries because the criteria are very specific, and just not being able to get a bursary since bursaries are very scarce. There are also problems related to people receiving bursaries, given the South African context. The issue is that students send their bursary money home to support their families as they are the only one in the family having any form of income. They need to support their families and the families see this as the responsible thing to do. These issues were specifically mentioned in the World Café sessions:

*“What is a big hindrance is the lack of sufficient bursaries” and “Students send the bursary money to their homes to support their families.”*

From the results of the second theme, it is evident that financial stressors are challenging demands made on students, although not as challenging as academic obstacles.

Table 4 displays the main themes and sub themes for career obstacles.

Table 4

*Summary of Themes Found in the Literature and World Café Sessions on Career Obstacles*

Main themes and subthemes	Associated keywords	Frequency in World Café's
<b>Correspondence between themes found in the literature and World Café sessions</b>		<b>13</b>
Career uncertainty / indecision	Uncertainty about career choice; doubt the relevance of career choice in the future; financial impact of career choice; uncertain about personal fit with career; worry if there is a future in the selected career; uninformed about career prospects, or other choices	13
Work-study role conflict	Part-time work impacting on studies; not having balance between work and studies	0
<b>Unique to World Café sessions</b>		<b>22</b>
Uncertainty of study choice	Not studying what they want to; not suited for the study field; lack of motivation for the field of study; difficult to receive assurance to pursue studies; not receiving guidance in their choice of studies; uninformed about study choices or other possibilities	18
Not studying the study course of their first choice	Studying their second choice due to lack of qualifying for first choice; pursuing parents' choice of studies for them; only study to enter university; pursues second choice of study as they have the idea it has better future career and financial possibilities; conforming to stereotype of certain field of study	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>35</b>

From Table 4 it is clear that there is one major subtheme that emerged from the literature which was also frequently mentioned in the World Café sessions. This subtheme was labelled ‘career uncertainty’ with a frequency of 13. Career uncertainty was described as being uncertain about their choice of career, the relevancy of that career in the world of work, uncertainty about their personal match with the selected career and being uninformed about other career options available to them. A quote from a participant supports this:

*“Students do not know if they are following the right choice for their career, they are not certain if they made the right choice or not.”*

Uncertainty about study choice was the major subtheme unique to the World Café sessions with a frequency of 18. This was described as not studying what they want to study, lack of motivation to continue with selected studies and not receiving guidance in their selected field. Another unique subtheme not found in the literature was students not studying the study course of their first choice with a frequency of 4. It seemed that many students pursue a study course to please their parents, conforming to what seems to be popular in the world of work, or a lack of general insight into the future prospects of the selected course. As quoted in the World Café session:

*“They are bullied into a thing they do not really want to do”; “Students study a specific course because mom or dad studied the same course, even though they are not interested in the course” and “They are not selected for their first choice, now they study an alternative course, but is [are] not really motivated to do so.”*

Table 5 below displays the main themes and subthemes for social disengagement.

Table 5

*Summary of Themes Found in the Literature and World Café Sessions on Social Disengagement*

Main themes and subthemes	Associated keywords	Frequency in World Cafe’s
<b>Correspondence between themes found in the literature and World Café sessions</b>		
<u>Social support</u>		<b>56</b>
Lack of support	Insufficient support from friends; family; partners; peers; hostel parents; SRC; hostel committees; community leaders; spiritual leaders, etc.	9
Need for support network	Need for support; not knowing where to find help; not having sufficient support; the need for others to be there for them	8
Difficulties in family/romantic relationships	Relationship problems; not focusing on relationships; not having time to spend with important others; parents divorcing; broken relationships	7

Table 5 Continued

*Summary of Themes Found in the Literature and World Café Sessions on Social Disengagement*

Main themes and subthemes	Associated keywords	Frequency in World Café's
Absence and separation from family and friends	Lack of security from previous support network; not having somebody to depend on; being lonesome	4
Need for acceptance	Afraid of exclusion; trying to fit in; not being true to self; presenting something they're not; wanting to belong	0
Inadequacies in student support structures	Gaps in referral processes; services overlapping; services do not fill the needs of students; services offered are not clear or reachable	0
<b><u>Acculturation</u></b>		<b>49</b>
Adaptation difficulties/Poor integration	Not able to adapt; difficult transition; not able to understand the change; not receiving help to assist in transition process; not comfortable adapting; not wanting to change; lack of motivation to change; lack of understanding of transitioning process	27
Dramatic lifestyle change	Exposure to new environment; routine change; different environment; many challenging external forces	8
Difficult acculturation	Diversity in people and environment; not meeting new people; racial difficulties; understanding other people; difficulty adapting other values and norms e.g. university culture	2
Not meeting social expectations/ poor social fit	Not being what others want them to be; not fitting the popular image; not able to keep up ; not able to make friends; lack social skills	2
Homesickness	Longing for their parents; wanting familiarity; missing their families; urge to go back home	0
Not being in a hostel is more demanding	Lack of peer support; not able to fit in; no structure for help; not living on campus makes travelling difficult; not having an example to follow	6
Withdrawal from social situations / activities	Being too busy with academics and not taking part in social activities at all; not wanting to take part; seeing social activities as a demand; focusing on studies	2
<b>Unique to World Café sessions</b>		
Students are uninformed	Not knowing about resources available; not understanding the need to reach out; not open to external help; not being open to services offered	9
Too many social activities	Social activities clashes with other responsibilities; not able to keep up on social level; social calendar of university is too busy; social life interfering with academic demands	6
Absence of supervision	Too much freedom; acting out; first time away from home; parents not there to check-up on them; parental supervision not present anymore	6
Peer pressure at social activities	Pressure to participate in activities they do not want to, or not normally do; acting differently to impress others; conforming to peers' values and norm system; not living up to own values	5
Difficult adaption to different cultural groups	Not accepting other cultures; not being able to live out their spirituality; being negative towards other races; not being inclusive	5

Table 5 Continued

*Summary of Themes Found in the Literature and World Café Sessions on Social Disengagement*

Main themes and subthemes	Associated keywords	Frequency in World Café's
Too much freedom	Taking advantage; not having control over themselves; taking thoughtless risks	3
Challenges related to first time exposure to diversity	First exposure to other cultures, new spirituality and races; first time meeting people having different norms and values	3
Lack of constructive recreational activities	Lack of suitable and safe activities; activities not related to substance usage; lack of constructive activities develops into unconstructive activities e.g. drinking	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>113</b>

Social disengagement is a major theme in the literature and the World Café sessions. Social disengagement consisted of four themes, namely social support, social disengagement, acculturation and involvement. The two main subthemes under social support were the lack of support with a frequency of 9, and the need for a social support network with a frequency of 8. Lack of support describes insufficient support from critical support groups including friends, family, partner, peers, hostel parents, et cetera. The need for a social support network described the need for help, guidance and security from others to assist them and provide needed resources. In the World Café sessions the following was mentioned:

*“Many students do not know that they can go to a lecturer and talk to them” and “Being away from home can be the reason they no longer want to study.”*

A unique subtheme emerged that was not found in the literature (with a frequency of 9) – students are not aware, willingly and unwillingly, about the resources available to them. They do not know where to look for help when it is needed. As stated by a participant in the World Café session:

*“They do not hear about everything that is available” and “They don’t see themselves to be at risk, therefore they don’t access it.”*

The category of acculturation included the main subtheme for this section. This was the subtheme of adaptation difficulties, or poor integration with an above average frequency of 27. Students are faced with the demand of not being able to understand the change, not being able to adapt, having difficulty comprehending the transition process and not understanding the process through which they are going. Secondly the subtheme of dramatic lifestyle

change had a frequency of 8. Uniquely found in this section under acculturation was the difficult social adaptation for different cultural groups with a frequency of 8. Many find it difficult to be inclusive of new cultures, accepting different values and norms and being negative towards them. Participants in the World Café sessions stated that:

*“This is the first time they see different people and different values, exposure to new and different things”, “Here they see new cultures and new races” and “What is a shock is exposure to diversity, it is maybe the first time they see a new race.”*

It is evident that very prominent subthemes are emerging in this section. In the category of involvement, the most prominent subtheme was: not being in a hostel is more demanding with a frequency of 6. This is due to a lack of peer support, structured support systems and not knowing where to find help. Students in hostels seem to adapt more easily because they have peers experiencing the same things and people focusing on assisting them, for example, house committees. This section highlights a sense of imbalance towards their social support services and their perceived “idea” about the university context.

Table 6 below displays the main themes and subthemes for Personal hindrances.

Table 6

*Summary of Themes Found in the Literature and World Café Sessions on Personal Hindrances*

Main themes and subthemes	Associated keywords	Frequency in World Café's
<b>Correspondence between themes found in the literature and World Café sessions</b>		
<u>Personality difficulties</u>	Personality; personality disorders; psychological ill-health (e.g. anxiety and depression)	2
<u>Challenging background</u>		<b>23</b>
Underprivileged socio-economic background	Rural backgrounds; poor social economic status; underprivileged upbringing; poverty; poor living conditions	17
First-generation obstacles	Parents' and family's education and occupation did not include HEI studies; first from family to study; unfamiliar with HEI context	4
Traumatic life events	Death; illness of family or friends	2
<u>Intellectual hindrances</u>		<b>52</b>
Lack of time-management skills	Not able to prioritise, lack of routine; not having the skill of effective time management; not able to plan	18
Cognitive disability	Intellectual functioning not suited for studies; not able to comprehend the work; having difficulty studying due to external forces e.g. demands as described in previous tables	14

Table 6 Continued

*Summary of Themes Found in Literature and World Café Sessions on Personal Hindrances*

Sub theme	Associated keywords	Frequency in World Café's
Inadequate/lack of social skills	Not able to start conversation; acting differently when attention is received; not able to communicate effectively; cannot maintain relationships, not able to build relationships; shyness	11
Mental and emotional pressure	Not coping on cognitive level, burnout, mental overload; emotional exhaustion	4
Depersonalisation	Secluding themselves; not presenting who they are	2
Lack effective stress-management skills	Not able to cope; lack of coping skills; not able to handle stress; not having resources in place to assist them	1
Hopelessness	Feel left alone; feel there is no good outcome; pettiness	1
Lack of motivation	Lack of motivation; do not want to do it; lack of ambition to pursue studies and social activities	1
Ineffective coping skills	Looking for alternative coping measures related to negative outcomes; looking for help in the wrong places; not coping in anyway resulting in burnout; not having resources for the present demands; not seeing or having an alternative measure for help	0
Impaired Health		23
Poor physical health	Poor diet; insufficient, or extreme physical exercise; obesity, diabetes; HIV; disabilities; lack of sleep	11
Poor mental health	Substance abuse; psychological disorders; eating disorders	6
Infringed safety	General violence; crime; abuse; unsafeness on campus; afraid for their lives in some areas	6
Unique to World Café sessions		68
Not seeing themselves at risk	Sense of ignorance; obliviousness; not recognising resources; thinking they are not susceptible to external forces	13
Lack of self esteem	Not able to be themselves; not presenting themselves appropriately ; not true to self	11
Students are too proud to use services/get help	Pride; too proud to ask for help; not wanting others to pity them	10
Lack of self-regulation	Not able to draw the line themselves; do not know when to stop; going too far	8
Not having balance	On academic, social and time level; lack of balance; not able to compromise according to demands	7
Not accepting responsibility	Not wanting to be responsible; blaming others; not standing up for themselves; do not want to see themselves as adults; free-spirited; gullible	7
Problem with forming own identity	Doubt who they are; others have a strong influence on them; change impacting on them	4
Lack of independence	They are not independent; want constant help; need for guidance; lack of initiative	4
Lack of internal locus of control	No internal control; looking for external control measures	2
Lack of emotional intelligence	Lack of emotional regulation; aggression; inappropriate reactions	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>166</b>

Personal hindrances were the major theme of all five themes and consisted of multiple themes and subthemes as described in the literature and the World Café sessions. The description of personal hindrances was mentioned 166 times in the World Café sessions. Personal hindrances consisted of four themes. viz. personality difficulties, challenging background, intellectual hindrances, impaired health and uniquely emerged subthemes. In this section, the theme with the highest frequency was unique findings.

The first theme of personality difficulty related to personality disorders and pathology and was only mentioned twice. The category of challenging background brought a very prominent subtheme to light, viz. underprivileged socio-economic background with a frequency of 17. Underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds describe factors related to poor living conditions such as poverty, rural upbringing and poor socio-economic status. The high frequency makes it a worrying theme that needs serious attention. As stated by a participant in the World Café sessions:

*“What reaches my office the most by far is problems of students with a socio-economic unprivileged background.”*

Concerning subthemes under the third category of intellectual hindrances, is the theme of lack of time management, thus prioritising and creating a new routine for themselves with a frequency of 18As stated by a participant:

*“Some have no idea what time management is, they are not able to plan.”*

Cognitive disability had a frequency of 14. Students are struggling on a cognitive level to manage everything, their intellectual functioning is not suited to their study choice and they are unable to grasp and understand their work. They did not expect the cognitive demands that their study choice would place on them and they do not have the ability to cope with them.

For the category of impaired health, the main subtheme was poor physical health describing factors related to poor diet, insufficient physical exercise, overweight, diabetes, HIV/Aids, disabilities and lack of sleep, with a frequency of 11. A participant mentioned this notion in the following way:

*“They do not really know where the borders are and how to handle it.”*

Therefore, students push themselves beyond the limits they previously had. Furthermore, this section highlighted a substantial number of unique factors that were not found in the literature. The most significant subthemes include not seeing themselves at risk with a frequency of 13. There is a serious sense of ignorance that many students have, for example, they seem oblivious to the process through which they are going and to external forces that may have an impact on them. This is very concerning as stated in the World Café sessions:

*“Now they have freedom, and the wheels come off” and “There is a lack of insight into their own problems.”*

Relating closely to the above-mentioned is the subtheme of lack of self-esteem with a frequency of 11 and students being too proud to use services, or ask for help with a frequency of 10. Pride seems to hinder the students from getting, or even acknowledging the fact that they need help. In the World Café sessions it was mentioned as:

*“We moved back to identity, many students struggle to find their identity and to articulate it”; “There is hesitation to make use of resources”; “Another challenge that we saw is pride, people that maybe do not have any money for food, are too proud to ask for help.”*

From this major theme of personal hindrances, various worrying factors emerge that pose significant challenges for the students, resulting in a delay in the students’ integration into the HEI environment and accepting their academic responsibilities. The following section entails a discussion on the findings.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Outline of the results**

The purpose of the research was to explore the demands made on first-year students in a HEI from the perspectives of student support structures, in order to provide a comprehensive research basis. This study is seen as an important contribution to a theoretical structure that is tailor made for South African HEIs and based on the JD-R framework. As stated in the introduction, there is a need to provide research on the JD-R model in order to make it as effective in the HEI environment as it is in the workplace.



This section focuses on the discussion of the findings of this study and the contribution it makes to existing knowledge on the subject. Firstly there will be a discussion on the World Café findings compared to the literature and secondly, the discussion of the unique findings of this chapter. Figure 1 below is a graphic representation of the literature review combined with the findings of this study. This figure will contribute to the development of the demands section of the JD-R model suited to the South African HEI setting.

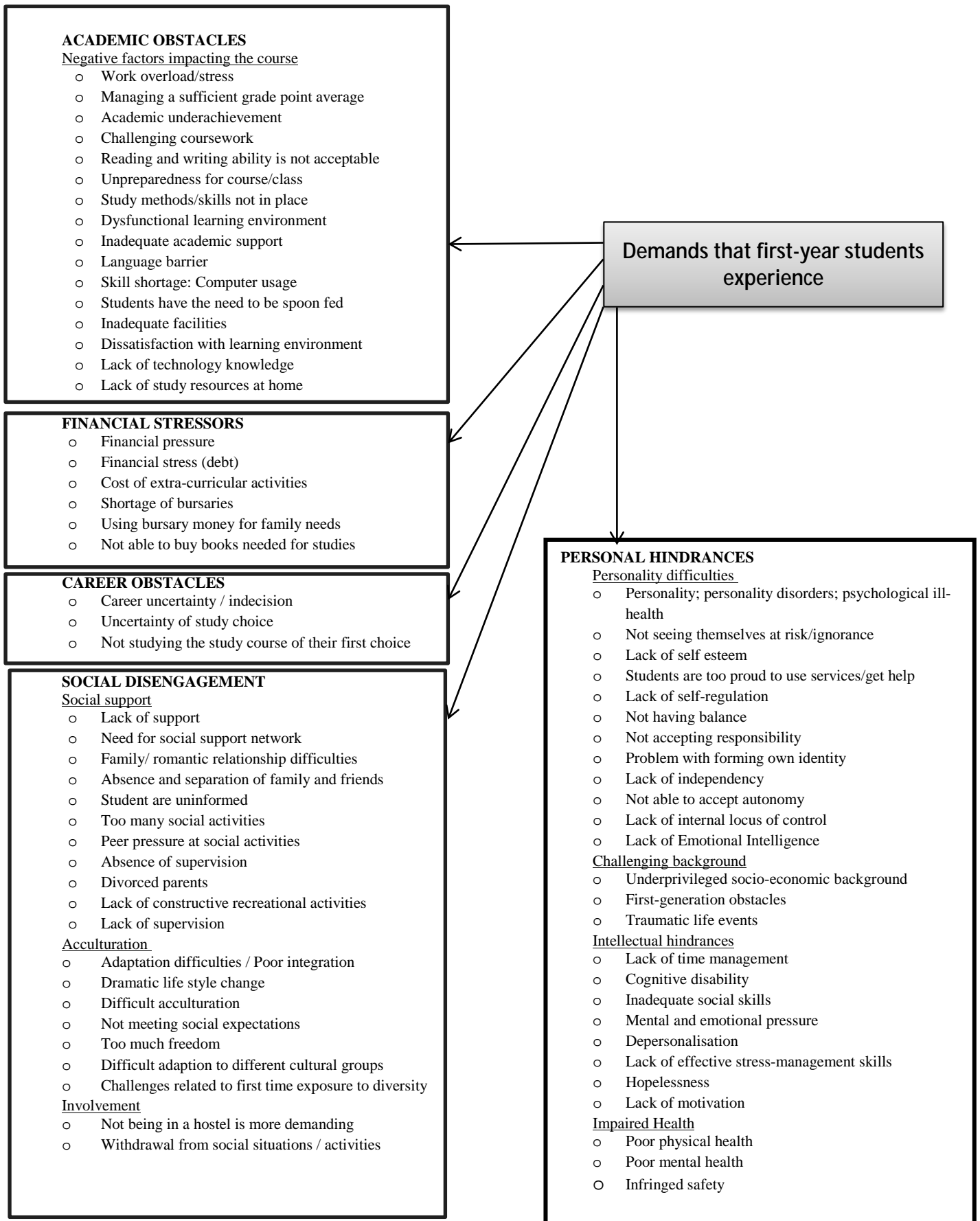


Figure 1

*Graphical representation of the demands that first-year students experience according to student support structures in the present study*

## **How do the World Café findings correspond with the literature?**

After a comprehensive analysis and the study of literature on the demands that first-year students experience, it is evident that there are themes in the literature that correspond with the results of the present study. As presented in the results, approximately two thirds of the demands identified in the literature were confirmed by the World Café sessions. Numerous studies have been done in other countries and settings on the demands that first-year students experience. Similar results were found in South African HEIs.

Five broad themes were identified in the literature which acted as a framework for discussion, viz. academic obstacles, financial stressors, career obstacles, social disengagement and personal hindrances. The literature for this study found that academic obstacles, specifically work overload/stress, were frequent topics. As stated by Clark, Murdock, and Koetting (2009), students misjudge the demands and energy necessary for academic activities. Because of this, students experience stress attributable to the work overload (Moneta, 2011). Under the category of learning environment, inadequate academic support was shown to be a great concern. This is confirmed by Dyrbye et al. (2009) who state that the dissatisfaction that students have with their learning environment and the supposed levels of perceived support from the faculty, is the greatest contributor to their academic stress. In this sense it is understandable that the main subtheme of work overload/stress is enforced by factors such as unpreparedness for class and insufficient academic support. The aggravating matter is that the South African education setting is challenged by these factors on a daily basis, which leads to the following demand – finances.

Finances are a major concern at any level of education, especially tertiary education, where students are faced with limited funds and bursaries (Robotham & Julian, 2006b). Round (2005) found that over half the students are worried about their finances and 31.9% of students reported finances as a significant stressor (Dzokoto et al., 2007). From these findings it is clear that financial stressors play a key role, not only on a personal level, but also on institutional level. It has a ripple effect, therefore the effective management of finances and bursaries must receive dedicated attention. The amount of literature available on this topic and taking in account the current South African situation regarding study fees, indicates how important the subject is.

The problem with students experiencing career indecisiveness relates to the fact that they experience a lack of efficient or satisfactory support. The literature and the World Café research conducted in this study found a lack of support for students while at the same time there is a dire need for support. This issue is double-edged, because students are either unaware of the support available, or that the support offered is not sufficient for them (Morosanu, Handley, & Donovan, 2010). This is a key component which must receive attention from the HEI. Furthermore, students seem to be unprepared regarding social aspects including relationships, and social activities were also experienced as a demand (Round, 2005). Students feel less prepared for the non-academic side of their studies (Beck, 2011). They have difficulty adapting to the new environment and to integrate their new circumstances. The dramatic lifestyle change and transition is a challenge for them (Hamaideh, 2011a; Verger et al., 2009). It has been shown, however, in the literature and in the present findings that students experiencing a balanced student life, adapt better and find the first year experience more pleasant, especially those who reside in a hostel, or residence (Serena & Allison, 2012; Thomas, 2002).

From the above, it is understandable that the literature has proved to be relevant to an extent to the HEI in South Africa, but there are still gaps and missing links. The literature together with the results, contribute to the research on the demands that first-year students experience in HEIs in South Africa. The following section provides an overview of the unique findings of the present study that have not been taken into account in previous studies.

### **What were the unique findings from this study?**

Most of the literature focused on international studies, and thus does not account for the specific dynamics and uniqueness of a South African HEI. Taking this into account, the second objective of this study was to determine the demands that first-year university students experience from the perspective of student support structures in a HEI in South Africa. This presented unique findings as reported in the results section. The unique findings of the present study were presented under the major themes of academic obstacles, financial stressors, career obstacles, social disengagement and personal hindrances, and led to three re-emerging concepts, or a pattern that surfaced. As the researcher took on a constructivist stance and relativism as the ontological approach for this study, it was appropriate to assume that there is no static reality; each person creates their own unique reality and promoting the principle that there is no objective reality (Raskin, 2008). From the literature review and from the World Café, these

unique realities became clear to the researcher, and thereby concluding the second research objective. Subsequently, a discussion on the unique realities present in the South African HEI context.

Firstly is the concept of uncertainty/indecision. This is one of the greatest concerns for students who study in South Africa and need to start their adult lives. This was shown to be a demand made on students from this HEI. Students are uncertain about their choice of study and their future. They feel the lack of sufficient support, guidance and certainty as to what they are doing. There is a sense of doubt regarding the relevance of the field of study and the possibility of future career opportunities. This uncertainty is aggravated by the findings reporting that students do not have sufficient ability to read and write for tertiary education, they do not want to take on the academic responsibility and lastly lack the resources due to underprivileged backgrounds. As the choice of study impacts the career the student will follow directly, the above-mentioned discrepancies must be addressed in order to prevent dropout from studies, lack of motivation and to ensure that the job markets receives its required candidates.

Uncertainty is further explored in the unique findings as students struggle financially. Although this motive has been found in the literature, the allocation and usage of funds seems to be different in these findings. This includes the cost of studies, lack of sufficient funding and using bursary money for non-study purposes. In various instances it was reported that students do not cope financially because they send their money home to help their families. Additionally, the university context requires a demanding lifestyle of academic and social responsibility in which the student needs to find resources, or support to assist him, or her in the process. Many students fail to get help as they are too proud to admit their circumstances to others. If students do not get assistance to deal with the financial aspect of being a student, it will lead to even higher rates of student-drop-out due to financial reasons.

As mentioned above, pride seems to hinder the students in effectively coping in the HEI context. This is also the next key concept under discussion. The idea of pride was mentioned numerous times, especially when it came to recognising resources that already were available to them. Trying to fit in and present themselves as coping adequately, pride impedes their functioning, being afraid that they will be seen as weak, or not part of the group. The South African student population, unfortunately, comprises many of these students as they come from underprivileged backgrounds, poor socio-economic circumstances, stern upbringings and extreme diversity. This

is their first exposure to new and demanding environments and with people from diverse backgrounds. Student support structures need to function with a sensitivity and awareness towards this situation.

There is, however, a sense of ignorance towards their problems, or recognising the services available, thinking that the services offered are not relevant to them, which is the last key concept. Many students do not pay attention to the support and resources that are available because they see these as irrelevant. They do not seem concerned about any of the demands made on them, whether it be illness, a challenge of some sort, or an external force. This is a challenge for the HEI setting, because one cannot reach them, or make them aware of possible hindrances which they may encounter and resources that are available.

To conclude, as mentioned in the problem statement, the integration of the research objectives and the discussion above, led to research on the demands section of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model to tailor it for the South African HEI context. As stated by Speckman and Mandew (2014), there is a critical need for the development of a theoretical framework to guide student support services and practitioners in the South African university context. The present research study is a contribution to this critical need. This study presented literature on the demands that first-year students experience according to student support structures and it contributed to a theoretical framework for student support structures. Therefore, more effective management and resource structures can be implemented accordingly, focusing on the major themes that emerged from this study.

### **Practical implications**

The main contribution of the study for the individual is to provide a basis of the demands first-year students in a HEI experience. It provides insight for the individual as to how and what to be alert for, identify and manage these stressors in order to prevent future occurrences. This will ensure that a more successful student will enter the workforce, having better skills and understanding of how to manage difficult times and in the long term having coping strategies in place. In light of this, the university also has gained improved knowledge on the type of resources that they should make available, how to utilise and optimise the resources they have in order to develop a student with effective skills and optimal well-being.

The above-mentioned factors play a significant role in the student support services that universities offer. This will ensure that demands and resources are met, in order to provide an optimised first-year experience. Through this research study, the university experience can be optimised, focusing on implementing strategies for students that lowers the dropout rate of first-year students. This can assist in reaching the strategic goals of the university which, in turn, will contribute to a more complete and successful university. The reason is that the HEI will have a positive effect on profits, stakeholder involvement, and funding received from Government for each student who successfully completes his or her degree. Finally, due to the limited research conducted on the demands, challenges and stressors that first-year students experience, in South Africa specifically, the present study provided clarity on this aspect.

This research study also contributes to the literature on the demands that first-year students experience according to student support structures, because it provides a theoretical framework for such structures and to the university about what can be expected. Therefore, more effective management and resource structures can be implemented accordingly, focusing on the major themes that emerged from this study.

### **Limitations and recommendations**

The researcher identified a number of limitations. The first limitation of the present study was that it was focused on a single HEI. Although widely diverse, it does not account for the unique dynamics of other universities. The student profiles of HEI's do differ and that could deliver different results. Secondly, the research made use of direct transcriptions of the audio recordings. Although it is allowed and has been done in previous studies, transcribing the audio-recordings to text and then coding it, may seem more thorough and ensures that no detail gets overlooked. Thirdly, the only source of data was World Café sessions. Even though it was sufficient for the present study, more sources of data can be included for future studies to ensure that a wider spectrum of participants and students are covered.

The researcher recommends that future research should focus on exploring, or extending the research topic on three levels, that is on an individual level, the organisational level and for future research. On an individual level, research can be conducted on the implementation and

practice of the findings of this chapter in a HEI context. This will provide clarity on the effectiveness and accuracy of the research and deliver even more data. Interventions can be made by using the findings in order to prevent and manage the demands of first-year students. Secondly, on an organisational level, in this case the HEI, it is recommended that the findings of the present study should be taken into account when developing support structures for students, focusing on implementing strategies and providing resources to students that lowers the drop-out rate of first-year students. Thirdly, for future research, more sources of data can be included to confirm the findings of the present study for example, document analysis, or interviews which support and broaden the research available on this topic. The topic can also be extended to all under-graduate students, focusing on their demands.

Additionally, it is suggested that a quantitative approach be incorporated in the research. This will ensure a more thorough explanation of the findings gathered from this qualitative study.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, it seems that there is a dire need to explore the demands that first-year students experience according to student support structures. Not only has no such a research to date been undertaken in South Africa, it resulted in many unique findings which have not been accounted for before. If no action is taken to respond to these unique demands many students will suffer and fail to cope as first-year students, falling through the fingers of the people that were supposed to guide and help them, or to direct them to the appropriate resources.



## AUTHORS NOTE

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## **CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Chapter 3 consists of the conclusion regarding the study and is provided according to the general objectives of the research. Additionally, this chapter describes the limitations of the study, followed by the recommendations for future research and practice.

#### **3.1 CONCLUSION**

The general objective of this study was to explore the demands made on first-year students in a HEI from the perspective of student support structures, by employing the World Café method. The first specific objective of the research was to establish the demands first-year university students experienced, according to the available literature. The second specific objective of this study focused on contributing to the gap in literature on the South African context. Finally, recommendations will be made for future research and practice.

The first objective of the present research was to conduct a thorough literature study on the demands that first-year students experience. Although many international studies have been done on the demands of first-year students, it was a challenge to find literature relating to the South African context. As there were many minor mentions of demands, or some very specific demands, it allowed for the allocation of sections under certain subthemes. These sections were then categorised and formed the final subthemes. The subthemes were, in turn, related to a broader main theme. Five main themes were identified from the literature, including academic obstacles, financial stressors, career obstacles, social disengagement, and personal hindrances. The following is an overview of the prominent corresponding literature accompanied by an explanation.

Academic obstacles, especially work overload/stress, are a major theme in the literature. Students underestimate the energy and input that academic activities demand from them (Clark, Murdock, & Koetting, 2009). This results in students experiencing stress which develops into work overload (Moneta, 2011). Contributing to this academic stress is inadequate academic support. Dyrbye et al. (2009) confirms this tendency by stating that the dissatisfaction students have with their learning environment and their perceived levels of support from the faculty, is



the largest contributor to academic stress with which support structures have to deal. Adding to the academic challenge are factors such as unpreparedness for lectures and insufficient academic support. Students in the South African educational setting are challenged by these factors on a daily basis, and are thus not only challenged on an academic level.

Round (2005) found that over half of the students are worried about their finances, and 31.9% of students reported lack of finances as a significant stressor (Dzokoto, Hicks, & Miller, 2007). Finances is a major challenge within the tertiary education environment, seeing that students are faced with limited funds and often restricted bursaries (Robotham & Julian, 2006). The amount of literature available on this topic and taking into account the current South African circumstances regarding study fees, demonstrates the importance of this demand. Financial stressors not only impact on a personal level, but institutionally as well. This causes a ripple effect and the effective management of finances and bursaries therefore need dedicated attention. If the institution is not able to support itself financially, it creates a lack of support in other areas as well.

Students experience a lack of efficient, or satisfactory, support in the area of career decisions and support. They develop career indecisiveness because they do not trust or feel comfortable with the institutional support provided, or the lack thereof. Indecisiveness about their career choice increases when there is a struggle to see the chosen career choice as relevant, or suited to the South African context. Houghton, Wu, Godwin, Neck and Manz (2012) confirm the struggle students undergo by lacking the emotional regulation and leadership skills suited for the world of work.

The confirmation in the literature about the perceived lack of support that students experience is ambivalent. Either students are not aware of the support that is available to them, or that the support they receive is not sufficient for them, which creates a sense of social disengagement (Morosanu, Handley, & Donovan, 2010). In this case students are faced with uncertainty, as well as being challenged academically and financially. This affects their personal interaction deeply, and as a result they are unprepared for social engagements and struggle with maintaining healthy relationships (Round, 2005). These students also seem less prepared for the non-academic side of their studies, experiencing serious challenges on a social level and in their attempts to adapt to the new environment (Beck, 2011).

Students therefore have difficulty integrating their circumstances, lifestyle change and transition, which creates a personal hindrance in their effort to cope (Hamaideh, 2011; Verger et al., 2009). Additionally, these students experience a lack of confidence, anxiety and a lack of cognitive ability (Beck, 2011). Trying to cope with the high levels of stress exhausts the students, which can lead to depression and inadequate psychological functioning. Students attempt to cope and explore alternative methods in order to function and keep up with the pace. Most of these alternative coping methods include avoidant coping strategies, which inevitably are negative since it they lead to unhealthy behaviour (Dyson & Renk, 2006). The avoidant, or alternative, coping strategies include poor eating habits, substance abuse, unhealthy and risky behaviour and even worse a combination of these negative behaviour forms. This develops into depression, mental exhaustion and guilt, forcing the student to remain in a vicious circle of trying to cope with his/her circumstances without the necessary resources (Oswalt & Riddock, 2005).

A further personal hindrance that came to the fore in both the literature and the findings of the present study is students who originate from underprivileged backgrounds. The transitional experience is even more traumatic for them as they find it difficult to adapt to the new environment and because they encounter new technology, teaching methods, interaction and people (James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010). The first-year student is faced with a large number of demands and unknown circumstances. This is found internationally and nationally in the literature; however the literature's findings have proven to be relevant only to a small extent to the HEI in South Africa. There are still unique South African dynamics which have not been taken into account in this regard.

The second objective of the present study was to explore the demands that first-year university students experience from the perspective of student support structures in a HEI. After a comprehensive literature study, certain similarities were established between the literature and the findings of this study. Approximately two thirds of the demands identified in the literature were confirmed in the World Café sessions. However, most literature focused on international studies and did not account for the specific dynamics and uniqueness of a South African HEI. It was important for the present study to contribute to a theoretical structure that is tailored for the South African HEI context and based on the JD-R framework. As stated in the problem statement, there is a need to provide research on the JD-R model to make it as effective in the HEI environment, as the case is in the workplace.

The researcher took a constructivist stance and explored relativism as the ontological approach for the present research. Therefore the presupposition was that there is no static reality and that an objective reality does not exist (Raskin, 2008). Each person creates his or her own unique reality. The data gathered from the literature review as well as the World Café sessions made the unique realities evident and clear to the researcher.

The findings of this study established five major themes, namely academic obstacles, financial stressors, career obstacles, social disengagement and personal hindrances. Each one of these had corresponding themes in the literature and unique themes gathered from the World Café sessions. Figure 1 below is a graphical representation of the findings based on the literature review and the World Café sessions.

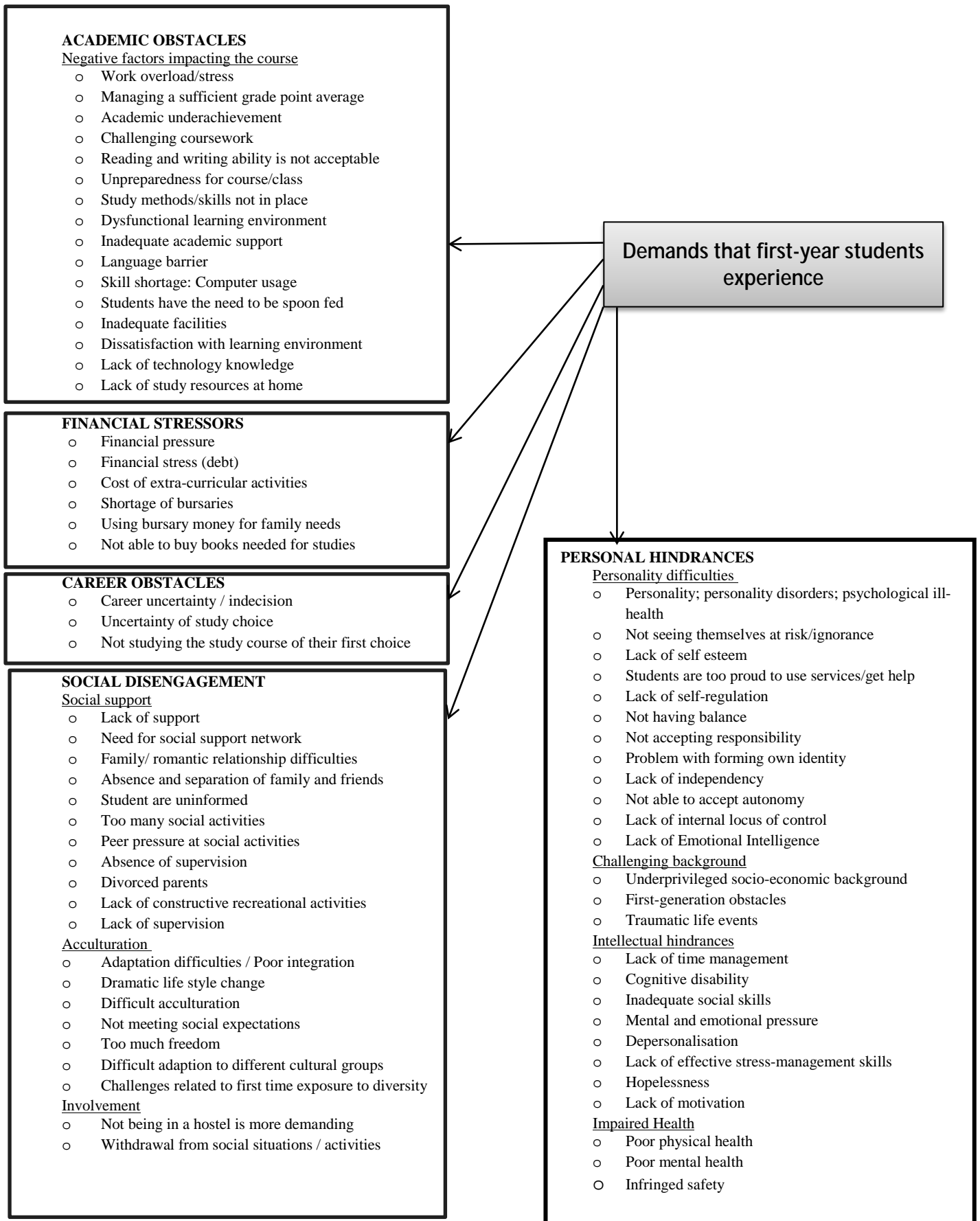


Figure 1

*Graphical representation of the demands that first-year students experience according to student support structures in the present study*

The unique findings of this study within the themes of academic obstacles, financial stressors, career obstacles, social disengagement and personal hindrances led to three re-emerging concepts. Following is a discussion on the unique realities presented by the South African HEI context.

One of the major concepts that emerged was the theme of uncertainty/indecision. The South African context is faced with uncertainty in many ways, which impact on the HEI, especially students who begin their studies. Students are uncertain about their study choice and career prospects. This uncertainty is aggravated by the lack of sufficient support, guidance and lower confidence about what they are doing. Doubt comes into play as it impacts the students' impression of the legitimacy of their study field, its relevance and possible career opportunities. The students and the people working with them experience a sense of uncertainty in the abilities of these students as well. In this regard findings report that students do not have the ability to read and write at tertiary level. They do not want to take on the academic responsibility, and lastly lack the resources due to underprivileged backgrounds.

The above-mentioned discrepancies must be addressed in order to prevent student dropout and burnout as the motivation lowers. This, in turn, impacts the job markets outside of the HEI context as they do not receive suitably-qualified candidates for positions, or to fill 'skills gaps' in the market. This has a financial impact on many levels and increases the uncertainty in students. Although financial demands have been mentioned in the literature, the problem with allocation and distribution of funds seems to be unique to the South African context. The unique financial stressors include the cost of studies, lack of sufficient funding and using bursary money for non-studying purposes. Students do not cope financially and they struggle to manage their finances, do not have funds at all, or use it for purposes for which it is not intended. An example of the latter is when students send their bursary money home to support their families. As a result, students are not able to keep up owing to the lack of study resources to do so. The HEI context is a demanding environment with a demanding lifestyle. Students struggle keeping the balance between academic and social responsibility in which they need to find resources, or support to assist them in the process.

In many instances, support and resources are available, but students fail to find, or take advantage of it because they are too proud to admit their predicament. Pride is an obstacle for many students which they seem unable to shake off. The concept of pride was mentioned

frequently in the World Café sessions, especially when it came to recognising resources that already were available to students. Pride impedes the students' functioning on many levels. It hinders the students trying to adapt to the new lifestyle, coping with all the demands, being too proud to recognise, or reach out for help and being too afraid to be seen as struggling, or as outsider.

The South African student population, unfortunately, comprises many of these individuals because they come from underprivileged backgrounds, poor socio-economic circumstances, stern upbringings and extreme diversity. For some it is a first-time experience coming in contact with such a wide range of individuals and circumstances. It should be a starting point for any person working with students, to handle that individual with sensitivity and awareness because of these factors.

Linked to pride, students also show ignorance regarding their problems. They may be aware of the services available, but believe it is not relevant to them. Paying attention to the support and resources that are available seems irrelevant for many students as they perceive themselves to be invulnerable to any demand, illness, challenge or external force. This is a challenge for the HEI, because practitioners or support services cannot reach them, or make them aware of possible hindrances that they may encounter and resources that are available.

In conclusion, the question can be posed: Why are students still faced with so many challenges that are not managed, or looked after? The answer is that there is no real framework to follow for the HEI in South Africa. There is a dire need, therefore, to explore the demands of first-year students in a HEI in order to create a basis from which they can function. The present study helped establish a new angle of research on the demands section of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model tailored to the South African HEI context. This model provides the individual, student support structures and the HEI with a basis of demands unique to the South African HEI context, assisting and guiding these students to achieve greater personal and institutional success.

### **3.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

The first limitation of the present study was the focus on only one HEI. Although the specific HEI is diverse to an extent, it does not take into account the dynamics, greater diversity and

environments of other universities or HEI's. The student population of the HEI used for the study was more homogeneous. It suited the study's focus, because it contributed to the findings fit for the specific context. The student populations as well as the institutional background of a HEI can be diverse, which could mean different results as outcome. Diversity as such is a factor with dimensions that cannot always be understood, or determined. Repeating this study in different HEI's and with students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, will explore demands and factors in a wider South African spectrum.

Secondly, the only source of data was World Café sessions. This was a sufficient source for the study as it provided a rich and thorough discussion and it consisted of student support structures from all levels of the HEI. Even more sources of data can be included in future studies to ensure that a wider spectrum of participants and students are covered. Using a phenomenological, or a quantitative approach, can be incorporated into the research to add to the findings of the present study.

Thirdly, there were demands mentioned in the literature, but not in the findings of this study. Elaboration on these demands that were not present in the findings may bring forward more demands, or new results, on which to build future models and explain why the demands were not present. This will ensure a better explanation of the findings that was gathered from this qualitative study.

### **3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **For the individual**

This study equips the individual with a basis to work with on the demands that first-year students experience. This will provide information to students and raise awareness on the resources available to them as well as the interventions that can assist students to complete their studies successfully. Furthermore, it provides insight for the individual as to how to be aware of, identify and manage these stressors, in order to prevent future occurrences. This ensures a more successful employee entering the workforce, having better skills and understanding how to manage difficult times and in the long term having developed coping strategies. The recommendation is, therefore, that students and the individuals working with them, use this basis of demands and implement resources accordingly.

### **For the Higher Education Institution**

This research provides the HEI with knowledge on the type of demands that first-year students' experience. As a result, the HEI can allocate resources accordingly in order to assist the student to cope effectively and deal with the transition. This plays a significant role in the student support services that universities will offer. Providing the right resources and being aware of the specific demands, ensures that demands are met, delivering an optimised first-year experience.

Higher Education, furthermore, has a meaningful role in the development of a country and to keep up with international competition. By implementing the findings of the present research study, the HEI can focus on effectively managing the first-year experience in order to address dropout and obtain a higher success rate. This, in turn, assists the HEI in reaching each target, contributing to a more complete and successful HEI, positively influencing profits, stakeholder involvement, and funding received from government for each student who successfully completes their degree.

### **For future research**

The present study provided a sound basis, tailored to the South African HEI context. It also attributed to literature in the field of Industrial Psychology which supports the Industrial Psychologist, Psychometrist, or any individual working with students in the university environment in which students struggle daily with these demands. This assists the practitioners and students with the literature on what can be expected, how to manage it, and successfully allocating needed resources, or preventative measures.

It is recommended that this study serve as a basis for future studies to build on. As stated previously, the research was done in a single HEI, therefore additional literature on studies focusing on other HEIs within South Africa and international third-world countries will add to the framework and complete it. Involving parties outside of the HEI, for example community services, external counsellors and psychologists, can also assist in elaborating on the demands. Certain parties that are involved with students may provide a perspective from outside the university. Additionally, as the present study focused on adapting the JD-R model for the South African context, more research is needed on the resources available to students, the effect of these resources on demands and the result of that on student well-being and success.



Finally, certain demands in the literature were not captured in the present study. Conducting further research on these omitted demands can contribute seeing that it explains certain dynamics and factors that were not found in this study. Such future research can expand the literature and research on this topic, because the need remains for literature on this topic in South Africa.

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