

Academic development practices at Fort Hare University: an epitome of university access

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ABSTRACT

Research on best practices in higher education aimed at empowering the disadvantaged learner is scanty. The Learning Advancement Unit of the University of Fort Hare under the Teaching and Learning centre has been established to support learning among students from diverse backgrounds. A unique feature is that this Unit trains and uses an array of local and international scholars to facilitate higher learning with a view of impacting positively on student academic performance. This paper reports on how learning programmes at the rural-based tri-campus University have been structured, run and integrated using best practices for the benefit of local and international students. Using secondary statistical data, captured from various activities in the programmes on offer, the paper generally reveals how such innovative programmes have impacted positively on academic access and performance, socio-cultural and technological integration. Furthermore, the paper highlights a regrettable trend of underutilisation by students, of the services offered, particularly by international students, and an apparent reluctance by locals and females to take up academic support roles in the Unit. The positive impact of the initiatives make a strong case for investment in marketing and championing these programmes amongst students; at the same time it is clearly important to consider ways of improving staff attraction and retention to ensure continuity within the programmes.

Key terms: Academic development, globalisation, education; student; peer

INTRODUCTION

The post-apartheid higher education system in South Africa has witnessed an invigorated restructuring and accessibility to education by previously disadvantaged groups. Restructuring and transformation was informed by what Schoole (2006) calls “international best practices”. This meant not only borrowing ideas and practices from elsewhere, but increasing educational access to the victims of apartheid (Sutherland, 2009), most of whom were in the rural areas. Consequently, there has been an increase in the number of higher education institutions. One strategy of increasing access and bridging the rural/urban gap involved the merging of institutions. For instance, the East London campus of the University of Rhodes (est. 1981) was incorporated/merged with the University Fort Hare (UFH) (est. 1916) in 2004 (SANTED II Report 2006; Skead, 2006). The purpose was to offer historically black institutions additional city delivery sites, racial heterogeneity, graduate marketability, as well as tapping on combined expertise, programmes and facilities, and diverse feeding into the new UFH (Skead 2006). The strategic location of the rural universities would also provide them an opportunity to play a meaningful role in South Africa’s reconstruction programme by linking it to the human resource development strategy (Nkomo and Schoole, 2007).

Since then, most universities have competed for the best students (local and international) with the urban (former white) universities attracting crème de la crème, while the predominantly rural campuses like UFH have had to contend themselves with low quality students from surrounding areas. This is aptly encapsulated by SANTED II Report (2006) “...students entering the University are from resource-poor environments which have not adequately prepared them for tertiary studies”. This underpreparedness also includes insufficient life skills, communication or linguistic skills, numerate and conceptual analytical competencies (Sutherland, 2009; Archer, 2010). After entering university, some students fail due to a multiplicity of factors chief being: an alienating institutional system, ineffective teaching modes, inadequate resources and facilities, absence and ineffective communication on course requirements and as well as language, skill barriers (Skead, 2006: 3). It is these students who require institutional academic support for them to survive in academia.

The aim of this article is to show the interventions the UFH has instituted, through the Learning Advancement Unit of its Teaching and Learning Centre, to support the ‘not so meritorious’ students that it enrolls. The paper argues that despite the competition for the brightest students by universities, UFH as a ‘rural institution’ has also managed to attract an array of international students who benefit and participate in its academic development programmes. The phenomenon of internationalising education is not unique or new to South Africa (Schoole, 2006); neither should the academic support offered by LAU be perceived as ‘remedial’ (Skead, 2006) but a principle of equity and redress (SANTED II, 2006) and bridging the gap between secondary and higher education (Sutherland, 2009). As such, academic development programmes integrate issues of language and content across the curriculum.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Apartheid is perceived as the most significant and plausible predictor of contemporary South Africa’s education woes (Mahlomaholo, 2010). Nkomo and Schoole (2007) have posited that apartheid succeeded in entrenching a most pernicious form of institutional marginalisation imaginable by creating ethnic-based universities and removing them from catchment areas that contain modern infrastructure, eliminating emerging leadership within these institutions, denying them research infrastructure, and subjecting them to chronic under-funding. These historically black universities (HBUs) have had to endure a legacy and

cumulative impact of apartheid state-planned strategy to imprint white supremacy and privilege, and inculcate permanent black inferiority and impoverishment (Odora-Hoppers, 2009). It is this marginalisation that has resulted in institutions, such as UFH lagging behind other higher education institutions in many respects.

To address the persistent woes in Higher education, policy and legislative imperatives had to be instituted by the 1994 African National Congress-led government (Nkomo and Sehoole, 2007; Mahlomaholo, 2010). The UFH has had to institute programmes aimed at increasing academic access through policies such as the Senate Discretionary Exemption Policy (SDE) and Recognition of Prior Learning policy. In her key note speech at the launch of the 'Grounding Programme' at the University of Fort Hare (UFH) on the 13th July 2009, Prof Odora Hoppers pointed out the intentions of the programme was that of unlocking the potentials of students, transcending the limits of knowledge boundaries, generating new forms of thinking, doing and injecting compassion and innovation into academic work. Odora-Hoppers (2009) highlighted that the core ethic of such programmes or interventions is to alleviate human suffering by affirming one's commitment to self and the community. These innovations stem from the need to address historical imbalances created by the apartheid state. Since the demise of apartheid in 1994, more enrolment figures for most higher education institutions in South Africa have steadily risen. This increase in enrolment makes a case for a requisite improvement in quality instruction and basic provisions. As indicated in Figure 1 (Appendix) the trend in student enrolment at the University of Fort Hare since the inception in 1916.

Under the SDE policy (now the Recognition of Prior Learning or RPL), students who do not meet the normal or basic entry requirements for a degree study are deliberately admitted despite their weak Matric results. Such students, as Twalo (1997) observes, are under-prepared for university study and, as such, their progression from school to university level is not a smooth one. The same goes for those from a privileged academic background who, despite having done well in their Matric, are under-prepared in terms of university academic discourse (Archer 2010; Brussow and Wilkinson, 2010; Twalo, 1997). Moreover, some universities do not have adequate mechanisms in place to address students' under-preparedness. This under-preparedness, in the case of UFH, stems from its traditional student market which is characterised by poor performance of the provincial school system (Bally, 2007), hence his call for UFH to compensate for this in several ways.

The traditional student market for UFH is dominated by the Eastern Cape Province. This province is reportedly the poorest in terms of socioeconomic development, poverty levels and infrastructure (SANTED II Report 2006; <http://www.nda.org.za>). As indicated in Figure 2 (Appendix) the eastern Cape supplies the bulk of UFH's student population.

The student population is mostly derived from the Eastern Cape (74%) while 13% come from other South African provinces. Interestingly, by 2006, international students constituted 13% of the student population, which is in line with UFH's quest to internationalise the institution. It is the location of the institution and historical factors which have impacted negatively on student throughput and retention rates (SANTED II 2006). Rod Bally (2007) cited in Twalo (1997) reported that on average, 34% of the students failed to complete their studies within the stipulated time. Those that completed confront unemployment and 'unemployability'. Reasons for this scenario were traced to second language challenges and a shaky secondary education foundation which rendered students unable to cope with higher education demands. Students, thus find themselves entangled in an ineffective, discriminatory and elitist higher education legacy (Skead, 2006).

The student challenges are further compounded by the fact that increased access to higher education has resulted in academics being overwhelmed by deluge of under-prepared students. Some lecturers have resorted to unorthodox instructional strategies, such as giving

multiple choice questions and group assignments to reduce marking load (Twalo, 2006) thus compromising quality in the process. Moreover, the academics lack practical skills in assisting students having problems of meeting the standards of higher education studies (SANTED II, 2006). University academics, unlike teachers in other sectors such as primary and secondary, receive minimal induction in that role particularly in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment (Brawn and Trahar, in Sutherland, Claxton and Pollard 2003). As a result, they adopt a non-reflective and uncritical ‘canteen culture’ which is anathema to academic best practices and detrimental to students’ learning (Claxton and Pollard, 2003). It is this culture that permeates to the students they teach with deleterious effects on their learning. Hence the call by Stes (2009) for institutions to invest money into student centred active learning, assessment and curriculum development. Barnes, Dzansi, Wilkinson and Viljoen (2009) have posited that most tertiary students have embraced surface learning instead of deep learning. The former, result in them acquiring low level of understanding since the aim is to cram for exams. Hence Brussow and Wilkinson’s (2010) advocacy for engaged learning to encourage underprepared students to become more effective learners.

Academic Interventions at the University of Fort Hare

Cognisant of the foregoing, UFH, through its vision and mission, has devised coping mechanisms aimed at increasing student throughput and retention rates. These mechanisms are meant to inform strategy and in the process identify students “at risk” to meet their demands and expectations. (SANTED II, 2006). The establishment of the three-Unit Teaching and Learning Centre in 2004 should be seen in this light. The UFH website, <http://www.ufh.ac.za/centres/tlc/> encapsulates the core function of the TLC as:

“... to address the changing needs of Higher Education with the focus on striving towards teaching and learning excellence, programme development, student assessment and success, experiential and e-Learning through critically reflective practice, professional development of academic staff and learner academic support and development.

In an attempt to generate new forms of thinking and doing, the Learning Advancement Unit (LAU) of the TLC has come up with innovative student support programmes aimed at not only unlocking students’ potential, but enhancing their academic performance, and access. Equal access provides for the students that are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion (Nkoane, 2010). LAU has made it its mission to meaningfully contribute to UFH’s quest to increase academic access to previously disadvantaged groups and in the process countering the legacies of apartheid. To achieve this, three key strategies focusing on teaching and learning processes have been adopted viz:

- a. Provision of student support and development initiatives
- b. Nurturing a culture off excellence through research in teaching, learning and re-curriculation
- c. Establishment of internal and external partners in pursuit of development in teaching and learning in higher education

The above strategies encapsulate the issues of educational access, in the process trying to ensure bridging the rural/urban gap created by the apartheid system and promoting international integration. This paper reports on how learning programmes at the rural-based tri-campus University have been structured, run and integrated using best practices for the

symbiotic benefit of local and international students. It attempts to report on the integrated initiatives the University of Fort Hare has undertaken to increase and to positively impact on academic development.

The Learning Programmes

The Learning Advancement Unit of the Teaching and Learning Centre runs a series of voluntary academic programmes under the auspices of Peer Assisted Student Services (PASS). It is an organic outflow of well established Supplemental Instruction principles and processes that integrate academic initiatives (Skead, 2006). Basically, the programme seeks to offer student academic support in the areas of language and writing and subject matter or content in subjects traditionally perceived as 'risk' or difficult using a peer collaborative and active learning model. Peer facilitators are rigorously selected students who are potentially knowledgeable, and willing to assist their peers in the area(s) they are pursuing at under or postgraduate level. Supplemental Instruction (SI) for instance, targets historically difficult courses such the natural sciences and accounting. The Supplemental Instruction (SI) programme "...focuses on helping students understand the subject content..." (Twalo, 2008: 3). The programme is non-remedial and proactive and uses an active learning, peer-collaborative model whose quality is assured. Peer and staff observations are a quality assurance mechanism built within the university's SI and PASS systems. Moreover, student attendance is voluntary and this capacitates the conscientious student. The students are actively engaged in process learning. In an effort to offer the students quality education, the Peer facilitators concurrently receive extensive ongoing training and supervision by trained qualified full-time staff. Each facilitator maintains a portfolio for self evaluation and reflection.

As regards issues of language, LAU offers the Language Writing Advancement Programme (LWAP) and the Computer Assisted Language Learning Programme (CALL). These are housed at the Alice and East London campuses Writing Centres. The LWAP focuses on the development of the students' proficiency in academic writing with the assistance of peer facilitators who are called Language and Writing Consultants (LWC). Acher (2010) has posited that historically disadvantaged students need assistance with academic writing for them to acquire discipline specific conventions. Such academic literacies are imperative for students if them to survive in academia. The unit also runs the Placement and Access Testing (PAT) programme aimed at identifying students with language and numeracy challenges through a battery of tests, with view to, not only assisting them after enrolling at UFH, but informing UFH's academic practices. The PAT test will soon be replaced by the National Benchmark Test (NBT). The aim of the NBT is to assess the 'entry level academic literacy, quantitative literacy and Mathematics proficiencies as well as providing additional information for placing students in appropriate curricular routes' (<http://nbt.ac.za>).

In all these programmes, the unit uses a peer collaboration culture where students collectively referred to as Peer facilitators (PFs) assist fellow students. This is a cohort of local and international scholars who facilitate higher learning with a view of impacting positively on student academic performance. Those responsible for language and writing issues are referred to as Language and Writing Consultants (LWCs) and those focussing on subject matter are called Supplemental Instruction Leaders (SIL). Both categories undergo rigorous training and mentoring after which successful candidates receive a 20 credit National Qualification Framework (NQF 6) rated Certificate in the Facilitation of Learning (CFL). As a quality assurance measure, the PFs are mentored by knowledgeable consultants. Mentoring is an established professional support or nurturing strategy world over for student

learning and adjustment and involves tasks and behaviours such as modelling, encouraging and assessing the protégés (Lazarus and Tay, 2003 in Sutherland, Claxton and Pollard, 2003). Each student facilitator at the UFH also maintains a reflective portfolio aimed at informing their facilitation processes and practices. It is in this vein that LAU has adopted a unique framework in the training and assessment of Peer Facilitators.

The Certificate in the Facilitation of Learning

The Certificate in the Facilitation of Learning (CFL) is a course which is offered by the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) based on unit standards (20 credits) registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) within the higher education band (NQF 6), but not aligned with any programme in the university's PQM (QMA02). CFL quality assurance issues are derived from the UFH policy framework using a developmental and total quality management perspective. The objective of the CFL is to train and equip peer facilitators with best teaching and facilitation practices that will enhance student academic performance. In addition, the programme strives to ensure that the services offered to the clients are of high quality, as per the guidelines of the UFH Policy on Quality Assurance.

The CFL quality assurance regime that ensures quality:

1. Compliance with the portfolio requirements
2. An assessment instrument specifying three categories (NC =Not Compliant; C=Compliant and HC=Highly Compliant)
3. Continual improvement and effectiveness of the CFL to satisfy both internal and external customers (satisfaction ratings).
4. Ensuring that LAU staff takes responsibility for quality, ensuring they receive what they need and deliver more than what is expected.
5. Maintaining a passion for continuous improvement by continuously improving processes, services and staff performance e.g. Programme Teams; training; IPA/PDPs

Theoretical Framework

The globalisation theory is central to an understanding of the post-apartheid education trends in South Africa. The education system is inextricably intertwined to global economic and social trends. There is a growing demand for higher education particularly the need for widening initial access to higher education (van der Wende, 2003). Universities are especially 'insufficiently responsive to the demand for more diversified and flexible forms of higher education' (van der Wende 2003, 2). To close this demand gap, some higher education institutions have resorted to exporting access and services to cross border regions (van der Wende 2003) in line with the globalisation philosophy. Schools are not immune from paradigmatic changes especially pressures and demands exerted by parents (Collinson and Cook, 2007). Globalisation has resulted in new thinking and practices. For instance, post colonial (Apartheid) educational theory has taken cognisance of the impact Bantu education had, for instance, on current trends in higher education. Even though enrolment and access have improved, it has been important to retain those that access higher education. In the South African context, the opening up of educational access to the previously disadvantaged groups led to formally black universities being overwhelmed by, regrettably, lowly qualified students as meritorious students were attracted to formally white universities, thus compromising the 'quality' of education services on offer. Within the context of the globalisation theory, this article endeavours to critique issues of access, internationalisation and interventions (bridging the rural/urban divide) vis-à-vis university education in the South African context.

Research Questions

It is based on the above background that the questions below have been formulated to assist in the research;

- 3.1 To what extent do UFH students utilise the academic services offered by the teaching and learning centre?
- 3.2 What is the impact of the academic programmes on students' education?
- 3.3 How do these academic programmes contribute to UFH's quest internationalise the institution?

METHODOLOGY

The study fundamentally adopted a quantitative methodological approach. Secondary statistical data were randomly selected from the PASS activities (LWAP, SI, including consultations and observation reports) done in 2008 and 2009. Primary data on Certificate in the Facilitation of Learning (CFL) was captured from the 2009 LAU programme statistics. More data were collected from the programme evaluation instruments or surveys. The data collected included attendance registers for SI in 2008, assignment response forms for LWC in 2008, consultations both for SI and LWC Programs in 2008 and on CFL recruitment in 2009. Data were captured by category, namely; South African and International students to investigate programme utilisation by category.

The statistical data from programme activities were run and analysed using excel, while qualitative data from peer observation reports and evaluation instruments were analysed for their content. As Khuzwayo and Chikoko (2009:147) observe "...qualitative data were useful in capturing the richness and complexity of the respondents' understanding..." The perceived impact of the programmes in question was thus discerned.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Utilisation of LAU Programmes by UFH Students

An analysis was done on utilisation of LAU support programmes by local and international students. As indicated in Figure 3 (Appendix) the rate of programme utilisation by UFH students is almost consistent.

The results in Figure 3 depict a clear trend of underutilisation of PASS services by international students with an average utilisation rate of 21% to 79% for the South African students. This trend could be attributed to the fact that international students only constitute about 13% of the student body. A second probability is that, the university's offerings are 'free' hence serious individuals voluntarily utilise them. It is also probable that some international students possibly perceive these academic support programmes as remedial hence may not find merit in utilising them. For the record, over twenty thousand students utilise the SI programme annually. The trend also depicts that international students utilised the Language Writing Advancement Programme (23%) more than the rate they utilised the SI programme (19%). This could be attributed to the fact that students consult more on assignment related issues and submit drafts for consideration before submitting them suggesting a higher utilisation rate in this programme.

The perceived Impact of LAU Programmes on Student Education

An analysis was done to evaluate the perceived impact of the LAU academic support programmes on student education. The students were probed on how LAU programmes have impacted on their academic performance. Their responses were captured and analysed as indicated in Table 1 (Appendix).

The results in Table 1 depict the perceived academic and social impact of LAU support programmes on students. These data were collected from the programme evaluation instruments. LAU seems to be making a huge impact under the CALL programme where ninety-three percent of the students interviewed highlighted that their computer skills and competence have since increased. In terms of student academic performance, 89% of the students reported that their individual examination marks had improved. This can be attributed to the support they receive, especially from the Supplemental Instructional Programme and the Language and Writing Advancement Programme. The LAU support programmes also made an impact with regards to perceived customer satisfaction, with 86% of the students reporting that they were satisfied with the LAU programmes on offer. In addition to being satisfied with the support programmes on offer, another 86% of the students reported that these programmes created independent learning and were motivating. This could be explained by the fact that LAU employs the best teaching and facilitation practices which are customer oriented and tries to maintain a high degree of objectivity and professionalism in delivering such services. This promotes the quest to bridge the rural/urban divide. This is so because these support programmes strive to assist students to make them be on the same page with peers from urban institutions or backgrounds. Increased satisfaction as highlighted by some students implies that UFH students will always feel that they are at the right institution, regardless of its rural location.

It is also important to note that LAU support programmes do not only offer increased collaboration on the academic ground, but also strive to ensure increased and improved social integration between the students. The University of Fort Hare is a multi-national and cultural institution whose student body is diverse and is constituted by students from various academic, economic and social backgrounds. With regards to this, it was interesting to note that 76% of the students reported that through LAU support programmes have managed to integrate and interact well with other students of different nationals and social backgrounds. The peer facilitators are also drawn from a pool of both local and international students. The relationships created are not only student-student relationships, but also between peer facilitators and students. Archer (2010) was perhaps correct when he posited that writing centre programmes for instance, enable students to be, not only 'literate' but to master a set of social practices. Such collaboration creates integration and interaction of locals and international students, both at peer facilitator level and student level. This 'academic socialisation' (Archer, 2010) is in line with Globalisation and UFH's quest to promote internationalisation of the institution and encourages exchange of information, ideas and cultural knowledge. It is an approach that inducts students into an institution that is presumably homogeneous in terms of norms, values and cultural practices (Archer, 2010).

Internationalisation of UFH

In Table 1, it was noted that one of the perceived impacts of LAU support programmes on students was increased social integration and interaction between local and international students. This collaboration in way promotes and encourages local and international students to engage and participate in making UFH a recognised institution locally, regionally and internationally. As such, the peer facilitators drawn from a pool of

local and international students also form the basis of internationalising UFH at the grassroots level. One of the strategic goals of the University of Fort Hare is to internationalise it. It is from this quest that LAU participates in UFH's bid to achieve this goal by offering support programmes to address the academic and social needs of both local and international students. The UFH also uses an array of local and international peer facilitators to assist in offering these support services to all students. The analysis as indicated in Figure 4 (Appendix) reveals the recruitment of peer facilitators in the LAU programmes by nationality.

The LWAP had a total of 18 Language and Writing Consultants for both Alice and East London campus. Of the 18 LWCs, 67% were international students, while 33% were local students. This trend is in line with internationalising UFH, although local peer facilitators are few. The analysis in Figure 4 also depicts recruitment of LWCs by gender. The programme recruited more female facilitators (61%) to male facilitators (39%), with more international female students (64%) compared to 36% local female students. Recruitment of more female students to the LWAP can be attributed to the fact that female students are more oriented to arts and language subjects compared to their male counterparts who are science-inclined. This trend overallly depicts a regrettable participation by local students in the LWAP.

The Supplemental Instruction Programme

The results for the supplemental instruction depict a similar trend. As indicated in Figure 5 (Appendix) the recruited local and international student peer facilitators are in contrasting numbers. Seventy-one percent SI facilitators were drawn from a pool of international students compared to 29% local students. However, in contrast to the results in Figure 3 with respect to the male-female ratio, it was observed that there were more male facilitators in the SI programme (69%), compared to 31% females. This suggests that female students do not have passion for natural science subjects and also seem reluctant to teach and facilitate on content-based courses.

Consolidated Peer-Facilitator Inventory

The consolidated inventory of SI and LWC peer facilitators as indicated in Figure 6 (Appendix) shows a regrettably low participation rate by local students. Of the 67 peer facilitators, 70% were international students, while 30% were local students. In addition, fewer females (39%) seemed to be willing to take up peer facilitation responsibilities compared to their male counterparts (61%). South African students are reluctant to take peer facilitation roles judging by their (very) low application ratio (Results not included herein). This is clearly a regrettable trend in as far as taking up peer facilitation roles is concerned. On gender basis, there are more male SI facilitators than females in the science courses.

Peer Facilitators Resignations

The purpose of this analysis was to monitor the trend in resignations by nationality and by gender. This has been necessitated by the fact that fewer locals and females in general, take up peer facilitation roles respectively. Peer facilitator resignations impact on LAU's quest to provide quality support programmes to the students and discourages continuity of the programmes. We need to point in passing that most SI leaders cite 'pressure of work' and 'personal reasons' as the core reasons for the resignations. The resignations frequency among the peer facilitators from LAU is as indicated in Figure 7 (Appendix).

As shown in Figure 7, 71% of the facilitators who resigned were male, while 29% were female. However, considering that female peers are fewer than male, this rate of resignation is quite higher if turned into absolute figures. With regards to nationality, a regrettable trend is also observed since 40% of the locals resigned, taking into cognisance their lower contribution to the peer facilitators body. This has negative impacts on UFH's quest of internationalising the institution as the social and academic collaborations created by LAU programme offerings are reduced. Unless the peer facilitator is replaced, this can impact on student performance as there is continuity of these programmes to the affected students. Thus, efforts to bridge the rural/urban divide and put UFH students on the same page with other students from urban universities are compromised. An analysis of peers enrolled in the CFL course as at July 2009 is as indicated in Figure 8 (Appendix).

From Figure 8, it is clear that 78% of the peer facilitators that enrolled for CFL were international students while local students constituted 22% only. This trend could be attributed to the low numbers of the locals in the peer facilitators' body. Once a peer facilitator is engaged, he or she is automatically compelled to enrol for the CFL. The activities that are done during CFL courses promote social and academic interaction and integration of the peer facilitators. One way or the other, the facilitators can share their personal and country experiences based on academic, personal and social backgrounds. Such collaboration promotes academic cooperation and internationalisation which are key tenets of globalisation. It is this shared experience that facilitators take with them to their peer students. This assists in helping fellow students, improve their understanding of different course concepts. Such collaboration also creates a confident cohort of learners who can stand an equal chance of showing their personal, social and academic skills just like any other student from any University, be it urban or rural-based.

CONCLUSION

South African universities, including Fort Hare are characterised by student diversity and educational under-preparedness and finding ways of designing interventions to accommodate this diversity is critical (Archer, 2010). From the foregoing, it is concluded that the Learning Advancement Unit of the University of Fort Hare offers several programmes or interventions aimed at academically empowering students from diverse social backgrounds. The majority of these come from poor and marginalised rural communities of the Eastern Cape. The university, in an effort to internationalise and globalise, is also host to a significant number of international students (13%) most of who come from Zimbabwe. The free programmes on offer are mostly utilised by local students. Regrettably, there is a low utilisation rate from international students; only a paltry 21% of these utilised the PASS services during 2009. Paradoxically, most of the peer facilitators are international students, considering they only constitute 13% of the student body. South African students are generally reluctant to take up peer facilitation roles, in particular, female students.

LAU programmes are perceived as impacting positively on student academic performance by the student themselves. In addition, these interventions promote the bridging of the rural/urban divide and internationalisation through social and academic interaction. It is through these academic development programmes that the university has been able to internationalise. It is mainly by recruiting international students that UFH promotes the internationalisation of the institution. As with any academic programme, the UFH programmes are not without challenges. For instance, the rate of resignations especially of locals is high, given their lower proportion in the peer facilitator body. This potentially slows programme continuity and possibly impact negatively on student performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The perceived positive impact of the LAU programmes makes a strong case for investment in the marketing of the programmes across campuses. Reality on the ground shows that some academics are generally reluctant to buy into such interventions due to perceived ‘interference’ of their academic autonomy. The paper recommends that those entrusted with offering academic interventions should champion such programmes amongst students and staff. Staff development interventions are positively correlated to student achievement (Stes, 2009). Furthermore, institutions should put in place measures to improve staff attraction and retention to ensure the continuity of the noble programmes. It is also suggested that concerted effort be made to change the mindset of the South African higher education student. The student should not be a perpetual recipient of instruction, but a provider of such an instruction. Central government pours billions for student support into universities. Staff have a collective responsibility of ensuring that students benefit from such grants. Such efforts dovetail with South Africa’s human resource development strategy (Nkomo and Sehoole, 2007). Such policy efforts and measures would mitigate the apartheid legacies.

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APPENDIX

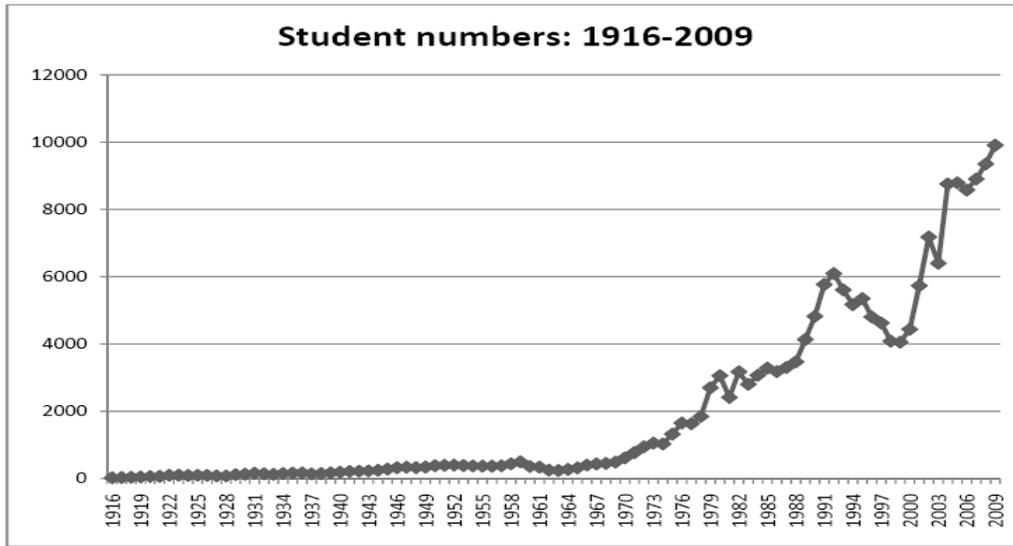


Figure 1: Student numbers at UFH (1916 – 2009) Source: R. Bally, 2009.

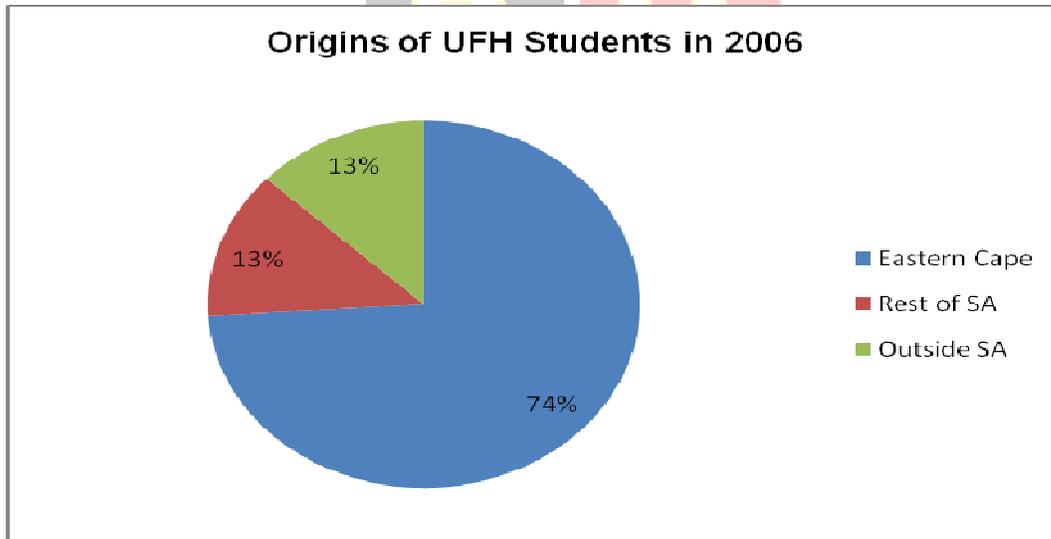


Figure 2: Origins of UFH students: Source: UFH SANTED II Report, 2006

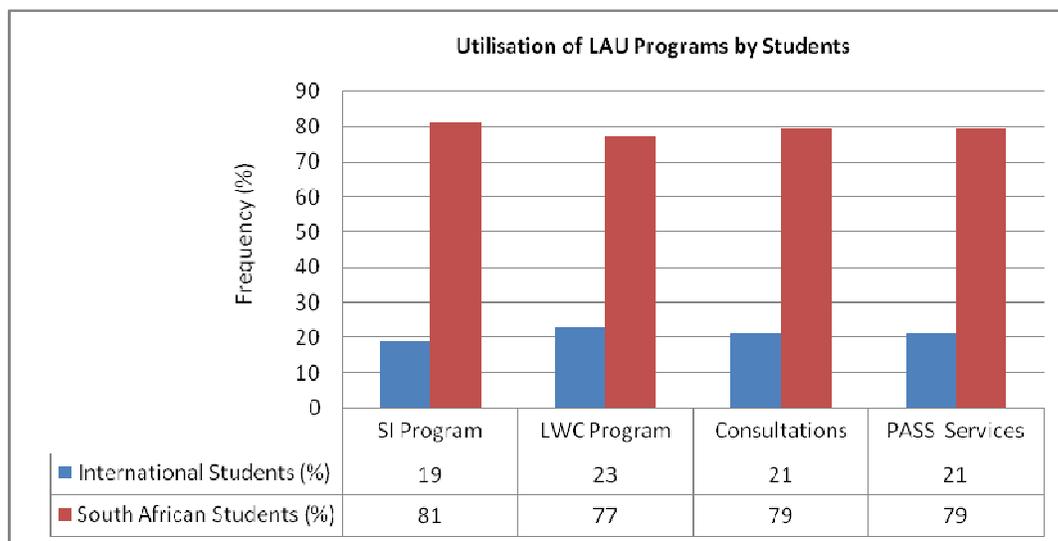


Figure 3: Utilisation of LAU programmes by local and International Students in 2009
Source: LAU 2008 programme statistics

Table 1: Satisfaction Rates of LAU Programmes by Students

	Observed impact	%age frequency
1	Increased client satisfaction	86
2	Increased individual pass rates	89
3	Increased understanding of concepts and academic skills	83
4	Increased independent learning and motivation	86
5	Improved computer literacy and competence	93
6	Increased social interaction and integration with peers	76

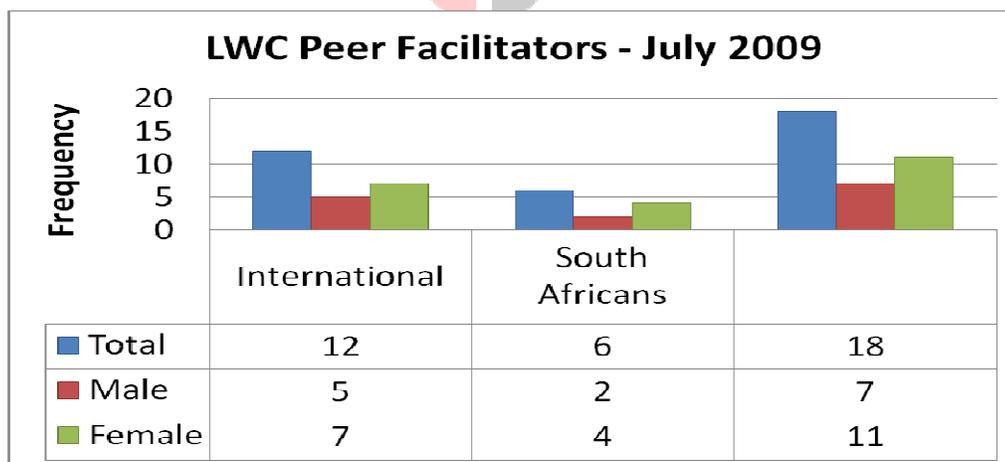


Figure 4: Language and Writing Consultants as at July 2009. Source: LAU programme statistics (2009)

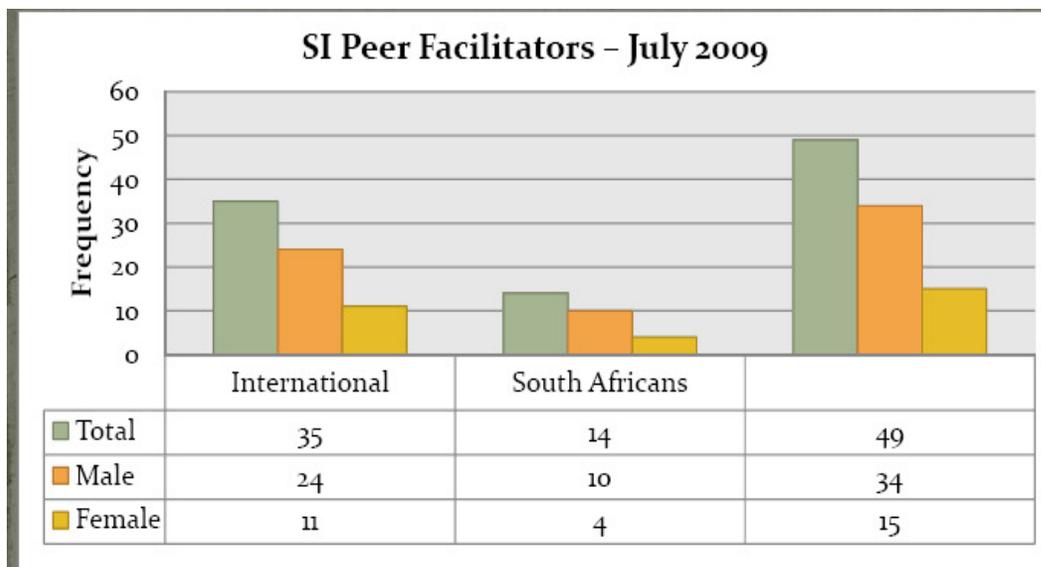


Figure 5: Supplemental Instruction Facilitators as at July 30 2009 Source: LAU programme statistics (2009).

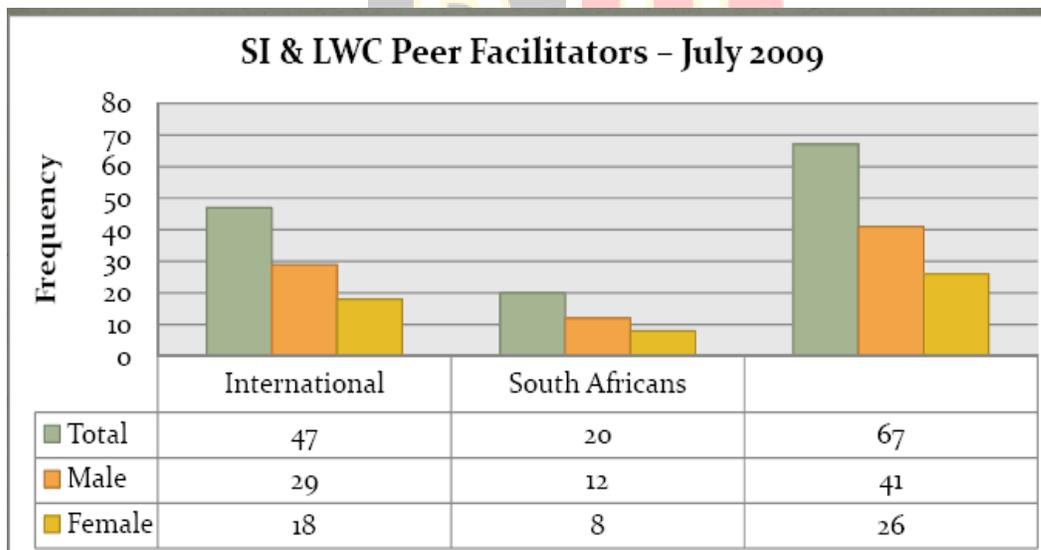


Figure 6: SI and LWC Peer facilitators as at July 30 2009. Source: LAU programmes statistics (2009)

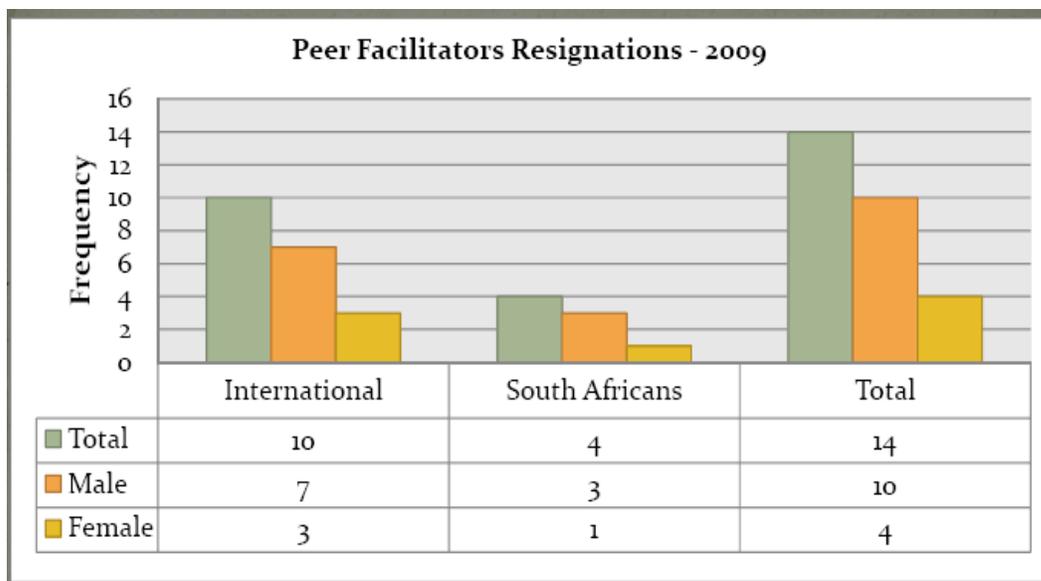


Figure 7: Peer facilitators' resignations as at July 2009. Source: LAU programmes statistics (2009)

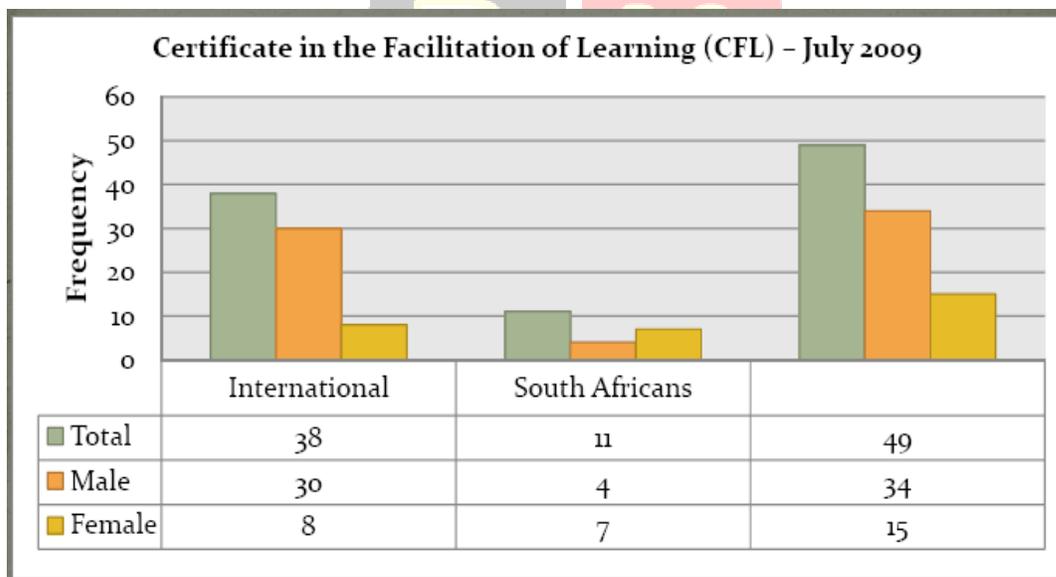


Figure 8: Peers registered for the CFL course. Source: LAU programmes statistics