EXPLORING THE VIEWS OF ADULT LEARNERS ABOUT THEIR LEARNING IN A

POSTGRADUATE NURSING PROGRAM IN A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN KZN

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MASTER'S IN NURSING (EDUCATION)

BY

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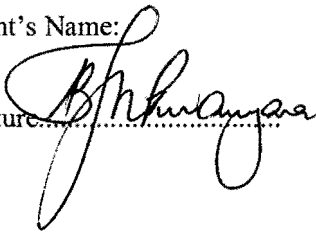

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JANUARY 2012

DECLARATION

I, Thobile Barbara Nkwanyana, declare that this dissertation titled "Exploring the views of adult learners about their learning in a postgraduate nursing program in a Higher Education Institution in KZN" is my original work. It has never submitted for any other purpose, or any other university. Sources of information utilized in this work have been acknowledged in the reference list.

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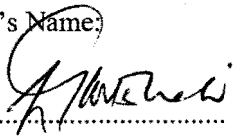
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Tsheliwe, my children Noluthando, Nqobile, Nompilo and my grandchild Sbongakonke Unathi, my sisters and their families and all my friends for their love, support and encouragement.

ABSTRACT

Background

Minister Pandor (2008) challenged universities to increase access to higher education institutions by setting the goal as a participation rate of 20 per cent by 2015, as stated in the National Plan for Higher Education (2001). The participation rate should be augmented by recruiting and increasing numbers of 'non-traditional' students-including mature adults. While increasing numbers of adult learners entering higher education is applauded, literature shows that they are subject to many challenges. The main challenge is associated with the need for updating adult learners whose existing skills have grown rusty; the aspiration of skills and knowledge to seek progression to more responsible jobs; and the need for new and additional skills, grafted onto the existing levels of competence in response to new opportunities for adult learners. Therefore the purpose of this study was to explore the views of adult learners about their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme.

Method

A mixed- method approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods was used. The whole population (N=81) included nine (9) students from the BN Honours programme and seventy two (72) students from the Coursework Master's programme. All students were from the University of KwaZulu Natal, and they were all requested to participate in the study. Qualitative data was collected through focus group interviews and quantitative data was collected using questionnaires. About 62 students returned completed questionnaires, thus making the response rate 77 per cent.

Results

The research results indicated that teaching methodologies used at postgraduate level focused on both positive and negative teaching methods. A number of teaching methods were cited as positive methods. These had collaborative learning, active involvement in the learning process, and observation of adult learning principles. The study findings also indicated that teaching methods at postgraduate level

focused on negative teaching methods. These involved demanding and time-consuming teaching methods, instability owing to a change of lecturer, poor class work preparation , and lecturers' knowledge and experience not being of a high enough standard.

The results also revealed that various learning styles in nursing education have been identified. These include: visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic; Kolb's learning styles, logical, social, and systems person,(this doesn't sound good...reword 'systems person') deep learning, surface learning, and strategic approach. Although a number of learning styles have been identified, the results demonstrated that the students learn differently depending on the way they perceive information.

The results indicated that factors facilitating learning focused on support and availability of resources. The study findings also showed that support for engaging at postgraduate level was from a number of sources. Peer, lecturer, and family support were quoted as providing the main sources of support.

The results also revealed that although a number of constraints were alluded to, lack of access to a computer, demands of employment, and time schedules were highlighted as high on the list of constraints.

Recommendations

Recommendations focused on the range of factors hindering leaning at postgraduate level. Financial aid, implementation of measures to rectify difficulties facing adult learners such as family responsibilities, computer classes as part of a programme of study, support by management and nursing education to adult learners involved in any relevant programme of study. Recommendations also included further research into this problem targeting specific aspects of the phenomenon, taking into account the views of adult learners at postgraduate level.

List of Abbreviations

CAI Computer Assisted Instruction

CBL   Case Based Learning

CHE   Council of Higher Education

DE   Distance Learning

DOH   Department of Health

EBL   Enquiry Based Learning

HE   Higher Education

HEI   Higher Education Institution

ICT   Information Communication Technology

MBTI Myers Briggs Type Indicator

PBL   Problem Based Learning

RPL Recognition of Prior Learning

STEPS Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Background to the Study

Literature (Chao, De Recco and Flynn, 2007; Buchler, Castle, Osman and Walters, 2007; Castle, Munro and Osman, 2006; The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2000; Heelan, 2001) reflects that the stereotyped image of the university student as one who is 18 to 23 years old in residential, full-time study is being challenged by a new reality. Working adults, referred to as non-traditional students, are pursuing higher education studies because in most countries economies are information driven. For adults to succeed in the current world of economy they have to advance their knowledge time and again. Global demands and rapid changes in society, economy, and technology and in the professions have led to a developing culture of lifelong learning especially amongst adults so as to keep up to date with these demands (Imel, 1998; Murray-Harvey, (2005).

Kim, Collins, Williamson and Chapman (2004) asserted that the increasing number of adult learners is changing the nature of higher education in terms of programme delivery, the services needed to recruit and retain adult learners, and the meaning of learning in the lives of adults. These authors predicted that in the next decade, the number of adult learners accessing higher education is going to double. In line with this observation, Hollberg (2003) reported that empirical research into adult learning has increased during the last two decades and a major part of it has focused on adult bridging techniques and adult pedagogy. Postgraduate nursing students are no exception. Boylston and Lacey (2004) reported that registered nurses represent a

significant group of non-traditional learners in higher education and these students are part of a growing pool of consumers whose needs and constraints differ from the traditional university or college student (O'Brien and Renner, 2002).

In the United Kingdom, the percentage of adult learners enrolled in colleges and universities seeking a degree or certificate grew from about 12% in 1970 to about 18% in 2002, an increase of 50% (National Centre for Education Studies, 2004). In South Africa, the Council of Higher Education-CHE (2007) reported a general increase of 23% in the number of adult learners in South African public higher education institutions. This may be attributed to policies on opening access and widening participation to higher education and the funding framework in Higher Education (in the South African context) where higher education institutions generate more funds through postgraduate studies (Castle, et al, 2007, CHE, 2006).

South African universities, as stated by Castle, Munro, and Osman (2006) have responded in a variety of ways to national policy directives to broaden access to mature adult learners. In her 2008 budget speech, the National Minister of Education spoke to the theme of "Education changes lives, changes communities," translating this as greater access, transformation and quality in the context of higher education. Minister Pandor (2008) challenged universities to increase access to higher education institutions by targeting the participation rate of 20% by 2015, as stated in the National Plan for Higher Education (2001), and to augment the participation rate by recruiting an increasing number of 'non-traditional' students including mature adults, women, workers and disabled people. According to the minister, the increased access will be matched by increased success.

While increasing numbers of adult learners entering higher education is applauded, literature shows that they are subject to many challenges. The main challenge is associated with progression and 'throughput'- the need for updating adult learners whose existing skills have grown rusty, the aspiration for skills and knowledge to seek progression to more responsible employment and the need for new and additional skills grafted on the existing levels of competence in response to new opportunities for adult learners. The research by Field and Schuller (2000) conducted in Scotland and Northern Ireland in 1999-2000 revealed that 68% of working adults were at substantial risk of not completing their studies, by virtue of their being employed full-time while studying part-time (NCES,2004). Similar findings were observed in the study by Choy (2002) that adult learners are at great risk of not achieving their education goals, especially those who were working while studying, this having a negative effect on their results. Tinto's (1982) study also showed that the completion rate of non-traditional students remained constant at around 45%. The study by Berker, Horn and Carroll (2003) on adult learners who were working full-time and studying part-time also reported that non-traditional students had trouble completing their studies; after six years in postgraduate studies 62% of these adult learners had not completed a degree or certificate and were no longer enrolled. The findings from Choy'study (2002) showed that three years after enrolling in a college or university, nearly half of non-traditional students had left school without a degree. The same study reported a completion rate of less than 15% of those who were enrolled at colleges and universities. These studies attribute the poor success rate to a number of challenges associated with balancing studies with work and family demands as well as the mismatch between teaching and learning styles.

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Glenn (2009); Hayes and Flannery (1996) pointed out that successful learning by adults in higher education institutions is partly associated with teaching styles used and partly with educators' knowledge of students' individual preferred learning styles. Understanding the learning needs, learning styles and preferences of each group of learners is crucial to their success. Adult learning requires a switch from teacher-directed learning to learner-centred approaches important to adult learning theories (Hayes and Flannery, 1996). According to Conti (2009), one of the distinguishing characteristics of adult learning is learner-centredness. In line with Conti's view, Alav (1995) asserted that the schools of nursing in universities around the world are responding to the need to ensure successful learning of adults by adopting adult nursing learning approaches to education. Although a change from teacher-centredness to learner-centredness is recommended, Spencer and Jordan (1999) indicated that this poses the major challenge to most of adult learners undertaking studies in higher education.

Malcolm Knowles (1968, 1980), drawing on his experience of teaching postgraduate students at Harvard University, introduced the concept of adult learning through his theory of 'andragogy'; the process of engaging adult learners with the structure of learning experience to distinguish adult learning in terms of age, from pre-adult schooling. His theory set the assumption that adults learn differently from children (Conti, 2009; Knightely (2007). Conti (2009) stated that later Knowles changed his position, indicating that the difference owed more to the focus of learning in the continuum of teacher-directed learning to student-centred learning than to age difference. Knowles appreciated that either approach might be appropriate depending on the situation or content to be delivered.

The study by Cyr (2007) revealed that knowledge of adult learning principles, educational theories and different learning styles of learners is critical to all educators in dealing successfully with adult learners. Cercone (2008) stated that understanding learning styles as well as adult learners' thinking styles (reflective, creative, practical and conceptual) is important in that these styles determine how individuals approach learning tasks and the way learners take in and process information. This knowledge by learners themselves may also enhance lifelong learning; students may be motivated to learn because they understand their learning styles (Coffield in Cercone, 2008) thus effective transfer of learning may be achieved (O'Shea, 2003).

According to Cercone (2008), insisting that educators and students understand various learning and thinking styles before embarking on a teaching process is crucial because most adults conceptualize learning as an instructor-designed and instructor-led endeavour that occurs in classrooms where students sit passively learning from the instructor who is dominating the students. This requires changing the mindset of adult learners introducing them to adult learning principles and the expectations from them according to the adult learning theories. In the study by Cyr (2007) it emerged that through understanding their learning styles, adult learners can accept responsibility for their own learning and this can enhance their ability to engage in various methods of learning (O'Shea, 2003). O'Shea (2003) further stated that when planning learning activities, the course facilitator must take into consideration adult learners' learning styles so as to achieve effective transfer of learning. Felder and Brent (2005) associated learning-related problems with a mismatch between teaching and learning styles advising that addressing these issues is critical for successful learning. O'Shea (2003) for example, reported that self-

directed learning can cause anxiety and frustration for students who are accustomed to the traditional lecture method of passively receiving course content.

Thompson and Crutchlow (1993) pointed out that most of the research on adult learning and learning styles has been done in general education, not in other professions such as nursing. Brookfield in Stuntman (1995) noted that research has been conducted on aspects of adult learning such as self-directed learning, critical reflection, experiential learning, learning how to learn and distance learning; further research still needs to be conducted in other areas of adult learning which would help one to have greater influence on how the education and training of adults is conducted. Stuntman (1995) also pointed out that research on adult education places greater emphasis on qualitative studies than on survey questionnaires or research through experimental designs. According to Stuntman, studies using a mixed-methods approach may contribute significantly to adult-learning research.

1.2 Problem statement

Knightley (2007) stated that throughout the world, policy-makers are demonstrating their commitment to widening participation in education by promoting alternative pathways to gaining academic qualifications, especially to non-traditional students, namely adults. According to the CHE (2007); Castle, et al (2006) ;(Brooks, 2003), however, adult learners in higher education have attracted no special attention and are rarely studied. CHE further pointed out, "although there is a history of adult learners in public higher education in South Africa, it is largely an undocumented one. Adult learners whether part-time, full-time, occasional or continuing education, students have gone unnoticed". Sharing the similar observation Hollberg (2003) also

reported that research into adult learning is essential and as yet insufficient. According to Sissel, Hansman and Kasworm (2001), adult learning programmes are marginalized, neglected and ultimately left out. These authors further state that adult students enter a higher education arena to learn advanced knowledge in relation to their own meaningful structures, their world, and their future, yet the traditional classroom is not necessarily structured to accommodate their needs and learning styles. More importantly, Arthurs (2007) Astin, Closs and Hughes (2006) pointed out that educators have inadequate knowledge to deal with adult learners and classrooms of students with diverse learning styles. Such knowledge is one of the major means to boost students' performance (Zhang, 2006). Literature (NCES, 2004; Berker et al., 2003; Choy, 2002; American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2001; Tinto, 1982) shows that success rate in programmes undertaken by adult learners is also very low for a number of reasons.

In summary, literature shows that opening access to non-traditional students is increasing the numbers of adult learners in higher education institutions; the higher education institutions on the other hand are under pressure to ensure 'throughputs' –the need for new additional skills to be grafted onto existing levels of competence in response to new opportunities, and timeous completion of studies to benefit those students who receive grants from the education department. The higher education learning environment is promoting the move from teacher-centeredness to student-centeredness and the use of teaching approaches that observe adult learning principles in teaching adults; these students however are less willing to take responsibility for their learning; regressing from the characteristics of the adult learners to those of pedagogy because of their previous academic socialization. More importantly, understanding adult learners and their different learning styles is crucial to successful learning; however, most

educators are not familiar with the concept of learning styles and are not equipped to deal with a classroom of adult students having diverse learning styles. This study therefore intended to establish the views of postgraduate students on their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme in a higher education institution; also, the teaching and learning styles that facilitate their learning.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the views of adult learners on their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme in higher education institution in KZN.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To explore the views of adult learners on their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme.

2. To identify the teaching strategies used in a postgraduate nursing programme.

3. To describe the learning styles of students in a postgraduate nursing programme.

4. To explore factors facilitating adult learners' learning in a postgraduate nursing programme.

5. To explore factors hindering adult learners from learning in a postgraduate nursing programme.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How do adult learners' view their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme?

2. Which teaching strategies are used in a postgraduate nursing programme?

3. What are the learning styles of students in a postgraduate nursing programme?

4. Which factors facilitate adult learners' learning in a postgraduate nursing programme?

5. Which factors hinder adult learners' learning in a postgraduate nursing programme?

1.6 Significance of the Study

Literature (Hoy, 2009; Chao, 2007; CHE, 2007, Butchler, 2007) shows that there is a paucity of empirical studies on adult learning. Most of the existing studies focus on the traditional higher-education student. This study therefore has a potential to add onto the existing body of knowledge of adult learning in higher education. More importantly, it may provide baseline data for further research in this area, especially in nursing education.

The findings from this study will include preferred teaching and learning styles, thus allowing this study the potential to contribute to teaching practice and nursing education curricula. The findings from this study may be shared with nursing educators, enlightening them on adult learners' preferences; workshops may be held as part of building the capacity for nursing educators to strengthen their knowledge in this area. Conti (2009); Astin, Closs and Hughes (2006) pointed out that knowledge of learning styles can help instructors' better understanding of learners, while understanding their teaching programme. According to Emamipour and Esfandad (2010); Glenn, (2009), students fare better when instructors are trained in learning styles; they are then better equipped to deal with classrooms of students having different learning styles. Equipping or strengthening the knowledge of nursing educators in this

area may indirectly contribute to addressing poor progression and 'throughput' rates by adult learners at postgraduate level, in that there will be both student support and strategic planning for teaching adults.

Information obtained from this study may also be used to strengthen the curricula of nursing educators during curriculum review, especially that of the teaching and learning module which places emphasis on aspects such as adult learning, learning styles and teaching styles both teacher- and student-centred . Nursing educators-in-training who are exposed to a curriculum that analyses different teaching styles may also better understand their own learning styles having then the opportunity to capitalize on their strengths while trying to improve on their weak areas, as stated in Astin, Closs and Hughes (2006). Enlightened learners are able to identify their dominant teaching styles thus potentially strengthening the underutilized ones. This cultivates both resourceful learning and effective teaching.

This study has also the potential to benefit nursing students in the long term; they may be trained by educators who understand their different learning styles and who are equipped to manage a diverse classroom. The educators are able to identify appropriate educational support material and supplies according to the learning needs of different students (Glenn, 2009). As stated in Wintergerst, De Capua and Verna (2003); Glenn, (2009) knowledge of different learning styles encourages teachers to think about how their students learn; deciding what would be the best instructional method for a particular lesson.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study is based on the reviewed literature; it combines information from a number of authors. Most of the concepts used are from Knowles (1969, 1980, 1984), Felder (1996), Felder and Brent (2005) and Kolb (1984). The main concepts in this framework include learning environment, adult learner, teaching and learning styles, intervening conditions and learning. See Figure 1.

Adult learning is a core concept, all concepts feeding into this core concept. Each concept has supporting sub-concepts, discussed under each concept. An adult learner in this conceptual framework is described in terms of age, a 'mature age' learner, 23 years or older who can obtain 'mature age exemption' to access higher education, for university entrance without having a Matriculation Endorsement (CHE, 2007; Buchler, et al. 2007). This learner in the context of this study is undergoing postgraduate studies in nursing. The learning of this adult is influenced by a number of factors; teaching styles used her own learning style, the learning environment, as well as other intervening conditions. Adult learning may take various forms - superficial, profound or strategic.
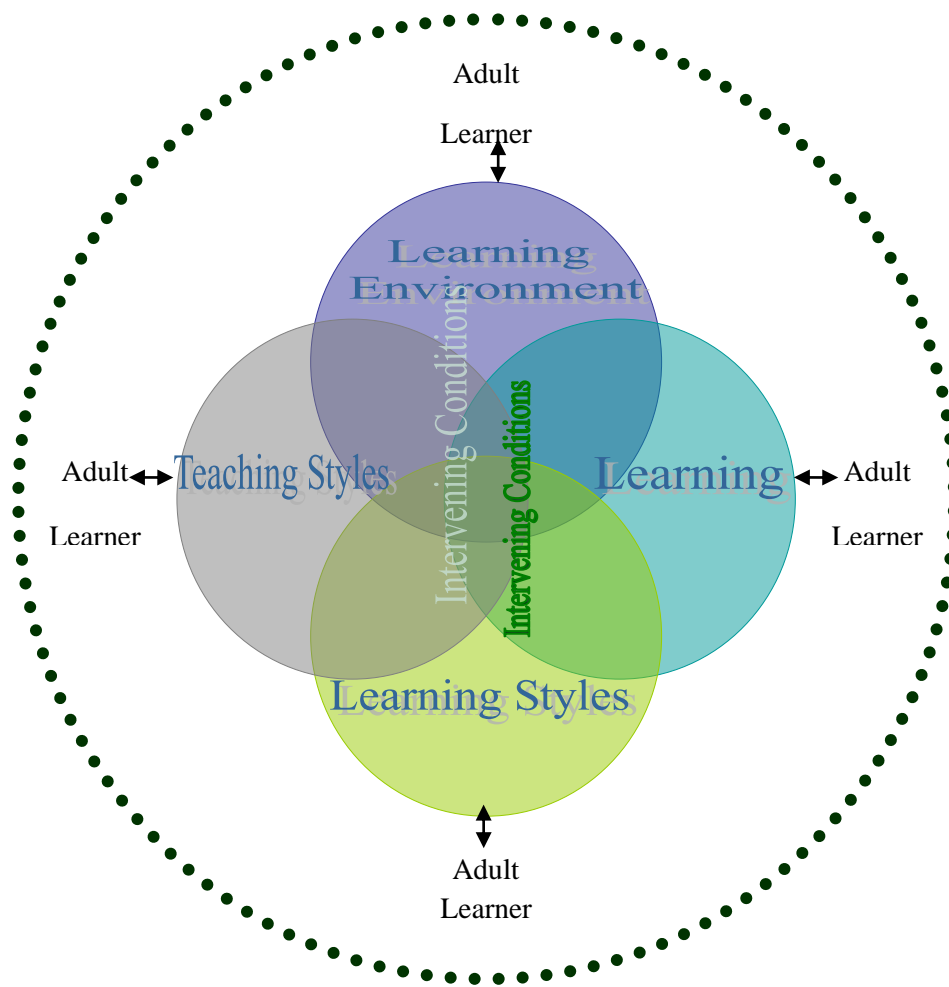
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework: Learning of adult learners

Adult learners possess specific characteristics which influence how they learn (Knowles, 1969, 1980, 1984, Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 1998). According to Cercone (2008) they are more self-directed in their learning and they bring more to a learning situation because of their wider experience (Brooks, 2003). As stated in Knightely (2007, their life experiences can be a valid source of learning. Adult learners can also take away more because they target learning that is relevant relating directly to their learning needs. As stated in Knowles (1969) adult learners seek education that relates or applies directly to their perceived needs. They seek education that

is timely and appropriate for their current lives, practices and roles (Brooks, 2003). Adult learners have a drive towards self-direction and towards becoming autonomous learners. More importantly, they have the ability to discover their own learning abilities and learning styles (Brooks, 2003; Mezirow, 1991).

Adult learning theories that emerged after Knowles's adult learning theory included a dimension of self-direction; a process of learning in which people take the primary initiative for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences.(Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). Knightely (2007) grouped the aims of self-directed learning under three major headings: (a) to enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning, (b) to foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning, and (c) to promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning.   The model by Schön (1983, 1987, 1991) introduced a concept of reflective practice into adult learning. Schön's model aims to overcome the limit of technical rationality which separates the theory from practice and promotes integration of theory and practical experiences. Schön's model proposes the concepts of reflection-in-action, theories-in-use and knowing-in-action. Mezirow (1991) introduced the concept of transformational learning into adult learning. Transformational learning is described by Mezirow as "the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings". In the context of this study, the adult learner is viewed in terms of all the characteristics presented, in addition to Knowles's six core characteristics of adult learners.

According to this conceptual framework there are two main teaching styles used: teacher-centred and student-centred teaching styles. Hossein, Fatemeh, Fatemeh, Katri and Tahereh (2010) defined teaching style as a characteristic way each educator collects, organizes and transforms information into useful knowledge for those he or she is teaching. Teaching styles are influenced by the various personalities of teachers; these change over time as a result of developments in different disciplines, as well as technological, social and cultural changes.

According to Gelislie (2009) teacher-centered styles are traditional approaches which are used in a number of educational programmes. De la Sablonniere, Taylor and, Sadykova (2009), stated that in the teacher-centred styles the teacher is the main source of knowledge with the learner expected to follow the instructions of, and information provided by the teacher in order to learn material. Teacher-centered approaches are rooted in positivism philosophy and the principle of behaviouralism from the psychology of behavior. According to the positivist theory knowledge can be acquired only through direct observation and experimentation. On a day to day basis, this implies that learning emphasizes observable facts while excluding speculation from the side of the student. In behaviourism theory learning is viewed as a system of behavioral responses to physical stimuli, driven by reinforcement, practice and external motivation. According to Sablonniere, Tailor, and Sadykova (2009) educators whose practice is based on behaviouralism devote their time and resources to deconstructing subject matter into its constituent parts, developing a sequenced, well-structured curriculum and content to be mastered by the students. Students in teacher-centred styles are mostly viewed as relatively passive with the behavior having to be shaped by external reinforcement controlled by the teacher. Teaching methods commonly used include lectures and seminars with the teacher providing structured

material for the students to master.   Although teacher-centered approaches are criticized for ignoring the needs of learners, they have a place in teaching certain content and abstract concepts (Gelislie, 2009).

Student-centred styles on the other hand are based on constructivist learning theory. According to Baeten, Kyndt, Struyven, Dochy (2010), student-centered approaches facilitate active learning in which learners are active sense makers who seek to build coherent, meaningful and context-driven knowledge. Student-centred styles place emphasis on student responsibility towards their learning, discovery learning and active participation, with minimal guidance from the teacher. Gelislie (2009), states that the role of the teacher is that of developing a structured learning environment where students are given support and guidance to attain skills in self-evaluation and independence in their learning. Teaching methods used include problem-based learning (as a broad concept), collaborative/cooperative learning with all team members held responsible and accountable for learning and project-based learning (Baeten, et al, 2010; Gelislie, 2009; Felder and Brent, 2005). According to Gelislie (2009) with student-centred styles students do not take for granted the knowledge reaching them; they deconstruct it to make meaning out of it, applying that knowledge in the context of their learning material The previous knowledge and experience of an individual, his features and also learning environment are of great importance according to Gelisli (2009).

According to the conceptual framework of this study, learners have different *learning styles.* Learning styles are characteristic cognitive, effective and psychological behaviours that serve as indicators of how individuals approach learning tasks, acquire process, retain, retrieve

information and respond to the learning environment (Cercone, 2008; Felder and Brent, 2005; Felder & Henriques, 1995*).* Literature shows that there are a number of learning styles, for example, Felder and Silverman (1998) make reference to 32 learning styles. Commonly referred-to learning models presenting different learning styles include Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Kolb's learning style model, Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument, Felder-Silverman Learning Style Model and many others. Felder and Brent (2005) cautioned that there is no preferred or inferior learning style because all have different strengths and weaknesses.

In this conceptual framework concepts used arise mainly from two models: Felder's model (1993) and Kolb's experiential learning model (1984). These two models were chosen because they differ, they bring in a unique perspective and they are also broad enough in that they include concepts which are found in other models. Felder's model of learning styles is based on Jung's theory of 1971. Felder (1996) suggested a model with five dichotomous learning styles. The five learning styles referred to in this conceptual framework include sensing and intuitive learners; visual and auditory learners; inductive and deductive organization, active and reflective learners, and sequential and global learners.

According to Felder and Brent (2005), s*ensing learners* (sensors) prefer information that comes in through their senses and *intuitive learners* (intuitors) favour information that arises internally through memory, reflection, and imagination. Sensors like facts, data, and experimentation whereas intuitors prefer principles and theories. The visual and auditory learners' category is based on the assumption that a number of people learn most effectively with one of the two modalities (visual or auditory) and tend to miss or ignore information presented in

another form. Visual learners remember best what they see - pictures, diagrams, flow charts, time lines, films, demonstrations. If something is simply said to them they will probably forget it. Auditory learners remember much of what they hear and more of what they hear and then say. They gain a great deal out of discussion, prefer verbal explanation to visual demonstration, and learn effectively by explaining things to others. In the category of inductive and deductive learners, i*nductive learners* prefer to learn a body of material by seeing specific cases first (observations, experimental results, numerical examples) and working up to governing principles and theories by inference; *deductive learners on the other hand* prefer to begin with general principles and to deduce consequences and applications. In the light of the assumption that deduction tends to be more concise and orderly than induction, students who prefer a highly-structured presentation are likely to prefer a deductive approach, while those who prefer less structure are more likely to favour induction. *Induction* is a reasoning progression that proceeds from particulars (observations, measurements and data) to generalities (governing rules, laws, and theories). *Deduction* proceeds in the opposite direction. In induction one infers principles; in deduction one deduces consequences (Felder and Brent, 2005).

Although the active and reflective domain is in Felder's model, it uses or shares concepts from Kolb's experiential model. According to this domain an 'active learner' is someone who feels more comfortable with, or is better at, active experimentation than reflective observation, and conversely for a reflective learner. Because of their personalities, active learners do not learn much in situations that require them to be passive, such as lectures. They prefer hands-on learning and discovery learning. Reflective learners on the other hand tend to be theorists. They prefer time to stand back and reflect on the learning experience in relation to specific theories. In

most cases they learn better by themselves or at most with one other person. In Kolb's (1994) model, students in Felder's 'active and reflect domain' are classified into four learning preferences: concrete experience or abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation or reflective observation (Felder and Brent, 2005; Arthurs, 2007). Kolb classifies learners according to four learning styles: accommodators, divergers, convergers and assimilators. Accommodators prefer engaging in concrete experience and active experimentation during the learning process (Arthurs, 2007). They learn best through hands-on experience. Divergers, according to Arthurs (2007), Felder and Brent (2005), use concrete experience and reflection to view concrete situations from many different viewpoints; they enjoy brainstorming. Convergers prefer abstract conceptualization and reflective experimentation during the learning process. They use theories for problem solving. Assimilators use abstract conceptualization and reflective observation to understand, organize and synthesize large amounts of data into a concise, logical framework (Arthurs, 2007; Felder and Brent, 2005)

In the sequential and global understanding domain, s*equential learners* are described as those learners who absorb information and acquire understanding of material in small connected chunks. G*lobal learners* on the other hand take in information in seemingly unconnected fragments and achieve understanding in large holistic leaps. Sequential learners can solve problems with incomplete understanding of the material; their solutions are generally orderly and easy to follow, but they may lack a grasp of the 'big picture'- the broad context of a body of knowledge and its interrelationships with other subjects and disciplines. Global learners on the contrary, before they can master the details of a subject need to understand how the material being presented relates to their prior knowledge and experience (Felder and Brent, 2005).

Felder (1996) points out that of the ten defined learning-style categories, five (intuitive, verbal, deductive, reflective, and sequential) are adequately covered by the traditional lecture-based teaching approach, and there is considerable overlap in teaching methods that address the style dimensions short-changed by the traditional method (sensing, visual, inductive, active, and global). The systematic use of a small number of additional teaching methods in a class may therefore be sufficient to meet the needs of all of the students.

Learning by adults, according to this conceptual framework may for a number of reasons, be surface, deep or strategic (Baeten, Kyndt, Struyven & Dochy, 2010; Ballantine, Duff & McCourt Larres (2010). *Surface learning* may be as a result of learning by rote, memorizing facts yet not fitting them into a larger context (Ballantine, et al. 2010). It may also result from following routine solution procedures without trying to understand their origins and limitations. These students commonly exhibit an extrinsic motivation to learn in that they say, '*I've got to learn this to pass the course, to graduate, to get a good job'. The concern is* an unquestioning acceptance of everything in the textbook and in lectures. In most cases, they either ignore what is not going to come into the test or examination. Surface learning may result from teacher-centred teaching styles (Gelisli, 2009). *Deep learning* results from the intrinsic motivation to learn, coupled with intellectual curiosity rather than the possibility of external reward's driving their efforts (Bellantine et al, 2010). Learners engage in meaningful learning that is context driven, with the possibility of immediate application. Deep learning results from having a critical eye on each statement or formula or analytical procedure presented in class or in the text, restating text in one's own words for meaning making, trying to relate new material to things previously learned or to everyday experience. *Strategic learning* is used mainly to obtain high 'grades' by

those students overloaded with work (Lublin, 2003). It requires students to be well organized and efficient in their studying. Students carefully assess the level of effort they need to exert to achieve their ambition, and if they can achieve by remaining superficial they will do so, but if the instructor's assignments and tests demand a deep approach they will respond to this demand. It is important to note that a student may adopt different approaches to learning on different courses and even for different topics within a single course (Felder and Brent 2005; Lublin, 2003).

The learning environment as one of the concepts within this framework indicates that learning takes place within a set environment. This environment has a number of factors; internal and external those influence the learning of students. The internal factors may include learning resources, teaching styles, learning culture and climate; external factors may be those factors associated with the background of adult learners, their families, work as well as socio-economic and political factors (CHE, 2007; Buchler et al, 2007).

1.8 Operational Definitions of Terms

1.8.1 Adult Learner

A learner admitted in a postgraduate programme in the School of Nursing. This learner maybe full or part-time.

1.8.2 Learning

Adult learners focus on their engagement in learning new knowledge as well as new perspectives and potentially new beliefs. They engage in learning through co-construction of meanings between their academic understandings, the knowledge and skills presented in the course and text the faculty and fellow students' understandings.

1.8.3 Higher Education Institution

Adult learners enter higher education institution coming from diverse backgrounds and have various characteristics for learning. The role of the institution is to prepare learners for the world as well as meet their academic demands of higher education. This place provides the connected classroom environment for adult learning and defining success as college students.

1.8.4 Postgraduate Nursing Programme

Refers to a program of study, in which adult learning students with a basic qualification enrol.

1.9 Overview of Dissertation Chapters

Chapter 1: This is an introductory chapter that introduces the whole research study. It starts by giving background information to the study, problem statement, research objectives, and research questions, significance of the study, operational definitions and conceptual framework guiding this study.

Chapter 2: This chapter deals with the reviewed literature and sections are organized by topic or themes and sub-themes that emerged from the reviewed literature. These include learning theories and theories underpinning adult learning, learning, and Knowles adult learning theory, self-directed learning, and transformational learning. Other themes that emerged the use of from the reviewed literature include adults in higher education, participation in education, attrition, assessment in adult learning, mechanism to foster resilience to adult learning, adult learning experiences, learning styles, adult learners and distance learning, funding framework for higher education, student support and academic development. Barriers facing adult learners,

adult learners challenges, adult learners and innovative teaching methods, and gender and adult education.

Chapter 3: This chapter outlines the research methodology used in this study; the research approach, design, research setting, population, sampling and sample, data collection instruments and process, data analysis, validity and reliability issues, trustworthiness, ethical considerations and data management.

Chapter 4: This chapter presents the research findings starting with sample realization, demographic data, teaching strategies used at postgraduate nursing programme, methods that work best for participants, factors that facilitated learning, factors that hindered adult learning, views of adult learners about their learning, and learning styles.

Chapter 5: This chapter covers the discussion and interpretation of findings in relation to existing literature or previous studies, conclusion to the study, recommendations and limitations of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the empirical as well as the theoretical underpinnings of adult learning. The search was conducted both manually (books and journals) and via internet and database searches. The primary search engines utilized were Google (advanced scholar search) as well as Science Direct, CIHNAL. Although Literature Review is categorized into three areas; – conceptual, empirical, and methodological, in this study Literature Review was approached and categorized into only two groups: (a) Theoretical Literature Review and (b) Empirical Literature Review. Empirical review focused on research studies on access, progress, success, and support. Theoretical Literature Review focused on the theoretical basis of adult learning theories.

2.2 Learning Theories

According to Hill (2002), learning theories have two values a) provision of vocabulary and a conceptual framework for interpreting the examples of learning that are observed b) suggesting where to look for solutions to practical problems. Work by Gold (1999) and Reeves (1994) discussed the two major educational philosophies that have emerged. The 'instructivist' and constructivist approaches to teaching and learning are considered to lie at either end of the continuum. The findings revealed that in an 'instructivist' approach, the instructor sets performance objectives and develops a systematic approach to the learning content that is independent of the learner. By contrast, the constructivist philosophy places the emphasis on the

adult learner and the learner's interpretations through self-directed explorations. According to the work by Merriam and Caffarella (1999), learning theories have their basis in philosophy and provide the overall framework for teaching and learning activities.

In line with Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Frey and Alman (2003) contended that learning is about change. The results showed that adult learning theory helps teachers to understand their students and to design more meaningful learning experiences for them. The findings further indicated that there is no one learning theory that successfully applies to all learning environments.

The study by Von Glasersfield (1989), argued that the responsibility of learning should reside increasingly with the learner. On that note social constructivism thus emphasizes the importance of the learner's being actively involved in the learning process, unlike previous educational viewpoints where the responsibility rested with the instructor to teach and where the learner played a passive, receptive role. Von Glasersfield emphasized that the learners construct their own understanding and that they do not simply mirror and reflect what they read. Learners should look for meaning and try to find regularity in the events of learning and even in the absence of full or complete information. Learners are challenged within close proximity to, yet slightly above, their current level of development. By experiencing the successful completion of challenging tasks, learners gain confidence and motivation to embark on more complex challenges.

2.3 Theories Underpinning Adult Learning

The basic definitions of adult learning were built on the idea of change in behaviour. Adult learning theories in and of themselves have arrived at very little consensus (Christman, Carman, and Jabenz, 2006). There is great debate on an actual determined number of theories that are even possible, still more on labelling those theories into groups. Overall it seems that the theory of adult learning is broken down into processes that create change within the individual and process to infuse change into adult education i.e. different theoretical perspectives on adult learning and teaching are critically examined and the arguments for and against the concept of 'andragogy' are explored. Access, participation and non-participation are looked at in relation to policies and practice on lifelong learning and social inclusion across the different sectors. Lifelong learning is a contested and problematical concept and there are various perspectives on this topic.

In Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, ideally an individual would pass through all four stages (Kolb, 1984). In reality, some stages may be passed over, or one stage may become the primary focus. As described by Kolb, preferences for the concrete experience stage of learning result in learning from specific experiences or from relating to people. When the reflective observation stage is preferred, careful observation and searching for meaning is likely to be evident (Kolb, 1984). A preference for the abstract conceptualization stage will produce logical analysis and systematic planning. The final stage of the cycle involves taking risks and pursuing activities or tasks, behaviours that are observed in an individual with a preference for active experimentation. Kolb takes Lewin's original cycle a step further, proposing a specific learning

style preference based on an individual's utilization of the four learning phases (Kolb, 1984). The resulting learning styles are 'accommodator', 'diverger', 'converger' and 'assimilator'.

Brudenell and Carpenter (1990) using Kolb's Learning Style Inventory with a group of 40 undergraduate registered nurses, found that participants who were assimilators exhibited the most negative attitude to Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI), compared with accommodators, convergers, and divergers. On the other hand Lu, Yu and Liu (2003) examined a variety of factors related to students' learning performance in a web-based management information systems graduate course. The findings revealed that other than ethnicity, no factors (such as gender, age, job status, previous computer experience, and learning style preference) had an impact on students' e-learning. Another study, by Liegle and Janicki (2006), explored the effect of learning styles on the internet navigation needs of web-based learning. The results showed that student learners classified as 'explorers' tended to have a higher number of visits to linked web pages whereas students classified as 'observers' tended to be more passive. 'Explorers' created their own path of learning (learning control) while 'observers' followed the suggested path by clicking on the 'next' button (system control).

Ausburn (2004) completed a study that supported the view that learners with different characteristics may not only prefer, but benefit from different instructional features and goals. In the study of Tweedell (2000), he conceptualized that today most adults' learning is an instructor-designed and instructor-led endeavour that occurs in classrooms where students sit to learn from the 'sage on stage'. This is the model with which most adults grew up. Tweedell further explored that many adults wish to take advantage of learning environments, primarily owing to their busy schedules and the learning formats' convenience. They are using technology with

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different sets of expectations that are based on their histories. Instructors need to be aware of what adults want and need. Adult learning theories, such as 'andragogy', self-directed learning, and transformational theories are important for instructors to understand as they work with adults.

2.4 Learning

In Fidishun (2000) adult learners are autonomous, independent and self-reliant, and goal-directed. These adults with previous schooling have been constructed as dependent learners; it is up to the educator to move students from their old habits, shape them into self-directed learners, and encourage them to start taking responsibility for their learning. According to Lieb (1991), because adults tend to be autonomous and self-directed, they need to be free to direct themselves. According to these authors, instructors should actively involve the participants in the learning process as they are facilitators for this process. In line with Fidishun (2000); Lieb (1991)'s view Merriam and Caffarella (1999) provided the appropriate framework to allow this to occur: adults accumulate a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource of learning. Merriam and Caffarella emphasized the cognitive theory which supports this concept. This theory is based on the need to attach instruction to relevant schemata, which are considered internal knowledge structures; adult learners build on previous knowledge and experience by relating new information to past events and experience.

Fidishun (2000) stated that adults want to use what they know and want to be acknowledged for having that learning. In line with Fidishun, Lieb (1991) maintained that accumulated life experiences and knowledge are related to work or to family responsibilities as

well as to past education. Adults need to connect new knowledge to past events and experience. Lieb's (1991)'s work revealed that adults are practical, needing to focus on what is important to them. Lieb suggested that adult students are goal oriented, thus objectives and goals should be outlined early in a course. There is a change in time perspective as people mature from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application, thus an adult is more problem-centred than subject-centred in learning. According to Fidishun (2000), adult learners believe that they are being prepared for tasks and responsibilities that are more challenging than current tasks, and are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than external ones. Therefore, respect should be shown for all students no matter what age (Lieb, 1991).

2.5 Knowles's Adult Learning Theory

One of the most well-known theories of adult learning theory is Malcolm Knowles's learning theory of' 'andragogy'. 'Andragogy' is a learning theory that is designed to address the particular needs of adults. It is based on the idea that there are significant differences in learning characteristics between children and adults. This literature review will present an overview of three other important adult learning theories–self-directed' learning, experiential learning, and transformational learning.

Knowles (1968, 1980) proposed the concept of 'andragogy' to distinguish learning from pre-adult schooling. The concept contrasted with pedagogy, meaning 'the art and science of helping adults to learn' (Knowles, 1980). Knowles labelled 'andragogy' as an emerging technology which facilitates the development and implementation of learning activities for adults. 'Andragogy' is informed by humanism and could be defined as a 'scientific discipline'

that studies everything related to learning and teaching that would bring adults to their full degree of humaneness (Henschke,1998), and this concept is based on six core assumptions or principles of adult learning. Knowles (1989) refers to adult learners' independent self-concept and the ability to direct their own learning. According to Fidishun (2000), adults with previous schooling have been constructed as dependent learners; it is then up to the educator to move students from their old habits, shaping them into self-directed learners and encouraging them to start taking responsibility for their learning.

In line with Knowles's views Lieb (1991) concluded that because adults tend to be autonomous and self-directed, they need to be free to direct themselves. Lieb further commented that in order for this to occur, instructors should actively involve the learners in the learning process and be facilitators of this process, however, the instructor needs to provide the appropriate framework to allow this growth to occur. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) explored the assumption of underlying 'andragogy' that discusses an adult as a person who accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource of learning. Argote, McEvily, and Reagans (2003) were in line with Merriam and Caffarella's exploration, further pointing out experience as an important factor in one's ability to create, retain and transfer knowledge.

Fidishun (2000) stated that adults want their acquisition of knowledge to be recognized. Kolb (1984) accepted that learning is a continuous process based on experience; learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984:38). These activities are clustered together to represent a hierarchy of learning approaches and strategies. Lieb (1991) maintained that accumulated life experiences and knowledge are related to work or to family responsibilities as well as to past education. Adults need to connect new

knowledge to past events and experience. Merriam (2001) stated that learning needs should be closely related to changing social roles. In the study by Merriam and Caffarella (1999), the latter agreed with Merriam, proposing that the readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role. According to these authors most adults enter educational programmes voluntarily, managing their classes around work and family responsibilities. Additionally, most adult learners are highly motivated and task oriented. Lieb (1991) suggested that adult students are goal oriented, thus objectives and goals should be outlined early in a course. Knowles (1989) further explored that adult students usually know what they want to learn; they like to see the programme organized towards their personal goals. Lieb also believed that adults are relevancy oriented - they wish to see a reason for learning something; learning should be applicable to work or home.

According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), there is a change in time perspective as people mature from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. An adult is more problem centred than subject centred in learning. In the study by Knowles (1989), learners needed to know why they should learn something and how it would benefit them. Yi (2005) summarized the instructional methods designed for improving adult learning so as better to incorporate the principles of adult learning into the design of instruction. According to Yi, within this context, adult learning is aimed at not only improving individual knowledge and skill, but ultimately at improving the organizational performance by transfer of learning directly to work application. However, it also implies that it is merely a technical process to determine learning needs and objectives. Lieb (1991) believed that adults are practical, needing to focus on what is important to them.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) proposed that adults are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than by external factors. Some factors that motivate adults include the promise of increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, and quality of life. According to Fidishun (2000), this can be built into the learning environment in several ways by testing the knowledge of adult learners as they progress, rather than as they receive background theory. Lieb (1991) reported that respect should be shown to all adult students and adults are likely to respond positively when the learning environment is comfortable and safe. The study by Brookfield (1995) regarding 'andragogy' revealed that some authors articulated feelings of criticism and concern regarding 'andragogy'. According to Brookfield it is still not very clear how adults learn. He further explores that current learning theory does not address all aspects of how to learn. Brookfield's study revealed that everyone is different and is shaped by his or her history. Many variables influence how individuals develop as adults. Further findings showed that educators need to consider culture, physiology, cognitive style, and personality as they develop the learning environment for adults.

Merriam (2001) and Merriam and Caffarella (1999) also reflected that there has been debate as to whether the assumptions of 'andragogy' are principles of good practice rather than a theory, because 'andragogy' primarily describes what the adult learner may be like. Merriam (2001) stated that Knowles himself came to concur that 'andragogy' is less a theory of adult learning than a model of assumptions about learning or a conceptual framework that serves as a basis for an emerged theory, eventually representing the continuum ranging from teacher-directed to student-centred learning. These findings reflected that adults' dependence on the

instructor is based on their previous levels of knowledge of the topic. If they have limited knowledge, they will depend on the instruction alone.

Pratt (1993) concluded that while 'andragogy' may have contributed to our understanding of adults as learners, it has done little to expand or clarify our understanding of the process of learning, nor has it achieved the status of a theory of adult learning. Smith (2002) pointed out that Knowles's concept of 'andragogy' is an initial attempt to build a theory of adult learning; it is related to the characteristics of adult learners. Smith also noted that Knowles's theory uses a model of relationships from humanistic clinical psychology. Knowles, however, also built on behaviourist theory by encouraging the learner to identify needs, set objectives and enter learning contracts. In the study by Schapiro (2003), 'andragogy' is not perfect, but it represents an attempt to understand the difference between adult and childhood learning. In his findings, he further explored issues of power and social justice in society and in the educational process, the need for critical reflection as a necessary component of an adult learning process, the crucial place of dialogue and discussion as a means for learning and recognition of multiple ways of knowing and learning. A recommendation was made for continued research into the theories that are important for the development of appropriate adult educational programmes: these should be considered by educators as they work with adult learners.

2.6 Self-Directed Learning

The key to placing a learning experience within this context is that the learner has the primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating his or her own learning. Participation in self-directed learning seems almost universal. Adults engaging in self-directed

learning do not necessarily follow a definite set of steps or linear format. In essence, self-directed learning occurs both by design and chance depending on the interests, experiences, and actions of individual learners and the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) describe self-directed learning as a process of learning in which people take the responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences. According to Lowry (1989) self-directed learning is another central concept in adult education and suggests that the locus of control in learning lies with the adult learner who may initiate learning with or without assistance from others. Yi (2005) suggest three methods to foster learning in adult organizations: a) Problem-based learning which seeks to increase problem-solving and critical thinking skills b) Cooperative learning which builds communication and interpersonal skills and c) Situated learning which targets specific technical skills that can be directly related to the field of work. These methods support the assumptions about how adults learn specifically; they are more self-directed and have a need for direct application to their work, and are able to contribute to collaborative learning through their experience.

The study above by Yi (2005) is congruent with Garrison (1997), who suggested that three dimensions indicate learners' taking control of and shaping the contextual conditions. Yi further explored that self-monitoring describes learners' ability to monitor their cognitive and metacognitive processes, to use a repertoire of learning strategies, and to think about their thinking processes. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) concluded that the majority of self-directed models reflect only the first goal. They further reflected that self-directed learning tends to promote individual freedom based on an established value system; however, it fails to recognize that learning can be viewed as a social and political process where learners change their

emancipator knowledge. Knowles (1975) in his study puts forward three immediate reasons for self-directed learning. He argues that there is convincing evidence that people who take initiative in learning (proactive learners) learn more things, and learn better than do people who sit at the feet of teachers passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners). The findings revealed that the former type of learner enters into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation. They also tend to retain and make use of what they learn better and longer than do the reactive learners.

As Merriam and Caffarella (1991) commented, this means of conceptualization of the way we learn on our own is very similar to much of the literature on planning and carrying out instruction for adults in formal institutional settings. Spear, Mocker (1984, 1988) quoted in Merriam and Caffarella (1991:46-8) found, however, that self-directed learners, rather than pre-planning their learning projects, tend to select a course from limited alternatives which happen to occur in their environment and which tend to structure their learning projects. Brookfield (1995) commented that studies were conducted mostly with middle class subjects; that issues concerning the quality of self-directed learning projects were being ignored and that they were treated as disconnected from wider social and potential forces. Collins (1988); Candy (1991); Brocket and Hiemstra (1991) reflected meta-analysis of research and theory conducted by Australian, Canadian, and American authors that have raised questions about the political dimension to self-direction and the need to study how deliberation and serenity intersect in self-directed learning projects.

According to Field (1991) there has also been a spirited debate concerning Australian criticism of the reliability and validity of most self-directed learning. In a study by Hammond

and Collins (1991), they reflected that at least one book written on the South African adult educational experience, has argued that self-direction must be seen as firmly in the tradition of emancipator adult education. The findings revealed that a number of important questions remain regarding understanding of self-direction as a defining concept for adult learning. A recommendation by Brookfield (1995) was made for further research on more longitudinal and life history to understand how periods of self-direction in adults as learners alternate with more traditional forms of educational participation.

2.7 Transformational Learning

Transformative learning is the kind of learning where learners make meaning of their lives. This has become a very popular topic in adult education because it does not involve classroom learning alone; it involves learning about our lives. This is important because as adults, the meaning-making process can change everything about how we look at work, family, and the world.

Mezirow (1997) proposed that individual transformation includes a change in one's frame of reference or way of seeing the world. Mezirow considered transformative learning as a constructivist theory of adult learning. According to Palloff and Pratt (1999) the goal of transformative learning is to understand why we see the world the way we do and to shake off the constraints of the limiting perspectives we have carried with us into the learning experience. In the study of Swanson and Holton (2001), they reflected that transformational learning is the concept which occupies the centrepiece of adult learning and is therefore vitally important.

Frey and Alman (2003) stated that transformation learning is a process of critical reflection and is about change in learners; it is the kind of learning that occurs when individuals make meaning out of the world through experiences. Mezirow (1991) conducted a study on women returning to higher education. The focus was on the idea of perspective transformation which he understood as the learning process by which adults come to recognize and reframe their culturally-induced dependency roles and relationships. His findings draw strongly on the work of Habermas in proposing a theory of transformative learning that can explain how adult learners make sense of their experiences.

Collard and Law (1989); Ekpenyong (1990); Clark and Wilson (1991) reflected that Mezirow was criticized by educators in Nigeria, the United States, New Zealand and Canada for focusing too exclusively on individual transformation. Mezirow's recommendations in this study call for more understanding of how people experience episodes of critical reflection and what these entail, and how this would help educators respond to fluctuating rhythms of denial and depression in learners.

O' Hara (2006) in the conclusion of her article proposes that a new stage of human evolution would be the goal of organizing education for the global 21st century. O' Hara referenced Kegan (1994) in her revelation of the gap between the quality of consciousness, habits of mind and ways of being needed today in a complex world and where most people are operating. Like Kegan, O' Hara noted that what is required today is beyond the psychological development level of most people.

According to Mezirow (2000), in transformative learning one is able to create new meaning structures and to shift worldviews. The above study was in line with that of Merriam and Caffarella (1998); they contended that transformative learning challenges what learners know; this frees them from distorted notions of the world. As Boyd (1989) expressed it, an environment is generated in which learners' consciousness can dramatically shift and be comprehensive, inclusive and balanced in the process (Wilber, 2003).

2.8 Adults in Higher Education: Access, Equity and Success

CHE (2007) conducted qualitative research about adult learners in public higher education with the aim of establishing how higher education institution systems facilitate access, equity, and success for adult learners. The participants were drawn from Vaal University of Technology, University of Western Cape and University of Witwatersrand. The findings revealed that deep transformation is required from the micro teaching and learning relationships in order to understand the adult learner. Transformative learning is the kind of learning undertaken to make meaning of peoples' lives. According to Cercone (2008) the learning process involves learning about oneself and transforming not just what one learns, but also the way in which one learns. Mezirow (1970) with similar views contended that transformation is something that is usually triggered by a problem. After identifying the problem people enter a phase where they reflect. Reflection is the key to the transformation process.

The study conducted in Australia by Abbot, Chapman, Braithwaighte, and Godfrey (2004) in Culity (2006) revealed that socially and educationally-disadvantaged mature learners remain some of the most under-represented students in the higher education community and the

more successful   socio-economic backgrounds (Cantwell, Scevak, Robert and Hempenstall, 2001). The study expressed that it is of enormous importance that opportunities are created to enable such students to enter college or university to succeed. This study suggests that for adult learners to attain access it may be advisable to identify and to provide incentives for institutions and programmes that can spin networks of good practice which can infuse and inspire the system over time, thereby contributing to both social and economic development goals.

2.9 Participation in Education

Macleod and Lambe (2008) conducted a study on the dynamics of adult participation in part-time education and training. The aim was to develop a more detailed understanding of changes in the patterns and predictors of participation and non-participation in formal adult learning. In collaboration with the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), 4325 adult learners, over a14-year period were studied to detect their patterns in formal part-time adult learning. These study findings revealed that, crucially, many of the same individuals were not participating from one year to the next and, as a result of this turnover; change of some magnitude may have been taking place in the demographic make-up of participants' year on year. This showed that adult learners have episodes of going on and off college owing to the multiple social roles they hold. Macleod and Lambe (2008) recommended further research to study the duration of participation spells and whether the same or different triggers lead to longer or shorter spells in public higher education institutions.

The study by Watters, Koetsier and Walters (2007) had results congruent with the above. In their study participants were all non-traditional students who were part-time learners at the

local university. The purpose of the study was to help the institution think about the future of the part-time programme in the national policy relating to these programmes. The study findings indicated that there is no clear distinction between full-time and part-time students, although it can be said that one is more likely to find the older students attending evening classes. The study further appears to indicate that it is the students who are choosing to register as either full- or part-time.

2.10 Attrition

Wylie (2004) conducted a study to examine the role of factors previously identified in attrition in higher education. The results showed that student attrition was mainly observed in non-traditional students. The challenge of a new and uncertain environment that requires one to meet the rigours of study, the established standard academic ability and the demands of interpersonal interaction are more possibly factors contributing to the decision of the mature-age to withdraw. This study revealed that attending to these factors could result in significant improvements in persistence rates in higher education.

The study conducted by Holy (2009) aimed at using the Peterson (n.d.) search engine that yielded 63 colleges/universities that offered registered nurse training in distance format. The purpose of this study was to present distance education as a model that can meet real world demands that can serve older adult students of nursing to persist in the programme of study. The results showed that these adult learners tend to be very committed in life; as such the traditional classroom is not convenient for them to continue their studies or pursue new profession. Further results showed that students who are enrolled in nursing programs are more likely to live off

campus and are members of racially/ethnically diverse group. Stark (as cited in Work, 2008) stated that a nursing programme is difficult especially for students who are still learning, who need to work and tend to family while completing the program. These results were in line with those of (Wells, 2003) which explored that the non-traditional students are required to meet the challenges of a rigorous nursing programme while simultaneously managing the many facets of family and work responsibilities. A recommendation was made of providing increased flexibility, access and cost effective in nursing education. E-learning was increasingly viewed as an economical way of expanding educational activities, widening opportunities for students in all sectors of the nation without students' attrition in the course of study. Other recommendations were made by (Spelling Commission, 2006) which reported that there is a potential for this type of learning to meet the mandate persistent gap between the college attendance and graduation rates of the nation growing population of racial and ethnic minorities.

Tyler-Smith (2006) conducted a qualitative study on early attrition among first time e-learners and factors that contribute to drop out. The results showed that attrition among mature adult learners is affected by sociological, physiological, technical and cognitive factors. Kember (1989) proposed a conceptual model of attrition for distance education. The results indicated a complex interaction of family context and background, personal motivation, abilities and depth of commitment into completion. Further results showed that responsibilities and an income to support the family can have significant impact on students, decision to quit the course.

2.11 Assessment in Adult Learning

According to Collins and Martin (2011) there are two important types of assessment: (a) formative and (b) summative. These examine how assessment is incor porated into the literature of adult learning, the process of assessment and evaluation being of critical importance to adult education. These authors further explore that many adult learning programmes are created in non-traditional settings and do not conform to the normal parameters of programmes in higher education. Kasworm and Marienau (1997) cited in Collins and Martin (2011) concluded that the positive use of assessment serves not only as a catalyst for the improvement of student learners, but also as a form of evidence for the validity of the programmes and student performance. Tara (2005), in line with the above authors uses the term 'evaluation' when making judgements about academic endeavours. He further focuses on judgements concerning student learning and refers to teachers making judgements that cause them to provide feedback to students for their improvement, judgements that cause teachers to modify the curriculum.

The study by Brian, Matthew, Kreuter and Brownson (2008) aimed at introducing principles of adult learning, discussed how these can be applied in assessing trainee needs, planning and delivering training, and evaluating processes and outcomes. It revealed that understanding and adhering to the principles that have been outlined should enhance not only learning but also reciprocal respect and trust between trainers and trainees. This study recommended assessment; evaluation using items provided can help to determine how well the principles of adult learning were integrated into training and will yield useful data for refining and improving future iterations of training.

In line with the studies reflecting assessment, Holt and Willard-Holt's (2000) study also indicated that the concept of dynamic assessment indicates a way of assessing the true potential of learners that differs significantly from conventional tests. The results showed that the assessor becomes one who enters into dialogue with the persons being assessed to find out their current level of performance on any task. The findings further indicated that assessment and learning are seen as inextricably linked and not separate processes.

Massay (2004) conducted a qualitative study with the purpose of locating and deconstructing some principles underpinning traditional and innovative methods associated with adult nurse learner empowerment and assessment. The study findings revealed that assessment of adult learning has been introduced and explored in this context, meeting the needs of all and being innovative and flexible.

2.12 Mechanisms to Foster Resilience to adult learning

William and Seary (2008) conducted research on changing perceptions of self as a tool for transformation with the aim of illustrating how members of a small group of adults performed, who were enrolled in a pre-university preparatory programme known as Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS). The results of the study showed that deconstruction of long-held assumptions can be a vital phase in the process of perspective transformation. Using adult learners' words as data, evidence suggests that upon scrutiny of long-held assumptions about self-learning and self-direction, some of the adult learners engaged in the pre-university preparatory programme were able to perceive how these assumptions came about.

In line with the studies reflecting that preparatory courses contribute to improved learner performance, the study by Mezirow (2000) also indicated that transformative learning is central to STEPS, and such educators within the programme are committed to allowing the space and conducive environment in which students learn to face important life challenges, and learn to overcome personal limitations through new learning. Halstead (2000) with similar views added that in so doing they are encouraged to move forward with a deeper knowledge and understanding of themselves, others and the ways of the world.

Imel (2001), conducted research into preparing adult learners in postsecondary education; the findings revealed that instructors who help adult learners connect their real-world experiences and what they already know to what they are learning in the classroom are perceived as most helpful and motivating. This study suggests practice be provided for adult students; the classroom should become the main stage for the creation and negotiation of meaning for learning, for being a student and for defining the collegiate experience. A recommendation for further research was made by Donaldson, Graham, Martindill and Bradley (2000) about instructional strategies that are particularly meaningful; they include those that provide examples and explanations that help learners connect what they already know to new material, opportunities for class discussion of topics and small group projects that require active involvement.

2.13 Adult Learning Experiences

Stone (2008) conducted a qualitative study with the purpose of exploring the experiences of mature-age students. The study involved 20 mature-age students in the second and final years

of their degree programme at the University of Newcastle, Australia. The study findings revealed that a number of women were lacking encouragement from family; they also had a sense of not being 'smart enough'. Findings about experiences were based on two themes**: Inspiration and Influences**. McGivney (2006) described the influencers, catalysts or agents as hugely important in leading others into learning. This appeared to hold true for many in this study. For many, recent experiences of formal learning had been much more positive than were the adult experiences. Some were inspired by a recent experience of other formal study to consider enrolling at university. These findings are again similar to those of Tett (2000) who found that all in her study group were able to give positive examples of learning which had taken place at a later point in their lives. **Anxious time:**   Adult learners' memories of starting university were mixed. For many it was an anxious time particularly for a number of women. O' Shea (2007) in her research with first-in-the-family female students, revealed that for many of these students, commencing tertiary studies initiated feelings of anxiety, unfamiliarity and self doubt, however, for some, the excitement outweighed the fears. The men's memories of starting indicated that they had felt reasonably confident.

Furthermore, previous research into mature-age student experiences indicated that women generally tend to be less confident than men in the academic environment. Acker's research with mature-age students in the UK (1994) revealed that male students tended to show less self-doubt and greater self-confidence. This is supported by Shand's research (1998) which revealed that female students tended to distrust their intellectual capacity more often than did men. The mature-age learners, who have arrived at university as a 'second chance', illustrated the transformative nature of their experiences as students. However, Cantwell et al. (2001)

further explored that the growth in confidence increased their opportunities for the future and the sense of dreams and ambitions being achieved.

2.14 Learning Styles

Adult learners preferred learning styles that are, simply put on various approaches to learning. They involve methods that encourage the fostering of individual styles of learning, adapted to the personality of each learner. It is commonly believed that most people favour a particular method of interacting with taking in and processing information. Students preferred a variety of delivery methods, self-direction in learning, convenience in scheduling, and accessible distance education. Video tapes are sometimes identified as the preferred method for assessment content in distance learning. Based on this concept, the idea of individualized learning styles has gained popularity; it has been proposed that teachers should assess the learning styles of their learners and adapt their classroom methods to best fit each learner's learning style.

Arthurs (2007); Coffield, Mosley, Hall, Eccesstone (2004) described learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Individuals use learning to adapt to and manage everyday situations, giving rise to different styles of learning. The concept of learning styles has received considerable attention in the empirical literature and many theories have been proposed in order better to understand the dynamic process of learning. According to Dunn and Griggs (2003); Loo (2004) a variety of learning style theories and frameworks has been developed along with accompanying instruments that operationalize their learning style constructs. Hickcox (1995) found that the three categories of learning style

instruments are: (a) instructional and environmental learning preferences (b) information-processing learning preferences (c) personality-related learning preferences.

Smith (2005) conducted a qualitative study which involved all postgraduate nursing students having to explore their experiences of Enquiry Based Learning (EBL) at Nui, Galway. The results showed the students' initial difficulty in adjusting to the process and uncovered their views on the limitations of the EBL approach. This study, however, revealed that towards the end of the module students seemed to be adapting to EBL, describing associated personal benefits. This aside, EBL facilitated the students in becoming more self-directed, autonomous and responsible learners. A recommendation was made on Smith's study that ongoing development and research needs to focus on the way in which students experience and understand the programmes in which they are involved.

A study conducted by Cyr (2007) reflected   findings similar to the above-mentioned findings: studying various learning styles is imperative before moving on to teaching methods and strategies. According to Cyr, reflective learners accept feedback from others, adapting accordingly and these learners transform as the world around them changes. The study by Fraser and Greenbaugh (2001) regarding learning styles revealed that some participants articulated feelings of dissatisfaction about change. They are, however, able to make connections between current knowledge and newly-presented knowledge. Although the study by Fraser and Greenbaugh showed arguments about change, in research conducted by Kuiper and Pesut (2003), the findings showed that learning activities must be designed to assist participants in meeting opportunities for active participation in the process as well as to allow time for critical reflection. Further findings revealed that learning environments which promote positive emotions help

learners remember the content with greater clarity; and learning must create meaning for the learner by connecting it with past experiences.

Yoder (1994) conducted a survey that aimed at examining learning styles as related to teaching and learning, comparing interactive and linear videos. The population included 58 participants all of whom were learners. The findings of the survey revealed that there was a positive correlation between two learning styles and a method of instruction. Active experimenting learners (those who prefer concrete experience, active experimentation and practical application of ideas) preferred the more interactive video. The reflective-observer learners (those who prefer concrete experience, reflective observation, and abstract conceptualization preferred linear video. The findings in the above study by Yoder (1995) are congruent with the findings in the survey by Andrusyszyn; Cragg, and Humbert (2001). The results of the study showed that even though respondents preferred a variety of methods of delivery, learning style was not as important as self-direction in learning, convenience in scheduling and accessibility. They identified video tapes as the preferred method for content assessment. This study recommended the incorporation of variety into the design of education programmes. A further recommendation was made by Andrusyszyn; Cragg; and Humbert to focus the research on that which recognized that highly-motivated students succeeded in their assignments and tests whether or not the course work matched their preferred learning style.

Steele (2002) explored the relationship between learning-style preferences, attitudes towards computers, and student evaluation of a Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) programme on a group of 151 American medical students. The results indicated no relationship between learning style preferences, computer attitudes and evaluation of the CAI programme. Steele

concluded that learning preferences and pre-existing attitudes towards computer technology in education do not bias acceptance or rejection of a particular programme. McNulty, Espiritu, Halsey and Mendez (2006) found similar results to this study. They tested the hypothesis that personality preference, which is related to learning style, influenced individual utilization of computer-assisted instruction applications developed specifically for undergraduate medical students. Their results showed that students with a 'sensing' preference tended to use computer-assisted instruction applications more frequently than the 'intuitive'. They concluded that personality/learning preferences of individual medical students influenced their use of computer-assisted instructions (McNulty et al., 2006). In another study, Federico (2000) reported that students with assimilating and accommodating learning styles exhibited more favourable attitudes towards network-based instruction than students with converging and diverging learning styles.

Engleberg, et al. (2001) examined the learning styles and perceptions of the value of various learning modalities before and after a second year course in microbiology and infectious diseases. Their course consisted of lectures, small group sessions, interactive computer-assisted learning, and textbook readings. They assessed how individual learning styles influenced learners' value assessment of these teaching modalities. The findings revealed that at the beginning of the course, learners with a relative preference for experiential learning rather than abstraction initially favoured small groups and computer-assisted learning. Similarly, learners with a preference for reflective observation rather than active experimentation favoured lectures. However, at the end of the course, learning style did not predict the value assessment of any teaching modality. Yoder (1984) found that reflective learners fared better with traditional

lecture-style learning contexts while active learners fared better with interactive computer-assisted learning.

The results of the study are in contrast with the results of Steele and colleagues (2002) who found no relationship between learning preferences and attitudes towards computers amongst a group of 151 medical students. Lynch, Steele, Palensky, Lacy and Duffy (2001) examined whether learning preferences and attitudes towards computers influenced the acquisition of knowledge via computer-assisted instruction amongst a group of 180 students. Their results indicated that there was no correlation between students' learning preferences or attitudes towards computers and CAI knowledge acquisition.

Hoisington (2000) explored whether there was a relationship between learning styles and nursing students' comfort in using the internet/world wide web. No statistically significant relationship was found between students' results and perceived internet comfort and their learning styles. Similarly to Hoisington, McLaughlin (2001) the findings revealed no correlations between the learning styles of graduate nurses taking web-based courses and their perceived satisfaction with the course delivery mode. In a group of 33 dental hygiene students, Fleming, Mauriello, McKaig and Ludlow (2003) found no significant difference between learning styles in students participating in web-based learning tasks versus those receiving conventional lectures with slides. In a study of 18 physical therapy assistant students, Thompson (1987) found no significant correlation between student learning styles and attitudes towards computer-assisted learning.

2.15 Adult Learners and Distance Learning

Kilstoff and Baker (2006) conducted a survey with the purpose of reviewing the literature about the experiences of students who learn abroad. An open-ended descriptive survey was used for this study. The participants were international postgraduate nursing students enrolled in either postgraduate diplomas or Master of Nursing programmes. The findings in this survey revealed that participants not only struggled with their English language skills, both academically and clinically, but with the nursing practices and perspectives. A recommendation was made for further research that required both academic and clinical staff to structure support programmes in order to smooth the progress of the international postgraduate nursing students' learning while minimizing aspects of cultural shock.

Ostlund (2005) conducted a qualitative study using focus groups with the aim of describing, analysing and understanding adult distance learners' experiences. 33 adult distance learners participated in this study. The results showed the importance of considering adult learners' familiarity with higher education and computer-mediated education, and their everyday situation, when planning and organizing these courses. Further findings indicated that learners in this study expressed that most problems for their studying and learning were in these areas. A recommendation was made in Ostlund's study for further research about whether adult distance learners were interested in collaborative learning.

Seratwa and Kuswani (2008) conducted a study in Britain about mobile learning in reaching the disadvantaged with the aim of exploring the ongoing research on the possible effects of using mobile phones to support learning, especially as a way of creating success for

disadvantaged people. Stead (2006), in line with Seratwa and Kuswani, in his article 'Mobile Learning' reviewed a project on emerging technologies for learning, presenting mobile learning as one of the ways of reaching people who have not benefited from mainstream education in Britain. Stead further indicates that contrary to the assumption that most young people are skilled users of Information Communication Technology (ICT), these findings revealed that many young people are in socially disadvantaged groups that lacked confidence, actively avoiding ICT. Stead's findings further indicated that it was after several trials and steps that a massive shift in confidence, autonomy and motivation was developed among the socially disadvantaged (Stead, 2006).

Attewell (2005) conducted a study in Britain with the aim of determining the effect on poor literacy of learning via mobile technology. The study involved at least 32 % of learners who were unemployed and/ or homeless. The results showed that if the processing power of some sophisticated generation mobile devices such as smart phones and camera phones are developed, many people would prefer using mobile phones to personal computers to assist them in learning. Viljoin, du Preeze and Cook (2005) conducted a quantitative study at the University of Pretoria with the purpose of providing a basic administrative support to adult distance learners most of whom were from remote areas. 92, 000 participants were surveyed in this research. The results showed that 0, 8% had email access, while 97 % had entry-level cell phones. The study findings revealed that mobile networks could provide 95 % coverage in the country. The study findings further revealed that learning support tools could support a student population previously excluded from traditional learning.

Wilhelm, Rodehorst, Yong, Jensen and Stepans (2003) conducted a qualitative study about nursing students' perceptions of online teaching and learning with the purpose of examining the students' learning styles, and their perceptions of online nurse educator courses. An interpretive approach was used for this study. Participants were 31 nursing students who completed devaluation surveys. The findings of this study revealed that there were negative perceptions including frustration with the technology, lack of face-to-face contact, and limited instructor contribution to discussions. The results of the qualitative study conducted by Seiler and Billings (2004) indicated that general framework benchmarks should include the use of technology and educational practices and outcomes. The study adopted a convenience sample of 458 nursing participants at five nursing schools. The findings revealed that participants' responses to technology validated that readability and productive use of time met the framework benchmarks. Furthermore, the results showed that participants described how educational practices, such as active learning time on task, helped achieve outcomes of learning. A recommendation identified from the study was for further research into orientation to the technology, course orientation, learning resources and student support.

Kearns, Shoaf, and Summey (2004) conducted a study on the traditional course delivery methods with the purpose of comparing these with web-based methods. An exploratory approach was used for this study. The participants were the group of BSN students who already had a degree in another field, one of 25 taking a web-based course and 26 in the other group taking the same course by the traditional class methods. Findings in this study revealed that composite examination scores were higher for the web-based group, while satisfaction scores were higher for the traditional group. However, neither group was highly satisfied with the teaching method

provided. Kearns, Shoaf and Summey recommended further research into satisfaction for groups, relating to quality and timeliness of instructor feedback and accessibility of resource.

The findings in the above study by Kearns, Shoaf, & Summey (2004) were congruent with the findings in the survey by Bata-Jones and Avery (2004) who compared participants' outcomes in two graduate pharmacology courses, one face-to-face and one web-based. Both courses were taught by the same faculty member. A total of 18 students from the web-based course and 52 students from the face-to-face course participated in the study. The study findings showed that there was no significant difference in student satisfaction reported between the students enrolled in the traditional face-to-face class and those of the   web-based class. Furthermore, the mean pharmacology course examination scores were also not significantly different.

The results of the study conducted by Willis and Stommel (2002) indicated that web-based courses required a research course on aging by measuring participants' responses reflecting changes from the pre-test to post-test for each course. The study findings revealed that participants indicated a positive preference for further enrolment in this type of class. Willis and Stommel recommended further research into support for students. They felt that   socialization areas appeared to require improvement.

Ali (2004), DeBourgh (2003) and Wilhelm et al. (2003) contend that the use of distance technologies, such as web-based courses, can result in positive student perceptions, high satisfaction, and achievement of learning outcomes. Anderson and Mercer (2004), Beta Jones and Avery (2004), Kearns et al. (2004), furthermore compared traditional classes with online or

distance formats. In their conclusion they found no difference in the students' achievements, even students who rated online instructors lower but took additional online courses. Andrusyszyn, 2001, and Yoder, (1994) concluded that the relationship between students' preferred learning styles and students' perceptions of course faculties and online format has not been shown conclusively.

2.16 Funding Framework for Higher Education

The Ministry of Education within the Department of Education (2004), has direct control over government grants to public universities and Technikon. The Ministry furthermore takes no account of income raised from student fees and other private sources when distributing government grants to individual institutions. These institutions are, however, required to submit to the Ministry annual financial statements which reflect all expenditures and all income from all public as well as private sources.

Kasworm (2000) conducted a study about access of adult learners at the educational institutions in USA. Kasworm noted that funding formulas do not take account of the increasing number of part-time adult learners. The intermittent nature of their participation and their increasing demands for flexible access to cutting edge knowledge and skill development. Kasworm further reported that present formulas suppress the fact that what may be reported and counted as only one full-time student may actually be reported and counted as three part-time adult students each of whom has diverse interests and the unique needs in relation to institutional support. In addition, the ways in which the completion rates are calculated often do not take part-

time students into account. Thus policy frameworks and funding formulas may act as disincentives to institutions to take adult learners seriously as a constituency.

In line with the findings above Castle, Munro, and Osman (2006) supported this by stating that the growth in numbers of mature adult students in higher education in North America and the UK has been applauded and ignored, because adult students challenge historic conventions of higher education structures, purposes and processes. The National Budget for higher education institutions consists of institutional restructuring including mergers and recapitalization of institutions - 3%, earmarked grants - 8% which further divides into National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)- 6% interest redemption on loans and foundation programmes - 2%, Block grants - 87%, teaching input grants - 56%, teaching output grants - 12% and institutional factor grants 6% (Department of Education, 2004).

Teaching input grants (56%) are based on enrolled or full-time equivalent (FTE) students, weighted according to CESM categories included in a funding group, devised in a step process where the Ministry of Education determines the national goals and objectives related to graduate outputs, institutions develop institution-specific three-year rolling plans in response to these goals and objectives and the Ministry jointly determines the final student enrolment plan which is subject to annual amendment on the basis of changing external circumstances (Department of Education, 2004).

 Teaching output grants (12%) comprise an actual total of non-research graduates and diplomats and a normative total of non-research graduates and diplomats which should have produced in terms of national benchmarks i.e. graduation benchmarks for contact and distance

students stratified undergraduate degrees of 4 or more years (e.g. Health Sciences), postgraduate degrees up to honours level and postgraduate degrees up to masters level (Department of Education, 2004).

Research output grants are a means of implementing the National Plan's proposals of enhancing research productivity, entrenching accountability for the use of research funds and allocating resources to institutions demonstrating research capability. The output grants are determined from publication of research masters and doctoral graduates (Department of Health, 2004). Research allocations are a weighted total of the research outputs produced by an institution compared with the normative weighted total which has been produced according to benchmarks i.e. 1.25 publication units per research at universities and 0.5 at the University of Technology (Department of Education, 2004). Any shortfall in both teaching/research output grants between the actual and normative total output initially accrues to the institutions as part of the block grant but will in future become subject to the submission of an institutional research development plan (Department of Education, 2004).

According to the Department of Education (2004), disadvantaged students are deemed to be Africans and Coloured students who are South African Citizens, and who are enrolled in either contact education programmes or distance education programmes. Institutional factor grants additionally assist institutions enrolling 40% of disadvantaged students; these institutions will receive a proportional increase in their teaching input grant up to a maximum of 10 % for enrolment of 80 100% disadvantaged students. According to CHE (2007), one feature of adult learning in higher education that has received attention both internationally and in South Africa is the recognition of prior learning (RPL). RPL refers to the process of reflection and assessment

of experiential learning. These reflective processes are often documented in a portfolio of evidence that may be supported by interviews and observations as well as challenging examinations for the purpose of assessment (Buchler, 2002). Access, identified as a priority for the transformation of higher education in the National Plan for Higher Education (2001) relates to a university's initiatives in making its educational offerings accessible to a diversity of students (CHE, 2007). The additional funds produced during the teaching input and output grants, the research grant and the institutional factor grants need innovative strategies pre- and post-student admission. Recruitment drives target schools with largely disadvantaged student populations, students select tools predictive of student success, student support, and curriculum and pedagogical interventions addressing both access and success within enquiry and transformation, while also assuring financial viability of higher education (Department of Education, 2004).

According to Murphy et al. (2002) internationally, there has been a growing debate on issues of access to HE for disadvantaged groups. In the UK, broadening access policy developments and systematic change have been driving change in both HE and further education (FE). Furthermore, Murphy et al. reported that in Scotland funding has been provided to promote widening access initiatives, including part-time study (2002). The strategy of expanding part-time study, as well as increasing flexibility in pace of learning has emerged as one part of coherent strategy by HEIs to attract students who might access HE if it was delivered differently (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2006).

2.17 Student Support and Academic Development

Morrison, Brand and Cilliers (2006), Botha, Brand & Cilliers (2005) highlighted that the Student Counselling Service (SCS) is cited as a vital component of higher education institutions in the light of growing enrolment of students from diverse ethnic, social and educational backgrounds. According to the International Association of Counselling Services, the SCS has three roles: a holistic approach to student wellness, support offered students with learning skills and personal counselling and/or psychotherapeutic services related to difficulties with adjustments, psycho-social problems, and career support.

According to Blunt and Connolly (2006) peer mentoring has been advocated as a transformation strategy in higher education as has been its integration into the broader context of student learning and development (van Wyk and Daniels, 2004). According to Blunt & Connolly (2006) peer mentors facilitate the induction and the retention of students and enable them to realize their potential by providing psycho-social guidance and support; they serve as positive, encouraging and affirming role models (Blunt and Connolly, 2006). Favish (2005) in agreement with the above stated that peer mentoring was encapsulated in Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Case-Based Learning (CBL), both of which allow the creation of learner communities enabling learners to share across the curriculum and shape a shared peer group.

In line with authors above, CHE (2004) curriculum intervention is aimed at adapting curricula to assist in developing a student's general academic and cognitive skills, language proficiency and capacity for self-directed learning. However, Koch, Foxcroft and Watson (2001) summarized that this learner centredness requires the use of teaching, learning and assessment

methodologies such as teamwork and collaborative learning (Venter, Blignaut and Stoltz, 2001).
Enkenberg, 2001). As evidenced in participative pedagogies such as PBL and CBL, engagement with learning is reported to produce better learning results.

2.18 Barriers Facing Adult Learners

Mathers (2005) conducted a study pointing out that, although there are many success stories, the barriers for adult students are pervasive, persistent, and for far too many adults, insurmountable. Adult students are quickly becoming the majority on the nation's college campuses, yet the system works against them in many cases (American, Council on Education, 2000). The report, 2002 titled 'Held Back', pointed out that fewer than 8% of working adults enrolled less than half time during the 1999-2000 school years received any form of federal, state or institutional financial aid (Bosworth and Choitz, 2002). According to Mathers (2005), most of the aid programmes were developed to serve full-time students. Ramsay (2004) suggests that a barrier to participation in HE for adults may be the representation of their lack of previous educational success as an aspect of their personal learning identity. O' Donnel and Tobbell (2007), moreover, addressing these issues of early failure through a bridging course which helped students to recognize that their social and economic circumstances were socially constructed rather than caused by any individual lack of ability significantly eased the transition to university.

As mentioned previously, higher education institutions around the world are grappling with identifying their student body. Very often the issue is not just the label, but is linked to broader policy issues concerning widening access, addressing equity and state of funding

(Division for lifelong learning, 2007). A study conducted by Pechar and Wroblewski (2000) in Austria, suggested three variables: (a) the nature of their entrance qualification, (b) timing of participation and (c) their mode of study. In the UK, several studies have been conducted; Merrifield, Macyntyre and Osaigbovo, (2000); Schueze and Slowey, (2000) have confirmed that these factors can form a major constraint to participation in higher education.

Davies (2003) conducted a study in the United Kingdom, where full- and part-time categories are retained and where the policy is to draw a distinction between learners based on who is paying. Thus for full-time students there is a financial partnership between the state and the individual while part-time students must gain assistance from their employers. As in South Africa, this distinction is becoming less useful, but it is only in Scotland in the UK that part-time students can apply for state funding (Division for lifelong learning, 2007). In the study conducted by Bron and Agelii (2000), they stated that in Sweden, undergraduate and postgraduate students are entitled to the financial support. Undergraduate students must obtain a certain number of credits each year, but people over 45 do not qualify and the grant is reduced if the student is employed. Furthermore, at British Columbia University and the University of Missouri, undergraduate and postgraduate students can register for financial aid, but aid is based on the number of credits obtained per semester (Division for lifelong learning, 2007).

February and Koetsier (2007) indicated that the findings of the research do not clearly distinguish between the full-time and part-time students, whereas St. Clair (2006) made an important observation about the barriers facing adult students, what counts as participation, and what is perceived as successful participation. In his view these matters are a complex experience for a range of stakeholders in higher education. Drawing on the work of McGivney (2003) in

this regard, he noted that learners' own notion of their progress and participation are often different from the views of policy makers, funders and educational practitioners. St. Clair (2006) advocated McGivney's work and further stated that it is very difficult to get the ways real decisions about participating in real adult learning.

Justine and Dornan (2001) assert that adult learners may enrol in college as a result of a significant life experience or a re-evaluation of their life goals; however, they hold certain negative views of college or university because of their prior experiences and therefore lack confidence in their ability to achieve success. Furthermore, they may also experience financial obstacles and child-care difficulties and may possess poor study skills (Donaldson and Graham, 1999; Kerka, 1998). Kerka (1998), pointed out that adult learners may encounter opposition to the completion of academic goals from significant others who feel threatened by their success; women are specifically challenged by employment and child-care conflicts that may add to and build on this opposition from significant others. As Horn (2002) contended, overall, parents are at greater risk of dropping out of college for a period of time than are others. These issues are noteworthy in that 27% of today's college students are parents, and 13% are raising children in single households. Although these barriers increase the likelihood of dropping out of college, they are not always deterrents to a student's ability to achieve his or her academic goals. Justine and Donaldson (2001) also argued that, despite their multiple roles and having little involvement in the campus, adult learners report educational outcomes similar to those of traditional-age students.

A qualitative study was conducted by Ostlund (2005) with the aim of creating learning environments that make collaborative learning possible. Participants were 33 adult learners (6

men, 27 women) in an introductory course on teacher education.   According to Ostlund, the learners often mention domestic and work-related factors as obstacles to their studies, maintaining that support from fellow students is an important factor in feelings of satisfaction. Moreover, to a lesser extent the learners mention the structure and organization of a course as obstacles; however, as Saljo (2000) put it, this is the area the distance education (DE) teacher often focuses on when evaluating and developing courses. The study findings revealed that the DE learners communicate with each other about personal matters, but they do not collaborate about the context of school work. The contact between learners was probably facilitated by meeting face-to-face at campus and there starting to build group solidarity. This highlights the importance of creating situations where distance learners can get to know one other, thereby generating feelings of security. Recommendation was made in Ostlund's study for further research on creating favourable prerequisites for studying and learning based on the individual's vital necessities and for supporting lifelong learning for more individuals. It is of great importance to further investigate the students' own experiences of the conditions under which they study.

Timarong, Temaungil, Sukrad (2001) conducted a quantitative study to find out more about barriers facing adult learning and learners in order to assist adults studying at Palau Community College (PCC). The results showed that adult learners abroad and in Palau echo each other on what they identify as barriers to their education goals. As much as they enjoyed being back at school, many face the enormous task of balancing studying with jobs, housework, and childcare. Further findings revealed that many adult learners everywhere face the problem of supporting themselves and their families, as well as paying for school. A recommendation was

made for further research to implement the measures that would rectify the various difficulties adult learners' face, with the initial need to advance the understanding of adult education and adult learners.

2.19 Adult Learners' Challenges

Kasworm (2008) conducted a study about emotional challenges of adult learners in higher education with the aim of exploring the emotional challenges of the complex journey in developing adult students live by pointing out that adult learners "face challenges in gaining a place, a position, a voice and a related sense of valued self in the cultural worlds of higher education. According to Kasworm their initial entry is buoyed by special positive validation from other older students and faculty members, as well as friendship and assistance from select younger students and collegiate staff. Furthermore, many adults have reported that their children, spouses, siblings, and co-workers provide initial support and encouragement on this long journey. Kasworm, Polson and Fishback (2002) in line with studies reflecting challenges, indicated that the 'connected' classroom represents the social and psychological space for learning, connecting the adult's life to academic studies and other life roles.

The study by Calcagnoa, Crosta, Bailey and Jenkins (2006) reflected similar findings as above - adult learners face ongoing challenges in a collegiate environment. Because adults have competing lives, hopes, and realities, each semester of college environment represents either a re-negotiation or adaptation of themselves and their lives. According to the study by Kasworm (2003) the beliefs of the learner are embedded into two patterns of epistemological beliefs: the world of academic knowledge and the world that many adults know as real-world knowledge.

Kasworm's findings revealed that through these hopes, adult learners engage in a rich repertoire of emotional and cognitive needs while locating their place and voice in the classroom. Recommendations were made for further study to recognize the adult not just as a mind at work, but also as a complex individual who is both a learner and a contributor to the class and institution.

Stone (2008) conducted a qualitative study involving 20 mature-age students in Newcastle, with the purpose of exploring challenges of both males and females along their journey as mature-age university students. The results showed that mature-age students face challenges regarding studies and finances (Chapman, 2004). A recommendation was made in Stone's study that institutions provide specific programmes and ongoing support to enable such students not merely to enter university, but to find the encouragement to help them stay there and succeed.

Comings, Cuban, Bos, Porter and Doolittle (2003), conducted a quantitative study which involved 250 participants. The purpose of the study was to focus on key challenges in developing a strong initial connection with adult learners and a promising approach as suggested by their living experience. The results showed that many students were demoralised, feeling that schools or programme providers did not treat them with respect or strive to meet their needs. By contrast, this study revealed that many students reported that libraries offered them a caring and respectful setting in which to improve their literacy skills and express themselves as adults. A recommendation was made in this study for further research to continue to explore both diversity of programmes and people with the patterns of circumstances and behaviour. Further recommendations were made to explore whether and how library literacy programmes have

come to encourage participation of students, understanding the challenges they face, having crafted effective strategies to increase the benefits and reduce cost of adult learners' participation.

2.20 Adult Learners and Innovative Teaching Methods

Gravani and Jimoyiannis (2008) conducted a qualitative study in Greece using focus groups with the aim of developing adult learners' technical and social skills within the educational process, and to create networks of co-operation between the school, local community, the business world and education. Participants were 28 adult learners and 8 educators who were the key units of the analysis. The findings of the study revealed that teaching methods and practices among others promote personalized teaching, experiential learning, self-motivation, students' active involvement in process and decision making, and critical thinking. Further findings revealed that the SCS programmes administered are flexible and innovative educational programmes. A recommendation was made for further research into digital literacy in relation to adult learners.

A quantitative study was conducted by Wang (2008) about teaching methods and Bloom's taxonomy with the purpose of determining whether adult teaching methods were driven by lower thinking skills in relation to the first three levels of Bloom's taxonomy characterized by knowledge, comprehension and application. The study consisted of 389 participants at departments of continuing education at different universities in the city of Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhon. Findings of this study revealed that Chinese adult teaching methods and Western approaches represent two polarized points of view. Teaching in China has relied on

conventional ideas and an orientation to knowledge comprehension and application of knowledge which comprise the first three levels of Bloom's taxonomy (Chen, 1981). Further findings revealed that Chinese educators maintained that all education encompasses two goals: teaching books and teaching learners (as cited in Wang, 2007). On the contrary, many Westerners prefer student-centred teaching as this manifests 'andragogical' philosophy (Jarvis, 2002; Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 2005).

According to King (2005) and Mezirow (2000) more research in the West found that schools have been advocating the use of transformative learning in adult education. The key to transformative learning is that learner's critical reflections are closely related, which aligns to the Bloom's higher level taxonomy. As observed by international scholars (Boyle, 2000) the findings showed that Chinese teachers clung to their traditional pedagogical outlook, tending to emphasize knowledge, content, teacher-centred classrooms, and examination results. As noted by Boyle, (2000), Chinese teachers tend to stick to the textbook, which is often the same one almost throughout the country. According to Wang (2007), teaching in China is focused exclusively on transmitting orthodox subject knowledge; concepts such as flexibility, problem solving, critical thinking, and independent learning are not recognized. This research is only one-sided in the sense that it focused on teaching methods of teachers of adults. A recommendation was made for further research to focus on the part of adult students themselves: a) how much do teaching methods affect student learning outcomes? b) How is adult education viewed by those adult learners?   c) What part of their lives is prescribed by formal education?

2.21 Gender and Adult Education

Stone (2008) conducted a qualitative study on the mature-age student gender equity with the purpose of voicing student experiences, their triumphs, achievements as well as their struggles. The participants were 20 female and male mature-age students. The study findings revealed that while there are significant changes in identity for both men and women in higher education, the change in identity for women is particularly profound.

Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2003) refers to the multiplicity of women's roles and gendered expectations of family obligations and the ongoing disparity with which women take on the second shift of maintaining children and home. Other feminist writers perceive that society places a different value on 'men's time' and 'women's time', with 'men's time' being seen as more valuable and productive (McNay, 2000). Hughes, (2002) with similar views as those of Wolf-Wendel and Ward, pointed out that gender plays an important role in adult learner participation in higher education. Cullity (2006) made recommendations that institutions provide specific programmes and ongoing support to enable men and women students not merely to enter university, but also to find the encouragement to help them stay and succeed in the programme.

Aiken (2001) conducted a study from a black feminist perspective into the factors that motivate or hinder participation of black women in nursing education in the USA. Results showed that gender and race were significant factors. Black women were aware of themselves as being 'the other' in the classroom, and their experience of culture racism at individual and institutional level discourages participation. Further findings revealed that the women believe their position in society is replicated in the educational environment.

Studies that were conducted by Murphy (2003) in the UK and (Belenky 1986, 1999) in the USA have drawn attention to the affiliation needs of learners as a vital component of the learning process, particularly for women. Betts (1999) and McGivney (1999) cited in Murphy (2003), confirmed that gender differences exist as triggers which affect mature adult learners' involvement and retention in higher education. Furthermore, male students are more motivated by employment prospects than women, and men find the support of tutors and peer less significant.

2.22 Summary of Literature Review

Based on the theories of learning, the literature critically evaluates several contemporary theories and concepts of adult learning. Most of the existing adult learning theories, learning styles and concepts tend to define adult learning and to offer adequate explanation for adult learning. Learning theories suggest that knowledge is a multi-faceted social construct. Adult learning involves dynamic interactions, and many propositions and concepts of adult learning are explained in the literature. This provides a comprehensive framework of adult learning that integrates various knowledge facets and layers at learners' social and learning levels. The melding nature of knowledge provides a new epistemology of practice for adult learning.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research methodology according to Trochim and Donnely (2007), is seen as the glue that holds the study together because it gives structure to the research project; it shows how all the major parts of the research project work together to address the research question under study. As stated in Babbie and Mouton (2002) the research methodology section reflects how the researcher has gone about answering the research questions. This chapter therefore presents the process and steps that were followed to achieve the research objectives of this study. Aspects of research methodology covered in this chapter include the research paradigm, research approach and design, research setting, population and sampling, data-collection instrument, data-collection procedure, reliability and validity of the instrument as well as trustworthiness, data analysis, ethical considerations and data management.

3.2 Research paradigm

According to Bryman (2004), a paradigm is a cluster of beliefs and, for scientists, dictates the particular discipline influence that should be studied, how the research should be conducted and how results should be interpreted. A paradigm guides the researcher's action, containing as it does the investigator's assumptions about the research methodology and how the investigator defines and comes to grips with truth and reality (Tashakkori, and Teddue, 2003). A

pragmatic paradigm which is one of the mixed-methods paradigms (Greene and Caracelli, 2003) was adopted in this study because the study used both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A pragmatic mixed-methods paradigm is that which is premised on the assumption that true knowledge claims are those that are practical, contextually responsive and consequential, taking cognisance of the demands, opportunities and constraints of the situation in which the study is carried out (Greene and Caracelli, 2003).

3.3 Research Approach

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach; that is, both a quantitative and a qualitative approach. The choice of mixed methods in this study was based on the understanding that it helps explore complex concepts of social interest such as care and human behaviour that cannot be explained by statistical patterns and generalizations or narratives alone (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Burns and Grove (2005); Saks and Allsop (2007) argued that mixed methods has the advantage of bridging the divide between quantitative and qualitative approaches. It facilitates triangulation of findings from more than one method to overcome potential flaws that may arise from the use of a single method. As stated in Johnson and Onwuegbizie (2004), a mixed-methods approach allows the researcher to mix or combine qualitative and quantitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study.

Quantitative approach which is underpinned by positivism, involves the systematic collection of numerical information, often under conditions of considerable control, and the analysis of that information using statistical procedures. It eliminates researcher bias, and the

researcher remains emotionally detached and uninvolved with those under investigation (Johnson and Onwuegbizie, 2004). In this study, the researcher was able to collect data objectively through a structured questionnaire, so as to avoid emotional involvement with how adult learners learn in a postgraduate nursing programme and data was analysed statistically as expected in quantitative studies.

Qualitative approach , underpinned by constructivism and 'interpretivism' collects and analyses more subjective narrative materials, using procedures in which there tends to be a minimum of researcher-imposed control (Polit and Beck, 2009); Johnson and Onwuegbizie, 2004). Qualitative approach provides in-depth exploration, understanding and interpretation of the participants' context. According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), qualitative purists are characterized by dislike of detachment and passiveness in research because the researcher needs to be immersed in understanding the context of what is under investigation. This qualitative aspect was ideal in this study to establish the views of adult learners about their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme and to better understand what they go through during the learning process.

3.4 Research Design

This study adopted an exploratory descriptive design. According to Polit and Beck (2009), *descriptive research design* allows the researcher to describe the phenomenon under study without influencing it in any way. This research design is used to gain more information about a particular characteristic within a particular field of study. It may be used to develop a theory, identify problems with current practice, justify current practice, make judgments or

identify what others in similar situations may be doing (Struwig and Stead, 2001). This design does not allow for manipulation of variables or an attempt to establish causality (Burns and Grove, 2009). The descriptive aspect provided useful insight into the learning of adults in a postgraduate programme, especially the teaching and learning styles used in this programme (Polit and Beck, 2009). Differing from the descriptive design, the primary purpose of *exploratory research design* is to provide information to assist the researcher to gain knowledge and deeper understanding of the problem or issue at hand. It is far more flexible and dynamic than descriptive research design. It is also used to investigate an area in which little information exists (Burns and Grove, 2009). The exploratory aspect assisted in gaining insight into the views of adult learners about their learning. It was also appropriate, because literature shows that adult learning is not a well-researched area.

3.5 Research Setting

This study took place at one selected university in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province in South Africa. According to Maguire (1982) this is one of the oldest universities in the country, dating back to 1910. The department of nursing is also one of the oldest nursing departments and was established in 1956. The school falls under the College of Health and the Faculty of Health Sciences. It offers both undergraduate and postgraduate studies in nursing. Undergraduate studies include Bachelor of Nursing (entry to nursing) and Bachelor of Nursing Advanced Practice for those already in possession of basic nursing qualifications. Postgraduate studies include Bachelor of Nursing Honours, Coursework Masters, Masters by Dissertation and PhD in Nursing. In the context of the study, the focus is on Coursework Masters and Bachelor of

Nursing Honours because the students are expected to attend classes where they are subjected to a number of teaching methods and classrooms of students with diverse learning styles.

3.6 Population

Population is the entire aggregation of cases with characteristics the researcher attempts to understand (Polit and Beck, 2009). This study targeted students registered for Coursework Masters and Bachelor of Nursing Honours because these two programmes have a component requiring students to attend lectures. The total number of Coursework Masters students was 72 and the Bachelor of Nursing Honours students were 9, making a total of 81.

3.7 Sampling Technique

Sampling is a selection of a subset within a population of individuals selected to yield some knowledge about the population of concern (Mason, 2000; Patton, 2002). In this study purposive sampling technique was used. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique which is used to select a specific group for a specific purpose. As found in Ritchie and Lewis (2003), purposive sampling in this study allowed for choosing a specific group of postgraduate students with the aim of establishing a detailed exploration of the views of these students about their learning at a postgraduate level. The participants were selected because they were knowledgeable about the phenomenon under study. Convenience sampling which is a subset of purposive sampling was adopted because of the limited numbers of postgraduate students, especially for the quantitative aspects of the study. In convenience sampling the researcher used the available participants, as suggested by Burns and Grove (2009). All seventy

two Coursework Masters and nine Bachelor of Nursing Honours students were requested to participate in the quantitative aspect of the study, making the total number of participants 81.

For the qualitative aspect, the researcher used cluster sampling, with the aim of gaining a greater degree of representation. The participants were clustered into Coursework Masters and Bachelor of Nursing Honours. Coursework Masters has eight specializations; five clinical specializations and three non-clinical specializations. Clinical specializations include Critical Care and Trauma Nursing, Gerontology, Mental Health Nursing, Community Health Nursing and Maternal and Child Health Nursing. Non-clinical specializations include Nursing Education, Health Services Administration and Research. There were two representatives from each specialization. The researcher ensured that there was both a local and an international student selected from each group. The participants were randomly re-selected depending on their availability. The total qualitative sample size for Coursework Masters students was 16. Two focus groups of eight each were used for control purposes. With the Bachelor of Nursing cluster, the researcher requested that all participants participate in a focus group.

3.8 Data-Collection Instruments

Two types of instruments were used for data collection. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data for the quantitative aspect, and focus group interviews were used for the qualitative component.

The structured questionnaire was developed by the researcher using literature and learning styles instruments available in the public domain (Kappe, Boekholt, den Rooyen, van der Flier, 2009; Duff and Duffy, 2002; Kolb, 1994, Freedman and Stumpf, 1980; Furnham, 1992;

1996). Some of the online learning inventory instruments did not have names of authors. The structured questionnaire comprised three sections (see Annexure 1). Section A included demographic data collection; Section B focused mainly on teaching and learning styles; Section C posed open-ended questions exploring the views of adult learners on their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme.

An unstructured interview guide was used for collecting qualitative data (see annexure 7). The interview guide contained eight main questions to initiate the discussion related to research questions to be addressed in this study. These questions had to do with views about learning in a postgraduate programme, teaching styles used, preferred learning styles and factors that influenced their learning, either positively or negatively. Probing questions emerged from the participants' responses during focus group interviews.

3.9 Data-Collection Process

After securing ethical clearance from the university and obtaining permission from the head of school, the researcher approached the postgraduate coordinator and individual group facilitators, requesting access to postgraduate students. Coursework Masters were approached separately from the Bachelor of Nursing Honours students. The students were approached as a group as per arrangement with the facilitator, during their free time, mainly tea and lunch breaks. The researcher personally contacted the participants, verbally administering the survey questionnaires, using free classrooms for completion of questionnaires.

The data- collection process started by explaining the purpose of the study, the rights of the participants, issues of anonymity and confidentiality and the participants' right to withdraw

anytime should they no longer wish to participate in the study. The participants had to give consent in writing to participate in this study (see Annexure 6). The researcher collected signed consent forms before administering the structured questionnaire. Each student was given a questionnaire as well as verbal and written instructions on how to complete it. The instruments were identified by codes and special numbers to ensure anonymity. The questionnaires were self-administered because the participants were literate people. The researcher was present during the process of completing questionnaires to respond to questions and to assist where there was a need. The completion of each questionnaire took some 30 minutes. The researcher collected the completed questionnaires. The process of collecting data took about two weeks as some students only attended campus on alternate weeks.

Regarding qualitative data, the researcher organized a special vacant classroom for focus group interviews. The researcher conducted three focus groups interviews; two for Coursework Masters' participants and one for the Bachelor of Nursing Honours group. The questions were the same across the three focus groups. The researcher tried to make all the participants feel comfortable to share their views by involving all of them, and by appreciating their responses. The researcher ensured that all the participants felt that their contributions were worthwhile and that they were free to agree or disagree with each other as stated in Kingry, Tiedjie and Friedman (1990). This mode of collecting data enabled the researcher to be attentive and willing to listen, showing interest in what was being said, and encouraging a wide range of opinions, assisting the participants to explore their ideas further.

With the permission of the participants an electronic voice recording system was used during the focus group. The voice recorder was also used to prevent the distraction of the

researcher that commonly occurs during concurrent documentation and interviewing. The researcher engaged an assistant to take notes and memos in order to record the whole process of data collection. The researcher also jotted down critical points without losing focus on her role as an interviewer. The skeleton notes were augmented with information from the recorder and from the assistant's notes. Focus group interviews took about three days, one group per day.

3.10 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed statistically. SPSS software package version 15.0 was used to organize and clean data, as stated in Polit and Beck (2009). Descriptive statistics was used to analyse data. 'Univariate' analysis was conducted to establish the distribution of responses, measures of central tendency and dispersion or standard deviation.

Qualitative analysis. Conceptual content analysis was the method used to analyse qualitative data. This method was chosen because it focuses on words and concepts critical to the research question; the analysis is also guided by concepts in the conceptual framework guiding the study. The process of coding is primarily one of selective reduction, which is the central aim of content analysis. Data is broken down into meaningful and pertinent units of information and these are analysed and interpreted; meaning is made out of them. Conceptual content analysis assisted the researcher to establish the existence and frequency of concepts most often represented by words or phrases in a conceptual framework. The researcher began reflecting on the research questions and concepts in the conceptual framework. The next step was line by line reading and analysis of text identifying important concepts and grouping them into categories. Once chosen, the text was coded into manageable content categories. The researcher focused on

and coded specific words or patterns that were applicable to the research question, as suggested by Carley (1992).

3.11 Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

Validity and reliability are traditionally used in a quantitative research paradigm (Golafshani, 2003). In this study it was used for the quantitative aspect. Academic rigour or trustworthiness was applied to the qualitative aspect of the study.

Validity and reliability serve as a means of ensuring the rigour of the research process and research findings (Burns and Grove, 2009).

Validity. According to Joppe (2000), validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. Burns and Grove (2009) stated that the content validity of a new instrument can be achieved by referring to literature pertaining to the topic or by calling the experts in the content area to examine the items to check whether they adequately present the hypothetical content in the correct proportions. These authors indicate that if the research can demonstrate that an instrument measures all the various components of the variables in question, the researcher may be confident that the instrument has a high content validity. In this study content validity was determined by subjecting the questionnaire to the experts in nursing education and research methodology for their critique and recommendations. The experts evaluated each item on the instrument checking the degree to which the variable to be tested was represented, as well as the instruments' overall suitability for use (Polit and Beck, 2009; Brink, 2006). The suggestions

recommended by experts on analysis of the instrument were addressed; corrections and adjustments were made accordingly.

Reliability. Burns and Grove (2005) defined reliability as a measure of the consistency obtained by using a particular instrument. Kirk and Miller cited in Golafshani (2003) identified three types of reliability in quantitative research which relate to (a) the degree to which a measurement, given repeatedly, remains the same (b) the stability of a measurement over time; and (c) the similarity of measurements within a given time period. According to Struwig and Stead (2001), reliability is the extent to which test scores are accurate, consistent or stable. As a means of testing reliability, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was ascertained by conducting test/re-test reliability. The instrument was administered twice to similar participants within the space of two weekends. Six Bachelor of Nursing, Advanced Practice students who are also mature students agreed to be part of the test/ re-test. Cronbach's Alpha test was then used to compute the scores to establish the level of reliability. Cronbach's Alpha test was appropriate to this particular structured instrument being more recommended when applying instruments that use Likert-scales (Burns and Grove, 2009). The instrument, excluding demographic data and open-ended questions comprised 64 structured questions. The instrument was found reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha of .876. There were ten   items on teaching methods and the reliability of that section was .850. The section on items related to learning comprised 54 items; the Cronbach's Alpha score was .833.

3.12 Academic Rigour (Trustworthiness)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested four criteria for establishing credibility and accuracy of qualitative research. This is also known in qualitative research as trustworthiness. These authors introduced four concepts: credibility, dependability, 'confirmability' and transferability. Analysing these four concepts in relation to quantitative research, Rolfe (2006) indicated that credibility corresponds roughly with the positivist concept of internal validity; dependability relates more to reliability; transferability is a form of external validity; and 'confirmability' is largely an issue of presentation.

Credibility is the extent to which the data, data analysis, and conclusions are believable and trustworthy. It implies confidence in the truth of findings, including understanding of the context. There must be consistency in terms of explanation, and enough narrative data which is sufficiently rich to support the findings (Burns and Grove, 2009). In this study credibility was ensured through triangulation of data sources**,** and member checks where the collected information during focus groups was confirmed with the participants through reflection and through taking notes and recording at the same time to confirm and ensure correct capturing of data.,

Transferability in Lincoln and Guba's framework (1985) is defined as referring essentially to the generalization of the data, which is the extent to which the findings from the data were derived**.** This may be achieved through a purposive sample (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), as in this study. It may also be achieved through a dense description of the research methodology and the research processes followed. The researcher attempted to do this in this study. This assists in determining whether the findings are applicable to another context.

Dependability according to Polit and Beck (2009) refers to the stability of data over time and conditions**.** As recommended in Lincoln and Guba (1985), focus group interviews were conducted by one person; the note taker also took notes from all the groups. The data-collection team was not changed, ensuring uniformity in asking questions and in scribing. The researcher used four questions as a starting point across the three groups; probing questions were based on the participants' responses. At the end of each focus group the researcher compared the notes with the note taker, ensuring that the critical points captured by the researcher were the same as captured by the scribe. Methods of collecting data were also triangulated to ensure dependability. The research supervisor as an expert monitored the whole research process, the collection, analysis and interpretation of findings as one way of maintaining dependability in qualitative data.

'Confirmability' according to Lincon and Guba (1985) is a measure of how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data collected. It refers to the objectivity of the research process and outcome, the degree to which data confirms the findings, freedom from the researcher's biases by ensuring that the conclusion depends on the subject and conditions of enquiry rather than on the investigator. 'Confirmability' was promoted in this study by taking detailed field notes (reflexivity), by tape recording interviews, transcribing interviews verbatim to identify variations in responses and by making field notes available for audit checks and verification, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). .

3.13 Ethical consideration

The researcher presented the research proposal to the School of Nursing Research Committee to ensure that ethical issues were adequately addressed. The proposal was sent to the University of KwaZulu Natal Research Ethics Committee for ethical clearance. Ethical clearance was secured from the University Research Ethics Committee before obtaining permission from the Head of the Nursing Department to conduct this study. The approval from the Research Ethics Committee was submitted to the Head of the Nursing Department as part of the securing of permission to use the campus as a research setting and to have access to students studying at this university. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Head of Nursing School. Researchers have a duty to treat all respondents with dignity and to reduce anxiety or discomfort.

Participants were provided with a written explanation of the purpose of the study, the nature and the procedure of the study and their expected roles as participants of this study. Informed consent involves voluntary status; fairness was upheld in that those who wished to withdraw could do so during any stage of the collection. Participants were assured that they would not be coerced to continue and that they would not be disadvantaged in any way by the researcher or by the outcome of the study. The respondents were also assured that they would be used only for research purposes. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained during the analysis and the final reporting of this study. Confidentiality was observed in that the respondents who were asked to participate in this research were given assurance of confidentiality which was coupled with the anonymity principle. The questionnaire did not require the name of the university or that of the respondent. The signed consent forms were separated from the completed data collection instruments to ensure that there was no link

between these two. The names of the participants were not used on the questionnaires; numbers were assigned to each questionnaire.

3.14 Data Management

The information was saved in the computer that has a special log- in code known only to the researcher. The coding system used to maintain confidentiality and interview transcripts are kept under lock and key for a period of five years. Tapes used to record interviews were locked in a safe place which was free of both damp and dust. Data will be disposed of in accordance with the institutional policies, that is, after five years, by shredding.

3.15 Dissemination of Findings

According to Polit and Beck (2004) progress in nursing research depends on researchers' efforts to share their work. Dissertations and final reports to funders, which are too lengthy and inaccessible for widespread use, are read only by a handful of people. Therefore, publication in professional journal articles ensures broad circulation of research findings. Executive summaries of the study were sent to the Department of Health, the Nursing Education institution participated in the study. The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Library and the Health Systems Trust were furnished with a report on completion of this study.

3.16 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed quantitative, qualitative and purposive cluster research methodologies of the study. Concordance between the descriptive exploratory research design and methodology as pertaining to the data analysis has been demonstrated. The ethical

considerations, validity and reliability, trustworthiness, limitations and strength of the study have additionally been discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this study; these are organized according to the research objectives, starting with sample realization and demographic data. The purpose of the study was to explore the views of adult learners doing Coursework Masters and BN Honours on their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. The objectives were (a) to identify teaching strategies (b) to describe learning styles (c) to explore the views of adult learners about learning (d) to explore factors facilitating their learning (e) to explore factors hindering their learning.

4.2 Sample Realization

The participants in this study were postgraduate students from the School of Nursing who were doing Coursework Masters and BN Honours. From the population of 81 postgraduate students, who were to participate, only 62 were able to return their questionnaires, thus making the response rate 77 %. According to Polit and Beck (2004) a response rate which is greater than 60 % is sufficient for most purposes. This response rate is acceptable for a mailed or self-administered questionnaire. The researcher personally presented questionnaires to the participants. Polit and Beck (2004) contend that personal presentation of questionnaires to individual respondents is found to have a positive effect on rate of questionnaires returned.

Of the participants who returned questionnaires 87 % (n=54) were taking Coursework Masters and 13 % (n=8) were taking BN Honours.

4.3 Demographic Data

Demographic data were obtained from the participants. These included   nationality, gender, marital status and racial grouping. As for nationality there were local and international participants. The majority of the participants, 85.5 % (n=53) were South Africans, 4.8% (n=3) were from Rwanda, 3.2 % (n=2) from Malawi, 3.2 % (n=2) were from Nigeria, 1.6 % (n=1) from Botswana 1.6 % (n=1) from Seychelles. See table 1.

Table 1. Nationality.

Nationality	Per cent (100%)	Number (N=62)
South African	85.5 %	(n-54)
Rwandan	4,8 %	(n=3)
Malawian	3.2 %	(n=2)
Nigerian	3.2 %	(n=2)
Botswanan	1.6 %	(n=1)
Seychellois	1.6 %	(n=1)

Although perhaps not balanced there was also representation from each of the major South African racial groups with Africans 87.1% (n=54); Indians 8.1% (n=5); Coloureds 3.2% (n=2); Whites 1.6% (n=1). The majority were females (n=55; 88.7%) males were (n=7; 11.3%). About 50% (n=31) were married, 41.9% (n=26) were single, 4.8% (n=3) widowed and the rest fell into a category other (n=2; 3.2%).

4.4 Teaching Strategies used at a Postgraduate Nursing Programme.

The descriptive data is presented on the learning styles, teaching methodologies used and the factors which either facilitated or hindered learning of the participants as depicted by the learning style inventory. Next, the mean and the standard deviation scores obtained from the courses taught are presented for the overall sample.

The findings revealed that a variety of teaching methods are used at postgraduate level. These include discussions, PBL, lectures, case studies, short scenarios, reflective learning journals, learning contracts, learning logs, portfolios and demonstrations. See Table 2. The discussion method appeared to be the most commonly-used method with 95.2 % (n=59) of the participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with the use of this method. The mean was 3.54 and the standard deviation was 0.621.

The discussion method was followed by the PBL method with 87.1 % (n=45) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with this method. The mean was 3.45 and the standard deviation was 0.73. Responding to the item about the use of lectures, 72.6 % (n=45) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with this item. The mean was 3.07 and the standard deviation was 1.059.

The findings showed that case studies were used by the largest percentage in the postgraduate nursing programme. About 79 % (n=49) of the participants agreed and strongly agreed with the use of case studies. The mean was 3.14 and the standard deviation was 0.888. Short cases or scenarios emerged as one of the most   commonly-used teaching methods with 77.4 % (n=48) agreed and strongly agreed with this statement. The mean was 3.16 and the

standard deviation was 902 as in table 6. More than half of the participants 59.7 % (n=37) agreed and strongly agreed with the use of reflective journals. The mean was 2.83 and the standard deviation was 1.087.

Regarding the use of learning contracts 56.5 % (n=35) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with this item. The findings showed a mean of 2.73 and the standard deviation was1.15, indicating that learning contracts were used by more than 50 % of students at postgraduate level. Although the learning logs were used, 37.1 % (23) of the participants indicated that learning logs were not used in their programme.

Portfolios were also pointed out as one of the teaching strategies used with 64.5 % (n=40) of the participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with this item. The mean was 2.98 and the standard deviation was 1.055. Demonstrations were used by almost half of the participants in the group. About 51.6 % (n=32) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the use of demonstrations. The findings reflected the mean as 2.78 and the standard deviation was 1.2. See Table 2.

Table 2: Teaching methodologies used by postgraduate nursing programme.

Teaching Methods	SA/A		Neutral/missing		SD/D		Mean	Std
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Discussions	59	95.2%	1	1.6%	2	3.2%	3.54	0.621
PBL	54	87.1%	4	6.5%	4	6.4%	3.45	0.73
Lectures	45	72.6%	6	9.7%	11	17.7%	3.07	1.059
Case studies	49	79%	4	6.5%	9	14.6%	3.14	0.888
Short cases/scenarios	48	77.4%	5	8.0%	9	14.6%	3.16	0.902
Reflective journals	37	59.7%	9	14.5%	16	25.8%	2.83	1.087
Learning contracts	35	56.5%	11	17.7%	16	25.8%	2.73	1.15
Learning logs	18	29%	21	33.9%	23	37.1%	2.24	1.179
Portfolios	40	64.5%	8	12.9%	14	22.6%	2.98	1.055
Demonstration	32	51.6%	12	19.4%	18	29.0%	2.78	1.2

4.5 Methods that Worked Best for the Participants.

The participants were requested to list about four teaching methods that worked best for them. The majority of the participants 40.3 % (n=25) listed lectures, discussions, case studies, demonstrations and scenarios as methods that worked best for them. 19.4% (n=12) reported lectures, discussions, group work seminars and portfolios; 11.3% (n=7) reported problem-based learning, discussions, seminars and lectures, 9.7 % (n=6) reported problem-based learning, case studies, short cases and discussions; 3.2 % (n=2) reported discussions, lectures, group work and seminars; 3.2 % (n=2) reported portfolios, seminars, discussions, and role play, 1.6 % (n=1) reported discussions, lectures; 1.6 % (n=1) reported e-mail, internet, skype and webinars; 1.6 % (n=1) reported lectures, problem-based learning, demonstrations and discussions; 1.6 % (n=1) reported problem-based learning, case studies, learning contracts, portfolios; 1.6 % (n=1)

reported problem-based learning, discussions, seminars and lectures, portfolios; 1.6 % (n=1) reported problem-based learning, group discussions, portfolios, and short cases. 3.2 % (n=2) were missing. See Table 3.

Table 3. Methods that worked best for each participant.

Teaching methods	Frequency	Percent
Lectures, discussions, case studies, demonstrations, and scenarios	25	40.3 %
Discussions, lectures, group work, seminars, lectures	12	19.4 %
Problem-based learning, discussions, seminars, lectures	8	12.9 %
Problem-based learning, case studies, short cases, discussions	6	9.7 %
Discussions, lectures, group work, seminars	2	3.2 %
Portfolios, seminars, discussions, role play	2	3.2 %
Discussions, lectures	1	1.6 %
Emails, internet, skype, webinars	1	1.6 %
Lectures, problem-based learning, demonstration, discussion	1	1.6 %
Problem-based learning, case studies, learning contracts, portfolios	1	1.6 %
Problem-based learning, group- discussions, portfolios, short cases	1	1.6 %
Missing	2	3.2 %
Total	62	100 %

4.6 Factors Facilitating Learning

In response to the statement "I believe that adults learn most effectively when they have inner motivation to develop their skills", 96.8 % (n=60) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This method of learning appeared to be the most commonly used. The mean was 3.73 and the standard deviation was 0.577. See Table 4. 80.7 % (n=50) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that adult classes are interesting. Learning took place in the classroom environment. The mean was 3.11 and the standard deviation was 0.858.

Findings show that the majority of the participants 97.8 % (n=60) agreed or strongly agreed that the learning environment promotes positive emotions and helps them to remember the content with greater clarity. The mean was 3.48 and the standard deviation was 0.565. The use of scenarios and problem-based methods appeared to be the most commonly-used methods, providing participants with relevant education; 96.8 % (n=60) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with these two methods. The mean was 3.42 and the standard deviation was 0.56. See Table 4.

Table 4. Factors which facilitate adult learning.

Item	SA/A		Neutral		SD/D		Mean	Std
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Adults learn most effectively when they have inner motivation to develop a skill	60	96.8	0	0	2	3.2	3.37	0.577
Adult classes are interesting	50	80.7	1	1.6	11	17.8	3.11	0.858
Learning environment promotes positive emotions and helps students to remember the content with greater clarity	60	96.8	0	0	2	3.2	3.48	0.565
The use of scenarios and problem-based situations provides adult learners with educationally relevant problems	60	96.8	0	0	2	3.2	3.48	0.565

4.7 Factors Hindered Adult Learning

More than half of the participants 51.6 % (n=32) reported that the lecturer was interested in the students' problems. The mean was 2.39 and the standard deviation was 1.107. Of the 62 participants who responded to this study 40 (64.5 %) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that

the lecturer dominated the class discussions. The mean was 2.11 and the standard deviation was 1.118. See Table 5.

The findings showed that the lecturer was friendly and considerate to most of the participants. This was indicated by the 67.7 % (n=42) of the participants who disagreed with the statement that the lecturer was unfriendly and inconsiderate towards students. The mean was 2.05 and standard deviation was 1.122. See Table 5.

Table 5. Factors hindering adult learners' learning.

Item	SA/A		Neutral		SD/D		Mean	Std
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Lecturer is not interested in students' problems	32	51.6	0	0	30	48.4	2.39	1.107
My lecturer dominates class discussions	22	35.5	0	0	40	64.5	2.11	1.118
The lecturer is unfriendly and inconsiderate towards adult learners	20	32.2	0	0	42	67.7	2.05	1.122

4.8 Views of Adult Learners about Their Learning

Regarding the item, "I believe that most of the adult learners develop a preference that is based on childhood learning patterns" 67.8 % (n=42) of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The mean was 3.02 and the standard deviation was 0.938. The majority of the participants 93.5 % (n=58) either agreed or strongly agreed that students do not learn the same way. The mean was 3.43 and the standard deviation was 0. 694. See Table 6.

More than half of the participants, 51.6 % (n=32) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view that the learning objective was usually the transfer of knowledge from lecturer to students. The mean was 2.57 and the standard deviation was 0.963. Almost half of the participants, 51.6 % (n=32) stated that they believed that the purpose of learning was to acquire and memorize knowledge. The main purpose was not to memorize, but to become knowledgeable, critical thinkers. The mean was 2.63 and the standard deviation was 0.025. See Table 6.

In response to the item, "whether learning activities must be designed to assist adult learners in meeting their goals of learning", the majority of the participants, 85.5 % (n=53) either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The mean was 3.37 and the standard deviation was 0.78. Regarding the item, "I believe that the lecturer should treat questions and comments with respect, and acknowledge contributions adults make to the class," 93. 6 % (n=58) of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with this item. The mean was 3.6 and the standard deviation was 0.558. The majority of the participants, (n=57; 92.0 %) either agreed or strongly agreed that the lecturer should use a variety of teaching materials and methods to take into account differences in style, types and places of learning. The mean was 3.41 and the standard deviation was 0.619. See Table 6.

The findings reflected that the majority of the participants, 96.8 % (n=60) either agreed or strongly agreed that the teaching styles of lecturer should be modified according to situation, skills and learner level. The mean was 3.58 and the standard deviation was 0.497. Of the 62 respondents who participated in this study, 96.8 % (n=60) either agreed or strongly agreed that reinforcing student' learning and giving feedback to them increases responsibility towards

learning. The mean was 3.63 and the standard deviation was 0.486. See table 6. The majority of the participants, 98.4 % (n=61) either agreed or strongly agreed that they tried to avoid failure as much as they could. The findings showed a mean of 3.65 and the standard deviation was 0.515. The majority of the participants, 93.5 % (n=58) either agreed or strongly agreed that the lecturer should use more innovative activities for adult learners. The mean was 3.52 and the standard deviation was 0.624. More than half of the participants, 67.7 % (n=42) either agreed or strongly agreed that all learners in class should be expected to do the same work. The mean was 2.97 and the standard deviation was 1.057. See Table 6.

The findings revealed that the majority of the participants, 92.0 % (n=57) either agreed or strongly agreed that the experiences and emotions connected with learning stimulate the creation of meaning and the ability of adults to use new learning. The mean was 3.26 and the standard deviation was 0.599. Regarding the item, "Teaching strategy of lecture promotes the ability to present large amounts of content in a short time frame", about 85.5 % (n=53) of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The mean was 3.16 and the standard deviation was 0.706. Findings revealed that the majority of the participants, 91.9 (n=57) either agreed or strongly agreed that small groups assigned to work on case scenarios can find the experience stimulating. The mean was 3.42 and the standard deviation was 0.737. See Table 6.

Table 6.   Views about Adult Learning

Item	SA/A		Neutral		SD/D		Mean	Std
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Believe that most adult learners develop preferences based on childhood learning patterns	42	67.8	3	4.8	17	27.5	3.02	0.936
Believe that all students in class do not learn the same way	58	93.5	0	0	4	6.5	3.43	0.694
Learning objective is to transfer knowledge from lecturer to students	28	45.2	2	3.2	32	51.6	2.57	0.963
Believe that the purpose of learning is to memorize new knowledge	32	51.6	2	3.2	28	45.2	2.63	0.025
Learning activities must be designed to assist adult learners to meet their learning goals.	53	85.5	2	3.2	7	11.3	3.37	0.78
Believe that the lecturer should treat questions with respect and acknowledge contributions adults make to the class	58	93.6	2	3.2	2	3.2	3.6	0.558
I try to avoid failure as much as possible	61	98.4	0	0	1	1.6	3.65	0.515
Lecturer who uses a variety of teaching material and methods to take into account differences in style types and places of learning	57	92.0	3	4.8	2	3.2	3.41	0.619

Teaching styles of lecturer should be modified according to situation, skill and learner level	60	96.8	2	3.2	0	0	3.58	0.497
Reinforcing students' learning and giving feedback to them increases student responsibility towards learning	60	96.8	2	3.2	0	0	3.63	0.624
The lecturer should use more innovative activities for adult learners	58	93.5	2	3.2	2	3.2	3.52	0.624
All learners in class should be expected to do the same work	42	67.7	2	3.2	18	29.0	2.97	1.057
Experiences and emotions connected with learning stimulate the creation of meaning and the ability of adults to use new learning	57	92.0	0	0	5	8.0	3.26	0.599
Teaching strategy of lecturer promotes the ability to present large amount of content in a short time frame	53	85.5	0	0	9	14.5	3.16	0.706
Small groups assigned to work on case scenarios can find the experience stimulating	57	91.9	0	0	5	8.1	3.24	0.737

4.9 Learning Styles

4.9.1 Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic.

About 93.5% (n=58) of the participants preferred what they were learning. The mean was 3.42 and the standard deviation was 0.561. About ninety three (n=58) indicated that they learn best with pictures, diagrams and flow charts. The mean was 3.42 and standard deviation was 0.561. Regarding the item, "I process information better if I engage in a physical activity", 67.7 % (n=42) either strongly agreed or agreed. The mean was 2.78 and standard deviation was 1.2.

The findings revealed that 91.9 % (n=57) either agreed or strongly agreed that they preferred to hear the message or instruction being given. The mean was 3.4 and the standard deviation was 0.689. More than half of the participants, 54.9 % (n=34) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they remembered verbal instructions and preferred someone to read the directions to them while they did practical work. The mean was 2.39 and the standard deviation was 1.005. 58 % (n=36) of the participants indicated that they generally did not like lecture or discussion classes, preferring practical sessions. The mean was 2.28 and the standard deviation was 1.002. About 91.9 % (n=57) indicated that they want their learning to be practical. The findings reflected a mean of 3.39 and a standard deviation of 0.613. 93.5 % (n=58) of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they preferred taking themselves through a task and that they should be given such opportunities. The mean was 3.49 and the standard deviation was 0.595. See Table 7.

Table 7. Visual, auditory, kinaesthetic learners.

Preferred Learning Style	SA/A		Neutral		SD/D		Mean	Std
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Visual								
I prefer to see what I'm learning	58	93.5	2	3.2	2	3.2	3.4	0.561
I learn best with pictures, diagrams and flow charts	58	93.5	0	0	4	6.5	3.42	0.561
I process information better if I engage in a physical activity	42	67.7	2	3.2	18	29	2.78	1.2
Auditory								
I prefer to hear messages being given	57	91.9	0	0	5	8.1	3.4	0.689
Kinaesthetic								
I remember verbal instruction and prefer someone to read the directions to me while I do practical work	27	43.5	1	1.6	34	54.9	2.39	1.005
I generally do not like lectures or discussions. I prefer practical sessions	36	58	1	1.6	25	40.3	2.28	1.002
I want my learning to be practical	57	91.9	1	1.6	4	6.5	3.39	0.613
I prefer taking myself through a task and I should be given this opportunity	58	93.5	1	1.6	3	4.8	3.49	0.595

4.9.2 Logical, Social Learners and Systems Person.

Findings revealed that 96.8 % (n=60) of the participants learned better by comparing past experience with new experience. The mean was 3.44 and the standard deviation was 0.562. In response to the item, "I need immediate feedback concerning my progress" 98.4 % (n=61) of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with this item. The mean was 3.58 and the standard deviation was 0.529. The findings revealed that the majority of the participants, 85.5 % (n=53)

either agreed or strongly agreed that they learned theories and concepts better if they were presented in a logical manner. The mean was 3.23 and the standard deviation was 0.698. More than half of the participants, 70.9 % (n=44) either agreed or strongly agreed that they preferred to be with a team instead of studying alone. The mean was 3 and the standard deviation was 1.086.

Of the 62 participants, 95.2 % (n=59) indicated that they preferred lecturers who used participatory techniques such as case studies and problem-solving groups in order to apply knowledge to current problems. The mean was 3.63 and the standard deviation was 0.52. The findings showed that most of the participants, 91.9 % (n=57) preferred lecturers who drew on students' knowledge and experiences to provide opportunities for dialogue among students. The mean was 3.35 and the standard deviation was 0.685. The findings revealed that 79 % (n=49) of participants learn better if they are given a global picture first and then break that into smaller parts. The mean was 3.14 and standard deviation was 0.888. See Table 8.

Table 8. Logical, social learners and systems' person.

Item	SA/A		Neutral		SD/D		Mean	Std
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Logical								
I learn better by comparing past with new experience	60	96.8	0	0	2	3.2	3.44	0.562
I need immediate feedback concerning my progress	61	98.4	0	0	1	1.6	3.58	0.529
I learn theories and concepts better if they are presented in a logical manner	53	85.5	2	3.2	7	11.3	3.23	0.698
Social								
I prefer to be with a team rather than studying alone	44	70.9	0	0	18	29.0	3	1.086
I prefer a lecturer who uses participatory techniques such as case studies and problem-solving groups in order to tackle current problems	59	95.2	2	3.2	1	1.6	3.63	0.52
I prefer a lecturer who draws on students' knowledge and experiences to provide opportunities for dialogue among students	57	91.9	1	1.6	4	6.5	3.35	0.685
Systems Person								
I learn better if I am given a global picture first, later breaking that into smaller parts	49	79	4	6.5	9	14.6	3.14	0.888

4.9.3 Kolb's Learning Styles.

About 85.5 % (n=53) of the participants stated that they learn better if information is presented in a systematic logical manner. The mean was 3.15 and the standard deviation was 0.735. Regarding the item, "I understand better when course material relates to experience or my career", 85.5 % (n=53) either strongly agreed or agreed. The mean was 3.16 and the standard

deviation was 0.706. More than half, 87.1 % (n=54) either strongly agreed or agreed that they learn better if they are given time to reflect on their learning experience. The mean was 3.45 and standard deviation was 0.73. In response to the item, "I prefer to have an opportunity to work actively on a well-defined task, through trial and error, in an environment such as a clinical skills laboratory", 92 % (n=57) of participants either strongly agreed or agreed. The mean was 3.24 and the standard deviation was 0.737. The majority of the participants, 96.8 % (n=60) either strongly agreed or agreed that they prefer a teacher to provide guidance in a safe environment during their practical work. The mean was 3.63 and standard deviation was 0.624. See Table 9.

Table 9. Kolb's learning styles

Preferred Learning Style	SA/A		Neutral		SD/D		Mean	Std
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Assimilator Abstract								
I learn better if information is presented in a systematic, logical manner	53	85.5	4	6.5	5	8.1	3.16	0.735
Diverger Type 1 (concrete reflective)								
I understand better when course material relates to experience or to my career	53	85.5	0	0	9	14.6	3.16	0.706
Assimilator Type 2 (abstract & reflective								
I learn better if I am given time to reflect on my experiences	54	87.1	4	0	4	6.5	3.45	0.73
Converger Type 3 (concrete active)								
I prefer the opportunity to work actively on well-defined tasks, through trial and error in an environment such as a clinical skills laboratory	57	92	0	0	5	8.1	3.24	0.737
I prefer a teacher to provide guidance in a safe environment during my practical work	60	96.8	2	3.2	0	0	3.63	0.624

4.9.4 Deep Learning.

About 96.8 % (n=60) indicated that prefer applying course material to new situations to solve problems. The mean was 3.48 and the standard deviation was 0.56. The findings revealed that 64 % (n=40) either strongly agreed or agreed that participants' learning with understanding was important to them. The mean was 2.98 and the standard deviation was 1.055. More than

half, 51.6 % (n=32) of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that sometimes they read supplementary material out of curiosity in addition to prescribed resources. The mean was 2.57 and the standard deviation was 0.963. Only 51.6 % (n=32) of the participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed that learning background information is important for them to understand the subject at hand. The mean was 2.39 and the standard deviation was 1.107. More than half, 56.5 % (n=35) of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that they prefer making summaries of what they read guided by their interpretation of information. The mean was 2.73 and the standard deviation was 1.15. The majority of the participants, 98.4 % (n=61) either strongly agreed or agreed that they always try to relate what they read to their previous knowledge or experience. The mean was 3.65 and the standard deviation was 0.515. See Table 10

Table 10. Deep Learning

Preferred Learning Style	SA/A		Neutral		SD/D		Mean	Std
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Deep Learning								
I prefer applying course material to new situations in order to solve problems	60	96.8	0	0	2	3.2	3.48	0.56
Learning with understanding is very important to me	40	64.5	4	6.4	18	29	2.98	1.055
Sometimes I read supplementary material out of curiosity, in addition to prescribed sources	32	51.6	2	3.2	28	45.2	2.57	0.963
Learning background information is important for me to understand the subject at hand	30	48.4	0	0	32	51.6	2.39	1.107
I prefer making summaries of what I read guided by my interpretation	35	56.5	9	14.5	18	29	2.73	1.15
I always try to relate what I read to my previous knowledge or experience	61	98.4	0	0	1	1.6	3.65	0.515

4.9.5 Surface and Strategic Approach

In response to the item, "Memorizing facts works better for them", 59.1 % (n=37) participants either strongly agreed or agreed. The mean was 2.83 and the standard deviation was 1.087. The findings revealed that 64.5 % (n=40) of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that they only learn what is presented to them, questioning it is for their teacher to do. The mean was 2.98 and the standard deviation was 1.055. Regarding the item, "When studying for exams

or tests, I only focus on what the teacher said is important", 92 % (n=57) of participants either strongly agreed or agreed. The mean was 3.4 and the standard deviation was 0.689. The majority of the participants, 93.6 % (n=58) either strongly agreed or agreed that they highlight all that they need to read for exams or for the test. The mean was 3.42 and the standard deviation was 0.561. The findings revealed that 85.5% (n=53) of participants did not go beyond what they learn in class because they were learning to pass. The mean was 3.16 and the standard deviation was 0.706. The findings revealed that 67.7 % (n=42) adopted a learning approach that gave them best results at the time. The mean was 2.97 and the standard deviation was 1.057. See table 11

Table: 11 Surface Approach and Strategic Learning

Preferred Learning Style	SA/A		Neutral		SD/D		Mean	Std
Surface learning	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Memorizing facts works better for me	37	59.1	9	14.5	16	25.8	2.83	1.087
I only learn what is presented to me, questioning it is for my teacher to do	40	64.5	2	3.2	20	32.2	2.98	1.055
When studying for the exams or tests, I only focus on what the teacher said is important	57	92	0	0	5	8.1	3.4	0.689
I highlight all that I need to read for exams or for the test	58	93.6	0	0	4	6.5	3.42	0.561
I do not go beyond what I learn in class because I am learning to pass	53	85.5	0	0	9	14.5	3.16	0.706
Strategic Approach								
I adopt a learning style that gives me best results	42	67.7	2	3.2	18	29%	2.97	1.057

Results from Qualitative Analysis

4.10. Introduction

The process of coding was basically selective reduction; by reducing the text or categories to a word, set of words or phrases, a researcher can focus and code for specific words or patterns that are indicative of the research process. Text is coded, broken down into manageable categories on a variety of levels, words, word sense, phrases, sentences or themes then examined using one of content analysis basic methods, i.e. conceptual or relational (interviews from text). In this study, conceptual analysis was followed. Conceptual analysis is also known as thematic analysis. This approach was used in analysing words and phrases. Coding was conducted manually by reading through text and writing down concept occurrences. The data that was not needed was deleted or set aside as unwanted material (Weber, 1990).

When undertaking the word frequency count one must not assume that the words mentioned most often are the words that reflect the greatest concern. The researcher did not ascribe great importance to those words or concepts which were not frequently mentioned because most issues are difficult to raise.

4.11 Views of Adult Learners about their Learning

A number of categories emerged under the views of adult learners about why they engage in postgraduate learning. These included Reasons for engaging in Postgraduate Studies, Positive views about Teaching Methodologies used at Postgraduate Level, Negative views about Teaching and Learning Process, Challenges/Barriers.

4.11.1 Reasons for Engaging in Postgraduate Studies

Motivation emerged as a reason for engaging in Postgraduate studies. Two subcategories emerged from the category motivation. These included intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Each of these categories was made up of codes which will be discussed under each subcategory.

Intrinsic Motivation. The findings in this study revealed that participants were motivated to learn for a number of reasons. These included the desire to be knowledgeable. According to the participants, today adults need higher levels of academic and technical knowledge to remain employable in an information and service economy characterized by frequent job and career change. Some indicated that they needed something challenging to do and they needed to be knowledgeable in their work place. This is evident in the following extracts:

"I wanted to move out from the comfort zone and do something challenging in another job..."
P8
"... I needed to learn more so that I can be knowledgeable at the same time." P8

Other participants were motivated by wanting to know what is important nationally and internationally. Others felt that the experience they have accumulated over years was not enough; they needed to study further so as to ground themselves to their area of work as the extracts below:

"...I wanted to be well versed with what is going on nationally and internationally pertaining

nursing..." P12

"It's the experience I gathered so what's happening now is to attach a name of the concept to something that I already know." P3

Extrinsic Motivation. Serving as models to young nurses serve as a motivator to some of the participants. Having other nurses looking up to them about even engaging in furthering their studies was reported as one of the driving force to study further and to pursue even in difficult times. The support given to them also motivated them to study further as stated in the extracts below:

"..., from my place of work, I observed that since I've started studying again, I've been a role model to many young professionals, so as it is now, so many have applied to continue.*"*
        P3

"Hmm, if she can do it at her age, what about us? So I've been a motivating factor and I helped them. I've had so much support in all forms and that has been instrumental in propelling me to go on and on." P3

4.12 Views about Learning at Postgraduate Level

The categories that emerged under these were grouped into positive and negative views. Positive views highlighted factors that facilitated or promoted learning of students at postgraduate level. Subcategories that emerged included (a) collaborative learning (b) active involvement in learning process (c) observation of adult learning principles i.e. self-directed learning, prior learning (d) supportive environment (e) availability of resources, and (f) support.

4.12.1 Positive Views about Teaching Methodologies used at Postgraduate Level

Findings from this study revealed that participants were shifting from a pedagogic traditional teacher-centred approach, in which the emphasis was on teachers and what they taught, to a student-centred approach, in which the emphasis was on students and what they

learned. These participants looked at progressive education vs. traditional teacher. Others required a fundamental change in the role of the educator from that of a didactic teacher to that of a facilitator of learning. Others wanted to explore some of the student-centred approaches to learning being implemented, and the underlying educational theory and concepts on which they were based.

4.12.1.1 Collaborative Learning

In support of collaborative learning, the participants indicated that they preferred learning in groups, with peers. They cited a number of reasons including that it facilitated their learning, it helped simplify difficult material, and allowed coverage of more content at the same time, learning from one another, forced participation by all members in the learning process. This is evident in the following extracts:

"Group discussion promotes active participation and involvement of all learners." P24

"...And then meeting with a group, I found it very helpful because you get to get other people's ideas how they looking at certain concepts..., maybe something that will simplify the way you've been looking at them and that it helps you. And you need to cover a lot of work that you would have not covered through..., you still have to force it". P4

Elaborating on Collaborating Learning, the participants preferred small group teaching as it allow opportunities for face-to-face interaction with other members. These included viewpoints, awareness, and exchange of ideas. Participants were able to exchange their ideas and feelings with other group members. Yet others were being challenged by the viewpoints of their colleagues in order to expand their universe of awareness. The participants also reported that this style of teaching provided teachers with the opportunity for more intimate and rewarding

engagements with students than is possible in lectures.   The following extracts illustrate this point:

"An adult learner I prefer a small group where we share ideas and everybody get a chance of saying something. Everybody participates as opposed to a larger group where there is most of the time somebody who will dominate and you will find others recoiling." P3

"Discussion with the group is also good because, as I've said it enhances what you know. Sometimes you have a weakness in one area and this other person has his track in what you have a weakness in." P14

Other participants were very much involved in the formulation of the aims and objectives of group discussions. These included learning together and remaining independent in the learning process. Some fostered the ability to work cooperatively in groups, collect information and develop confidence in the decision making. Others worked together until the given task was completed and that made them acquire more knowledge. This is illustrated by the following extracts:

"..., so I've gained a lot from my colleagues..., yes, because I've been involved team learning and also being involved into the group where I really sit and discuss a question, and there were so many questions I've understood after a colleague has explained to me." P16

"..., and also still under team learning, you also as a learner get an opportunity to hear the ideas and suggestions from others and you also reflect on them." P9

4.12.1.2 Active Involvement in the Learning Process

The findings in this study revealed that participants were driven by active learning environments that allowed them to talk and listen, write and reflect as they approached course content through problem-solving exercises. These included active participation, degree of engagement and promotion of critical thinking. Others were motivated when they were actively involved in the learning process. Others needed to know what was expected of them to do in

order to engage them in learning so as to stimulate critical thinking and a greater awareness of

other perspectives. This is encapsulated in the following extracts:

"For me..., innovative methods were wonderful experience because now I am able to apply them in my work situation." P11

"When we meet, we've been calling each other, apparently asking questions from each other, and for me it was very helpful to learn from each other." P15

4.12.1.3 Observation of Adult Learning Principles

About two subcategories emerged under the facilitators of learning. These included (a)

self-directed learning, and (b) prior knowledge

Self-directed Learning. Participants in this study preferred self-directed learning

because as adult learners it allowed them to take initiative for their own learning, kept them

motivated and allowed them to take decisions about their learning as illustrated in the following

extracts:

"I like self-directed learning the one where the students take initiatives. I think it's the one the school is using, and for me not only I like it, let me say I love it. I learned that love is more than like. I really love it and it is helpful for me it's very positive and encouraging students." P15

"I am a self-directed learner, motivated and able to take initiatives in my learning, and take decisions accordingly." P47

Prior Knowledge. Participants cited prior knowledge as one of the attributes of an adult

learner which is bridging the wealth of prior learning to class, and is also the one which

facilitated their learning. Participants indicated that they bring a wealth of knowledge to class

and this facilitated meaningful learning to them**.** This included activation of prior knowledge and

an inquisitive style of learning. Others included activation of prior knowledge as a major determinant of what could be learned, and learning in the context enhanced transfer of knowledge. Others fostered competence by an inquisitive style of learning. This is evident in the following extracts:

"I think it's true. These adult learners like us who came with..., who have been working in units for eighteen years; others have worked more than that. We've got experiences on different issues. So as you come in class, you don't come blank, you come with ideas and that is the thing when you come here. You come just like topping on what you already know." P16

"..., each of us in our own sphere, own lives, own experiences come in with a very much source of information. So, therefore it should be assumed that an adult learner with the age of 50, or over the age of 30 is regarded with a wealth of knowledge and information that needs to be shared and nurtured." P8

"It's the experience I gathered so what's happening now is to attach a name of the concept to something that I already know." P3

Elaborating on prior knowledge, the participants were adult learners who came to learn, bringing with them experiences and knowledge in diverse areas. These included work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education. Others were able to relate new facts to past experiences and enjoyed having their talents and knowledge explored in a teaching situation. Others were able to relate theories and concepts to recognize the value of experience in learning. Others wanted to self-reflect on their learning processes to discuss options for their new roles, plan action strategies and to exchange knowledge and skills for effective and efficient learning. This is encapsulated in the following extracts:

"..., that's the difference between us and the kids. We are experienced, we are involved and most of the time we are advancing in what we are already doing. So it's true that experience really does help and experience helps adult learners when they come to their learning to advance in their education. I've seen it that experiences helped and it was like I was just adding on to what I already know. Experience does help." P16

"..., very motivated, excited and having a lot of experience to share. Having to work and study at the same time can be challenging." P11

4.12.1.4 Support

Three subcategories emerged under support. These included peer support, lecturers support, and family support.

Peer Support. The findings in this study revealed that participants were motivated to learn through support by peers helping one other, discussing with peers and tackling difficult questions, as indicated in the following extracts:

"..., there is no way that you can do alone. There are different points of view for whatever work that you faced with, so peers helped a lot." P11

"*..., and other factor it was my friends because they kept on helping me with things if I need something they can clarify it." P10*

"Having peers that we discuss with, tackle some difficult questions, so it did help me a lot." P11 continued.

Lecturer Support. The findings in this study revealed that the support participants received from lecturers facilitated their learning. The students outside South Africa expressed that sometimes they needed more than cell phone support, they needed to face support and lecturers were able to provide that. This is encapsulated in the following extracts:

"..., and another thing that has helped me also was the lecturers because they were very supportive." P10

"..., you see in this school, there are other people who are helping us as foreigners. Let me say ..., I'm not discriminating, but if you are a foreigner you feel it. And sometimes you feel that you need someone to talk to, not on the cell phone, face to face. So the school of nursing has parents. There are people to whom you go and talk to, for me it's a very positive point." P15

"..., lecturers each time when you have something that you needed, they were there also to enlighten you about the information and everything that you required." P10

Family Support. Findings in this study revealed that most of the participants reported that their children, spouse and helpers at home provided them with critical support and encouragement for this long journey of learning. Some learners were supported psychologically, others materially. This is illustrated by the following extracts:

"*My family is very supportive because even the ones that are away from home, that are not staying with me, they always ask me..., mum, how do you feel? Aren't you tired? And you know, even when I need to come to study after hours, they always like to accompany me and say; mum..., leave your car behind and then we can take you there because we don't like you driving that late..., they are very supportive". P2*

"My family is also very supportive. My children are interested in knowing how things are going and I also receive good luck cards and the messages on the card were that I must do them proud just like they will do me proud..., so I do have family support." P1

"..., even the helpers that we have in our homes, they are so supportive because if you have informed her that you are writing exams, she will make sure that you focus on your studies." P10

4.12.2 Availability of learning resources

Findings in this study revealed that participants did have access to learning material. Teachers provided them with the required learning aids which complied with their learning requirements. These included learning equipment, learning packages, and members of staff. Others stated that their teachers used learning packages such as audio-visual aids; these were made available and accessible as illustrated by the following extracts:

"..., has got all learning resources." P51

"..., lecturers are there to assist and computer labs are available to do our work." P33

Elaborating on availability of resources, the participants revealed that the staff was always available as part of the resources to teach them, consult them when needed by students as illustrated by the following extracts:

"I like to hear from the teacher teaching, explaining concepts and answering questions where I did not understand..." P15

"Our teachers are like the source of reference because you ask something you don't know and they will tell you exactly what you needed." P7

4.13 Negative Views about Teaching/Learning Strategies

Four subcategories emerged under the category negative views about teaching/learning process. These included demanding and time consuming teaching/learning strategies, instability due to changes in lecturers, preparation for class, and lecturers' level of knowledge and experience.

4.13.1 Demanding and Time Consuming Teaching/Learning Strategies

The participants cited the use of the portfolio as a teaching tool as the most stressful, demanding and time consuming method from the side of the students. They additionally expressed anxiety and stress about the uncertainty of the nature and the amount of evidence to provide in the portfolio. Some of them also considered the portfolio too big and bulky, making copious entries seeming to be too time consuming. Others stated that portfolios were a waste of time, not what the students had expected to do when they applied for the course. Others

commented that it required a great deal of work on their part. This is illustrated in the following extract:

"..., the only problem was portfolio. There is a lot of work and the time allocated for that is a bit tricky because there are a lot of some other things to be done in the same year. And at the end of the year you have to produce a portfolio of everything which is a lot of work." P16

"Indeed, us who are working full-time and studying part-time have trouble on programmes because of too much work we are facing with." P13

"..., another thing there is also a lot of work that we do in my place of employment as well." P11

4.13.2 Instability due to Changes in Lecturers

The participants expressed that changes in lecturers during the course of the year affected their learning because that required them adjusting learning to the teaching style of philosophy of the new lecturer. The difference in the way the lecturers prepared for class, delivered the content, was cited as the challenge that affected their learning with one lecturer favouring content driven learning and learning direct from the book, and the other facilitating learning by sourcing information from them. Students' facilitated learning stimulated them, but content driven approach frustrated them. This is captured in the following extracts:

"Wow! At the beginning of the year we didn't have a problem because our lecturers were approachable, they prepared the content, and the content was eh...spot on. They left no gaps in our knowledge. However, in our second semester we have encountered lot of problems. The lecturer used to come and sit, reading from text book, she was not prepared, she didn't give us a good direction." P5

"I do agree with the student that the strategy used will influence or will not influence student and learning e.g. for first half of the year and I had a lot of participation and the second half of the year, we changed the lecturer. We did just sit, just read out of the book, a prescribed book, my marks were not as good as for this year, and I was not motivated to attend." P6

4.13.3 Preparation of Class

Preparation of the lecturers for class and their knowledge and skills emerged as one of the challenges. The participants pointed out that some lecturers came to class unprepared and they will read direct for the book. Others felt that their attendance was of no use because they remained passive recipients of information. Participants felt that the lecturer's conveying information which was readily available elsewhere without adding anything to it was a waste of time. This is evident in the following extracts:

"..., she wasn't even prepared for the lecture. It was just like she page through the text book and said not this, no that. There was no application as such." P5

'...Personally, I come from Pietermaritzburg, to actually put petrol and come here for what, for something that I can teach myself at home, was really discouraging." P1

4.13.4 Lecturers Level of Knowledge and Experience

The participants in this study also highlighted the problem of lack of immediate application of classroom theory into practice. According to these participants they expected that the lecturer draws from previous knowledge and experience to illustrate the application of the theory they were learning to practice. This is evident in the following extracts:

"..., there was no actual application as such to say basically, how I would like for you to apply this model. For example, for us actually to see that we could be able to better use the knowledge that we have learned and put into practice." P5

"..., I will prefer that the lecturer to be well informed and to talk out of experience and prior knowledge. P2

4.14 Challenges/Barriers

Three subcategories emerged from the category challenges. These included Personal Barriers, Work Related Barriers, and School Related Barriers. Each of these subcategories was made up of codes which will be discussed under each subcategory.

4.14.1 Personal Barriers

Elaborating from personal barriers, participants cited self doubt, computer literacy, and dual status as the most factors which hindered their learning.

Self Doubt. In this study the participants indicated that during early phases of their studies they doubted that they will cope with their studies, the expectations from the course seemed too high for them. The thought of studying at the university where more is expected really challenged them. This is evident in the following extracts:

"... Think of one, being fear of the unknown. You should look at you life, you look at your life style, you look at the expectation of studying and you think you not going to make it and you decide not to study at all..." P1

The fear I had, first of all, was that I didn't have self worth... I didn't think I would be able to achieve this degree..., so I didn't start earlier." P6

"...And also the fear on its own of being at the university where at times I felt very much I had phobia to say..., I don't know how I can describe it..., being there at the university because at times I found that there was too much work which also clash with work that I am suppose to do at home..." P12

Computer Literacy. Findings in this study revealed that participants had problems with the computer. Lack of computer skills was an important barrier to optimal performance. They were unable to type their assignments which are a requirement. This delayed them in engaging with their studies. The use of advanced computer programs such as PowerPoint, SPSS was cited

as another challenge in the learning process of postgraduate studies. This is evident in the following extracts:

"..., I wasn't used to the technology that was being used in the institution, so I really found very challenging to use, to do my assignments and all the necessary school work that I was suppose to have done." P7

"..., so we were delayed because we did not have computer skills and you could see that for Masters, there is nothing you can do without computer skills, so it's like a course on its own..., the fact that we were not taught SPSS programme was a big problem. You can't do analysis." P11

"The idea of using Power point presentation was good because it summarizes the points of discussion and it made visible for both the lecturer and the student at the same time. But one needs to have a basic knowledge of computer before being able to use Power Point, so it made it difficult for me." P13

Dual Status. In this study the findings revealed that participants were challenged to cope with a dual status of being an adult learner with other responsibilities as well as being a student as illustrated in the following extracts:

"..., and another thing was that I am a working person so to me to run from being a full-time employed somebody and a part-time student was a bit challenging again to me." P7

"It's quite challenging because as I've mentioned earlier, two sides you act as a leader. You become an adult whether you like it or not you must lead, so it comes with obligations. You suffered roles as a mother, a leader, so it's difficult honestly." P14

"..., having to work and study at the same time can be challenging." P11

Other concern came from local vs international students. The findings in this study revealed that local participants were the ones with problems as far as learning was concerned. Local students stated that they were faced with family responsibilities, work-allocated duties, together with their learning which formed a barrier to success at school. International students were at the university full-time even if they were adult learners with a repertoire of

responsibilities, but they were here; they focused on their learning with minimal family responsibilities as illustrated by the following extracts:

"What I can say it's a bit tricky because you discover that there are two types of adult learners. There are those who are full-time, especially the international students..., so they've got all the time to spend in the local area network (LAN) and look for information for 24 hours. They had no hurry to go home too; they stay in the university residence. But when it comes to the other adult learners who are us (local students), who are not full-time here..., it's difficult because now we had to look for other things as well. We had to attend to other problems as well, so we discover that part-time adult learners ended up dropping out because sometimes it's just stressful." P16

"For me..., I will wait for others to come because I leave on campus and then I don't have other things or responsibility to do..., it's just this place, which means that I concentrate myself, time in whatever for the studies? So, I don't have difficulty to meet my colleagues. I'm always available." P15

Family priorities surfaced as one of the challenges that affected most of the students' studies at postgraduate level. These ranged from paying school fees for their children, caring for sick family members, assisting children with their studies at the expense of your time as well as attending school meetings. Others had lower completion rates than traditional students as illustrated by the following extracts:

"..., I need to care for my disabled husband, caring a great deal of responsibility regarding his life and also putting bread on the table as s breadwinner at my home that can be a source of hindrance. But I have used these factors and tried to turn around and made it work for me." P8

"..., another factor was the children, because I've got children that are school going, so, I found it very difficult to run around doing their homework and attending school meeting, as well as still coming to school and doing my best." P7

"..., we have to attend to other problems as well, and so we discover that part-time adult learners end up dropping out because sometimes it's just stressful that at home you've got things to do." P16

4.14.2 Work Related Barriers.

In this study, participants cited work related barriers as contributory factors for them to drop out of the university. They were unable to attend classes due to work. Lack of support from work, unplanned change of work time schedule, and lack of financial support from employers emerged as a challenge that affected participants' learning process.

Lack of Employer Support. In this study the findings revealed that participants had full-time jobs; there was evidence of lack of employer support in their learning process; how employers conceptualized their support was critical. The participants reported that they struggled to get time off for basic courses. Others stated that it appeared that there was little employer support. This is captured by the following extracts:

"..., and another problem that we had really, it was our employer. We have difficulties here as government employees because the support is not there at all. You find that as an employee, whatever you are studying, it's going to uplift the standard of education in our department, but the support is not there, because you have to be at work and also attend your school." P10

"It can be over delegation of duties at work, so you'll find that at times you are being told to go and attend a special meeting which is not scheduled, which would also affect you. Maybe those meetings are not during school hours, that's after 16H00. At times you are being allocated to go and do student accompaniment, and when you come back you are exhausted." P12

Lack of Financial Support from Employers. Participants who were international students cited lack of financial support from their country of origin as one of the barriers to their learning. They struggled for money to travel to South Africa in pursuit of their studies, money to buy books, and to pay for their studies. This challenge began when their countries of origin stopped sponsoring learners furthering their studies. This is evident in the following extracts:

"Actually I did not think of this university initially. I was at home and many people used to be sponsored to go to overseas to study and it was said that they were no longer sponsoring people

who go overseas, they don't return to their country of origin. So, based on that, Africa was the only option." P14

The funds also are the factor. The funds to go for studies, buy books and to pay fees has always been a factor, but now I've been able to make some little savings with which I've decided to come." P13

Unplanned Change of Work Time Schedule. Findings revealed that the participants were working full time and reported that working hours affected their ability to schedule classes. Others were likely not to attend classes due to change of time schedule. They had to accompany students at clinical areas sometimes far away depriving themselves of school hours for attendance as illustrated in the following extracts:

"It's regularly, irregular because sometimes work schedules have been altered without notification and having done Masters, you have the school to attend to. And there is this place of work which wants you on a special duty and sometimes you end up missing some of the lectures." P13

"..., at times you are being allocated to go for student accompaniment and you end up not attending the class." P 12

4.14.3 School-Related Barriers

One subcategory emerged from the category school-related barriers. This included suitability of class time. This subcategory was made up of codes which will be discussed hereunder.

Suitability of class time. Weekdays and office hours emerged as a challenge that affected studies of postgraduate students. Sometimes the unplanned change in their work schedule impacted on their studies because work is also a priority. They had to attend to work demand that clashed with the class times first rather than their needs. This is encapsulated in the following extracts:

"..., that's true, because we are attending during weekdays. During weekdays it's time that we are working. We are unable to attend during those periods... Although it was not that convenient, some of the students ended up not being able to complete the course." P10

"For me it was work in my employment, it was difficult sometimes to attend some of the classes because they are not offered over the weekend, they are offered during working hours." P11

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of findings, recommendations, limitations and conclusion. To reiterate the purpose of the study was to explore the views of adult learners about their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme. The research objectives were: (a) to identify the teaching strategies used in a postgraduate nursing programme (b) to describe the learning styles of students in a postgraduate nursing programme (c) to explore the views of adult learners about learning in a postgraduate nursing programme (d) to explore factors facilitating their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme (e) to explore factors hindering their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme.

The findings are discussed in relation to the research and the conceptual framework used in this study as well as the literature and previous studies on this topic. This study adopted mixed methods: A quantitative exploration and descriptive design and qualitative approach were used to conduct the research. A questionnaire and focus group interviews were used as data collection tools. Utilising the survey for its exploratory purpose allowed the researcher to obtain information relating to the views held by adult learners with regards to their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme. A purposive sampling technique for quantitative approach was used to obtain a sample of eighty one adult learners at one of the selected higher education institutions. Only sixty two of the eighty one in the sample returned the complete questionnaires.

A cluster sampling for focus group interviews for qualitative approach was used to obtain a sample of sixteen adult learners who were able to participate in focus group interviews.

5.2 Demographic Data

The findings from this study revealed that 87 % of the participants were taking Coursework Masters and 13 % were taking BN Honours. As for nationality, there were both local and international participants. Underlying the importance of collaboration in an international setting, the quality interactions between local and international students were hindered by language and cultural barriers and the differences of learning and teaching styles. The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal has begun to emphasize global education in its mission statement, changing its teaching and learning strategies, encouraging students to work as a team combining international and local students.

Each of the major South African race groups was represented in the study. The racial mix is disproportionate to the demographics of the general South African population as well as the regional department make up of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Racial mix also does not redress the changes in education industry that are desired by economic and social bodies (Department of Education, 1993 cited in Reid, 2006).

In this study, 88.7 % of the participants were females, 13 % were males. It was noted that adult women were filling higher education classrooms in increasing numbers. As their presence grows on campus, their learning needs and preferences demand increasing attention. Education was seen by women as a way of achieving their spiritual purpose in life. Interestingly, women have developed higher self-esteem from their successful engagement with significant life

challenges, such as poverty, discrimination and responsibilities. This finding echoed the findings of Massey and Osborne (2004) that empowerment of learners is considered at the heart of adult learning, adopting many of the principles embedded in feminist pedagogy. Murphy (2003), with similar findings supported this and has drawn attention to affiliation of the needs of learners, especially women, as a vital component of the learning process.

The findings also revealed that most of the participants were married and about 88 % of them had children. This showed that the participants were independent, adult part-time learners, working full time, who had multiple roles and were very committed to their studies and to their family responsibilities. Most of them were contributing to household expenses and paid for their own education and for that of their children, with salaries earned through their full-time positions.

5.3 Views of Adult Learners about Their Learning

5.3.1 Reasons for Engaging at Postgraduate Level

In this study the findings revealed that the participants were motivated by their set of processes that gave direction and maintained a positive attitude towards attaining their goal. These findings echoed the findings of Lakin and Mullane (2007) who anticipated that adult learners are working longer across a wide economic, cultural and educational spectrum, and are beginning to articulate new postsecondary education goals including enrolling in college to fulfil an unrealised dream. This was discussed under two sub-themes: extrinsic and intrinsic views

5.3.1.1 Extrinsic motivation

The findings revealed that participants were motivated by external rewards, including such extrinsic factors as support from all quarters. Motivation of the participants depended on the forces external to the individual, where personal interest was not the driving force. The behaviourist concept of motivation has been highly influential on the thinking of the participants. This finding echoed the findings of Reiss (2009) who contend that certain interpretations of the behaviour measure have lead to circularly and self fulfilling prophecy. This finding was supported by Hancock (2011) who asserted that extrinsic motivation is the drive to learn in order to achieve something else unrelated to the content of what you learning i.e to pass an exam, to get promotion. The participants knew that they were given a stipulated time frame to complete the programme of study and demonstrated growing in education so that at the end of time period they would be rewarded for their learning by a pass or they could be granted tenure at work.

5.3.1.2 Intrinsic motivation

The findings revealed that participants had a desire to learn owing to inherent interests, for self-fulfilment, enjoyment and to achieve mastery in a learning process. The cognitive and humanistic views of motivation spring from an understanding of participants as unfolding both physiologically and psychologically from the biological givens. In this study view, motivation is thought of by the participants as creating conditions within themselves that facilitate and enhance the likelihood that their internal capacities will mature intellectually. Participants were motivated to seek out a learning experience because they had a sought-after skill. This finding echoed the findings of Lantanich (2001) and Parker (2003) that supported this conjecture by revealing that intrinsic motivation may be high enough to allow students to compensate for their individual

learning preferences. This is supported by Reiss (2009) who asserted that a learner is rewarded for learning a skill; however, the learner is likely to show greater interest in the activity. However, Sunshinsky (2009) argued that effects of rewards depend on how the learners use them.

5.4 Views about Teaching Methodologies used at Postgraduate Level

The discussions of the teaching methodologies used at postgraduate level focused on positive and negative teaching methodologies. The positive methods were collaborative learning, active involvement in learning process, observation of adult learning principles i.e self-directed learning, prior learning. The negative methods were demanding and time consuming teaching/learning strategies, instability due to changes in lecturers, preparation for class, and lecturers' level of knowledge and experience.

5.4.1 Positive Teaching Methodologies

5.4.1.1 Collaborative Learning

In this study the findings revealed that the participants preferred learning in groups and with peers. This is in line with Brown (2005) study which stated that when students teach their peers, they reinforce their learning that they had already done in discovering a solution to a problem. Brown further stated that while working closely, the learners form valuable friendships which can last after the course is over. These findings echoed the findings of Cruver (2010) who stated that by learning in groups, students can pinpoint and repeatedly review the relevant information without enduring the entire session. This finding is also supported by Brown (2005) by revealing that being questioned in front of one's peers forces a student to be very prepared to

discuss the idea at hand, and this allows the students to become more articulate when discussing their work.

5.4.1.2 Active Involvement in the Learning Process

The findings in this study revealed that participants were driven by active learning environments that allowed them to talk and listen, write and reflect as they approached course content through problem-solving exercises. This finding echoed the findings of Chickering and Gamson (1997) who stated that students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing prepacked assignments, and spitting out answers. They further said that, students must talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. These findings were in line with the findings of Knowledge Jump (2009) who stated that active learning involves the learning by being engaged in the instructional process by means of such activities as exploring, analysing, communicating, creating, reflecting, or actually using new information or experiences. This echoed in a study conducted by Knowles (1984) which stated that active process of learner involvement differs from the convectional hierarchical instruction model where those who know, teach those who do not know. Active learning is new experience for some learners.

5.4.1.3 Observation of Adult Learning Principles

In this study the findings revealed that the participants' learning was facilitated by two adult learning principles i.e self-directed learning and prior knowledge.

5.4.1.3.1 Self-directed Learning

The findings in this study revealed that the participants preferred self-directed learning because as adult learners it allowed them to take initiative for their own learning, kept them

motivated and allowed them to take decisions about their learning. This finding echoed the findings of Lowry (1989) cited in Cercone (2008) who suggested that the locus of control in learning lies with the adult learner, who may initiate learning with or without assistance from others. These findings were also supported by Cercone (2008) that self-directed learning underlies Knowle's 'andragogy'. The theory of 'andragogy' acknowledges that as a person grows and matures his or her self-concept changes from that of a dependent personality toward that of a self-directed individual. This is in line with the study done by Stein (2009 which stated that students should have a choice of designing and implementing their own complex learning projects , work independently or in groups and will act in a consultative role and resource person. Stein further stated that developing student's capacity to function in an autonomous fashion and interested in having people become self-directed and self-initiating of the learner is the overall goal. Dolmans and Schmidt (2000) found that, although students continue to seek guidance throughout a problem based learning, they become better self-directed learners as a result of being in the curriculum for a longer time, and hence becoming more experienced.

5.4.1.3.2 Prior Knowledge

In this study the findings revealed that participants cited prior knowledge as one of the attributes of an adult learner which is bridging the wealth of prior learning to class, and is also the one which facilitated their learning. The participants came with experiences and knowledge in diverse areas. These findings echoed the findings of Fidishun (2000) who stated that adults want to use what they know and want to be acknowledged for having that knowledge. These findings were also supported by Kolb (1984) cited in Cercone (2008) who recognized that learning is a continuous process that is based on experience; learning is the process whereby

knowledge is created through transformation. These findings were in line with the findings of McDaniel (2009) who asserted that students come into a classroom; they enter with a wide range of experiences and come from many cultures. McDaniel further stated that these students have ideas, knowledge and concepts that are already formed and the prior knowledge is very important to acknowledge in order motivating student learning. This is supported by Roschelle (1995) who contend that the roles of prior knowledge in learning often focus on the ideas that teachers want their learners to have, and as much information as possible provided by the learners' experience. Furthermore Roschelle has shown that a learner's prior knowledge often confounds an educator's best efforts to deliver ideas accurately. Additional findings showed that learning proceeds primarily from prior knowledge, and only secondarily from the presented materials. Prior knowledge can be at odds with the presented material, and consequently, learners will distort presented material. Neglect of prior knowledge can result in the learners learning something opposed to the educator's intentions, no matter how well those intentions are executed in an exhibit, book, or lecture.

According to Kasworm (2003) adult learners enter or return to higher education to pursue knowledge as a personal growth opportunity. This was evidence from the participant who mentioned that she had to move out of her comfort zone, meaning that she needed to learn more in order to be knowledgeable. These findings were supported by Kiely (1993); Prather (2000); Sternberg (2003); and Thompson (2003) that developing a work culture that values creativity and encourages innovation is imperative to an individual who desires to learn and produce new ideas. Suh (2002) concurs with the importance of encouragement for the innovative thinking of the worker/ learner in the areas of planning, learning and production. The implications of past

endeavours and attempts at growth or learning will affect the long-term view of learning overall within that learning institution. Lane (2001) wrote that the process of learning is a view of the organization as an embodiment of past learning.

5.4.2 Negative Teaching Methodologies

5.4.2.1 Demanding and Time Consuming

In this particular study, the findings revealed that the participants cited the use of the portfolio as a teaching tool as the most stressful, demanding and time consuming method from the side of the students. These findings echoed the study done by Harris (2001) who criticized the amount of time that portfolios took to complete and to assess them. This is in line with the study done by McMullan (2005) who contend that portfolios are very time-consuming causing students a great deal of anxiety. McMullan further stated that portfolios are not very effective in developing and assessing students' learning and competence. Gannon (2001) and Dolan (2004) rose that the issues concerning portfolios are related to their compilation. Gannon further suggested that there is negative correlation between the use of the portfolio as an assessment tool and the honesty of entries, thereby reducing its validity and credibility.

5.4.2.2 Instability due to Change in Lecturers

The findings from this particular study revealed that the participants expressed that changes in lecturers during the course of the year affected their learning because that required them adjusting learning to the teaching style of philosophy of the new lecturer. This finding echoed the findings of Brown and Duguid (1996; Robey, Khoo, and Powers (2000) who noted that in the past, knowledge sharing among professional practitioners has typically been discussed

in the context of traditional learning approaches. Such sharing of knowledge, however, has been criticized as being removed from the place where knowledge is to be applied. This is supported by the study done by Ganger (2002) which states that supported the 'need-to-know' approach that can transform practitioners into active knowledge builders possessing substantial autonomy regarding the specific knowledge or skills required. The negative attitude was interpreted by the participants as representing a fundamental lack of respect for their professional experience and prior knowledge. One of the mechanisms to support informal knowledge sharing was through communities of practice. As Huysman and Wulf (2005) explain 'their greatest strength is that they facilitate informal sharing of knowledge among people'.

These findings were in line with findings of Fento (2002) who stipulated that teachers need to contribute effectively to the continuous improvement of quality by evaluating their own practice, by identifying opportunities for personal and professional development. According to Acker (2000); Brown (2004); Burbach, Matkin and Fritz (2004) a plethora of research has been done in the traditional classroom environment to examine the relative value of various instructional strategies for promotion of students' critical thinking abilities. Research clearly supports the benefits of active learning strategies to promote enhanced understanding, retention and critical thinking over the shallow, passive learning that results from conventional lectures. The consistent finding across this study is that instructional approaches that incorporate constructivist, active learning, and student-centred philosophies were the most effective for enhancing students' critical thinking (Thana Soulas, 2002; Walker, 2003; Wlodkowski, 2004). These findings were in line with that of Astleither (2002) as highlighted by Pyle (1997), that the student-centred instructional philosophies are not unique to any one teaching mode.

5.4.2.3 Preparation of Class

Findings in this particular study revealed that the participants were affected by the preparation of the lecturers for class and their knowledge and skills emerged as one of the challenges. This finding echoed the findings of Popovich, (2006) who highlighted that lecturers play a critical role in the teaching and learning process and classroom behaviour affected many different areas of this process such as teacher preparation, classroom presentation, learning activities and approaches to the assessment of learning. These findings were also supported by Bitzman, (2003); Evans; (2004) that pre-service teacher preparation and schooling socialization is of vital importance. Furthermore, research has also examined the relationship between teaching style and student achievement of learning outcomes. According to Zhang and Sternberg (2004), within this area, research has painted a far from clear picture, with recent studies suggesting that although students may prefer to be taught in their own favoured style, they are open to teaching styles that are completely different from their preferred learning styles.

5.4.2.4 Lecturers' Level of Knowledge and Experience

The participants in this study also highlighted the problem of lack of immediate application of classroom theory into practice. This finding echoed the findings of Mohanan (2006), who highlighted the characteristics of a teacher who is likely to trigger learning, including someone with a deep knowledge and understanding of the matter, who is committed to teaching, is hardworking, and continually seeking ways to improve, innovate and be up to date. This emerged as an important concern because the second lecturer was diverging fully from this model. An expert lecturer is an inspirational role model to students and has a high emotional intelligence to empathize with students; she should also be   eminently approachable.

5.5 Learning Styles

The different learning styles in nursing education programme 2009 have been identified. The main learning styles were visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic; Kolb's learning styles; logical, social and systems person; deep learning; surface learning and strategic approach. Those learning styles have an impact on learner's performance and retention of information (Litzinger; Lee; Wise and Felder(2007). The learning styles differ from one student to another for their preference (Pashler, 2009) . The results from this study demonstrated that students learn differently, depending on the way they perceive information, process information and understand information

5.5.1 Visual, Auditory, and Kinaesthetic.

In this study, the findings revealed that most of the participants, (93.5%) strongly agreed/agreed that they were visual learners, meaning that they preferred to see what they were learning. This echoed the study by Smurfs and Gryffindors (2011) who contended that these students will value 'to do' lists assignments and written notes. Further findings revealed that participants remembered best what they see, for example, pictures, diagrams, demonstrations, etc., as opposed to (3.2%) who strongly disagreed/disagreed with this. This accords with the study conducted by Smurfs and Gryffindors (2011) who stated that visual learners benefit by diagrams, charts, pictures and written directions. Furthermore, findings revealed that participants processed information better if engaged in a physical activity. This falls in with the study of Smurfs and Gryffindors (2011) who stated that many visual techniques, however, also benefit kinaesthetic learners. By contrast, according to Sims and Sims (2006) unfortunately, most

participants were visual learners, which indicated that most learners did not gain nearly as much as they would have if more visual presentation aids were used in the classroom contexts.

Findings revealed that (91.9%) of the participants strongly agreed/agreed that they were auditory learners as opposed to (8.1%) who strongly disagreed/disagreed. These participants preferred to hear messages being given. This is supported by the study by Smurfs and Gryffindors (2011) which indicated that regulating voice tone, inflection, and body language will help learners maintain interest and attention. These authors further stated that auditory learners succeed when directions are read aloud or information is presented and requested verbal.

In this study, findings revealed that (54.9%) strongly disagreed/disagreed that they were kinaesthetic learners compared with (43.5%) who strongly agreed/agreed. These participants were patient with details, good at memorizing facts, and good with hands-on work. They were more practical and did not like courses that had no apparent connection to the real world. Fielder & Silverman (1998) cited in Zoghi (2009) supported this. However, Smurfs and Gryffindors (2011) argued in stating that kinaesthetic learners are most successful when totally engaged with a learning activity. They further stated that these learners acquire information fastest when participating in a science laboratory, in drama or other such activity.

5.5.2 Kolb's Learning Styles

Findings revealed that (85.5%) of the participants strongly agreed/agreed that they were assimilator abstractors as opposed to (8.1%) who strongly disagreed /disagreed. These participants learn better when information is presented in a logical manner. This is in line with the study by Kolb (2005) who stated that the assimilating learning preference is for a concise, logical approach. Ideas and concepts are more important than people. About (85.5%) of the

participants strongly agreed/agreed that they were concrete reflective learners as opposed to 14.6% of the participants who strongly disagreed/disagreed with this type of learning. These participants understood better when course material related to experience.

This is consistent with a study conducted by Kolb (2005) who indicated that these people are able to look at things from different perspectives. They prefer to watch rather than do, tending to gather information and use imagination to solve problems. Findings in this study further showed that the majority of the participants (87.1%) strongly agreed/agreed that they were abstract and reflective learners as opposed to (6.5%) who strongly disagreed/disagreed with this view. These participants learned better if they were given time to reflect on their experience

This is congruent with a study conducted by Kolb (2005) who indicated that these people use other people's analysis, preferring to take a practical, experiential approach. Kolb further stated that they are attracted to new challenges and experiences, and to carrying out plans. About 92% of the participants strongly agreed/agreed that they were concrete active as opposed to 8.1% who strongly disagreed/disagreed with this. These participants preferred the opportunity to work actively on well-defined tasks through trial and error in an environment like a clinical skills laboratory. This study further revealed that 96.8% of the participants strongly agreed/agreed that they prefer the teacher to provide guidance during their practice in a safe environment as opposed to 3.2% who were neutral. This was supported by a study by Kolb (1984) cited in Chapman (2010) who stated that learners with a converging learning style are more attracted to technical tasks and problems than social or interpersonal issues.

5.5.3 Logical, Social, Systems Person

The study findings revealed that 96.8% of the participants learn better by comparing the past with new experience compared with 3.2% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is supported by the study conducted by Stilborne (1996) who stated that every adult learner has a lifetime collection of previous knowledge and experience. When learning something new, most adults need to see how it fits in with (or is different from) what they already know.

About 98.4% of the participants strongly agreed/agreed that they needed immediate feedback concerning their progress compared with 1.6% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is supported by the study conducted by Hill (2007) who identified that "feedback plays an important role in helping learners move round the cycle." Hill further stated that "feedback supports the process of reflection and the consideration of a new or more in-depth theory. Through a process of negotiation, feedback can also help the learner plan productively for the next learning experience". This study further showed that 85.5% of the participants learn theories and concepts better if they are presented in a logical manner compared with 11.3% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is congruent with the study conducted by New Education Nation (2011) which indicated that when it comes to understanding and remembering new information, the learner feels most comfortable when using logic, reasoning, and systematic thinking.

The findings of this study revealed that the majority of the participants (70.9%) strongly agreed/agreed that they prefer to be with a team instead of studying alone compared with 29.0% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is in line with the study conducted by Brown and Zoghi (2009) who contend that social learners may be able to solve complex problems quickly or may

put things together in a novel ay once they have 'grasped the picture', but they may have difficulty explaining how they did this. Further findings revealed that 95.2% of the participants prefer a lecturer who uses participatory techniques such as case studies, and problem-solving groups in order to apply learning to current problems as opposed to 1.6% who strongly disagreed/disagreed.

This is congruent with the study conducted by Bongartz, Musyoki, Milligan and Ashley (2005) who stated that there should be adaptation work, climate change, without knowledge gaps, issues around the type and quality of participation, and the need for policies and institutions that support. The results further showed that 91.1% of the participants prefer a lecturer who draws on students' knowledge and experiences to provide opportunities for dialogue among students compared with 6.5% who strongly disagreed/disagreed.

This is in line with the study conducted by Perkins (2007) who stated that the creation of meaningful learning experiences should be equally accessible to all students, regardless of wide differences in culture, information processing, learning styles, and individual strengths and challenges. Furthermore, Salomon and Perkins (1998) refer to the great deal of practice in varying circumstances. This involves purposeful cognitive understanding, and application of strategies that cut across disciplines.

In this study findings revealed that the majority of participants (79%) strongly agreed/agreed that they learn better if they are given a global picture first and then later break that into smaller parts as opposed to 14.6% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is congruent

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with the study conducted by Fleming (2011) who stated that a holistic (big picture) person likes to begin with a big idea or concept, then go on to study and understand the parts.

5.5.4 Deep Learning

Findings in this study revealed that the majority of the participants, 96.8% strongly agreed/agreed that their learning was deep as opposed to 3.2% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. These participants preferred applying course material to new situations to solve problems. This is in line with the study by Krathwohl (2001) who used procedures to solve problems. This study further showed that 64.5% of the participants strongly agreed/agreed that learning with understanding was important to them as opposed to 29% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is supported by a study conducted by Krathwohl (2001) who contended that a learner must understand and construct new meaning by mixing new material with existing ideas. Findings form this study reflected that 51.6% of the participants sometimes read supplementary material out of curiosity in addition to prescribed resources as opposed to 45.2% who strongly disagreed/agreed.

This mimics the study conducted by Roubidoux (2008) who stated that supplementary reading may be assigned to spark the learners' interest in other facets. Findings revealed that about 51.6% of the participants strongly disagreed/disagreed that learning background information was important for them to understand the subject at hand as opposed to 48.4% who strongly agreed/agreed. This is in line with the study conducted by Conole and de Laat (2006) who stated that against this background, the nature of the learner's experience and their learning

strategies and beliefs will be explored around the facts produced by the learner in the course of their learning activity.

This study further showed that 56.5% of the participants preferred making summaries of what they read guided by interpretation as opposed to 29% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is consistent with the study conducted by Dijk (1980) who contend that summarizing and interpretation are cognitive processes; it should be clear that the two are strictly connected and cannot be separated. Dijk further stated that learners need to understand a text in order to make a summary, and understanding always implies making some kind of interpretation. Furthermore, it was evident that 98.4% of the participants strongly agreed/agreed that they always tried to relate what they read to their previous knowledge or experience as opposed to 1.6% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is supported by the study of Krathwohl (2001) who stated that analysing, subdividing content into meaningful parts, relating the components and coming to a conclusion about something is based on these standards. The learners should challenge themselves to go a level above the course requirement.

5.5.5 Surface Learning and Strategic Approach

In this study findings revealed that 59.1% of the participants strongly agreed/agreed that memorizing facts works better for them as opposed to 25.8% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is in line with the study conducted by Salonga (2011) which indicated that memorizing is widely used in the mastery of foundational knowledge. About 64.5% of the participants strongly agreed/agreed that they only learn what was presented to them, and questioning it was for their teacher to do as opposed to 32.2% who strongly disagreed/disagreed.

This is congruent with the study conducted by Coxe (2006) who stated that each learner must be responsible for the information transmitted, thus ensuring its integrity. The findings of this study further showed that 92% of the participants only focus on what the teacher said was important when studying for the examinations as opposed to 8.1% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is in line with the study conducted by Crawford (2007) that a learner must learn about how the mind works and learn different techniques and tools to help him with studying and passing exams. Furthermore, the benefit is that studying and knowing how to pass examinations will become easier.

Further findings indicated that 93.6% of the participants highlight all that they need to read for exams or for the test as opposed to 6.5% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is congruent with the study conducted by Wanderman (2003) who contended that typical highlighting is to pick out the important ideas on a page so that later, in reviewing, one will be able to see and scan them more easily.

About 85.5% of the participants strongly agreed/agreed that they do not go beyond what they learn in class because they are learning to pass as opposed to 14.5% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is supported by Crawford (2007) who reported that learners must use a multi-disciplinary approach, to maximize their examination results through diverse strategies and different, but effective knowledge.

Findings in this study revealed that 67.7% of the participants adopt a learning style that gives them best results as opposed to 29% who strongly disagreed/disagreed. This is supported by the study conducted by Biggs (2003) and Gibbs (1989) who stated that learners who include

active approaches to learning are being encouraged to become involved, to be thoughtful about the content and thus to take a deep approach to their learning of the subject.

5.6 Factors Facilitating Learning

The discussion of the factors facilitating learning focused on two factors that facilitated participants' learning in a postgraduate level. Those factors were: support; availability of resources.

5.6.1 Support in Learning

The discussion of support focused on three factors that facilitated learning at a postgraduate level. These were: peer support, lecturer support, and family support.

5.6.1.1 Peer Support

The findings in this study revealed that participants were motivated to learn through support by peers helping one other, discussing with peers and tackling difficult questions. These findings echoed the findings of Carter, Cushing, and Kennedy (2009) who asserted that peer support really works and it is a great, efficient way to help all students learn, make the most of teacher/professional time, and increase the achievement level of challenging students. Their findings further revealed that this is the concise, practical guide every middle and high school needs to implement peer support strategies including cooperative learning and peer tutoring to benefit students with moderate to severe disabilities and their peers. These findings were in line with the study done by Parsons and Blake (2004) who stated that peer support contributes to school improvements where learners are supported to read, study by their peers and standards in literacy will improve.

5.6.1.2 Lecturer Support

The findings in this study revealed that the support participants received from lecturers facilitated their learning. This meant that lecturing staff had an added responsibility in terms of the support they provided to participants, and which was unlikely to be recognized as part of their formal workload. In reality, participants as adult learners needed as much, if not more than their younger colleagues by way of quality academic and student support. Without positive human connection, participants were likely to become disaffected, departing the institution, no matter how technically excellent the programme might be. This finding echoed the findings of Kasworm, Polsen, and Fishback (2002) who contend that key staff should provide personal attention and advice on admission entry, career advice, potential basic skills and study strategies, courses and support, and should provide an institutional climate that welcomes adults into their programmes. These findings were supported by Flint (2000) who stated that a telling sign of institutional commitment to the Student Support Systems Principle is the degree to which faculty members engage in coaching their students on matters academic and otherwise.

5.6.1.3 Family Support

Findings in this study revealed that most of the participants reported that their children, spouse and helpers at home provided them with critical support and encouragement for this long journey of learning. These participants needed much support from their families and friends in order to succeed in their learning process. This finding echoes the findings of Stark (as cited in Work, 2008) who stated: "A nursing programme is difficult, especially for students who are still learning or who need to work at a job or tend to a family while completing the programme.

These participants needed much support from their families and friends in order to progress with their learning. The findings revealed that some of the participants were assisted with their house chores by family members and the general assistants they have in their homes. This provided the participants with more time to attend learning programmes. Simonson, Smaldion, Albright, and Zvacek (2000) supported this by reporting that nursing students are increasingly demanding to be allowed more time to learn as a matter of necessity. AACN (2003) reported the importance of part-time academic training so that the student does not have to abandon an existing career or family to pursue a lengthy education owing to family responsibilities, or often at a different location from her residence. The support from family allowed the participants to go to school, continue to work and therefore reduce disruption to personal learning and family life.

5.6.2 Availability of Resources/Learning Environment

Findings from this study revealed that most of the participants were satisfied with the presence of resources. The best way for to prove success for learners is to promote success in their learning. This is in line with the study conducted by Roubidoux (2008) who stated that the first thing successful students do is find out what study help resources available. This is supported by Brighouse and Woods (1999) who contend that in order for learning to be effective, the environment needs to be conducive to learning, allowing the pupils space and time to interact within the learning and teaching process.

5.7 Factors Hindered Learning/Intervening Conditions

The discussion of the factors hindered learning focused on three factors that hindered participants' learning at a postgraduate level. These factors were: personal barriers, work related barriers, and school related barriers.

5.7.1 Personal Barriers

The discussion of personal barriers focused on three factors that hindered adult learning. These were self-doubt, computer literacy, and dual status.

5.7.1.1 Self Doubt

In this study the findings revealed that revealed that the participants as adult learners returned to formal education after a period of absence; coping with change was a constant challenge. As they came to break down previous barriers to success in the educational arena, many participants were able to change the perceptions they had of themselves as learners. This finding echoes the findings of Ferguson (2006) who contend that the greatest revolution in our generation is that human beings, by changing the inner aspects of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives. Cranton's (2002) similar views explored the notion that some learners can and do change their perspectives to reflect critically upon themselves as learners, deconstructing the origins of past assumptions.

5.7.1.2 Computer Literacy

In this study, the findings revealed that outstanding learning barrier hindering adult learners' learning, mentioned by the participants was a lack of computer skills. This was a

problem for getting started with the studies and with some of the programmes. The majority of the participants were not familiar with the computer. Participants had a problem because it took a long time to download documents and to gain access to other programmes, hence it was important to teach students how to use the computer. Lack of knowledge about the computer hindered some of the participants from learning. This finding echoed the findings of Hiltz (1997); Weller (2002), Holmberg (2003) who noted that the computer allows the learners to make contributions and join discussions whenever it is convenient for them. Therefore, the computer must be integrated into all aspects of the course.

Some of the participants mentioned that colleagues or friends had shown an interest in giving computer support or had helped them in their everyday life. Computer technology in this study was defined as the use of technologies in learning opportunities. Alonso, Lopez, Manrique, and Vines (2005) supported this statement. This finding echoed the findings of Mayer (2003) that the computer involves the acquisition of knowledge and skill using electronic technologies such as internet-based courseware, local, and wide area networks. In this study it was found that lack of computer technology did not cause a large amount of stress and frustration among most of the participants. Some had colleagues/friends who helped them through certain difficulties. They felt they had sufficient computer skills; however, this did not exempt them from technological problems.

5.7.1.3 Holding a Dual Status

The findings from this study revealed that most of the participants had responsibilities such as jobs and situations such as childcare; they needed to earn an income that could help them avoid interference with the learning process. The participants entered educational programmes

voluntarily, finding it difficult to manage their classes around their work and family responsibilities. The findings revealed that most of these participants were blaming themselves for delaying doing things earlier because as time went by, added responsibilities invariably appeared. There were many challenges thereafter such as multiple careers, social structures to rely on, longevity of participants. The past was less helpful as a guide for living in the present and it was noted that participants were insecure in many decisions that they needed to make. Life was complex owing to career, family and other personal choices within the social context.

This finding echoed the findings of Merriam (2001) who highlighted that the adult learner and the manner in which he or she learns best has been questioned and researched, when adult education became a professional field of practise. In a very important sense, they constructed their existence; how they sensed and interpreted what happened to them and to the world around them, were a function of understanding the perceptual filters that were so culturally embedded that they were scarcely aware of their existence or operation. These findings brought researchers to an understanding of participants as adult learners. Smith (2002) pointed out that Knowles' concept of 'andragogy' is a first attempt to try to build a model of adult learning, and it is anchored in the characteristics of adult learners. Smith also noted that Knowles used a model of relationships from behaviourism and humanism, however, Knowles also built on behaviourist theory by encouraging the learner to identify needs, set objectives and enter learning contracts.

5.7.2 Work Related Barriers

The discussion of work related barriers focused on three factors that hindered adult learning. These were: lack of support from work, unplanned change of time schedule, and lack of financial support from employers.

5.7.2.1 Lack of Support from Work

Findings from this study revealed that substantial differences in working conditions for participants existed in the workplace. Working conditions were not conducive to the needs of the part-time student; rather, many participants felt overwhelmed by their workload. This had a negative effect on the learning process of the participants. Employers should ideally have provided support for participants at times and places congruent with work schedules including school hours, so as to establish support. This finding echoed the findings of Sewell (2006) who elaborated that effective job performance requires a balance of professional demands, family responsibilities, and personal issues. Failure to acknowledge and accept the relationship between each aspect can result in conflict, frustration, and anger that spills over into all areas of a person's life. Further also findings also revealed that learners were full-time employees and part-time learners which made them overloaded with work.

This is in line with the study conducted by Biggs (2003 and Gibbs (1989) who indicated that any student doing a part-time course will have a formidable workload during the semester if they are to conscientiously keep up with class attendance, reading and with the requirements of continuous assessment. Furthermore, Biggs (2003) added that when the student has a full-time job of some sort it becomes quite likely that the learner will say that he is overloaded, and will adopt surface approaches to learning in order to cope with all the requirements of the various subjects. Working while studying at a university may influence the students' academic performance. Learners may sometimes not have time enough to do the assignments and they may feel exhausted after work, having no energy left to study, however, this is a challenge that the learners have to face. They have to learn to balance working with studying and they must

form new habits of living. In order to keep up in both their studies and work they have to be more self-motivated. Once the students achieve this they also gain a sense of accomplishment. They become more self-confident and more courageous for the challenges that the future holds in store.

5.7.2.2 Unplanned Change of Work Time Schedule

In this study, the findings revealed that the participants were working full time, having dependents and family responsibilities to juggle, returning to school after an extended time out. These participants were at great risk of not achieving their post -secondary educational goals. Some of the participants suggested that classes could be conducted in the evenings or during weekends so that they would be able to attend when they were not at work. Most of these participants reported that working hampered their ability to schedule classes. The participants who worked full time tended to be older, worked longer hours and attended school less; had family responsibilities as their priority over being a student. They tended to be more likely not to attend class owing to pressure of work and family responsibilities. These findings echoed the findings of Berker (2003) who reported that indeed, adults who are working full time and studying part time have trouble in completing their programmes. These findings were consistent with those of the NCES (2004) study of non-traditional students that found that non-traditional students are considerably less likely to complete their programmes.

5.7.2.3 Lack of Financial Support from Employers

The finding in this study revealed that financial flexibility was the most commonly acknowledged problem in adult learning. The participants were financially independent, working

full time, having dependents and family responsibilities to juggle after being back in school after an extended time out. This finding echoed the findings of Berker, Horn, and Caroll (2003) with that employees who study tend to be older, they work more, attend school less, and have more family responsibilities compared with peers whose primary activity was being a student. They tend, therefore to be more likely to have multiple-risk factors owing to financial burdens. These findings were also supported by Choy (2002) that financial burdens harm adult learners' ability to register for the number of classes they desired. The National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES) (2002) show that only about seven per cent of all postgraduate and professional degree students receive employer aid, yet postgraduate students are self-supporting adult students.

This finding echoed the findings of Study Kaunas (2009) that the main barrier preoccupying the international students was the financial burden. They were not being well supported by their country of origin. The financial barrier was frequently cited by the international students who considered it a major obstacle to enrolling abroad. The findings revealed that there is very little financial aid for international students available from private sources, such as foundations and individual sponsors. Fin Aid (2010) stipulates that international students who intend to enrol in a postgraduate programme should contact the schools that interest them.

5.7.3 Suitability of Class Times

The discussion of suitability of class times focused on one factor that hindered adult learning. This included school related barriers.

5.7.3.1 School Related Barriers

In this study the findings revealed that most of the participants were not regularly attending, owing to an uneven balance between university and work hours. Regular attendance is an important part of the learner's receiving much information in the best possible manner. Clashing of university hours with working hours has created a serious problem; evening/weekend classes may have to be put in place so that students are able to attend. The inconvenient timing of lectures results in many learners being repeatedly absent from class. This is in line with the study conducted by Baltimore (2011) who contended that after school hours/weekend days have a potential for learners who may be inspired to continue learning, finding their interests and skills in learning. These findings echoed the study by Directgov (2011) which indicated that arranging after school hours/ weekend days' attendance will help to prevent disruption of learning.

5.8 Conclusion

The overall picture from the analysis of practices, "Exploring the views of adult learners about their learning in a postgraduate nursing programme" was that various teaching methods were used and also participants were using different learning styles to process information delivered to them. There was a clear process of planning and conducting interviews. There were measures to ensure validity and reliability and trustworthiness in the conducting of research. Inadequate preparation by the lecturer or 'traditional power' emerged as an area of concern because most of the participants complained about the teaching style she adopted. Most of the teaching methodologies were reported to be valid and reliable. The learning process was also reported to be generally well conducted; however, some weaknesses were reported because in

some instances, no feedback was provided to students in order to enable them to progress. Class environments were reported as conducive to learning. Finally, lecturers were reported to be a great support system; because most of the participants received much academic support from lecturers thus increasing the validity of learning.

5.9 Limitations of the study

The main limitation was the paucity of relevant literature on the subject content. The researcher had limited time to collect data as she started undertaking this research during examination time using the cluster sampling technique in the selecting of participants in the study. These factors meant that the researcher was less able to generalize the findings of the study to other contexts. Mayring (2007) argued that generalization is necessary in research, but we have to differentiate different aims of generalization. There are various ways of arriving at a generalization: analysis of total population, falsification, random or stratified samples, argumentative generalization, theoretical sampling, variation, and triangulation. Mayring (2007) further stated that, depending on the type of research or research design, some of those strategies of generalization can be important for oriented research.

The additional limitation was the matter of conducting focus group interviews. Owing to time constraints, the researcher finally conducted individual interviews because she could not obtain interviews from the international students at the same time as she did the others because these students had already gone home. This is in line with the study by Allen (2001) which stated that one should try not to leave interviews to the last minute; while many interviewees try to be

helpful with respect to deadlines, one never knows when someone will be out of town, too busy, or otherwise unavailable.

5.10 Recommendations

Adult learning allows the learner to look at wider issues around learning, and to meet his educational needs more efficiently. The more adult learners learn, the more they will challenge educational practice, embracing change and fostering innovation. Adult learners' competence includes not only what the institution can do to increase this competence, but also how the institution uses a variety of teaching methods, and learners use different learning styles that are suitable for themselves. A large part of the assessment of an institution's competence is its ability to retain high standards of adult learner's success. Based on the findings and the literature review, the researcher recommends the following:

5.10.1 Factors that Hindered Learning

- This study showed that dropouts had significant differences in perceptions of learner satisfaction and relevance from persistent learners. In other words, learners are less likely to drop out when they are satisfied with the courses, and when courses are relevant to their own lives. Therefore, there is a need to include adult learners during programme planning to cater for their prior knowledge and experiences. Furthermore, most adult learners do not persist in the programme of study owing to financial constraints. There is a need for financial aid specifically to enable adult learners to complete their courses. In agreement with prior research (Levy, 2007; Doo & Kim, 2000), the results suggests that

learners' satisfaction with the course relevance and with learners' job, prior knowledge, and experiences are major factors affecting their decision to drop out.

- The desire and willingness of adult learners to complete education presents them with many common challenges, regardless of where they may be geographically. Adult learners both nationally and internationally echoed each other on what they identified as barriers to their education goals. As much as they enjoyed being back in learning, many faced the enormous task of balancing their jobs, housework and childcare. In addition to these responsibilities, many adult learners everywhere face the problem of supporting themselves and their families, as well as paying children's school fees. Implementing the measures that would rectify the various difficulties adult learners face is secondary to the initial need to advance the understanding of, and the appreciation for adult education and adult learners.

- The computer technology in this study caused a great amount of stress and frustration amongst many of the adult learners. Most of them did not have basic knowledge and felt that they had insufficient computer skills. Technological problems arose for some learners when they had to write assignments, PowerPoint presentations, and also data analysis. It is imperative to teach the learners how to learn computer-mediated environments so as to share knowledge through an email text-based medium.

5.10.2 Support

- Adult learners are more likely to drop out of courses when they do not receive support from their family and/ or institutions while taking courses, regardless of learner's academic preparation. Internal factors such as course design strategies and learners'

motivation should be prioritized at the course development stage in order to make the course participatory and interesting and to keep learners engaged.

- There is an agreed mixture of support for learning and encouragement of student responsibility based on the evolving needs of students. Appropriate support at appropriate intervals is needed, meaning that, over time, students are motivated and enabled to guide their own efforts, secure in the knowledge that they have developed the skills that allow them to continue learning effectively.

5.11 Recommendations for Further Research

- This study was selected from only one institution in KZN, thus the results from this study may not be generalized to adult learners in other institutions. Further research is needed to confirm the generalizability of the results to a broader population.

- This research is one-sided in the sense that it focused only on learning styles of adult learners. Though a few factors were highlighted concerning teaching styles, this was not detailed. Further research is needed to explore individuals' teaching styles in details.

- Finally, ongoing development and research needs to focus on the way students experience and understand the programmes they are involved in.

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ANNEXURES

Annexure 1: Student Questionnaire

Study Title: Exploring the Views of Adult Learners About Their Learning in a Postgraduate Nursing Program

Section A: Demographic Data

Instruction: Please fill in the correct information in the box provided.

1. Course or degree: Coursework masters ☐   BN Honours ☐

2. Nationality ☐

Please tick the appropriate box

 3. Age:……………………….☐

4.   Race:………………………..White ☐   Black ☐   Indian ☐   Coloured ☐

5. Gender:……………….............Female ☐   Male ☐

 6. Marital status:………………. Single ☐   Married ☐   Widow ☐   Other ☐

7. Do you have children?..............Yes ☐   No ☐

 If yes, how many?..........................☐

Section B: Learning/Teaching style inventory

Instructions: For each of the questions indicate your answer by circling the appropriate column.

Key:

1 - Strongly Agree

2 - Agree

3 - Neutral

4 - Strongly Disagree

5 - Disagree

1. Teaching methods used in my course/programme include (tick every appropriate box)

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
1.1 Lecture					
1.2 Discussion					
1.3 Problem-based learning					
1.4 Case studies					
1.5 Short cases or scenario					
1.6 Reflective learning journal					
1.7 Learning contracts					
1.8 Learning log					
1.9 Portfolios					
1.10 Demonstrations					

2. Give at least 4 methods that work best for you.

2.1……………………………………

2.2………………………………….

2.3………………………………….

2.4………………………………….

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
3.I prefer to see what I'm learning					
4. I learn best with pictures, diagrams and flow charts					
5. I process information better if I engage in a physical activity					
6. I prefer to hear a message being given					
7. I remember verbal instruction and prefer someone to read .the directions to me while I do practical work					
8.I generally do not like lectures or discussions; I prefer practical sessions					
9.I want my learning to be practical					
10.I prefer taking myself through a task and I should be given this opportunity					
11.I learn better by comparing past with new experience					
12. I need immediate feedback concerning my progress					
13. I learn theories and concepts better if they are presented in a logical manner					
14. I prefer to be with a team rather than studying alone					
15. I prefer a lecturer who uses participatory techniques such as case studies and problem-solving groups in order to apply this information to current problems					
16. I prefer a lecturer who draws on students' knowledge and experiences to provide opportunities for dialogue among students					
17. I learn better if information is presented in a systematic logical manner					
18. I learn better if I get a global picture first and then later break that into smaller parts					
19. I understand better when course material relates to my experience or my career					
20. I learn better if I am given time to reflect on my experience					

21. I prefer the opportunity to work actively on well-defined tasks, through trial and error in an environment such as a clinical-skills laboratory					
22. I prefer a teacher to provide guidance in a safe environment while I practise					
23. I prefer applying course material to new situations in order to solve problems					
24. Learning with understanding is more important to me					
25.Sometimes out of curiosity I read supplementary material in addition to prescribed resources					
26. Memorizing facts works better for me					
27. I only learn what is presented to me; questioning it is for my teacher to do					
28. When studying for exams or tests, I only focus on what the teacher said was important					
29. I highlight all that I need to read for exams or for a test					
30. I do not go beyond what I learn in class because I am simply learning in order to pass					
31. Learning background information is important for me to understand the subject at hand					
32. I prefer making summaries of what I read guided by my interpretation					
33. I always try to relate what I read to my previous knowledge or experience					
34. I adopt a method of learning that gives me best results					
35. I believe that adults learn most effectively when they have inner motivation to develop skill					
36. I believe that most adult learners develop a preference for learning that is based on childhood learning patterns					
37. I try to avoid failure as much as I can					
38. I try to avoid failure as much as I can					
39. I believe that students in class do not learn the same way					

40. The learning objective is usually the transfer of knowledge from the lecturer to students					
41. I believe that the purpose of learning is to acquire and memorize new knowledge					
42. Learning activities must be designed to assist adult learners in meeting their learning goals					
43. I learn theories and concepts better if they are presented in such a way as to facilitate their application					
44. I believe that the lecturer should treat questions and comments with respect and acknowledge contributions adults make to the class					
45. The lecturer uses a variety of teaching materials and methods to take into account differences in style, types and places of learning					
46. The teaching styles of lecturer should be modified according to situation, skill and learner level					
47. Reinforcing students and giving feedback to them increases student responsibility for learning					
48. The lecturer should use more innovative activities for adult learners					
49. All learners in class should be expected to do the same work					
50.The lecturer is sometimes not interested in students' problems					
51. My lecturer in my class dominates the class discussions					
52. The lecturer is unfriendly and inconsiderate towards adult learners					
53. Adult classes are interesting					
54. The experiences and emotions connected with the learning material stimulates the creation of meaning and the ability of adults to use new learning					
55. Learning environments which promote positive emotions,					

help learners remember the content with greater clarity					
56. The use of scenarios and problem-based situations provides adult learners with educationally-relevant problems					
57. Teaching strategy of lecturer promotes the ability to present large amounts of content in a short time frame					
58. Small groups assigned to work on case scenarios can find the experience stimulating					

Section C: Please complete the following questions about the views of adult learners in the learning program.

59. What is your typical or preferred pattern of learning?

....

....

....

60. Describe the learning environment: is it conducive to learning? If yes, how?

....

....

....

61. How would you describe yourself as an adult learner?

....

....

Annexure 2: Research Ethical Clearance Approval

RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587
EMAIL : ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

22 SEPTEMBER 2009

Ms. Thobile Nkwanyana (202517846)
Nursing
Faculty of Health Sciences
Howard College Campus

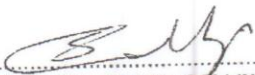Dear Ms. Nkwanyana

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0597/09

I wish to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has received full approval for the following project:

"Exploring the Views of Adult Learners about their Learning in a Postgraduate Nursing Program in a Higher Education Institution in KwaZulu-Natal".

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

PROFESSOR STEVEN COLLINGS (CHAIR)
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE

cc. Supervisor (Prof NG Mtshali)
cc. Sugen Reddy

Founding Campuses: Edgewood   Howard College   Medical School   Pietermaritzburg   Westville

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Annexure 3: Request to conduct Research

University of KwaZulu Natal

Department of Nursing

Durban

4041

South Africa

2009-10-25

Dear Madam

Re: Application for permission to conduct research at University of KwaZulu Natal

I am a Masters student doing a research project in the Department of Nursing, University of KwaZulu Natal, Durban. As a requirement for the degree, I have to conduct a research project.

The title of the study is "Exploring the Views of Adult Learners About Their Learning in a Postgraduate Nursing Program."

I therefore request access to the University of KwaZulu Natal. Permission for voluntary participation will be requested from students and lecturers.

I have provided you with a letter from the ethical committee of the University of KwaZulu Natal.

Thank you

Yours faithfully,

....

Ms Thobile Nkwanyana (M Cur Student) 0725574985 email: 202517846@ukzn.ac.za

Supervisor

Prof. N.G. Mtshali

Annexure 4: Permission to conduct Research

27th October 2009

Ms T Nkwanyana
c/o School of Nursing
UKZN
Howard Campus
Durban

Dear Ms Nkwanyana

Permission to conduct research in the School of Nursing University of KwaZulu-Natal

With reference to your request, regarding permission to conduct research in the School of Nursing, University of KwaZulu-Natal, please note that this matter was discussed, with the governance and management committee.

Permission was hereby granted for you to conduct your research.

We look forward to working with you, and wish you all the luck in your study.

Thank you

Sincerely

Professor B R Bhengu
Head
School of Nursing

School of Nursing, Howard College Campus

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 2499

Postal Address: Durban4041, South Africa

Facsimile: +27 (0)31 260 1543   **Email:**

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Founding Campuses: ▬ Edgewood   ▬ Howard College   ▬ Medical School   ▬ Pietermaritzburg   ▬ Westville

.79

Annexure 5: Information Sheet

Topic: Exploring the Views of Adult Learners about Their Learning in a Postgraduate Nursing Program.

Dear Participant

I am completing a research project as part of the requirements for the Nursing Education Degree (Masters Degree)

Title of the Research: Exploring the views of adult learners about their learning in a Postgraduate Nursing Program in a Higher Education Institution in KZN

Purpose of the Research: To explore the views of adult learners regarding their learning as adults in a post graduate nursing program.

Description of the Procedure: Your participation is requested as you are representative of the population under study. As part of the research process, you will be required to fill out a questionnaire. It will take you about 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Ethical Aspects: Please note that your identity and information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Please feel free to ask any questions you may have so that you are clear about what is expected of you. Please note that:

- you are free to *not* participate
- you are free to withdraw at any stage without repercussions
- your name will not be used nor will you be identified with any comment made when the data is published
- there will be no risks attached to your participation
-

Advantage to you as a respondent: The findings of the study will be made available on completion.

Thank you,

Researcher: Thobile Nkwanyana

C/O University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Student No: 202517846 cell no: 0725574985 email: 202517846@ukzn.ac.za

Supervisor: Prof Fikile Mtshali (031 – 2602498) email: mtshailn3@ukzn.ac.za

Annexure 6: Informed Consent

Title: Exploring the Views of Adult Learners about their Learning in a Postgraduate Nursing Program in a Higher Education Institution in KZN

Researcher: Thobile Nkwanyana   **Supervisor:** Professor N.G. Mtshali

Student Number: 202517846   **Tel:** 031-2602498

Contact Number: 0725574985   **E-mail:** mtshalin3@ukzn.ac.za

E-mail: 202517846@ukzn.ac.za

DECLARATION

I ………………………………………………………………………………………………. (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Signature of participant: ……………………………………… Date………………………

Annexure 7: Interview Guide

1. Which factors in your life that facilitates you're learning as an adult learner?

2. Which factors in your life that hinders you're learning as an adult learner?

3. How do you feel about the teaching methodologies being used in a postgraduate program?

4. What are your views about being an adult and studying at the same time?

5. Are there any contributions from your fellow colleagues during learning? In what way during this period that you feel have helped your learning?

6. Are you interested in collaborative learning even though it limits the flexibility in time?

7. What assumptions can we make about the study patterns and class attendance of part-time adult learners?

8. Does your family support you as you are studying in any way?