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# THESIS / DISSERTATION SUBMISSION

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**THE SOCIAL CHALLENGES THAT CONTRIBUTE  
TOWARDS NON-COMPLETION WITHIN INSTITUTIONS  
OF HIGHER LEARNING IN LESOTHO**

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**Submission date: October 2024**

Submitted in the fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of doctoral of philosophy degree with specialisation  
in Psychology of Education  
in the Department of Education Foundations  
in the Faculty of Education at the  
University of the Free State.

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## Declaration

I, Mamolefe Ntelo, declare that the dissertation titled *“The social challenges which contribute towards non-completion in higher learning Institutions of Lesotho.”* submitted for the qualification of Doctor of philosophy in Psychology of Education at the University of the Free State is my individual effort. I declare that I have correctly acknowledged all materials included in this research. In addition, I affirm that this dissertation has never been submitted formerly for any other degree in any other training institute. It is an original product of research meant specifically for this qualification.

  
.....  
SIGNED

20-07-2024

DATE



**GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)**

10-Aug-2023

Dear Mrs Mamolefe Ntelo

**Application Approved**

Research Project Title:

**The social challenges that contribute towards non-completion within institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.**

Ethical Clearance number:

**UFS-HSD2022/2020/23**

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Adri Du Plessis**

**Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee**

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16<sup>th</sup> of July 2024

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**Re: Confirmation letter of language editing for Mamolefe Ntelo's PhD thesis**

**THE SOCIAL CHALLENGES THAT CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS NON-COMPLETION WITHIN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN LESOTHO**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Higher learning dropout has predominantly been identified as one of the major problems that the higher learning systems face almost every year. Multiple analytical factors point out the complexity of dropout phenomena in higher learning Institutions. These occurrences prompted the researcher to conduct a study that explores a range of hardships that students face, specifically the social challenges that mostly make it rigid for them to continue learning at higher learning institutions in Lesotho.

The study adopted a qualitative approach through an interpretive research paradigm and a narrative research design. Sixteen students and four staff members who were purposively selected from two colleges and two Universities in Lesotho. It employed the structured interviews to collect data. The data were analysed through the thematic analysis. The findings revealed the holistic support provided to students have proved to bring about improved student's academic accomplishment and retention. Students who are aware of the social challenges are more likely to be resilient if equipped with required skills. This enables students to gain more control over their learning and increases their likelihoods of success. Secondly, familiarity form a centre that informs lecturers towards reflecting on the approaches that will facilitate student learning and enhance the influence of positive factors. The study recommends that lecturers need to be well trained to provide students with psychosocial support and also be able to identify individual psychological needs. The higher learning institutions also need to have a proper channels of referral for students who needs further support.

Key words: Academic non-completion, Higher learning institutions, Students, Social, Challenges and Social challenges.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself”  
Matthew 6:34

I express my appreciation to my laid father (May his soul rest in Peace). My wholehearted gratitude goes to my mother Malieiso Beneda Tsiu, who continuously and tirelessly provided me with all the support I needed. The support, and understanding provided by my supervisor, who constantly encouraged that I am capable. To the rest of my family members who took care of my other responsibilities, including assisting my children while I was not there for them. To my close friends, I am humbled and will forever be grateful.

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this study to my mother and my late father once again. I wish to express my appreciation for their sacrifices in my education.

To my kids, Morakane Ntelo, Molefe Ntelo and Matilda Ntelo. Their presence made me what I am today.

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## List of Acronyms

NUL	National University of Lesotho
CHE	Council of Higher education
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NMDS	National Manpower Development Secretariat Sponsorship portal
DSA	Department of Student Affairs
TA	Thematic Analysis
TBL	Team based Learning
HE	Higher Education
NASP	National Aviation Safety Plan
LGSCE	Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education
HLIs	Higher learning institutions
LD	Learning disability
FGDs	Focused group discussions
STIs	Sexually transmitted infections
SSI	Semi-structured interview
CTL	Contextual Teaching Methods
WHO	World Health Organization
NTCDs	Non-transmissible chronic diseases
MD	Maseru District
BA SW	BA Social Work
Dip BM	Diploma in Business Management
MoH	Ministry of Health

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The chapter underpins a general introduction to the study. It discusses the background to the study, problem statement, the study's rationale, research objectives and research questions. It presents an overview of the theoretical framework and literature review. It further discusses the summary of the research design and methodology. At the same time, it concludes with the definition of keywords and study layout.

### **1.2 Background to the study**

There is increasing concern about research in the psychology of education as well as inclusive education since there is a need to determine the dynamics that contribute towards students' academic success and non-completion in higher learning institutions. It has been acknowledged that students at this stage face numerous challenges, including intellectual, social and physical development. Tinto (2017) mentioned that students' successes depend on their willingness to pursue in learning and participating constructively in academic and social activities.

Concomitantly, higher institutions together with families play a vital role in enhancing the students' pass rates including increased number of graduates. It is vitally important to give urgent attention towards expanding knowledge regarding the relationship between social challenges and higher learning non completion. That will contribute in gaining deep understanding regarding appropriate tactics that would enable students to attain coping mechanisms. Ideally, students need support to make it possible for them to strike a balance between the social life and the academic experience. The study holds that the provision of adequate support may expand opportunities for students to cope with the social challenges that confront them.

Tlali et al. (2022) scrutinised how students' skills, knowledge, commitment, and attitude could influence their studies at the National University of Lesotho (NUL). In response to student challenges, it has been identified that although psychosocial

support is provided for students in the Department of Student Affairs (DSA), there are no specific support structures for students with disabilities (Mosia & Phasha, 2020).

The argument articulated above is found particularly relevant with NUL since it is one of the international universities of Lesotho that declares its vision as maintaining lifelong learning. The issue has raised the significance of understanding available support services within the institution. However, Motsoeli (2011, cited in Tlali & Jacobs, 2015), the former NUL Vice Chancellor, asserts that the institution is undergoing serious problems including high student failure rates. He further declares that lack of quality teaching is also among the main reasons for student failure. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), and Council of Higher Education of Lesotho (CHE) acknowledged that fostering quality learning is one of the biggest challenges facing Lesotho's higher education in general (Tlali & Jacobs, 2015). Among the challenges faced at NUL, Tlali and Jacobs (2015) further suggested that lecturers are mostly overwhelmed by overcrowded classes and poorly equipped lecture halls with a lack of training regarding teaching and assessment approaches.

The study holds that the phenomenon of non-completion in higher learning institutions requires programmes that provide immediate and strengthened supportive services that allow students to achieve their academic goals, personal development as well as promoting economic change. Mosia and Phasha (2020) highlighted that the social encounters such as student disability falls under the main contributing factors that lead towards non-completion within higher learning institutions of Lesotho. He further states that it has been highlighted that disabled students experienced challenges such as limited access to learning resources.

Furthermore, higher learning institutions experienced challenges while transitioning to online learning during Covid 19 locally and globally. For example, these institutions in Lesotho could not effectively integrate technological facilities and emerge technologies in teaching and learning (Turugare & Rudhumbu, 2020). Thus, occurrences of students' non-completion in higher learning institutions establish that there are certain areas in which institutions fail to strengthen to increase academic completion. The Ministry of Education and Training and the Council of Higher

Education of Lesotho (CHE) have acknowledged that promoting quality learning is one of the major challenges confronting HE in Lesotho (Tlali, 2018).

### **1.3 Problem statement**

Looking at the effects of students' academic failure in higher learning institutions, it is worth noting that non-completion is not only a personal problem since it forms part of the leading social problems. Previous literature has revealed that students face various social challenges influence their well-being and academic success. However, Goodman (2017) highlighted that students encountered obstructions such as obstacles of disability, illness identity, stigma, and negative perceptions about mental illness. The lack of mental health services such as counselling and therapy, which could also be considered as students' social challenges. Similarly, Mah (2017) suggested a need for further research on students' retention since it has been a global issue for many years.

The study therefore aims at understanding fundamental instances that bring complications in students' academic journey. The study the explored diverse social challenges, including identifying initiatives that may be considered as a form of support to minimise the severity of the challenges students come across. Street (2010) emphasised that students could fully persevere in their studies if they get adequate social support from the institution.

The study argues that the social complications are recognised as a threat to sustained education. Johansson (2019) acknowledged that social problems might affect student's physical health, psychological and social relation that may lead to low academic outcomes. Hence, the effects of social challenges cannot be overlooked while developing the educational design. This study holds that it is possible to develop constructive initiatives and interventions within higher learning institutions if proper analysis has been done. Thus, the study embraces that fundamental measures ought to be taken to elucidate such issues since they will negatively affect the whole society in the future. Factors affecting study success ranges from individual dispositions and characteristics such as motivation and prior academic background including structures

of the educational environment such as curriculum design and learning tasks (Bijsmans & Schakel, 2018).

As a former student at the National University of Lesotho, the researcher observed that some students were forced to drop out due to various factors such as academic relations, financial requirements, family problems and health problems. Although the literature supports that there are available programs available in higher institutions, thus, these programmes mostly are not accommodate all students depending on their special needs. Mosia and Phasha (2020) reported that most students at higher learning institutions in Lesotho experience limited access to teaching and learning resources.

On the other hand, scholars highlighted that even when students had positive attitudes toward teaching and learning in higher learning institutions, they faced challenges such as difficulty in communicating with peers, lack of a sense of community, and absence of real-time feedback (Muuro et al., 2014). The feeling of separation and disaffection from the institutional community is therefore regarded as one of the aspects that negatively affect students' performance and might lead to students' dropping out. Consequently, operational counteractive interventions are desirable to relieve students in overcoming their academic challenges and developing individual resilience. The social challenges and non-completion remain vital, which interests us in exploring the social challenges in higher learning institutions to minimise dropout rates for higher learning students.

#### **1.4 Rationale of the study**

Various motives drive the conduct of this study. Firstly, this study highlights that students are exposed to high levels of direct and indirect challenges that have a negative impact on students' academic success. On this basis, the study acknowledges that the existence of social challenges has negative impact towards higher learning completion. Thus, the study emphasises a need for higher learning institutions to consider the effects of social issues by including supportive services in their educational programs. In that way, the study is found beneficial in contributing

towards knowledge that discovers more understanding on possible causes, effects and dynamic processes that lead to students' academic non-completion.

This study has adopted a holistic approach in the interpretation of in-depth processes that shape students' lives. The methodology that was employed permitted the researcher to detect data regarding complex issues that led to non-completion. However, it is worth noting that student's needs may vary due to their different educational backgrounds. Hence, higher learning institutions must ensure building the provision of comprehensive learning activities to strengthen learning success. For instance, some students have good foundations in their educational background, while others lack basic learning foundations. In addition, those with poor educational backgrounds might need additional support since they may lack confidence in their learning abilities. Failure to provide adequate support to students who need additional support may contribute to learning difficulties to the extent that they may be forced to drop out.

Thus, the study findings may inform policy formulation and implementation. The policies that informed by the current issues may be more beneficial since they will be designed in a way that does not only address the academic needs but also pay attention to the social, emotional and economic factors that affect students' performance. As a result, the study will contribute towards developing strengthened institutional programs that encompass universal support including students' mental health, provision of financial aid and promotion of positive community engagement. It is recommended that it is important to have a comprehensive representation of modifiable factors that predict non completion before designing effective interventions targeting existing factors (Delnoij et al., 2020).

## **1.5 Research questions of the study**

### **1.5.1 The main research question was:**

What social challenges lead to students' non-completion within higher learning institutions in Lesotho?

### **1.5.2 Sub-research questions were:**

1. Which individual factors influence students' non-completion within higher learning institutions in Lesotho?
2. What environmental challenges affect to students' non-completion within higher learning institutions in Lesotho?
3. What interventions can improve students' completion rates in higher learning institutions in Lesotho?

## **1.6 Aim and objectives of the study**

The study explores the social challenges influencing to students' non-completion within higher learning institutions in Lesotho.

### **1.6.1 The objectives of the study were:**

1. To explore the individual factors that influence to students' non-completion within higher learning institutions in Lesotho.
2. To determine the environmental challenges affect to students' non-completion in Lesotho higher learning institutions in Lesotho.
3. To develop interventions that can enhance the students' completion rates within higher learning institutions in Lesotho.

## **1.7 Theoretical framework**

This study chooses two theories to gain insight regarding the phenomena, such as bioecological theory and motivation. The rationale behind choosing Bioecological perspectives is based on the fact that it allows the researcher to explore the roles played by parents, institutional environment, including lecture attitudes that may influence students' decisions to drop out. Looking at the structures of the bioecological theory, the researcher strongly emphasises that the dysfunctions within the systems

negatively influence students' performance and may lead to academic non-completion. The ecological approach not only allows researchers, educators, and practitioners to understand the experiences of individual students in academic advising, but also contributes to gaining in-depth insight that will create a campus environment that can enhance student development (Zhang, 2018).

Bioecological theory encourages a holistic view of student development, recognizing the multiple layers of influence on a student's growth and academic success. Subsequently, the theory comprises several layers, namely, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Zhang, 2018). In this regard, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory intends to explore the connections among student health, learning environment, and issues that compromise good academic performance. Following this study, Universities can use this framework to understand the impacts of factors such as family background, peer relationships, and societal expectations to gain more insight into how they shape students' academic completion. The theory is therefore applied to assist educators in creating more inclusive and supportive learning environments. That may include nurturing resilient relationships among students and educators and providing tailored support services. The theory further highlights the importance of understanding and addressing systemic inequalities that affect students from diverse backgrounds by considering socioeconomic status, cultural background, and institutional policies. For instance, many colleges and universities look thoroughly at factors that impact students' inclination to complete, including the relationships between students and faculty as one factors that contribute (Hassanbeigi et al., 2011).

Reasons for students' failure to graduate with a degree vary and they range from dismissal due to lower academic progress to financial concerns (Hoffman, 2014). Motivation theory is therefore included since it is recognized as one of the most important psychological concepts in education that may contribute to drop out if not reinforced. Understanding the social challenges that university students' face through the lens of motivation theory can provide insights into how these challenges affect students' drive and perseverance. Recently, a study regarding the relationship between challenging course content and the types of interactions with students

including faculties revealed a connection between supportive interactions with students and student academic self-confidence and motivation (Hoffman, 2014).

Understanding and addressing students' social challenges through the lens of motivation theory can help universities overcome educational obstacles. Understanding areas of motivation can benefit universities by developing strategies that will keep students engaged and committed to their studies, thereby increasing retention rates. Thus, programs and support systems can be personalised to address the specific motivational needs of different students. In that way, motivation theory also supports educators in understanding what drives students to learn and perform well. By applying these theories, universities can generate environments that foster intrinsic motivation to improve academic outcomes and a deeper engagement with learning material (Shin & Bolkan, 2021). Garn and Jolly (2014) indicated that effective interaction and communication between instructors and students could support students' feelings of relatedness to their environment which positively influence on students' motivation.

## **1.8 Definition of key concepts**

### **1.8.1 Student**

In this study, a student is an individual who is actively engaged in learning, typically within an educational institution such as a school, college, or university. Students keenly participate in academic events, including being present in classes, completing assignments, taking exams, and engaging in additional activities. They pursue education to acquire knowledge, grow skills, and attain individual and professional goals. The term "student" can apply to learners of all ages and levels of education from elementary school to postgraduate studies and beyond.

### **1.8.2 Social**

The term social refers to the informal interaction amongst individuals within a certain environment including the positive interaction with peers, adults and other prosocial behaviour (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). In this study, the social element implicates students' cognitive, emotional, spiritual, cultural aspects and interpersonal

relationships. It is an ongoing relationship among a group of people who share common practices. It is an organized setting such as family, friends, and community members where individuals get to fulfil their holistic needs, including expressing their thoughts and feelings. Generally, social aspect is a broad term that comprehends the interconnectedness and dynamics of human relationships within a societal context.

Reed et al. (2010) added that the term social refers to interactions, relationships, or phenomena surrounding individuals within the society they live in including learning institutions. It encompasses various aspects of human interaction, including social norms, cultural practices, group dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and societal structures. Social phenomena can range from informal interactions between individuals to complex systems such as institutions, organizations, and social movements. The study of social phenomena is often interdisciplinary, drawing upon fields such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, and political science to understand the dynamics of human behaviour and social relationships within different contexts.

### **1.8.3 Challenges**

In this study, a challenge speaks of any difficult situation that requires one's ability and skill to deal with. These are impediments that individuals, groups, or organizations encounter in various aspects of life, such as personal, professional, social, or academic. Challenges can arise from various sources, including external circumstances, internal limitations, or unforeseen events. They often require effort, resilience, problem-solving skills, and sometimes creativity to overcome or navigate successfully. Challenges can also present opportunities for growth, learning, and development. These challenges can arise in different contexts, such as personal, professional, social, economic, or environmental spheres. They often require effort, creativity, problem-solving skills, and perseverance to overcome. Challenges can range from everyday obstacles to larger, systemic issues requiring significant resources and collaboration. They play a crucial role in personal growth, innovation, and societal progress that builds upon opportunities for learning, adaptation, and resilience-building.

#### **1.8.4 Social challenges**

Social challenges refer to the obstacles and problems that individuals or societies face which has a negative impact on their well-being, social cohesion, and progress of community members (Jones, 2010). In this study, social challenges refer to any state that has negative consequences for large numbers of people and thus need to be addressed. Understanding diverse adversities that lead to non-completion can provide a foundation for helping students to reflect on their abilities.

These challenges can manifest in various forms and affect different aspects of society, including but not limited to economics, politics, culture, and interpersonal relationships. Examples of social challenges include poverty, inequality, discrimination, unemployment, crime, substance abuse, mental health issues, access to healthcare, educational disparities, and environmental degradation.

#### **1.8.5 Academic non-completion**

Delnoij et al. (2020) describes non-completion as students decision to leave their university or college studies before completing their study program and obtaining a degree. In the same way, in this study academic non-completion is when a student fail to complete their academic program or course of study. This can occur due to various reasons such as facing difficulty in completing the required coursework, failing to meet academic standards, or encountering personal or external obstacles that prevent them from finishing their studies. Academic non-completion may result in not obtaining a degree, certificate, or qualification associated with the program or course. In general, academic non-completion denotes a failure to complete the program one has enrolled into in a higher learning institution.

#### **1.8.6 Higher learning**

Johnson et al. (2016) defines higher learning as provision of education and training offered beyond secondary level. In this study, higher learning typically include the level of learning within universities, colleges, technical institutes, vocational schools and professional schools. These institutions offer diverse academic and vocational programs including undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Higher learning institutions are also known as tertiary institutions. These institutions are crucial in

preparing individuals for careers, advancing knowledge through research and fostering intellectual and personal development.

### **1.9 Overview of research methodology and design**

The Interpretivist paradigm has been used to gain deeper knowledge concerning the phenomena. The technique made it possible for the researcher to partake in individual conversation through structured interviews, allowing participants to share their personal views concerning causes of non-completion. Firstly, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from the university before engaging participants. Higher learning institutions were approached to get permission to interview students. The researcher explained to participants that participation is voluntary and no rewards were offered. The questions used were open-ended to allow participants to provide as much broad information as possible.

This study used a random sampling for the selection of participants. Four students were selected being two females and two males together with one staff member being either male or female from selected higher learning institutions of Lesotho were included as participants. This study was conducted in three higher learning institutions consisting of two Universities and one college. This means there were five participants from each institution and the total number of participants were fifteen in all. The age group of participants ranges from 18 to 60 years. Students were provided with consent forms, and it was communicated that signing them was consent for analysis of the information they would provide. This study ensured confidentiality and privacy of participants' identities by using pseudonyms.

This study employed the semi-structured interviews for data collection. Each interview session was estimated at last 20-30 minutes. Data were analysed through a thematic analysis where they were categorised according to the themes identified.

## **1.10 Social challenges contributing to non-completion in higher learning institutions**

McDermott et al. (2019) highlighted that it is essential to note that the short- and long-term experiences that precede dropout are interrelated. In general, the evidence suggests a presumed relationship between social challenges and non-completion at institutions of higher learning. The study is informed by the understanding that completion in higher learning institutions is determined mostly by a good mental state. It has been revealed that academics can be overwhelmed by crippling attacks of stress that include pressures of meeting grade requirements, test taking, the volume of material to be learned, and time management (Beiter et al., 2015). The mentioned challenges have a negative effects on students' academic performance.

It is, therefore, common for students confronted with mental challenges to be at risk of dropping out. Mental health problems among students have both short term and long-term consequences, including decreasing work capacity and poor academic performance (Saleem, 2013). To gain more insight regarding social challenges, it is wise to explore students' experiences from both academic and social perspectives. For example, in the context of Lesotho, CHE (2012, Cited in Mosia & Phasha, 2020) highlighted that infrastructures are not reachable, especially for disabled students within higher learning institutions. The researcher is inclined to believe that students who fail to access other facilities within the institution may be forced to drop out of learning in the long term.

It has been highlighted that students' success does not rely on one particular factor in the educational system. Students who succeed tend to benefit from a state of affairs that sustains their journey from numerous angles (Li & Carroll, 2017). On this basis, the implication is that students who do not get support from the mentioned factors have a low likelihood of completion. Khurshid (2014) asserts that success at the higher learning is determined by students' personal characteristics, such as motivation and intellectual abilities. In this context, students unaware of academic goals may have less passion in completing academic tasks. The findings of the study can be helpful to the regulatory authorities in adjusting support services provided. It would make it possible to revisit the existing policy frameworks and attempt to design new strategies

and technical structures to assist educators in providing psychosocial challenges for students to minimise dropping out rate.

Nevertheless, the reality is that there is a wide range of diverse students in any educational system. It is common today for teachers and instructors to deal with students with a wide range of needs regarding learner support unless we are willing to sacrifice the future of many thousands of learners. This means thinking about and planning how the support can best be provided within the constraints of available resources. Thus, enhancing completion rates within universities involves a multifaceted approach that addresses various aspects of the student experience, institutional support, and the broader socio-economic factors.

## **1.11 Chapter Layout**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction and Background to the study**

This chapter presents the definition of social challenges and their negative influence students' non-completion. A broad discussion is put forward to establish possible factors that may contribute negatively to students' performance, which may result in dropping out within higher learning institutions.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The chapter presents an analysis of literature from previous studies in order to gain more insight into the social factors that lead to non-completion in higher academic programs. It discloses how relevant knowledge has progressed within the field by underlining what has been achieved, including what is evolving and the existing state of thinking on the topic. It also discusses Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and motivation theory as the theoretical framework that underpinning this study.

### **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

The chapter demonstrates an overview of the overall strategies employed to conduct the research. It designates all the steps followed while selecting participants during data collection, interpretation, and analysis.

## **Chapter 4: Findings of the study**

This chapter displays the new knowledge revealed throughout the study. It summarises the main research findings and participant's views that align with the study's research questions.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion of findings, Conclusions, Implications and Limitations**

The chapter presents the discussion of key findings and conclusions drawn from the research findings. The chapter further discusses the limitations of the study to pronounce the nature of the study in order to avoid generalization of the study findings. Conclusions are therefore made to highlight the summary of the main points including the recommendations for future research.

### **1.12 Conclusion**

Seemingly, social factors affect students' academic success to different degrees. McDermott et al. (2019) asserted that the stressors may include both direct factors and those that function slightly throughout the course, making individuals more susceptible to school leaving. Accordingly, more detailed attention to factors like course content, instructors, teaching methods and learning environments in education and welfare programming needs to be considered to prevent from the emergence of academic failure. The study intends to gain deep, nuanced insights regarding the contextual complexities of social issues concerning student non-completion.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed the general introduction of the study. This chapter developed a contemporary literature review and the theoretical framework of the study. The ecological system, and motivation theory were considered as the theoretical framework in this study to conceptualise the social challenges. The literature focuses on both personal and environmental challenges that affect students' non-completion. Furthermore, the exploration covers possible approaches that could be executed to minimise higher learning dropout.

### **2.2 Conceptualisation of social challenges**

The term social challenges pertain to societal influences that have an impact on individuals' mind and behaviours. Skinner and Pitzer (2012) describes social challenges as the negative experiences that confront students during general interaction within their communities. Cutting off from school may not be due to impulsive events but may be the outcome of a multifaceted longitudinal process (McDermott et al., 2019). The study believes that students' academic success is determined by a dynamic relationship among students and contextual factors. Lee and Shute (2010) advocated that psychological and emotional attributes in students' learning could affect environmental experiences and social interactions, which lead to students dropping out. In support of the mentioned views, the study aims at understanding the effects of environmental aspects on students' academic wellbeing and how such effects may lead to higher learning non-completion. The researcher, therefore holds that apart from the institutional factors, it is essential to indicate that there are also pull factors that students experience outside higher learning institutions.

Bandura's model indicates that personal and environmental factors influence students' academic success, including family, school, and technical support (Street, 2010). Based on this understanding, Daley (2010) pointed out that the overall causes that lead to the dropout figures in education are complex since it combines various factors, including poverty, illiteracy, weak family structure, inadequate parenting, and an

overburdened education system. Such aspects are crucial in students' academic performance and ability to make personal decisions.

In brief, ideas on social problems communicate that students enrolling in higher learning Institutions experience various prominent academic, psychological, and social challenges as they adjust to new, demanding institutional and social environments. Personal factors are within-student features comprising psychological, cognitive, and behavioural variables. Social-contextual factors involve the variables that originate from outside of the student. No black-and-white distinction exists between personal and social-contextual factors (Lee & Shute, 2010). Student's academic completion demands overall well-being, including the social element, since it forms part of comprehensive independence for individuals. From this view, it can be argued that students may not perform well if they are not in peace with their environment. The main support systems in higher learning completions include both academic institutions and the family.

Similarly, community is identified as one of the major factors that may also negatively affect student's completion. Hurst et al. (2013) specifically confirmed that stressors can include interactions within the family, romantic life, peers, relations with professors, lack of academic time, money, or any other resources that may lead to hostile environments. Deficient social support may be a barrier to learning, forcing students to quit in higher learning Institutions. On the other hand, it has been highlighted that students may face learning challenges due to the teaching approaches.

Along with meeting these challenges, another point of view suggests that students often face difficulties balancing academic stresses, personal responsibilities and social practices. Daley (2010) asserts that students fail to take full responsibility hence, they fail to adopt required skills such as reading and writing essays. In this regards, students are blamed for not dedicating enough time for their academic tasks. Partially, the researcher supports the idea however, the researcher embraces that student's success is not only dependent upon their efforts. Instead, there are many factors that may take place due to their educational background, academic environment, and family setup. Self-efficacy and course relevance and support as being crucial in

academic success. It was highlighted that the vital support functions can also stem from faculty, family, and organizations (Street, 2010).

Khurshid (2014) emphasises that students' awareness of academic goals and existing knowledge with the job market can determine their degree of success. This denotes that students who do not know the relevancy of the course they are studying are likely to give up before completion. In addition, positive faculty-student relations also appear to be important in encouraging students to participate in academic tasks. These positive relations include faculty support such as mentoring, promoting students' self-confidence and development their academic self-concept to enhance general positive education experiences (Perger & Takacs, 2016). From these ideas, it is apparent that students who do not get adequate support from the institution or home are at risk of non-completion. During higher learning, there are various challenges that students need guidance on in order to handle such challenges in a positive way.

Subsequently, other authors identified the influences of different instructional approaches on students' success. Gelisli (2009) has demonstrated the positive effect of a student-centred education approach compared to a teacher-centred approach on students' academic success. From the two approaches, it can be drawn that since the central person who needs to be equipped with skills in higher learning is a student, failure to use the appropriate method may be one of the contributing factors that lead to drop out. Therefore, a focus must specifically concentrate on improving students' intellectual abilities to enhance their reasoning and creativity. Aruguete (2017) additionally underlined that students success can be understood through constructive domains of integration within the university environment and social integration. The academic integration activities might include interaction over course material, access to research experiences, and usage of tutoring centres. From this view, students who fail to establish good social integration may experience negative relations with peers and institutional staff, which may destroy their academic journey, resulting in non-completion.

From the above discussions, it is clear that social skills are one of the key aspects of the academic endeavour. In summary, Caemmerer and Keith (2015) expressed that

the academic achievement of university students is a result of numerous factors, including the supportive psychosocial climate of the campus. However, the campus environment's effectiveness may be associated with students' experiences, values, attitudes and beliefs attached to the university (Sakız et al., 2021). All these factors have potential to negatively and positively influence students' achievement.

Khurshid (2014) asserts that most students enrolled in higher education institutions do not clearly explain why they are studying certain courses and what they want to become. They have only enrolled because they got admitted, and at least they are doing something. It can be assumed that students who are not knowledgeable are likely to lack passion and may not put in the necessary effort, which increases their likelihoods of dropping out. Daley (2010) conveyed that students with self-knowledge become more self-directed since they are eager to set meaningful goals and seek ways to achieve them.

It is a fact that students' success requires their initiative in managing the balance between their academic time and their social life. However, it has been highlighted that in support of individual efforts, students' needs strengthened support from both institutions and the family. This means students who fail to commit to their academic work may drop out. Student initiative cannot apply to all groups of students since there are those students who are gifted whom we cannot confidentially put much expectations on their abilities. However, it has been highlighted that there are students' with learning disabilities (LD) who experience specific difficulties, such as reading and spelling problems, which may affect their academic performance (Manalo et al., 2010).

## **2.3 Fundamental personal challenges leading to students' non-completion in higher learning institutions of Lesotho.**

### **2.3.1 Students' psychological challenges**

#### ***a. Students' lack of academic integrity***

Students who fail to remain honest in the academic journey are likely to face academic challenges because they cannot adopt effective study skills such as time management. Students who lack academic integrity may struggle to arrange and

allocate sufficient time for academic tasks to balance academic responsibilities with social activities. Consequently, they may fall behind and fail to meet academic prospects. In a learning context, there is a complex yet increasingly clear relationship between the characteristics of students, the specific learning approach they adopt and the outcomes of the learning processes (Platow et al., 2013).

Platow et al. (2013) stated that students failed to obtain evidence that their discipline and self-concepts acted as precursors toward successful learning approaches and outcomes. The researcher believes that there is no doubt that academic discipline helps students to stay focused on their academic goals and objectives. In this regard, it is believed that a lack of academic discipline lowers students' ability to focus, which can hinder their ability to concentrate and master the necessary material. For instance, students without discipline may become distracted and spend much time on pleasurable activities that may compromise a good academic performance. Academic discipline is therefore essential for developing critical academic skills such as organization. Ching and Jaffri (2015) maintained that self-discipline is important since it signifies the critical notion of internalization. Students who lack discipline may struggle to develop these skills leading to failure and ultimately dropping out. Hadjar and Buchmann (2016) added that these academic skills include additional orientation in learning, such as attentiveness, task persistence, and self-control.

The other problem with lack of discipline is that students tend to procrastinate their academic work. As a result, doing academic tasks at the last minute may negatively affect the quality of the academic work done since it is done under pressure. Such habits lead to incomplete assignments, missed deadlines, and poor academic performance, which automatically leads to non-completion. In addition, some students drop out of higher learning due to such behaviour.

### ***b. Students' inability to handle academic pressure***

Academic pressure seems to be a common issue faced by students locally and globally. It originates from academic demands, social expectations, financial concerns, and personal aspirations. Guimba et al. (2015) assert that as part of the students' residence, academics suffer subjective problems while dealing with greater pressures on improving their grades and increasing academic success. The pressure might get to a point where students may drop out because they feel they cannot handle the

alarming academic demands. Pariat et al. (2014) affirmed that college students are exposed to internal and external pressures that lead to stress, which require effective and repetitive changing coping strategies.

There are conditions such as disability that may also make it hard for students to cope academically. It means some students face learning challenges due to their learning disabilities. The study conducted by Manalo and Wong-Toi (2010) indicated that it has been discovered that academic success including graduation for the disabled students are poor as compared to their counterparts without learning disability (LD) and their dropout rate also remains high. In this regard, the issue raises a concern regarding the assessment and grading used for students with disability. The implication that may be drawn from the findings may give an impression that disabled students are being assessed in comparison with other counterparts without learning problems. Hence, that may be a call for review due to the recent recognition of the emphasis on students with special needs who need to be assessed differently by looking at their overall intellectual ability.

### ***c. Students' lack of motivation***

Students' lack of motivation fail to show characteristics of being goal-oriented. Such students fail to pay attention, ask questions, and work on general academic tasks. As a result, they appear unhappy and not keen to succeed, which may result in bad performance. Based on this, the problem of academic motivation is associated with the factors that influence it (Graciani Hidajat et al., 2020). Aivaz and Teodorescu (2022) therefore, stated that there is evidence that both boredom and anxiety levels increase when students search for information, which may negatively affect their learning enthusiasm. Robbins et al., (2018) reported that motivation energizes and directs behaviour toward achievement. Hence, it is an important determinant of academic success. It has been established that less motivated students appear to put less effort educationally. This is because students who lack strong mental aptitudes, including motivation, may find it hard to resist learning challenges. As a result, they may resort to dropping out before completion.

Reviewing the empirical literature, Lee and Choi (2011, cited in Meneses & Marlon, 2020) identified student entry characteristics such as skills and psychological

attributes, including individual satisfaction and motivation and course design as the main factors in student retention. However, it is worth noting that students can not possess such skills on their own. They need mentorship from their educators. Students who struggle with academic satisfaction with what they have enrolled in may decide to drop out.

### **2.3.2 Psychological effects of academic pressure**

#### ***a. Depression***

Cahuas et al. (2020) defines depression as a mood disorder that comes in various forms and stages of severity and it controls how people think, feel, and go about daily activities. Students who experience depression may have challenges in focusing on their studies. It is worth noting that there are times when students experience depression due to various factors, such as being overwhelmed by academic load and failure to perform to the required standards. As a result, students may face uncertainties due to depression, which may lead to worry and anxiety. Given that less is acknowledged about depression and academic performance, it has been clearly highlighted that clinical depression is often associated with the inability to concentrate and disturbing thoughts (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000, cited in Owens et al., 2012). Hence, students experiencing depression are more likely to acquire lower school achievement and they have shown to be less engaged in essential activities such as reading, sports and doing school work (Cahuas et al., 2020).

Higher learning demands that the majority of students to leave their homes and stay in institution premises. Beiter et al. (2015) affirmed that the transition itself has been reported as the main cause of depression, anxiety, and stress, which is associated with homesickness. The above mentioned circumstances may lead to poor performance, which may force students to drop out of higher learning institutions. Depression has therefore been identified as a central factor for college dropout decisions (Asher BlackDeer et al., 2023). Recently, depression has become a common mental disorder caused by the combination of genetic, social, psychological, and environmental factors. Dapaah and Amoako (2019) stated that depression affects people from all angles of life, and young people in the university are no exception. For example, students who got low pocket money were seen to be experiencing fewer chances of depression as compared to the students who received higher pocket

money (Ahmed et al., 2020). Students, therefore, find themselves battling with depression, which in turn affects their ability to participate in their learning errands. Ibrahim et al. (2012, cited in Dapaah & Amoako, 2019) stated that depression is a serious health problem among university students' population. Although there is a high prevalence of depression among students, it seems that seeking help is very low (Ahmed et al., 2020).

### ***b. Anxiety***

Excessive worry, fear, or nervousness can interfere with daily functioning, which may cause physical symptoms like rapid heartbeat and sweating. Anxiety may pose conflicts for students as individuals or among a group, which may require their abilities to handle such conflicts constructively. The existing literature confirmed that there is a high proportion of students worldwide who experienced anxiety disorders (Liu et al., 2022). In the academic context, Trifoni and Shahini (2011) suggested that a lack of effective study skills caused anxiety since it contributes towards poor performance.

If students are not given strengthened support to manage time adequately, they may find themselves experiencing anxiety due to a high workload. This implies that students who are not made aware of anxiety and its symptoms may fail to reach out for help when needed. According to Ladejo (2023), young people rarely seek help from formal services regarding their mental health, and that could be caused by failing to recognize they are experiencing mental health difficulties. As a result, students who go through anxiety may go through severe conditions that may force them to drop out since they may fail to attend lessons as required if left untreated.

### ***c. Stress***

Stress refers to the psychological state that develops from the person's appraisal of the success while making efforts to adjust to both academic and societal demands (Kumaraswamy, 2013). From this view, it is apparent that students are at high risk of developing stress whenever they find themselves overwhelmed by situations or academic tasks. In behavioural sciences, stress is regarded as the perception of a threat that results in anxiety, discomfort, emotional tension, and difficulty in adjustment (Fink, 2010). According to Liu et al. (2015), experiencing stress is a natural and adaptive reaction that can motivate individuals to engage with their learning

environment nevertheless, excessive stress can hinder effective learning and cognitive processes.

Stress is part of our daily human experience. Still, it could be associated with a variety of essentially dissimilar problems such as mental and physical efforts, fatigue, pain, frustration, intoxication with drugs, and fear of a need to concentrate (Fink, 2010). On the other hand, students are sometimes confronted by overwhelming pressure that arises from several sources such as educational work, relationships, or any other life changes issues. Often, students who find it problematic to manage the pressure of higher education, including exams and deadlines, may decide to drop out.

According to Robbins et al. (2018), the transition to university and simply studying in Higher Education (HE) can cause stress in young people in many different ways. Some students may easily adjust to the new environment while others may experience extreme emotional stress, negatively disrupting their learning abilities. Liu et al. (2015) asserted that excessive stress can impair concentration and problem-solving abilities, making it difficult for learners to absorb and retain information. In addition, stress can lead to frustration that may hamper the learner's motivation and willingness to engage with the learning material.

#### ***d. Lack of self-esteem***

Self-esteem is seen as one of the key factors that affect an individual's academic performance and more significantly contribute to other effects, including stress and body image (Arshad et al., 2015). Consequently, it is understood that students with low self-esteem have negative self-perception and a constant sense of self-doubt. Hence, low self-esteem can lead to poor performance on assignments, exams, and other academic tasks. As a result, students with low self-assurance do not believe they have the individual capacity to accomplish academic tasks in line with the set expectations. In this regard, confidence is perceived as a positive attitude that encourages students to keep trying regardless of the challenges they experience. Consequently, students with low self-esteem are likely to give up without taking the initiatives to deal with difficulties. Previous findings have also revealed that lower self-esteem is a result of unresolved mental health complications (Mullins et al., 2017).

Arshad et al. (2015) publicized that female students had higher academic performance as compared to male students though it has been reported that male students had higher self-esteem than female students. However, the researcher does not support gender as a basis for comparison of student' performance or their level of self-esteem during learning. The researcher holds a strong emphasis that academic success is determined by individual effort hence there is no relationship between students' gender and learning abilities. From this view, there is no hesitation that high self-esteem is one of the qualities that leads to good performance because it makes it possible for students to interact and participate in learning activities. Liu et al., (2022) established that low self-esteem is one of the leading contributors to anxiety for college students. That being the case, it is established that students whose self-esteem is not nourished to alleviate their anxiety issues and improve their mental health may fail to continue and complete higher learning.

#### ***e. Burnout***

Burnout significantly undermines student's ability to complete their higher education by affecting their academic performance, engagement, mental health, and decision-making processes. The continuing demands of schoolwork and stressors may lead to negative outcomes like burnout (David, 2010). Students experiencing burnout may feel overwhelmed and unable to cope with academic demands. Failure to meet expectations can lead to a decision to drop out of school altogether, especially if they feel that their mental health and well-being are in distress. Addressing burnout requires a comprehensive approach that includes support from academic institutions and access to mental health care services.

According to Jagodics and Szabo (2023), Student burnout is a serious problem in higher education associated with lower academic motivation, which can be seen through decreased engagement and low participation. Feelings of devastation characterize burnout in learning, reduced performance and a sense of detachment from the learning process (Teles et al., 2020). On this basis, it is clear that burnout leads to psychological exhaustion, which may be the key factor in low sense of personal abilities, including academic accomplishment. The feeling may discourage students from placing enough effort in their academic errands. This can result in lower grades and low academic performance, making it harder for students to meet the

requirements for completing their courses or degrees. Manifestations of burnout appear at the interpersonal and individual level where the intrinsic motivation, enthusiasm, and career goals (Shen et al., 2015).

Furthermore, burnout is associated with clouding student's judgment and decision-making abilities, negatively affecting academic performance. Eventually, students may struggle to make informed choices about their academic and career paths, which might lead to choosing courses of action that are not in their best long-term interests. For example, a student experiencing burnout may choose to take official withdrawal with the hope of recovering. However, if institutions fail to make a follow-up by ensuring that they get necessary supportive services, such students may not succeed in returning and completing their programs.

### **2.3.3 Students' health issues**

Physical health problems can have a weighty impact on various aspects of academic life, including attendance, concentration, performance, emotional well-being. Such health issues may have a short or long impact on students' academic success since they may affect the timely completion of academic requirements. Physical health problems can also take a toll on emotional well-being, leading to feelings of stress, anxiety, or depression. These mental health issues can further hamper academic performance by affecting motivation, self-esteem, and the ability to manage academic pressure. Mullins et al. (2017) support this view by stating that existing models of risk and resilience within chronically ill populations suggest that multiple factors contribute to psychological distress. He further emphasise that illness uncertainty was associated with negative adjustment consequences in college students irrespective of whether they had asthma, allergies, or other chronic illness (Mullins et al., 2017).

#### ***a. Physical Health issues***

Literature reveals that students who cannot attend school due to illness are at risk of poor academic performance, which is associated with increased chances of discontinuation (Allison et al., 2019). Students' illness is related to medical appointments or hospitalisation, which compels them to miss lessons. Thus, it may be

difficult for students to keep up with coursework and assignments. On the other hand, students who are ill or dealing with chronic illnesses may not have the strength to complete coursework. As a result, realising students who are not in good physical health may get discouraged to their academic performance, reducing their chances of completing.

On the other hand, students with chronic physical health problems may experience social isolation due to limitations on their ability to participate in social activities or attend school events. This isolation can contribute to feelings of loneliness and negatively impact the overall well-being, affecting academic performance. It has, therefore been established that there is a connection between chronic health conditions and school performance (Crump et al., 2013). On the other hand, Shaikh and Deschamps (2006, cited in Wang et al., 2011) asserted that most students mentioned that they were not in good well-being because they did not invest any time in promoting their health.

### **2.3.4 Higher learning institutional demands that lead to dropout**

#### **2.3.4.1 Financial difficulties**

Academic funding and budget constraints in schools significantly higher learning institutions, are common. Consequently, inadequate resources cause a serious struggle for institutions to adapt to evolving educational trends. The limited funding affects available resources for educational tools, technology, facility repairs, and staff wellbeing, including salaries. As a result, higher learning institutions invested in inventive teaching methods, curriculum improvement, and educational research may be hindered. Financial limitations may force the engagement of unqualified staff, including lecturers, administrators, counsellors, and other supportive personnel. The mentioned complications can result in larger class sizes and reduced student support services, including overworked staff. The moment staff members communicate a heavy workload, the quality will be negatively affected because it is clear that they fail to provide full support. The poor education provided due to limited resources may force students to drop out because they may not see a need to continue.

One of the most significant barriers to completion is the lack of financial means to pay tuition fees, especially at postgraduate levels. Government and institutional funds often have significant financial support available, although they may not be enough to cover all the academic requirements (Tsani, 2013). In some cases, the criteria for allocation of bursaries is performance-based. That suggests that students who are not best performers may not be funded, and that may force such students to drop out if they cannot afford to pay for themselves. Often, financial need is one of the essentials for students to complete higher learning. Financial crisis is one of the measure reasons leading to drop out before students' completion. Financial stress is characterised as difficulty meeting financial obligations, and it is highly prevalent among higher education students in both undergraduate and postgraduate (Stallman, 2010). This implies that financial pressures may consequently force students to seek part-time jobs, which may be strenuous and lead to burnout or non-completion.

Tuition costs are rising at alarmingly high rates. Apart from the tuition fee there are additional cost such as housing, meals, supplies, transportation, and textbooks. The mentioned academic demands may affect students' performance negatively if they are not sufficiently available. Du et al. (2021) reported that financial stress had been associated with various negative health behaviours, including poor dietary behaviours. Students who do not to have basic needs, including food, are not likely to persist in learning since they may be forced to generate income to sustain their living. In addition, Du et al. (2021) observed that several studies among university students report that higher financial strains predict lower sleep quality. Students with less sleep due to challenges, including financial strains, are not likely to perform well academically because their mind has not rested enough, so they may not concentrate well.

Similarly, some institutions deny students the opportunity to carry out some educational tasks, such as writing exams if they have not yet cleared off their financial requirements (VanOra, 2012). In this situation, it is obvious that failure to write exams affects student completion in different ways, including in terms of overall marks and lower chances of academic enrolment. With this in mind, the researcher found this approach as being unfair to students since it tempers the overall initiative that students have done. The researcher believes other techniques could be used to enforce student payments, such as blocking the results. The suggested approach can minimise

inconveniences for students during exams because putting additional financial stress on students during exams may negatively affect the outcome of their results. As a result, they may decide to drop out or the unsatisfactory result may force them to discontinue.

Furthermore, successful learning also requires a conducive environment in terms of infrastructure. If all students including the disabled can access available facilities, the environment can be favourable. Higher learning institutions facing financial challenges may struggle to maintain and upgrade learning environments. Thus, students are likely to perform poorly within challenging environment since situations may be as bad as deteriorating buildings and outdated technology. Students need a couple of extracurricular activities and programs to reinforce their intellectual abilities and ensure their overall wellbeing is healthy to avoid psychological and physical problems. However, minimum funds can affect the implementation of extracurricular activities such as arts programmes and sports.

#### **2.3.4.2 Academic pressure**

Academic overload may be regarded as students feeling overwhelmed by their academic requirements while pursuing a degree at higher learning. It has been perceived that there are students who struggle with handling the academic workload at university. Fook and Sidhu (2015) revealed that some students find it hard to cope with reading academic material. The problem seems to affect both undergraduate and postgraduate students. For instance, some students may find it hard to finish all the assigned readings within a given time, thus, failing to comply may make them incompetent as a result fail to complete. According to the evidence provided by both undergraduate and postgraduate students during the interviews, the amount of reading material was overwhelming (Fook & Sidhu, 2015). It is a fact that there may be work overload during academic experience, but the researcher holds a strong belief that the academic work given to students is manageable. One of the major problems that students may go through involves failure to assign enough time to perform their academic tasks. Some students may postpone their academic tasks until they are forced to work under pressure, resulting in bad performance that may bring about negative effects, including non-completion.

Writing skills are also seen as one of the challenges that students face at higher learning. Clearly, students who experience writing challenges are more likely to experience poor performance, which may lead to drop out before completion. Daley (2010) asserts that many students are unprepared for the severities of the higher academic world since they have low educational skills, affecting their reading and writing abilities. Another concern is that the quality of high school background does not keep up with the pace of college weights; hence, students score below basic standards (Kuh et al., 2010). Although Daley's (2010) prospect might be true, his idea may not be generalised, and does not change the fact that providing additional support to students who experience such challenges may be crucial. However, that would still be determined by a students' responsibility and effort to seek additional support.

University students have various roles and responsibilities that can boost or diminish the effect of demands and resources. For instance, having a part-time or full-time job besides school means more workload. Clifton (2021) asserts that demands from part-time or full-time employment are among the common reasons for dropping out. Some students work more hours, travel and also have to fulfil family responsibilities (Clifton, 2021). From this viewpoint, there is an assumption that students sometimes fall behind academically because of social demands. It is apparent that students today are confronted with more distractions than ever that may lead to non-completion in higher learning. Research has reported that today's college students live in a multifaceted world full of distractions and interruptions triggered by social media that may inhibit them from attaining their educational goals (Aivaz & Teodorescu, 2022). It can be drawn from the perspective that students who fail to acquire the skill in time management are rarely going to succeed.

Moreover, students may have challenges if they fail to efficiently use academic information from available sources. Consequently, the incapability to become creative in information literacy may bring complications in specific areas of higher learning, such as research and critical analysis. According to Ulger (2016), a substantial positive connection existed between creative thinking and critical thinking skills in students' achievement. Low critical thinking abilities play a major role within the completion in higher education as it may cause failure to analyse complex information, evaluate arguments and form well-reasoned opinions making it difficult to understand and

complete academically (Tumkaya et al., 2009). That may also include failure to cultivate effective study techniques such as active learning, which requires time and effort to be refined.

Additionally, students who fail to deal with learning challenges may also experience challenges in solving broad-spectrum complications, whether related to coursework or personal challenges. Such complications may include the ability to initiate individual efforts to complete academic responsibilities. Among the responsibilities, Li and Carroll (2017) reported that goal setting in academics is one of the key aspects. Setting academic goals serves as an enabler that empowers students to maximize their efforts toward the right direction. This implies that students who do not have set goals are not likely to persevere in learning or strive toward completion. Moreover, students' who fail to acquire other skills, such as communication, may not perform well academically since strong written and verbal communication skills are essential for conveying ideas, participating in discussions, and completing assignments that require clear expression of conceptions.

#### **2.3.4.3 Unsatisfactory academic experiences**

##### ***a. Lack of Student engagement in learning institutions***

Lack of student engagement in learning institutions can lead to various problems both for individual students and the educational system as a whole. Thus, students not actively engaged in learning activities are more likely to drop out of university. The feeling of not being engaged brings up a sense of disconnection from the content. Students may lose interest, which may affect their motivation level since they may feel like they are not part of the content, and that may also fail to include their contextual knowledge. Thus, students may feel that remaining in education is not worth the effort, which may lead to higher dropout rates and lower retention rates for the institution.

Seemingly, Students who do not feel involved during their learning experience may only focus on memorization, resulting in lower learning outcomes and poor academic success. The minute students feel disengaged, they may fail to strive for guidance, which may have a negative impact on their participation in discussions. In addition, students do not utilize available opportunities such as lecturers and other academic

support services. The instructional methods that exclude students' participation may lead to limited development of critical skills. As a result, students are likely to face complications in problem-solving and acquire good communication skills. Failing to develop essential skills may affect the student's future career, including personal growth, since they may decide not to continue.

Maintaining high-quality instruction and fostering effective teaching practices are ongoing challenges. The aim is to engage students through small group instruction and group projects (Clifton, 2021). Tutors who cannot promote student's engagement may also contribute towards student's inactiveness in learning. Balancing the mentioned factors can be complex tasks. There is a need to reflect on the teaching strategies implemented in order to improve towards making the content more engaging and meaningful to students. Failure to engage students might contribute towards students' loss of interest, which might lead to their decision to drop out. Student engagement predominantly focuses upon increasing attainment of positive behaviours and a sense of belonging in students so they might remain in school (Parsons & Taylor, 2011).

Teaching approaches that do not encourage inventiveness place students in positions where they are passive and spoon-fed with information, which does not stimulate students' creativity. Thus, the approach creates high chance of a tedious learning environment as a result, some students may lose interest and fail to complete their programs. More than half of respondents in a study indicated that the reason they dropped out of higher learning institutions was related to school engagement and environment (Doll et al., 2013).

### ***b. Academic Technological challenges***

Technology has conveyed several benefits to universities by increasing learning through research. Universities rely heavily on technology for various functions, including registration, student ratings, and communication. However, technical issues such as coordination outages can disturb these practices, creating hindrances for staff and students. It is not all students who arrive at higher learning institutions with the same level of technological capacity. Discrepancies in accessing technology and other

digital skills can broaden the accomplishment gap, especially for disadvantaged students who lack sufficient resources.

Introducing new technological approaches may bring challenges since students and tutors must adjust to advanced teaching techniques. That may include commencing technology in the classroom and administrative setting, which may bring challenges in cases where institutions have limited resources. Complications arising from new approaches may be difficult to the extent that they may increase possibilities, which lead to non-completion. For example, Aivaz and Teodorescu (2022) revealed that using technology for class-related and class-unrelated purposes can result in cognitive overload during lectures. Hence, introduced technological approaches must be friendly enough to enhance education rather than distraction and learning complications. On this note, it is well known that internet connection sometimes creates challenges, especially in the rural areas. This makes it possible for some students to encounter challenges in accessing reliable internet and technology, which can impede their participation in online courses and other virtual learning activities.

Simamora (2020) asserts that it cannot be denied that online learning necessitates more faculty efforts to encourage perfection in the use of online learning over just face-to-face instruction. It has also been highlighted that the biggest problem lies in insufficient infrastructure that complicates internet access and that creates an obstacle to the implementation of online learning. Muuro et al. (2014) asserted that during the pandemic, the study found that in some institutions, lecturers also experienced challenges and failed to provide online group activities that contributed towards participation and collaborative learning.

Some of the main encounters caused by online learning included isolation, which increased feelings of loneliness during student learning. The authors highlight that educational technologies has failed to promote a continuous social interaction since the focus mainly on content instead of students participation and interaction (Pereira et al., 2013). The increase in online communication platforms and remote learning reduce face-to-face interaction among students and faculty. This may obstruct student growth and interpersonal skills and influence some students' decision to drop out. It is established that students turn out to be the most supportive system in their learning

endeavour hence, the learning environment needs to be conducive to allow interaction among themselves. Muuro et al. (2014) asserted that minimal interaction makes it hard for students to work collaboratively as groups since it does not allow them to effectively acquire knowledge.

Universities are increasingly employing blended learning approaches that integrate online and face-to-face teaching methods and a range of sophisticated technologies have been created to enhance teaching and learning potentially (French & Kennedy, 2017). However, it has been highlighted that the widespread of smartphones, laptops, and other devices seems to be causing a lot of distractions. Students turn to be looking at their gargets most of the time they are likely not to focus during lecturers and study sessions. While digital resources can enhance accessibility for some students, they can also present obstacles for others. For instance, students in rural areas are not so exposed to technology, and that may lead to challenges in accessibility.

### ***c. Lack of institutional diversity and Inclusion***

Diversity and inclusion in universities are crucial to creating a positive and enriching academic environment. Institutions that fail to promote diversity and inclusion can create environments where students and staff lack a sense of value, and respect and feel unsupported in their pursuits, including academic experience. Equity issues may be caused by various circumstances such as budget constraints. Minimum funds can exacerbate existing equity issues since allocation may seem to favour certain groups over the other. Students from low-income, minority communities attend schools with fewer resources and less qualified teachers than students in wealthier communities (Mangiante, 2011). This can widen the achievement gap and perpetuate inequalities in education accessibility.

A curriculum that is not diversified may seem irrelevant to certain groups. This is because it will bring challenges, making it impossible to incorporate different perspectives from different cultures. In that way, course material that fails to recognize diverse backgrounds will exclude certain groups of students, and the moments students feel left out, they are likely to feel neglected as a result they may choose not to continue learning. In the same way, the institutions that are not diversified are also likely to offer support services tailored to the specific needs of certain student

populations. Therefore, the student population that is neglected from services such as counselling, mentorship, and resource Centre might go through difficulties that may remain unresolved, leading to non-completion.

There are times when institutions fail to promote inclusive policies, including community engagement. Campuses that do not promote inclusivity and diversity may make certain students feel marginalized or unwelcome, which may lead to isolation and less motivation to complete their studies. There are also political factors in higher institutions. Complementing free speech rights while maintaining a respectful and inclusive environment can be challenging. Institutions that fail to foster an atmosphere where diverse viewpoints can be expressed to promote constructive dialogue may create a challenging environment that some students may choose to discontinue.

Failure to create an inclusive and diverse campus environment that respects and supports all members of different communities may greatly affect student retention. Non-inclusion within institutions vigorously summons issues of discrimination, biasness, and stimulates cultural struggles. The environmental issues make students subject to various challenges that distract academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Non-inclusion in academic institutions may also lead to sudden social isolation, which can lead to students experiencing problems due to a lack of social interactions, motivation, and mental health problems such as seclusion and anxiety. Bernardo and Baranovich (2014, cited in Mojalefa, 2021) believes that the struggles at higher education institutions take place in different contexts.

Badat (2010) reiterates that one of the contributing factors contributing to high drop-outs among black students is almost certainly insufficient funding in the forms of scholarships and bursaries. For instance, although the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has been successfully established and has considerable funding it has only been allocated for needy students. Thus, the overall amounts allocated are limited to providing effective support for all eligible students in need, and it does not cover in case one fails. However, Badat (2010) further highlights the reality of the inter-connection of race, class, and equity towards accessing funds since students from disadvantaged rural social backgrounds continue to be compromised unless there is a greater commitment of public funding for financial aid to disadvantaged students.

#### ***d. Minimum academic support***

The term academic support may refer to various instructional methods and other educational services. The academic support consists of general school resources made available to students to assist them to accelerate in academic performance. In practice, academic support incorporates various educational strategies, including extra tutoring sessions, provision of life skills and general psychosocial support. In a case where there is insufficient academic support, students learning progress is affected negatively since students may fail to meet required learning standards, thus leading to drop out. However, it is worth noting that provision of support that is not contextualized may not serve its purpose. For example, offering support that does not address the needs for students with special needs, students who are non-English speakers and disabled may still leave them in situations where they cannot continue with their studies.

Bovill et al. (2011) emphasized that state and national policies may ensure a huge coverage of supportive strategies that may expand to address issues regarding performance results, course failures, and behavioural problems. Research revealed that students' experiences highlight the need for institutional support, shifting roles for students and staff, giving students genuine responsibility and respect, and allowing them time to grow in confidence (Bovill et al., 2011).

Sikhwari et al. (2019) underlined that some participants indicated their lecturers' teaching approaches were suitable. Students not provided with adequate academic support services such as tutoring, study groups and academic advising are not likely to succeed academically. Students not given enough support services may find themselves in situations where it is difficult to overcome challenges connected to coursework and help them stay on track academically. That implies that for students to succeed, supplemental instruction programs such as writing centres and academic skills workshops are needed since they can also enhance students' learning and success.

However, it has been highlighted that some of the lecturers seem to have lost the passion for their jobs. Hussain (2020) asserts that lecturing is a matter of practicing,

hard work, passion, determination, consistency and perseverance. In addition, the study conducted by Mojalefa (2021) revealed that there are employees who are hopeless to the point that they no longer work for their duties. A lack of lecturers who fail to avail themselves fully may negatively affect students' passion in learning, which in turn may influence them to withdraw.

On this note, it is equally important to highlight that there have been occasions where lecturers fail to offer necessary support to students due to lack of resources. For instance, Mojalefa (2021) reported that NUL participants confirmed that they cannot produce the expected marketable services as expected due to insufficient resources, while management points out that staff fails to perform their responsibilities fully. Based on the argument, it is clear that it is sometimes challenging to identify the root cause of some issues due to blame-shifting. Thus, students learning experiences is automatically affected negatively, which may have a direct contribution towards non-completion. Teles et al. (2020) reported that there are times when lecturers experience negative sceptical attitudes and feelings about students' abilities as they evaluate themselves negatively, particularly regarding their cooperation with students. It is, therefore, clear that lecturers without the urge to build a constructive relationship with students will fail to monitor student performance and learning needs continually. As a result, students may not perform to their level best since they do not become anxious to seek further assistance from their lecturers. This may influence students to end up labelling a course negatively, thus not putting enough effort, which may cause failure leading to non-completion.

Muzenda (2013) reported poor academic performance by frequent students in both public and private institutions, which in turn bring about increased consideration by most researchers in the field of educational management. That has been supported by Tlali and Jacobs (2015) who maintain that lecturers at NUL need to be exposed to theoretical perspectives that support their abilities to adopt constructivist view to promote deep learning. Clifton (2021) further indicates that there are times when there is a lack of instructor bonding and mentoring between lecturers and students. This kind of relationship does not inspire students to invest their efforts in understanding and participating in course content. According to Lorenzo (2012, cited in Clifton, 2021),

a lack of instructor bonding and mentoring influences many students to transfer or drop out completely.

***e. Incompatible choice of programme***

It has been identified that there are cases where students do not complete programs because they are unhappy with the incorrect course selection of the study. Satisfaction is a relevant measure because many studies have demonstrated that satisfied individuals are more likely to be willing to apply more strength than unsatisfied individuals (Tessema et al., 2012). Previous research stipulates that for both students who leave the university before completing their degree and those who complete their studies, a wrong course selection and a lack of vocational focus have been identified as common reasons for non-completion (O'Keefe et al., 2011).

Numerous studies regarding college-related issues reported a lack of research on students' satisfaction regarding major curriculum (Tessema et al., 2012). On this note, the study intends to contribute further knowledge that may contribute towards minimizing academic dissatisfaction due to the wrong course selection. One other reason would be that students may not adopt the positive attitude needed for a good performance. As a result, students who do not like the courses they enrolled in may easily give up if there is inadequate support. When students take courses they experience more than just an interaction with course content. They need to have interest since that will determine their approach during difficulties. The learning environment's broader perspective includes intellectual, social, emotional and physical interaction within the institutional environment.

Another common reason for dropping out of a degree can be a change in goals or other opportunities outside the programme of study. Students may feel that there is a change in career goals which brings about dissatisfaction. This may be caused by multiple reasons, including challenges keeping up with a course that does not match one's unique work. Thus, students who experience such feelings may drop out to enrol in what they believe to be a dream career or what is more compatible with one's work. Apart from making wrong choices when it comes to courses, students may struggle to perform well due to their level of understanding, which may lead to non-completion.

Failure to perform to the required standards may make it impossible to pass exams and may lead to dropping out or being discontinued by the institution.

Students who may be willing to continue after failure may be confronted with financial challenges as a result of failure to complete their studies. It is common that although some institutions may provide tuition assistance, in most cases, it covers a certain number of students and has a specific duration of sponsorship. This implies that students who fail to complete during the provision of the scholarship may be confronted with unpleasant challenges in case the scholarship is put on hold or withdrawn. That may automatically affect students' academic completion.

There are times when parents choose academic courses for their children. At the same time, there are situations where students choose to enrol in certain programs because they do not qualify for the ones they want. As time goes on, such students may lose interest and motivation. With time, students' academic performance suffer, which may bring about negative outcomes since they may fail to complete assignments, allocate study time, and attend classes regularly. As a result, students may battle with understanding the content. In the same way, lack of interest can lead to poor performance and eventually affect students' completion.

Choosing the wrong course also has a direct impact on emotional stress. Students who feel like investing time and resources into something that may not benefit them in the long run may be emotionally strenuous. If such students are not provided with adequate psychological support, they may experience feelings of frustration and anxiety about their academic future. Continuous struggle with unwanted courses may therefore, increase the likelihood of dropping out completely.

#### ***f. Gender inequalities***

Addressing gender inequalities in education is crucial for promoting social justice, economic development, and gender equality. Efforts to improve access to quality education for all, regardless of gender, are essential for building more equitable and prosperous societies. Gender inequalities in education are differences between boys and girls or men and women in various aspects, including educational and career paths (Hadjar & Buchmann, 2016). The primary effects of gender on educational attainment mainly concern differences in performance and achievement between two genders. The constructionist perspective suggests that the differences do not originate from biological abilities but from the socialised motivational, attitudinal and behavioural

patterns of males and females and how these are supported regarding to educational activities (Hadjar & Buchmann, 2016).

Gender inequalities can significantly affect university students, impacting various aspects of academic, social and personal experiences. Sexual harassment is one of the destabilizing effects on the education of female students. The female students who are victims may find it very hard to concentrate on their studies as a result choose to transfer to new universities or simply leave school as a result of hopelessness and pregnancy if they had unsafe sex with their perpetrators (Kheswa, 2014). In many parts of the world, gender inequalities can limit access to education for certain groups, particularly women and gender minorities. This can be practiced through barriers such as cultural norms, economic constraints, and discriminatory policies that prevent students from completing their education. In addition, gender biases can affect academic performance. For example, stereotypes about gender abilities in certain subjects may lead to differential treatment by instructors, which can negatively influence students' self-esteem and academic engagement.

Research has reported that girls seem to place more effort in their academic work than boys. Thus, the number of girls who succeed during higher learning institutions is much higher. Perger and Takacs (2016) indicated that female students consider completion of the degree as more important hence, they are seen to be utilising every support to gain a degree. In addition, Fenyes's (2009, cited in Perger & Takacs, 2016) indicates that girls were more successful and achieved better grades in higher education as compared to boys. This implies that boys tend to be less engaged in school and put less effort in their academic tasks than girls.

However, it has been identified that there are existing educational inequalities within cultures where boys are given more support than girls. In some cultures, girls are raised to acquire certain responsibilities which may deny them the opportunity to continue with higher learning. For instance, in a case where an unplanned pregnancy has occurred, in most cases, the arrangements done are the ones that forces a girl to drop out of school because she is expected to look after a child.

Cultural practices in some citizens oblige girls with some responsibilities that may force them to stay out of school temporarily or permanently interfering with her education. Some of these traditions require drastic measures on the girl. For example, in a cultural context, decisions for girls to discontinue school are made by family. Clifton (2021) emphasised that family burdens force students to drop out since 4.8 million undergraduate students are raising dependent children nationally.

Students who experience discrimination, harassment and gender-based violence on campus may have challenges in performing according to the set standards. A hostile environment has a direct effect on students' wellbeing. If not addressed, the situation may get out of control, exacerbating stress and anxiety, thus resulting in students dropping out.

#### ***g. Cultural practices and differences***

Cultural practices and differences play a significant role in shaping individual characteristics and social dynamics. Awareness of cultural diversity is essential for promoting joint understanding, cooperation, and respect in our progressively diverse world. Peterson and Spencer (1990, cited in Tierney & Lanford, 2018) defined culture as rooted patterns of structural behaviours and members' shared morals, expectations, beliefs or principles about their organization. In the academic environment, students coming from different contexts find themselves interacting on a daily basis in their learning endeavour. As a result, students who find it hard to understand one another may face difficulty interacting with others academically and socially. Fook and Sidhu (2015) stated that the interviews conducted from previous studies revealed that international students specified that most of their problems were language barriers since the English language is the second language. Thus, research has shown that ethnic minority students generally feel less at home in their educational program compared to their fellow students from the dominant culture (Meeuwisse et al., 2010).

In most cases, the decision to get married is made by male partners, hence, they end up marrying girls and women who may be in the middle of their studies and whom may be forced to drop out. Furthermore, the self-esteem could affect the students' gender, family environment, and the educational backgrounds of their parents. The self-

esteem might differ among college students from different nations and regions (Liu et al., 2022). This kind of cultural practice makes female students susceptible to early marriage, which conveys responsibilities that make it impossible to carry on with their higher education. Pregnancy and birth mostly put female students at the highest risk of various vulnerabilities, including health problems. For instance, when a child is born, a female is the one who has to look after the child. Early marriage also exacerbates problems like illiteracy and under education, since girls in such marriages are often expected to leave school. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2014, cited in Clifton, 2021), unplanned births account for nearly one in ten dropouts among female students at community colleges. Hsiao (2012, cited in Aruguete, 2017) asserts that students report being torn between the culture of family and the culture of the university; hence, students may be forced to drop out of higher learning if there is no support from the family.

Besides such linguistic and financial challenges, black rural students in particular, had little experience of a multiracial society. Assimilation was, therefore, difficult in many ways, and it was different from the richer white urban peers since they were not challenged (Chetty et al., 2015). Some Universities strive towards creating inclusive and assorted learning environments. Hence, they have implemented resources such as diversity offices, cultural centres and multicultural programming to support students from diverse backgrounds and promote dialogue, understanding, and respect among all university community members.

In some cultures, men adhere to certain standards to designate their manhood. These beliefs shape their attitude and social behaviour. For instance, in cultures where men are expected to be providers, they may fail to continue with higher learning because they feel they need to participate in income-generating activities. It has therefore been identified that in the majority of cultures, drug abuse was significantly associated with male students, which concluded that the male gender was significantly correlated with substance abuse, which may be attributed to cultural and social contexts (Kabbash et al., 2022).

Different cultures have unique artistic traditions and storytelling techniques that reflect their values and history. In an increasingly interconnected world, cultural practices are often shared and adapted through cultural exchange and globalisation processes. This can lead to enriching cultural diversity but also raise concerns about cultural appropriation and the erosion of traditional practices. Cultural differences can positively influence how individuals learn and engage with the educational system. For instance, some cultures may prioritize memorization, while others emphasize critical thinking and collaboration. Cultural differences can also influence good attitudes towards the environment.

#### ***h. Sexual Assault and Harassment***

MacKinnon (2015) maintained that sexual harassment refers to unwelcome sexual advances in the context of a relationship of unequal power, and it includes non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual assault and harassment on campus are some of the critical social challenges that students face at times. Sexual harassment can have a devastating impact on the education of the victims of sexual harassment. This has resulted in victims' low participation to avoid unwanted attention from teachers (Joseph, 2015). One in ten female students at major research universities report being sexually harassed by a faculty member (Cantalupo & Kidder, 2018). Klein and Martin (2021) reported that it had become commonplace for sexual harassment to present a serious threat to women's academic and workplace pursuits. According to Quaicoe-Duco (2010, cited in Kheswa, 2014), asserts that female students whose male classmates are sexually harassed may fail to finish their academic work.

Willness (2007, cited in Kheswa, 2014) suggested that students who experience sexual harassment from lecturers are not likely to partake fully in educational programs. Many students who witnessed sexual harassment did nothing simply because they did not know how to respond, did not think it would make a difference, or feared that they would become targets themselves. Silva and Hill (2005, cited in Kheswa, 2014) also confirmed that social workers and therapists reported that some students go through harassment during learning in their courses, hence they are not able to finish their degree. Although sexual harassment is widespread, it is often difficult to combat because victims are often reluctant to report it, fearing that they will jeopardize their opportunities and suffer other negative consequences (Karami et al.,

2020). Hill and Kearl (2011) argue that sexual harassment often takes place where other students are probable to be eyewitnesses.

Although Klein and Martin (2021) emphasized that no study to date has explored the academic impact of sexual harassment using comprehensive samples and adequate detail. The researcher believes that previous studies have reported the general effects of sexual assault, which may contribute to gaining more insights into the impact of sexual assault on academic performance. For example, the trauma and stress associated with sexual assault and harassment can damage cognitive functioning, memory, and concentration, making it difficult for survivors to focus on their studies and perform academically (Klein & Martin, 2021). The effects of trauma therefore, contribute towards the short-term or long-lasting effects which may extremely lead to poor performance since survivors may develop serious conditions such as depression and anxiety.

Whether sexual assault occurred within the campus or outside the campus, survivors may feel unsafe to travel to the campus, leading to a reluctance to attend classes and participate in campus activities. The fear of stumbling upon the perpetrator can disrupt their sense of safety and hinder their ability to participate in the university community fully. Survivors may end up withdrawing from social interactions due to feelings of shame, guilt, or fear of being judged by others. Bauemeister (2001, cited in Kheswa, 2014) asserts that a hostile environment is another form of harassment in which female students are exposed to recurring aggressive and belittling sexual comments and behaviour. Klein and Martin (2021), revealed that harassed women reported not only selective avoidance but also lowered confidence, disappointment with male faculty, and inappropriately negative evaluations of their work.

### ***i. Bullying***

According to Ada et al. (2016) bullying is a rising trend globally, and tertiary institutions are not an exception. Bullying in higher education refers to actions of terrorization, oppression, mistreatment, harm, victimization, and harassment of students within institutions of higher learning such as universities and colleges (Ada et al., 2016). Learning institutions make initiatives to minimize occurrences of threats, viciousness, terror, and intimidation in educational settings, yet the problem of bullying has

remained persistent, making educational settings unsafe. Fogg (2008, cited in Ada et al., 2016) stated that higher learning institutions have become an ideal environment for bullying because of its decentralized nature.

There is one common form of bullying known as cyberbullying. Electronic bullying is a newly emerging phenomenon threatening all age groups but students in particular, and it is done through the use of technology. Electronic bullies use the popular student mediums of e-mails, mobile phones, and text messages to harass, abuse, and scare others. Dake Telljohann and Funk (2004, cited in Ada et al., 2016) affirmed that this kind of bullying is escalating at a wrong rate, with around half a million young experiencing it.

Bullying at university can have significant negative effects on both the victims and the overall campus environment. In essence, a need to highlight the problem of bullying at universities is crucial since it can be identified as one of the extreme experiences that may influence students to drop out. It is taken into consideration that bullying is not a new problem, but the effects continue to affect students' performance on a daily basis. It has been revealed that some students choose not to attend school to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, and harassment (Allison et al., 2019). According to Myers and Cowie (2013), bullying is one of the under-researched phenomena in higher learning institutions, though it has a profound impact on the learning aptitude of many students today. It has also been discovered that numerous universities have a personal tutor available. Still, lecturers are not well trained in terms of dealing with bullying in cases where it is reported (Myers & Cowie, 2016). The study aims to exhaust the environmental challenges that lead to non-completion, including lecturers' abilities to identify students' problems, including the ability to pick students' who might be experiencing bullying in an educational setting.

Hendricks and Tanga (2019) revealed that the outcome of bullying learners in schools could lead to serious emotional and behavioural problems, including depression low cognition, resulting in poor academic achievement that may lead to academic non-completion. Thus, bullying can significantly impact students' ability to focus on their studies. Victims may experience difficulty concentrating, attending classes, or completing assignments due to the stress and anxiety caused by the bullying. As a result, Bullying can lead to various psychological issues, including depression, low

self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts. Victims may also experience ongoing emotional distress that can interfere with their academic performance and may even lead to dropping out of university. The stress caused by bullying can manifest in physical health problems such as headaches and loss of appetite. This experience may be severe and lead to chronic stress, which may put the victim at high risk of being more susceptible to various illnesses.

The effects of bullying can spread to external relationships affecting good relations with mates, friends and family because victims may have difficulty trusting others. Lack of trust around schoolmates, automatically has negative outcomes as students who are victims may miss the opportunity to join in dealing with the academic tasks, especially group work. Constant bullying in the form of harassment and marginalization can grind down individual's confidence and sense of positive self-image. Victims may begin to internalize the negative treatment imposed by bullies, resulting in negative feeling that will give them a negative concerning their academic success. On the other hand, students experiencing bullying may feel unwelcome or unsafe around the campus. That may lead to disengagement from academic lessons and other extracurricular activities. That can hinder students overall college experience and deny them opportunities for personal and academic growth, including completion.

#### ***j. Stigma***

Understanding the possible indicators of stigma within academic institutions is crucial and important in developing effective programmatic and policy interventions. Stigma can contribute to higher dropout rates among affected populations. Students who feel unwelcome may decide to leave the university, resulting in decreased retention rates. Stigma can potentially wear away students' reliance on the higher learning community. When students feel stigmatised and discriminated against, they turn to lose their faith in the institutional ability to protect them and address their academic needs effectively. Apart from health conditions, other factors including disability may lead to stigma. Coetzee et al. (2017) established that while progress has been made generally in mainstreaming students with disabilities, traditional attitudes and stereotypes still lead to exclusion and reduce access, retention, progression and participation.

There is a broad theory of self-stigma where people judge themselves as worth less than others through identification with the stereotypes associated with their stigma (Grimes et al., 2020). Previous studies have indicated that there are instances where students reported that higher institutions are not supportive of the episodic impacts of various learning challenges such as depression and anxiety, with some staff not accommodating because they are blamed for making excuses (Grimes et al., 2020).

Students come to higher learning with different learning abilities. Some students may have intellectual or physical disabilities. Such students may suffer negative treatment within the campus. Hadidi and Khateeb (2014) affirmed that students who are not taught to support one another may mock students with disabilities. Research has demonstrated that adolescents and youth with disabilities may face many social difficulties, including stigma, unrealistic attitudes, and prejudice. Stigma surrounding mental health issues can prevent students from seeking help when needed. Fear of judgment or discrimination may prevent individuals from accessing counselling services, leading to untreated mental health conditions and potentially worsening existing problems. That can damage their capacity to concentrate and perform academically. This can result in lower grades, decreased motivation, and even dropout rates among affected students.

Stigma can lead to social exclusion and isolation. Students who feel stigmatized may withdraw from social interactions, clubs, and activities hindering their ability to form meaningful connections and support networks within the university community. Stigma can also impact physical health outcomes. For instance, individuals facing weight-related stigma may be more susceptible to unhealthy behaviours such as disordered eating or avoidance of physical activity, which can contribute to long-term health issues. Higher learning is crucial for identity development, but stigma can impede this process. Students who feel marginalized or stigmatized may struggle to develop a positive sense of self, leading to feelings of shame, self-doubt, and identity conflict. Stigma can undermine efforts to foster diversity and inclusion on campus. When certain groups face discrimination or prejudice, it creates a hostile environment that hinders the university's ability to attract and retain a diverse student body and faculty.

#### **2.3.4.4 Fixed institutional policies**

##### ***a. Inappropriate grading standards***

University grading structures differ across institutions and countries. In this case, passing usually means meeting a certain performance threshold while failing means falling below that threshold. Educational institutions depend on assessment in the form of grading to qualify students for necessary certifications (Vaessen et al., 2017). Schwab et al. (2018) criticized grades by enforcing that they fail to capture the full capacity of the human potential. Thus, grades are seen to be encouraging extrinsic motivation, which is considered to be unsustainable when the reward is removed. Thus, Grading may generate feelings of doubt for students since they may feel like they are not competent enough to perform well. As a result, poor grades may cause worry, leading to failure since students may find it difficult to focus fully.

Traditional grading systems probably need to be reconsidered in these current days of inclusive education. The assessment standard is designed competitively. This sense of competition sometimes does not reflect what education aims to achieve, especially considering that students do not have the same learning abilities. The standards set through pass marks denies the opportunity to assess students as individuals by looking at their development as individuals. This kind of grading further compare individual performance with that of classmates where they are rated according to the performance of the whole class. As much as the method maybe useful, there might be limitations to some students especially the gifted since they may fail to perform according to the set standards, though they may perform well in other educational tasks. The other is that students come to the university with different backgrounds and levels of preparation for their course.

Setting specific marks to apply to all students regardless of their learning abilities may not be the best way to assess students. Thus, using the same standard to assess students fails to embrace students' differences and diversity as a result, it may be unfair to certain students who may fail to perform according to specified standards, hence forcing them to discontinue learning. Additionally, grading neglects other essential traits of student's development merits, such as creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities and emotional intelligence. Relying on one form of assessment may overwhelm students, which may negatively affect their overall well-being by causing anxiety and stress. The national standards underline that the main

purpose of assessing students is to monitor and inspire students' reflection and self-assessment (Lubbe et al., 2021). Hence, set grading standards can demotivate students particularly when they receive low scores. This can hinder their enthusiasm for learning and cause them to focus more on achieving high grades rather than understanding the material deeply. These experiences may be unnecessary for students, which may also contribute towards non-completion in higher learning institutions.

In many instances, grading fails to strengthen students' creativity since it does not recognize their intellect. It also brings emphasis to specific standards or expectations. Students are therefore channelled to tackle academic work in a certain way to succeed. That solely encourages memorization rather than a deep understanding of the content and application of critical thinking. Students may therefore prioritise remembering information given during lessons perform well on exams rather than engaging with the material meaningfully. Thus, students may be discouraged from taking different routes to explore the alternative approaches since it may lead to lower grades. In the same way, grades do not provide students with necessary feedback that can assist in understanding their strengths and weaknesses.

#### ***b. Unfavourable Institutional policies***

Understanding unfavourable institutional policies involves analysing regulations, rules, and practices within an institution that negatively affect individuals or groups. As much as institutions often provide justifications for their policies. There is a need to review official documents, handbooks, and guidelines provided by the institution time and again to ensure that they still align with the higher learning institution's objectives. Outdated policies fail to address contextual challenges that students may be dealing with, which may bring about complications that students may not be assisted with lead to non-completion.

Higher learning institutional policies can become significant barriers to students' completion in higher learning institutions. For example, most institutions have established standardized performance as a form of assessment. Failing to assess students as individuals may be a barrier since failure of certain subjects does not necessarily mean incapacity to prosper in specialised field of study. For instance, a student who fails mathematics may still perform well in nutrition. Instead, higher

learning institutions need to consider cognitive skills as well as practical skills to acknowledge individual learning differences.

Widening access as one of the policies in higher learning has led to an increased number of students who enter the institution with poor backgrounds, including underprivileged cultural capital that negatively affect success (Chetty et al., 2015). Students who join higher learning institutions may face learning challenges as their educational foundation might be either low or behind. It has been reported that the black students who got admitted to previously white institutions were faced with considerable challenges in adapting to university life. For instance, some black students experienced a language barrier since some lecturers were in English and few black students had received instruction in English (Chetty et al., 2015). It is obvious that such students may need extra support, including extra classes, to catch up with the rest of the students. Failure to get extra support may leave them with poor performance that may force them not to continue.

### **2.3.5 Environmental challenges leading to non-completion in higher learning institutions**

Environmental and Institutional challenges are framed around the complex and multifaceted issues students face in educational institutions such as colleges and universities. These challenges create barriers to the provision of quality education, thus leading to failure towards fully maintained and effective operations. The challenges can vary depending on the institutional size, location, and the broader societal context. It has been demonstrated that the prevailing climate within institutions impacts performance outcomes. Aina et al. (2022) indicated that relational factors play a central role as college students who are more socially or academically integrated are less likely to drop out.

Based on these findings, the implication is that a learning environment that does not promote unity fails to create a conducive learning environment and subsequently negatively impacts students' academic performance. As a result, it may create challenges that increase the chances of dropping out. Salanga and Bernardo (2016) found that students who do not feel attached to their colleague were likelier to drop out than those who reported strong feelings of comradely. On the other hand, Hoffman

(2014) identified a positive relationship between supportive faculty interactions in both academic and social environments.

### **2.3.5.1 Family circumstances**

Lack of family support for students at university can have extreme effects on students' academic success, including mental health and future visions. Students without family support may feel overwhelmed by the challenges of university life, including academic pressure, financial burdens and social integration. This can lead to heightened stress levels, impacting their ability to focus and perform well academically.

Thus, home environment can also be identified as one aspect that may create an inadequate learning environment. Social support from family members and friends is important for the well-being of students, both with and without impairments. Several factors have been identified as contributing to insufficient parental support. Such factors include parental death and any other causes of parental absence. Up to the present, HIV/AIDs has left most students as orphans. In such cases, it has not been easy for such students to get proper guidance and motivation. However, there are cases where participants reported that their poor family background motivated them to work hard academically since their families were hopeful that they would bring about positive change (Sikhwari et al., 2019). In addition, participants reported that praises, gifts and words of inspiration influenced their academic achievement. The study conducted by Aruguete (2017) discovered that university students have academic and social disadvantages that are compounded by work and family responsibilities.

Khan (2013) upholds that parental level of education and occupation are significant factors contributing to student dropout. In contrast, Osuafor and Okonkwo (2013, cited in Sikhwari et al., 2019) argue that the family occupations and their educational level had little influence on students' academic achievement. Similarly, Ebong (2015, cited in Sikhwari et al., 2019) asserts that students' academic achievement is not hooked to the family structure, parent occupation or education. From this argument, the researcher embraces that family background has much of an influence in boosting students' academic completion. A clear example would be in the case of assisting in academic assignments or projects. Educated parents are likely to assist their children

in making the best out of the tasks provided, while uneducated parents may fail to assist due to a lack of information. Grolnick et al. (2007, cited in Wang et al., 2014) confirmed that children may become more academically and psychologically assertive if their parents are involved since they are more likely to familiarize them with general school tasks.

Students whose families struggle to meet the financial demands of attending university, including tuition fees, accommodation, and living expenses, may force them to find alternative ways of income generating. McDermott et al. (2019) emphasises that family financial limitations may be implicated in school leaving when students as part of the family, need to work to support the family or take care of younger siblings. The increased obligations can therefore, interfere with studying routines, which may increase dropout chances.

Lack of family support can lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and homesickness, particularly for students who are living away from home for the first time. These emotional stressors can affect mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, or other psychological issues. Family support often provides access to resources such as academic guidance, mentorship, and advice on navigating university life. Without these resources, students may struggle to find the support they need to succeed academically and personally. Feeling unsupported by family members can diminish a student's motivation to excel in their studies. Without encouragement and validation from loved ones, students may question their abilities and lose confidence in their academic pursuits. The cumulative impact of stress, financial strain, emotional distress, and limited resources can increase the likelihood of students dropping out of university. Students may feel compelled to abandon their educational goals altogether without a strong support system to help them overcome challenges.

#### **2.3.5.2 Peer pressure**

Students living within the same social group are likely to influence each other through interaction. The term is therefore, used to define the positive and the negative influence that students have on themselves. Teenagers turn to seek comfort from each other without realizing how their peers influence them academically (Moldes et al.,

2019). Researchers from various environmental studies and social psychology have established a relationship between the built environment of schools and student learning and performance (Garibaldi & Josias, 2015). In detail, students' academic achievements are determined by whether students get a positive or a negative influence from parents, teachers, and peers of teenagers.

The influence of peer pressure on learning depends on various factors, including the nature of cultural context, individual differences in personality, and resilience skills. In this regard, it highlighted that as much as students can be a great academic support to each other, they can also be a bad influence, which may lead to academic dropout. It has therefore been emphasized that peer pressure often seems to have various negative effects on student academic performance in school since students may end up prioritizing social activities over studying or completing assignments (Moldes et al., 2019). For example, Tetteh et al. (2021) stated that in most cases, peers influence each other to do negative deeds, such as treating others badly or engaging in risky behaviours such as smoking. In addition, Peer pressure is normally linked with crime, drug abuse, and sexual behaviours (Deepika & Prema, 2017). Much of this influence occurs formally or informally through students' interaction during and after academic lessons. It could be drawn from this idea that as much as students can influence each other in a negative way, they still need peer support which their performance might be negatively affected. According to Allen (2005, cited in Deepika & Prema 2017), peer influence has a direct or indirect influence on academic achievement since the social, emotional, and educational objectives are mostly influenced by peer groups.

Peer pressure can be seen positively by recognising it as a source of motivation since it can give students passion to excel academically. However, for students with a poor educational background, the surrounding of peers who value learning and aim high can cause unnecessary pressure, which may lead to non-completion. Some students may be compelled to drop out because they feel inferior by not performing like their peers. It is therefore, clear that peer pressure may negatively and positively affect student academic achievement.

Students as individuals can make personal decisions regarding performing academic tasks as expected. Such behaviour may include prioritizing social activities over academic work. So, peers can influence each other to skip classes and neglect homework. It is also raised that peer groups may not allow adolescents to be themselves in the exact sense of the word. Adolescents sometimes feel a need to put an act to gain approval from the specific group with which they would like to be related (Tetteh et al., 2021). This kind of pressure requires someone with strong resilience, which means those who are weak will try to fit and follow behaviour that will cause academic problems, including dropping out.

The researcher has also witnessed that some students got involved in unacceptable practices due to the friends they were associated with. Such practices included substance abuse, which in some cases made students to stop creating enough time for their studies, which in turn resulted in bad performance, leading to non-completion. The study supports the idea that the influence of peer pressure on freshly admitted students' academic adjustment may depend on the student's personality variable (Nwafor et al., 2021). Hence, the emphasis of the study has been on identifying the factors that lead to non-completion to explore strategies that would support students to utilize their inner abilities to handle stressors.

### **2.3.5.3 Substance abuse**

Substance abuse is a global challenge with detrimental effects on health and livelihood since it affects individuals' physical and mental health. Drug abuse by adolescents has become one of the main causes of health-related problems in several parts of the world causing some students to experience mental health problems and finally drop out of school (Kabbash et al., 2022). College students have been identified among the high-risk population of substance abusers (Mossie et al., 2015). As a result, most students fail to complete higher learning because their minds are not in a good state due to the use of drugs. For example, the Ministry of Health in Lesotho reported on national television that tertiary students are being admitted at a higher rate at psychiatric hospitals due to the use of drugs. It is clear that even if students could be offered rehabilitation support, the wasted time is not likely to be recovered, and that break puts them at risk of dropout.

Substance abuse often forces students to misuse the financial funds provided. This may lead to other problems where they may find themselves in situations where they do not have food or lacking funds to pay other necessities such as rent. The moment students suffer due to misusing funds, their academic performance is likely to be negatively affected since they may fail to acquire basic needs thus increasing the chances of non-completion. In some cases, students get involved in criminal offences that may get them to prison.

Daley (2010) revealed that alcohol, drugs, and gambling are usual student problems. Alcohol use is the greatest contributor to morbidity and mortality among college students since it is associated with more than 1400 deaths, 600,000 assaults, 70,000 to 100,000 sexual assaults, and 500,000 injuries annually on college campuses (Gupta, 2013). In most cases, students learn drug usage within the learning environment. Hence, Gupta et al. (2013) stated that the perception of peers' substance use is equally influential among students. Unfortunately, students consistently overestimate both their peers' subjective approval of substance use and how much their peers use (Gupta et al., 2013).

The main causes of drug abuse are very complex. In one aspect, it appears that parents are to be blamed for raising children in homes where drugs, including alcohol, are radically consumed and abused (Dada, 2012). To some extent, parental practices might contribute, but we cannot deny the fact that there are students who are influenced by the external environment to misuse drugs. From all that has been discussed, it is established that students who are not courageous enough to deal with the challenges stand a high chance of non-completion.

Unprotected sex with unplanned contact has been identified among the problems interconnected with alcohol abuse (Zidan & Saied, 2022). The casual sexual behaviour that students get involved in exposes them to various negative outcomes, such as sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, students may experience unwanted pregnancy, which may force students to drop out, especially girls, since they are the immediate ones expected to take care of new-born children. The financial pressure

reinforced by children may force both male students and female students to seek employment in academia.

#### **2.3.5.4 Inadequate learning Infrastructure**

Wegrich et al. (2017) emphasised that nowadays, infrastructure governance implicates more than the provision of brick-and-mortar assets since it includes the expansion of multifaceted infrastructure systems, including technologies. Poorly maintained facilities with outdated technology create multiple challenges during academic learning. Students' learning in an uncomfortable and unsupportive environment are not likely to complete since they may be forced to drop out due to circumstances. Inadequate infrastructure can significantly complicate the learning process in several ways. That may comprise unsafe surroundings that can lead to injuries and distractions hindering students' ability to focus on learning.

It is probable that some institutions may have limited classrooms, but they have a huge number of students. Once there is a large number of students, there is a need to increase the number of educators too. When there are no additional educators, it might be difficult to pay attention or give extra support to students who are not performing well. Thus, students who are not supported to improve the poor performance may officially be disqualified and may choose to stop academically.

In modern days, technology is essential for the provision of equitable access to quality education for students. Thus, higher learning institutions without adequate infrastructure may lack internet connectivity and computers. Lack of access to technology may put students at a disadvantaged position, complicating the opportunity to acquire digital literacy skills, including access to online educational resources. Students who find themselves compromised due to technological problems may feel like they are not well equipped to fit into the current educational standards hence, they may choose not to continue.

Inadequate infrastructure in higher learning institutions often means an inability to offer extracurricular activities such as sports. That negatively affect students' development since they are denied the opportunity to participate in teamwork, creativity, and critical thinking skills outside the classroom. On the other hand, poor infrastructure is likely to

compromise teachers' ability to provide effective instruction such as appealing lessons and conducting experiments.

#### **2.3.5.5 Commute and transportation issues**

Insufficient transport, or lack of adequate transportation, can pose significant challenges to learning and education, particularly in communities or regions with limited access to educational resources. Without reliable transportation options, students may struggle to attend school regularly. This can lead to absenteeism and ultimately impact their academic performance and progress. Insufficient transport affects students and teachers and staff who may face challenges in commuting to schools, especially in rural or underserved areas. Thus, transport challenges affect both student and teacher retention rates, including the overall quality of education provided. Mudua (2017, cited in Laby et al., 2021) admitted that long travelling distances result of being late for early classes since students arrive at university exhausted and unable to focus on their academic tasks.

The ongoing effort of promoting alternative transport modes as a sustainable solution to the urban transport problem finds a prosperous terrain in university campuses worldwide (Pitsiava-Latinopoulou et al., 2013). Transportation issues can significantly impact university students in various ways. Laby et al. (2021) mentioned that students who do not get accommodation on campus are responsible for their transportation to and from the university campuses because the university does not have the necessary funds to provide transport from all the different locations where students are residing to the campuses. In most cases, the means of transport may be one of the biggest challenges for students in certain areas. It might be due to hard-to-reach areas or financial burden. While financial circumstances may force some students to walk extensive distances to attend academic lessons. There are still cases of students who can afford to pay for transport but may deal with unreliable transport. Both factors may make it difficult for students to attend classes on time and consistently. As a consequence, negatively affect students' ability to engage with their coursework which may result in non-completion.

Inadequate transportation infrastructure, particularly in urban areas, can also expose students to safety risks such as accidents, crime, and harassment during their commute to and from campus. Students, especially those who travel late at night, may experience dangerous attacks that may harm them. Such experiences may threaten

their life and make them anxious about their safety, negatively affecting their overall well-being and academic completion. Nimako and Bondinuba (2013) confirmed that non-resident students cannot attend evening classes due to anxiety of being robbed on their way back to their residences. The study was conducted to establish the success rate between students living on campus and those living outside the campus. The results indicated that the degree success rate of resident students was 93.5%, while for non-resident students, it was 87.8%. A possible reason for this discrepancy could be related to class attendance, which could be exacerbated by transport to and from campus (Nimako & Bondinuba, 2013).

Insufficient transport can exacerbate existing inequalities in education. Students from remote areas may face more significant barriers in accessing schools and educational resources than their more wealthy peers with access to private transportation. The educational growth has produced new schools being located in areas that are outside the city, and some of those schools are located in areas where there are invisible public transport routes (Miralles-Guasch & Domene, 2010).

Lack of transportation may prevent students from participating in extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, or extra lessons, which might be helpful in their holistic development and enhance their learning experience. Mudua (2017, cited in Laby et al., 2021) acknowledged that some academic lecturers are scheduled in the early morning and late evenings during weekends. Additionally, such lecturing periods are disadvantageous for non-resident students who might have difficulty adjusting to transportation schedules (Davison et al., 2015). In some cases, students may resort to unsafe and unreliable modes of transportation, such as walking long distances or hiking, which can put their wellbeing at risk. According to Wylon et al. (2018), another factor underpinning further dissemination of public transport is the quality of services provided, comprising of cost, time, availability, and convenience.

### **2.3.6 Interventions overcoming social challenges to enhance completion rate within higher learning institutions**

Overcoming social challenges often requires a multifaceted approach that addresses these issues' root causes while empowering individuals and communities. There is a need to ensure the implementation of comprehensive education reforms that prioritize equitable access to quality education for all socio-economic backgrounds. It is important to note that these interventions should be tailored to specific contexts and continuously evaluated to ensure they effectively address the underlying social challenges. Collaboration between government, non-profit organizations, businesses, and communities is critical to implementing sustainable solutions.

#### **2.3.6.1 Provision of full funding**

Tertiary education funding has dominantly been public concerns worsened by the rising cost of education (Suleiman et al., 2020). The overall provision of full funding in higher learning institutions has far-reaching positive effects that enhance individual opportunities, institutional success, and societal progress. Jongbloed (2011, cited in Skrbinjek et al., 2018) emphasise that it is a fact that financial resources play a crucial role in creating incentives for the operation of tertiary education institutions. There is no doubt that students who are provided with adequate financial support experience reduced financial burden. Provision of full funding therefore alleviates the financial pressure on students, allowing them to focus more on their studies rather than worrying about tuition fees, accommodation, and other academic expenses. That contributes towards enhanced academic performance that encourages more students to advance their academic qualifications.

On the other hand, funding makes higher education accessible to students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds who might not otherwise afford it. That increases retention rates and thus improves the wellbeing of the whole community. Full funding can also contribute to greater social equity by ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent talented individuals from accessing higher education and achieving their potential. Educating a larger number of students at no cost can help create a more skilled and knowledgeable workforce, driving innovation and economic growth.

### **2.3.6.2 Establishment of ongoing support**

#### **a. Time management**

Time management is critical for academic success, and its absence can add to various factors that lead to school dropout. Developing effective time management skills is therefore crucial for students to flourish in their academic pursuits and prevent the risk of dropping out. The academic journey, especially the first years, seems to be the most crucial time for college adaptation because of the large number of possible adjustments, including time management. Bashir et al., (2015) assert that students face several challenges when it comes to developing new social networks, keeping up with academic work in an environment of much greater autonomy, and negotiating the temptations of a college environment.

As much as there is an issue of students being overloaded with academic work, there are also high probabilities that students fail to manage time adequately. Indeed, the school environment may bring about challenges between time allocation for studies and one's social life. Thus, students need to balance for them to succeed academically. Students who fail to allocate sufficient time for their studies may find themselves in a position where they fail to submit their work on time and make enough preparations for examinations when necessary. Failure to manage academic work may lead to non-completion in higher learning. It cannot be denied that time management may be a struggle for most students, especially those with other commitments such as full-time jobs and family responsibilities. Failure to manage and plan time properly by prioritizing tasks may harm student's ability to complete. Meneses and Marlon (2020) confirmed that time-related issues such as mismanaging time are key factors affecting persistence and attrition, especially for the most mature aged students with added commitments such as jobs and families.

Student effort is prominent in students' expectations of success and failure. A good study environment and effective time management are considered necessary for academic success. Academic failure is attributed primarily to lack of study, poor time management, and inadequate goal setting. Students frequently suffer from not being able to manage their time and routine (Wang et al., 2011). We can say that a better

understanding of the factors or variables that would influence academic failure and those factors that would motivate students to engage persistently in their studies might also hold the key to improved student performance at institutions of higher learning. In contrast, students who fail to manage their academic time adequately are not likely to succeed, and as a result, they may drop out.

It has been discovered that several college students do not know how to manage their time by themselves when they are doing their coursework in college, as their junior and senior high school years were mostly structured (Wang et al., 2011). However, some students are confronted with responsibilities, which makes it hard to balance with academic demands. This kind of problem affects students who may be working part-time and have other family obligations. Such students may need additional support in acquiring learning material and having a flexible duration for the submission of academic tasks. Without flexible learning options and effective time management skills, students may feel overwhelmed and decide to drop out to lighten the pressure.

According to Nasrullah and Khan (2015), time management has a major influence on the lives of the students, especially those studying in higher education institutions without parental supervision. Unfortunately, students who lack clear time management may not have a sense of direction. Consequently, poor time management often leads to regular underperformance in academics. If students continuously receive low grades despite their efforts, they may lose confidence in their abilities. Students may therefore, lose interest in studying and eventually drop out as they perceive no path to success.

### ***b. Participatory methods***

Participatory methods refer to approaches that involve stakeholders, communities, or individuals in decision-making processes, problem-solving, and research initiatives. The benefits of participatory methods vary across different contexts and disciplines. In this manner, participatory methods empower participants by giving them a voice, which can lead to increased confidence. Yamashita et al. (2010) asserts that participation enhances communication skills for learners and improves their competence. The method allows all students to participate and reveal their learning abilities minimizing the imbalances for the marginalized. It has been revealed that once

students get to college, the most felt disappointed as they turn to feel less competent than peers and admitted to dropping a course or dropping out of college (Fine et al., 2007).

Participative methods assume a high degree of student activity. A teacher has to apply his methods and techniques to teach students different concepts and ideas. Employing participatory and collaborative pedagogical practices, including active learning strategies and project-based assignments, can increase student motivation and persistence. Engaged learners tend to remember information better and for longer periods thus leading to good results, reducing the chances of dropout. The practicality of learning actively creates a meaningful experience that makes it possible for students to become analytical in their subjects. Frame et al. (2015) has the same view by emphasising that participation may be encouraged through team-based learning (TBL) since it has been discovered that it helps students perform better as they have shown increased mastery of course content. The researcher holds that participation may also capture students' interest because it improves their engagement and curiosity. Treagust (2013) asserts that one of the major struggles faced by the lecturers is to keep the students actively involved in learning activities. It has been reported that passive listening hardly promotes learning hence, there is a need to make use of strategies that promote active learner involvement such as asking questions to the group by using a variety of audio-visual aids (Treagust, 2013).

Student involvement in the planning of curriculum and teaching methods is seen as another form that would bring about improvement towards the development of new curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy (Yamashita et al., 2010). It can be assumed that participation contributes towards enhanced understanding as it facilitate a deeper understanding of complex issues by incorporating varied perspectives and local knowledge. As a result, this can lead to a wider range of problem analyses and more operational solutions. In addition, when students and communities are involved in decision-making, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and commitment to achieve the set outcomes. This can lead to enhanced willingness to implement and sustain initiatives over the long term. From the mentioned ideas, it is established that participatory methods offer a range of benefits that can contribute to more effective, sustainable, and equitable decision-making and problem-solving processes across various contexts. It is therefore assumed that participatory approaches encourage creativity and innovation by providing a platform for brainstorming, creating

opportunities that lead to different solutions while at the same time facilitating adaptive management approaches by allowing continuous learning and adjustment based on feedback from participants. This can increase the resilience of initiatives in the face of changing circumstances or unforeseen challenges.

### ***c. Team-Based Learning***

Team-Based Learning (TBL) is a teaching and learning strategy that has gained popularity in various educational settings due to its numerous benefits. TBL is an educational method that bonds large groups (classroom) and also small groups (Treagust, 2013). Students must be allowed to participate in team learning, where they are given tasks to tackle challenging topics. Giving students some control over their learning activities indicates that educators respect students' individuality, strengths and other needs.

Developing a sense of classroom community is important in promoting course satisfaction and in helping students overcome feelings of disconnectedness, especially in online courses. When considering the various strategies identified as contributing to a sense of classroom community, instructors likely need support in selecting strategies and technology tools, as well as in implementing those strategies. This support may be especially needed for instructors who translate community-building practices in face-to-face settings to their online courses. Team-based learning might foster a sense of classroom community among students in both face-to-face and online courses. An embedded mixed methods design was used to determine if and how students' perceptions of classroom community varied between methods of course delivery (face-to-face or online) and course format (non-TBL or TBL). The results showed whether students in face-to-face courses (non-TBL and TBL) reported a stronger sense of classroom community than those in online courses (non-TBL and TBL). The results also revealed how students in TBL courses (face-to-face and online) described their sense of connectedness to their instructor and peers compared to those in non-TBL courses (Parrish et al., 2023).

TBL encourages active participation and engagement among students. Instead of passively receiving information, students work together in teams to solve problems, discuss concepts, and apply their knowledge. TBL promotes critical thinking skills as students collaborate to analyse complex problems, evaluate evidence, and make

informed decisions. Through discussions and debates within their teams, students learn to think critically and develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

TBL fosters teamwork and collaboration among students. By working in teams, students learn to communicate effectively, share ideas, listen to others, and constructively resolve conflicts. These skills are essential for success in both academic and professional settings. TBL can increase student motivation and engagement by creating a supportive and interactive learning environment. The opportunity to work with peers, participate in discussions, and apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios can motivate students to participate in the learning process actively. In TBL, each team member is accountable for their learning as well as the success of their team. This accountability encourages students to come prepared to class, contribute to team discussions, and actively participate in team activities.

TBL provides immediate feedback to students through peer discussion and instructor facilitation. This feedback allows students to identify and address misunderstandings, clarify concepts, and deepen their understanding of the material in real time. TBL challenges students to apply their knowledge to solve complex problems and real-world scenarios. Students learn to approach problems systematically, think critically, and develop effective problem-solving strategies by working collaboratively with their team members.

Research has shown that TBL can lead to improved long-term retention of knowledge and skills. By actively engaging with the material, discussing concepts with peers, and applying their knowledge in various contexts, students are more likely to retain information beyond the classroom.

#### ***d. Case Method***

The case method is a dominant pedagogical tool that equips university students with the skills and competencies to excel in their academic and professional endeavours. Students may be involved in discussions where they are given a complex problem to analyse outside of class. The case given is aligned with the course learning objectives and is usually intended to have different truthful answers that can have multiple reasonable solutions. In this case, a facilitator comes prepared with questions that review and test the reasoning and solutions. The facilitator therefore, encourages students to use content knowledge to synthesize, critique, and contribute toward new knowledge (Treagust, 2013).

The case method is commonly known to promote active listening instead of passively receiving information. In addition, it gives students the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-life situations. This bridges the gap between classroom learning and professional practice.

Analysing cases requires students to explore compound situations to recognize key issues and assess multiple viewpoints. Cases frequently present dilemmas or decisions that must be made. By deliberating on different options and their potential consequences, students develop decision-making skills crucial for their future careers. This sharpens their analytical abilities. Discussing cases in a group setting fosters communication skills, which promotes teamwork and collaboration. Students learn to work effectively with others and articulate their thoughts clearly, constructively defending their viewpoints. The skills developed through the case method increase skills that are also highly valued in preparing students for the demands of their future careers.

#### ***e. Demonstrations***

Demonstration in teaching refers to showing or illustrating something to students rather than just telling them about it. Demonstrations provide students with visual, auditory, and sometimes hands-on experiences, which can deepen their understanding of concepts and tend to be memorable (Hussain, 2020). Seeing something in action often makes it easier for students to grasp complex ideas since they are engaged in understanding all the steps followed to reach a certain conclusion. It is good in showing the appropriate ways of doing things since it illustrates the steps followed to perform a certain task (Daluba, 2013).

The demonstration method builds a relationship between prior knowledge and procedural knowledge (Hussain, 2020). Classroom demonstrations can be used as a valuable approach to teaching and critique various skills and examining students' attitudes and values. Hussain (2020) emphasize that the purpose of using demonstration method is to exhibit the existence of the material to be learned and taught. Videotapes and pictures can illustrate realities that cannot be defined verbally. The move from the common classroom dynamic captures students' attention while improving mental flexibility during discussions (Treagust, 2013).

Demonstrations capture students' attention and interest, making the learning experience more engaging, reducing passive learning. When students are actively

involved in demonstration activities, they are more likely to stay focused. As a result, it enhances the students' curiosity and reasoning ability (Hussain, 2020). Thus, demonstrations often encourage students to participate by asking questions and thinking critically about what they observe. They may analyse why certain outcomes occur, which helps develop problem-solving skills and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. This hands-on approach fosters active learning, which has been shown to lead to better comprehension and retention.

Hussain (2020) assumed that the demonstration method can be fruitful and effective for students with low cognitive abilities. This curiosity-driven learning encourages lifelong learning habits and a deeper appreciation of the subject. Watching demonstrations and sometimes participating in them can boost students' confidence in their ability to understand and apply concepts. Seeing practical applications of theoretical knowledge can empower students and make learning seem more achievable. Demonstrations often simulate real-world scenarios or applications of concepts, preparing students for future endeavours in their academic or professional lives. The demonstration exhibits and demonstrates concepts, procedures, and sequence (Hussain, 2020). Thus, experiencing how theory is translated into practice can help Students Bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world situations (Daluba, 2013).

#### ***f. Focused group Discussions***

Focused group discussions (FGDs) offer a powerful qualitative research method for exploring complex issues that generate insights and inform decision-making processes in diverse settings. The method is flexible enough to be exercised in a learning context to assist students in acquiring learning in a way that does not demand too much effort. Students may also get to enjoy participating in learning activities. Focus group discussion can be utilised within a suite of techniques in a multi-method research design, as a principal research method in its own right, or as a form of participatory action research to empower participants and promote social change (O'Nyumba et al., 2018).

In focused discussions, a problem is presented and discussed within a group. Students are given cases that are relevant to their experiences, address defined learning objectives and contain teaching points that can be applied to other situations (Treagust, 2013). FGDs allow researchers to inquire deeply into participants' attitudes,

perceptions, opinions and experiences on a particular topic. Through open-ended discussions, participants can express their views and ideas in detail, providing rich qualitative data.

FGDs leverage the dynamics of group interaction, allowing participants to build upon each other's responses, generate new ideas, and challenge assumptions. Bringing together students from varied backgrounds enables instructors to explore a comprehensive range of perspectives on a given topic. This diversity can uncover variations in behaviours and experiences that might not materialize during individualized tasks.

### ***g. Role-Play***

Role-playing is a versatile and effective tool for personal and social growth, cognitive development, and learning across diverse domains (Cerkez et al., 2012). Role-playing often involves embarking upon scenarios and challenges that promote critical thinking and problem-solving in the safety of the small group setting. It is particularly effective in promoting and practicing communication skills. Role-plays can be based on previously scripted written scenarios or on a real case that may have been presented to the group (Bowman, 2013). Clear instructions are given regarding the nature of individual roles, timing, and specific objectives. Thus, Role-playing encourages participants to think creatively, generate ideas, and explore imaginative possibilities, enhancing creativity and innovative thinking.

Yusof and Alas (2021) indicated that role-play can help students to learn in a fun way and entertaining environment, increasing their confidence since they enjoy the process of learning. It has also proved to enhance communication skills since it encourages individuals to articulate thoughts ideas and improves verbal and non-verbal communication skills. By assuming different roles, students gain insights into the thoughts, feelings and motivations of others, which nurture empathy and understanding of diverse perspectives. Furthermore, it serves as a form of stress relief by allowing individuals to temporarily escape from real-life stressors while also providing a safe environment to practice coping strategies and resilience.

Role-playing can be used as an educational tool in various settings such as classrooms and training sessions to facilitate learning and skill acquisition in subjects ranging from language acquisition to professional development (Kilgour et al., 2015). In that way, it is established that role-play allows individuals to experiment with

different roles and behaviours, which gradually builds confidence and assertiveness in expressing themselves. Role-play involves interaction with others, fostering social skills such as active listening, cooperation, negotiation, and conflict resolution, which are essential for building and maintaining positive learning relationships.

#### ***h. Access to adequate Resources***

Access to resources, including libraries and sports activities, offer a supportive environment within and outside of campus where students can connect with others. University students typically require various resources to support their academic endeavours, personal development, and overall well-being. These resources can vary depending on the university, the student's field, and individual needs. There is a need to ensure sufficient access to essential resources such as textbooks, technology, and research materials. Insufficient learning material, including study spaces, can hinder students' academic progress and make it difficult to complete their courses. Khurshid (2014) also believes that different types of resources are important for the learners' success, including access to scholarship and academic resources.

Reading underpins the massive majority of education achievement. Libraries play an essential role in learning institutions by providing access to information and resources that support literacy and education, promoting successful educational outcomes (Jiyane & Onyancha, 2010). Libraries also help to preserve history since they have an extensive collection of useful tools, such as maps and photographs, that may no longer be easily accessed (Kerr, 2017). Students, therefore, need to access reading material from the library to gain authentic information through the books, journals and others written by reputed authors. Library assistants are regarded as invaluable resources within the library since they can help students navigate the library's collections, locate resources, develop research strategies, and cite sources properly.

In today's digital age, access to technology is essential for university students. This includes computer labs, high-speed internet access, and software programs necessary for coursework, such as word processing, data analysis, and programming tools. The study revealed that college students put forward countless struggles they face to navigate the system in higher education institutions (Dawson et al., 2012).

This implies that students need ongoing technological training to minimize academic problems. University students need sufficient access to a wide range of technology resources to enhance their learning, research, and productivity. By leveraging these

technology resources effectively, university students can enhance their academic experience, streamline their workflow, and achieve their educational goals more efficiently.

#### ***i. Academic support services***

In searching educational excellence, academic assistance plays a critical role in nurturing students' progress and overcoming challenges. The support and guidance provided by educators and peers contribute to a well-informed academic journey. Academic support services for university students can vary from one institution to another, but they typically include a range of resources aimed at helping students succeed academically. Support services may also include academic advisors who assist students in navigating their academic journey by guiding course selection, degree requirements, academic plan, and career planning (Zhang et al., 2019).

There is a need to offer extra tutoring services for students who are not performing well as expected. Services must also have academic advisors who are available to deal with guidance in course selection. Lastly, the services may include study groups and peer mentoring programs. Service provision may be offered as one-on-one or group sessions for students who may need extra aid with specific subjects or assignments. Some universities offer courses designed to help students develop the skills needed to succeed in college, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication (Wilson, 2012).

Capitalising on supportive programs that provide mentorship, leadership training, and extracurricular activities for young people may also be useful. These programs can help build resilience, self-esteem, and essential skills for future success. Launching public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma around social issues such as mental illness, addiction, and poverty may play a crucial role in building upon conducive learning. These campaigns can help foster empathy, understanding, and support for students within the communities they live in.

#### ***j. Health and wellness services***

It has been established that students go through enormous challenges which may lead to non-completion if not adequately addressed. To better understand the contextual meaning of the term (Kern & Waters, 2015), health and wellness support can best be described as a multidimensional concept comprising a wide variety of components,

including spirituality, physical health, mental health, social relationships, and intellectual development.

Thus, higher learning institutions need counselling services to provide mental health support for students to cope with the social challenges to minimize the negative effects on their academic success. In a nationwide survey of college counselling Centre directors, 92% of the respondents conveyed that the number of students seeking help at their centres has increased in recent years (Gallagher, 2012).

Programs designed to enhance the health and wellness of students and institutional staff have subsequently become a priority at many higher learning institutions. According to Gibbs and Larcus (2015) Healthy Campus 2020 was developed as a guiding framework for college campuses to promote quality of life, healthy development, and positive health behaviours. The list of objectives that falls under this framework is comprehensive and contains dimensions including academic performance, mental, physical health, harm reduction, self-care, and sexual and social relationships. The information on mentioned factors is meant to sensitise students concerning taking care of themselves to make informed decisions.

#### ***k. Community and extracurricular activities***

Students as future leaders, must be trained within the academic experience to start participating in community development programs. Institutions need to work cooperatively with existing community organizations and other stakeholders to engage students in service projects and outreach initiatives that allow students to volunteer and contribute positively (Laninga et al., 2011). Such initiatives can include events like empowering people with low incomes, taking care of orphaned children and the elderly, or participating in environmental clean-up initiatives.

Having multiple student clubs and organizations would be helpful in attracting students to engage in activities they may participate in during their spare time. This will minimise engagement in activities that may be harmful to them and may also influence them to get engaged in practices such as drug abuse; such may include cultural and recreational events. These activities provide opportunities for leadership development, community engagement, and social networking outside the classroom.

Engaging students in community projects will also provide them with opportunities to take part in research projects that may be guided by faculty members. Riebschleger

and Cross (2011, cited in Skzypek et al., 2019) affirmed that mentoring offers students career support by allowing them to build on their foundational knowledge and skills. Those practices enable students to apply classroom knowledge to real-world problems, develop critical thinking skills and contribute to developing knowledge in their field. Student engagement also increases students' chances of getting internships and job opportunities since they turn to gain practical skills, develop leadership skills, and gain a sense of social responsibility.

### ***I. Cultural Integration***

Implementing culturally responsive practices that recognise and respect students' diverse backgrounds and experiences can contribute to a supportive and inclusive learning environment. The concepts of cultural diversity and cultural identity are at the forefront of the political debate in many Western societies (Algan et al., 2012). Individuals from different cultural groups are matched to interact educationally, economically and socially. The motivations for an individual belonging to a minority cultural group to assimilate the majority's culture are then directly related to the expected gains (Algan et al., 2012).

In this framework, it is well known that students from different backgrounds and cultures study together in higher learning institutions. Social integration has been identified as a critical factor supporting, satisfying, and successful learning experiences (Owens & Loomes, 2010). Therefore, students need to be made aware that they learn to accommodate one another's differences in order to achieve academic completion.

On this note, community events, festivals, and art galleries can enrich students' cultural experiences while widening their educational perspectives. Exposure to different cultures and traditions also nurtures diversity and tolerance among students. In this case, Severiens and Wolff (2008, cited in Owens & Loomes, 2010) affirmed that social interconnectedness is crucial for mental and emotional health since it supports better learning outcomes.

Creating platforms that allow cultural enrichment for students may make it possible for students from different backgrounds, including international students, to adapt. The interaction among them can promote unity and strengthen their intellectual development. That would also help international students become accustomed to the local culture, develop local language skills, and feel more at home in their new

environment (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Ironically, international students revealed high levels of satisfaction with their study in Australia based on their chance to meet and interact with students from diverse cultures (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011).

### ***m. Religious and spiritual support***

University can be a time of transition and adjustment where religious or spiritual communities can provide a sense of belonging and a support network for students who share similar beliefs and values. There is a need to have religious or spiritual organizations on campus. Religious empowerment falls within resources essential for students to thrive spiritually, academically, personally, and professionally during their time at university. Religious and spiritual communities often offer a space for students to share their struggles, seek guidance, and find emotional support from peers and leaders within their faith tradition.

Support for students from religious organizations can take various forms, such as spiritual guidance and counselling. Such services are often meant to assist students struggling with personal, academic and any other issues. This can involve one on one counselling sessions with religious leaders or trained counsellors who usually incorporate faith-based perspectives into their support. Rovers and Kocum (2010, cited in Alorani & Alradaydeh, 2018) asserts that spiritual well-being is one of a core human component that provides driving force to give person stability, meaning and fulfilment in life and confidence in self. The results showed that female students had higher spiritual well-being than male students. At the same time, there are no significant differences in the mean scores of spiritual well-being regarding students' major or academic years (Alorani & Alradaydeh, 2018).

Religious support for university students can play a fundamental role in helping them navigate academic life challenges while fostering their spiritual and personal growth. Religious groups may generate opportunities for students to connect with others for worship services and other social events. These communities can minimize involvement in risky behaviour and promote a sense of belonging and support, particularly for students who are distant from home or adjusting to campus life.

Creating religious educational opportunities can minimize students' unsafe behaviour by helping them deepen their understanding of religious traditions, hence the implications of such teachings in their own lives. Engaging with religious or spiritual teachings can help students explore morality, ethics, and foster personal and

educational growth and development. Religion serves as a universal model that guides the development of cultural and social dimensions, and prepares a guideline for better living, including discipline (Purrostami, 2012). Overall, religious and spiritual support can play a significant role in the holistic development of students, addressing their social, emotional, and intellectual needs. However, it is essential to recognise that these benefits may differ depending on individual beliefs and experiences.

#### ***n. Retention Programs***

Retention programs can be an operational strategy for assisting struggling students and stimulating academic success for groups or individuals. It is important to implement them thoughtfully with consideration to meeting majority needs but not excluding individualised unique needs depending on circumstances. Cuseo (2010) remarks that there is a need to strengthen student retention as part of the enrolment management strategy rather than focusing solely on recruitment of new students. The overarching goals of these initiatives are to increase students' strengths awareness as a foundation for increased self-awareness, getting support from advisors or career counsellors (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015). For example, African American students have implemented various academic retention strategies such as support programs, programs for first year students and mentoring programs to increase academic success.

According to Johnson (2013), the importance of support programs has been recognised as a significant contributor to student academic success. Students have socially stated that program participation increased their interaction with the faculty including program staff and other students. They further stated that the retention office provided them with information on various events and organizations, which positively contributed to their encouragement and involvement (Johnson, 2013).

Developing targeted retention programs for at-risk student populations such as first-generation college students, low-income students and students from underrepresented backgrounds can also address specific barriers. Research suggests that in some cases, retention can lead to better long-term outcomes for students. Retention programs may ultimately contribute to greater success in higher education and the workforce by ensuring that students have a solid foundation of skills and knowledge.

Retention programs often include social-emotional support to help students cope with the challenges. This may involve counselling, peer support groups, or other interventions promoting resilience and well-being. They also provide an opportunity to catch up by attending to academic deficiencies, which may prevent future dropout and increase overall success rates. Research has also shown that academic support services are critical for the success of students who may be unprepared for college level work (Tinto, 2017). Involvement of parents in higher learning institution activities may bring about close collaboration between educators and parents/guardians. That can nurture greater parental involvement in their children's education and create a supportive network to help students succeed academically.

#### ***o. Flexible learning options***

According to Outram (2011, cited in Loon, 2022), educationists agree that flexible learning is about providing choices for an increasingly diverse student body. Flexible learning options is founded on good pedagogy that puts students and their needs at the centre of learning (Jones & Walters, 2015). Ryan and Tilbury (2013, cited in Wanner & Palmer, 2015) affirmed that flexible learning and teaching is about a more tailored learning to provide a variety of choices that enable students' involvement in their preferred style of acquiring knowledge. Flexible learning options often come with cost-saving benefits. For instance, online courses and part-time courses eliminate the need to commute or relocate. That allows individuals to continue working while pursuing their education, thus reducing the financial burden.

Ahmad and Chua (2015) assert that the study conducted revealed that a traditional tutorial which was a face-to-face interaction, denied the opportunity for detailed discussion as a result partially fulfilled learning objectives. Therefore, e-learning lessons were executed as an alternative method in the teaching and learning processes. The results showed that using the e-learning tutorial increased the mastery of knowledge and enhanced the higher order thinking skills of the pre-service teachers in their educational psychology courses (Ahmad & Chua, 2015). However, taking into consideration that social support was earlier considered important, it is assumed that online learning may contribute to social isolation due to reduced social interaction.

According to UNESCO and the Council of Europe (2000, cited in Ziguras, 2001) other learning options include transnational education, which refers to the form of education in which students are located in a country different from the one where the awarding

institution is based. With the initiation of technology, flexible learning options can reach a global audience. Online courses and virtual classrooms break down geographical barriers, enabling people from diverse backgrounds and locations to access the same quality education (Dooley et al., 2018).

The need for continuous learning is increasingly recognized in today's rapidly changing world. Flexible learning choices accommodate individuals who wish to upskill, reskill, or pursue further education while still engaged in their careers and other responsibilities. Not all students may be available to commit to traditional full-time classroom settings due to multiple reasons such as work, family commitments, health issues, and geographical limitations. Thus, flexible learning options provide accessibility to education for individuals who may otherwise be unable to participate. Flexible learning alternatives promote inclusivity, cater to various learning needs to facilitate continuous learning, and adapts to evolving educational trends.

#### ***p. Student coaching***

Coaching offers valuable opportunity for individuals to unleash their full potential, achieve their goals and thrive in both personal and professional lives. In the context of education, coaches work closely with students to form clear and achievable goals. Coaching focuses on working with a non-clinical population to achieve and work through steps needed to achieve specific goals (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018). By aligning coaching strategies with these objectives, individuals can make meaningful progress toward their desired outcomes. Students need to be drilled towards taking charge of their mind-set, attitude and how they look at the positive aspects including supporting each other. Positive mind-set challenges are opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles. That approach can reduce the negative impact of stress since students are also trained towards self-care, including taking regular breaks and getting enough sleep to preserve a healthy learning attitude and environment.

Personalized coaching can also be provided to consider each student's exceptional needs, goals, and challenges. Coaches can customize their approach to match the specific requirements of their clients while ensuring that the coaching experience is relevant and effective (Grant, 2011). Martens and Vealey (2023) asserted that personalized coaching helps students to gain deeper insights into their strengths,

weaknesses and areas for improvement. In this way, coaching allows students to manage academic pressure and nervousness, enhancing their personal growth. This heightened self-awareness may be useful in helping students develop new skills and competencies. Academic advisors may therefore support students throughout their educational journey to assist in course selection, career planning and personal development, which helps students navigate challenges and stay motivated.

Higher learning requires students to develop a high level of confidence to be flexible enough to partake in learning activities. That allow educators to identify students who need additional support. Confidence will also help students to build resilience towards social challenges. Academic coaching focuses on strengthening individual ability to reflect, conduct self-assessment and set goals to establish students current study habits, strengths and levels of engagement (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). On this note, it is worth noting that low confidence predicts failure in academic completion. That may lead to dropping out due to personal decisions or academic demands such as financial needs. Students who are not coached to become resilient may easily drop out of higher learning institutions when confronted with challenging situations. For that reason, resilience is regarded as fundamental in empowering students' abilities to manage academic anxieties, allowing a positive attitude to handle the pressure around studying, working, and other responsibilities (Robbins et al., 2018).

#### ***q. Family involvement***

The family and its organizational dynamics influence student academic achievement (Cheng et al., 2012). College students need family support to cope with academic demands and adjust positively to an educational environment (Schnettler et al., 2015). The effects of lack of family support at university can extend beyond the college years, impacting students' long-term academic performance. Without a solid foundation of family support, students may face ongoing challenges in academic completion. Attempts done by parents or guardians like visiting educational institutions to gather relevant information including discussions with educators may keep in touch with student progress. That would make it possible for parents and educators to identify and discuss developing problems which may be addressed to avoid drop out. The confidence that parents have in their own capacity to support their children thrive at school is one of the important factors that contribute positively towards students'

academic completion (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Stecker (2004, cited in Cheng et al., 2012) asserts that most university students reported that their families are their number-one source of support.

#### ***r. Competent lecturers***

In the instructor area, educators are regarded as the most imperative school-base factor influencing students' achievement levels (Muzenda, 2013). Skilled lecturers build a positive learning environment where students feel relaxed when asking questions, partaking in discussions, and sharing their thoughts. This sense of community and group effort can improve the overall learning experiences. According to Mokhele (2013), teachers are expected to demonstrate specific skills, apply knowledge, and possess professional qualities to prepare students to meet societal demands.

According to Dimitrova and Dimitrova (2017), the quality of the educational outcome is specifically what has traditionally been linked to the effectiveness of Higher learning Institution (HEI). It manifests itself in preparing highly qualified staff with acquired knowledge and competencies (Dimitrova & Dimitrova, 2017). Competent lecturers offer multiple benefits to students and that can minimize the rate in which students drop out from higher learning. They have proved to possess excellent communication skills, allowing students to feel free to discuss complex ideas and issues. Their skills therefore, allow them to break down difficult concepts into understandable chunks making it easier for students to grip. In the case of NUL, the main issue identified is that it fails to attract quality staff. The emphasis was on engaging professors due to low salaries (Mojalefa, 2021).

Policy makers decided that if they invested in very skilful teachers they could allow local schools more independence to decide what and how to teach (Darling-Hammond & McCloskey, 2008). Skilful lecturers know how to engage their students through various interesting means such as storytelling, interactive activities, and multimedia resources. However, the study conducted by Mojalefa (2021) reports that it is not all employees who can stand the frustration of insufficient resources, which hinders their service delivery. This means that some employees decide to resign and join other organizations. Higher learning institutions need to ensure that lecturers are equipped with all the resources they need to provide a quality education that will increase the success rate of students.

Unlike Treagust (2013) who asserts that Lecturers are much less operative at changing approaches, developing other learning skills such as enquiry, assessment, teamwork or facilitating students to relate knowledge to working situations. Increasing completion in higher learning institutions requires lecturers committed to helping students participate in learning activities to allow them to gain in-depth knowledge, thus improving their cognitive development. Effective lecturers can stimulate and persuade students to work hard by instilling sense of responsibility and capturing their enthusiasm to invest in their learning, including bringing a positive change in their communities. Students alleged that a lack of inner drive and self-confidence in the study area are the most significant factors contributing to academic failure (Fine et al., 2007).

Skilful lecturers respect students and provide constructive feedback in a supportive manner, even in cases where performance is not good. That helps students reach out for assistance to improve where necessary. That allows lecturers too to offer direction that suits individual needs and learning preferences. According to Morelli et al. (2021), Students are less likely to leave school when they notice that they have good relationships with educators.

Well-delivered lecturers can help students to prepare for assessments such as exams, quizzes, and assignments by covering key concepts, providing practice opportunities, and offering guidance on the best way to study effectively (Dooley, 2018). The individual initiative increases the chances of pass rate for students. In contrast, competent lecturers can also function as motivating figures for students and could influence them to strive for excellence in their own academic and professional pursuits.

### **2.3.7 Conclusions**

In summary, it is important to note that individuals may face challenges that cut across all the factors: institutional, environmental, and personal. Earlier studies have highlighted that although students can be held accountable for failing to perform academic tasks, it has been attested through literature that poor teaching also leads to lower student satisfaction, hence poor performance. Higher learning experience is a crucial time when students are given the freedom to become responsible beings. However, there is a need for institutions to provide ongoing support to ensure that

students are continuously instilled with a passion that will sustain them throughout their academic journey.

The study attempted to merge the effects of long- and short-term perceptions to gain more insight into the contribution towards dropout. There was also an analysis done to explore whether these short and long term experiences correlate. Therefore, future qualitative research needs to further explore the psychological factors that influence students to drop out of higher learning institutions. Despite the limitations encountered throughout, the study has attempted to reveal the relationship between social challenges and non-completion in higher learning. The findings have revealed that social challenges play a crucial role in higher learning non-completion.

Consequently, it has been identified that there is a need for provision of strengthened support for students to assist them to take sensible and reasonable decisions about utilizing their time and dealing with complex life issues. That includes involvement of the community that is capable of enhancing students' academic, professional, and personal development to prepare them for success in their future endeavours. This study has also raised some further questions that future research could address. One particularly pertinent issue relates to whether students are frequently made aware of wellness programs for them to utilize services.

## **2.4 Theoretical framework**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

This study is anchored on the theoretical underpinnings of two theories, namely bioecological theory and motivational theory, which are employed throughout as lenses towards understanding key variables that influence inquisitiveness. These theories will highlight the necessity to scrutinise how they contribute towards non-completion in higher learning institutions. Thus, making it possible to define, discover, and convert compound information to academic success. The role played by both theories complement each other in student's academic completion. Students' intrinsic motivation is more likely to be sourced from the environment, including the family. Motivational theory is the inner drive that encourages students to remain in learning regardless of the difficulties they may encounter. Mulisa (2019) suggested that human

progress is the consequence of individual characteristics and ecological functioning.

The mentioned theories have, therefore been increasingly cited as an essential component that emphasised on students need both psychological and social support to complete academically. Learning environments, which do not build upon inspiring atmosphere do encourage participation since students feel uncomfortable making mistakes. Similarly, a learning environment that is not conducive for students to partake in learning discussions and feel free to make mistakes can also obstruct completion in higher learning. Students need to be allowed to become innovative and discover new knowledge rather than being only fed with information. The theories hold that classrooms that only praise correct answers will likely discourage students from making mistakes. On the other hand they may also be hesitant to ask questions for further clarification. Learning activities that do not create a positive atmosphere, support student learning, and allow risk-taking are not conducive to persuading students to strive towards completion during higher learning.

#### **2.4.2 Background of Bioecological Theory**

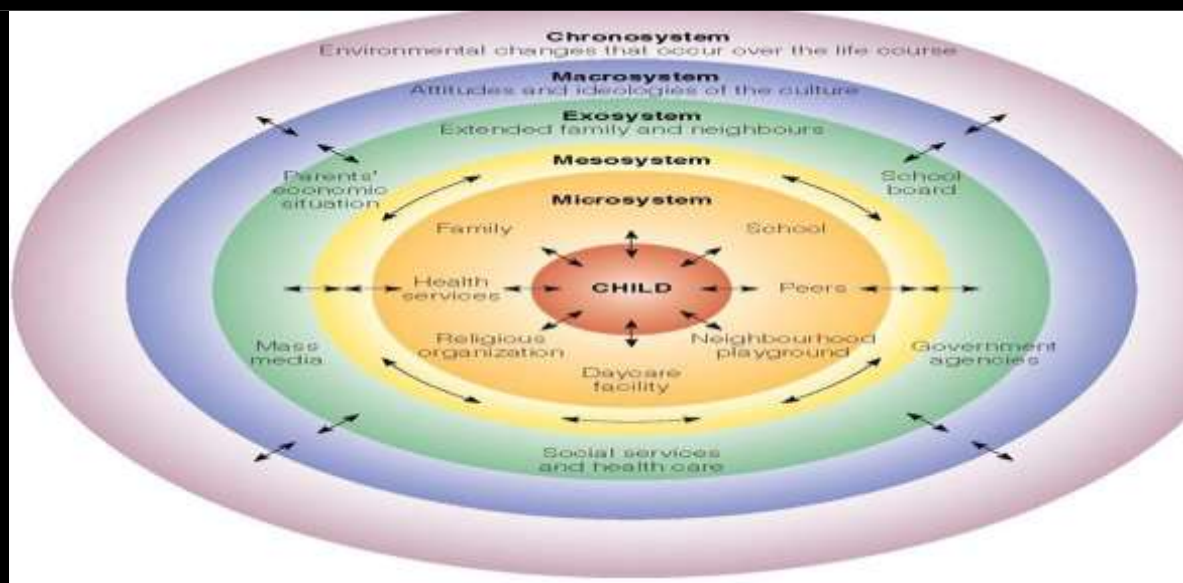
The essence of the bioecological theory is based on the idea that learning is positively or negatively affected by the environment. Velez-Agosto, Soto-Crespo, and Vizcarrondo-Oppenheimer (2017) defined bioecological theory as understanding individuals' development within the environment he/she lives. Throughout the study, the theory will be used as a guiding conceptual tool which incorporates several contexts in a very wide sense. At the heart of the theory lies different systems with which an individual interacts. In relation to the study, the theory emphasizes that positive interaction within the structures is perceived as the pillar of academic success. Meeuwisse et al. (2010) reported that lecturers and peers interactions certainly form back ground of students' sense of belonging which brings about good performance. Thus, any dysfunctions between the layers of bioecological theory are recognised as the sole determinant of dropping out of higher learning.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory suggests that persons, including students, learning is influenced by multiple layers of their environment, from the

closest and most immediate to the more distant and abstract. The theory supports that students who feel safe and supported in their learning environment are less likely to experience stress, anxiety, or depression. A positive environment is believed to endorse a sense of belonging and connectedness, which are vital for students' well-being. Meeuwisse et al. (2010) added that positive peer and faculty interaction influences students' sense of belonging by making complex environments feel more socially and academically supportive. From these ideas it is apparent that students who experience negative learning environment are at high risk of dropping out.

**Figure 1:** Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Olivia Guy-Evans (2020)



### **2.4.3 Objectives and principles of the theory**

#### ***a. Microsystem***

This is the close environment with which an individual interacts frequently and consists of elements such as family, school, peers, and community. In this study, the theory holds that students' non-completion is directly influenced by their environment. Environment entails the overall elements such as distractions, pessimistic atmosphere and wide-ranging tactics, and inappropriate teaching formats. These elements have been demonstrated to improve performance and facilitate effective learning. However, the negative experiences are also major factors that lead to non-completion if insufficient support is provided.

For the sake of the study, it is vital to understand the general environment including the higher learning institutional setting. Students' success relies on the holistic support to remain passionate about their academic work. This is a critical time where students have the freedom to be on their own, requiring more discipline. If students fail to be self-disciplined, they may end up not attending lessons as required, thus failing to perform according to required standards. At times, students may be tempted to be busy with spending pleasurable time with friends over carrying out their academic errands. Thus, peer pressure could be one of the foremost factors negatively affecting student commitment to their academic responsibilities. Students involved in activities for a greater number of hours may benefit from additional opportunities for developing interpersonal skills (e.g. teamwork), making friends, and connecting with others in ways that benefit their psychosocial well-being (Bohnert et al., 2013).

Programs that students enrol in may be considered as part of the microsystem. It has been identified that there are cases where students drop out because of inappropriate selection of the course of study. This may largely be because students may not adopt the positive attitude needed for a good performance. As a result, students who do not like the courses they are enrolled in may easily give up when they are confronted with learning difficulties. Students get to experience more than just an interaction with the course they choose. Students, therefore need to have passion regarding the course they enrol in to gain strength to deal with academic challenges. There is a wide range of learning environments, including intellectual, social, emotional, and physical interaction within institutional environments.

The interaction between students and the lecturers is considered as a microsystem since students cannot fulfil their educational tasks without their lecturers. Lecturers are entrusted to ensure that students are equipped with the required knowledge and determine student's good performance. Lack of good rapport between lecturers and students makes it difficult for students to put more effort towards their studies. It is apparent that during learning, there are times when students may require additional support from their lecturers in cases where they have challenges. Hence, sour relations may be an obstacle for students to approach lecturers for assistance, and that may lead to negative effects and non-completion. Lecturers who are well trained are expected to ensure that they build good relationships with students. They are also expected to have a flexible attitude to make it easy for students to approach them when needed. Lecturers should also be able to use strategies that accommodate students to gain interest in learning. Such methods may include participatory methods that encourage students to participate in their learning. Lecturers need to be supportive even when they give out negative feedback to avoid discouraging students from continuing their studies.

Provision of additional support, therefore will reinforce student's ability to carry out academic plans and attain responsibilities towards the best performance. Lecturers also need suitable skills that will enable them to attend to students' needs beyond classroom requirements. It is established that students have the potential to acquire the best knowledge provided there is additional support. In most cases, parents are the pillar of strength for many students. This denotes that students who lose parents due to death may face challenges generally as they may experience stress, trauma, and financial challenges. Such painful experiences may leave students with no other option than to drop out while dealing with personal issues. Family is seen as a source of motivation provided through emotional and psychological support. The family is also responsible for any other material needs students must complete in higher learning institutions. For example, the family meets educational costs such as fees, food, and accommodation. Thus, it can be established that the microsystem directly controls a person's learning that may determine completion. For example, the quality of interactions with parents and teachers can significantly influence a child's learning outcomes.

Failure to treat students equally may be recognised as a negative factor leading to non-completion. Lack of equity in the classroom may cause unpleasant student experiences, which could lead to non-completion if not addressed. Students may need additional support from either lecturers or family, depending on their individual needs. Lecturers can offer psychological support if they have been equipped with skills to fully avail themselves, making it easy to recognize students' learning difficulties. Strengthened support will determine students' ability to carry out plans and attain responsibilities for their best performance. Thus, additional support including prioritising students' developmental skills may increase student success.

Teaching methods as part of instruction form part of close dynamics that contribute towards student success or non-completion. Teaching methods that are seen as more effective are the ones that ensure students' participation to apprehend their creativity and their interest in learning. Teaching methods that do not engage students may reduce their interest in learning and affect their chances of completion.

Inclusiveness may also include students' ability to access academic resources fairly. Unfairness in resource availability may be a barrier in students' achievement since they may lack resources that are crucial for their academic success. For example, there are times when students have special needs including the disabled, need to be accommodated to fit in the learning environment. There are occasions where such students are not left out intentionally, but the institutional infrastructure is made so that they have been excluded. Infrastructural challenges are likely to cause frustration to students, including disabled, to an extent that students may drop out of higher learning institutions. Apart from accessibility, disabled students may find themselves where they are not socially accommodated due to their disabilities. Such experiences may also be contributing factors that may make it difficult for students to continue their studies.

### ***b. Mesosystems***

Mesosystem refers to the connections between students' home and learning environment. Students' success in higher learning institutions is determined by support by both environments. Any destruction between the systems may create a hostile atmosphere for students who ultimately may not complete academic programs. Students who experience aggressive environments at home or during learning may feel uncomfortable, confused, and unsupported. That may affect participation and

creativity since they may be anxious to make mistakes. A hostile environment does not allow students to explore their learning abilities fully hence, they may not put in enough effort, which may lead to demotivation or deserting academically.

Family as the immediate surroundings is a source of inspiration which has been demonstrated to be the greatest push towards building determination and educational achievement. From the argument above, it is inherent that connection within systems collaboratively contributes positively in students' accomplishment. It is therefore worth noting that parents who do not support higher learning are not likely to provide required support to students learning necessities. Undoubtedly, lack of sufficient support increases students drop out within higher learning institutions. In the same way, a supportive mesosystem can enhance learning experiences and increase chances of completion.

In relation to the social challenges, the mesosystem may also include the whole institutional management system and policies. The rules and regulations enforced must not accommodate institutional staff only but also consider students' homely structures. Their family background better understands students. Failure to acknowledge students from home structures may bring about complications that may lead to non-completion. Consequently, conflicts arising within academic institutions and students' home are likely to affect students' performance, which may contribute towards non-completion.

There are influences that students come across mostly at home which negatively affect academic completion. Students may interact within the home environment creating challenges for their learning. For instance, recently, drug use among students is common. Substance abuse, including drugs, is known to destabilise the mental state, thus creating learning problems. Such involvements may affect students not only psychologically but also generally while at the same time increasing their risks of non-completion.

The relationships among students, and the support they offer are fundamental to their educational achievement. In a case of sour relationships, some students may become miserable and fail to cope to an extent that they may pull out. The concept of community-centred Learning environments emphasises the constructive influence of enabling students to support each other in learning. Students who work together turn

to build on each other's development and motivate one another towards working toward shared goals (Nicholson, 2015).

Learning environments that do not build an inspiring atmosphere do not encourage participation since students are likely to feel uncomfortable making mistakes. Similarly, a learning environment that is not conducive for students to partake in learning discussions and feel free to make mistakes can also obstruct completion in higher learning. Students need to be allowed to become innovative towards discovering new knowledge rather than being only fed with information. On the other hand, in classrooms where it is not okay to make mistakes and only correct answers are praised, students are likely to be discouraged from asking for further clarification. Learning activities that do not create a positive atmosphere, support student learning, and allow risk-taking is not conducive to persuading students to strive to complete during higher learning.

While trying to understand the social factors that lead to non-completion, the teaching methods may also be viewed as part of mesosystem since they contribute to students' success. For instance, teaching methods that do not engage student's participation can be identified as some of the factors that lead to non-completion. The banking teaching method has been highlighted as inappropriate for student's development. The method has been criticised for its weakness in failing to actively engaging students, thus depriving their ability to acquire more knowledge. The method treats students as passive by considering them empty without prior knowledge. The extent to which students' families engage with learning institutions has a huge positive impact. Family members including parents need to be frequently updated with students' academic progress for them to provide additional support when necessary.

### ***c. Exosystem***

Exosystem in the context of bioecological systems theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner focuses on the outer layer of an individual's environment that indirectly affects their development and learning. The exosystem entails components that ultimately influence individual's learning, though they do not form part of their immediate environment. These outward factors significantly have either constructive or undesirable inducement throughout students' learning and development. It is important to highlight that destructive effects can contribute towards non-completion. While the primary focus of ecosystems is not specifically on learning, they can still play

a significant role in shaping an individual's educational experiences and outcomes. In summary, these factors can either simplify or impede learning accomplishment depending on the nature and the level of influence. Regarding higher learning completion, the exosystem alludes to the recognition and enhancement of all layers, including the outer systems. Collectively, the support provided by the features nurtures educational success and lifelong learning.

Though family economic status does not form part of the immediate environment, it drastically plays a major role in higher learning completion. Students whose parents have inadequate financial resources to sustain academic needs may put them in situations where they can be denied access to academic services including writing exams. Such incidences may affect students' performance including progress and minimises chances of completion. In the same way, the economic challenges of the family can affect school funding, teacher salaries, and the overall quality of education available to students since the institution may not function properly.

It is significant to note that these dynamics are interconnected, and system changes can have ripple effects on students' academic completion. Education policies and interventions are often designed to address multiple aspects to create a more compassionate learning environment. However, sometimes they can be made in a way that works against some of the student's needs. Accessibility is identified as another factor in education that can create barriers that hinder students' academic performance, personal development, and overall success (Beyene et al., 2023). Accessibility includes the overall method of designing courses and developing teaching styles to meet various students' needs while focusing on their backgrounds and learning abilities. Course content that is not relevant to students' contextual experiences may be too complicated for students to understand, which may, as a result, lead to non-completion.

At times, family support may be more effective if students as individuals get support from both biological parents. However, in some cases, there is only one parent who may fail to offer such support for various reasons. Therefore, the absence of support from parents may lead to a lack of academic commitment and, hence, low performance. However, parents who might be available may still fail to provide necessary support due to poor education. Their little knowledge could make it difficult to assist with academic tasks or they may deliberately value other aspects as

important and view education as having little value in children's future. That may lead to parents who may end up discouraging students because they do not consider education to be important. In his theory, Tlali and Sepiriti (2023) affirmed partnership of schools, families, and communities as overlapping spheres that need to work together to create a learning community that places a learner at the centre.

Some parents may fail to support students due to factors such as long working hours. Limited time may be a barrier when it comes to parental involvement. These factors can prominently influence student's learning experience since they may not get close supervision and the emotional support they may need. Participation in extracurricular activities, which are often organised at the community level, can contribute to learning in various ways. Activities such as sports, arts, clubs, and volunteering provide skills development, teamwork, leadership, and personal growth opportunities.

The media and technology available in the exosystem can significantly influence learning. Access to educational television programs, the internet, digital learning platforms, and educational apps can provide valuable learning opportunities. Conversely, exposure to inappropriate or distracting media content can hinder learning. Peer groups are part of the exosystem and can influence learning through peer interactions and social experiences. Positive peer relationships can facilitate collaborative learning, knowledge sharing, and study skills development. Conversely, negative peer influences may distract from learning or lead to non-productive behaviours.

Government policies and regulations related to education form part of the exosystem. Thus, Policies regarding curriculum standards, funding, and educational access can profoundly impact the quality and equity of learning opportunities. Advocacy and reform efforts within the political sphere can shape the educational landscape.

#### ***d. Macrosystem***

The macrosystem represents the broader cultural and societal context in which an individual lives. It encompasses the values, beliefs, customs, and laws of a society or culture. Chetty et al. (2015) affirmed that students should understand their society and be able to participate fully in its political, social, and cultural life. Cultural norms and expectations can shape the goals and methods of education and influence what is considered essential to learn. The cultural norms that do not recognize education as valuable may not contribute positively to shaping an individual's learning experiences.

Communities that do not prioritize education may fail to provide adequate support for academic achievement or offer cultural enrichment activities that can inspire and motivate students. Conversely, communities with limited educational resources or negative attitudes toward learning may challenge educational progress and completion.

It has been acknowledged that some cultures support students depending on their gender. In some cultures, boys are given enough support for their learning compared to girls. Such experiences may make it impossible for girls to complete during higher learning. In some cases, women are forced to drop out during higher learning due to the responsibilities attached to them, such as raising children. For instance, if a woman falls pregnant, it becomes difficult after the pregnancy to continue with the studies. Although children would benefit from being raised by their parents, this has a negative impact on women's empowerment since motherhood denies them to improve their economic development through academic completion.

#### ***e. Chronosystem***

The chronosystem considers the dimension of time in a person's life and how changes in their environment can impact learning and development. Events such as divorce, relocation, or introducing new technologies can have long-term effects on an individual's learning experiences.

In summary, the bio ecological theory of learning emphasizes that the complex interplay of biological, environmental, and temporal factors shapes learning and development. It highlights the importance of considering multiple levels of influence and their interactions when understanding how individuals learn and develop. This theory has been influential in various fields, including education, psychology, and child development, as it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of human learning and development.

This system emphasizes that a dysfunctional environment has a negative influence on students' completion. Students confronted with difficult situations may not perform well academically if they are not given psychological support. Bagheri et al. (2017) revealed that students indicated that among the six studied areas, namely family, learner, instructor, learning environment, curriculum, and socioeconomic factors, designed curriculum is seen as the most influential factor for academic failure.

#### **2.4.4 Relevance of the theory**

The bioecological theory of learning, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, is a theoretical framework that focuses on the dynamic interplay between an individual's biological and environmental factors in their learning and development. This theory is often called the ecological systems theory and emphasizes the importance of understanding the various systems and contexts that influence an individual's learning experiences. The theory emphasises the factors that determine a positive learning environment to minimise occurrences of dropout. Some factors may indeed be beyond educators hence, dealing with them becomes complicated and in the end, negatively affects learning outcomes. It has been highlighted that for a positive learning community to prosper, there should be a social presence that promotes interaction with others in a meaningful manner.

The interaction within the immediate and the external environment builds towards cognition. Students who experience a learning environment without feeling secure are likely to discontinue their academic studies. For instance, Sotinis et al. (2013, cited in Moldes et al., 2019) asserted that students' interactions with their peers could help enhance their capability and increase their academic performance in school because they could seek help from their peers that could serve as a motivation than working alone. Consequently, most studies exploring the connection between the learning environment, sense of belonging and quality interactions indicated that cooperative environments help students integrate new knowledge with experience which help them achieve good study results (Meeuwisse et al., 2010).

The theory emphasises that well-funded and equipped schools, experienced teachers and a stimulating curriculum can enhance learning outcomes. In addition, various resources are needed for students to complete their academic needs. This may include finances, laptops, internet, and any other. If they are not available, students will face complications that may lead to non-completion. For instance, learning online requires the internet, and if it cannot be accessed, it means students may fail, which may contribute to dropping out. In this context, the conducive environment also includes adequate resources since they are essential for students' growth and development.

Generally, the bioecological theory place emphasises on the educational process, which focuses on preparing its members to acquire skills that are effective for conducive learning for students at all levels. The relationship between teachers, parents and peers is essential to student success since they generate an excellent emotional climate within the learning environment. More broadly, the theory establishes that the environment contributes to student's development; hence their prior knowledge must be considered. Learning is, therefore, about allowing the integration of information to increase the value and relationship between new content and its application to the real world.

Students are more comfortable if they are in a presence of a lecturers who builds positive relationships with them. As a result, they perform better in the classroom. Similarly, educators who can link the gap between traditional and contemporary knowledge while also demonstrating how either can be applied in the real world will have more academically successful students. Allowing students to become independent in learning improves their creativity and adaptability. This is because students take responsibility for participating in gathering information, which allows them to discover new knowledge.

There is no hesitation that surroundings have a significant impact on students' development. The background in which students are raised can positively or negatively influence our capacity to learn. A student's learning capability may be hindered by negative environmental factors such as poverty and violence. In contrast, positive environmental factors such as a loving family and excellent instructors can assist students in realizing their full academic potential. Froiland (2021) stated that parental expectations students' success and involvement with schools might enforce positive attitudes toward academic tasks.

On the other hand, Rumberger (2011) revealed that less parental involvement in children's education is associated with school leaving. From this view, it is clear that a wide variety of external factors can inflate higher learning completion. Students are therefore, confronted with negative influences that are under their control while at the same time facing difficulties that are outside their scope of influence. In the same way, teachers play a much larger role in determining academic achievement. They are

amongst the factors that carry the most weight in academic success since they can potentially reinforce new skills. Teachers who empower students to adopt a positive attitude also increase their chances of academic success.

### **2.4.5 Conclusion**

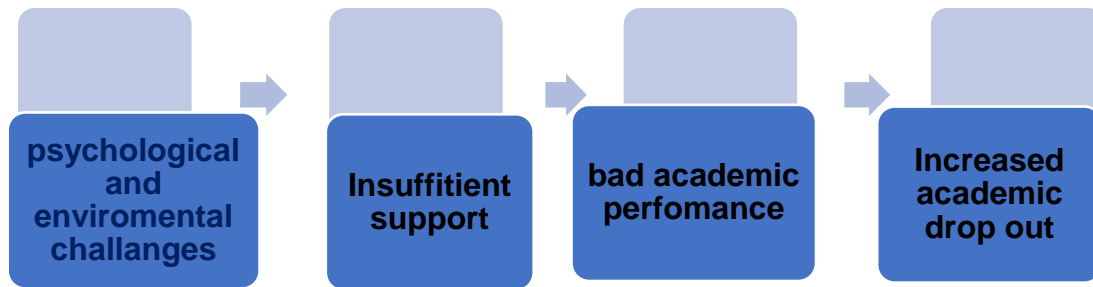
The bioecological theory of learning, developed by psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, emphasizes the multifaceted interaction between an individual's biological makeup and environmental context that shapes their learning and development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model often portrays this theory, which consists of nested environmental systems that influence an individual's development.

### **2.4.6 Background of Motivational theory**

Lunenburg (2011) defined motivation as an act that people intentionally adopt to fulfil their own desires to perform a specific purpose. Motivation theory aims at understanding factors that drive a person to work towards a particular goal. This implies that an individual must have a certain goal that he/she intends to satisfy. Turkpenova (2023) reported that teachers emphasized that learners with low motivation hardly respond to what happens in the classroom. Successful completion in higher learning requires intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to stimulate student's commitment. The theory proposes that consistent determination helps students to perform better. Students' commitment to schoolwork can originate from the student's motivation but may also be greatly influenced by the social context (Lee & Shute, 2010).

Motivation theory plays a crucial role in learning and education since it contributes to acquiring more knowledge and understanding. Many aspects inspire students to participate positively in learning activities. Motivation remains as a pillar that strengthens their persistence in the face of academic challenges. Motivation is one aspect that keeps students determined to remain in learning and accomplish in the long term. Motivated students are more organized and self-regulated since they strive towards doing the right things. It is equally important to note that lack of motivation leads to non-completion since students fail to utilise sustainable, effective learning strategies, including seeking help when necessary.

**Figure 2;** Factors affecting student's non-completion in higher learning institutions.



#### **2.4.7 Objectives and principles of the theory**

The theory holds that students who are not motivated are not likely to continue having the strength to perform their academic tasks. Students therefore need to be given enough support. However, students who live in an environment where education is not supported are not likely to remain in learning. The theory also emphasizes that students who are not motivated may not have passion to continue due to the long duration that is normally taken in higher institutions. It is thought that this theory will equip teachers and faculty members with further understanding regarding diverse student behaviour in the classroom environment which will in turn help them prepare suitable course plans. For this reasons, motivation entails taking into account two basic areas of motivation namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Students who are motivated intrinsically are able to focus on their academic tasks which is important because sustained attention is necessary for processing and internalizing new information.

### ***a. Intrinsic motivation***

Intrinsic motivation looks into the inner capabilities and skills that strengthen student's self-efficacy, which is a person's belief in their ability to accomplish a specific task. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to take on challenging learning tasks and persist in facing obstacles. Intrinsic motivation observes how learners attribute their initiatives to academic success and failure. In this regard, students do not rely on external factors like luck but work towards good performance. It can be seen from the course of learning itself that motivation makes the academic journey enjoyable, leading to a positive attitude toward education, which minimises dropout chances. Students who do not experience satisfaction during learning are not likely to show interest and participation in learning activities. Hence, they become slow and lack creativity (Beiter et al., 2015).

The theory asserts that education curriculum designed in a way that does not promote participation reduces learning curiosity. Considering the role played by intrinsic motivation, it can be concluded that students who do not feel a personal connection with what they are learning are less likely to remember and apply the knowledge acquired. Lecturers that fail to incorporate interrelated activities in the teaching methods are likely to eradicate students' passion; hence they increase the chances of withdrawal. The theory holds that students fully engaged in learning activities often gain an emotional connection with the subject matter. Engaged learners are also likely to engage in higher-level thinking processes such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creative thinking. Motivated students are enthusiastic to search for ideas, challenge assumptions, and make connections between different concepts. However, intrinsic motivation for a task is believed to be low when a person feels controlled to engage in the task or does not provide a feeling of competence (Vaessen et al., 2017). Motivation theories further suggest the importance of setting achievable goals. In this opinion, the expectation is that students must identify the duration in which targets will be reached. That commitment influences students to focus and use their academic time more efficiently. Thus, students who are not motivated may fail to set achievable goals and may fall behind during their academic journey, leading to bad performance and non-completion. Since it has been highlighted that students are confronted with various challenges during learning, such challenges may make it hard for students to

persevere toward academic completion. It has also been acknowledged that motivation brings confidence and makes students invest in their academic tasks.

### ***b. Extrinsic Motivation***

Extrinsic motivation is driven by the desire to engage in an activity for external rewards or to avoid negative consequences. Understanding the value of extrinsic motivation can contribute positively towards assisting educators in designing learning experiences that foster intrinsic motivation since it tends to lead to more sustainable learning. Social factors are therefore seen as the main support system that strengthen students' determination in learning. There are different factors including peers, family and teachers. Bers and Schuetz (2014, cited in Aruguete, 2017) confirmed that collective interactions with university personnel including lecturers and advisors, are linked with improved confidence, sense of belonging, and higher grades.

Along with this institutional support in the form of an institutional environment, effective teachers and peer groups can enhance students' motivation to study (Khurshid, 2014). However, it is essential to realize that students are individuals who turn to get motivated by different factors since they have unique learning abilities. Motivation theory helps educators recognize and address the diverse areas of motivation for students to tailor instruction suitable to individual needs.

The other point that is often overlooked is how students are assessed and receive feedback since it is capable of either motivating students or at same time, demotivating them. Punitive feedback that ignores students' effort and the broader cultural context in which students live can reduce motivation and could be so severe that it may lead to non-completion. Lanford (2016, cited in Tierney & Lanford, 2018) expressed that a conducive environment allows students to become superior incubators for cultivating advanced ideas. In support of the feedback, lecturers need to offer support to students regardless of how good or bad the results are. That will great a trustworthy relationship between lecturers and students, making it possible for lecturers to identify gaps that need to be attended for poorly performing students. According to Brewster and Bowen (2004, cited Elena, 2018), Social support from teachers is critical for maintaining students' engagement and persistence in school.

Teaching methods that do not engage learners to actively participate in the learning process may demotivate students. Being in a classroom without a platform to ask questions, seek clarification, and contribute to discussions may not be thought-provoking enough to retain students. As a result, a lack of participation may not reinforce students' understanding of the content. There are times when students bond with lecturers in such a way that they perceive such lecturers as their role models. Without this role model, many students fail to connect properly to the subject matter and the institution itself (Clifton, 2021).

Social interaction is also key to stimulating students' motivation. Students who do not get the opportunity to participate in collaborative learning activities such as group discussions and peer interactions can face reduced opportunities to learn from each other. Students who learn in isolation may struggle with motivation, attention, participation, and overall ability to be retained in their programs until completion. At the same time, Sakiz et al. (2021) reported that the quality of instructional behaviour portrayed by the lecturers might affect students' motivation to participate in classroom activities and ultimately perform better to achieve academically.

Lecturers that are not approachable may force students to distance themselves, which automatically increases chances of disengagement and lessens motivation. Subsequently, students who are not motivated cannot succeed in self-management as a result, they may not achieve taking control over their academic performance. This means that unapproachable lecturers cannot assist students with learning difficulties, including those who are demotivated, since students are not likely to come forward to seek extra support. In addition, incompetent lecturers may also fail to practice collaborative learning since they are not equipped with adequate skills that may instil motivation in students' learning attitudes. Shen et al. (2015) reported that motivational crisis may be a source of burnout since a feeling of discouragement causes it. David (2010) affirms that an intrinsically motivated person feels he has control over the outcomes of his behaviours. Such a person cannot be easily discouraged from the hunt for his goals, which would lessen the impact of burnout.

#### **2.4.8 Relevance of the theory**

Motivation plays a vital role in the learning process and is a key factor in determining students' learning attitudes, retention and completion. In summary, motivation theory offers valuable frameworks and concepts to help college students understand their motivations, set meaningful goals, and adopt strategies to enhance their academic performance and overall well-being. By applying these theories, students can cultivate a sense of agency and purpose in their academic journey. Ho et al. (2012) found that students held several motives for studying postgraduate studies. The motives could be classified related to qualifications, current career, potential future career, interest, perpetual students, and professional. The theory focuses on the role played by students' inner desire to succeed since it emphasizes that student's success does not only depend on the medium of instruction. The theory embraces that the external factors such as support provided by the family and the community could stimulate student motivation.

Effective teaching may also affect students' motivation due to its ability to engage students and build a welcoming relationship with students, which captures students' interest in learning while also promoting participation during learning activities (McDermott et al., 2019). Trying to understand the two concepts of motivation would make it possible to offer individualized support to students. That can contribute to students' mind-set development, which can increase their resilience. Along with this institutional support, effective teachers and peer groups can boost learners' motivation in studies (Li & Carroll, 2017).

There is sufficient evidence that academic success and the environment are separate entities that impact students' academic completion. This implies that completion may be seen as being energized by mental liveliness generated through support and motivation. Motivation plays a unique role since it allows learners to contribute towards the continuity of their learning, attitude, and behaviour. Students who are satisfied with the curriculum get motivated and they are likely to employ additional effort in their educational studies and become committed in regular class attendance and getting more involved in their coursework and institution (Tessema et al., 2012). Students who are motivated contribute actively towards intellectual capital. The willingness aspect

becomes the measure drive in overcoming the challenges confronting them. Students who are not driven by their distinctiveness cannot resist the challenges since they are not resilient enough to contest for what they want to achieve. Brailsford (2010) revealed that most of the study participants cited improving career prospects, personal development and intrinsic interest in their discipline. Motivation is the force that encourages students to learn and face all challenges (Gallego et al., 2021). According to the theory, the institutional set up should be in such a way that there are activities meant to motivate students. There is a need to offer pre-active ongoing support to students. Among the support provided, students need to be made aware of possible challenges in their academic journey. They should also be encouraged to speak out and use available supportive services in case they do not see progress in their academic work. For students to remain motivated, they need external support from the institutions or the family. Once no support is provided, students are likely to get discouraged and drop out in higher learning.

In an ideal world, motivation reflects something unique about one's ability to remain courageous in achieving certain tasks. For students to succeed at higher education levels, their characteristics, such as motivation, intellectual abilities and personality, act like catalytic forces (Li & Carroll, 2017). Thus, it allows individuals to gain valued outcomes like improved performance, enhanced wellbeing, personal growth, and a sense of purpose. Countless influences contribute to maintaining and losing motivation during academic journey. Students indicated that the curriculum is the most influential factor in academic failure (Bagheri et al., 2017). Students who are not motivated are likely to demonstrate negative attitudes and misbehave. Bad performance may be one discouraging feedback that may influence students from intentionally discontinuing their studies. While in some programs students may at times not allowed continuing. That may be one of the measure reasons why students end up not completing.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Operational prevention programs for dropouts needs to respond to the variety and complex factors that force students to disconnect from school (Feldman et al., 2017). A positive psychological environment can encourage students to engage with the curriculum and their fellow students in ways that can enhance their personal and

professional development. By building trust with students and creating a safe space that feels welcoming for all, teachers create a positive learning environment and ensure students have more opportunities to participate, ask questions, take risks, and receive feedback. Thus, supporting students' emotional needs may positively impact their motivation. In summary, motivational theory provides valuable insights into why students engage in learning, how they approach learning tasks, and how educators can create environments that foster motivation and promote effective learning. Understanding and applying motivational principles can lead to more engaged, persistent, and successful learners.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter focused on the research design and the methodology of the study. It shows the comprehensive research methods that were used throughout the study to establish the criteria that informed inclusion. That includes the presentation of the research design and the instruments used in data collection. Further discussion consist of the methods that are used to analyse data as well as ethical consideration. Lastly, the chapter indicates the limitations of the research methods then the summary is made to conclusion.

### **3.2 Research approach**

The research approach refers to how the study is conducted. It involves a series of phases, including research questions, the theoretical framework, and appropriate research methods. According to Mohajan (2018), research methodology designates the rationality of developing the process used to generate theory, a procedural framework within which the research is conducted.

### **3.3 Qualitative approach**

In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted since it focuses on understanding the phenomena from the participants' perspectives. According to Kuckartz and Radiker (2019), qualitative research methodology is derived from the social sciences and is an umbrella term for all non-numerical and unstructured data. Choy (2014) emphasised that, unlike the quantitative approach, the qualitative approach applies rationality in practice and follows a nonlinear research path. Jamshed (2014) highlighted that qualitative research methodology is considered appropriate when the researcher explores a new field of study to discover and hypothesise prominent issues.

Kuckartz and Radiker (2019) further described qualitative research as a method that generates data through open-ended questions and relaxed communication. The qualitative research depends on communal and cultural anthropology, philosophy, psychology, history, and sociology (Mohajan, 2018). This approach is beneficial in this

study because it makes it possible to increase knowledge through probing. It further allows the exploration of behaviours, values, beliefs, and assumptions (Choy, 2014). This approach helps to discover individuals' views and unpack differing lived perspectives of varied groups of people (Choy, 2014). Hence, qualitative data is subjective and its findings cannot be generalised. However, Mohajan (2018) agreed that circumstances, conditions, happenings, settings, and relations cannot be replicated to any degree, nor generalisations to a wider context than the one studied with any confidence.

The nature of the qualitative approach helps in-depth examination of situations and permits researchers to construct new theories for under-researched areas (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). This qualitative research methodology is suitable when the investigator either investigates a new field of study or intends to establish and theorize prominent issues (Jamshed, 2014). It enables the researcher to create new ideas and give emphasis towards constructing theoretical interpretations (Neuman, 2006, cited in Choy, 2014).

Despite advantages, there are weaknesses attached to this approach. It is time consuming due to the processes included, such as conducting interviews. It fails in providing accurately confirmable results (Choy, 2014). ACAPS (2012, cited in Choy, 2014) further highlighted that the qualitative approach necessitates exhaustive manual labour during analysis process such as categorisation, and recoding while at the same time demanding skilled interviewers to successfully conduct the primary data collection activities. Similarly, it is generally open-ended, thus creating a platform for participants to have more control over the content of the data collected (Mohajan, 2018).

### **3.4 Research Design**

Research design is referred to the mode of reflection that allows researchers to collect data in an organised and controlled way (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This study employed a narrative research design. According to Hoshmand et al. (2005, cited in Mohajan, 2018), a narrative research is a method that examines the characteristics of the narrative text, including the meaning of inter-human relations in social, historical, and

cultural contexts. However, Spector-Mersel (2010) indicated that narrative research design focuses on people's narratives about themselves or events. Instead of looking for themes that emerge from an account, it concentrates on the sequential unfolding of someone's story to emphasise characters. This research design is useful in this study as it helps to gain insights into students' social and academic experiences (Decosse et al., 2013). It further helps for unique, context-based evaluations through time-oriented structures, revealing how changes occur and evolve from a personal perspective (Constant & Roberts, 2017). Although this design was beneficial, it is disadvantageous in time consuming since it focuses on participants' telling stories. These information are subjective and these findings cannot be generalised.

### **3.5 Research Paradigm**

According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), the term paradigm is a way of understanding the world's reality and studying its basic theoretical framework with assumptions about ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods. According to Antwi and Hamza (2015), a research paradigm is a comprehensive system of interrelated practice and thinking that define the nature of inquiry along these three dimensions. Understanding and articulating the research paradigm underlying a study is essential for researchers to effectively communicate approaches used. According to Antwi and Hamza (2015), the answer to questions regarding these three elements provides an interpretative framework that guides the entire research process, including strategies, methods, and analysis. It is important to note that positivism, interpretive and critical theory are the common philosophical research paradigms that might guide research methods and analysis.

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) indicated that the research paradigm is a conceptual lens through, which helps the researcher to examine the methodological traits of their research projects and define the research methods that may be used and evaluated. While Malmi (2010, cited in Win & Kofinas, 2019) mentioned that a research paradigm provides social scientists with a comprehensible understanding of a particular set of assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge and the appropriate methods of producing such knowledge.

### **3.5.1 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions**

Ontology is a component that deals with the way the investigator defines the truth and reality, while epistemology deals with the process in which the investigator comes to know the truth and reality, and methodology focuses on the method used in conducting the investigation (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). Neuman (2003, cited in Antwi & Hamza, 2015) affirms that ontology stipulates the form and nature of reality through objectivism and constructionism, where objectivism holds that there is an independent reality and constructionism that assumes that reality is the product of social processes.

In this way, informative research that contributes towards discovering new knowledge consists of different models that fundamentally comprehend various ontological and epistemological views. Similarly, ontology offers a deeper understanding of the social challenges according to the view of participants. Throughout their personal experiences, they managed to build their contextual reality. In other words, researchers at the end need to consider that the information they gathered regarding individual experiences is subjective.

It has been highlighted that people hold various ontological assumptions that shape their perspectives concerning the world. One of them is the assumption that there is an objective reality that exists independently regardless of our perceptions or beliefs (Searle, 2010). The view emphasises that there is a reality whether we believe it or not. In relation to learning, it is a fact that the decision to invest in one's academic achievement is determined by the individual being a student. That implies that regardless of the academic support that may be provided, a student is at the centre of deciding between whether he wants to fulfil the learning journey. These ontological assumptions influence philosophical discourse and how individuals perceive and interact with the world around them. In addition, different philosophical, religious, and cultural traditions often have distinct ontological perspectives that shape personal worldviews and beliefs (Johnson, 2011).

Epistemology in research simply describes how we know the truth or reality. It is concerned with the foundation of knowledge, focusing on its nature and how it can be acquired and communicated to other human beings (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This concept allows the researcher to explore available data to discover new knowledge. Therefore, the researcher can justify the relationship between reality and personal experiences. From this standpoint, the researcher will be able to address the social challenges that lead to non-completion in higher learning institutions.

Epistemology assumption holds that knowledge is acquired through direct interaction with the world, often through experimentation and observation (Pascale, 2010). In other words, it is strengthened by the rationale, which emphasizes the role of reason and logic in acquiring knowledge. From this perspective, epistemology argues that certain truths can be known through reason alone. It further stipulates that constructivism speculates that individuals actively construct knowledge based on their experiences, interactions, and interpretations of the world. In summary, this perspective emphasizes that knowledge is subjective and contextual and varies between individuals and cultures.

Every paradigm is, therefore, constructed upon its own ontological and epistemological assumptions. Thus, diverse paradigms naturally contain differing ontological and epistemological views that provide different assumptions of reality and knowledge, reinforcing particular research approaches (Scotland, 2012).

### **3.5.2 Interpretive paradigm**

The Interpretive paradigm encompasses social theories and viewpoints within social sciences and humanities that emphasises understanding and interpreting the meanings attached by individuals or groups to their social realities (Putnam and Banghart, 2017). Glesne et al. (1992, cited in Thanh and Thanh, 2015) stated that researchers believe the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm mostly uses qualitative methods. Willis (2007, cited in Thanh & Thanh, 2015) further explained that qualitative approaches often give rich reports necessary for interpretivist to understand contexts fully. From this view, it is established that interpretivists maintain that social phenomena cannot be understood solely through objective observation but require an understanding of the subjective meanings and interpretations people attribute to them.

In other words, interpretive paradigm emphasizes the subjective nature of reality and the importance of understanding social phenomena from the perspectives of the individuals involved.

In the study, interpretive researchers will make it possible to understand the influence of context on students' performance and decision to drop out of higher learning. Interpretive research often employs qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis to delve into social contexts' rich and nuanced meanings (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Creswell (2009, cited in Scotland, 2012), added that interpretive methodology is directed at understanding phenomenon from an individual's perspective while considering the interaction among individuals and the historical and cultural contexts in which people dwell. Researchers, therefore, seek to uncover patterns, themes, and meanings from their observations and interactions with participants. Thus, Researchers adopting an interpretive stance often acknowledge their subjectivity and the potential influence of their background, experiences, and biases on the research process. Reflexivity involves critically reflecting on one's positionality and its impact on the research.

Interpretivists seek to understand the complexity and interconnectedness by analysing social phenomena in their totality, considering the various factors influencing individuals' interpretations and actions. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) support the idea by confirming that the interpretive paradigm would enable researchers to treat the context of the research and its situation as unique, considering the circumstances associated with it and the participants involved. Interpretivists emphasize the importance of understanding social phenomena within their cultural, historical, and social contexts. Smith (1993, cited in Thanh & Thanh, 2015) asserts that interpretivists believe that meanings are not universal but are products of a particular group or culture. Thus, the interpretive paradigm, as discussed above, would allow researchers to consider different influences, such as behavioural aspects based on participants' experiences, which would help to describe reality given the interpretive researcher's assumptions and beliefs (Alharahsheh Pius, 2020).

## **3.6. Methods of data collection**

### **3.6.1 Structured interviews**

This study used the semi-structured interviews (SSI) to collect the qualitative data. This technique is a set of predetermined questions or topics to cover. Still, the format allows for flexibility and adaptation during the interview process (Kakilla, 2021). AstedtKurki and Heikkinen (1994, cited in Kallio et al., 2016) clarify that semi-structured interviews consist of two levels of questions, which consist of the main themes and follow-up questions that allow the researcher to delve deeper into certain areas based on the participant's responses. In this regard, it is apparent that the role of the researcher is to build a rapport that encourage participants to express their views regarding their experiences freely. Jamshed (2014, cited in Choy, 2014) stipulates that to achieve the prime use of interview time, interview guides function as a helpful tool that assists in exploring many respondents more analytically and systematically and keeping the interview focused on the desired line of action.

Each interview session lasted for approximately 20-30 minutes in this study. The researcher first requested permission from participants for audio recordings during interviews to make it possible to transcribe later. The flexible nature of interviews helps participants to disclose more about themselves, which in turn enhances qualitative data since it allows the interviewer to explore the interviewee's thoughts, feelings and opinions effectively. In addition, the interviewer can follow up on the philosophies behind the responses in a way other methods do not allow (Alamri, 2019). Audio recordings are preferred since handwritten notes are unreliable, and the researcher might miss some significant points. The interview recording makes it easier for the researcher to focus on the interview content and the verbal stimulates (Jamshed, 2014).

It is worth noting that although interviews can be very rewarding, they are considered time-consuming since they require transcribed (Neilson & Rheams, 2018). Moreover, the SSI may be challenging when there is limited understanding of the topic, and when the conversation is not flexible, SSIs would often kill the conversation by resulting in

limited responses (Kakilla, 2021). Rabionet (2011) reports that he finds analysing and summarising the interview overwhelming when managing and organizing data.

### **3.7 Selection of participants**

The selection mechanisms involved population, sampling technique, criteria for selecting participants, and sample size of the study.

#### **3.7.1 Participants**

Population refers to the entire mass of observations, which serves as the parent group from which a sample is formed due to the common characteristics (Davidaviciene, 2018). Pandey and Pandey (2021) state that population refers to the entire mass of observations from which a sample is formed. While Etikan et al. (2016) declared that population does not necessarily mean the number of people chosen. It could also refer to a total measure of the cases used as the main focus of the study. In this study, participants involved three higher learning institutions and two Universities. One University and a college are located in the urban area, while the other University is in the rural area. Clearly defining the group or population under study is crucial. This definition could be based on demographic characteristics explaining age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, or any other relevant criteria.

#### **3.7.2 Sampling technique**

The sampling technique is the method through which a sample is selected from the population (Singh & Masuku, 2014). There are two broad divisions of sampling techniques: probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Etikan & Babtpe, 2019). This study used purposive sampling, which falls under non-probability sampling. Etikan and Babtpe (2019) further enlighten that purposive sampling allows a researcher to state eligibility criteria to reach out to participants he feels can meet up with the objective of a study. That makes it possible to exclude individuals without relevant knowledge of study objectives. The major benefits of using the random sampling technique are that it is time and cost-effective since it makes it easier to

narrow down the subjects of interest (Obilor, 2023). However, this technique was disadvantageous as its eligibility specifications since there is a likelihood of excluding the population members who would have sincerely participated in the study.

### **3.7.3 Criterion for selection of participants**

This study selected participants based on the following criteria:

1. All participants were registered as student and be personnel staff in the higher learning institution in Lesotho
2. They were Basotho culture from Lesotho.
3. They were returning students and not first-year.
4. All participants were above sixteen year old and below the age of sixty-five.

### **3.8 Procedure for data collection**

Prior to data collection, the researcher acquired ethical clearance from the institution that had thoroughly review the research committee. The ethical clearance was presented at CHE to seek permission to collect data from the selected higher learning institutions of Lesotho. Thus, CHE provided approval through email to continue with the study by approaching concerned institutions. Consequently, the researcher was granted approval letters to collect data from respective institutions. During data collection, the researcher introduced herself and explained the study objectives. The researcher communicated to the participant to be aware that participation was voluntary and the participant had a right to withdraw at any time they felt uncomfortable. Institutional staff assisted in arranging appointments for participants.

The researcher approached six higher learning institutions, although four institutions were needed for data collection. The researcher faced difficulties in some institutions since they had complicated requirements, such as getting approval from the Ministry of Health (MoH). This forced the researcher to leave out some institutions since the requirements from MoH would take too long. Thus, the researcher was forced to collect data from three institutions because requirements were feasible.

Consent forms were therefore issued to the participants to sign before interviews were conducted. Interviews were successful, and participants were willing to participate.



## University 2

It was one of the new international universities located in the urban area. It is a big campus, and due to space, it has two different campuses. The University offers only full time studies. It does not offer accommodation for students. The institution is located in a very busy area in the capital town of Maseru. The building is not yet fully equipped since the offices are partitioned temporarily.

### **3.9 Sample size**

The study was conducted at three higher learning institutions: University 1, university 2, and College 1. The sample size was comprised of 15 participants (n=15), twelve higher learning institutions, and three institutional staff members. Each institution had one personnel (university 1: n=4 and staff n=1; University 2: n=4 and staff n=1; College 1: n=4 and staff n=1). The participants involved all resided in both urban and rural areas. Participants were Basotho from Lesotho. They were teaching LSE during the study period.

### **3.10 Data analysis**

#### **3.10.1 Thematic analysis**

Understanding thematic analysis (TA) would best be understood by first defining data analysis. Mohajan (2018) defines data analysis as a dynamic process that unites emerging themes, including identifying key ideas or units of meaning and material acquired from the literature. Thus, thematic analysis is a method for analysing qualitative data that involves searching for recurring ideas referred to as themes in a data set (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Typically, TA involves steps such (Ningi, 2022). This study selected the method because it allows participants to make sense of their experiences. People may have different understandings since there is no fixed reality apart from people's interpretations.

In this study, the method permitted the researcher to create meaningful units to pursue different standpoints and gain insight concerning the social challenges that lead to non-completion in higher learning institutions. Despite its flexibility, thematic analysis

follows a systematic process ensuring accuracy and transparency in data interpretation (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). However, it has been highlighted that TA has been criticised for not being a particular method but simply defined as a process that identifies patterns, which is regarded as a technique common to many qualitative approaches (Terry et al., 2017).

### **3.11 Trustworthiness**

According to Pilot and Beck (2014, cited in Connelly, 2016), a study's trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in data analysis and procedures used to ensure the quality of a study. The researcher, therefore, explained to participants that the study is voluntary. Participants were assured that the information discussed would remain confidential, and pseudonyms would be used throughout the study to ensure that their names were protected.

### **3.12 Credibility**

In research, credibility refers to the extent to which study's findings, interpretations, and conclusions are believable and trustworthy. According to Mohajan (2018), credibility is the significance of the truth from the findings and is constructed from the environmental context of the participants. It creates the opportunity to establish provable evidence of the researcher's experiences with the people. In essence, credibility establishes whether the research findings represent acceptable information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Credibility is a crucial aspect of research integrity. It is often assessed based on the rigor of the research methodology, the transparency of data collection and analysis procedures. That includes the coherence of the findings which is determined by existing literature, the qualifications and expertise of the researchers conducting the study. Hence, (Stahl & King, 2020) state that credibility is about understanding how the findings interrelate to show the relationship between the ideas.

### **3.13 Confirmability**

Confirmability is the degree to which other researchers could confirm the findings of the research study, it is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not inventions of the inquirer's imagination but clearly derived from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In a study concerning the social challenges that lead to non-completion in higher learning institutions, confirmability would be essential in ensuring that the researcher's biases, assumptions, and preconceptions do not influence the findings. Researchers may ensure confirmability by acknowledging their own biases and perspectives. Reflexivity involves acknowledging and critically reflecting on how the researcher's background, beliefs, and experiences may influence the research process and findings.

### **3.14 Dependability**

It is the measure in which the study could be repeated by separate researchers and stand the possibility of revealing the same findings. Polit and Beck (2014, cited in Connelly, 2016) explained that dependability refers to the stability of the data over time and over different study conditions. Thus, dependability involves participants' assessment of the findings, interpretation, and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data received from participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

### **3.15 Limitations of the study**

The researcher had planned to conduct interviews in four learning institutions. However it was discovered that some institutions require approvals that may take a long time. Thus one institution located in the rural area was not included. As much as appointments were set, students appeared to be a bit busy with their academic tasks to the extent that they were in a hurry during interviews. In some offices where interviews were held, it seemed that they were busy, and students and staff would come knocking at the door during the interviews, which caused some kind of distraction.

### **3.16 Ethical considerations**

In every research, the researchers must ensure that the study conducted is done ethically and responsibly. The purpose is to foster trust in the research process and promote the welfare of participants. Chervenak and McCullough (2021) define ethics as a process, practice, and guideline for determining how to act and analyse complex problems and issues. Being ethical also incorporates researcher's responsibility to protect participants by demonstrating a professional relationship and ensuring codes of conduct. Thus, the study encompassed the researcher's responsibility to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality. Miller (2013) emphasized that ethical principles include the protection of participants through informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity.

Rani and Sharma (2012) asserted that many different disciplines, institutions and professions have norms for behaviour that suit their particular aims and goals. These norms support discipline members to organise their activities to establish trust. In this study, the researcher approached higher learning institutions to explain what the study is all about. The researcher produced documents from the institution such as ethical clearance from the committee and request for data collection to confirm the study has approval.

In this study, the researcher first obtained ethical clearance from the University as proof that the study's title had been assessed and approved by the ethics committee. Participants were given full information concerning the study including its objectives. It was clearly communicated that participating in the research interviews was completely voluntary, hence, they were asked to sign consent forms. The researcher further explained to participants that the information collected should remain confidential. The researcher will use pseudonyms to protect the participants' true names, including the names of Higher learning institutions involved.

Institutional personnel was helpful in assisting the researcher by informing students and setting up appointments for interviews. Each interview was conducted individually in a private and quiet room to create freedom to express one's views. The researcher ensured confidentiality by using pseudonyms for the names of the participants and the schools. It was explained to participants that they were free to withdraw from the

research interviews whenever they felt like they are uncomfortable. Participants were selected in a way that could minimize the occurrence of biases. They were not chosen according to their values. The selection was determined by the requirements needed for the information needed to answer the research questions. The personal practices and values were not taken into consideration. Therefore, the researcher remained neutral and respected participants' views.

Furthermore, the researcher ensured that other authors' ideas were accurately referenced to avoid plagiarism. Harvard referencing style was followed both within and at the end of the text as recommended by the Faculty of Education at the University of Free State (UFS). Information containing participants' details, including interview audio recordings, was kept and locked in a cabinet with no access to anyone other than the researcher. In the course of the research process, planning and designing a qualitative study, the researcher anticipated that there might be ethical issues that may suffice during the study since they will need to be addressed. From this view, the researcher has acknowledged that the issues of social challenges in academic completion have the potential to raise emotional pain, especially for students' participants due to their psychological sensitivity. In a case where the researcher comes across such cases, immediate psychological support will be provided, although referral will be done for further support where participants will be made aware of shared confidentiality for further management.

### **3.17 Informed consent**

Informed consent is considered as a way of respecting individuals' and a sustainable principle that maintains adherence to ethical issues by researchers. It ensures minimisation of negative impacts such as harm. It is also considered a legal requirement by many authorities to protect both participants and the interviewers. Informed consent provides a reasonable declaration that participants were well informed and hence concerned about participating in the research study (O'Neill, 2017). In this study, consent forms were issued to participants prior interviews. The consent forms included the full information concerning the study, what the topic covers, and the study's purpose. They clearly indicated that participatory was completely voluntary and they have a right to withdraw whenever they feel like. In

addition, it was well communicated that there were no incentives that would be provided. Participants were therefore asked to sign the consent forms before participation to ensure that they understand the information and implications of their decision.

### **3.18 Conclusion**

The chapter presented techniques used throughout the study to gain more knowledge regarding the social challenges that lead to non-completion in higher learning institutions. These include all the measures, such as sampling techniques, population, and study area. All these measures followed in the course of data collection were specified. Further discussion included the validity, reliability, and limitations of the study. An attempt was made to provide an understanding of all the steps followed to collect reliable data. The researcher used the narrative design, qualitative research approach, and interpretive paradigm. The methods are chosen on the basis that institutional students and personnel have seen that social challenges have contributed on academic non-completion.

## CHAPTER 4: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presented the qualitative findings of the study. It outlined the biographic results of university students and academic staff. Similarly, thematic results were discussed and summarized. The findings were presented by indicating the biographic results and responses from each participant.

### 4.2 Aim and objectives of the study

To explore social challenges contributing to non-completion within higher learning institutions in Lesotho.

### 4.3 Objectives of the study were:

1. To explore the fundamental individual challenges that lead to non-completion within higher learning institutions in Lesotho.
2. To determine the environmental challenges contributing to non-completion in Lesotho higher learning institutions in Lesotho.
3. To identify interventions that could be used to overcome the social challenges and enhance the completion rate within higher learning institutions in Lesotho.

### Table 1: Biographic results

The biographic results indicate that all participants were members of the Basotho culture and originated from Lesotho.

Participant	Sex	Age	Year of study	Residential areas	Highest qualification	Full time student	Marital status	School district
Student 1	Male	23	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Urban	LGCSE	Yes	Single	College 1, Maseru District

Student 2	Male	20	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Urban	LGCSE	Yes	Single	College 1, Maseru District
Student 3	Female	22	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Urban	LGCSE	Yes	Single	College 1, Maseru District
Student 4	Female	24	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Urban	LGCSE	Yes	Single	College 1, Maseru District
Staff 1	Female	42	N/A	Urban	Hon Ind. psych	N/A	Married	College 1, Maseru District
Student 5	Male	21	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Urban	LGCSE	yes	Single	university 1, Maseru District
Student 6	Female	22	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Urban	LGCSE	Yes	Single	University 1, Maseru District
Student 7	Male	21	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Urban	LGCSE	Yes	Single	University 1, Maseru District
Student 8	Female	22	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Urban	LGCSE	Yes	Single	University 1, Maseru District
Staff 2	Female	38	NA	Urban	MA Com	N/A	Married	University 1, Maseru District
Student 9	Female	26	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Rural	LGCSE	Yes	Single	university 2, Maseru District
Student 10	Female	28	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Rural	Dip BM	Yes	Married	University 2, Maseru District

Student 11	Male	24	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Rural	LGCSE	Yes	Single	university 2, Maseru District
Student 12	Male	25	4 <sup>th</sup> Year	Rural	LGCSE	Yes	Single	University 2, Maseru District
Staff 3	Female	32	NA	Rural	BA SW	N/A	Married	University 2, Maseru District

Dip HS: Diploma in Health and Safety

Hon Ind. psych: Honours in Industrial Psychology

MD: Maseru District

LGCSE: Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education

MA Com: Master in communication

Dip BM: Dip in business management

BA SW: Bachelor of social Work

#### Student 1

Student one is a male who is 23 years old. He is a full-time student in his 2nd year of study. He gets funding from the National Manpower of Lesotho (NMDS). He changed course when he had to repeat it. His original location is still in the capital town, which is an urban area. He stayed with his parents and was still single. He uses public transport to get to the college. He is attending college 1, which is located in the urban area of Maseru District (MD). Since the college is in town, it is surrounded by different kinds of businesses, including nightclubs. His highest qualification is the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE).

#### Student 2

The participant is a male who is 20 years old. He is a full-time student in his 2<sup>nd</sup> year of study. He gets funding from the National Manpower of Lesotho (NMDS). He was dropped off when he failed and returned after a year to continue with a different course. His original location is still in the capital town, which is an urban area. He stayed with

a grandmother because the mother stayed elsewhere and was still single. He uses both walking and public transport to get to the college. He is attending at college 1, which is located in the urban area of Maseru District (MD). The college is in a busy area since it is in town. It is, therefore, surrounded by different kinds of businesses, including nightclubs. His highest qualification is the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE).

#### Student 3

Student 3 is a female aged 22 years old. She is in 2<sup>nd</sup> year of studying, and she studies on a full-time basis. She gets funding from the National Manpower of Lesotho (NMDS). Her original home is in the rural area, but she is renting in an urban area where she can easily walk to the campus. She stays alone and single. She attends college 1, which is located in the urban area of Maseru District (MD). The college is in town hence it is surrounded by different kinds of businesses including nightclubs. His highest qualification is the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE).

#### Student 4

The participant is a female aged 24 years. She is in her 2<sup>nd</sup> year and studies full-time. She gets funding from the National Manpower of Lesotho (NMDS). Her home is in the rural area, but for academic convenience, she rents in the urban area. She uses both walking and public transport to get to the college. She is single and stays alone. She uses public transport to get to the college on a daily basis. She is attending college 1, located in the urban area of Maseru District (MD). Since the college is in town, it is surrounded by different kinds of businesses, including night clubs. Her highest qualification is the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE).

#### Staff 1

Staff 1 is a female aged 42 years. She is working in the Office of Student Affairs. She is the one who is responsible for providing psychosocial support to students, including counselling and handling student grievances. She has the highest qualification in honors in general and industrial psychology. She is currently a full-time employee. Since she is not a clinical psychologist, she refers students when there is a need for intensive psychological assistance. She stays at her place with the kids, and she is married.

#### Student 5

The participant 5 is a 21 years male. He is a full time student in his 3rd year of study. He gets funding from the National Manpower of Lesotho (NMDS). He stays with his parents and is still single. He is attending at college 2 located in the urban area of Maseru District (MD). Since the college is in town, it is surrounded by different kinds of businesses, including nightclubs. His highest qualification is the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE).

#### Student 6

The participant 6 is a female who is 22 years old. She is a full time student who is in 3<sup>rd</sup> year of study. She gets funding from the National Manpower of Lesotho (NMDS). She is staying with her parents and is still single. Her home is outside town so she uses public transport to get to the college. She is attending University 2, which is in the urban area of Maseru District (MD). Since the University is in town, it is surrounded by different kinds of businesses, including nightclubs. His highest qualification is the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE).

#### Student 7

The participant 7 is a male who is 21 years old. He is a full-time student, and he is in 3rd year of study. He gets funding from the National Manpower of Lesotho (NMDS). He stayed with his parents and still single. He is attending at the University 1 which is in the urban area of Maseru District (MD). He uses public transport to get to the campus. The University is in a busy area since it is in town and it is surrounded by different kinds of businesses including night clubs. His highest qualification is the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE).

#### Student 8

The participant is a female who is 22 years old. She is a full time student and she is in her 3<sup>rd</sup> year. She gets funding from the National Manpower of Lesotho (NMDS). She is still staying with parents and still single. She studies at University 1 which is located in the District (MD). Since the University is in town, it is in the urban area and it is surrounded by different kinds of businesses including night clubs. Her highest qualification is the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE).

## Staff 2

The participant is a female who is 38 years old. She is a lecturer and also there to provide psychosocial support for students. She is a married woman who stays with family. She works at University 1 which is located in the urban area of the capital town. The University is located in a busy area that is surrounded by different kinds of businesses including restaurants and night clubs. The highest qualification she has is in Master of Communications.

## Student 9

Student nine is a female who is 26 years old. She is a full time student in her 2<sup>nd</sup> year of study. She gets funding from the National Manpower of Lesotho (NMDS). She is staying within the university campus and still single. She is attending University 2 located in the rural area of Maseru District (MD). The University is located outside town close to the mountain and surrounded by trees. It has therefore attracted many businesses including restaurants and night clubs. Her highest qualification is Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE).

## Student 10

Student 10 is a female who is 28 years old. She is a full time student but also a permanent job. She is in 2<sup>nd</sup> year of study and she gets funding from the National Manpower of Lesotho (NMDS). She is a married and stays with family. She is attending University 2, located in the rural area of Maseru District (MD). The University is located outside of town near to the mountain that is surrounded by the trees. It has therefore attracted different kinds of businesses including restaurants and night clubs. Her highest qualification is Diploma in Business Management (Dip BM).

## Student 11

Student 11 is a male who is 24 years old. He is a full time student and he is in 2<sup>nd</sup> year of study. He gets funding from the National Manpower of Lesotho (NMDS). His home is far from the campus so he stays in campus. He is still single. He is attending at University 2 that is located in the rural area of Maseru District (MD). The University is located outside town and it is near a mountain that is surrounded by the trees. It has attracted different kinds of businesses including restaurants and night clubs. His

highest qualification is the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE).

#### Student 12

Student one is a male who is 25 years old. He is a full time student in his 4th year of study. He gets funding from the National Manpower of Lesotho (NMDS). His original home is located in the urban area but he stays within the campus. He is under the support of guardians since parents passed on and he is still single. He is attending at University 2 that is located in the rural area of Maseru District (MD). The university is outside town and near the mountain that is surrounded by the trees. It has attracted different kinds of businesses including restaurants and night clubs. His highest qualification is the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE).

#### Staff 3

The participant is a female who 32 years of old. She is a staff member and is working in the student affairs office is a married woman who stays with family. She is working at University 2 that is located in the rural area of Maseru District (MD). The University is located outside town where it is near the mountain and is surrounded by the trees. It has attracted various kinds of businesses including restaurants and night clubs. The highest qualification is BA in a Social work (BA SW).

### 4.4 Data analysis and discussion of findings

**Table 2:** Overview of thematic results

The table indicates the themes and subthemes that emerged from data analysis. Direct themes are further discussed and supported by the relevant quotations.

Themes	Subthemes	
1. Fundamental Personal experiences that lead to drop out.	1.1 Student' Psychological challenges	a. Students' lack of academic integrity
		b. student inability to handle academic pressure
		c. Lack of motivation
		d. Academic withdrawal

		e. Personal development and exploration
	1.2 Psychological effects of academic pressure	a. Depression b. Drug addiction c. Low self esteem
	1.3 student health issues	a. physical challenges
2. Institutional demands that lead to drop out	2.1 Financial difficulties	
	2.2 Academic pressure	
	2.3 unsatisfactory academic experiences	
	2.4 fixed Institutional policies	
	2.5 Stigma in accessing institutional services	
	2.6 Unapproachable lecturers	
3. Environmental factors that contribute towards non completion	3.1 family circumstances	a. lack of family support
		b. family problems
	3.2 Peer pressure	
	3.3 substance abuse	
	3.4 Lack of resources	
	3.5 Gambling problems	

4. Interventions that could be used to overcome the social challenges	4.1 Provision of full funding	
	4.2 Establishment of ongoing Support	a. Time Management b. Provision of supportive programs

#### **4.5 Fundamental Personal experiences leading to drop out.**

Research findings from structured interviews stipulate that students experience challenging situations that may force others to drop out. Various personal circumstances, such as relationship issues, bereavement, or other life events, can influence a student's decision to leave university. These circumstances may create emotional distress or practical obstacles that make it difficult for students to continue their studies effectively. It has been established that the short and long-term psychosocial experiences that precede dropout are interrelated (McDermott et al., 2019).

##### **4.5.1. Psychological challenges**

###### ***a. Students' lack of academic integrity***

In this study, lack of academic integrity entails a sense of responsibility that students fail to acquire to approach their studies ethically to enable them to have the courage to make the right decisions. East and Donnelly (2012) defined academic integrity as being honest in academic work and taking responsibility to achieve positive outcomes in learning. The findings show that the transitional period during higher learning is very challenging for students as they need to meet academic demands. At this stage,

students are said to be experiencing different psychological developments that may cause difficulty academically applying full attention. Thus, students experiencing the challenges may fail to dedicate enough time to academic tasks. Individual choices or their peers may cause failure to concentrate. Lack of adequate time for academic tasks may lead to non-completion. Participants responded in the following way:

*“Eh! Social challenges at school lead to academic failure because of a negative influence caused by friends, environment, and lack of discipline (Student 2).”*

*“Yeah! I think there are a lot of things that happen academically. Sometimes people just decide to miss classes with no valid reasons just because they feel lazy or have not completed their assignments so they miss classes to cover up the assignments for them to submit (Student 5).”*

*“Recently, our first years are immature due to age. So there is a program meant to support them, it started this year because our first years are young, starting from the age of 16 years (Staff 3).”*

The findings reveal that academic institutions build a conducive learning environment to enhance students' academic accomplishment. However, students may not be mature enough to keep up with the higher learning environment, including academic weights. They may also choose to expose themselves to other destructive activities, which may be done on or off campus. As a result, some students do not attend lessons and fail to complete academic programs.

*“Yes, that is a lack of discipline. There are those times when we go out with friends to have fun. Some of us end up not performing academic work because of time. Some students are not being responsible. I don't see anyone impressing people as being responsible because you will never know if you will be able to refund the academic money you used (Student 2).”*

*“Because everyone has that time when they are messed up and go out for fun. So one must focus to make it possible to complete studies (Student 1).”*

*“They do in various ways, not that they can because entertainment may be addictive affecting our attendance and since you will turn to like bars more than school. We also end up having unprotected sex (Student 1).”*

*“Ah! Going for entertainment is an individual choice. I can attend entertainment and still come to school. Somebody else may not manage to attend entertainment and then the following day comes to school. Others choose to go for entertainment and end up missing classes as a result, lose much information at school (Student 4).”*

*“Some of us drink a lot. Sunday, you deal with a hangover at that time, you have an assignment that is due, and you have not done it, and even you already have problems because home parents are furious because one is drinking a lot. We also get STI because we are exposing ourselves due to money. Including unwanted pregnancy where one cannot even tell who the father is (Student 7).”*

*“We indeed go clubbing on Fridays, yet we know we have assignments to work on. By the time you try to focus, you will see a short time left, which brings pressure (student 4).”*

The participants, especially the students have expressed that they do get destructed from allocating adequate time for their academic work because they cannot resist other social activities such as entertainment. However, some participants emphasized that the decision to compromise one's academic time is influenced by various factors, including personal values, experiences, and the culture of their educational institution.

#### ***b. Student inability to handle academic pressure***

For the purpose of this study, academic pressure is a situation in which students get overwhelmed by academic loads. That includes adapting to the role of being a student and other aspects of the school environment. The findings reveal that students struggle academically because they find it challenging to plan adequately toward achieving academic goals. It has been discovered that there are cases where students drive themselves towards self-initiated growth and development but still face challenges in meeting their academic needs due to their learning capabilities. To support this view, participants responded in the following ways:

*“I think what I found challenging was during the second year since I had to conduct research. I found out that we have consultants for our research and we had only two days in a week and those were during the weekend. So we attended classes from*

*Monday to Friday, so you found out there is not enough time to focus on research, and I had to submit it over the weekend. So honestly, that gave me too much pressure and I felt like dropping out. So that I can come the following year to complete it because I felt I won't manage. But then I finally completed it because we meet with other students and discuss where we have challenges (student 3)."*

*"I want to get a degree so simultaneously, I want to secure my job because there is a high unemployment rate. I had to decide to do them both: attend school and work. I had put it on trial, and the plan was that if I do not manage, I will have to do official withdrawal, but the fact is I am not managing, they are clashing (Student 8)."*

*"You will find that poverty is a challenge, here at school you will find that these students have a challenge where they want to look stylish with the little money we get. So you will find that the challenge is that one is not eating healthy because I of the little money they have they invest on clothing (student 10)."*

It is established from the reports that some students choose not to put effort into their university coursework since they fail to allocate adequate time required. Hence, they find it hard to adapt to the increased workload.

*"I think that the work load is not why someone would drop out. It is those kinds of situations (Student 7)."*

*"Oh! The time we live in is very dangerous. There are massive weekends where we leave school work and forget we have school work pending. So most of us were not managing well because even now those graduating are very few. After all, they liked entertainment and failed to attend to their schoolwork (Student 3)."*

However, participants have also mentioned that there are times when students often feel overwhelmed and find it difficult to bear academic demands due to what they refer to as a high work load. Further discussions from the findings revealed that more often, students contribute towards academic overload by failing to adhere to class attendance and completing the academic work, including reading for exam preparation. This is found to be a common problem among students since it is a transition period with new academic challenges, social adjustments, and personal responsibilities.

### **c. Lack of motivation**

In this study, lack of motivation refers to a psychological problem of lack of passion and willingness to reach desired goals. Without a strong sense of purpose or motivation, students may lose enthusiasm for their studies and ultimately decide to pursue other opportunities outside of academia. Kamel (2018), stated that students need to be self-motivated to monitor their learning to be more prepared in the class. The responses from the in-depth interview are as follows:

*“Yes I have experienced low motivation. It was because I had failed some subjects and had to carry them to the next year. So I found it overwhelming since there was a lot of pressure, and I decided not to take the exams because I felt demotivated. I felt that my mind was tired, and I felt like we were being pressured, so I ended up not writing. I will go for exams again (Student 1).”*

*“No, yes! There have been times when I felt dispirited because I was disappointed by the results, yet I put in a lot of effort and felt fit for the exams. They would be not good or I would have even failed (Student 2).”*

*“I think apart from there, at times, we don’t enrol in courses we like. I will make an example with myself. I wanted to do fashion and apparel design, it was my first my choice and the second choice was digital firming, and then I was told that there is no space that I wanted is not available so they decided to choose what suited your results. Then I was advised to do doing had to do professional communication, my mentality was not on professional communication and that was not my plan, so I learned about it while I was already in class. I don’t mind because it is related to business. So I was like ok it is still related, but the truth is that it has limited me with what I wanted to do. I feel like I no longer know what I wanted to do in life, it feels like it is slowing me down (Student 5).”*

Students have reported that there are times when they experience low motivation due to failure or being enrolled in courses they do not like. Students who find themselves demotivated if not provided with support may discontinue. On the other hand, some students may become demoralized because they have discovered that their chosen course does not align with their interests, passions or career goals.

#### **d. Academic withdrawal**

Academic withdrawal in this study refers to a lack of meaningful interaction between students and the academic activities. The findings have shown that students sometimes struggle to integrate into the university community or form meaningful social connections. Participants highlighted that students struggling to fit in experience feelings of loneliness, which can significantly impact their academic satisfaction and desire to strive toward a sense of achievement. This sense of detachment can negatively impact their overall university experience and may contribute to their decision to drop out. The following responses from the interview sessions support this: *“Once you participate a lot in class, that automatically calls attention to you and then classmates turn to have interest on you concerning what you have. Those kinds of things limited me to the extent that I ended up withdrawing myself from the rest of the groups. I was not myself due to the financial situation (Student 5).”*

*“It is so challenging to adapt to a university environment because you are far from home. Seeing only your classmates causes loneliness sometimes. But with time you get to make friends (student 7).”*

*“At times it would be inability to perform what is being done by the majority of a class. Most of the time, we go out for fun here at the university. So when you do not become part of them, you feel left out but since you still have to work with them, that is where you will find that when you have to join them in a group they may decide to keep quiet and one may decide not to join because you find it difficult to fit in (Student 6).”*

*“We deal with so many issues here, to keep up with friends, you are supposed to be part of their activities even when you see it is unimportant. That makes one to lose interest in all academic tasks (student 9).”*

*“There are times when you do your best, but there are lecturers who will give you low marks. That makes you hate school (student 4).”*

The participants' views indicate that failing to perform to the required standards may lead to social withdrawal, and that may lead to emotional distress. From the respondents, it is shown that it is common for students to withdraw if they feel troubled with the results they get, especially when they feel they have put all their effort into it. In the same way, academic tasks may require students to interact with one another,

so failing to interact with others may have a huge negative impact on their academic completion.

**e. Personal development and exploration**

As part of this study, personal development and exploration refers to a wide range of activities and pursuits to enhance one's skills and overall well-being. It is a journey of self-discovery and growth that can take many forms. The study revealed that financial circumstances force students to drop out of academic learning and prioritize income generating. The findings show that some may combine work with studying while others may decide to drop out of learning. This is how participants answered the interview questions:

*“I could use the example in my case where I am already looking outside my university life and you are being discouraged of continuing because there is a lack of job opportunities in Lesotho (student 6).”*

*“What I think they do not understand simultaneously is the pressure that we encounter because they say a student should have a side hustle. Our lecturers tell us to hustle because they insist that you cannot be a student without a side hustle, and this is where we try to balance because we are not well financially. So, I have to push my studies and the side hustle, and sometimes lecturers can give us a pile of assignments (Student 6).”*

*“Another issue is that you would find out that other students drop out because their side hustles are succeeding, and they now do not find a reason to continue studying anymore I know a friend of mine who dropped out this semester just to continue with his camera job because it is being successful that is one of the matter (Student 6).”*

*“Yes, it was last year when I came across a challenge. I have a small business that sells ginger drinks. I had a lot of customers, and I could no longer balance school work and business. I missed classes including presentations, while on the other hand missing the deadlines for customers. That affected my results, where I got a few As and lots of Bs. That affected my academic work a lot (Student 7).”*

Exploring other opportunities during higher learning may bring about additional load, which may negatively affect the outcome of students' performance, and lead to non-

completion. However, it is worth noting that working may expose students to practical work, which in turn improves their competency and increases their chances of employability.

#### **4.5.2 Psychological effects of academic pressure**

##### ***a. Depression***

In this study, depression refer to any mental, emotional, and social changes that occur due to any kind of mental pressure. It has been identified as hindering good academic performance. The research findings reveal that students spent most of their time anxious about meeting their academic needs and other social challenges, which makes it difficult for them to concentrate fully. Thus, students who spend a lot of time overwhelmed by academic pressure may experience poor performance and eventually drop out. These is how participants responded:

*“Well, I can say I was sick. I got sick because I could not focus on other subjects because I was nervous that I could not afford to fail the same subject again. I felt it was going to cost me, and I could see that I would be behind my colleagues. So it gave me stress since I was now allocating a lot of time to that particular course (student 3).”*

*“When it comes to learning. I usually face a challenge during lessons where I do not understand anything due to a lecture accent. Also, sometimes the class starts and even ends without concentrating, so I sometimes leave to work on other assignments. However, such destructions result in me not following the course (Student 12).”*

*“I had to work tirelessly and would end up sleeping in the morning while it was almost time to wake up. It was so stressful because I was exhausted (Student 8).”*

The findings establish that academic worry and pressure can bring about a negative emotional state, which affects academic performance. Experiencing doubts creates difficulty in organizing new information, including internalizing it for further intellectual development.

### **b. Drug addiction**

In this study, drug addiction refers to uncontrolled behaviour that lead to misuse of unhealthy substances such as alcohol. The study reveals that students find themselves misusing drugs as a form of handling high academic pressure. Participants responded as follows:

*“I still have an example of people who are now addicted to drugs. They say they cannot read without having dagga. Like if he did not smoke weed, he would not do anything but after smoking it he could actually read and pass. Some courses are hard, Like BSc for the smart students so I have realized that most students who are studying these hard courses say they cannot read without dagga. They are saying dagga helps them read (Student 12).”*

*“There are times when students find themselves engaged in various activities including drug abuse, relationship problems, family problems, you name them. Such problems may lead to depression (staff 1).”*

*“When we get financial assistance, it becomes too busy. It is hard to focus because there is entertainment all over where we learn to drink. Some of our friends drink a lot (student 1).”*

The findings reveal that students do not opt for a healthy way of dealing with academic pressure as they do not utilise the support services that available within HIs. It is reported that drug use affects students in a negative way since most the users end up not attending lessons properly. As a result such students turn to perform poorly leading to drop out.

### **c. Low self esteem**

In this study, low self-esteem refers to a feeling that one does not have certainty in his abilities, thus relying on trusting other people. The findings from in-depth interviews discovered that some students turn to rely too much on their peers due to academic pressure including bad performance. Such students end up not being content with

making their own decision making. Beneath are the responses on how participants responded during interview sessions:

*“I think when one sees others in a certain way, they turn to undermine themselves. They start judging themselves and feeling like they are not meant to be at school, that school is made for others. That is why they are forced to go out to make money (student 8).”*

*“The other thing is that for sure we have different backgrounds. Here at school, we do not know how others survive and we see others having high status than yourself that makes one feel unacceptable. That is where one may end up questioning whether you manage to fit in because you can see others seem to have it all. You have nothing so you end up disbelieving in yourself to an extent that you may end up thinking it is better to discontinue (Student 6).”*

*Most of the people, when they arrive at the universities, they do not have that much confidence just to make a decision on their own even that everything to them they need the confidence to do it on their own (Student 11).”*

*“Yes, one could be a source because I think so if he doesn’t have backbone because obviously, he cannot stand up for himself because he will agree with everything even when it is not right (Student 2).”*

The above narratives indicate that the interaction and the relationship that students build amongst themselves may have a positive impact in their academic performance as well as negative consequence. It has been reported that there are multiple factors that tempers with self-esteem. That include the whole academic environment where students try to fit in including the negative academic feedback. Students who are struggling academically may feel like becoming dependant to their peers may help them meet the expected academic standards.

### 4.5.3 Student health issues

For this study, physical challenges mean the problem of the body that makes it difficult to perform required tasks. It has been established from the findings that there are times when students fail to participate in their learning activities. Thus, the study found out that students with physical problems are not able to perform well, leading to academic dropouts. Griban et al. (2021) asserted that students need to be educated on maintaining good health including preventing diseases to enhance educational success.

#### *a. Physical Health issues*

In this study, health issues define any negative factors that may affect the physical or mental condition. The research findings from in-depth interviews have revealed that the health of some students deteriorates when they get to the institutions because they decide to default from chronic treatments. The study further discovered that physical illness may become the source of mental health, which significantly impacts student's ability to continue in their studies. The following responses are from the interview sessions:

*“One may have discovered that they have been diagnosed with chronic illnesses e.g. HIV. At times, that on its own may make one become depressed since he may be struggling to accept, and they have to go through denial, judging themselves. That may demotivate them since they wonder how others will treat them. Failing to seek help from such issues may demotivate them until they decide to drop out (Staff 1).”*

*“There was a time when my body could not take it due to flue. I was forced to go to the Doctor, which consumed my time (student 5).”*

*“I had a colleague who was demotivated after giving birth. She started getting sick, and you could see she was weak. Unfortunately, she stopped coming for classes. I do not know what happened with her (student 8).”*

Students experiencing both physical and psychological challenges may not be fit enough to perform their academic tasks including attending classes. The study also highlighted that serious infectious diseases like tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, or chronic viral infections do affect students and result in extended periods of illness, making it difficult for students to keep up with their coursework.

#### **4.6 Institutional demands that lead to drop out**

##### ***a. Financial difficulties***

In this study, financial difficulties mean being unable to pay academic financial needs, including tuition fees. The research findings have reported that, in most cases, students struggle due to financial complications. Participants have communicated that some financial complications lead to students' stress which negatively affects students' performance. Students who lived in poverty scored significantly worse than other students (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). It was further affirmed that students' financial problems have become the most common reasons for dropping out of higher learning because some students are self-sponsored, so they struggle to meet the expenses of tuition fees, accommodation costs, textbooks, and other expenses associated with tertiary life. When students were asked if there was a relationship between financial problems and completion, they responded as follows:

*"I think sponsorship must be considered. If we get the sponsorship, we will at least be able to buy food and other necessities (Student 3)."*

*"I believe there is a link because if there is a certain challenge, for instance, that of finances. Let us say I have financial challenges, and I do not have sufficient income to pay fees obviously, I am going to drop I won't be able to complete (Student 3)."*

*"I think the main reasons include finances because we are self-sponsored here. So once a parent loses a job and cannot pay, obviously one will drop out. My understanding is that it is the major one because the rest of other challenges can be dealt with and continue with school (Student 4)."*

*“The biggest challenge is financial problems. Our families are struggling at home. Sometimes as students, there are those students who are working and attend lessons late. So there is no money now that there is a high unemployment rate. Even parents are overloaded, so some students fail to pay school fees at the end, drop out. At times, they manage to come back the following years, but some you will find it is the end of their academic journey (Student 4).”*

*“Let’s begin with the first time I arrived here. It was not good, eh! It was not good because financially I was not normal. I can say I was very low. I remember one lecture on the day on lecture which was at the gate, in fact he was not alone it was a group of lecturers who were like “hey man do not wear slides. Slides on a male person do not look presentable, especially in tertiary level. And for me, those kinds of shoes were the only ones I could afford (Student 5).”*

*“Yeah! I asked him a day ago and he said he skips classes to make money so that he can assist his mother who is sick. Because I mean here in Lesotho, not everyone has medical aid (Student 5).”*

*Yes! Family issues are there and some come seeking financial support but fail to assist because we do not have such a program which is not referred (Staff 3).”*

The mentioned areas concerning financial crisis give a picture of students' complications. There is no hesitation that such demands may force other students to drop out and look for income-generating tasks to help themselves including family members. High tuition fees and additional costs such as textbooks, accommodation and living expenses can overwhelm some students. Thus, financial pressures can contribute towards academic unpreparedness since students may be forced to work to support themselves, which may cause them to struggle to balance work and academics effectively. That automatically may lead to academic difficulties and, ultimately dropout. Lack of financial aid therefore limits opportunities for students from low-income backgrounds.

### **b. Academic pressure**

Academic pressure for university students is a multidimensional concern that is influenced by a number of factors including multiple courses and examinations. The pressure significantly affect students' welfare including academic performance, and the overall university experience. Fear of failure can drive students to overdo their academic tasks thus engaging in unhealthy study habits that may lead to mental health challenges. These issues can hinder students' abilities to perform well. The participants responded as follows to emphasise their experiences on academic pressure.

*"It is in cases where I feel like. Ok, there is just too much work. Or when I know, there is this thing for group work because I know how my group behaves like they are slow, sometimes they don't want to do the work, and that puts more pressure in my work (Student 5)."*

*"Hmm! In my academic journey, I think what I found challenging was during my second year since I had to conduct research. I discovered that we have a consultant for our research and we had only two days during the weekend. So we attended classes from Monday to Friday, you would find out there is not enough time to focus on research and I had to submit it over the weekend. Honestly, that gave me too much pressure, and I felt like dropping out to come the following year to complete because I felt that I would not manage (Student 4)."*

*"Here at school a, pressure is caused by assignments, eh!, a lecturer may put a certain day for submission and find out that the date set is close to the other one. At times when I was in first year, I did not have a laptop and I used computers from school, which most of the time were crowded so it was challenging because I was even slow when typing (Student 4)."*

*"As for us, especially on the second semester, the work load is too much, honestly not that the student complains about it. On the other side, there is a lot of work, including the assignments, which we are given personally. There are four assignments and a presentation that I have to complete in one week. It often happens for seniors from year three to four you find out there is a lot of work. Some are randomly announced, yet some still needs to be done, and some lecturers do not understand that there is a*

*lot of work that is already at hand which frustrates and overwhelms the students that is where they try their best to complete their work which strains the mind (Student 6)."*

*"We were given too many assignments and tests. One had to attend classes while at the same time had to write tests. Each one of the lecturers was expecting his assignment to be done (Student 8)."*

*"Some students dropped out while some are continuing but carrying along repeated courses to the following year, and that increases workload (Student 3)."*

The majority of respondents have communicated that most of the time they have to work under pressure to keep in line with the academic pressure. These experiences lead to unhealthy lifestyle including sleepless nights which may result in physical or psychological dysfunctions while at the same time negatively affecting their academic performance.

### ***c. Unsatisfactory academic experiences***

For the purpose of this study, unsatisfactory academic experience refers to the difficult experience that students face during learning. The research findings have highlighted that there are times when students feel that their academic needs are not being met. Students expressed that they go through experiences that complicate their learning experiences so much that some students choose to discontinue their studies and seek alternative educational opportunities. This is how participants responded through interviews:

*"The biggest challenge is the tuition fee. The other one is that there are no enough activities that would allow students to refresh their minds. The school fails to address our aims, they only attend to learning issues. Even if you look at the calendar there are no planned student activities. The other thing is that they are too strict and that would be demotivating id one has to study yet he knows there could be a problem to write exams and makes it difficult to concentrate so there is no need to read (Student 1)."*

*“I would say it is their pace, not that I was not giving myself enough time because classes were conducted in the afternoon and ended late. So we travel from school to home, and when you get home, there are certain tasks that you have to perform before doing school work, which will probably be due in the next 2 to 3 hours or the following day. Then you get additional work, which also needs to be submitted that was overloading for us (Student 2).”*

*“I think apart from there, at times we do not enrol in courses we like. I will make an example with myself. I wanted to do fashion and apparel design. It was my first choice and the second choice was digital transformation and then I was told that there is no space that I wanted is not available and they decided to choose what suited your results. Then I was advised to do doing had to do professional communication, my mentality was not on professional communication and that was not my plan so I learned about it while I was already in class. I don't mind because it is related to business. So I was like ok, it is still related but the truth is that it has limited me with what I wanted to do. I feel like I no longer know what I wanted to do in life, it feels like it is slowing me down (Student 5).”*

*“when it comes to learning, I have a challenge of not understanding anything at all I think sometimes my mind gets too occupied and keep thinking of the problems I left at home even the ones I have at my place. Such distractions result in me not understanding what was being said. Sometimes I leave during a lecture because I do not see any use of paying attention (Student 12).”*

Students may become disillusioned with their university experience due to unfavourable classroom environment, uninspiring teaching, lack of support from faculty or advisors, or an inadequate learning environment.

#### **d. Fixed institutional policies**

In this study, fixed institutional policies refer to a static guide used within institutions to determine the current and future decisions. The findings indicate that there are times when higher learning institutions implement strict policies that fail to accommodate students' needs to the extent that they may fail to achieve their academic needs, including writing exams. To support this issue, participants responded as follows.

*“How can I put it, you pay for yourself if not paid, you cannot come to school. They want fee so when you come back you are behind and try while under pressure. In this*

*yard, there is a lot of confusion. I do not know where to start to emphasize the situation (Student 1)."*

*"My results were low, and I was almost left with a high chance of being disqualified from the exam (student 11)."*

The above responses highlight that there are policies within Higher learning institutions that are not flexible enough to accommodate the different needs of students. It is, clear that such policies may be a barrier to student's higher learning completion.

### ***e. Stigma in accessing institutional services***

In this study, stigma in accessing institutional services refers to a negative attitude that is attached to utilising the student services office. The research findings revealed that students are hesitant to seek available services due to the fear of being stigmatized. Some of the main services that students run away from include health services, which negatively affect their overall wellbeing. Participants were asked to share their views on making use of the services, and they responded as follows:

*"The other thing would be up to students who do not access available resources like using student welfare. That is another challenge that students are afraid to open up that's another challenge (Student 1)."*

Students were asked if they knew about the student service office. And whether they were comfortable to seek services from the office. These are how participants responded.

*"No! I don't even have a valid reason it is just that we are not used to approaching such offices because we tend to think that by understanding, we are scared that maybe it will be communicated that a certain student has said certain information. So it would be to avoid conflicts with our lecturers (Student 2)."*

*"Failing to seek help from such issues may demotivate them until they decide to drop out (Staff 1)."*

*"Health education programs we have where we create awareness (Staff 1)."*  
*"The other thing concerns our infrastructure, so you see, this is my office, and at the same time,*

*it is a counselling room. So it is not conducive for someone who has a problem. I have to let them sit on that chair. I do not have any confidential room for counselling because at times, one is already crying (staff 1)."*

*"Yes, most of us do not go out to seek help. Just like I am saying, I used to talk to a friend, and now that she is not here, I usually close my bedroom and cry alone (student 7)."*

*"I never approach the office of student affairs because I do not think they will address what I need (student 7)."*

*"Some of them do, but when they come back, they default to their chronic medication as a result of dying (staff 2)."*

*"But I have only heard that counselling is available. I think we do not go because we get scared and start to question if we are going to get help by just talking I do not know what we need for us just to go there and talk about our problems when we are under pressure (student 12)."*

*"Some students do not believe in the counsellors found in student academic office (students 12)."*

The study shows that there are available support system that are made available to for students to utilise. Nonetheless, it is has been clearly communicated that students deliberately choose not to make use of them because they are associated with stigma. From the findings, one can get an impression that students are not given adequate orientation concerning such services. The other thing would be they lack an element which could attract them to be familiar with such offices. Hence, they feel like seeking support is a sign that one cannot handle his individual challenges. One of the respondents reveal that they also doubt the service provers who are placed in such offices.

#### **f. Unapproachable lecturers**

The research findings revealed that there were some lecturers that students found as difficult. The support provided by lecturers plays a crucial role in students' persistence in higher learning. However, the participants shared their experiences in the following way:

*“I would say it was how they addressed some issues in class. I would say they are oppressing us, though they have been in the same position that we are in. They want us to do things at their own pace; they do not consider that an individual is a living thing he needs to perform other tasks apart from that of schooling (student 2).”*

*“They are approachable, but there is a question that they normally ask. If you explain that you do not have a certain topic, they will ask what you do not understand specifically. That becomes difficult for you as an individual because you come declaring that you do not understand the whole topic. So the response you will get is that the lecture can't start with the whole topic from the beginning. Then you will be told to go through it and specify where you have a challenge, and you will find that you have contacted people whom you think they understand for their assistance. Then you decide to approach a lecture (Student 2).”*

*“I did not understand that lecture when teaching, and I was not able to approach it because of how she conducted herself when dealing with us. So I ended up failing that module and since I am paying for myself, it was difficult to pay for my supplementary but at the end I managed to pay. I had to supplement and move to the next year with additional courses while because I did not plan an additional amount for repeat (student 3).”*

*“There have been occurrences where I would consult during late hours and she communicated that she is not available during that time she is only available in class. so in class I was not so comfortable to say it loud when there was something I did not understand because I was in a class where they would criticize you. So the only available option was to follow up after class, but you find he is still busy. So it was that kind of a person who was always busy (Student 3).”*

Good lecturers do not only offer academic support but also manage to offer both psychological and social support to students. Students, in any case spend a lot of time at school than at home. It must be reflected that for lecturers to provide social support, they need to build good rapport with students. For instance, there are some cases where students face difficulties with specific module challenges. That requires a

separate consultation and a student will manage to approach a lecture if there is a platform for students to do so. Instructors who would offer both academic and social support are those who are passionate about learning. Such instructors can easily go beyond their teaching responsibilities alone and avail themselves of additional support. Quigley (2016) alluded that educators need to believe that they possess the power to help students to overcome various life complications, which might negatively affect their academic success.

#### **4.7 Environmental factors that contribute towards non completion**

The findings reveal that students in higher learning institutions face various environmental challenges that can impact their ability to complete academic tasks, campus communities and the broader environment. Environmental challenges considerably impact higher learning institutions, which hypothetically leads to increased rates in non-completion among students (Clifton, 2021). These challenges expose students to various conditions which may create barriers that hinder students' ability to succeed. The environmental aspect also includes society as a whole. As much as the main purpose of education is to transform education. The findings have established that society plays a crucial role in both formal and informal education. Hence, the contribution made by the informal education strengthens students' formal knowledge.

##### **4.7.1 Family circumstances**

The findings revealed that there is a range of family circumstances including family responsibilities that can lead students to drop out of university. Some of these responsibilities can significantly impact students' ability to continue with their education due to various factors such as financial constraints, caregiving duties, and personal circumstances. The following sub-themes were established:

###### ***a. Lack of family support***

The research findings have shown that students at times experience lack of family support. Participants have reported that there are cases where they do not get

sufficient assistance they require to fully focus on their academic work. From this findings, the assumption that has been established is that students in higher learning may not complete if there is no adequate support from the family. Szemerszki (2015, cited in Perger & Takacs, 2016) reported that family background, especially the social status of the family and the parent's level of education, were seen as having an influence on students' academic performance and planned to continue their studies. Participants therefore responded in the following ways:

*“Parents at times do understand. They do not believe me when I tell them I have a lot of school work since they communicate that I am just making an excuse when I am told to do certain tasks (Student 4).”*

*“I think if one does not get enough support, for instance, support from home. At home, there are those times that parents do not understand that one has to do certain things they prioritize on their plans, and they think one is making excuses for you to do your things (Student 2).”*

Lack of family support may put students under stress and pressure since they may not get the adequate support they need them to complete their academic tasks. As a result, some students may find it difficult to cope with the situation and choose to discontinue their academic programs. Fine and Zane (1991, cited in McDermott et al., 2019) reported that, at times, family factors are associated with school leaving including lack of parental involvement, family financial constraints, and events within the family.

*“like his family puts so much pressure on him that they know that he is a photographer and during his spare time, he goes in the streets to make money by taking photos and sometimes video. That is how he gets to make a living to avoid depending on the scholarship money, but now the family considers it in a way that he has money so he can manage to support them. So I feel like that is putting pressure on him, I think even at that point, I went through the same thing. I was staying alone, and I moved back home, where I realized that they started telling me their needs at home. Maybe they sleep without food (Student 5).”*

*“Yeah they inconvenience a lot because at times we depend on stipends. So sometimes they delay, and some of us are from poor families, which do not afford. So we find ourselves in positions where assignments are supposed to be printed and submitted. So we do not have other means of cash while you still have to buy data for other academic tasks like research (Student 5).”*

It has been highlighted that some students are forced to drop out due to family economic demands. That includes caring for children, including childcare arrangements and managing household tasks, which can be overwhelming for students, leading them to leave university temporarily or permanently.

*“We had a case of a student who had a child, and there was no one to look after the child. She ended up dropping out of school. She was in her first year. She is not the only one. Others went through the same problem (Staff 3).”*

*“One may be forced to look after a child, including seeking employment or to make income by stealing. And you will not be earning enough to raise a child because if there are no qualifications. That is where you will likely get depressed (Student 1).”*

Students with significant family commitments such as caring for children or elderly relatives, may struggle to balance their academic pursuits with their caregiving responsibilities. In such cases, the need to prioritize family commitments may lead to the decision to drop out of university.

### ***b. Family problems***

The research findings have revealed that students experience family issues that cause emotional distress among the family members. It has been reported that there are occurrences of unexpected family emergencies, such as a serious illness or death within the family that can disrupt student's ability to continue with their education. Family finances have been identified as one factor that imposes serious restrictions on students' educational plans (Guimba et al., 2015). Participants shared their experiences as follows.

*“The ones from home you know there are conflicts at times. You find out there is no peace at home that causes stress (Student 4).”*

*“I was looking at the fact that it could include teenage pregnancy, early marriage responsibilities increase chances of drop out and their academic performance is negatively affected (Student 8).”*

Students may also have caregiving responsibilities for family members, such as parents, siblings, or children. This could include providing care for family members who are ill, disabled, or elderly. Balancing caregiving duties with academic responsibilities can be challenging and may lead to dropping out of university. The responses from the in-depth interviews were as follows:

*“At home, yes. It was a relationship between my parents since they separated. My mother was insisting on separation based on what she was going through. At that time, I was very close to mother as compared to my father. So that would bother me and I would come to school loaded with a lot of things and it was difficult for me to concentrate until I decided that let me try other things that can disturb me and help me so I decided to spend less time at home. I decided to spend a lot of time within the campus so that when I get home, I do few things and leave to school the following day (Student 5).”*

*“Yes there are some issues that bother me such as stepfather who stays with us (Student 1).”*

*“At home my parents, do not (door opens and closes). They are married, but they are not married. Each one sleeps in his bedroom that used to affect me here at school and in my love life. That is making it hard for me to focus, and they do not allow me to move out because they don’t want to stay alone since they are no longer in good terms. So Hai! (Student 7).”*

From the above responses, it is clear that family conflicts have a direct negative impact on students’ academic achievement. An unhealthy family environment may cause concentration difficulties for students. If such students do not get the necessary support, they may experience chronic stress which may lead to severe physical and mental health problems.

#### 4.7.2 Peer pressure

The findings indicate that students find themselves in positions where they want to fit in within higher learning institutions. That feeling forces them to do the same things that others do regardless of whether it is good or bad. Uslu (2013, cited in Moldes et al., 2019) emphasizes that as children grow and reach adolescence, teenagers become more dependent on their peers than their family especially in making choices and enhancing their moral values in life. This view is supported by the following responses.

*“In addition, that influence of peers going out not attending classes while parents are giving out money thinking they are going to school only to find such a student is no longer attending school. There are plenty of factors which cause problems (staff 1).”*

*“No, only I can decide to take my work seriously as we are facing friends. For instance, just like now at home, they will know that I am at school, but I am not going home after this. I also think I like friends, and we waist a lot of time, and of course, I need to change (Student 1).”*

*“It is friends. You will find that I have friends outside who are not attending the same institution as me. Those friends are from home, they drink, they use other drugs, and they will be saying negative things that one is wasting time by going to school. (Student 4).”*

*“I think that thing of friends that we have mentioned I did not know whether we can call it a wave or what. There is this thing of peer pressure where one wants to dress to kill, and say he wants to be good-looking. That depends on the individuals. Sometimes, other people do not consider good looks important. They expect something that has value, not that type of standard. For example, girls all want to have make up and weaves, but that does not describe beauty. That is where I can say they cause challenges for themselves because that is just a cognitive thing (Student 5).”*

*“My friends and I have seen that they are desperate for marriage. While some are desperate for stability. So we end up being involved in bad activities because we are trying for financial stability. A friend of mine is looking for a blesser (sugar daddy). She realised that her business was not going well so she wanted a blesser to boost her*

*business. The other one is that we are in a church union, so when you are in that union, the expectation is that you should get married. That makes us feel like we are too old to be single. So it goes with the stigma they even call us names (Student 7)."*

*"For example, my friends insist that we go to a tavern. Even when you do not want to you end up going because you are afraid that you might feel left out, and that almost became what I lived because it tempered with many things the way you study and budget. You do not know where the money ended up, and it was mostly in my studies because I saw myself off-track with many things being left behind (student 11)."*

It is recognized from these responses that as much as students may help each other academically, they may also be a source of bad influence to each other. For instance, it seems that sometimes students choose to have much fun at the expense of their academic success. Sadly, at times, this goes beyond institutional control, where the overall support, such as coaching and mentorship, may make little or no difference. It has been reported that students tend to overrate Leisure time due to peer pressure.

*"In addition, that influence of peers going out not attending classes while parents are giving out money thinking they are going to school only to find such a student is no longer attending school (Staff 1)."*

*"Oh! The time we leave is very dangerous. There are this..., there are massive weekends where we leave school work and forget we have school work pending. So most of us were not managing well because even now those graduating are very few. After all, they liked entertainment and failed to attend to their schoolwork (Student 3)."*

*"At times, a problem would be when you isolate yourself from what the majority of the class is doing. Most of the time, we go out for fun here at the university. So when you do not become part of them you feel left out but since you still have to work with them that is where you will find that when you have to join them in a group they may decide to keep quiet and one may decide not to join because you find it difficult to fit in (Student 5)."*

*"Some of my friends go to parties, some are often in trouble while others are on drugs even go out for night clubs. The matter is when we have such friends most of the time you end up being influenced to do the same like having drugs and clubbing which are*

*the things I encountered and made me lose track of my studies and affected my health (Student 5)."*

*"It is socialization, going clubbing and drinking because we want to reduce stress. One of my friends will tell you that for them to reduce stress he has to go to kazi Kota (night club) every weekend because she does not want to stay with people at home (student 7)."*

*"Yes it is still part of the challenge, it is a big one. Because even if you look at the behaviour on its own you will find that when there is money you will see that marketing id high, they are giving out flyers to attract students to come. It is noisy around and you feel the entertainment (student 10)."*

#### **4.7.3 Substance abuse**

The research findings have revealed that one of the social problems that students face include substance abuse. Such include alcohol and drug use that has resulted in drug addiction that lead to decreased academic performance which eventually result in dropping out of university. This problem has affected students' ability to fully perform their academic tasks. Participants have therefore responded as follows:

*"For instance, there was this student when we first arrived. He was an alcoholic and skipped classes because he had to go to the hospital because it was found that there was too much alcohol in his body, and the body could not function well. He was forced to be away from school for something like two months for treatment. The other thing is stressing up with outside things and ending up having depression. Then everything that is mine stops I am forced to focus on recovering (Student 4)."*

*"As an example of peer pressure includes drinking alcohol, especially where I attend school. It is like it is a tradition for everyone to drink alcohol, so if you did not go to drink alcohol, you will feel like there is something that you missed in life." (Student 12)."*

*“From what I have seen, students who use drugs end up in mental hospitals. When they return, they fail to get back on track because no one takes them seriously (Staff 3).”*

The above feedback confirms the fact that substance abuse has negative effects on students' cognitive abilities, which as a result lead to bad academic performance. It has also been mentioned that even if students are referred for rehabilitation, in most cases, they do not fully recover, that may automatically lead to non-completion.

Lack of resources

For the purpose of this study, the lack of resources refers to various academic requirements that students need to meet to perform their academic tasks. The research findings show that students have many challenges due to limited resources. It has been confirmed through the study that at times situations become severe and force students to drop out before completion. Thus, participants responded in the following way:

*“Yes! They cause various challenges academically, including not coming to school. For instance, if one runs out of food, he may wonder how he will attend a class while hungry since he will not be able to concentrate. He then finds a way to make money to force one to prioritise money over academic work (student 8).”*

*“Few computers caused serious challenges because due date would come and I would be under pressure and it was worrying (student 4).”*

*“At first classes ended at six p.m. then it was moved to five p.m. During that timeframe if I leave school, which we don't normally leave exactly at five p.m. To get to the bus stop for people who use transport, there is a queue. It is not his fault that he does not get in time due to transport. So by the time he gets home, he is tired and given other responsibilities at home either to cook or do any other house chores. He does that, and after that, it is time to rest, which means he fails to prepare for the next day or just read (Student 2).”*

*“Even before, you can see from attendance. Some students end up not attending classes as needed. When you make a follow up, you find out that it is due to finances (phone rings). She answers a phone (student 2).”*

Based on the responses, it is clear that social factors directly impact students' performance since they cause different complications. Students may put enough effort into completing their academic work. Still, inadequate resources, such as computers, may complicate ability to complete their academic tasks.

#### **4.7.4 Gambling problems**

In this study, gambling problem implies repeated gambling behaviour that makes it impossible to control even when it cause significant problems. The research findings have revealed that there are students who misuse the funding they get and opt for gambling as a way of generating more income. However, it has been reported that they end up being addicted to the extent that they miss academic lessons. Participants therefore responded in the following way:

*“They go for gambling, and there is a case of someone who was like that, he was no longer attending classes. He was now going for gambling all the time and not attending the classes (student 10).”*

*“The other thing is about trading that initially was used as a good thing, but recently it is becoming addictive, and they are becoming broke because they lose (student 10).”*

*“They will tell them to invest R10000, and they will get R30 000. So they choose not to pay their living expenses and you would find that one does not have rent. They struggle very much. So you will see they just come to class occasionally (student 8).”*

Built on the findings, it is established that financial mismanagement may result in risky behaviour that may bring about complications that may force students to drop out. It is also shown that there are gambling sites found near higher learning institutions, which increases students' chances of falling into a bad habit of gambling with the hope that they will change their financial circumstances.

## 4.8 Interventions overcoming the social challenges

The majority of students have acknowledged that there are various challenges within and outside the campus. They also revealed that other challenges originate from their communities including their families. The study highlights that students who are not provided with enough support to deal with the social challenges may experience negative effects that may lead to terrible academic performance, which may lead to non-completion. Participants have suggested that interventions that may either be introduced or strengthened to enhance the completion rate within higher learning institutions in Lesotho.

### 4.8.1 Provision of full funding

Throughout this study, full funding point to the availability of enough financial resources that makes it possible for students to complete within higher learning institutions. The research findings have revealed that scholarships are not available in all courses in some institutions. Some students rely on paying all academic, financial needs by themselves. In this case, students from poor backgrounds may fail to enrol in higher learning. The participants responded as follows:

*“I do not know, but the fact is that people pay for themselves and sometimes they cannot continue with their studies. How can I put it? You pay for yourself; if not paid, you cannot attend school (Student 1).”*

*“The biggest challenge is that of tuition fee (student 1).”*

It is discovered from the findings that financial problems have an impact on students learning since their enrolment may at times be suspended. As a result, some students may be forced to drop out of higher learning because they cannot afford to pay tuition fees and other academic expenses.

#### **4.8.2 Establishment of ongoing support**

For this study, ongoing support refers to sustained programs designed to improve student retention and success. It has been established from the findings that students need to be assisted in setting up educational objectives to compete academically.

##### ***a. Time management***

In this study, time management means the students' ability to utilise academic time effectively. The findings have shown that students do not perform well in most cases because they do not allocate enough time to their studies. Hence, they fail to complete all their academic requirements which affects the quality of their work, including pass marks. The next responses from the interview sessions reinforce this:

*“Going out with friends does affect my academic work, not that they may affect our performance because the more we attend, the more we become addicted, and it affects our academic attendance, and we turn to like fun activities rather than school (student 4).”*

*“I think it is within me. There are times when I did not give myself enough time. I did not prioritise at all because I would be given time to perform a certain task like an assignment due in two weeks, and I would do it in two days or a night before the submission date (student 2).”*

Participants have acknowledged that the only way academic completion can happen is if students acquire the skill in time management. That calls for various programs that offer supportive skills for students to succeed in their academic journey.

##### ***b. Provision of Supportive programs***

Throughout the study, the provision of supportive programs refers to learning activities provided to enhance students' performance. The research findings have revealed that students need additional support as groups or individuals to ensure they succeed in managing their academic work. The following responses supported the view.

*“I don't know how to put it, maybe holding campaigns that educate the community that they should not pressurise students when they are home let them be themselves so that they can perform to their best (student 5).”*

*“The other one is that there are not enough activities that would allow students to refresh their minds. The school fails to address our aims, and they only attend to learning issues. Even if you look at the calendar, you will see that there are no planned activities for students (student 1).”*

*“The more we go for alcohol that is when we are going to be exposed to risky practices (student 1).”*

From the findings, students were not so confident on what types of activities they need but articulated that there is a need to have programs that motivate their passion for learning. Some students have communicated that the only activities they see are strictly academic, which demotivates them since they have to find their own ways of entertainment which in most cases bring about risky behaviour. Students expressed that the rest of the community, including families, need to be involved in their academic tasks to gain more understanding and offer them adequate support. Social support can minimize the pressure burden caused by nervousness in facing difficulties and learning challenges, which enables students to find solutions to learning problems (Graciani Hidajat et al., 2020).

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the research findings from in-depth interviews revealed a long history of theorizing about factors associated with non-completion. In support of this initiative Universities and colleges are very interested in understanding the factors that influence students' academic performance (Griffin et al., 2012). Thus, the study made efforts to explore the main social challenges to raise awareness concerning emerging issues. It has been discovered throughout the study that the social factors identified often interact with each other. However, the reasons for dropping out cannot be generalised since they vary greatly from one student to another. The study further looked into the strategies that may be implemented to address students' problems to enhance their completion in higher institutions.

Therefore, addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving financial assistance, academic support services, mental health resources, and a supportive home and campus environment. Eroglu (2002, cited in Hatunoglu, 2020)

asserts that support can be provided to students by establishing guidance services for each department and introducing new social events while enriching the existing activities.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The chapter presents the discussion of findings, conclusions, and recommendations in a summary form. The findings from participant interviews are discussed in line with the existing literature related to the research questions. In conclusion, the reflection of the study is presented, and a conclusion is drawn.

### **5.2 Discussion of the findings**

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: Which individual factors influence students' non-completion within higher learning institutions in Lesotho?

#### **5.2.1 Personal experiences that lead to drop out.**

The research findings have revealed that dropping out of academic institutions can be influenced by multiple personal experiences and each individual's reasons may differ. It is important to note that these personal experiences are often interconnected, and individuals may face multiple challenges simultaneously that may contribute to and increase the chances of their decision to drop out.

##### ***5.2.1.1 Student' Psychological challenges***

The research findings have reported that students' face a range of psychological problems due to the pressures and transitions associated with academic life. Saleem et al. (2013) asserted that the report also showed that overall, 85% of university students display severe type of psychological issues. Thus, participants have indicated that it is common for students to experience feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in learning activities which as a result may negatively affect students' academic performance and overall well-being.

In addition, there are often occurrences of high levels of stress from academic workload, exams, deadlines, and other responsibilities that can lead to physical and emotional strain. There are times when students find themselves battling with conflicts with peers, roommates, romantic partners, or family members, which can contribute

to emotional distress for students. Such experiences may lead to other psychological distress, such as irregular sleep patterns, insomnia, or excessive sleeping, which can affect students' ability to perform well academically.

***a. Students' lack of academic integrity***

The study has identified that students struggle with acquiring academic integrity within higher learning institutions. Lofstrom et al. (2015), asserted that it is complex to understand how academic integrity is taught and how it should be addressed in higher education since it is a highly subjective paradigm. From the findings, the study holds that students need to be responsible for performing their academic tasks by following effective study habits, time management skills and any other strategies that would enable them to retain information to succeed academically. The conclusion has been reached based on the findings that indicated that students fail to show commitment by taking ownership of their academic actions and consequences.

That includes meeting deadlines, attending classes and fulfilling academic duties. However, Peters (2019) believes there has been a mistake that has been done for too long where all the responsibility has been placed on the shoulders of students, often expecting a higher standard from them than we do of faculty or the institution. Thus, he emphasize that there is a need to acknowledge that students take their cues from their mentors and academic leaders.

***b. Student inability to handle academic pressure***

In this study, the inability to handle academic pressure refers to individual states where students struggle to meet academic requirements. The findings from the data collected assert that such experiences may be a result of their intellectual abilities, educational background or commitment. The experiences put students in situations where they struggle to acquire effective study skills. The initiative is supported by Fazal et al. (2012), who reported that students' achievement is not dependent on one skill but relies on various skills that make learning more effective.

Jordan (2015) publicised that most students struggle academically while trying to acquire new knowledge and skills, which expects them to adopt new practices. The study has also discovered similar challenges where participants have revealed that students are confronted with various uncertainties caused by low academic performance, mental challenges, or social and or personal effects. Furthermore,

students have reported that they find it challenging to adjust to the teaching methods and learning styles used in their new academic environment.

On the other hand, other students have communicated that the other challenge they experience is language barrier because they have international lecturers. So they fail to hear their accent, which causes them problems since they fail to participate in class discussions and understand course requirements. In such cases, it is apparent that students who do not get extra support are at risk of failing, which is likely to compel them to drop out. Indeed, the state of uncertainty is deeply rooted in the process of knowledge construction since it is associated with a state of confusion that one certainly goes through during learning. Thus, it may be considered a sign of low confidence in one's ability to perform specific tasks (Jraidi & Frasson, 2013). Hence, Kaljahi (2016) pointed out that Students adjust academically well if they are motivated and strongly believe that they can fully perform their academic responsibilities. As a result, participants have reported that they end up being less engaged since they may feel demotivated and hopeless. Thus, research findings show that students' worries negatively affect institutional retention rates as students may transfer to other institutions or they may choose to drop out entirely.

However, the study's findings have acknowledged that students sometimes face learning problems not because they have challenges with study skills but because they do not allocate adequate time for their academic work. Landsberger (2009, cited in Fazal et al., 2012) proposes that students' success is determined by their ability to study skills, including time management. Students have therefore admitted that apart from the fact that they may be overloaded, they spend a lot of time enjoying their free time, which put them in situations where they struggle to complete the academic tasks given to them.

The findings show that failure to manage time sensibly forces students to opt for unproductive study techniques such as memorizing, cross-night studying and last-minute exam preparation. Lack of study skills places students at a disadvantage and they suffer enormously at various stages along their journey. Students who are not educationally disciplined are often at risk of becoming victims of procrastination, overconfidence, mismanagement and severe stress (Naqvi et al., 2018). It is clear that

without proper study techniques, students may have trouble recalling information in the long term, resulting in poor performance and dropout.

***c. Lack of motivation***

The research findings have revealed that multifaceted issues lie under students' lack of motivation. Thus, some students reported feeling demotivated when they realized during their learning that they did not see the purpose of their studies, including certain causes they had enrolled in. Cakmak and Ercan (2006, cited in Bulent et al., 2015) emphasised that students with low motivation in the learning process are reluctant to study and do their assignments. It has therefore been revealed that students who are not provided with adequate support that encourages them to set specific, achievable goals are at risk of performing poorly, increasing their chances of dropping out. The findings further reported that students also experienced demotivation when they were not given adequate support by their lecturers and their families.

The other issue is when students feel demotivated because they have little or no control over their learning process that denies them the opportunities to explore topics that interest them and take ownership of their education. The findings also revealed that there are times when they find the learning environment very dull and uninspiring. Hassanbeigi et al. (2011) hold a different view as he states that many students face academic challenges due to lack of organization rather than intellectual ability.

***d. Academic withdrawal***

The research findings have shown that some students felt unease due to the academic load and demands. Most of them reported that they sometimes feel overwhelmed by high academic pressure, making it difficult to sail across without support. On the other hand, staff members claim that most students experience pressure because they fail to allocate enough time for their academic work; hence, they find it difficult to manage their tasks. Barnes et al., (2013) revealed that the present reality is that far too many students struggle at various stages of their academic demanding journey from middle and high school through college without much understanding of how and why this life-changing phenomenon occurs.

### ***e. Personal development and exploration***

The research findings have revealed that students are encouraged to participate in internships, co-op programs, or research projects to gain practical experience in their field of interest. The initiative has a positive outcome, though it may negatively affect students' completion since they may come across hobbies they enjoy, which are not in line with the training they get f higher learning institutions. Such activities may consist of different areas including income-generating ones. Identifying their passion may expose them to businesses they can rely on, which may ultimately influence them from dropping out. According to Eroglu and Ozturk (2000, cited in Hatunoglu, 2020), students should be empowered to be active in the social field and activities. Thus, disadvantaged students may drop out due to the need to engage in alternative income-generating activities that may consume their academic time, which may affect their performance negatively (Tetteh et al., 2021).

Findings have shown that their interests and career aspirations may change as students grow and develop. Students reported that some of them find that their chosen field of study no longer aligns with their passions. Hence, they may decide to leave university to pursue other opportunities. In some instances, withdrawing from the study can be positive, enabling the individual to pursue more rewarding opportunities (Webb & Cotton, 2018). Prior research has shown that the number of college students who work while attending college has increased substantially (Tessema et al., 2014).

### **5.2.2 Student health issues**

The research findings have indicated that physical challenges present significant barriers to learning and academic completion. Students who are not in good health are more likely to struggle with quality life and find it hard to handle educational demands. Thus, it has been established from the study findings that conditions like chronic illness and poor diet affect students' overall wellbeing since it complicates their ability to engage productively in learning activities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) non-transmissible chronic diseases (NTCDs) affect developed countries more than developing countries (Brandao et al., 2011).

### ***a. Physical Health issues***

The research findings have discovered that health issues temper with students' wellbeing. It has been reported that there are numerous cases of students who are found not to be performing well because they have chronic illnesses and they may have defaulted from the medication. Students who have defaulted from chronic medication often deal with health crises that interfere with their lesson attendance, concentration and overall academic performance. Such experiences have been identified from the findings as major factors that prompt some students to withdraw or discontinue from higher learning temporarily or permanently. Chronic illnesses and other illnesses may require ongoing medical care and management that can interfere with students' academic commitments. Brandao et al. (2011) asserted that increased risk factors for NTCDs can affect the wellbeing of university students and impact their health in adulthood. These results should support implementing health promotion and prevention programs at the university. Higher learning institutions have attempted to train excellent professionals so they need to improve on training healthy individuals (Ramon-Arbues et al., 2020).

It has also been reported from the findings that due to the high rate of substance abuse, some students experience severe mental health conditions. Ng et al. (2022) affirmed that mental problems such as depression and anxiety disorders are common among college students, and they can significantly impact a student's ability to cope with academic demands since they depreciate mental functioning.

### **5.2.3. Unsatisfactory academic experiences**

The research findings reveal that there are times when students experience dissatisfaction during their academic journey. The report reveals that students sometimes are unsure about their career path. The findings further reveal that some students struggle academically and may no longer feel fit to progress. Tessema et al., (2014) emphasised that students' satisfaction and academic achievement are directly related to student persistence. This implies that students who are unsatisfied are at high risk of losing the passion for completing.

Also, the findings show that failure to connect socially within the campus may create unsatisfying academic environment that may lead to social isolation. Report further indicate that apart from dealing with academic pressure, students are at times confronted with mental health issues that may be caused by other external factors such as family issues, relationship problems, or health distresses. Similarly, Lam et al. (2012) mentioned that participation in societal activities created an extra time burden for students to cope with since the time to conduct and finish these extra curriculum activities clashed with that of coursework. Higher learning tends to care about student satisfaction because of its potential impact on student motivation and retention (Tessema et al., 2014).

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: What environmental challenges contribute to students' dropping out within higher learning institutions in Lesotho?

### **5.3 Higher leaning institutional demands that lead to dropout**

The research findings have shown that universal problems within higher learning institutions, such as administrative issues, lack of resources, and negative campus culture, can contribute to a higher dropout rate. Vossensteyn et al. (2015) added that the social integration of students within higher education is an ongoing responsibility for institutions, and there is a need for more tailored and individualized follow-up of students to provide them with a sense of belonging and increase their engagement with their studies. It has ,been established from the findings that students' abilities to manage academic responsibilities also play a crucial role in their academic achievement, as failure to comply may cause complications.

#### **5.3.1 Financial difficulties**

It has been identified from the findings that there are times when students are forced to drop out of school because they cannot afford basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing. Many college students are exposed to low levels of personal financial management (Archuleta et al., 2013). The multiple studies conducted by the United States of America (U.S) Department of education (200, cited in Lacour & Tissington,

2011) has indicated the results which clearly validated that school poverty adversely affected student achievement. Many countries make additional funding available to encourage their institutions to focus more on study success (Vossensteyn et al., 2015). Students have also reported that there are times when they get funding from the government, but most of the time, it is delayed. That causes complications, especially for students from low-income families to continue with their studies. To emphasise the problem, Lacour and Tissington (2011) affirmed that family income level was a predictor of school completion for all subcategories.

It has also been discovered that there are times when students are denied access to write exams due to their outstanding fees. Unless students qualify for financial aid, they and their parents may face an additional problem as they may have to pay for courses they do not get credit and may not afford (Barnes et al., 2010). It is apparent that failure to write exams may bring about adverse effects on the students' academic future. Some students may never have a chance to recover the opportunity they have lost; as a result, they may be forced to drop out without completing the program they enrolled in. It has also been revealed from the study findings that in some cases students are forced to seek for employment in order to maintain financial needs. Astin and Oseguera (2005, cited in Mann & Henneberry, 2012) affirmed that planning to work full-time while attending college is negatively related to degree attainment.

### **5.3.2 Academic pressure**

The research findings indicate that academic pressure has been identified as a significant challenge faced by many students at various stages of their educational journey. It has been revealed that stress is among the challenges students experience for a combination of reasons, including high expectations from parents, teachers or oneself. Siegrist (1996, cited in Rubio-Valdehita et al., 2014) pointed out that stress is generated by high effort, inadequate rewards, and low autonomy since these conditions cause a significant decrease in the individual's self-esteem and self-efficacy. Students communicated that their desire to excel and meet specific academic goals so causes too much pressure for them. They also reported that there is competition amongst themselves that brings about fear of failure since it would bring disappointment for them and the rest of their families.

The findings revealed high demands of coursework, assignments, projects, and exams, which students find overwhelming especially when multiple deadlines coincide. Rubio-Valdehita et al. (2014) believed that failure to handle academic workload may bring about stress that can lead to non-completion. The situation can be worse in cases where students have additional extracurricular activities including formal employment. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the other challenge that some students face is to understanding other international lecturers that can make it difficult for them to cope with academic pressure. While on the other hand, some students find it difficult to adjust to the increased academic standards and intellectual demands of higher learning, especially if they come from poor educational backgrounds. Andrade (2018) added that having too many things and not having enough time to do them can lead to exhaustion, which may prevent one from adequately participating in other roles.

### **5.3.3 Fixed Institutional policies**

Countries or institutions taking a more holistic policy approach toward educational success have better study success outcomes (Vossensteyn et al., 2015). The research findings revealed that although institutional policies are meant to maintain order, fairness and consistency within organizations, they are the source of complications that lead to non-completion. The research findings revealed that available policies do not seem to accommodate the prevailing problems. Prevailing knowledge policies do not counter and can even foster trends towards increasing inequality that stem from structural change (Arocena et al., 2015). From these ideas, it can be assumed that existing policies are not comprehensively reviewed. That calls for a process to identify shortcomings, areas for improvement, and alignment with current goals, including dominant challenges.

### **5.3.4 Stigma in accessing institutional services**

The research findings have indicated that stigma is one of the significant barriers to accessing institutional services. Based on these findings, for example, it has been revealed that some students who are experiencing mental health issues such as substance use are hesitant to seek professional help. Vogel et al. (2017) asserted that researchers have theoretically discussed that public stigma leads to the development

of self-stigma and that self-stigma is the main factor of attitudes toward mental services. Hence, students without adequate mental health resources and support struggle to cope with their symptoms and eventually drop out academically. According to Priestley et al. (2010), significant developments across the higher education sector in recent years require counselling services to be re-evaluated and redesigned to meet the changing needs of a growing and increasingly diverse student population. This view is applicable since the findings have shown that professionals found within the institutions are not competent enough to offer support for severe mental illness. So, they rely on referring to mental health hospitals for further management.

It has also been reported that students generally prefer dealing with their problems in isolation due to the fear of discrimination. Students, mentioned that in most cases, they do not disclose their challenges because they worry about being treated differently or facing negative attitudes from their peers, including service providers. Peterson et al. (2022) reported that some critical barriers to food access around stigma include fear of judgment and believing others need it more than they do.

### **5.3.5 Unapproachable lecturers**

For this study, unapproachable refers to lecturers with an attitude that is unfriendly and not accommodating. The study findings have conveyed that unapproachable lecturers can be a challenge that negatively affects students' performance. The findings have shown that some lecturers give students learning tasks without creating a platform that allows them to participate through discussions and posing questions. Furthermore, the study indicates that some lecturers that are strict with consultation hours, which causes problems for some students since they may also be struggling with set time due to other commitments such as work. Based on the consultation restriction that some lecturers put in place, Sandhu et al. (2012) asserted that several studies have demonstrated that verbal and non-verbal skills affect students' rating of teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes. Such experiences may complicate students' academic lives and, as a result, force them to drop out.

### 5.3.6 Family circumstances

The research findings have reported that an unstable home environment create undesirable family situations that impact parental participation in students' education. The findings have discovered that parents who are dealing with their own challenges may be less able to support their children's learning at home or engage with teachers and school activities leading to missed opportunities for academic support and enhancement. Persistent distractions, such as social problems and difficulties among the family members have been conveyed as contributing to poor academic performance.

It has been emphasised that most students struggle with their academic requirements because they are from low income families, which sometimes force them to assist with the funds they get from the scholarship. Blanden (2004, cited in Garwe, 2015) stated that many of these studies indicate that students from less privileged family backgrounds have greater chances of dropping out of university than those from well-off families. On the other hand, some families and communities, particularly in poverty stricken areas, do not value or understand formal education, leading to students who are unprepared for the school environment (Lacour & Tissington, 2011).

On the other hand, the findings revealed that parents' marital status also causes stress for students to the extent that students mentioned they did not enjoy being at home. In addition, family responsibilities add more burden to students and make it hard for them to concentrate and put all their efforts into their academic work. Thus, the findings have also presented that students from dysfunctional families experience lack of emotional support and encouragement at home, which affects their motivation and self-esteem. Participants have revealed that they struggle to remain motivated without positive reinforcement, which puts them at risk of dropping out. The research findings revealed that the overall lack of social support is a determinant of both physical and mental health problems, including depressive symptoms among university students. Research evidence indicates a significant negative relationship between social support and psychological disorders, including depression and stress (Ahmed et al., 2020).

The research findings have uncovered that family problems cause emotional distress and other mental health issues. Alshareef et al. (2015, cited in Palmer et al., 2011) in support to family influences emphasized that family's internal dynamics can have both positive and negative effects on the further development and academic performance of individuals. Thus, participants reported that they live in unstable and hostile environments which brings about emotional challenges that make it difficult for them to focus. Students reported that the painful experiences they face within their own homes during learning contribute to decreased motivation and energy levels. Students have reported that they find themselves worried and struggling to concentrate because their minds are occupied with family challenges. The study established that students who are constantly stressed find it difficult to retain information, which impact their academic performance.

### **5.3.7 Peer pressure**

It has been found from the research findings that behaviours of each individual can be formed hereditary or it is environmentally influenced. For adolescents, the originally formed behaviour can be changed by a peer group (Tetteh et al., 2021). Peer pressure often encourages conformity to group norms, which may not always align with productive learning behaviour. Peer pressure is often seen during the adolescence stage of teenagers since they often seek comfort among their peers and intend to do what their peers do regardless of whether it is good or bad for them (Moldes et al., 2019).

It has been highlighted from the findings that students adopt study habits, attitudes, and behaviours of their peers, which are not conducive to effective learning. For instance, if a peer group views studying as uncool, students may avoid studying to avoid social stigma, though they know it hampers their academic progress (Tetteh et al., 2021). The findings further revealed that students influence majority of students to engage in behaviours such as excessive drinking, drug use or risky sexual activities. Such behaviour pressurise them to spend money on social activities, clothes, or other items to keep up with their peers, leading to financial tension or debt. Morrison (2005, cited in Tessema et al., 2014) emphasised that some students combine studying and learning to support a particular lifestyle or as a reaction to peer influence.

### **5.3.8 Substance abuse**

The research findings have revealed that substance abuse has severe effects on student's ability to complete their academic programs successfully. In recent times, drug abuse among undergraduates seems to become a global problem despite the existence of various procedures taken by governments and other agencies due to its negative effect on education and future leadership (Ojiaku & Nwokoro, 2021). The study findings have shown that there have been students who were forced to take official withdrawal because they had severe mental disorders due to the use of drugs. Such students have, therefore, presented decreased academic performance. Akanbi et al. (2015) mentioned that psychologists argue that heavy drinking may lower individuals' expectations about their academic performance. It has also been exposed that students who abuse substances frequently skip classes altogether, which makes them fall behind in coursework and ultimately fail to meet graduation requirements.

Students may experience several challenges during higher learning, which may tempt them to use drugs. Morojele and Ramsoomar (2016 cited in Dykes & Casker, 2021) indicated that substance abuse often develops in the transitional phase of adolescence, which is a time when puberty and physical growth are occurring and when a young person seeks independence. The findings further indicate that substance abuse leads to social withdrawal as students turn to prioritize substance use over participating in academic, and extracurricular activities. This impacts their sense of belonging and connection to the academic community, thus potentially leading to disengagement and dropout. It has been reported that drug use has been associated with long-term effects where students fail to recover from the effects and become psychologically fit to complete their studies. Several students experience mental health problems either temporarily or for a long period, and some become insane, maladjusted to academic requirements, and eventually drop out (Akanbi et al., 2015).

### **5.3.9 Lack of resources**

The research findings have shown that lack of resources in higher learning institutions impacts various aspects of the educational experience. Students have expressed that there are times when they do not get their academic funds on time, which hampers

academic performance. It is established from the findings that students struggle to do their academic work on time without access to essential tools and materials, leading to lower achievement levels. For example, Kascus (1994, cited in Janet et al., 2014) discovered that providing library support to distance learners was overlooked and abandoned to the background.

The findings also revealed that institutions fail to provide extracurricular activities since the ones offered are limited. Hence, the findings indicate that fewer activities limit students' holistic development, affecting their skill growth and social networking. Poverty significantly affects the resources available to students. Due to this lack of resources, many students struggle to reach the same academic achievement levels those not living in poverty (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Lack of financial resources also forces some students to work while at the same time study. This has shown to put too much work load on students, affecting their performance to an extent that some students may drop out. In addition, Wang et al. (2013) revealed that there was a concern about government funding since it was confirmed that provisions were limited to such a degree that the families of poor rural students were not sure if they would receive assistance for higher education.

### **5.3.10 Gambling problems**

The research findings showed that gambling addiction leads to various psychological issues. Young people are a high-risk group for gambling problems, and students fall into that category at higher learning institutions (Moore et al., 2013). It has been discovered through the findings that gambling sites are close to the learning institutions. Thus, some students choose to go gambling with the hope that they will change their financial status. However, it has been discovered that they end up in serious debts which in most cases lead to bankruptcy. Given changing trends in gambling, such as the wider availability of Internet and mobile gambling opportunities, it is not surprising that gambling has become a popular activity among students, and it has transitioned from some form of entertainment to a more serious problem (St-Pierre et al., 2014).

Gambling problems increase absenteeism, which perhaps leads to poor performance. It has also been reported from the findings that there are students who find themselves involved in criminal cases while trying to make money for survival, including gambling. Understanding the motivations for gambling among college students is therefore of crucial importance for the development of effective prevention programs among this at-risk population (St-Pierre et al., 2014). Buckle et al. (2013) reported that the increase in gambling accessibility provides a greater opportunity to gamble, which leads to an increased likelihood of some individuals becoming pathological gamblers. Both domestic and international university students may be vulnerable to the gambling problem due to their propensity to experiment with new and potentially risky behaviours and the need to manage emotional, financial, academic, and social stressors associated with university studies and their developmental stage (Moore et al., 2013).

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: What interventions can improve students' effective completion rates in higher learning institutions in Lesotho?

#### **5.4 Supportive programs and services that would improve student retention.**

The research findings have presented that student support services need to be very effective and provide trusted psychosocial academic support. It is discovered that availability of personal and academic support give students sense of belonging which in turn strengthens their academic performance thus minimising student drop out.

##### **5.4.1 Provision of full funding**

The research findings have revealed that financial support significantly contributes to academic success. The efforts of the government to alleviate the financial burden of higher learning on people with low incomes have been relatively successful in colleges. Because of this, foundations and individuals may decide that if they want to improve human welfare, giving additional scholarships in colleges may have a huge effect (Wang et al., 2013).

However, it has been discovered that students fail to manage the funds that they get because they normally struggle with living expenses due to a lack of an adequate financial plan. Many college students have little experience in personal financial management since they have not independently managed bills (Tran, 2018). Thus, it has been reported that in most cases, they find themselves in desperate financial situations, making it hard for them to fully participate in their academic activities, including attending lessons.

The findings also revealed that students sometimes find themselves in desperate situations because the funding benefits have delayed. That situation becomes more severe for students from poor backgrounds and whose parents cannot afford to assist financially. These experiences could impact on their academic performance and also affect their mental well-being. Apart from academic performance, participants have stated that students preoccupied with financial worries do not fully engage in campus life. Thus, they fail to participate in sports, internships, and other enriching activities contributing to personal growth and development. Tran et al. (2018) asserted that among the potential contributing factors, financial stressors have been linked to health and adjustment concerns, including mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

#### **5.4.2 Establishment of ongoing support**

It has been established from the research findings that there is a need to strengthen psychosocial support programs. It has been discovered that students hardly make use of available services. That may call for more relevant interventions that can be modified to capture their interest and increase uptake of provided services. According to the study conducted by Habley et al. (2010, cited in Perger & Takacs, 2016), academic guiding and comprehensive learning assistance programs, including early warning systems for at-risk students, are among the practices that are important in student success. It has been mentioned that university life has shown to be stressful with academic pressures, social challenges, and personal issues. So, participants feel that extra psychosocial support may provide a safe space for students to express their emotions, manage stress, and develop coping strategies.

The findings further revealed that mental health and academic success are closely linked. Participants hold that when students receive psychosocial support, they are better equipped to manage anxiety since they will connect with peers, form supportive relationships, and feel a sense of belonging within the university community. Johnson and Riley (2021) indicted that poor mental health has been associated with decreased student engagement, peer relationships, and graduation expectancy.

### **5.4.3 Time management**

The research findings have shown that time management is one area that students find themselves battling with during their academic journey. Students must possess excellent time-management skills to do well academically (Lam et al., 2012). Thus, findings indicate that among the academic support that may be provided, time management training is one of the most important. Time management is one of the most traditional topics in the field of learning and study strategies, occupying a fundamental position in study skills since it is regarded as key to college success (Nadinloyi et al., 2013). Participants, especially students, have indicated that they fail to perform their academic tasks properly because they find it difficult to manage their academic and social life. Thus, the study findings have revealed that effective time management does not allow students to allocate sufficient time for studying, completing assignments, and preparing for exams. Students can optimize their study time and achieve better academic results by prioritizing tasks and setting realistic goals.

Academic procrastination is perceived to be relatively mutual among undergraduates and associated with a lack of discipline in time management (Ocak & Boyraz, 2016). The study findings indicated that participants have confirmed that one of the downfalls students face is failure to organize their workload since they keep procrastinating, which sometimes forces them to work under pressure because they have to meet deadlines. Similarly, Lam et al. (2012) found that many students pronounced that they were not good at managing time appropriately. Participants have articulated that doing academic tasks at the last minute compromises the quality of their work. At times, they fail to meet deadlines, which increases stress and anxiety levels. However, it is worth

noting that it has been established that there are cases where students communicated that they feel overwhelmed by the workload.

#### **5.4.4 Provision of Supportive programs**

The findings reveal a need to provide a combined series of academic resources, including supportive programs in higher learning institutions. The effective implementation of such programs may need close monitoring and continuous evaluation to ensure they increase completion rates. Janet et al. (2014) declared that catering for learners' academic interest in providing them with the needed resources is highly imperative. For example, computer skills are important assets for students, allowing them to utilize the electronic information resources they desire in their learning and research processes (Ankrah & Atuase, 2018). The research findings also established that providing career counselling services may assist students in exploring career options. The provision of student services within the campus may help students to develop practical work experience that is relevant to their fields of study. That would create networking opportunities such as career fairs and alumni connections to help students build professional relationships.

Participants reported that they often experience challenges in accessing technological resources, including computers. Although technology is a very important, useful, and indispensable part of life, effective and appropriate usage still needs to be improved in education (Sahin et al., 2010). Some students reported that they found it difficult to access library resources online (Janet et al., 2014).

### **5.5 Recommendations for further research**

#### ***a. Monitoring progress***

The study recommends a strengthened monitoring progress system that will detect students with learning difficulties at an early stage. Monitoring students' progress is important since it improves the quality of knowledge (Krivova, 2021). As much as it has been reported that there are monitoring strategies in place, it was confirmed that they fail to pick challenges that need to be addressed early. To minimise such occurrences, Vaccaro and Sabella (2018) suggested that one-on-one writing

conferences may be supportive to students individually since it provides detailed feedback tailored to the student's specific needs rather than addressing the strengths and weaknesses of the whole class. Romero-Zaldivar et al. (2012) emphasised that the level of interaction between students and instructors is vital for academic success. This implies that recognising challenges later may make it hard, if not impossible, to intervene and assist involved students.

Monitoring progress for students may offer several advantages since it allows students and educators to identify areas where a student excels and areas where they may need additional support or improvement. Lecturers are advised to initiate interaction with students by engaging them in conversations that discuss academic tasks, including assignments, rather than waiting for the students to call for help (Vaccaro Sabella, 2018). By tracking progress, educators can intervene early if they notice a student falling behind or struggling with certain concepts. This can prevent issues from escalating and help the student catch up. By closely monitoring student progress, universities can identify patterns that may lead to dropout or non-completion. Interventions can then be implemented to support students at risk of leaving the program.

#### ***b. Lecturers' competency in the provision of psychosocial support***

The study recommends that lecturers be skilled enough to offer psychological support to students. Their competency is crucial since it contributes significantly to students' overall well-being and academic success. Lecturers' support was defined as a safe space for students to rely for assistance, support and care especially when they were under stressful academic expectation and career aspirations (Mohd et al., 2016). By fostering a supportive learning environment and being attentive to students' needs, lecturers can also play a vital role in promoting mental health and resilience among students. Sandhu et al. (2012) suggested that enhancing students' conceptual understanding and retention of knowledge requires lecturers' ability to motivate and capture students' interest.

Thus, all Lecturers must have a solid understanding of psychosocial dynamics, including various factors that influence individuals' mental health and well-being. This includes knowledge of psychological theories, coping mechanisms, resilience, and the impact of environmental factors on mental health. That may include providing

constructive criticism to prevent discouraging students from continuing their academic work in cases where performance is not good. Mohd et al. (2016) believed that a lecturer who is perceived to be supportive and caring toward the students creates an active environment that allows students to interact and engage more in their learning.

***c. Adequate support for Course selection***

Based on the findings many students enter university with a general idea of their career interests; hence they fail to understand the specific academic pathways that can lead to those careers. It is highly recommended that professional support in course selection be provided by well-trained service providers with adequate skills. Helping students choose a course during the first year of enrolment and offering well-defined and structured programs will go far toward increasing the number of students earning college credentials of value (Moore & Shulock, 2011). It has been reported that academic advisors and faculty members are available to provide insights; however, some students still struggle to identify personal interests that align with academic strengths. Hence, there are many cases where students feel they have not chosen courses that are fulfilling and academically rewarding. Moore and Shulock (2011) state that as much as students may express dissatisfaction, it is important to highlight that some students go to colleges with no intention of earning a qualification, meaning they can meet their goals without ever entering a program to study.

Mann and Henneberry (2012) found that attending college with optimistic academic, personal, or social motives is associated with degree completion. The research findings have revealed that some students expressed dissatisfaction by expressing that they have chosen the wrong course. The research findings revealed that some students enrolled in some courses due to the results they acquired. Such students felt they are studying what they are not interested in, which is not in line with their career. Based on these findings, it has been acknowledged as one of the major causes of demotivation, contributing to increased number of students who drop out of higher learning.

Thus, the research holds that leadership in education may increase retention rates and improve students' learning potentials by making them aware of their abilities and training them to improve these abilities (Moore et al., 2010). By improving the demands

for career guidance for young people, policymakers can address the challenges in tertiary education (Getachew & Daniel, 2016).

#### ***d. Flexible Learning Options***

Flexible learning options for university students have become increasingly important, especially with the changing landscape of education and the diverse needs of students. Wanner and Palmer (2015) stipulated that flexibility is seen as being universally presented as an obvious solution to any problem. The research study recommends that higher learning institutions offer flexible learning options such as online courses, part-time programs, evening classes, or hybrid models to accommodate the diverse needs of students including working professionals, parents, or those with other commitments. Flexibility in scheduling can help students balance their academic pursuits with other responsibilities. Janet et al. (2014) asserted that distance learning all over the world has become a powerful force in training, especially when it comes to its flexibility in terms of timing, which gives a greater relief to the student as well as a choice of where to learn. This has therefore, helped in creating wider accessibility to the educational attainment of learners.

Higher learning institutions may also offer evenings or weekends classes to accommodate students who work during the day or have other commitments. Different forms of learning may run concurrently for the same lessons to give students an alternative to opt for the one that suits them at their convenient times. This scheduling flexibility indeed enable students to pursue their education while balancing other responsibilities. By offering a range of flexible learning options, universities can better meet the needs of their diverse student population and support student success in higher education. Wanner and Palmer (2015) believed that flexible education is portrayed as inherently considered as automatically leading to a more student-centred approach.

#### ***e. Contextual teaching methods***

Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach is one approach that can be used to encourage student activity during learning (Tari & Rosana, 2019). The study recommends using contextual teaching may encourage students to explore concepts

within a broader context, leading to a deeper understanding of the subject matter since it involves problem-solving within real-world contexts. The awareness of the need for a contextual approach to learning is based on the fact that most students cannot relate what they learn to how it is utilized in real life (Madjid et al., 2017). By connecting learning material to real-life situations, contextual teaching methods make the content more meaningful and relevant to students' lives. It is assumed that educational relevance can enhance students' engagement and motivation. Tari and Rosana (2019) asserted that learning must also contain teaching materials close to students' daily lives so that activities can be meaningful for students. The learning approach is one of the important methods that must be considered in developing learning. The method is also believed to be excellent in promoting students' participation, improving their cognitive abilities. Students' engagement in learning is important to guarantee good academic results (Mohd et al., 2016).

#### ***f. Formation of Peer support programs***

Establishing peer support programs such as study groups and peer mentoring initiatives can foster a sense of community and belonging among students, which is linked to higher retention rates. The formation of peer support programs allows students to have a chance to share their challenges with others who might have similar experiences, thus enabling them to develop a supportive community on campus. Encouraging peer support networks such as student clubs and peer mentoring programs can foster a sense of belonging and connection. In addition, it is believed that experienced old students may be capable of mentoring newer ones by providing academic guidance, sharing study strategies, and offering emotional support. The research conducted by Bergeson (2006, cited in Lacour & Tissington, 2011) declared a need to create stronger, better partnerships between schools, families, and communities while providing better intervention programs for students struggling with exceptional outside barriers was evident.

Therefore, establishing proper screening and intervention programs through educating students on stress management programs and providing counselling in Universities is recommended to reduce mental illness (Ahmed et al., 2020). Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has indicated that peer support is a guiding

principle of recovery from mental health problems since it enhances an individual positive attitudes, increasing hope and self-efficacy (Johnson & Riley, 2021).

#### ***g. Early Intervention and Remedial Programs***

The study recommends that implementing academic monitoring systems that identify struggling students early on and providing targeted interventions can significantly impact students' completion. The study proposes that it is important for institutions to adopt a proactive and holistic approach to student support, addressing academic and non-academic factors that contribute to non-completion. Students in remediation may have earned a high school diploma but may still not be academically prepared for success in college (Bettinger et al., 2013).

The study recommends that institutions implement effective prevention programs that provide education about the risks and consequences of risky behaviours such as substance abuse, and offer support services to students struggling with addiction. Improving static determination and graduation rates requires innovative programs that address the needs of at-risk students (Pike et al., 2014). Remedial education significantly improves students' academic achievement while also increasing students' course satisfaction and achievements through self-efficacy (Zhao et al., 2022). Thus, interventions to improve students' readiness for college offer a variety of services consisting of academic preparation, college financial aid, and other available psychosocial and behavioural supports, such as the development of habits and organizational skills (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013).

#### ***h. Diversity and inclusion***

The study recommends that institutions need to ensure that they promote diversity and create an inclusive learning environment. Institutions need to strive towards ensuring representation of different racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender groups among both students and faculty. Many higher learning institutions have officers and even entire departments dedicated to diversity, which indicates that it has become somewhat of an imperative in higher education (Lehan et al., 2020). However, Olzmann (2020) argued that despite decades of programs aimed at increasing diversity, underrepresentation and exclusion remain issues at all levels of the academic world. The recommendation is based on the idea that inclusive campus

culture and addressing issues of discrimination and bias require ongoing efforts. However, for students to succeed, the environment outside learning institutions also plays a vital role. Students come from various cultural backgrounds, and have different abilities and needs. A rigid policy may not effectively cater to the diverse requirements of this population.

Different students have different learning styles and needs. Providing various resources, including visual aids, hands-on activities, and interactive learning materials, accommodates these differences. The study holds that further studies focusing on the effects of diversity, and lack of inclusion must be explored to celebrate differences and actively work to address biases or discrimination. Universities may also offer courses or programs that explore issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion across various disciplines to deepen their understanding of these topics and their relevance to their field of study. Other activities may include awareness campaigns, cultural celebrations, or advocacy efforts to promote diversity and foster inclusion on campus.

#### ***i. Academic advising and mentorship***

The study recommends that there is a need to assign each student to an academic advisor who can provide personalized guidance and support. The suggestion is that the advisor should facilitate regular meetings with students to discuss academic progress, career aspirations, and any challenges they may encounter. LeBel (2016) further suggested that holistically utilising academic advising can aid in facilitating a progressive experience for college students. That will make it possible for advisors to encourage students to seek mentors within their field of study or professional community for additional support and guidance. Academic advising can also improve student retention and success since it promotes campus connection and can provide overall support to the student to benefit from multiple forms of their college experience (LeBel, 2016). Some institutions have developed this into more general mandatory systems for personal tutoring and peer-mentoring among students to stimulate the relationship between students and their programme by creating a community and a sense of belonging and engagement among students (Vossensteyn et al., 2015).

The study also recommends a reliable platform that looks at students' attendance. That will make it possible to pick signs that need attention, take time to discuss

observations with the student, and refer them to the on-campus guidance counsellors for assistance if needed. Afzal et al. (2024) asserts that research has shown that students who engage in regular academic advising sessions are more likely to make knowledgeable decisions about their academic pathways leading to higher academic performance and increased likelihood of degree completion.

## **5.6 Reflection on the study**

The study has emphasised that there are social conditions during higher learning that have a direct impact on the high dropout rate. It has therefore been reported that there is a high rate of non-completion of studies encountered globally (Mugendi & Githae, 2021). Aina et al. (2022) believed that it is only consciousness that is found to be significantly related to dropout. The literature demonstrates that student success cannot be accomplished using a business-as-usual approach. Thus, it has been analysed throughout the study that multifaceted factors inform students' decisions. It has been established that three aspects mainly cause learning difficulties. The first aspect is personal ability, which was addressed by engaging participants in sharing their experiences regarding social challenges and learning. The second aspect looked at the environmental effects, while lastly included the higher learning institutional aspect.

Evidence is relatively clear that regular challenges that remain unresolved increase the possibilities of non-completion in higher learning. Perna (2015) stated that improving college access and success for low-income and first-generation students requires a multi-faceted, comprehensive approach and commitment from multiple players. It has been established that completion in higher learning does not benefit individuals at a personal level only. Since students live within the community, they bring about positive change that impacts the whole community. Perna (2015) mentioned that society also benefits from academic completion since higher educational attainment creates higher economic productivity, thus reducing reliance on social welfare programs.

## 5.7 Conclusion

Based on the outcomes of this study, various aspects were identified as the main factors that lead to higher learning dropout. Based on the findings, the researcher established that students face complex issues and problems during their learning endeavours. These challenges can be related to social, economic, cultural, or political factors and often require collective efforts to be addressed. However, it has been established at the end of the study that addressing these institutional challenges requires a proactive and holistic approach that involves collaboration among administrators, faculty, staff, students, and other external stakeholders.

Understandably, to achieve academic excellence, students must possess essential study skills, including time management, organisation, note taking, reading, and critical thinking (Naqvi et al., 2018). In addition, effective leadership, strategic planning, and a commitment to continuous improvement are essential to navigating these challenges successfully. It is assumed that implementing these strategies can create a supportive environment that nurtures students' well-being while promoting productivity and success. Throughout the study, the researcher has attempted to establish how social challenges may bring about psychological challenges, which may lead to non-completion. However, both social challenges and psychological challenges are not fully exhausted. Garwe (2015) highlighted that it is imperative to note that dropping out of university before completion of studies has personal, institutional, and social repercussions.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

Letter to conduct research

P.O.BOX 20  
Mazenod 160

The registrar  
Higher Learning Institutions  
Lesotho

Dear sir/Madam

#### **REQUEST FOR DATA COLLECTION**

The letter serves as a request for data collection at your institution. I am a PHD student in psychology of education. I currently studying with University of Free State and my student number is 2015220342.

My tittle is in regard to the social challenges that lead to non-completion in higher learning institutions.

I wish to conduct interviews for four students and one staff member who is well informed in students' affairs. Your assistance will be highly appreciated.

Yours Faithfully

Nthofela Tsiu/Ntelo

## Appendix B

### Interview questions

#### Biographic information

Age:

Gender:

Highest qualifications:

Current academic level:

Faculty:

Culture:

Residential areas:

#### B. Interview questions for students

Which year of study are in?

When did you enrol with the institution?

How many years does your programme take?

When is your last year of completion?

Which field of study are you in?

How would you describe your learning experience?

Would you describe it as a good experience?

If not what do you find challenging in your studies?

How do you cope with the challenges you encounter during your studies?

What are the challenges majority of you face in your studies?

What are the individual challenges that majority of students during their studies?

Do you think students get enough support to deal with their personal issues?

What kind of support do you think would help students to cope with individual challenges?

What are the main challenges students face due to environmental factors?

Is the institutional environment conducive for students to learn?

What do you think would improve the institutional environment to be more effective for learning?

## Interview questions for Institution personnels

What are the main individual challenges that lead to non-completion in higher learning institutions?

To what extent do they affect completion rate?

Do you think higher institutions offer enough support to students to cope with personal challenges during their studies?

What are the environmental challenges that lead to non-completion in higher learning institutions of Lesotho?

Do you think higher institution environment is conducive enough to allow students to complete in higher learning institutions?

To what extent do environmental challenges contribute towards non-completion in higher learning institutions?

What are the activities needed to stimulate students' passion in learning for them to complete their studies?

In what ways can higher institutions enhance supportive environment?

Do you think the institute has adequate resources and competent staff to provide social support to students?

What else do you think needs to be improved to support students' completion in higher learning institutions?

## Appendix C

# Consent to participate in this study

I, the undersigned,

\_\_\_\_\_ (participant's full names to be included), (the "Participant")

confirm that I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study referred to as the

\_\_\_\_\_ (the "Study") in relation to

—

and which Study is being conducted by

\_\_\_\_\_ (insert the name of the researcher), (the "**Researcher**").

I, the undersigned Participant, further confirm that—

1. the Researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study;
2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as explained in the attached information sheet;
3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study;
4. I understand that my participation in the Study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable);
5. I voluntarily provide the UFS and the Researcher with my personal information and consent to the UFS and the Researcher collecting, disclosing and processing my personal information in order to conduct the Study and any related activities in relation thereto;
6. I hereby acknowledge and confirm that I understand the purpose for which the UFS and the Researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise process, as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein;
7. I am aware that the findings of the Study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings and that my personal information will be aggregated and deidentified at such stage;
8. I also give the UFS permission to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at the UFS or other Higher Education Institutions. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, anonymity/confidentiality, safekeeping of information, and other issues listed above applying.

I, the Participant, agree to the recording of the <insert specific data collection method>.

Full Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

Approval letters to conduct data

09 November 2023

Dear Mamolefe Ntelo

**Approval of Data Collection at IDM**

The above mentioned subject matter bears reference.

This letter serves to inform you that your request regarding data collection at Institute of Development Management is approved.

If you need any additional assistance, please feel free to approach the office and you will be assisted accordingly.

Warm regards



.....  
\*Matšenase Tšenase (Mrs.)  
Discipline Coordinator - PHM

# THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO

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P O Roma 180  
Lesotho  
Africa

## OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

REF: REG/ADM-1.37

08 March, 2024

Mrs 'Mamolefe Ntelo  
P.O. BOX 20  
MAZENOD 160

Dear Mrs Ntelo

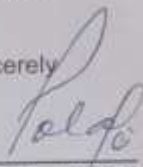
**Re: Request to conduct research at the National University of Lesotho**

The National University of Lesotho (NUL) is in receipt of your application to conduct research at this institution. The title of the study is **"The social challenges that contribute towards non completion within institutions of higher learning in Lesotho : A case study of Higher Learning Institutions in Lesotho"**.

After careful consideration of all relevant facts, the University has agreed to allow you to continue with your research as requested.

By copy of this letter, Director Student Affairs is requested to assist you to carry out the assignment.

Yours sincerely

  
E. Maqalika-Lerotholi (Mrs)  
REGISTRAR

CC: Director Student affairs



## Appendix E

Turnitin Report

## 2015220342 Mamolefe Ntelo

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