EXPLORING THE VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION OF ORIENTATION PROGRAMMES TOWARDS FIRST YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' TRANSITION.

Ganqa, N.H. (PhD) & Masha, R.K. (PhD)
University of Fort Hare,
50 Church Street, East London, Eastern Cape, South Africa
nganqa@ufh.ac.za 04037047681/071 920 0588
rmasha@ufh.ac.za 0437047081/082 780 1458

ABSTRACT
Orientation marks the beginning of new educational experiences in the transition to university for first year students' academic success and personal growth. The purpose of this study was to examine integration of orientation programmes towards First Year students' transition and persistence. Using Tinto's stages of separation, transition and incorporation; the study explored how orientation provide a 'rite of passage' in which students are welcomed, supported and assimilated into the campus. An exploratory, qualitative, case study design was adopted to interview 15 purposively selected registered First Year students who attended Orientation Week Programme and 2 research sites. The results found four dimensions encompassed in the Orientation Programme namely, Personal Development, Institutional, Academic and Social Orientation. The study concludes that orientation programmes should be implemented in phases, instead of the traditional once-off approach throughout the year and beyond. A more holistic approach which integrates academic and social orientation is recommended.

Key Words: first year student, horizontal, integration, orientation, transition, vertical.

1. Introduction

Transitioning of First Year (FY) students into Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been found to be most difficult especially during their initial first semester (Bowles, Dobson, Fisher & McPhail, 2011).To meet the needs of FY students, the majority of HEIs tailor orientation programmes that assist FY to adjust in the new learning environments (Deggs, 2011). Padgett, Keup and Pascarella (2013) confirm that orientation programs now hold a substantial position in HEIs with approximately 95% of colleges and universities offering orientation to their FY students. Laing, Robinson, and (2005) claim that orientation for FY students is often timetabled into the first semester. Orientation and transitional programs have a variety of purposes, ranging from conveying institutional expectations to new students (Bowles et al., 2011); feeling of cohesiveness among new entering students (Claborne & Kane, 2012); campus safety and security issues (Baxter-Magolda, King, Taylor, & Wakefield, (2012); reducing trial-and-error behaviour (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013); to tips on achieving academic success and graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini 2005). Deggs, (2011)'s concern is that these different orientation programmes address adjustment problems in general.

Transition and orientation programmes have historically been specialised having a narrow focus on providing a particular service (Mayhew, Vanderlinden & Kim, 2010); localised

(Keup, 2015); aimed at a particular group of students (Greenfield, Keup & Gardner, 2013); and students who are academically underprepared (Scott, 2012b). Strydom and Mentz (2009:61) note that the development of orientation programmes in South Africa appears to have been overshadowed by the development of bridging and foundation programmes. Furthermore, transition programmes in South Africa have been characterised as primarily administrative or transactional rather than based on meaningful connections, coherence and interdisciplinarity (Young, 2016). Yet, these programs defined and created from a perspective of history and tradition (Moja, Schreiber & Luescher-Manashela, 2014); do not necessarily reflect the increasingly diverse college student population (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). The approach to orientation programming is deficient in at least one major area; that those who may be neglected will continue to be neglected until they amass either enough vocal power or enough problems to warrant a significant change (CHE, 2016). Moja et al., 2014) refer to this type of constituent reaction as a responsive critical mass.

As a result students in the first year of university are likely to be confronted with challenges related to confidence, emotions, relationships and new-found independence (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013; Gardner, 2016:26). To that end, FY students are likely to look to external sources of authority as they engage in learning and making meaning of novel information (Baxter-Magolda, King, Taylor & Wakefield, 2012: 419). Young (2016) asserts that most institutions have tried some if not all of the different kinds of orientation programmes; but they offer them for smaller groups of students, often what is called "boutique programmes", rather than bringing them to scale. Often, students are passed from one transition programme to the next like a baton in a relay race (Keup, 2015). Yet, the impact of orientation programme on persistence to FY although it has positives, it fails to have an impact beyond 2nd year (Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2009:235). For Owusu, Tawiah, Sena- Kpeglo and Onyame, (2014:131) the impact of such programmes on student performance remains a difficult thing to determine as HEIs struggle with little success in transitioning students through orientation. Despite the broad recognition of student induction, HEIs struggle with little success in transitioning students through orientation (Owusu, et. al., 2014:131). Contrary to the wealth of literature that indicates the likely positives of orientation programmes on students' physical, financial, emotional wellbeing and supportive university environment as key to student success (Gale & Parker, 2014; Denovan & Macaskill, 2013); there are typical gaps found in the orientation programme content considered as the possible influences in the lack of long term persistence (Baxter-Magolda, et.al., 2012; Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This article sought therefore to explore the vertical and horizontal integration of First Year (FY) students' transition orientation programmes at the University of Fort Hare.

2. Theoretical perspectives on orientation
2.1. Tinto's success, retention and persistence
Tinto (1993) provides a foundational model for understanding student persistence in college. Van Gennep (1960) cited in Tinto (1993) believe that the process of transmission of relationships between succeeding groups is marked by three distinct phases or stages, each with its own specialized ceremonies and rituals. These so-called "Rites of passage" are referred to as the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation. As an extension to Van Gennep's work, Tinto used these three stages of passage as a basis for his reasoning on how a student becomes integrated within the institutional system over time. According to Tinto (1993) each stage serve to move individuals from youthful participation

to full membership in adult society, providing, through the use of ceremony and ritual, for the orderly transmission of the beliefs and norms of the society to the next generation of adults and/or new members.

The first stage, **separation,** which involves the separation of the individual from past associations, is characterized by a marked decline in interactions with members of the group from which the person has come. Students enter college with various characteristics - gender, race, academic aptitude, academic achievements, family socio economic background, and parent educational levels and different levels of initial commitment to the institution (Tinto, 1993). These characteristics and the initial level of institutional commitment thus, influence the passage of students through the separation stage. However, separations are likely to entail some form of parting from past habits and patterns of affiliation to the process leading to the adoption of the behaviors and norms appropriate to the university.

The second stage, **transition,** is a period during which the person begins to interact in new ways with members of the new group into which membership is sought. Tinto (1993) view transition as an ongoing process where levels of support should be adjusted accordingly. However, transition from school to university life is one of the most challenging tasks as new students come into a new unfamiliar environment. An important task, therefore, is to prepare them for their new roles to adjust to their new terrain (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).Gale and Parker (2014: 735) noted the three broad conceptualisations of transition within higher education specifically. These are:

• transition as induction;
• transition as development;
• and, transition as becoming

Transition as induction presents a view of the institution as being responsible for enabling students to make the academic and social adjustments necessary to participate fully in university life (Gale & Parker, 2014). On this view, a 'smooth' transition can be facilitated by a comprehensive and well-implemented induction programme (Greenfield, et al, 2013). However, focus on transition as induction necessitates short-term support rather than prolonged support. Scheckle (2014:77) perceives such short term induction as being a `once-off' or `train-and-release' programme. Yet, HEIs have a primary responsibility to influence a student emotionally, socially, academically, personally, and spiritually (Briggs et al., 2012).

The third and last phase, **incorporation,** involves the taking on of new patterns of interaction with members of the new group and the establishing of competent membership in that group as a participant member. During the incorporation phase students are required to become involved in the academic and social communities of the institution (Tinto, 1993:59). According to Young, (2016) a student does not necessarily have to conform to the dominant culture of the institution to become integrated or experience cultural connections but rather as Bowles et al. (2011) put it, join a 'cultural enclave'. Cultural enclaves are subgroups within the institution that share similar norms, values and beliefs to that of a 'minority' student's culture (Tinto, 1993: 60). For Laing et al. (2005) the term 'membership' would be more appropriate when FY students' engage in orientation because it allows for more diversity of participation.

Using Tinto's framework, many tertiary educational institutions have therefore responded to the separation and transition difficulties faced by first-year students by introducing orientation and other support programmes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These

orientation programs are designed to provide a 'rite of passage' (Tinto, 1993) in which students are welcomed, supported, celebrated, and eventually assimilated into the campus (Gale & Parker, 2014). In attempting to navigate successfully the stages of separation and transition and to become incorporated into the life of the college; students who are able to adjust to the new environment (Deggs, 2011), experience a sense of belonging to the environment (Claborne & Kane, 2012); and those who do not experience feelings of isolation (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013). Since transition is dependent on social integration and on academic engagement (Tinto, 1993); a more holistic approach which combines these two types of activities through institutional strategies to develop and manage the induction process is thus, inevitably.

2.2. The Notion of Orientation

Collins and Dodsworth (2011) view orientation as the institution's 'best opportunity to introduce a strong learning environment, build the foundations for academic success, welcome students and families to the campus community, promote students interactions with faculty and staff, and convey the values and traditions of the new institution. According to Strydom and Mentz (2009:62) orientation can therefore be a very powerful re-socialisation agent that can be used to develop and nurture a new campus climate. The offering of orientation has fluctuated from institution to institution throughout the years as HEIs began to recognize its importance due to the "influx of diverse groups of students whose needs were not being met by existing, piece meal orientation initiatives" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Strong arguments were made to intellectualize orientation which previously had always been generally informational (Greenfields et. al., 2013; Mayhew & Vanderlinden, 2010).

Once students arrive on campus, they are met with one or more offerings aimed at easing the challenges of the transition to university, such as: credit-bearing first-year seminars (Padgett, et al., 2013); programmes developing academic and personal skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005); or workshops designed to foster information literacy development (Scott, 2012b); outdoor orientation programme (Pickard et al. 2017); bridging programmes (Young, 2016); extended curriculum (Greenfield et al, 2013); adventure orientation activities (Vlamis, Bell, & Gass, 2011); and on-line Spiral Induction Programme (Laing, Robinson, & Johnston, 2005). Various familiarisation programmes have been advocated such as Partners programme and Buddy Program (Briggs, Clark & Hall, 2012). Student familiarisation programmes are important in helping potential students build their learner identity whilst Buddy and mentoring systems provide peer support for first-year students (Ibid).

3. Research Methods

The use of qualitative approach allowed the researcher to seek clarity and deeper understanding by finding according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) convergence and corroboration of the results from a variety of data sources. A case study design chosen is defined by Yin (2017) as design of inquiry used to develop in-depth analysis of a case, program, event or process. Since qualitative studies require a relatively small number of participants (Cresswell, 2012); 15 First Year students from six different Faculties across both campuses were purposively selected. Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Group Discussions were employed with participants contributing a wide range of domain descriptors and construct dimensions. Themes, patterns and common views

were analysed using thematic analysis. Ethical issues adhered to included voluntary participation, acquisition of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, protection from harm (Babbie, 2013).

3.1. Profiling the Research Site

Known as one of the historically disadvantaged universities and servicing more than 19,000 students a year, the University of Fort Hare's (UFH) mission is to give open access to the community members of which it serves (UFH, 2020).The institution has an objectives-driven, cyclic orientation programme which runs exclusively for a duration of one week for the new students or new intake after registration each year (UFH, 2020). The induction programme is designed to assist new student to familiarise themselves with the institutional history, expectations, processes and procedures; to refresh their knowledge of teaching and learning paradigms; to introduce them to the different support services; to provide opportunities for bonding and bridging with colleagues and important role players and to facilitate their adjustment to the university community as smoothly as possible (Scheckle, 2014:78; UFH, 2020).   UFH provide a range of student support services, through non-academic structures such as SCU, Health Care Education & HIV/AIDS, GBV, Disability Unit, Sport, Financial Aid Offices, Counselling Centres, Health Centres, and Writing Centres. Academic support structures and services offered include amongst others, TLC, ICT, Library, International and legal support (UFH, 2020).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Personal Development

With regards to Welcome Week events and programs FY students reported that they included a range of activities designed to both ease transition and acclimatize newcomers. According to Gale & Parker, (2014), induction presents significant benefits to organisations such as a reduction in the amount of time it takes for new incumbents to adjust in an organisation and to reach full working capacity. The term "induction" is generally used to describe the whole process whereby the incumbents adjust to or acclimatize to their new roles and environment. 90 % of the participating FY students mentioned how the orientations have boosted their confidence, motivation, willingness and determination in order to pursue their careers and reach their goals. For Gale and Parker (2014) student agency in the induction process manifests through individual motivation, their willingness to engage with learning opportunities, with other staff and students, and to conform to institutionally accepted norms of behaviour and action.

The Message of the Registrar (UFH, 2020) affirms that, "Student orientation programme is an important means by which the university prepares and positions its FTENs for a successful tenure at the university". For FY students who attended the programme all week, the orientation was seen as a highly-valued landmark in their transition, because in addition to knowing the institution, making friends and forming study groups, they were also given orientated academically. To reach first-year students during this week requires an approach that matches this level of energy and excitement while also thoughtfully addressing the circumstances and emotions that students may be experiencing (Collins & Dodsworth, 2011). **FY03** reports, *"As the programme unfolded from speaker to speaker, all I was thinking about was my future ahead and the journey I have to undertake to reach where I want to be. I could see the faces of my friends I know back from high school beaming with joy, interest and motivation."*

Although most higher education institutions offer orientation programs, many students are not taking advantage of these offerings (Scott, 2012b). While it is often assumed within institutions that students will use services because they are available, this is not always the case (Pickard, et al., 2017:294). Burgette and Magun-Jackson (2009:236) is of the view that students may be more successful in their college development if they are full-time and reside on campus and therefore university support staff need to avail themselves to help non-residence students to assist and support such needy students. This calls for a concern because FY might lose interest and enthusiasm in the institutional activities and thus opt out (Tinto, 1993). Utilisation of social networking platforms such as what's up, video calls, Facebook and Twitter, to keep in touch with and reach out to other students who were not part of the orientation was mentioned. **FY09** had this to say, *"On discovering that my friends were missing on something that was informative and interesting I sent them a what's up to quickly come and join the orientation. Whilst I was still waiting for them I then videorised some speeches and entertainment items and posted them on Facebook"*

Literature has shown that orientation programmes are not always useful for poorer students, who are often busy sorting out administrative details of registration, financial aid and housing during the first few weeks (Mayhew, et al., 2010; Greenfields, et al., 2013). In addition, FY students leave the orientation venue and thus miss the important part of the event, meetings or campus tours. **FY04** remarks,*"I missed some days of orientation due to late registration. I was also busy looking for residence and funding. We thought orientation is done at the same time with registration, if it was like that it would have saved us a lot of time and money. Instead of coming for one thing, we would be doing all these things at once, then wait for classes to start".*

The participants reported that at the Alice campus orientation did not take place due to students protest. **FY01** comments, *"I was looking forward to my first experience at varsity only to be disturbed by students protesting about exclusions and funding matters so there was no orientation for me. I feel so sad, really disappointed"*

Moja et al. (2014) noted that the South African higher education system is beset with problems of unplanned and violent student protests and it is perhaps remarkable how these have become a normalised part of many institutions' annual planning. The negative impact of such protests on an institution is overwhelming to an extent that student engagement and success are likely to suffer ongoing problems as a result of these upheavals (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). While institutions attempt to negotiate with students, protests are often the only effective means available to students to bring about change (Moja, et. al., 2014). Although FY students reported that they were initiated to Registration Matters, Finance, Accommodation, Code of Conduct and Student Counselling Unit; aspects on stress management, financial management were not clearly covered. Knowledge and understanding of key processes such as financial aid and online registration is narrow. Yet, supporting students to engage with activities that enable navigation of the institutional requirements of university life, such as course selection, funding advice, accommodation and orientation are referred to by Gale and Parker (2014) as first generation co-curricular activities.

4.2. Institutional Orientation

Orientation programmes have the potential to influence the campus climate right from the outset of a student's time on campus (Strydom and Mentz, 2009:63). At the start of the induction, the incumbents learn about the institutional policies, processes, practices,

culture and values, and their mentor groups are formed (Baxter- Magolda et al, 2012). Similarly, FY students were shown campus facilities however, they reported not to have been given opportunities to engage and interact with the relevant stakeholders. Students' perception of orientation was one of *"long lines, a lack of customer service, and overall disorganization".* Yet, (Claborn & Kane, 2012) argue that a well-organised orientation programme will aid students in dealing with anxiety by providing them with coping strategies like goal setting and planning during one of the most stressful times in their university life. By reducing insecurity and anxiety, orientation programmes are able to help students settle in faster and feel more at home (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013). These positive emotions may lead to improved levels of satisfaction amongst first year students, which in turn could translate into more productive students who feel part of the university (Tinto, 1993). **FY08** echoes, *"During orientation, we were quite a large number of first years. We felt special as we were easily identifiable as new students through the T-shirts we were given. The campus tour, though was a total disaster with students pushing and shoving in between narrow corridors. The campus tour was more like a "treasure hunt."*
Because of poor infrastructure students felt they were *"clamped, suffocated and tired from moving from venues to venue in long queues".* Similarly, Owusu et al. (2014:132) confirms that students who opt to participate in orientation are often faced with long queues at the designated venues for both orientation and registration of students. Tinto (1993) argue that on many college campuses the model for participants in programs is either "assimilation into the dominant group's activities or separation and creation of new activities marginal to the mainstream of campus life". Although FY students were oriented and shown campus facilities such as ICT, TLC, Library, computer laboratories; but FY students claimed academic study skills and time management were not well covered. However, an orientation programme focusing on how to access and use the library might be difficult for students who do not yet have an idea of what they might be using the library for and how library use may be important to their particular course (Collins and Dodsworth, 2011).

4.3. Academic Orientation
For Padgett and Keup (2011) maintaining an adequate and meaningful orientation is the responsibility of many departments across campus. Similarly, Burgette and Magun-Jackson (2009) acknowledge that there are also discipline-specific conventions that freshmen must engage with. Various ways of presentations in Orientation meetings mentioned included talks, motivational speeches, demonstrations, PowerPoint presentations, videos, campus tours and candle lighting in some departments. However, FY students acknowledged that faculty and department-convened orientation programmes tend to be overloaded, largely policy-related and context- specific. **FY15** alludes, *"The challenge is trying to squeeze in all this information in your mind. I feel like I am still in an incubator, an infant who has been fed with solid meat. These people know what they are talking about but it will take time for me to know, understand and make sense of all that was done and said in such a short period of time. I hope there is an office where I can seek clarities now and then. We were not given an opportunity to ask questions to the speakers."*
Both Briggs, et al., (2012) and Laing, et al., (2005) argue that a week is not a long enough time to establish effective social and peer support groups. Strydom and Mentz (2009) also remark that students are often quite passive during induction, which can limit the extent to which they can feel involved in the process. **FY09** affirms, *"After listening to that professor*

in my Department talking of how students easily become "professional students", "excluded", At-Risk" because of academic misbehaviours I started to shiver. We are not sure of what those jargon terms mean". Scheckle (2014) also notes that there is very little real understanding of the potential of induction and that this is particularly evident in the lack of personal action by inductees. Lewin & Mawoyo (2014) puts forward conditions of abstraction, namely, that a programme must be "cognitively adequate" and suited to its purpose; be cognitively economical so that nothing unnecessary is included and the "scope of the formalisation must be applicable to most of the situation". Given that the orientation is for a short period; FY students mentioned that information provided at orientation is often *"de-contextualised and therefore not absorbed effectively".* As a result of the de-contextualised nature of orientation and the information overload, some institutions have instituted what they call the First-Year Experience (FYE) so as to spread the various activities that have traditionally been provided during orientation across the first year (CHE, 2016).

4.4. Social Orientation

In his welcoming message the Dean of Students (UFH, 2020) alluded that "Institutions of learning no different from communities as students in both contexts are expected to be socially conscious, participate in Community Engagements and social cohesion". To that end, UFH provides a range of student support services to assist with social integration into university life and with the psychosocial aspects of engagement with academic life. These include various orientation programmes, counselling and career guidance programmes, peer support mechanisms within faculties and residences and other interventions related to life skills, as well as more practical services such as healthcare on campus (UFH, 2020). For Deggs (2011) psychosocial support is a key service to support students' wellbeing, especially in first year where many students battle to adjust to being away from home and to the demands of a university and its workload. A consistent theme was the importance of understanding the link between students' psychosocial and academic needs. Although students experience the transition into higher education in different ways, the change from a familiar environment into an unfamiliar one represents a period of disequilibrium (Tinto, 1993). One potential approach to helping students transition and adapt to university is to provide Outdoor Orientation Programmes (OOP) (Pickard, et. al, 2017:294). Based on student development theory, these programmes aim to accelerate psychological growth (Vlamis et al., 2011); thought to aid transition to university (Briggs, et. al, 2012). Social support and social cohesion was mentioned as provided to FY students by organising social events such as "Fresher's Ball" for them to meet with friends and peers and the university community at large. FY students felt that social interaction and organised activities will be very important for their welfare and social wellbeing. **FY11** had this to say, *"I can't wait for Fresher's Ball as I believe that in those social gatherings, I will loosen up a bit, show them some of my dance moves".*

During FY Transition phase, external changes related to the new environment as well as the new social life can make students experience emotions of homesickness, isolation, depression, fear of being ignored from the other students and feelings of not belonging in the new setting (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013). Feelings of isolation may be generated by the lack of familiar support networks (Claborn & Kane, 2012). However, a major benefit of the orientation programme reported was the formation of a peer group, consisting of students who entered university for the first time.

The Message of the Vice Chancellor (UFH Orientation, 2020) confirms also that "the quality of social interaction and social integration at a university are a key indicator of student success and well-being". This can reduce the concern about social integration in the university.Establishing supportive peer groups, tutoring and mentoring programs can have a positive effect on transition to university, sense of belonging, retention and skill development (Greenfield et al., 2013). Establishing friendship groups, as well as a sense of belonging to the university programme and peer group, is viewed as essential in aiding personal and social adjustment to university life (Tinto, 1993). However, students who are home-based rather than campus-based can experience greater difficulty in establishing friendship networks at university and integrating into campus life since they are likely to be less involved in university-based social or extracurricular activities (Gale & Parker, 2014).

5. Discussion of Findings

Since orientation is an effective enabler aiding the transition process; enablers to transition are considered as the development of study skills, tailored orientation programmes, the encouragement of participation, the utilisation of support services, the benefits of social interactions, and the creation of a strong culture and learning communities (Young, 2016). Therefore, orientation and first-year programs play a vital role in helping to establish relationships, and it is often during these initial interventions that students first meet peers, professors, and academic advisors (CHE, 2016). Thus, faculties, staff, and students who work with orientation and transition programs should provide ample formal and informal opportunities for students to begin to develop these relationships. The study found that what happens in the FY orientation is likely to have a significance on FY students' overall persistence and success, as it is a foundation for the rest of the study experience. This is in line with Greenfields et al., (2013) findings that success is more likely when focus is on individual "star" programmes and create an integrated constellation of student success programmes.

Speaking of first-year programmes, Scott (2012b) suggested that initiatives should be Janus-faced, looking forward and backward simultaneously. This then implies that FY orientation programmes, should be a special and integrated but not discrete part of the educational process. Vertically integrated programmes have coherence between initiatives, support campus-wide learning standards, and attend to student developmental and educational progression (Young, 2016). Moreover, the "vertical" aspect of the integration suggests that not only are students' needs attended to and supported at each step along the path; but that FY experience is coordinated with the experiences that follow (Tinto, 1993). An integrated approach to support structures, curriculum and pedagogy would improve the effectiveness of the delivery of student support services, generate efficiencies and economies of scale at the institutional level, and create a more engaging and satisfying educational environment for student (Young, 2016). Therefore, flexible, personalised or individualised comprehensive approaches to supporting students are necessary rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' orientation programme approach. It is thus the responsibility of student affairs professionals, faculties, and staff, to unite the two academic and social orientation with the help of other university support services.

6. Conclusions

Student Induction is designed to help in the whole process of transition therefore, it should be taken seriously, and as something more than the mere Orientation Programme.

Although the Orientation programme has been found to have significant and worthwhile positives towards FY persistence and success. However, orientation was found to be too formal, theoretical and abstract. HEIs need to have intentional evaluations of whether or not the current orientation models meet the needs of their respective student population. Areas of improvement suggested include prolonged term of orientation, integration of academic and social activities such as recreational activities, extra-mural and extracurricular. The nature of the programme needs to change from being context-specific, objectives-driven to participant-oriented through a process over time. The study proposes an orientation office that runs throughout the academic year focussing on career services, curriculum advising matters, academic and non-academic related issues for FY students.

7. Suggestions

Having an orientation office on a campus can symbolize to students that the campus is dedicated to providing support during their transition period and beyond. Not having a designated space for an orientation office or embedding such an office in other departments may impede these new students from finding the help they need to learn academic lessons necessary for succeeding in the university. Transition support must be prolonged, instead of attempting to address the challenges of transition in a "quick- fix", short period of time through orientation programmes. Academics should allow students to engage in their own processes of meaning making, and support them to negotiate challenges and opportunities along the way. It is recommended therefore that orientation programmes should have phase implementation, instead of the traditional one-off approach. The focus on FY orientation should be on finding ways to apply resources effectively through extended, sustainable and integrated student support that spans the entire university journey.

8. Limitations of the Study

The two research sites sampled were Alice and East London campuses of the University of Fort Hare with the exclusion of Bisho campus as it hosts part-time postgraduate students. This study was limited the small sample as it did not include all first-time students enrolling as first time entry (FTEN) and first year students. This study only included full-time students in their First Year undergraduate programmes. Interviewing was conducted with the sampled FY students who are currently registered and who attended and participated in the Orientation Programme. The population used in this study is largely homogeneous in ethnicity. Because of the limited ethnicity, this might affect the ability to generalize the results. A major limitation of this research is the research design and approach since qualitative studies require a small sample of participants. The study unearthed the general and overall approach of the orientation programme through the students' perspectives instead of an in-depth investigation of the impact and effectiveness of orientation over the years.

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