

# The impact of academic variables on the study experience of second year Hospitality Management students at selected South African Higher Education Institutions

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## Abstract

Students from all backgrounds are facing challenges when they enter the higher education system. Hence, the objective of this study was to determine the academic variables that impact on the overall study experience of second year Hospitality Management students at selected higher education institutions in South Africa. In order to identify the academic variables that could influence on the study experience of students, 228 participants from five selected universities completed a questionnaire. To determine the variables that impacted on the study experience, cross tabulations between categorical variables were tested for significance using Chi-square tests at the 5% level of significance. Results revealed statistically significant academic relationships for adapting to the academic workload ( $p < 0.01$ ), coping with the academic demands of the learning programme ( $p < 0.0001$ ), knowledge about the Hospitality Management learning programme prior to enrolment ( $p < 0.004$ ), academic performance of the students ( $p < 0.005$ ) and studying at their preferred institution ( $p < 0.01$ ). Universities therefore have to assist students as far as possible to ensure that they graduate successfully and not terminate their well-intended studies.

**Keywords:** South Africa, Hospitality Management students, Hotel Schools, study experience, academic variables

## Introduction

South African tertiary institutions have been experiencing major increases in student enrolments since 1990 (Bunting, 2006:96; Wolhuter, 2014:280). A transition from access to higher education for only certain population groups, to access for all population groups, have been due to population explosion, economic growth (increasing higher education affordability for more people), economic transformation (a production economy is being surpassed by a knowledge economy, that is where the production of new knowledge is becoming the driving axis of the economy) and democratisation with emphasis on the rights and empowerment of individuals (Wolhuter, 2014:278). The accompanying growth in student numbers increased the diversity amongst the student populace, hence an increase in diverse needs (McKenzie & Gow,

2004:107-108) due to the diverse cultural backgrounds, languages, social classes and educational backgrounds (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012:31). One of the key functions of segregation, under apartheid, was to make sure that education in black communities was inferior and limited. Although apartheid was brought to an end in 1994, the ramifications of the system mean that the entire education sector is still undergoing transformation and many students arrive at higher education underprepared for their studies due to their historical disadvantaged background. Underprepared students tend to come from high schools where there is often an absence of qualified teachers and career guidance. In addition, underpreparedness also relates to the language competency of the student, to speak and understand the instructional language of the higher education institution (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012:25-26). The lack of financial resources is one of the major problems faced by students and loans often do not cover living expenses, impeding campus accommodation that causes students to live further away from campus. Public transportation is expensive and often unsafe, and students that have to commute to university often live in accommodation that is not favourable to studying. These factors necessitate accommodating students in residences, but until 2009, student accommodation was not subsidised by the state. There have been students whose funds have been depleted by the end of their first semesters, and who have been forced out of the higher education system as a result (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012:24). These changes and challenges have had a significant influence on the experiences and success stories of university students (McKenzie & Gow, 2004:107-108). For any tertiary institution, not only the academic development of their students, but also their cultivation of a wide range of life skills and their overall well-being are major challenges (Wood & Olivier, 2004:289). In addition, it is also evident that university and its experiences is one of many areas that play an important role in the overall satisfaction and well-being of university undergraduates (Sirgy, Grzeskowiak & Rahtz, 2007:345).

In order to control the retention of students, a comprehensive understanding of the reasons why a considerable number of students terminate their studies is essential (Bennett, 2003:124). According to Des Jardins, McCall, Ahlburg and Moye (2002:108), there is a significant relationship between students' academic performance, social activities and the decision to terminate, or proceed with their studies. In addition, the satisfaction with university facilities and services will influence the satisfaction with academic and social aspects of university which in turn will impact on the overall satisfaction levels of the student (Sirgy *et al.*, 2007:358). As a result, universities are interested in ensuring that the study environment encourages their students to proceed in the successful completion of their studies thus increasing retention rates at the tertiary institution (Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali & Pohlert, 2004:256).

According to literature there are numerous post-enrolment academic variables such as, *inter alia*, the participants' academic preparedness for higher education, coping with, and adaption to the academic workload during the first year and the knowledge the participants obtained about the Hospitality Management learning programme before enrolment that could have an influence on the academic success of students and their decision to persevere, or terminate their studies, impacting on their overall study experience. In addition to the academic variables, student support programmes offered to the participants at university, the participants' academic procrastination, feedback received on assessments and the academic performance of the participants, the participants' preferred institution, perceived Hospitality Management as a first choice learning programme and the relationships the participants had with lecturers could all conceivably impact on the study experience of students.

Pitkethly and Prosser (2001:189) identified the transition from school to university as possibly having an impact on the study experience of students as the successful academic adjustment of students is important for academic success and eventual completion of the learning programme. The academic under-preparedness of students for higher education (McInnis, 2003:391; Wood & Olivier, 2004:289; Scoggin & Styron, 2006:112), could also result in unfavourable study outcomes (Scott, Yeld, McMillan & Hall, 2005:275) particularly in South Africa, where there is a mismatch between the school teaching system and higher education (Mumba, Rollnick & White, 2002:155). Higher education institutions are underprepared to manage the demands of their students (Jones, Coetzee, Bailey & Wickham, 2008:42) and are increasingly challenged with ways to prepare students for success in higher education and assisting them to become part of the educated population (Landrum, 2001:196; Grant-Vallone *et al.*, 2004:255) therefore higher education institutions are investing in support programmes to improve the determination of students to complete their studies (Allen, Robbins, Casillas & Oh, 2008:648).

Teaching, learning and assessment periods could furthermore contribute towards possibly impacting on the study experience of students, as higher education should promote cognitive (the ability to learn such as memorising new information), practical (skills applicable to the specific learning programme) and personal skills (such as verbal and nonverbal communication) development and widen a profound understanding of the learning programme content. Students can accomplish these objectives by connecting in an array of learning activities and carry out a range of assessments which examine the achievement of the outcomes (Byrne & Flood, 2005:115). However, the teaching and assessment instruction experienced while attending high school may not prepare the student with the appropriate study skills and learning techniques required for the more independent practice of learning expected in higher education (Cook & Leckey, 1999:169). Proper time management skills and study techniques for academic obligations are important aspects that will assist students to be successful in higher education (Jones *et al.*, 2008:42, 44). Additionally, respectable relationships between students and their lecturers play a vital role in the motivation and attitude of students towards learning and coping with the academic demands of the learning programme (Thomas, 2002:432; Bennett, 2003:134).

Literature indicates that the self-confidence and motivation of students towards their studies improve when they feel that lecturers are concerned about their study outcomes. Students feel valued when lecturers could recall their names, show interest in their work and treat all students equally. When students approach lecturers with academic problems, such concerns could be addressed at an early stage, before leading to study termination due to academic failure (Thomas, 2002:432). The lack of approachability, failure to listen and the lack of availability of a lecturer or a tutor are factors that could contribute to a poor relationship between the student and the lecturer.

A good relationship between lecturers and students is important, as the academic staff supports students with the integration into the learning programme and when the lecturer is supportive and approachable the student becomes more confident in the academic environment (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005:717-718). Students failing to successfully achieve the academic requirements will result in academic failure or termination of studies (Byrne & Flood, 2005:120) and a lack of commitment to the learning programme and/or institution could lead to a possible change in learning programme, study termination (Yorke, 2002:35) or transfer to a different tertiary institution (Thomas, 2002:426) all conceivably impacting on the overall study experience of student.

## **Problem statement**

The hospitality industry is looking to employ hospitality management graduates who possess a set of skills and competencies and who will succeed and excel in their careers (Gursoy, Rahman & Swanger, 2012:32). However, certain students do not adjust well to higher education as they have to adapt to numerous changes that could have a major influence on their intentions to complete their studies successfully (Wood & Olivier, 2004:289). Thus, a study was envisioned to determine the variables that could possibly impact on the overall study experience of Hospitality Management students at selected South African Higher Education Institutions. The results could assist these institutions in developing appropriate strategies to address these issues. These strategies may contribute towards students' needs being met, encouraging them to successfully complete their learning programme, supporting a lifetime learning experience and student development.

## **Research objectives**

The primary objective of this study was to determine the variables that could impact on the study experience of second year Hospitality Management students at selected South African Higher Education Institutions. In order to achieve the primary objective, the following secondary objectives were set:

- To determine the academic variables that could possible impact on the study experience of students as indicated by literature
- To determine the influence of academic variables on the overall study experience of students
- To make recommendations to higher education institutions regarding the identified issues of academic variables that could impact on the study experience of students

## **Research methodology**

The entire population of registered second year Hospitality Management students enrolled for a National Diploma in Hospitality Management at seven public universities in South Africa were decided upon for this study. The universities selected to participate in this study included all the universities of technology and comprehensive universities that offer a National Diploma in Hospitality Management. Second year Hospitality Management students were selected as the aim was to receive objective feedback regarding their first year as a student.

The head of department from each hotel school was approached for permission to conduct the research at their hotel school. Five universities agreed to participate in this study and two universities declined the offer. The participating universities are referred to as Universities A, B, C, D and E. The actual university names are not disclosed due to ethical/confidentiality reasons.

A descriptive quantitative study design was followed (O'Leary, 2004:11). The survey method was employed to collect data from the participants and utilised a self-administered, closed-ended questionnaire developed by means of an in-depth literature study. A pilot study was conducted prior to the main study on 10 Third Year Hospitality Management students at

University B. A sample of 10 students was selected as McMillan and Schumacher (2010:237) stated that a sample of 10 individuals similar to the participants of the main study will be sufficient for a successful pilot study.

The main study was performed during October 2012. After approval was received from each head of department, the co-ordination process began. Each Hotel School assigned a specific contact person with whom a date, time and venue for the completion of the questionnaire were organised. The universities participating in this study offered to facilitate the questionnaire completion due to time constraints. Questionnaires, accompanied by the instructions for the facilitation of the data collection process were couriered to the contact person from each university.

The questionnaires were distributed for completion during class time. The purpose of the study was explained to the participating students and confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. Participation was voluntary and verbal consent was obtained from the participants before the questionnaire was distributed for completion.

A total of 308 questionnaires were distributed and 228 completed questionnaires were returned. Table 1 indicates the number of questionnaires that was distributed to each university and the response rates.

The data were scrutinised using SAS/STAT software version 9.3 for Windows, ©2010, SAS Institute. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic characteristics of the data that were collected and was a source of summarising the variables. The aim was to present quantitative descriptions in a controllable and understandable manner (O'Leary, 2010:237). The results were portrayed by means of frequencies and percentages. As the variables that impacted the study experiences of students were to be determined, the applicable variables were measured against the participants' overall study experience. Cross tabulations between categorical variables were tested for significance using Chi-square tests at the 5% level of significance. Where the dependent variable was continuous, the influence of categorical independent variables was tested with one-way Analysis of Variances (ANOVAs) and post-hoc Scheffé tests.

**Table 1: Response rate per university**

<b>University</b>	<b>Distributed questionnaires</b>	<b>Number of completed questionnaires</b>	<b>Response rate per university</b>
University A	120	85	71.33%
University B	48	34	71.33%
University C	50	30	60.00%
University D	45	37	82.22%
University E	45	42	93.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>74.03%</b>

## Results and discussion

The results of the academic variables that could possibly affect the study experience of second year Hospitality Management students are presented (Table 2) and discussed below. Additionally, it was determined whether or not the variable had an impact on the study experience of the participants.

The academic variables include the participants' academic preparedness for higher education, coping with, and adaption to the academic workload during the first year and the knowledge the participants obtained about the Hospitality Management learning programme before enrolment. Furthermore, student support programmes offered to the participants at university, the participants' academic procrastination, feedback received on assessments and the academic performance of the participants could possibly impact on the study experience. The participants' preferred institution, perceived Hospitality Management as a first choice learning programme and the relationships the participants had with lecturers could all conceivably affect the study experience of the students.

Table 2 indicates that nearly 80% of the participants (79.5%) felt academically well prepared to study in higher education. Consistent with the above explanation a similar study performed in the Western Cape by Nel, Troskie-de Bruin and Bitzer (2009:980) observed that the majority of South African students indicated that high school did prepare them well for the academic demands of university. Although more than half of the participants (60.8%) acknowledged that they had an effortless adaption to the academic workload when they started their study career, nearly 40% of the participants (39.2%) did experience difficulty adapting to the academic workload. Smith and Wertlieb (2005:162) reported that an effortless adaption might be due to students expecting that the academic workload and pace would be faster at university than at high school, and therefore they had to study more on university level and they had to set goals to achieve academic success.

Based on the results in Table 2, 41.2% of the participants indicated that their knowledge about the Hospitality Management learning programme before enrolment was only "average" followed by 28.8% reporting that they had a "good" overview about the learning programme. "Poor" and "very poor" knowledge about the learning programme was reported by 22.1% and a mere 8.0% of the participants had "excellent" knowledge about the learning programme before enrolment. A study conducted in Turkey reported that many students chose to study Hospitality Management willingly, even without realistic knowledge about the learning programme, career opportunities and working conditions in the industry (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000:256).

Table 2 suggests that the majority of the participants (68.8%) reported procrastination of academic obligations at some stage during the academic year while the rest (31.2%) indicated that they never procrastinated their academic obligations. Findings from this study support the findings of Howell, Watson, Powell and Buro (2006:1526) who reported that students have a tendency to postpone the submission of assignments until the hours closely prior to the submission deadline, thus indicating procrastination in doing the assignment and not only in the submission.

Table 2 indicates that more than half of the participants (56.2%) were academically successful in all their subjects, while 43.8% were not succeeding in all their subjects. Both successful and unsuccessful participants indicated the reasons for their performance. The most popular reasons for not being academically successful in all the subjects cited by the participants were a lack of study time (20.6%), not studying enough (15.8%) and not understanding the learning material (10.5%). These findings were similar to a study performed by Chireshe, Shumba, Mudhovozi and Denhere (2009:871), where students indicated external sources beyond their control as reasons for academic failure. These sources included a lack of study time and not understanding the learning material. An important internal factor controlled by the students that led to academic failure was cited as not studying enough for assessments and examination periods. In the present study, the participants academically successful in all subject areas

reported hard work (29.4%), regular class attendance (19.3%) and good time management (15.8%) as the most important reasons for their academic success. This was in order by Chireshe *et al.* (2009:871) who found that academic success was mainly due to internal factors controlled by students such as working hard, regular class attendance and good time management. In addition, the Hospitality Management participants recounted academic stressors they experienced during the academic year as examination periods (55.7%), excessive homework that led to a lack of sleep (38.6%) and a combination of practical and theory subjects in the learning programme (25.4%). The above-mentioned results were comparable to numerous research findings. Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelly II and Whalen (2005:21) and Bland, Melton, Welle and Bigham (2012:368) found that students reported test and examination periods as significant causes that led to academic stress. Additionally, excessive homework (Dusselier *et al.*, 2005:21) and a lack of sleep were confirmed as causes of academic stressors (Bland *et al.*, 2012:368).

The majority of the participants (67.9%) implied that they had professional relationships with their lecturers at university, followed by 13.4% who indicated that they had no relationship with their lecturers. Nearly 20% of the participants (18.8%) were unsure about their relationship with their lecturers (Table 2). It was interesting to note that 76.4% of the participants felt that professional relationships with lecturers were important to assist with their academic success while studying. This was similar to the findings of Myers and Thorn (2013:486), who believed that students who were more motivated to communicate with their lecturers placed more effort into their academic performance.

**Table 2: Academic variables of the participants (n=228)**

	n	%	Total
<b>Perceived academic preparedness for higher education</b>			
No	46	20.5	
Yes	178	79.5	224
<b>Adapting to the academic workload</b>			
No	89	39.2	
Yes	138	60.8	227
<b>Coping with the academic demands</b>			
No	50	22.3	
Yes	174	77.7	224
<b>Knowledge about Hospitality Management</b>			
Very Poor	19	8.4	
Poor	31	13.7	
Average	93	41.2	
Good	65	28.8	
Excellent	18	8.0	226
<b>Student support programmes</b>			
No	74	32.5	
Yes	154	67.5	228
<b>Usage of support programmes</b>			
No	166	73.8	
Yes	59	26.2	225
<b>Academic procrastination</b>			
No	68	31.2	
Yes	150	68.8	218
<b>Feedback on assessments</b>			
No	22	9.8	
Yes	202	90.2	224
<b>Academic performance</b>			
No	99	43.8	

Yes	127	56.2	226
<b>Reasons for academic failure</b>			
Lack of study time	47	20.6	
Do not study enough	36	15.8	
Do not understand the work	24	10.5	
Other	96	42.1	n#228
<b>Reasons for academic success</b>			
Hard work	67	29.4	
Regular class attendance	44	19.3	
Good time management	36	15.8	
Other	134	58.8	n#228
<b>Reasons for academic stress</b>			
Examination period	127	55.7	
Excessive homework leading to a lack of sleep	88	38.6	
Combination of practical and theory in your learning programme	58	25.4	
Other	98	43.0	n#228
<b>Preferred study institution</b>			
No	55	24.3	
Yes	171	75.7	226
<b>Hospitality Management as a first choice learning programme</b>			
No	101	44.7	
Yes	111	49.1	
Maybe	14	6.2	226
<b>Relationships with lecturers</b>			
No	30	13.4	
Yes	152	67.9	
Unsure	42	18.8	224
<b>Lecturer relationships important towards academic success</b>			
No	17	7.6	
Yes	172	76.4	
Maybe	36	16.0	225

\*n#228 where the participants could either select more than one answer to the question or the responses to a question were limited to particular participants

Table 3 summarises the statistical significance of academic variables on the overall study experience of the participants. At a 5% level of significance, adaption to the academic workload, coping with academic demands, knowledge about the Hospitality Management learning programme prior to enrolment, academic success and studying at the preferred institution had a significant impact on the study experiences of the participants.

**Table 3: The study experiences of participants according to the various variables**

	Not satisfied		Satisfied		Very satisfied		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
<b>The study experiences of participants and perceived preparedness for higher education</b>								
No	16	35.6	17	37.8	12	26.7	45	
Yes	41	23.6	75	43.1	58	33.3	174	
Total	57		92		70		219	( $p < 0.25$ )
<b>The study experiences of participants and the adaption to academic workload</b>								
No	29	33.3	39	44.8	19	21.8	87	
Yes	28	20.9	54	40.3	52	38.8	134	
Total	57		93		71		221	( $p < 0.01$ )*
<b>The study experiences of participants and coping with academic demands</b>								
No	24	50.0	18	37.5	6	12.5	48	
Yes	34	20.0	73	42.9	63	37.1	170	
Total	58		91		69		218	( $p < 0.0001$ )*

<b>The study experiences of participants and the knowledge about the Hospitality Management learning programme prior to enrolment</b>								
Very poor	9	47.4	7	36.8	3	15.8	19	
Poor	14	45.2	10	32.3	7	22.6	31	
Average	23	25.6	39	43.3	28	31.1	90	
Good	10	15.6	32	50.0	22	34.4	64	
Excellent	1	6.3	5	31.3	10	62.5	16	
Total	57		93		70		220	( $\rho < 0.004$ )*
<b>Study experiences of participants and the awareness of student support programmes offered by the institution</b>								
No	22	31.0	33	46.5	16	22.5	71	
Yes	36	23.8	60	39.7	55	36.4	151	
Total	58		93		71		222	( $\rho < 0.11$ )
<b>Study experiences of participants and procrastination tendencies</b>								
No	19	28.8	27	40.9	20	30.3	66	
Yes	37	25.2	64	43.5	46	31.3	147	
Total	56		91		66		213	( $\rho < 0.85$ )
<b>Study experiences of participants and assessment feedback</b>								
No	5	22.7	11	50.0	6	27.3	22	
Yes	53	27.0	79	40.3	64	32.7	196	
Total	58		90		70		218	( $\rho < 0.68$ )
<b>The study experiences of participants and academic success</b>								
No	33	34.7	41	43.2	21	22.1	95	
Yes	24	19.2	51	40.8	50	40.0	125	
Total	57		92		71		220	( $\rho < 0.005$ )*
<b>The study experiences of participants and studying at their preferred institution</b>								
No	21	38.9	23	42.6	10	18.5	54	
Yes	36	21.7	70	42.2	60	36.1	166	
Total	57		93		70		220	( $\rho < 0.01$ )*
<b>The study experiences of participants and studying their preferred learning programme</b>								
No	30	30.3	41	41.4	28	28.3	99	
Yes	22	20.6	46	43.0	39	36.5	107	
Maybe	6	42.9	5	35.7	3	21.4	14	
Total	58		92		70		220	( $\rho < 0.27$ )
<b>The study experiences of participants and their relationships with lecturers</b>								
No	11	37.9	14	48.3	4	13.8	29	
Yes	33	22.3	66	44.6	49	33.1	148	
Unsure	13	31.7	13	31.7	15	36.6	41	
Total	57		93		68		218	( $\rho < 0.10$ )

\* Indicates a statistically significant relationship between the study experience and the academic variable

According to the results in Table 3, participants who felt academically well prepared to study at a university indicated that they were either “satisfied” (43.1%) or “very satisfied” (33.3%) with their study experience. Further analysis indicated that no relationship was found between the academic preparedness from high school to university and the impact it had on the study experience ( $\chi^2=2.71$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $\rho < 0.25$ ). In contrast to this it was reported that the academic performance during high school had a significant impact on students’ satisfaction with university, as students who were struggling academically at university did not experience such high satisfaction levels as those students who were better prepared to handle the academic challenges of university. These findings could be expected as students who were less well prepared for university were possibly more stressed by their academic demands, and as a result may have less time and energy to enjoy university life (Fischer, 2007:145).

Almost 40% (38.8%) of participants who adapted easily to the academic workload when they started university were “very satisfied” with their study experience; however, interesting to note,

is that the participants who did not report an easy adaption were “satisfied” (44.8%) with their study experience. The relationship between adapting to the academic workload when starting university and the impact it had on the study experience was statistically significant ( $\chi^2=8.14$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). This suggests that a successful adaption to the workload would have a positive effect on the study experience and vice versa. It was expected that adjustment to the academic workload when starting university would impact on the study experience as Credé and Niehorster (2012:158) found that difficulty in adjustment could impact the students’ enjoyability / enjoyment and satisfaction with the university experience. If students failed to adapt to the increase in the academic workload at university, they would fail academically. The workload determined the effort and there was a clear difference in the academic effort needed during high school and the academic effort needed at university (Bitzer & Troskie-De Bruin, 2004:123-124). It was also found that students’ stress levels were increased when the academic experiences were worse than what they expected. Students that reported being more satisfied with their experiences had lower levels of stress (Kreig, 2013:640-641). In addition, difficulty in adjusting to the academic demands had a direct negative impact on the academic performance of the students which, in turn, could result in termination of studies for academic reasons (Credé & Niehorster, 2012:139-140).

The results in Table 3 furthermore illustrate that the participants who coped well with their academic demands during the academic year were either “satisfied” (42.9%) or “very satisfied” (37.1%) with their study experience. A statistically significant relationship was found between the participants’ perceived ability to cope with the academic demands during the academic year and the impact it had on the study experience ( $\chi^2=20.06$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ). This suggests that when participants had difficulty coping with the academic demands throughout the academic year it impacted negatively on their study experience and vice versa. Sirgy *et al.* (2007:347, 349) found that the overall workload at university indeed influenced students’ satisfaction with their university experience. It was expected that the academic demands of students would have an impact on the study experience, as literature indicates that difficulty in coping with the academic demands at university had a negative impact on the academic performance of students (Sansgiry, Bhosle & Sail, 2006:6), which in turn could lead students considering termination of studies (Yorke & Longden, 2008:7).

It was not surprising that the participants who indicated that their knowledge about the Hospitality Management learning programme was “excellent” also indicated that they were “very satisfied” (62.5%) with their study experience. In addition, participants who reported “good” knowledge on the learning programme prior to enrolment were “satisfied” (50.0%) with their study experience. A statistically significant relationship was found between the knowledge the participants had about the Hospitality Management programme prior to enrolment and the study experience ( $\chi^2=22.31$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p<0.004$ ). This suggests that the participants’ knowledge about the learning programme before starting university had an impact on the study experience once they started studying. Yorke and Vaughan (2013:226-227) reported similar findings when they stated that increased levels of prior knowledge about a learning programme resulted in a closer match between the student’s expectation and experience, causing students to be more satisfied with their learning programme. Previous research (Yorke & Longden, 2008:2, 8, 20) showed that inadequate prior information about a learning programme impacted negatively on students’ decision to continue with university as they often lacked commitment to the programme when they felt that they had made a poor choice of programme. It also appeared that once Hospitality Management students (with limited pre-knowledge about the learning programme and industry) were exposed to the hospitality industry their interest in making hospitality their first choice of career decreased significantly (Jenkins, 2001:19). Therefore, Fournier and Ineson (2014:69)

articulated that students who had hospitality experience before they enrolled for the Hospitality Management learning programme at university were more likely to perform better academically than students who had had little or no work experience in the hospitality industry.

Results from the present study furthermore indicate that participants who were aware of the student support programmes offered at the university reported higher levels of being “very satisfied” (36.4%) with their study experience. However, 46.5% of participants who were unaware of the student support programmes reported being “satisfied” with their study experience. No significant relationship was discovered between the support programmes offered to the participants, and the impact it had on their study experience ( $\chi^2=4.38$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.11$ ). It was expected that attending support programmes offered by the university would impact on the study experience of the participants as Grant-Vallone *et al.* (2004:264) found that support programmes impacted positively on the students’ study experience. These programmes assist students to address issues around student retention, progression and success (Thomas, 2002:428; Jones *et al.*, 2008:53). Additionally, the support programmes assisted students to adjust better to university life, academically and socially, had a positive impact on academic performance, and supported students to persist at university and not terminate their studies before graduation. Support programmes were often reported as a reason that contributed to student success at university (Grant-Vallone *et al.*, 2004:255, 264, 268).

It is interesting to note that participants who indicated that they procrastinated their academic obligations were both “very satisfied” (31.3%) and “satisfied” (43.5%) with their study experiences. Further analysis indicated that there was no significant relationship established between the procrastination of academic work and the study experience ( $\chi^2=0.31$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.85$ ). It was predicted that procrastination would impact on the overall study experience of the participants as Balkis (2013:65) found that academic procrastination had a negative influence on academic experience satisfaction and academic achievement. It was reported that students with a high tendency in procrastinating academic obligations experienced more stress, anxiety and anger because of the limited time they had to complete work (Balkis, 2013:69). Reduced procrastination could therefore result in lower academic stress (Misra & McKean, 2000:49) and cause students to be more satisfied with their academic experience which could in turn lead to higher academic performance (MacCann, Fogarty & Roberts, 2012:622; Balkis, 2013:69).

Approximately one third (32.7%) of participants who received feedback after an assessment were “very satisfied” with their study experience, whereas, 50% of participants who did not receive feedback after an assessment reported being “satisfied” with their study experience. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between the participants’ received assessment feedback and the impact it had on the study experience ( $\chi^2=0.76$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.68$ ). According to a study performed by Devi, Mandal, Kodidela and Pallath (2012:274) feedback on assessments, coupled with self-reflection had a positive impact on improving and enhancing the students’ learning experience. It was anticipated that feedback would impact on the learning experience as Orrell (2006:444) stated that proper feedback was an important part of the learning and assessment process. It is a means of gaining clarity on how to improve assessments (Blair, Curtis, Goodwin & Shields, 2013:71), assisted with examination preparation (Devi *et al.*, 2012:270) and enhanced individual learning (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2002:62; Devi *et al.*, 2012:270) which could lead to improved academic performance in the long run (Devi *et al.*, 2012:273).

Table 3 furthermore portrays that academically successful participants were “very satisfied” (40%) with their study experience and the participants who were not academically successful in all of their subjects were more inclined to be “satisfied” (43.2%) with their study experience. A statistically significant relationship existed between the participants’ perceived academic success in all their subjects and the study experience ( $\chi^2=10.45$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.005$ ). This was supported by Svanum and Aigner (2011:673-674) who found that increased academic performance was associated with increased learning programme satisfaction. Students who attained more academic success in the past were motivated to invest more effort into studying and earned higher academic results leading to higher satisfaction levels. Therefore, students performing less well were more likely to be less satisfied. Both levels of university satisfaction (Gbadamosi & de Jager, 2009:877) and poor academic performance impacted on students’ decision to continue with their learning programme or not (Allen *et al.*, 2008:660).

More than one third (36.1%) of the participants who studied at their preferred institution were “very satisfied” with their study experience; however, 42.6% of the participants who did not study at their preferred institution reported being “satisfied” with their study experience. A statistically significant relationship was found when the participants studied at their preferred institution and their overall satisfaction with their study experience ( $\chi^2=8.63$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). This suggests that studying at the preferred institution impacted positively on the study experience. It was expected that studying at a preferred institution would not impact on the study experience, as literature indicates that studying at a preferred institution did not directly impact on the study experience, but contributing factors determined the satisfaction with the university. According to Sojkin, Bartkowiak and Skuza (2012:572) factors that contributed to the satisfaction of students who studied at their preferred university were social conditions and the professional advancement the university offered to the student. In addition, support from lecturers, learning programmes offered by the institution, reputation of the university and lecturers added to the satisfaction with the university (Gruber, Fuß, Voss & Gläser-Zikuda, 2010:115). Increased student satisfaction with the university of study led to increased loyalty towards the institution (Helgesen & Nasset, 2007:53) and a decrease in satisfaction with the chosen university was associated with increased stress levels (Kreig, 2013:640). Additionally, Tinto (1975:96-97) found that the commitment of students towards their institution played a significant role in the decision to continue their studies at that institution or withdraw before graduating.

It is evident from the results that participants who studied their preferred learning programme, in this case Hospitality Management, were both “very satisfied” (36.5%) and “satisfied” (43.0%) with their study experiences. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between the Hospitality Management learning programme as a first choice to study and the impact it had on the study experience ( $\chi^2=5.14$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.27$ ). This suggests that whether or not Hospitality Management was the participant’s first choice learning programme, it did not impact on the study experience. It was expected that studying a first choice learning programme would impact on the study experience. Al Ghanboosi (2013:520) found that students who were not studying their preferred choice of learning programme often led to them terminating their studies. When a learning programme met the expectations the student had prior to enrolment, course material was accurately described in promotional material, had up-to-date unit content, closely linked theory and practice and had useful and relevant learning materials and equipment, it impacted positively on the students’ satisfaction with their overall study experience. In addition, the learning programme furthermore influenced the satisfaction of students when teaching facilities and learning areas were well-equipped, learning programme was conducted by good teachers, employ interesting and appropriate teaching and learning methods, provide clear assessment requirements and relevant assessment tasks, had class

times and locations which made it easy for the student to participate and impart timely and constructive feedback (Grebennikov & Shah, 2013:311, 317). Students entering a learning programme to focus upon learning and to attain knowledge considered a learning programme more favourably because of what was desired from the learning programme, which was fundamentally learning and mastery of material (Svanum & Aigner, 2011:676). An excellent reputation of a learning programme was also powerfully connected with a student's motivation to perform academically well which encouraged students to complete their learning programme (Bennett, 2003:134, 138).

Table 3 indicates that 36.6% of the participants who were "unsure" about their relationships with lecturers were actually "very satisfied" with their study experience and 48.3% of participants who had no relationship with their lecturers reported being "satisfied" with their study experience. The relationship found between the participants' relationships with their lecturers and the effect on the study experience was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2=7.73$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.10$ ). The findings were similar to those of Fischer (2007:145) who determined that academic relationships with lecturers were not strongly related to the students' university satisfaction. Even though the relationships between students and lecturers do not impact on the satisfaction with the study experience, these relationships are important according to literature. These relationships are fundamental towards learning and managing academic complications (Thomas, 2002:432), as effective communication between lecturers and students will assist lecturers to have a clear understanding of why certain students are struggling academically. Once the lecturers have a better understanding they would be able to assist students to enhance their academic performance (Fraser & Killen, 2005:36-37).

## **Limitations**

The first limitation to this study was obtaining permission from the tertiary institutions. The process was time consuming and two universities rejected the invitation to participate in this study. Thus, the opinions of students from these tertiary institutions who rejected the invitation to participate are lacking. Secondly, the participating universities were limited in its scope as only selected comprehensive universities and universities of technology were represented, not including other institutions offering a similar programme. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to students from other institutions such as colleges and private hotel schools. Thirdly, even though the participating population ( $n=228$ ) was fairly large, the population only represented second year Hospitality Management students, excluding first and third year students enrolled for a National Diploma. Lastly, the survey concentrated on particular aspects of variables that could impact on the study experience, providing only a snapshot into student experiences at university in a specific field of study.

## **Conclusion**

Enhancing the quality of the study experience of students has become a priority in most higher education institutions. Positive experiences not only shape students' cognitive functions, feelings and behaviour, but also improve their satisfaction with the experience (Awang, Kutty & Ahmad, 2014:261). The study is of value to the higher education institutions offering the learning programme because it has established the academic variables that influence the study experience of the students. The academic variables included adapting to the academic workload, coping with the academic demands, knowledge about the Hospitality Management

learning programme prior to enrolment, academic performance of the students and studying at a preferred institution. All of the findings were similar to literature, except for 'studying at a preferred institution'. Literature indicates that satisfaction with the university of study would not directly impact on the study experience but that contributing factors such as social conditions and the professional advancement offered to the student by the university would rather impact on the study experience. The results of this study could hopefully enhance the study experience of Hospitality Management students encouraging them to successfully complete their well-intended studies.

### **Recommendations for future research**

The research could be expanded to other institutions in South Africa offering a similar learning programme. The findings could then be compared to determine if students studying at public higher education institutions in South Africa had the same study experience as students studying at colleges and private hotel schools. The population of students could include first and third year Hospitality Management students, to compare and contrast with the present results, and to provide a clear picture of student well-being and study experiences across their time at university. Future research could furthermore focus on fewer variables that could possibly impact on the study experience, as the questionnaire was quite lengthy. A shorter questionnaire may increase the participation rate. It is clear that academic variables had a significant impact on students' study experiences and this could be further explored in future research. The study expectations and study experiences of Hospitality Management students could be compared. As the participating universities in this study were located across South Africa, future research could focus on comparing the results from the participants at the different universities to determine if students had a different study experience when studying in different areas of South Africa.

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