



# Student's lived experience of university life - Academic Success and Failure in a Problem Based Learning programme,, South Africa.

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SEFAKO MAKGATHO  
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

# Outline

Background

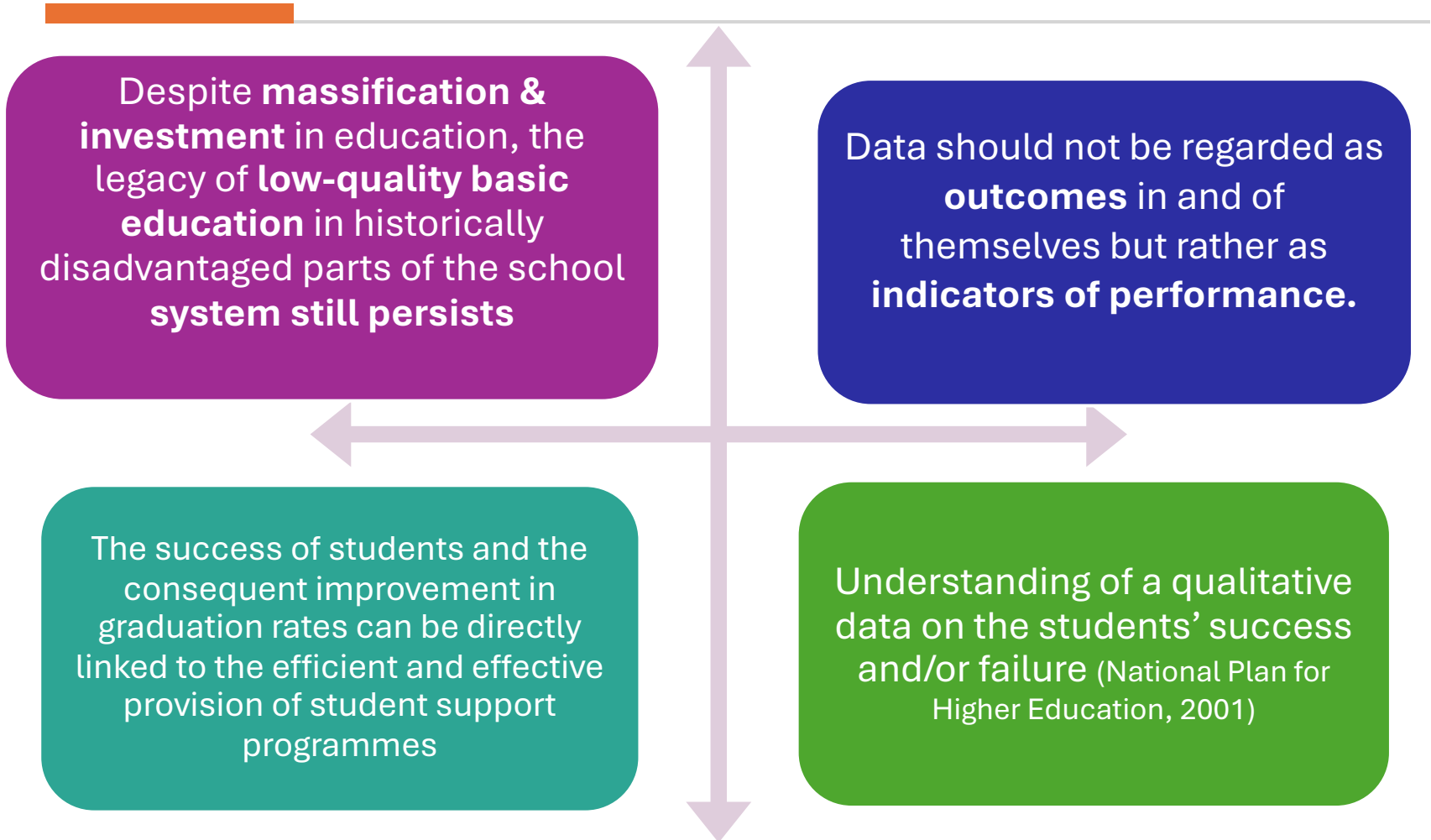
Aim

Method

Themes

Recommendations

# Background



# Background cont. – What & Why?

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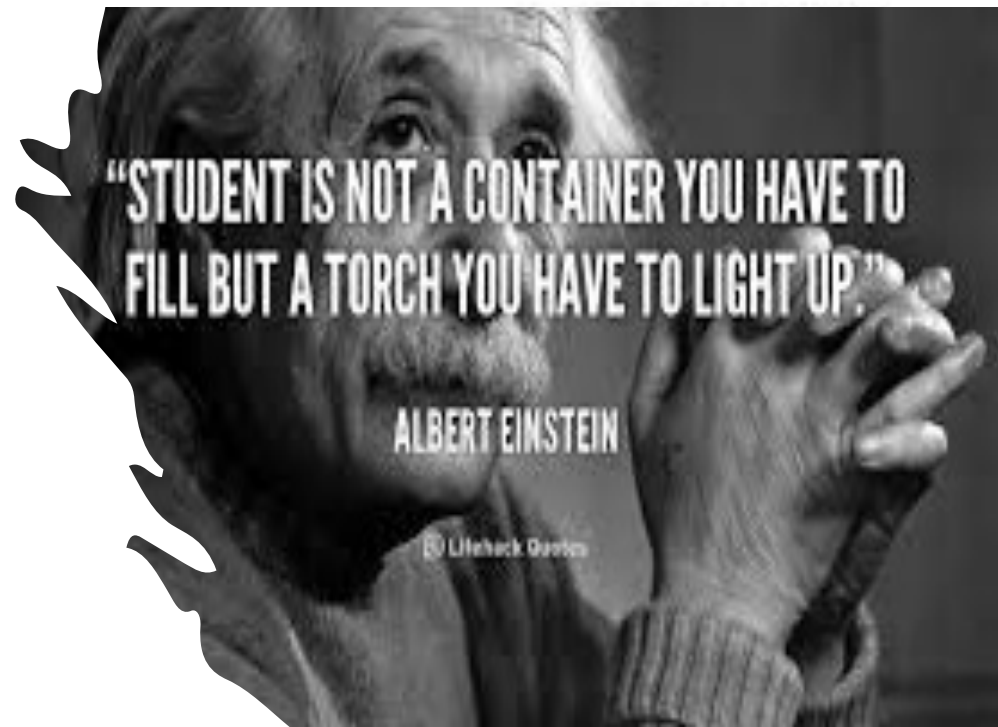
... beneficial in **enhancing the teaching and learning practices** to meet the **diverse needs of the students and improve student outcomes.**



... help inform **educational policies and practices** that better **support student learning and development.**

# Aim

- To **explore** and **gain** a deeper understanding about **determinants** related to **academic success and failure** from a student perspective (voice).



# METHODS

In semi-structured in-depth interviews

n=13 (2017)

11 students still in the programme +  
2 students who graduated in 2017

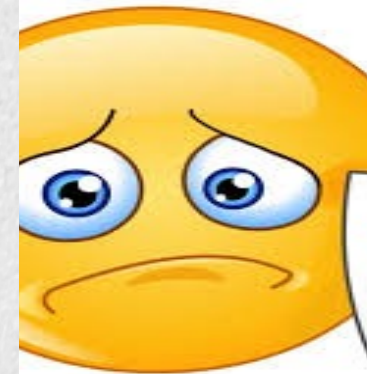
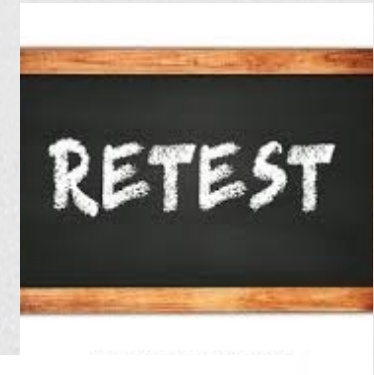
Participant – purposively selected

Ethical clearance: (MREC/H/173/2014:PG)

√ Passed

√√ Re-examined

x√√ Failed & repeated.



# Sociodemographic characteristics of participants



	Characteristics	Number (n=13)
<b>Gender</b>	Female	8
	Male	5
<b>Year of study</b>	BPharm 1	2
	BPharm 2	4
	BPharm 3	2
	BPharm 4	3
	<b>BPharm graduates</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Academic performance</b>	Passed all modules at first attempt	3
	Re-examination in one/more modules	4
	Failed and repeated one/more modules	6

# STUDENT SUCCESS AND FAILURE

## Students' lived experience of university life

### Institutional environment

#### Living conditions

- Distractions
- Temptations

#### Resources for learning

#### Extramural activities and facilities

- Leadership
- Pharmacy Students' Association
- Sports facilities

#### Financial resources

- Working while studying
- Limited family resources
- Sacrifice studies
- Personal sacrifices
- Obtaining financial assistance

### Teaching and learning environment

#### PBL methodology

- Small group functioning
- Workload
- Facilitator responsibilities
- Obtaining and using resources
- Learning styles and assessments
- Feedback and reflections

#### Work-based learning

#### Programme support for students

- Mentoring
- Lecturer support

### Life skills

#### Transition to university

#### Language of instruction

#### Study skills

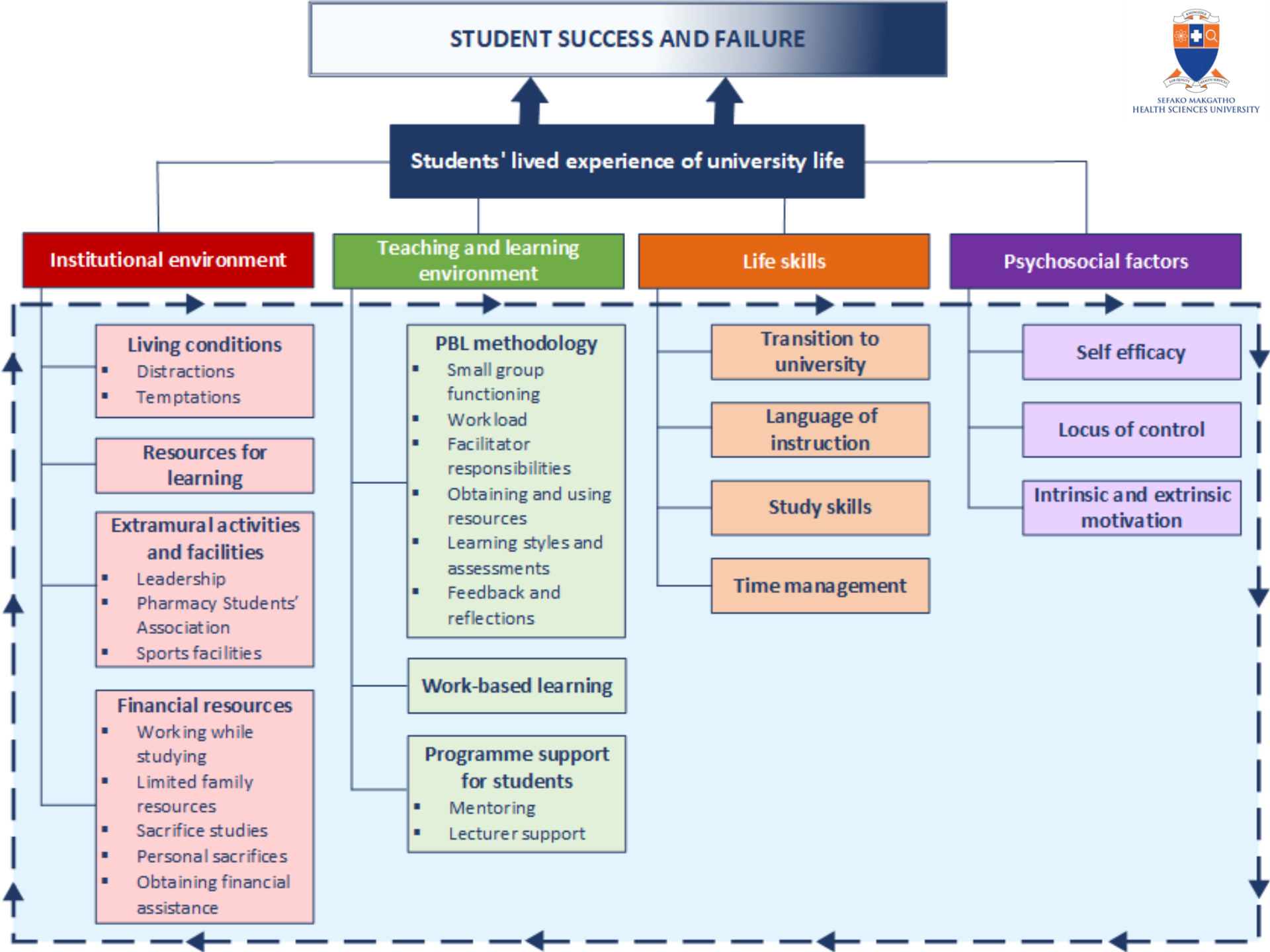
#### Time management

### Psychosocial factors

#### Self efficacy

#### Locus of control

#### Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation





# 1<sup>ST</sup> - INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT



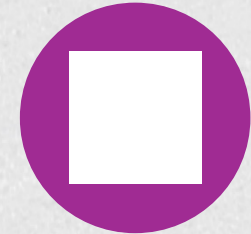
**LIVING CONDITIONS:** “... WE ARE MIXED WITH EVERYONE ELSE. SO, WE DON'T HAVE A PURELY PHARMACY RESIDENCE, SO THE INTERACTION BETWEEN PHARMACY STUDENTS IS NOT WHAT IT USED TO BE.” (P3, MALE, 4THYR, F)



**RESOURCE:** “... THE LIBRARY AND BOOK SHOP SHOULD IMPROVE. SOMETIMES THE BOOKS AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY ARE NOT AVAILABLE AND IN THE BOOK SHOP ARE OUT OF STOCK, THEN WE HAVE TO TRAVEL TO PROTEA BOOKSHOP IN HATFIELD AND BUY THEM THERE. SOMETIMES THE PHOTOCOPY MACHINES DO NOT EVEN WORK. THERE ARE ONLY THREE COPIERS.” (P8; BPHARM 2: FEMALE W; P)



**EXTRAMURAL ACTIVITIES AND FACILITIES:** “I ENDED UP JOINING THE SRC. I GOT A LOT OF RESISTANCE HERE IN THIS DEPARTMENT FOR BEING CHAIRPERSON OF TUTULAPS [STUDENT ASSOCIATION] AND SRC WHEN I WAS NOT DOING WELL ACADEMICALLY. I UNDERSTOOD THAT AND I GLADLY APPLIED TO STEP DOWN FROM BOTH POSITIONS, AT TUTLAPS AND THE SRC, THE YEAR AFTER, AND FOCUSED ON MY STUDIES.” (P7; MALE; GRADUATE; FAILED)



**Finance: Working while studying** “I PAID MY OWN FEES, SO I DID MY FIRST AND SECOND YEAR AND AT THE END OF SECOND YEAR I HADN'T PAID MY FIRST- AND SECOND-YEAR FEES. SO, WHEN I CAME TO REGISTER FOR MY THIRD YEAR, THEY SAID I WAS SUPPOSED TO CLEAR MY DEBT FIRST.” (P3; MALE; BPHARM 4; F)

# 2<sup>ND</sup> – TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

**PBL METHOD:** “... CHALLENGES IN THE SENSE OF, FOR AN EXAMPLE IT'S A SCENARIO. YOU HAVE TO GO ANSWER THE DLO'S YOURSELF. SO, HAVING TO READ AND THE LANGUAGE IS VERY SCIENTIFIC, THEN I HAVE TO DO THE RESEARCH MYSELF TO MAKE SURE THAT I UNDERSTAND IT – WHATEVER CONCEPT IS BEING EXPLAINED IN THE BOOK.” (P6; MALE; GRADUATE; P)



**FEEDBACK AND REFLECTIONS:** “... I COULD'VE PASSED BUT I DIDN'T. WHENEVER WE DO A REFLECTION, I DON'T GO. WHY? I KNOW I WOULD'VE PASSED, BECAUSE BY THE TIME I WENT FOR RE-EXAM, I GOT A CHANCE TO SEE MY ORIGINAL PAPER AND I REALIZED I COULD HAVE PASSED THAT PAPER, BUT I DIDN'T GO AND REFLECT.” (P7; MALE; GRADUATE; F)



**WORKBASE LEARNING:** “... SOMETIMES, IF I THINK ABOUT IT, WE HAVE A PRACTICAL SUBJECT WHERE YOU GO INTO PRACTICE, AND THAT HELPS A LOT WHERE OTHER PEOPLE FROM OTHER UNIVERSITIES DON'T HAVE THAT OPPORTUNITY. IF I TAKE THE YEARS THAT WE HAVE GONE THROUGH IT REALLY OPENED MY EYES INTO WHICH DIRECTION I WANT TO GO, OR JUST GAVE ME AN IDEA OF WHAT TO DO ONE DAY. AND I THINK THAT IS DEFINITELY THE BIGGEST HIGHLIGHT SO FAR.” (P5; FEMALE; BPHARM 4; F)

# 3<sup>RD</sup> – LIFE SKILLS

**LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION:** “...FIRST YEAR THE BIG TRANSITION FOR ME WAS FROM AFRIKAANS TO ENGLISH AND WHEN I LOOKED AT MY RE-WRITE PAPER, I MADE A LOT OF GRAMMAR MISTAKES. THERE WAS ESPECIALLY ONE WORD IN CONTEXT THAT WASN'T CORRECT. SO, BECAUSE IT WAS OUT OF CONTEXT THE LECTURER COULDN'T AWARD ME THAT [THE MARKS], BECAUSE IF YOU MAKE MISTAKES [IN PRACTICE] SOMEONE IS GOING TO DIE. SO, I THINK THE LANGUAGE BARRIER BETWEEN AFRIKAANS AND ENGLISH WAS A BIG DIFFERENCE FOR ME, BUT I HAVE ADAPTED NOW, IT SEEMS TO BE FINE NOW.” (P5; FEMALE; BPHARM 4; F)



**STUDY SKILLS:** “...THE ONLY REASON IT WAS EASY FOR ME TO FINALLY OPEN UP WAS THAT THE LECTURER PICKED UP ON THAT AND I KNOW OF ANOTHER GIRL WHO TOLD ME SHE WENT TO A LECTURER BECAUSE SHE WAS GOING THROUGH THE SAME THINGS I WAS GOING THROUGH. SHE TOLD ME SHE HAD SPOKEN TO A LECTURER ABOUT IT AND THEY MANAGED TO HELP HER. AFTER SOME TIME, THE LECTURER PICKED UP ON ME AS WELL. IT WAS THE SAME LECTURER THAT HELPED HER, AND I THINK SHE HELPED A LOT OF US. WE DON'T ALL TALK ABOUT IT.” (P9; FEMALE; BPHARM 2; R)



**TIME MANAGEMENT:** “... LACK OF INPUT IN MY STUDIES, BECAUSE OF THE BUSY LIFESTYLE THAT I'M LIVING. SO, I'M NOT FOCUSING ENOUGH ON CAMPUS.” (P4; MALE; BPHARM 4; F)

# 4<sup>TH</sup> – TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



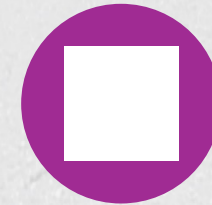
**PBL PEDAGOGY:** “... “IF YOU ARE NOT IN HOSTEL AND YOU ARE NOT TRAVELLING TOGETHER IT MAKES IT DIFFICULT. SO I EXPLAINED TO MY GROUP MATES, AND THEY AGREED THAT WE’LL MEET ON CAMPUS BUT SOMETIMES THEY ARE TIRED AND THEY ARE HUNGRY AND THEY DON’T HAVE MONEY ON THEM, AND THEN THEY’LL GO HOME. WE COMMUNICATE VIA THE WHATSAPP GROUP AND WE’LL DO GROUP WORK LIKE THAT.” (P5; FEMALE; BPHARM 4; F)



**LEARNING STYLE:** “... THE LIBRARY AND BOOK SHOP SHOULD IMPROVE. SOMETIMES THE BOOKS AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY ARE NOT AVAILABLE AND IN THE BOOK SHOP ARE OUT OF STOCK, THEN WE HAVE TO TRAVEL TO PROTEA BOOKSHOP IN HATFIELD AND BUY THEM THERE. SOMETIMES THE PHOTOCOPY MACHINES DO NOT EVEN WORK. THERE ARE ONLY THREE COPIERS.” (P8; BPHARM 2: FEMALE W; P)



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**FINANCE: WORKING WHILE STUDYING** “I PAID MY OWN FEES, SO I DID MY FIRST AND SECOND YEAR AND AT THE END OF SECOND YEAR I HADN’T PAID MY FIRST- AND SECOND-YEAR FEES. SO, WHEN I CAME TO REGISTER FOR MY THIRD YEAR, THEY SAID I WAS SUPPOSED TO CLEAR MY DEBT FIRST.” (P3; MALE; BPHARM 4; F)

# STUDENTS' VOICES – PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS

*SELF EFFICACY: "... MAYBE IF SOMEBODY IS IN THIS SITUATION (PREGNANT) SHE MIGHT NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO. A LOT OF THINGS ARE HAPPENING IN THE MEANWHILE, SO SHE MIGHT BE AFRAID OF APPROACHING PEOPLE. IF SOMEBODY APPROACHES HER, IT'S MUCH EASIER FOR HER TO TALK INSTEAD OF HER APPROACHING PEOPLE."* (P1; FEMALE; BPHARM 1; R).

**LOCUS CONTROL** "I THINK I'VE GROWN AS A PERSON, AS A PROFESSIONAL. BPHARM HAS GROOMED ME. IT'S BROUGHT MEANING TO LIFE. OUR PROGRAMME IS STRUCTURED IN A WAY THAT IT IS NOT ONLY ABOUT ACADEMICS, IT'S ALSO ABOUT YOUR SOCIAL LIFE, ALSO ABOUT RELIGIONS. YOU INTERACT WITH PEOPLE AROUND YOU. YOU END UP BEING FRIENDS WITH EACH OTHER." (P12; FEMALE; BPHARM 3; F)

*MOTIVATION: "I was more determined of where I had to go or where to end up. Another thing will be I knew that if I failed it wasn't just me who failed. So obviously my family also failed BECAUSE I would have failed them. (P6; Male; Graduate; P)*

# LESSON LEARNED

**ALTHOUGH THE UNIVERSITY DOES PROVIDE STUDENT SUPPORT IN VARIOUS AREAS, E.G. FINANCE, STUDY SKILLS AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING, STUDENTS ARE NOT ALWAYS AWARE OF THESE, OR MIGHT NOT HAVE THE COURAGE TO ACCESS THESE FACILITIES.**



**STUDENTS EXPERIENCE CHALLENGES THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAMME, NOT ONLY IN THE FIRST YEAR, EVEN THOUGH THESE FACILITIES OR SUPPORT UNITS ARE INTRODUCED TO THEM.**

**IT IS THEREFORE IMPERATIVE TO HAVE ONE COORDINATED STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME WITHIN THE SCHOOL WHICH CAN REFER STUDENTS TO THE NECESSARY SUPPORT UNITS, SUCH AS THE CUTL, TO SUBSEQUENTLY MONITOR STUDENT PROGRESS AND FOLLOW-UP WITH ADDITIONAL INTERVENTIONS, IF NECESSARY.**

**TO BE ABLE TO FULFIL THE SCHOOL'S AND UNIVERSITY'S MANDATE OF PRODUCING SKILLED MANPOWER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TO MEET THE CHALLENGES POSED BY THE DEMANDS OF THE 21ST CENTURY AND BEYOND, THE UNIVERSITY SHOULD STRIVE TO ALLOCATE FUNDING FOR RESOURCES ACCORDINGLY, TO INCREASE THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY OF INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS.**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The institutional environment should be maintained, including students' living conditions, sports facilities should be conducive for teaching and learning, and improved, where required.



The teaching and learning environment should be adaptable, useful and viable to meet the educational goals for all registered students



The library should have sufficient, relevant and updated resources available, aligned with the needs of all academic programmes, have regular workshops, or per request, to empower students on how to use the library and gain maximum benefits from the resources available



Sport facilities should be upgraded, developed and maintained to make a variety of sport options available for students, to ensure a student body that is well-developed in terms of physical, emotional, psychological, academic and social skills.



For students to **achieve excellent performance**, both **lecturers** and **students** need to exhibit a **positive mentality** to promote student and lecturer interaction.

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# CONCLUSION

- Despite having support systems available within the university, the findings showed that there
  - is a need for a **structured and formal support system** within the School of Pharmacy, working **in collaboration** with the existing **university student support units** and
  - most importantly **early monitoring of students' progress** throughout their academic programme is imperative.

**“ACCESS WITHOUT SUPPORT IS NOT OPPORTUNITY”.** (*Prof. Vincent Tinto at the Regional Symposia on Student Success from 19 - 23 August 2013 in Durban, Pretoria and Stellenbosch*).





***“Effective student support does not arise by chance. It requires intentional, structured, and proactive action that is systematic in nature and coordinated in application”***

*Tinto, 2013*

**"Student voice is so much more than just the leadership program...it's a way of informing curriculum and the wellbeing of students and staff."**

**VicSRC** Victorian Student Representative Council

**“VOICE AND CHOICE CAN ALLOW STUDENTS TO EXPLORE THEIR PASSIONS AND FEEL HONORED FOR THEIR IDEAS AND OPINIONS”  
-ANDREW MILLER**

**BE**lieve in  
**YOU**rself

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BPharm students and graduates for willingness to participate in the study and share their experiences

Supervisors

Siyaphumelela SMU Coach & organisers

School of Pharmacy for financial to attend





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*Working closely with communities on health issues*

**THANK YOU**  
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