

Retention of students: Challenges threatening part-time non-traditional undergraduate students in

Jamaica

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## RETENTION OF PART-TIME NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to identify issues which part-time non-traditional undergraduate students face as they strive to be retained in higher education. The voices, aspirations, emotions, and decisions of the students in addition to the perspectives of a dean, lecturers and a registrar were used to gain a deeper understanding of what the students faced and how they persisted. This research was guided by Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) Academic and Social Integration Theory and Astin's (1984, 1999, 2014) Development Theory of Student Involvement. These longitudinal theories are dynamic and assess students' retention decisions in a holistic manner as they interact with the academic and social systems of their institutions, thereby giving credence to this study.

A triangulation of data from the three groups of participants was used to confirm and cross-validate findings within the study. Triangulation as purported by Groenewald (2004), is an important process which provides a true insight of the phenomenon under investigation. Interviews were used to collect data from 16 students, (six in face-to-face interviews and 10 in focus group), one dean, five lecturers and one registrar. Results from the interviews present compelling evidence that the challenges faced by the students as they study can be the determining factor for their decision to leave or stay until course completion in higher education. The findings identified that the part-time undergraduate non-traditional students face issues such as financial difficulties, lack of academic support, lack of quality feedback, uncomfortable learning environment, lack of social programmes which could enhance social integration and feeling disconnected to their institution. Some of these challenges, especially the environmental, could be prevented if the institution and students' support system supported the interest of the students better.

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From these findings of the study emerged suggestions for relevant policy and practice implications and recommendations for future research. The study suggests that the administrators plan and collaborate with stakeholders effectively for the students as they should be included in the decision-making process of the institution. In short, the recruitment process should enable a smooth transition for the students, there should be reliable support services and contact with the administrators through the offices of an established evening administrative staff. Students should be provided with the opportunity of participating in social programmes through the innovative creation of modules geared towards social interactions. Finally, the modules for the students should be revised at least every five years in order to incorporate the demands of the market. This should result in enhanced students' empowerment, motivation to persist and eventually retention until course completion.

*Key words:* retention, higher education in Jamaica, part-time students

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

The occurrences of students attending higher education institutions and not completing their studies has been the focus of many studies. Some of these studies indicate that part-time students are less likely to have full retention than full-time students irrespective of their “demographic backgrounds, family characteristics, and prior academic performance” (Handel, 2009, p. 40). In Jamaica, many non-traditional, “older individuals – usually 21 years and above make a conscious decision to return to study” (Ronnie, 2016, p. 266) after being absent from the classroom for many years. They return as part-time undergraduate, non-traditional students studying for their first degree. A study by the University of the West Indies Jamaica, indicated that over a five-year period, 2010-2015, over 15,163 part-time students were enrolled at its Mona campus (University Office of Planning and Development, 2016), thereby indicating a thrust by students to improve their academic achievements.

The choice to return to the classroom is made based on the students’ need to achieve their degree which could affect a change in their social and economic status. Such choice however, is thwart with various militating issues which hinder the students’ continued retention until the end of their programme (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975, 1987, & 1993). The problem of students’ retention in higher education institution until they have graduated, is not unique to a student being registered as part-time in any specific higher education institution. The students all face similar issues which may hinder their progress as they study (Black-Chen, 2013; Priode, 2019; Stewart, Paterson & Ferguson, 2017; Thomas, 2020).

Schuster (2008); Stewart, Paterson and Ferguson, (2017) and Tight (2020) contend that one possible reason for student’s retention could be some students enter higher education without critically analyzing and addressing issues that might hinder their success. This inability to develop and clarify concepts could cause learners to become less confident of their abilities to

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effectively pursue their study. When this happens, they may become underachievers which make them despondent in achieving their academic achievement and finally drop out of their programmes. Bennett et al. (2012) further postulated that some students were unprepared for the austerity of higher education. Some students, according to Black-Chen (2013), in Jamaica experienced initial shock at the requirements of higher education. Being faced with challenges such as time restraints, family commitments, medical and emotional issues, such academic pressures further impede their academic progress. However due to their realization of the reality that students were facing similar issues as they, became encouraged to continue pursuing their higher education dream.

In addition, Schofield and Dismore (2010) stated that not all students have the skills set for all courses in which they are to enroll. Students matriculated for entry to higher education, but all were not prepared for the rigor expected to persist successfully in their programmes. Students encountered major setbacks “inclusive of finances, academic preparation and programme” (Stewart, Paterson & Stewart, 2017, p. 47) offering upon entering higher education which caused some to drop out. Students must be able to manage their time wisely to meet deadlines, able to solve problems, communicate effectively with their facilitators and colleagues as they collaborate for a successful outcome. They may become frustrated and drop-out of their programme of study.

The focus of this study was to investigate: first the challenges part-time undergraduate non-traditional students in one small higher education institution face as they study. Secondly, to identify the strategies this institution employed in ensuring part-time non-traditional undergraduate students are retained so they achieve success in their educational pursuits. Finally, to posit recommendations for improvement to the institution and policy makers and

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areas for future research. References will be made regarding foundation theories purported by Astin (1999) and Tinto (1975, 1987, 1988, 2004 & 2006). These theorists have related findings on the struggles part-time undergraduate nontraditional students face as they study. They further identified that irrespective of the challenges these students face as they study, the higher education institution and the students must strategize and collaborate in their effort for retention to be a reality. As such, emphasis must be placed on students' involvement, academics, and their social integration into the higher education institution, during their journey toward achieving their degree.

### **Problem Statement**

Retention of part-time undergraduate non-traditional students has been a concern for administrators, educators and professors in higher education institutions. Understanding the varied causes why these students leave the institutions is key for effective plans to be made and executed for hopes of increased retention. The administrators based on their intimate knowledge of the various programmes offered to the students and their responses over time, are more equipped in strategizing and implementing practices to keep the students retained to programme completion. This issue of part-time non-traditional undergraduate students dropping out before the end of their programme is not unique to any one country or institution anywhere worldwide. Findings from a study conducted in Jamaica by Paterson and Gordon (2010) identified that retention of learners in higher education varies in any institution evidenced in "how selective it is of its student population" (p.13). Students may enroll in any institution based on tradition or how attractive was the recruitment strategies. The institution on the other hand may accept students based on various criteria which may be some form of assurance that the students may stay until graduation.

Most of these part-time undergraduate non-traditional students face challenges such as working on a fulltime basis resulting in limited time for studying, family obligations which

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sometimes restrict study time and strained financial obligations. Additionally, in making the decision to enter higher education they face other issues such as health issues, and being ill-prepared intellectually for higher education. They however are resolute in their quest to acquire a degree. Based on the intention of this research to focus on the issues and challenges students faced as they struggle for retention, phenomenological research was ideal. Phenomenological research is a qualitative approach which focuses on relating the feelings, emotions and experiences of the research participants rather than a report of the researcher's perspective. Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, and Poole (2004) concurred that "the phenomenological researcher strives to identify the true 'essence' or meaning of the phenomenon, and present this as it truly appears to the participants" (p. 21). The design of this study responded to the attributes of a phenomenological qualitative research to assist in improving persistence and retention among part-time undergraduate nontraditional students in higher education.

### **Statement of Purpose**

Consistent with the statement of the problem, the focus of this research was to investigate the issues faced by part-time undergraduate non-traditional students as they pursue their degree. An understanding of the varied issues faced by students as they study can enable the administrators, academic staff and policy makers in creating new and contemporary means of keeping the students retained until the end of their programmes. The purpose of this study was to identify the challenges faced by the part-time undergraduate non-traditional students, in a private higher educational institution in Jamaica. Pursuant to the identification of the challenges, recommend possible remediation strategies, which may improve retention of the students.

### **Research Questions**

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The retention rates of students in higher education institutions have been a persistent cause for concern for administrators (Astin, 1994; Foster et al., 2011; Stewart, Paterson & Ferguson, 2017; Thomas, 2020). Students are faced with numerous challenges as they seek to participate in higher education learning. All these challenges can have negative impact on their retention in higher education (Fuller, Heath, & Johnston, 2011). The overarching question guiding this phenomenological enquiry was; what are the lived experiences of non-tradition learners, ages 21 years and older, in relation to their academic attainment and educational progress? This investigation was guided by the following questions:

- How do students perceive their experiences at the institution?
- What motivates students to enter higher education?
- What are the challenges students face as they study in higher education institutions?
- What influences students' decision to leave or stay in higher education?
- What can be done to assist the students to prevail against such problems?

Based on the information gathered from the interviews of the students, recommendations were made to the institution of higher learning, Ministry of Education and other stakeholders on retaining part time undergraduate non-traditional students in higher education.

### **The Jamaican Context**

Research has been conducted in various institutions from different regions of the world, such as Europe and America, on retention of students in higher education (Ishitani, 2006). Findings have indicated that irrespective of the non-traditional students' location they all experience similar issues, such as family obligations, financial constraints, and insufficient academic preparation as they attend higher education institutions (Bennett et al., 2012; Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim & Wilcox, 2012; Newton, Kim, Wilcox & Yeager, 2008).

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The Caribbean region, where this research was conducted, is no different in relation to part-time undergraduate non-traditional students experiencing challenges in higher education. Existing research in students' retention conducted by Paterson and Gordon, (2010) in Jamaica focused on the number of students who graduated based mainly on "a time-to-degree" basis (p. 12). This research did not focus on the factors which affected the students while they studied which would have affected their "throughput rates" (p. 11). Students' throughput would however be related to how they functioned throughout their period of study unto the end of their study, which would eventually have them being rewarded with their degrees. There are however varying factors which have affected students' negatively and delay or even aborted their expectations of having improved qualification and even a better quality of life. Black-Chen (2013) focused on the struggles women face as they return to the classroom. Even though this study had a feminist approach, it still highlighted that students experienced issues which would cause them to drop out, but they persisted. Staying in higher education has benefited them significantly where they feel empowered and academically fulfilled.

Hutton (2013) noted that students in Jamaica face the issue of financial hardship as they aim to access higher education. Hutton (2013) further noted that the provision of a strong national financial support for students in higher education could be one means of keeping students retained. Research on the factors affecting part-time undergraduate non-traditional students as they study in higher education has been done mainly in the northern hemisphere (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Thomas, 2020; Tight, 2020). This has left a gap for research to be conducted in Jamaica and the Caribbean region. Research in all regions of the world is crucial as they "provide the knowledge necessary for the social mobility and economic progress essential to societies across the globe" (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009, p. xxi).

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The experiences of part time undergraduate non-traditional students in Jamaica are similar to those of students in developed countries. Peters and Whittington, (2009) highlighted that students in the Caribbean and Jamaica do experience similar challenges to students in the developed countries, in their quest to improve their social and economic status through higher education. Many opportunities are available for students to access higher education in Jamaica. However, there are challenges students face as they access these opportunities which are the deciding factor in completing their studies or dropping out.

A literature review by Williams (2001) in Yorke and Thomas (2003) identified seven topical areas influencing student retention in higher education: “academic preparedness, the academic experience (including teaching, learning, and assessment), institutional expectations, commitment, academic and social match, finance and employment, family support, and institutional support services” (p. 66). Even though students may matriculate for entry into higher education they may not be fully equipped for the requirements and reality of such a rigorous environment. Thereby students may crumble under the pressure and drop out before programme completion.

Minott (2007) asserted that students can have continued retention in an institution when pastoral care is provided. Minott (2007), an educator in the Caribbean, recognized that students need quality feedback from facilitators and someone with whom they can discuss their problems. For students to survive the higher education environment they need guidance on how to effectively balance their family obligations, employment expectations, and financial obligations to their higher education institution. Students need coaching and mentoring to help them to endure the higher education journey, as they seek to contribute to their society after graduation.

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Higher education has the potential to be “a major engine of economic development” (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009, p. xii), which can enable any country to realize competitive economic development. Education of the masses is a global occurrence. Nations invest in educating their citizens as progressive students by providing funding for their education (Bryant 2006; Menon, 2010). This is done for investment returns expectations which becomes beneficial to their society overtime. There are however, nations which do not offer such privileges to the students. Students must finance their way through out their years of study. Here in Jamaica students can access higher education from one of the five universities, six teachers’ colleges, five community colleges, in addition to various skills training institutions (Frater, 2015). Except for one of these five universities, which tuition is subsidized by the government, students must totally finance their higher education. Even though that one university’s fees are subsidized, the financial burden on the students is quite similar to those attending non-subsided institutions. Having gained access to this government aided institution does not militate against students paying tuition. Such payments are quite burdensome for them as is for those attending non-subsidized institutions (Nkrumah- Young, Huisman, & Powell, 2008; Stewart, Paterson & Ferguson, 2017).

As the part-time undergraduate non-traditional students enter the higher education environment financial support is critical. Students need to be focused on their studies to realize excellent output. If they are distracted by their financial situations they may underperform academically. Students who successfully exit higher education do contribute significantly to their nations’ development. There is however the need for students to be assured their financial challenges will be addressed, whereby they can focus more on their studies. Loonin and Morgan (2019) noted in their study that when students are uncomfortable they may not persist. However,



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as students are encouraged to stay they ~~retained~~ realized there is the need for greater collaboration among lending agencies, students and institutions of higher learning.

In addition to financial support students also need a strong holistic support system for the duration of their study. This form of support however cannot be relegated to only the institution of higher learning. The students must become responsible and seek out communities of practice which can motivate them as they journey towards programme completion. Markus and Nurius (1986) discussed that students sometimes struggle with preconceived self while working toward their aspirations. Therefore, when students' self-concept and self-acceptance are truly formalized in their psyche, they are more likely to succeed as they understand the purpose of their goals and understand how it fits within their future plans. Some students however need the frequent validation of a support group to further develop their possible selves (Astin, 1984).

Recognizing the need of a strong support system for students, higher education institutions must be vigilant in retaining students (Stewart, Paterson & Ferguson, 2017; Talbert 2012). The result will be more part-time students could possibly be retained with continuous assessment and evaluation of the institutions' retention strategies. Such evaluations and assessments will inform the relevant administrators of the possible reasons why students drop out before graduation, how they can be retained and what can be done to help and encourage them to be retained.

### **Overview of Methodology**

This phenomenological investigation was conducted to capture the responses of students as they express the challenges they experienced as part time undergraduate non-tradition students. It also was intended to identify how they, students, became innovative with the intention of ensuring they are retained to the end of their programmes. An investigation of this

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nature would dictate that a qualitative methodology of collecting data would be more appropriate. Consequently, data was collected through face-to-face and focus group's interviews. Face-to-face interview was conducted with one dean, six lecturers, and one of the institution's registrar. The registrar's interview protocol was different from that of the deans and lecturers. The nature of a registrar's job is not academic as is the deans and lecturers. Six students participated in a face-to-face interview while 10 students participated in one of two focus groups sessions.

A triangulation of data was used in this investigation. It was used to strengthen and identify similarities and differences in the responses from the different group of participants. The study is concerned with the lived experiences of the students and the strategies they have utilized to be retained. It draws from retention theories and the perspectives of the deans, lectures and registrar of the institution how students contribute to their existence in higher education and the value of assistance received from the institution, family and support groups. The students were drawn from the cohort of third and fourth year part-time undergraduate non-traditional, while the deans and lecturer were from the education faculty at the institution. Third- and fourth-year students were chosen based on the focus of this study to identify their means of persistence over the years they have been studying, the challenges they face and strategies they have employed to stay retained. The data collected was first transcribed verbatim into a word document. Codes which then formed and themes identified in the participants' responses. These themes were then used to analyze the data as they responded to the research questions.

### **Rationale and Significance**

Previous research conducted in the Caribbean including Jamaica on students in higher

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education (e.g., Coates, 2012; Stewart & Paterson-Lipps, 2016) has been focused on accessing education in an environment fraught with liberalization, economic growth and social class systems. In the Jamaican landscape, there are three government aided universities, seven Teachers' Colleges, and many privately-owned universities catering to the needs of the undergraduate-non-traditional part-time students (Coates, 2012; University Council of Jamaica, 2017).

As the part-time undergraduate non-traditional students access higher education institutions they enter with varying expectations of the institution and themselves. Amidst all their expectations they are also faced with conflicting issues which could cause them to leave the institution before programme completion. The issue of retaining students in higher education institutions has been a constant challenge for administrators. Crosling, Heagney and Thomas (2009), identified that such challenges threaten the level of quality assurance of the institution. Wild and Ebbers (2002) concurred that retention of students "is significant for measuring institutional accountability and effectiveness is prevalent in this environment" (p. 503). Understating the issues, which affect students in higher education and planning how to address such issues can mean either success or failure for the institution and its programmes (Stewart, Paterson & Ferguson, 2017).

It is necessary that policy makers and administrators listen to the voices of part-time undergraduate nontraditional students, regarding issues that are indicative of what can be done to effect institutional and policy change. As asserted by Busher, James, and Piela, (2015), "some people assume that all students speak with the same voice, but student perspectives are multifaceted, shaped by the intersectionality of students' life experiences" (p. 300). The voices of students in higher education vary in many ways. They have different experiences, prior to

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entering and while participating in the higher education environment. Issues and experiences that can influence how they adjust and function in the new environment which can greatly impact retention (Black-Chen, 2013; Stewart, Paterson & Ferguson, 2017). Additionally, as administrators and policy makers recognize that students are their most valued customers in higher education, their voices must be considered for the future of the institutions. Students' voices can "be perceived as potentially threatening to existing institutional hierarchies" (Busher, James, & Piela, 2015, p. 300) or promoting their longevity. When students' voices are heard and addressed the learning environment among students, facilitators and administrators become more harmonious, and more students may be encouraged to become persistent towards graduation.

Many research studies focused on non-traditional students relating to retention in higher education have been conducted across the developed world (Altbach, Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; MacFarlane, 2012). It becomes necessary that more research be done on the growing group of part-time undergraduate non-traditional students (Office of Planning and Institutional Research, U W I., 2011; Paterson & Gordon, 2010; Stewart & Paterson-Lipps, 2016) in developing countries including Jamaica. This is important as, research is limited even in areas where there are large groups of researchers (Altbach, 2009), thereby creating gaps in the literature related to part-time undergraduate non-traditional students worldwide. As a result, there is the need for continued research in higher education in Jamaica.

Findings from this research, on the issues faced by part-time undergraduate non-traditional students and the strategies they used to ensure they stay for programme completion, will add to the already existing body of knowledge on the retention of students in higher education. This addition of data focusing on the retention of part-time undergraduate nontraditional students, will assist in answering questions related to the issues they face, how

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they addressed such issues and what the institution did in assisting them to be retained. This study will also provide information to educators, administrators and policy makers in Jamaica on the higher education environment and what can be done to have students being retained to graduation.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as in this qualitative research can be viewed as a data collection agent. My intent as a qualitative researcher was being sympathetic with the views of the respondents as they relate their experiences, hopes, aspiration and expectations. As the research progresses biases, assumptions, and prior experiences similar to the one under investigation had to be abandoned, or bracketed, to ensure the expression, feelings, and experiences of the participants were valid (Creswell, 1998, 2007; Greenback, 2003). As a researcher who has personally been afflicted with considerations of dropping out of higher education, while studying as a part-time undergraduate non-traditional student, I recognized that some personal biases and suppositions would surface as the research proceeded. I attempted to ensure that bracketing of personal biases and suppositions of the phenomenon was done (Creswell, 1998, 2007, 2008), to avoid having the results of the findings being invalid and not representation of the subjects under investigation. Bracketing, as discussed by Creswell (1998, 2007, 2008) and Crotty (1996), is putting aside my feelings, responses to and memories of situations while studying as a part-time undergraduate non-traditional student. This had to be done as best as possible so that there would not be any personal interferences when reporting the responses of my participants. As a researcher I recognized that investigating human experiences, it became difficult to totally abandon my preconceptions and personal experiences. Therefore, as Crotty (1996) expertly suggested, I developed strategies to maintain the validity of the research findings. I consciously thought of

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the grey areas where my biases would impinge on the findings and ensured they were clear. Furthermore, I journaled my thoughts, perceptions and emotions, so I could re-evaluate my position when issues, which could affect the research process surfaced.

The research took place within the institution where I am an adjunct lecturer. It is a small privately-owned institution in Jamaica, which strives to empower its students where they can make an impact in their society, Jamaica and the world. As I interacted with the students, my observations resonated with Tinto's (1993) findings relating to students' experiences in higher education institutions. I recognized they were encountering several problems, such as lack of finances to pay tuition and weak support from administrators, lack of scheduling quality time for studying based on work schedule and lack of quality feedback and quality support from some facilitators. These issues were not all being suitably addressed and there were signs that the situation was escalating where some students were thinking of deferring their studies for another year or simply dropping out. Being an adjunct lecturer and researcher did not impose a threat which could have ethical implications for the research process. The participants and I never had direct contact in classes or otherwise. I firmly believe that to arrive at a clear understanding of the students' retention experiences, as part time undergraduate non-traditional students, my personal experiences should not encroach on theirs, thereby ensuring the findings are not invalid (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Creswell, 2014; Wimpenny and Gass, 2000). As a result, students were informed of their right as research participants and the ethical assumptions necessary for the process involved in conducting a research.

### **Organization of the Study**

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This chapter introduced the key concepts, problem, purpose, research questions, methodology, rationale and significance, of the study. The remainder of this study is organized into four chapters. Chapter Two provides background and examination of scholarly research related to retention, retention theories, part time undergraduate non-traditional students, and students' persistence in higher education. It includes students' strategizing on how to survive the learning environment, while contending with personal and job-related issues, and their desire for retention to their programme completion. How to become motivated and develop various strategies in becoming engaged in their learning.

Chapter Three discussed the research methodology used to investigate what students do to be retained in higher education institutions. This chapter also explored the setting, context and selection of participants for the study, data collection procedures, method of analysis, ethical considerations, the phenomenological process, limitations and delimitations of the of the research process. Chapter Four presented data collected during this research using a phenomenological process of data collection. Chapter Five provided results, further recommendations based on the results, a conclusion and a summary.

### **Definitions of key terms**

The following terms are used in this study:

**Retention** – refers to students who are registered at a higher education institution and stayed there until they have graduated.

**Non-traditional Student** - refers to students who are older than 21 years old and have decided to return to the classroom (Ronnie (2016). These students are commuters who work and study part-time. Generally, they are more concerned about achieving academic excellent rather than being involved in or concerned with the social environment of their institution.

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**Social integration** – refers to the level of partnership between the students and the social system in the institution (Tinto, 1975). Social integration practices are evident in peer group interactions, co-curricular activities, and interactions with faculty and administrators.

**Academic integration** - refers to the structural fundamental systems of the institution. It involves students realizing expected norms based on set standards of achievements, in addition to students recognizing the standards and adjusting to meet such requirements (Tinto, 1975).

**Goal commitment** – refers to the level of commitment students display and their desire or willingness to work towards achieving their goals such as a degree (Tinto, 1993).

**Institutional commitment** – refers to how motivated students are to stay with their institution throughout the years of their study until they graduate (Tinto, 1993).

**Drop-out** – refer to the students who have not continued their programme and have left the institution before programme completion.

**Student Involvement** – refers to the “investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects or activities” (Astin 1999, p. 519) during their time in the institution. Eventually students’ involvement affects their learning and development and by extension integration in the institution.

**Persistence** – refer to the attitude of the students as they are determined to persevere until they have completed their course and graduate.



## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research was to investigate the experiences of part time undergraduate non-traditional students in one small privately owned higher education institution. The research also sought to identify the strategies the students employed as they studied in order to be retained, rather than dropping-out, until they have successfully completed their programme of study. The chapter begins with a discussion of research related to challenges non-traditional students worldwide, then those in Jamaica, face as they study in the higher education environment. The literature review provides background and examination of scholarly research related to retention theories, which will address the issue of retaining students and students' persistence in higher education. A discussion of the characteristics of the phenomenological paradigm is done to acquaint the readers with the methodology of choice, which forms the base for progression of the research and analysis of findings.

Finally, the chapter ends with a summary of the discussions done being cognizant of the implications of retention from the literature. Knowing the issues, which affect the part-time undergraduate non-traditional students in any institution is crucial for the administrators, policy makers and higher education governing bodies. In this competitive environment which higher education institutions exist, administrators, policy makers and governing bodies, would be more informed of how they can strategize and what to implement to encourage students to stay at the institution until course completion.

### **Non-Traditional Students in Higher Education**

The aim was to identify the need for additional research in the phenomenon of non-

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traditional students on part time undergraduate in Jamaica more closely. Not all students will immediately transition to higher education institutions after completing their secondary level of education due to varying personal reasons. When these non-traditional students return to the classroom (Jeffreys, 2012; Priode, 2019; Horn & Carroll, 1996; Richardson, 1994; Schuetzel & Slowey, 2002), they do so at different stages of their lives. They enter usually as a part-time, “financially independent, worked fulltime while enrolled, had dependents other than a spouse, was a single parent” (Horn & Carroll, 1996, p. 5) student.

There is limited literature on Jamaican researchers identifying students as non-traditional. In the Jamaican context these students are referred to as “part-time/evening college students” (Black-Chen, 2013; p. 41). The concept of who non-traditional students are, is not one which can be easily defined. As a result, the connotation of the term non-traditional is more of a semantical expression of students who return to the classroom to study. This semantic is subjected to researchers’ experiences, location in the world, epistemology and academic nature. Research has shown that irrespective of the various characteristics of non-traditional students fundamentally they did not enter higher education immediately after leaving high school and are older than 21 years old.

Ronnie (2016) basically described these students as “older individuals – usually 21 years and above – who make a conscious decision to return to study” (p. 266). Chung, Turnbull and Chur-Hanson (2007) expanded the description posited by Ronnie (2016) by stating that they are “mature-aged (over 25) students who delayed entry into university for at least 1 year” (p. 78). The disparity in definition related to students’ age continued with Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) who stated that their age is “23 or 25 years old at the time of enrolment” (p. 35). Jeffreys (2012) in her study on Nursing students purported that age alone is not the defining factor for

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students to be considered as non-traditional college students. They could be: “1) older than 25 years, 2) commuting to class, 3) enrolled part-time, 4) male, 5) member of an ethnic or racial minority group, 6) speaking English as a second language, 7) having dependent children, 8) having an equivalency diploma (GED), and 9) requiring remedial classes” (p. 9).

Ball, Alexander and Cleland (2020) expressed their perception of non-traditional students based on their study done in the United Kingdom. They described non-traditional students as being on the lower end of the social and cultural spectrum of society. These students reside in depressed areas of society, their intellectual achievement is low, their households consist of low income earners and they have been wards of the state. Such a description presents a very dismal picture of the students who have decided to enter higher education and improve their chances in life.

Some aspects, such as societal status, used in a study by Ball, Alexander and Cleland (2020) resonate with that done previously by Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011). It was identified by Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011), that non-traditional students are characterized by their societal, social and financial status. The students’ societal character incorporates their socio-economic status, which is generally disadvantaged students, cycle breakers by being first generation to enter higher education. These students are usually working adults maintaining self, family and relatives. The students’ employment status affects their financial alacrity and social status. Here students are more focused on improving their status in life which causes them to predominantly focus on attending university part-time. Usually, having a full-time job (which results in them being financially independent), delayed entering higher education. Sometimes based on their partial matriculation to higher education they have to complete pre-university courses. This they have to contend with while being single parents with dependents.

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According to Alshebou (2019) non-traditional students in Kuwait bear semblance to those in other areas of the world. These students are characterized by their delayed entry to higher education, they are usually parents, “employed, financially independent, attending part-time,” but they differ by “not having a high-school diploma” (p. 28). Thunborg, Bron, and Edström (2012) in their study of Swedish students identified these students as existing in working-class homes and are “women and students with disabilities” (p. 24).

As the writers express their perception of non-traditional students, generally they make references to the students’ age, social background, familial responsibilities, gender, financial background, time of returning to study and abilities. As the students enter higher education institutions they come with different characteristics, which do not categorically change the fact that they have made the decision to begin studying so they can effect varying changes in their lives. Within the context of this research non-traditional students will be referred to as adult male and female students ages 21 – 25 years old at the time of enrollment in higher education to study part-time, are employed, having dependents, commutes to their institution and are first generation to enter university.

Based on the fluid characteristics of non-traditional students, there are expectations that some students may not complete their course of study (Ball & Cleland, 2020; Bean, 2005; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Thomas, 2020). This however does not negate the fact that the phenomenon of students leaving institutions of higher learning before course completion has been a cause for concern for institutional leaders and policy makers for many years (Thomas, 2020; Crosling, Heagney, & Thomas, 2009; Lau, 2003). As discussed by Lau (2003) institutions can be negatively affected by the incidents of students not continuing to completion of their courses. Hovdhaugen, Frølich, and Aamodt, (2013) intimated that the phenomenon of students

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dropping out of higher education institutions is almost expected by the administrators. As such it is a natural occurrence which affects the institutions financial standing and their reputation.

Based on their studies done in Norway, Hovdhaugen, Frølich, and Aamodt, (2013) reported that students may first leave the institution because they do not feel a sense of belonging, or feel as if they fit in with the culture of their institution so they may leave. In addition to that, students enter higher education institutions sometimes initially unsure of their “choice of field of study and transfer between institutions or subjects to find the right education” (p. 170). The actions or decisions of the students to leave or stay retained has a financial effect on the institutions.

Institutions thrive on various financial agreements to keep their doors open. When students do not return to complete their studies, institutions may progressively lose funding and status. On the matter of reputation institutions which are known to have low retention rates are viewed negatively by prospective students and society at large. If the institutions are incapable of retaining most of their students, chances are their policies and structures are faulty and should be reviewed. Incidents of students who failed at retention however, cannot be profoundly linked to any specific area, because students enter higher education motivated by different stimuli. Lau (2003) purported that students leaving before course completion does not necessarily mean they have not satisfied their need for higher learning. Part-time non-traditional students who drop-out could be “exceeding their personal thresholds, they have failed to adequately establish integration of their studies with their lifestyle” (Lau, 2003, p. 2). As Ball, Alexander and Cleland (2020), Thomas (2020), Crosling, Heagney, and Thomas, (2009), Lau (2003), Schuetze and Slowey (2002), and Tresman (2002) argue, there are multiple reasons why students may not stay unto the end of their studies. As such it becomes difficult to generalize that all the institutions experience the same phenomenon why the students leave.

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Literature focusing on and defining the concept of non-traditional students also focus on identifying inter-related factors which could impact their being retained in or dropping out of higher education. While addressing the issue of the characteristics of non-traditional students, it becomes pertinent that focus should be placed also on the connotations of the concept retention. Various responses have indicated that retention is a concept which is usually defined contextually. Various researchers have documented their thoughts on retention. Hagedorn (2005) discussed that retention is the measure of the number of students who return to their institution yearly to their graduation. Crosling, Heagney, and Thomas, (2009) in a previous study discussed that retention is based on the institution's structure and policy. Such is the case where retention is viewed as how many students return to the institution the year following their initial entry. This does not indicate if the students who returned would have been at the institution the first year. The possibility exist that some students would have left the institution and were replaced by new entrants in the second year of their study. Borgen and Borgen (2016) agreed with previous findings that retention of students connotes a persistence of students staying in their institution until they have completed their course of study. At the end of their years of study they expect to achieve their new qualification.

Irrespective of the different expressions by the researchers relating to the registration status and retention of students, there is one other crucial factor which affect the students being retained. The experience of and being given the chance to participate in higher education had been aligned to the strong possibility of students being retained in higher education. Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman, and Vignoles (2013) identified that students being retained in higher education is also affected by their social-economic status. Students participate in higher education more if their status is higher than those who are struggling with various issues as they

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ascend higher education. With the burden of their socio-economic situation participation in higher education becomes challenging. Hayton, and Bengry-Howell (2016) discussed that retention of students is not only based on their stay in higher education. It is based on the level of their interaction and widening participation in the activities of their institution and their learning.

The findings indicated that even though students may drop out due to one or a combination of the following factors, some of them are beyond the parameters of the institutions. Students may drop out due to: being inadequately prepared for higher education, made an incorrect choice of courses of study which possibly resulted in them becoming demotivated and less committed to studying. Students may also be dissatisfied with personal or family matters and lack of finances. Students face institutional matters, which have a quite defining impact on their persistence. There are external or institutional issues which interplay with the personal issues which students in the learning environment experience. Students may have little or no participation in the affairs of their institution, minimal social integration with other persons in the institution and also experience challenges expressing themselves using their previously acquired language. This language can present a block in communication where students experience difficulties understanding the language used in the institution (Appleby & Hamilton, 2006).

Bean (2005) in his analysis of several empirical and theoretical studies purported that it cannot be generalized that all students drop out based on the same reasons as situations are specific to students' experiences. However, in general, there are additional factors which impact students staying or dropping out. He agreed that students do experience financial problems and have personal matters to address. Additionally, there are circumstances such as "bureaucratic

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factors, students' background, external environment issues, grades and academic performance, institutional fit, commitment and social factors" (p. 216) which must be addressed by both students and institution. Scaffolding for learners is important as they ~~learn the different cultures~~ become enculturated in their new environment. The new academic cultures would include oral expression, writing in an academic manner and learning to adapt to the new form of knowledge absorption (Appleby & Hamilton, 2006). Institutions provide an academic and social environment which encourages students to participate as they study. However, if the issues which impact students' progress are not effectively addressed, they may not be retained and the institutions will not fulfill their required mandate. Retention of students in higher education is essentially a collaboration of efforts by students and institutions (Cotton, Nash, & Kneale, 2017).

Bye, Pushkar, and Conway, (2007) contended that non-traditional students enter higher education with the intention to excel. They are motivated to achieve a predefined goal which proposed to be a worthwhile achievement for them. They recognize that to improve their economic, social and even familial status they need to become better qualified. Improved qualification is beneficial to the students' lives, their country's economy and the world (Thomas, 2020; Bowl, 2001). As non-traditional students transition to higher education learning environments they must contend with the reality of changes which will take place either in their academic, social or personal lives. Bowl (2001) after investigating the experiences and challenges faced by 32 non-traditional students as they transitioned to higher education, reported that the students felt a sense of disconnect from their institution. These students felt that their institutions, inclusive of institutional leaders and tutors, did not empathize with their "life circumstances" (p. 157). The students felt their life's challenges should be considered as important and needed attention as it would positively impact them by creating healthier and



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wholesome individuals suitable for higher education. This report of the students resonates with the postulations of Thomas (2020) that students need to participate in higher education as those who do not are more likely to drop-out. Hayton, and Bengry-Howell (2016) Green (2018) that the institutions benefit also from the students' widening participations and Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman, and Vignoles (2013) who identified that when the institutions upon identifying the socio-economic status of their students early can strategize in creating the environment for them to effectively participate and be retained in higher education. The students' life circumstances, jobs and families were important and cannot be ignored as they study.

While the students are desirous of the institutional address of their issues it is imperative that the students also decide to consciously adjust to higher education life for retention and success. Busher, James, and Piela (2015) intimated that for change to ensue, "people have to let go of the past, experiment with new strategies and behaviours, and become comfortable with emergent senses of identity, values and behaviours" (p. 300). This change can come by interacting with staff, colleagues and institutions which aids in formulating ways of learning for success. The time non-traditional students will invest in their work at the higher education institution is usually indicative of their perception of the value of their degree or "degree utility" (Brown, 2002, p. 70). Degree utility is evidenced in how students situate themselves within the learning environment, adjust, incorporate the assistance of their support groups and become involved in the social programmes of their institution, with the aim of being retained. There are, however, some non-traditional students, who do have a high sense of degree utility but did not persist, so they could be retained to the end of their programme. As researchers have indicated (Bowl, 2001; Maguire & Morris, 2018; Thomas, 2020) non-traditional students enter higher

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education institutions with prior knowledge, skills and predefined goals. They are usually focused on their goals for self-improvement and achieving their possible selves, pursuing them amid fears of failing, being haunted by past learning experiences and managing all that is expected of them by parents, spouses and workers.

In Jamaica the incidence of some students failing to stay in higher education is no different from other countries. Several studies (Black-Chen, 2013; Office of Planning and Institutional Research, U W I., 2011; Paterson & Gordon, 2010; Stewart & Paterson-Lipps, 2016; Stewart, Paterson and Ferguson, 2017), have been conducted in Jamaica on the issue of non-traditional undergraduate part-time students in higher education. Findings indicate students do encounter various issues which can cause them to dropout before graduation. Paterson and Gordon (2010) research, focused on the graduation rates of both full and part-time students in one university in Jamaica. The report discussed that the main factor affecting retention is students leaving the faculty within which they had initially enrolled when they ascended higher education. However, before they graduated they would have changed faculties and started studying a different course. This transition to faculties could be viewed as students dropping-out, when technically they are still in the institution but in a different faculty. This could be indicative of students not entering the institution with a clear idea of what they want to study, or they recognized that entry to the institution would afford them the latitude to switch faculties as they sought to find their best fit for their career. Dropping out does not always indicate learners leaving the higher education institution. As a result, retention rates of students are therefore not linear or continuous, as students will not always graduate within the faculty which they initially registered in their first year of study (Paterson & Gordon, 2010). The “time to degree measure” (Paterson & Gordon, 2010, p. 5) used to analyze the students’ retention rate was an invaluable

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method. Time to degree recognized students according to their current enrolment status.

Findings indicated that students, full or part time, retention is based on transference to another faculty, institution, financial or academic issues or sometimes dropout. With the implementation of additional student tracking measures, an institution can track the progress of its students and implement measures in reducing the number of those who drop-out.

The Office of Planning and Institutional Research (2011) also conducted a study of retention rates of first year students for the period of 2009-2010 at the University of the West Indies. The report indicated that irrespective of the institution having a high retention rate in comparison to 2007-2009, there is still the need to retain more students. Students lack retention based on their transferring to another institution, lack of finances, not prepared for higher education, and emotional personal issues. It was recommended that students would be better prepared for higher education if they were given “academic preparation, proper selection of majors, time-management” (p. 9) and support prior to beginning their study. Black-Chen (2016) reiterated that students do value their decision to enter higher education and gain their qualification. This accomplishment represents goal achievement and satisfaction. In contrast, as students aim for such realization of goals, they are faced with challenges such as “physical and psychological pressures, family obligations, and financial difficulties” (Black-Chen, 2016 p. 111). Ahmad (2019) also contended that as students enter higher education there is also the need for them to have soft skills which will enable them to be properly prepared for their re-entry into the working world. Ahmad (2019) further stated that there is hope for the students who might not have the well-developed soft skills as “universities will continue to play an integral role in preparing students with skills to meet the twenty-first century work world” (p.218). Irrespective of the level of students’ soft skills development, with the proper quality mentoring and learning

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these will emerge. Such challenges, even though daunting, do not cause all students to leave higher education. Students will be able to solve complex issues, develop their emotional intelligence as they become more adaptable to their environment (Ahmad, 2019). While the students are expected to perform excellently and persist to the end of their degree, there is the very essential need to have working relations between students and lecturers. Xiao and Wilkins, (2015) highlighted that relations are also built on the tacit concept that when both lecturers and students are committed to their tasks, the end result is students are satisfied with their progress and achievement. This interaction between lecturers and students should engender an amount of trust as “it is necessary for the dissemination and transfer of knowledge as it forms the basis on which academic communities function and thrives” (Annansingh, Howell, Liu, & Nunes, 2018, p. 1008). This is so as non-traditional students were noted to be more focused and persistent in improving their qualification. They became more proactive in seeking means and ways of having their aspirations of improving self, materialized. They economized on the time they had to be engaged in their lessons in order to succeed. This is evidenced based on the fact they are usually mature students who are usually focused, have various responsibilities and as such have little time and resources to waste.

### **Retention Theories**

An evaluation of research conducted on the reasons students may drop out of higher education has revealed several similar challenges: finances, family and social relations, health issues, cycle breakers and preparation for entry to higher education. Additionally, the disconnect between students and higher education administration and the delay or neglect in addressing such issues. The retention theorists focused on in this research have similarities and differences in their postulation with regards to the retention of students. It is recognized that each theorist in

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positing their findings on retention, is motivated by a specific school of thought or perceptions. This is so as their research was conducted with students from varied environment, culture and experiences. As a result, their diverse and rich source of information have provided invaluable reference points and framework for this research.

Of the literature posited on retention of students in higher education, the focus will be on the Development Theory of Student Involvement proposed by Astin (1975, 1984, 1999, 2014), the Academic and Social Integration Model developed by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1988) and the Theory of Self-Efficacy by Bandura and Gecas (2000). They have significantly contributed to the repository of research on retention and persistence of students in higher education. Their fundamental frameworks which have consistently and reliably informed studies on students' retention in higher education have also identified strategies which can be adopted and customized to suit a specific environment and also provide the necessary support to inspire students to stay until course completion.

### **Astin's (1984, 1999, 2014) Development Theory of Student Involvement**

Alexander Astin, an esteemed authority on retention of students in higher education, in 1975 published his findings of a longitudinal study which focused on the factors which contributed to students dropping out of college. Astin's aim for the research was to first identify, then focus exclusively on the factors presented in the higher education environment that greatly impacted the students' abilities to be retained throughout their course of study. After identifying such factors Astin suggested remediation practices to academic policy makers which would significantly improve students, persistence. Resultant from his study Astin identified that students who resided on the college campus, were involved in extracurricular activities, worked part-time on the college campus and attended colleges which offered a 4-year programme

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significantly impacted the persistence of the students. Astin recommended that students should be provided with academic advising as it caused students to be more focused on their goals and it also assisted in aligning students' capabilities or preferences to a particular career.

Astin's interest in students' persistence in higher education influenced his continued research focus. In 1999 Astin research highlighted a very critical issue. He purported that irrespective of any programmes an institution may offer to encourage students' persistence the ultimate decision is hinged on the decision of the students to persist. Students, Astin (1999) continued, must be deeply involved in their learning for them to be retained. Astin (1999) indicated that student's involvement epitomizes the degree or extent with which students are engaged, either physically or psychologically, in their academic work. Astin (1999) viewed involvement as a conscious effort of the students to effect engagement in their education whilst in higher education. Involvement incorporates behaviour, what the students do, and how they react to stimuli in their academic environment.

Fundamentally the Student Involvement Theory is an objective concept, based on the importance students place on their studies. The theory presents a framework which can be used as an evaluative approach identifying their perceived impact on the retention of the students. First the theory postulates that there is a perceived physical and psychological attachment or investment which the students have entrusted in their environment. This attachment cannot be linked to any one specific aspect of the students' lives. It could be as wide and with other persons on the campus, to as direct as the strategies they have implemented in studying for an examination or completing a project. This personal attachment to their higher education experience motivates students to work hard at achieving their academic goals.

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Students' involvement continued Astin (1999), is predominantly based on the students' decision to be focus on achievement. Their focus is evident in the number of hours they place in completing tasks and studying against having a cursory relationship with their work. The amount of work a student invests in their study is usually tantamount to the outcome or result at the end of their programme. A further analysis of Astin's (1999) theory identified his Input-Environment-Output, I-E-O strategy for retention, which emphasized that the students do have control over their level of success. Students do not enter higher education institutions as blank slates. They input, or enter higher education with learned behaviours, prior knowledge, skills, competency, ambitions, beliefs, cultural norms and family traditions. This can hinder or boost adjusting to their new educational environment and excelling. Input influences both the environment and output. Environment refers to what the students experience during their time of engagement in the institution. The new environment inclusive of new programmes, curriculum, interacting with faculty and other students can affect the students emotionally, mentally and intellectually either positively or negatively. As the institution leaders become more sensitive to the needs of the students, they should provide a more comfortable learning environment. Output focuses on the achievements of the students gained at the end of their programmes. Each aspect of the I-E-O are interrelated and affect the outcome of each other and stresses the need for students to be involved in their learning, socializing in their environment while committing quality time to their studies. When these principles or behaviours are followed there should be successful outcome and students are retained until the end of their programme. As a result, students' success is also heavily reliant on their involvement in their academic development (Astin,1999).

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Astin (1984) purported, that as students interact and socialize with other students in their institutions, they are responsible for their learning. They should be willing to adjust to their higher education environment and finally ensure they persist, achieve their goals and complete their degrees. Students' involvement in their learning can be evidenced in their ability to analyzing information, finding relevant information to answer and defend choices relevant to their course requirements, which impact their output. What students accomplish at the end of their study period is indicative of the amount of work and energy placed in the learning process, in addition to how they interacted with their environment. Students cannot expect to enter higher education and be reliant on pedagogues, institutions and support group only to succeed (Astin, & Astin, 1992; Cote & Levine, 1997; Stewart, Paterson & Ferguson, 2017; Thomas, 2020). They must be vigilant and stalwart in their quest for excellent output. Consequently, non-traditional undergraduate part-time students should rely on the trifecta, I-E-O, equitably to stay retained in higher education until graduation.

Students enter higher education institutions and expect support and guidance. As a result, as intimated by Astin (1999), students' persistence is also impacted by the strength of the institution's policies and practices. Based on the strength, relevance and quality of the policies and practices, the students could be retained as they are encouraged to become more intimately involved in their work throughout their period of study. Astin (1975, 1985, 1999) therefore encouraged the higher education institutions to reassess, re-evaluate their policies and practices. Further to that they should also place more intensive focus on students who are procrastinators, reticent, and unprepared for the rigors of studying in order to encourage closer involvement in every area of their academic life.

**Tinto 's (1993, 1988, 1987, 1975), Theory of Student Departure**



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Tinto (1975, 1993) in his Theory of Student Departure asserted that the academic environment which students experience in higher education institutions are more impactful on students' decision to persist to the end of their programmes. Tinto (1975, 1993) did not negate the impact students' prior experiences upon entering higher education has on their retention, but emphasized that the learning environment has a greater influence. Tinto suggested that the institutions have the responsibility of ensuring students are comfortable in the learning environment, and as such there should be a partnership between students and institution.

Tinto noted that policies and practices are critical for students' persistence. In his study he recognized that for open-enrollment institutions the students tend not to stay enrolled. This was far lower than the rates of persistence in selective entrance criteria (Tinto, 1993) institutions. Such disparity for the open enrollment institution was based on a number of factors. Students did not persist because the matriculation process for such institutions were easy to access. Where as in the selective entrance institutions they experienced strict and rigorous matriculation process which was indicative of the quality of education they would experience. Students in the selective entrance institutions were more adept to staying enrolled.

Another finding in his study of students' departure, Tinto (1993) identified that students are usually unsure of what they would pursue as they study, or they are very unsure of their career paths and future plans. Students also face social issues such as acclimatizing to the new environment socially and academically which may also result in their being isolated and feeling as misfits and unwanted in the institution. As a result, the first year of college is indicative of a students' desire to persist or leave the institution. Further to their feelings of insecurity related to why they are in the institution, students are also bombarded with external issues such as obligations and financial conditions. Tinto intimated that the students who have a defined goal

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or idea of what they aspire towards achieving, they would persist until programme completion.

This assertion is of particular interest to this study as it is aligned to the research question of what motivates students to enter higher education.

As students enter higher education institutions, they come motivated either intrinsically or extrinsically. Such motivation is critical to ensure parity in support for the students as they study. Tinto (1993) further intimated that some students enter higher education based on the encouragement of family members who have not had the opportunity to do so. As such, these vicarious experiences do not augur well for some students because they were not living their dreams but that of their relatives and so they eventually leave the institution. They did not feel accomplished or satisfied with the courses they are pursuing. Irrespective of the reasons students enter higher education institutions Tinto suggested that the institution should provide a climate conducive for learning. Tinto (1987) noted “it is the interplay between the individual’s commitment to the goal of college completion and his commitment to the institution that determines whether or not the individual decides to drop out” (p. 6). This is inclusive of open avenues of communication between faculty and students.

Tinto (1993) stated, "climates that discourage and discriminate, however subtly, are also climates that give rise to student failure and departure" (p. 74). When this climate is discouraging students are prone to becoming less patriotic and committed to their institution, thereby deciding to drop-out. This landmark theory posited by Tinto identified that students should enter higher education motivated to pursue their individual goals. If they are unsure of their career goals the institution should assist them in identifying them. Thereby fostering a student-institution environment which positively impact persistence. As a result, as the

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institutions become more aware of the student competencies and academic goals, they should use such information to create and implement suitable courses of actions to encourage persistence.

### **Bean and Eaton (2000) Theory of Self-Efficacy**

Bean and Eaton (2000) after analyzing the Student Departure model proposed by Tinto (1998) agreed with its principles and noted its relevance to students' persistence. They identified that the model however, had a gap related to the psychological perspective of the students. As a result, Bean and Eaton (2000) purported that students' retention has a psychological perspective which is very critical for the students' achievement of goals. They decided to use Tinto's model as the fundamental concept upon which they build their psychological model. In one of his work Bean (2005) discussed that studies related to students have a common theme related to students' behaviour. Students' behaviour is closely linked to their attitudes which affect their thought processes and decisions made about their life's choices.

Bean and Eaton (2000) discussed that based on their observation of students interacting with each other and the behaviours displayed behaviours are definitely psychologically motivated. As such when students withdraw from higher education institutions this is a behaviour which is motivated by psychological stimuli. This psychological model of Bean and Eaton (2000) focuses on four theoretical principles; students' background or experiences before entering higher education, students' experiences at their institutions, student's values and students' attitudes, which are used to corroborate that students' retention is psychologically linked. Bean and Eaton's (2000) model designates that students enter higher education with unique characteristics, expectations (either those enforced by family or personal), support or lack of support from family members, which would impact their higher education experiences.

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Self-efficacy therefore as posited by Bean and Eaton (2000) influences the image the students have of themselves. A positive level of self-efficacy encourages the students to aim for successful completion of their courses. This completion is impacted by integrating in the higher education community by becoming involved in social events. It also incorporates interacting with peers within and out of their study groups and also interacting with the administrative staff which usually have positive outcomes. Here students become surer of their attributes for success and become patriotic towards their institution. A high sense of self-efficacy positively impacts students' skills development, belief in self which is exhibited in their actions.

### **Factors Which Affect Non-Traditional Under-Graduate Part-Time Students**

The factors which affect non-traditional under-graduate part-time students in higher education will be discussed within the framework of theories, generally viewed as seminal references, as there is no one theory which can comprehensively address them.

### **Finances**

As students consider access to higher education, one of the foremost thoughts on their mind is finances. The matter of finances cannot be neglected as institutions and students need money to function. Institutions need money to fund the educational provisions for students and a great amount of this funding comes from students (Stewart, Paterson & Ferguson, 2017; Thomas, 2020). Tinto (1975, 1987, and 1988) identified that as institutions encourage students to access higher education it comes at a cost as students must offset their expenses, by various means such as scholarships, loans or from their salaries. Bean (2005) concurred that this happens "as most students pay a great deal for their education" (p. 234) which places additional pressure on students as they study. Bean and Metzger (1985) findings from a longitudinal study indicated that financial problems can negatively impact students' retention and cause them distress.

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A subsequent investigation by Bean (2005) indicated that non-traditional students though deeply concerned about honouring their financial obligations are also concerned about providing equitable time to other areas of their lives. For example, “balancing their jobs with their schooling and other commitments in their lives” (p. 236). When they balance their jobs with other obligations, they can be assured that their financial concerns are addressed. Bolam and Dodgson (2003) asserted that even though the issue of financial worries is not new to non-traditional students as they study, research has shown that single or “lone parents” (p. 182) usually suffer the most financially as they have less financial support for the family. With less financial support for the family it become more difficult for students to stretch the already meagre resources for their educational pursuits. The financial worries of students, however, cannot be evaluated in isolation as finances affects the entire scope of students’ involvement in higher education. Tinto (1987) in relating findings from his research conducted, noted that students aspire to stay the course of their study but are hindered by financial difficulties. All is not lost for the students encountering financial woes, as that could be remedied by institutions lowering tuition fees or there is an increase in the number of scholarships offered to students on and off campus.

Cotton, Nash, and Kneale, (2017); Hurd (2000), Lau (2003) and Wetzel, O’Toole, and Peterson, (1999) contended that the need for increased financial assistance, increasing cost of tuition, accessing students’ loans and working and study are worrisome for the students. Too much attention given to finances are distracting for students which can eventually affect their retention. Bolam and Dodgson (2003) in their study of students in 6 universities in North East England reported that study finances is a big contender in the life of the students. Some of the students, Bolam and Dodgson (2003) reported, complained about lack of information relating to

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financial assistance. Such information could significantly have assisted them in making more informed choices related to their financial situations. Other students continued, Bolam and Dodgson (2003), refused to take loans from financial institutions but rather opted to engage the assistance of their family members and utilized the services of known available scholarships to offset their financial burdens. Cotton, Nash and Kneale (2017) also identified that students were apprehensive about receiving financial assistance as they “did not have a bursary” (p. 70) or unqualified for loans. They further stated that there is enough information to prove that when students have a strong financial support “it makes students’ lives less stressful” (P. 71). Tinto, (1999) asserted that the students’ financial burdens could be eased in more than one way. First the students must be proactive and seek assistance from varying financial sources. Secondly, institutions awarding scholarships could increase the number of scholarships awarded yearly, thereby assisting more students. Lastly, institutions which have a vested interest in students’ retention can also educate the students of the various scholarships and other available financial aid which they could access.

Loonin and Morgan (2019) weighed in on the matter of students’ financial situation by stating the issue can be addressed in a collaborative manner with the institution and students. They indicated that there is great value in students being retained and exit into the working world to contribute significantly as educated specialists. There is however the need for students to be assured their financial challenges will be addressed thereby affording them the opportunity to focus more on their studies. Loonin and Morgan (2019) continued to discuss that “there is a logical assumption that more education leads to higher earnings” (p. 429). These students as they stay in higher education until their graduation, they will significantly cater to the “gaps in society” (Loonin & Morgan, 2019, p. 429) and contribute to their country’s development. Based

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on these declarations students are very mindful of their financial obligations. This is the reality in Jamaica as students are constantly reminded of the need to honour their debt during their years of studies, based on their formal arrangements with lenders as they finish studying in higher education.

Mention of a debt free education system to alleviate the financial burdens of the students was made by Loonin and Morgan (2019). This is a utopia for some countries especially those in the developing world such as Jamaica. This would work as societies aim higher, but not/ without major restructuring of the institutional policies and intense conversations with governments. Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2019) in findings related to the trends in higher education globally, noted that the issue of financial setbacks is evident as some students are very worried about their future in higher education. Mention was made of Europe “which was for long the bastion of free public higher education” (p.66), facing financial issues and are reverting to have students pay their tuition. This move will have significant impact on that educational system. When the financial issues of the students are controlled, they have one less problem to contend with, which enable them to become even more focused on their studies.

### **Family and Personal Relations**

Higher education institutions have seen an increase in the number of non-traditional students participating in improving their academic achievements (Gill, Hayes, & Senior, 2015). Research has shown that this level of widening participation of non-traditional students transforms the “lives of not just the student but their families as well” (Gill, Hayes, & Senior, 2015, p. 1). This transformation of lives which ensues from the non-traditional students accessing higher education can be both negative and positive. Bearing in mind that most non-traditional students had families, are spouses or single parents, their decision to become engaged

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in higher education is not one done in solitude, but including the interest of the family was also considered. This life changing decision however, is not always supported by family members as it is viewed as an attempt to disrupt the family's stability. Gill, Hayes, and Senior, (2015) further discussed that "unwillingness in general to cause change was identified in a study exploring the reasons for the non-participation of potential older learners" (p. 1) of the family. This affects the students emotionally and their ability to continue studying. They may not see the need to persist in satisfying their desire to study amidst the odds of being unsupported by family.

In their study Gill, Hayes, and Senior (2015) focused on the disparity between genders as they accessed higher education and found that even though males tended to be better supported in their decisions to access higher education, family support is very important for both male and females' in relation to retention. While it may be argued that family support is critical, research indicate that males who are "traditionally" perceived as the "provider for their family in financial and material terms" (Gill, Hayes & Senior, 2015, p. 2) are more supported by family to become engaged in higher education. Bolam and Dodgson (2003) agreed that females tend to get less support and usually feel guilty about sharing their family time with academics as they aim to improve themselves. Such feelings of guilt and lack of support from family can cause the students to lack confidence in believing they can manage studying, and juggling family responsibilities with work. Usually "students that lack confidence are also unlikely to seek help and advice and services from university staff." (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003, p. 181), without proper direction they are likely to drop out of higher education.

Nicpon, Huser, Blanks, Sollenberger, Befort, and Kurpius, (2006) conducted their study with 430 students focusing on the social effect that support has on students' persistence and retention. They indicated that students thrive on social support which alleviated the feelings of



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loneliness and being misfits in the learning environment. Such findings were in alignment to Tinto's (1984) model of students' persistence where social integration and the support of family and friends were important in student's achievement. Ou and Reynolds (2016) in their study of how non-cognitive variables impact the retention rates of students, reported that there is a strong correlation between the two. Non-cognitive variables "such as self-discipline, motivation, effort, interpersonal skills, help-seeking, organization, and learning strategies" (p. 388) are crucial in students functioning effectively in higher education. These non-cognitive skills however, cannot be formally tested as do cognitive skills, but they are important as they assist the students in formulating their self-worth and acceptance, which in turn can be strong indicators of their persistence. Ou and Reynolds (2016) further stated that "non-cognitive abilities might have a greater effect on schooling and other outcomes than does cognitive abilities" (p. 388).

The connection between non-cognitive abilities and persistence is evidenced in Bean and Eaton (2000) Psychological Model. They purported that students' motivation and desire to be successful is hinged in their psyche. As they utilize this innate desire in their pursuit of higher education they are poised for retention. Being cognizant of that fact Bean's model is based on psychology, it is highly probable not all non-traditional under-graduate part-time students will have the same capacity or intentions to persistently pursue their goals. This is where the strong influence of family and support group is essential for retention. Hamshire, Willgoss, and Wibberley, (2013) concurred that students' support group, which includes lecturers, family and friends, presents intrinsic motivation where they are 'thinking of the end goal and of the bigger picture" (p. 895). These are excellent combinations of factors for retention of student in higher education.

### **Health**

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A survey done on factors which impact retention of non-traditional students revealed an almost casual attention to students' health. As students transition to higher education they are expected to cope with several issues; new learning environment, courses to study, social adjustments and financial worries, which can become stressful and harmful to their (mental and physical) health. The problems related to the students' health include "smoking, alcohol use, health-related quality of life, social support, and maladaptive coping strategies" (Grizzell & McNeil, 2007, p. 23). For adult students, they have to take charge of such maladaptive and harmful behaviours. The institution however can implement standards which can address such behaviours if they pose additional threats to the students and the institution. One may consider that students' health issue may be difficult to identify. However, in keeping with Astin (1999) Development Theory, where each student should be treated as individuals as they participate in higher education, the result is "a clear understanding of the student population" (Grizzell & McNeil, 2007, p. 23). This individualized attention inclusive of counseling should identify indicators of students' health. Grizzell and McNeil (2007), concurred that higher education institutions will benefit greatly with "better assessment and testing of programs to begin the process of improving health behaviors, academic performance and retention" (p. 23).

Van Lingen, Douman and Wannenburg (2011) purported that "high levels of wellness" are correlated to "more positive academic" (p. 406) achievement for the students. Students' health as alluded to by Astin (1984, 1999) is crucial for the development of the students. It is highly probable that as institutions intervene and implement wellness programs, which can be incorporated in modules, the incidents of students being unwell and possibly dropping out of the institution would be less. As intimated by Van Lingen, Douman and Wannenburg (2011), these wellness programmes would be beneficial to students, "not only to their academic performance,

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but also their personal and professional wellbeing” (p. 406). Bean (2005) in identifying the relationship between healthy students and retention in his conceptual model, stated that students’ choices of healthy lifestyles enhance academic success. As adult students are responsible for their learning and health, recognizing stressors and unhealthy practices is not enough as “it is what approach that is important” (Bean, 2005, p. 221). Approaching the stressors and seeking help and implementing personal strategies to alleviate them, could significantly improve students’ health.

### **Social Relations**

The Academic and Social Integration Model (Tinto, 1974) claims that as students become more integrated into the academic and social programmes of the institution, they are likely to be retained until the end of their degree. This is so because humans as social beings tend to pursue and achieve goals and are more motivated and comfortable when they have a support system. Tinto’s model indicates that students’ motivation to learn in addition to their family background and support have a direct impact on how they adjust to higher education. The level of commitment they have for their studies can affect their interactions with colleagues and faculty resulting in their becoming either integrated or not integrated in the social and academic fabric of the institution.

As students integrate, consciously or unconsciously, into their new higher education environment they are faced with social, personal and environmental factors (Tinto, 1974). Socially they are expected to interact with other students, which can be difficult for students who arrive on campus just before classes begin and leaves as classes’ ends. These students are usually excluded from quality interaction with other part-time non-traditional students where they can garner support and understanding. Eventually these students may develop feelings of

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social disconnect or isolation (Woolfolk, Hughes, & Walkup, 2008).

Higher education institutions, in recognizing that students need to be provided with academic and social programmes to be retained, offer varying forms of support system to their students (Tinto, 1974). However not all part-time students participate in these activities. This social dysfunction might not be the reality of all students, because they all enter higher education with different levels of expectations, readiness and preparation for this new and unpredictable environment. This is so as “involvement, or what is increasingly being referred to as engagement, matters” (Tinto, 2006, p. 4). There is a strong possibility that when students become more integrated and interact with other students and staff in their institution the more likely they are to persist.

Tinto (2006), in his latest work, reiterated the importance of support groups. This form of support includes: family, communities of practice, collegial collaboration and comfortable class environment. Research has shown that most part-time undergraduate non-traditional students are commuters. Commuting to their institutions presents different challenges for the commuting students than for resident students. Thomas (2020) characterized commuting students as those students who travel to their place of learning for a number of years. Commuting students are usually from the lower class of society and from specific ethnic groups. In comparison to the resident students who can afford to live on the campuses and do not have to work as they study. Resident students are usually white, attended the best privately owned secondary school and are affluent. Students, based on their social status in life usually dictates their educational achievements. Maguire and Morris (2018) in findings from their study on commuter students presented an almost dismal picture of the students' level of achievement. They indicated that in comparison to residential students the commuting students are faced with

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varying issues which may cause them to “obtain poorer outcomes from their higher education, and will be less engaged and satisfied with their academic experiences” (p. 6).

Simpson, and Burnett (2019) in their work on commuting students disputed the findings of Chickering (1974) who stated that commuting students were operating at such a low level that they were more likely to fail. Findings from their study conducted on commuting students reported that “commuter students earned higher grade point averages (GPAs) while engaging in similar levels of academic challenge than their residential counterparts” (p. 287). Even though these commuting students face transportation issues, usually working full-time, have dependents, are usually the first ones in their families to enter higher education, from the lower economic strata of society, there is at least one great positive, they live at home. Here they have a support system as they study. This support system has a positive effect on them psychologically, bearing in mind that even though they usually are not involved in social activities on campus they still have social interactions with their families, which makes higher education bearable.

Although the findings may vary according to the time the research was done and the participants involved, it is evidenced that there is still a stronger relationship between social integration and retention for residence students than for commuters. This is so as the residence students usually have more time to socialize after classes and interact with faculty. This however is not much of a deterrent for the non-traditional students who have little time to become involved in social activities, due to their responsibilities off campus in addition to crammed academic schedules. They, however, find strength and support in forming communities of practice in their classes which is sometimes transferred into off campus meetings and connecting with each other on social media. As was concluded by Simpson, and Burnett (2019), irrespective of the students being engaged as traditional, non-traditional, resident or commuting: the true test

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of their being retained in higher education is their choice “to engage in the learning process” (p. 299).

These areas can have a psychological effect on the students as they aim to be retained until graduation. Bean and Metzner (1985) discussed that commuter students who are usually non-traditional “usually expressed relatively little interest in social integration and were less involved in social activities on campus” (p. 508) than the traditional students. Not disputing the need for students to be involved in their learning findings indicate that there is a stronger connection between social integration and retention for residence students than for commuters.

In affirming the importance of students being integrated in the activities of their institution, Tinto (1988) purported that students do access higher education ready to learn, having some skill sets and focused on their projected goals. Such preparation does not negate the importance of a support system. These students are faced with personal, academic, financial and environmental issues, which militate against their being retained for the duration of their programmes to graduation. These issues can affect them either negatively or positively where they either resolve to be retained to the end of their course of study, or yield to the various militating factors and drop out of higher education. In discussing Tinto’s (1988) Social Integration model Wetzel, O’Toole, and Peterson (1999) noted that based on predictors such as being married, working, studying part-time, usually enrolled for evening classes, non-traditional students may not become involved in social programmes. They may not have the economy of time based on their class schedules or feel a “sense of place, institutional loyalty or commitment to their institution” (Wetzel, O’Toole & Peterson, 1999, p. 48), which result in their not participating in any social activities.

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Irrespective of the institutions' and support groups' role in the students' progress in higher education, success cannot be negated, but it does not eliminate the responsibility which the students have to exhibit to succeed. Bennett (2007) noted that "without a will to learn, nothing else is possible" (p. 101). The onus is on the students to decide to learn and achieve a goal against all odds. While students may face varying difficult situations as they study Dr. Jorge Fuentes, a retention expert from Hunter College, in Hurd (2000) stated "it's the social and academic adjustment that determines whether a student makes it or not" (p. 2). It is very important that students believe in their potential to succeed as they exist in higher education environment. The retention of students is partially related to the care and support of external entities which motivate them to continuously pursue their goals, while having in mind their expected end result. Cotton, Nash, and Kneale (2017) described this support as an "authentic recognition provided by significant others" (p. 60). This psychosocial characteristic of support is crucial for relationships and self-validation. Essentially, as students operate within the higher education learning environment their interplay; socially, intellectually and emotionally, with other persons helps to concretize their perceptions of their construct and position in the learning sphere.

Cotton, Nash, and Kneale (2017) further expressed that students who experience a strong and supportive relationship with their support group tended to participate better in their learning experience. This widening participation has positive effects on their output and eventual persistence. This, however, does not indicate that success is only for students with strong support, as those without a strong support also persist. However, there is a greater chance of their persisting, based on their support system's strength. Additionally, as the students become so engaged in their academics, they should not deny themselves from spending time with other

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colleagues and encouraging them to persist. It is important that the social skills are honed because they are considerable encouragement towards the students' self-worth, self-acceptance and stronger self-efficacy.

### **Preparation Access and Adjustment**

Participation in the higher education environment is a conscious and voluntary decision for any student. Fralick (1993) asserted that students may enter higher education institution intending to complete a career goal. However, the result may be improved qualifications, or as “problem solvers and enrichment seekers” (p. 30). Students may access higher education based on their desire to complete short courses with the aim of “job enrichment or personal enrichment” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 496). In contrast there are students who access higher education with a long-term goal of achieving a degree. Students’ “readiness to learn becomes increasingly oriented to the developmental tasks of social roles” (Knowles, 1974, as cited in Jones, 1980, p. 19). When students have a strong sense of “self-regulated learning” (Woolfolk, Hughes, & Walkup, 2008, p. 405), they inadvertently have a firm understanding of how to manage their learning strategies and support systems to succeed and achieve their goals. Regardless of any provisions an institution may have for students, or any challenges they may face, if students are willing to become personally engaged in their learning, they may accomplish as much as they should during their years of academic engagement. Such high belief in self or personal ethos enables students to become more positive towards facing the challenges they encounter in higher education rather than viewing them as obstacles.

Studies based on Tinto’s (1974) Academic and Social Integration Model, indicated that the academic, than the social aspect of the students bears more credence on their being retained until programme completion (Wetzel, O’Toole & Peterson, 1999). In contrast Brown (2002),



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discussed that students' success is more than social inclinations but rather more inclusive of both the academic and social aspects of students' involvement in higher education, which would have significant impact on their retention. Academic and social integration fosters a holistic development of the students. This integration incorporates "degree utility, goal commitment and career decision making self-efficacy, cumulative grade point average and institutional commitment" (Brown, 2002, p. 70). Such a culmination of factors indicate that students who are aware of the requirements and rigor of higher education, are still willing to submit themselves to the task and to surmount the odds in order to achieve their goals.

Tinto (1999, 2006) in strengthening his claim, posits that to sustain retention, students need to be deeply committed and involved in their learning. When they are actively involved and socialize with other students they develop a sense of belonging to a committed group in higher education and are more likely to stay. Tinto (1999, 2006) purported that higher education institutions have the capacity to retain students. He suggested that competently scheduling students' classes can aid in retaining them. When students are grouped with their peers who share similar interests, and similar practice they are keen on relying on each other for sustainability. Thereby building and strengthening a community of practice for the practitioners. In this community of practice learners can collaborate, share best practices from their individual communities and by extension assisting their colleagues in developing their wealth of knowledge absorption (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017; Tinto, 1997, 1999).

The notion of student participation in the learning process, is crucial for students staying in higher education. Students do not only absorb more information, when they participate, but they learn better (Tinto, 1997). Students now become "attached" (Tinto, 1999, p. 8) and loyal to their institution, which is a positive outcome for the institutions. When prospective students are

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seeking for a place to study they can be assured, based on testimonials of past and present students, they made the right choice. The institutions which care for student's wellbeing are the place of choice for potential students. Motivated students who feel a sense of belonging and are engaged in collaborative communities of learning and practice, tend to "persevere at a substantially higher rate" (Tinto 1999, p. 8) than students who are not motivated. As students collaborate, socialize and become more enthused about learning, they have a greater chance of retention. Institutions, as they extend access to students, should ensure that incidences of dropping out are lower as collaboration among students, staff, programme planners. They "must work together, as equal partners, to ensure that the linked courses provide a coherent, shared, learning experience" (Tinto, 1999, p. 8).

Tinto's (1988) recognized that students face challenges as they adjust to each phase of their higher education life. They adjust to interacting and learning among different persons, which asserts that students' social skills are affected. In situations where students abstain from participating in the social activities of their institutions, they must strategize and adopt crucial personal coping strategies to ensure they persist to course completion. Astin (1999) in concurring with Tinto (1974, 1999) designated that social integration is one significant factor which can lead to success. As students develop and grow in higher education their involvement, which is "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the students devote to the academic experience" (p. 518) indicates that they cannot be laidback and expect success. Their success is heavily reliant on their involvement in their academic development Astin (1999). This student involvement and development theory "is more concerned with the behavioral mechanisms or processes that facilitate student development" (Astin, 2014, p. 522) than just the academic instructions students receive.

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Institutional support is important for students' involvement being cognizant that the attractiveness of the programmes offered and the effectiveness of the pedagogues, will motivate students to participate in their learning. In effect, the value of any educational policy is usually evident in the level of students' involvement. When the students actively participate in the learning process specified by the requirements of a curriculum, they become more motivated to learn and achieve their goal. Therefore, collaboration between students and institution is crucial for retention until they complete their courses. As students interact and socialize with other students while studying in higher education, they are inadvertently formalizing a sense of belonging to their institution (Astin, 1999). This sense of belonging and acceptance in their institution has positive psychological impact on their personal and academic development. students' psychological well-being is critical as institutions require students to be holistically healthy as they complete their tenure at the institution.

### **Summary of the Literature Review**

There is a vast amount of literature published in relation to student retention in higher education. Researchers concur that the major factors which affect students' persistence include: their pre-enrolment status (their social and marital status, academic readiness and financial standing), their involvement in the activities of the institution and quality support groups. The literature also indicated the importance of students receiving academic advising as they access higher education as an interventive process which can alleviate students dropping out. Further to that there is also the issue of students developing their tacit potential of self-efficacy where they believe in their potential to succeed and work assiduously towards goals accomplishment.

It was observed during the literature review that most of the information on students accessing higher education relates to students in their beginning years of higher education rather

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than for their third and fourth years. This study aims to expand the body of scholarly information on the issues part-time non-traditional students, in their third and fourth years, face as they study in higher education. The literature provided detailed insights on the struggles the mature students face and their tenacity in trying to accomplish their dreams. Chapter Three describes the research methodology designed to address this research interest of challenges part-time non-traditional students face as they study in higher education.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Design and Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of part-time undergraduate non-traditional students, ages 21 years and older, in relation to their academic attainment and educational progress as they strive to be retained in higher education. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do students perceive their experiences at the institution?
2. What motivates students to enter higher education?
3. What are the challenges students face as they study in higher education institutions?
4. What influences students' decisions to leave or stay in higher education?
5. What can be done to assist the students to prevail against such problems?

This chapter discusses the rationale for research approach, the setting, participants, procedures, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations observed in this research, reflexivity statement and a summary of the chapter.

#### **Rationale for Research Approach**

It is imperative that I explain the principles employed in conducting research investigations. The research methodology selected for this study is a phenomenological methodology. Based on researchers such as Creswell's (2009) and Owens (2018) assertions, this type of research is usually used to investigate and garner an understanding of a specific issue or problem. Owens (2018) further reiterated that phenomenology is an in depth investigation which focuses on identifying what the experiences mean to the participants so that a "comprehensive description" (p. 11) of it can be recorded. Phenomenology is a study of experiences. As a result,

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I have utilized the phenomenological research methodology to capture the true experiences of the part-time undergraduate non-traditional students as they study in higher education and aim to be retained.

The rationale in choosing this specific research methodology was to first identify what motivated students to enter higher education, then the challenges they face as they study in higher education institution, next to gain an understanding of what influences students' decisions to leave or stay in higher education and recommending what can be done to assist the students to prevail against the problems they face in higher education institutions. To justify the rationale for the approach used in this study, discussed below is an identification of the qualities of qualitative research methodology, types of qualitative methodologies and the characteristics of phenomenological research, which was the methodology of choice for this research.

**Qualitative research methodology.** Qualitative research is a “naturalistic, interpretive approach concerned with exploring phenomena, and using the viewpoints of the participants as a starting point (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013, p. 3). It focuses on presenting peoples' views, their interactions with their environment or their values. Qualitative research views human behavior as unpredictable, dynamic, subjective to being influenced by experiences and environment. It involves asking participants about their life's experiences while focusing intensively on identifying the root cause of a phenomenon with the intent to understanding it through the eyes of the participants. To present the views of the participants, I sought to “interpret, explain and develop understanding of particular cases and situations” (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p. 23) by asking what phenomenon occurred, why it occurred and how it occurred.

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Being cognizant of the fact that qualitative research concentrates on participants naturally occurring experiences, researchers reporting such experiences can prove to be problematic as sometimes “it is impossible to differentiate fully causes and effects, that logically flows from specific to general and that knower cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 14). As a result, researchers must be extremely careful to provide valid and unbiased analysis of participants’ experiences.

Available to the qualitative researcher is a variety of methods which can be used to collect data. These include in-depth interviews, face-to-face interviews and focus groups, observation of participants, field notes and open-ended questions. Bearing in mind that the nature of reality in a qualitative research is subjective, personal and socially constructed (Austin & Sutton, 2014), the researchers must first acknowledge their underlying assumptions, prejudices and biases related to the phenomenon under investigation. This acknowledgement of or bracketing of the researchers’ worldviews avoids contamination of data collected.

Qualitative research therefore aims to find answers for why and how participants behave in a certain manner. It provides holistic in-depth data related to human behaviour. Given that qualitative research caters to human behaviour and their perceptions and construction of reality, there are some drawbacks to this research:

- a. Participants might not be totally honest in reporting their experiences as they may report what they deem necessary or what they think the researcher wants to hear, instead of stating all that happened. As a result, participants’ recounts of the same phenomenon will vary and be very subjective.
- b. Maintaining a high level of confidentiality with participants’ information is another cause for concern in qualitative research. It is therefore critical that participants trust

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researchers to keep their private information confidential as it can result in violation of research ethics, and in contrast researchers maintain a high level of confidentiality.

- c. Researcher's bias is also difficult to observe, as the research focuses on peoples' feeling and behaviours. The researcher might have preconceived ideas or expectations of participants' responses. Based on researchers' previous assumptions and expectations of the phenomenon, researchers may develop feelings of empathy, for the participants, which may encroach on the credibility of the analysis and reporting of data findings.

**Types of qualitative methodologies.** It is important that a researcher choose the best approach for their identified research interest. A qualitative approach identifies the purpose of the research, the researchers' positionality with regards to the topic under investigation in addition to the methods which will be used for analysis of data collected. Bradley, Curry and Devers (2007); Cheek (2004); Creswell (2013); Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, and Morales, (2007), Marshall and Rossman (2014) and Owens (2018) identified several specific qualitative research methods from which researchers can choose to conduct their investigations: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, historical, discourse analysis, and case study.

Researchers using the narrative method of research focuses on investigating a series of events experienced by using a small number of participants. The expressed events depicted by the participants are then reported in the form of a story or narrative. Phenomenology focuses on attempting to understand and place meanings on how participants relate to a phenomenon they experienced. Themes are usually generated from the interviews conducted and used to validate findings. Grounded theory method allows the researcher to develop a theory of a phenomenon or incident based on data collected. In ethnographic research the researchers immerse themselves



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in the participants' natural environment to understand concepts such as their goals, values, norms practices and language. Ethnographers focus on study sites rather than individuals and refer to their people investigated as informants rather than participants. Historical research method focuses on researching past events. Sociolinguistic or discourse method is based in the linguistic expressions of participants. It focuses on how ideas are expressed, what was said, how it was articulated, which indicates to the researcher "how identity is established and reproduced" (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 27). A case study research involves an in-depth exploration, description and explanation of complicated matters or phenomenon, in the context of their naturally occurring environment.

Phenomenology, which has its foundation in philosophy, and which primary emphasis is that human truth is expressed through their expressions as they relate to their environment. It emphasizes that expressions are subjective as only when someone experiences a phenomenon can they communicate these to the outside world. As such it gives an understanding of a particular experience from the persons who have lived it. Phenomenology was used to ascertain a better or more intimate understanding of the lived experience of the part-time undergraduate non-traditional students as they identify the issues they face as they study and the strategies implemented to stay retained. The case study approach was not used for this study research methodology as phenomenology focuses both on the particular experiences of specific participants in addition to addressing my perspectives and biases as a researcher (Sweet & Parker, 2019). Phenomenology focuses on individuals while case study as discussed by Swanborn (2010), in contrast, focuses on a phenomenon being experienced holistically rather than in units within the research environment such as an institution, a family or community. For

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this research the choice to use phenomenology was based on its unique characteristics of focusing on individuals within the units and not the entire unit.

**Phenomenological research.** Phenomenological studies investigate the lived experiences or realities of human beings. The intent of phenomenological studies is to study, describe, seek understanding in areas, in which there is little information (Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004), and report findings. In phenomenological research the participants are asked to describe their experiences as they understand them. People interpret their realities differently and derive meanings from the social interactions they experience in their environment. Such meanings, which the participants ascribe to their experiences, are essential to the experience itself, because they impact or guide the participants' future behaviours.

To understand the participants' lived experiences, as they are articulated by the participants, the researcher must acknowledge their personal assumptions, biases and expectations of such experiences. This process of abandoning personal worldviews, is referred to as bracketing. Bracketing prepares the researcher "to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 44) as related by participants. Wimpenny and Gass (2000) also discussed that "phenomenological reduction or bracketing is undertaken to suspend belief so that preconceptions and presuppositions are put aside" (p. 1487).

Bracketing prompts, the "researchers to put aside their repertoires of knowledge, beliefs, values and experiences in order to accurately describe participants' life experiences" (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013, p. 2). Researchers therefore become more open to accept the participants' understanding and construction of their realities, which may include the surfacing of unexpected meanings and explanations.

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Phenomenology, which has its foundations in the field of philosophy, identifies that the conscious mind can be conceived as a credible source of information for the participants' experience. Husserl, a pioneer of phenomenology, as cited in Groenewald (2004) discussed that "people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness" (p. 43). Participants' recounts are pure, rich and thick which must be carefully analyzed. Researchers, therefore must focus intently on participants' descriptions and expressions to uncover the meanings of their lived experiences, while abandoning their personal assumptions. In a qualitative research, researchers present "descriptions of the interactions among participants and researchers in naturalistic settings with few boundaries, resulting in a flexible and open research process" (Harwell, 2011, p. 148).

The present study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach that incorporates interviews, face-to-face and focus groups to investigate the lived experiences of part time undergraduate non-traditional students in their natural environment (Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Groenewald, 2004; Russell, 1999). Interviews, which "are essentially negotiated conversations that we construct between ourselves, following the twists and turns of thought as the process continues" (Hale, Treharne, & Kitas, 2007, p. 144), is one of the main medium through which phenomenological investigations can unearth crucial information from the respondents (Groenewald, 2004; Lester, 1999). For this study interviews, face-to-face and focus groups, which provided invaluable insight in the realities of the lived experiences of the participants, were used to collect data from participants. The interviews conducted were semi-structured. Those interviews provided the opportunity for the researcher and participants to capture details that would be lost in a structured interview, as researcher is afforded the privilege

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of having a discussion with the participants rather than a strict form of question and answer session.

Phenomenological investigations are effective media that enable researchers to explore and form an informed perspective, describe the experiences of the participants to arrive at a better understanding of a phenomenon (Russell, 1999). Additionally, it causes the researcher to appreciate that the transition to higher learning institutions for the non-traditional students can, “at any rate, be a struggle for personal, academic, financial and emotional survival” (Bowl, 2001, p. 142), which can further negatively or positively influence their stay in the higher education institution. Phenomenology focuses on finding answers to how participants, people, narrate or recount their life experiences.

An investigation into the issues faced by part-time undergraduate non-traditional students as they aim to be retained until the end of their programmes in higher education institutions, requires an approach which can adequately address these issues in depth by presenting individual and group accounts of human experience. The field of higher education has seen substantial qualitative research studies conducted on various problems (Hale, Treharne, & Kitas, 2007). As such, the choice of qualitative phenomenological approach into such issues facing part-time undergraduate non-traditional students is quite relevant.

Findings in this phenomenological investigation cannot be generalized, however, there can be indications that irrespective of where students are located there are some basic needs that should be satisfied for them to succeed in their aspirations. The results of the investigations would then serve to inform administrators and policy makers of what strategies could be best implemented to remediate the situation (Groenewald, 2004; Lester, 1999; Stewart, Paterson and Ferguson, 2017; Tam, 2016).

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### **Research Setting**

The site for this study is a small university in Kingston Jamaica, which has other off-site campuses on the island, was chosen due to the considerations of convenience and access to the participants in a timely manner. This institution was established based on the mandate and vision of the founders to incorporate theological studies with secular studies. It is the intent of the founders that in providing an environment for expansion and intellectual advancement, its impact will be evident not only in Jamaica, but outside of its borders into the Caribbean and the world at large.

The institution pledged to address the financial needs of the students by offering affordable and accredited education that is on par with the more established institutions in the island. In addition to that the administrators designate that they will: foster a high level of students' leadership formation, communicate with students so they can access education in a timely manner, create a student-friendly and student-focused orientation, and modify the delivery of the lessons to suit the needs and learning styles of the students. The institution aims to make these strategies possible through the quality research and publication done by highly qualified staff and administrators.

The administrators and leadership of the institution maintain that the students' holistic development is key to achieving their possible selves and self-actualization. As a result, students are encouraged to earn as they learn. This takes the form of enrolled students enthusiastically encouraging and, by extension, recruiting new students for the institution. The recruiting students are awarded discounted tuition fees based on their successful recruitment of new students. Further to that, students are encouraged to apply for bursaries and scholarships to alleviate the financial challenges they face.

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All students commute to the campus daily for their classes. Students in need of living accommodation will need to make suitable arrangements off the campus. Programmes are offered on a full-time and part-time basis, catering to students who have recently graduated from high schools to the returning adults. To provide a competitive and relevant learning environment to enhance the students' holistic development, the institution has provided a flexible mode of lesson delivery. Here students can participate in online classes thereby alleviating their presence on campus daily in addition to the face-to-face collaborations. Students, especially part-time, would benefit more from the online classes, as they sometimes have varying challenges attending classes on campus in the evenings.

### **Participants**

There were three categories of participants included in this research: part-time undergraduate non-traditional students, dean and lecturers, and campus registrar. The students formed the core of the investigation; however, the other two categories of participants were included to triangulate information relevant to the research topic of the issues part-time undergraduate non-traditional students face as they study in higher education institution. Triangulation, which is a combination of “two or more data sources to study the same phenomenon” (Hussein, 2015, p. 2), was necessary as it is one way of ensuring the validity of data collected for a research. It entails “the careful reviewing of data collected through different methods in order to achieve a more accurate and valid estimate of qualitative results for a particular construct” (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006, p. 42). Triangulation of data also assisted the researcher in understanding how participants contextualize their experiences and use such experiences to construct their realities (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, & Caricativo, 2017). A discussion of the participants is presented below.

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**Students.** The part-time undergraduate non-traditional students were purposefully selected from three courses which I presently lecture at a higher education institution. All students who participated in this research were selected according to the following characteristics; they were willing to participate in the investigation and express their realities in a thoughtful manner (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016; Tongco, 2007). They were part-time undergraduate non-traditional students, attended classes in the evenings, were current students of the researcher, had completed a maximum of two years in higher education, older than 21 years, and had various roles which include: work, family and institutional commitments.

From a group of 25 students, 16 responded positively to the invitation for participation, and they formed the sample used. Of those participants, six (five females and one male), were engaged in the face-to-face interviews while ten, (two males and eight females), shared in the focus group.

**Dean and lecturers.** One dean (a female) and five lecturers (two males and three females) were chosen since they have been engaged in education for many years and have interacted with various levels of students, were from the faculty of education and are part of the management team in the university. The dean and the lecturers provided information based on their observations and evaluations of the undergraduate part-time non-traditional students with whom they have interacted (Bell, 2010). Questions posed to the dean and lecturers were focused on their views of the issue of students' retention at the institution. Have they at any point addressed the issue of students' retention and been involved in any remediation practices such as pastoral care or otherwise with the intention of encouraging students to be retained or are they usually not aware of the magnitude of the issues of the students' situations and as a result they usually do not consider intervening. Such probe is in alignment of the postulations of Furrer,

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Skinner and Pitzer (2014) and Swail (2006) when they identified that the higher education institution stands to benefit both academically and financially when facilitators understand and are aware of the issues affecting the students and the institution.

**Campus registrar.** The campus registrar was included because they are the custodians of the students' records who register students, records grades, prepare students' transcripts, schedules classes and evaluate enrolment and demographic statistics (Lockwood, 1979). As such, their experience with the students is different from that of the deans and lecturers. The registrar's responses to the interview questions presented data, which is not usually available from the deans and lecturers as they do not handle students' records. Therefore, some of the questions posed to the deans and lecturers would not be relevant and suitable for the registrar. The registrar's assistance was crucial for providing information on the trends of students' registration and retention over the years 2014-2018 at the institution.

### **Procedure**

After ethics approvals were obtained, from the University of Liverpool (see Appendix B), and local institution (Appendix A), a letter of invitation to participate voluntarily in the research study was emailed to deans, lecturers, and part-time undergraduate non-traditional students in the Faculty of Education, identified by the university enrolment records (see Appendix C & D). Student participants were contacted by email after two weeks to ascertain their decision to either participate or not in the research. With regards to the registrar, contact was made via their administrative assistant who scheduled an appointment for the interview. Participants were contacted a second time, at least one week in advance before the data collection began, to ascertain their consent to participate in the research. Participants who agreed to participate were sent a consent form and a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix E).



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The Participant Information Sheet clearly outlined to the participants that no information gathered during the data collection process would be shared with a third party. Information would be kept strictly confidential by the researcher. All data collected, which would identify any participant, as soon as the data was collected, was de-identified using pseudonyms names such as Sally and Robert to represent participants. This eliminated any chance of anyone, except the researcher, linking actual responses to individual participants.

Extra care was exercised in ensuring that data, which was not available to the public but belonging to the organization, were kept confidential as was clearly identified in the consent and ethical review forms of the University of Liverpool. Information gathered during the research process was kept embedded within another file on a computer accessible only by a password by the researcher. All documents, including transcripts of interviews, interview tapes and copies of registration details of students were kept in a locked metal file cabinet accessible only by the researcher. Participants were informed that they would, if they desire, be updated as the research progresses.

Prior to conducting the face-to-face individual and focus groups interviews I ensured the room was comfortable. The aim was to encourage a collaborative and trusting environment where the participants felt free to share their experiences without hesitation or limitation. Participants were further informed they had the right to discontinue their interaction at any time they chose. In addition to that, although it seemed highly improbable that any participant would be adversely affected psychologically by the interview process, they were made aware that access to counselling service was available should the need arise.

Based on the phenomenon under investigation, the lived experiences of part-time undergraduate non-traditional students as they endeavour to be retained to programme

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completion, it is important that findings are not misinterpreted but are justifiable, and trustworthy. Consequently, the participants were asked to review and validate the integrity of the results (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016) at given intervals.

### **Data Collection**

The data is information collected for this qualitative investigation and is concentrated on “discovering who, what, and where of events or experiences, or their basic nature and shape” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 338). Data was collected from focus group meetings with ten students, followed by individual in-depth interviews of six students, one dean, five lecturers, and campus registrar.

**Interviews.** After the various dates for the face-to-face interviews and focus groups were confirmed, these interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed in a professional and ethical manner. To maintain accuracy of expressions, participants were invited to read the scripts after the researcher had completed transcribing the dialogues. Conversations from the interviews and focus groups were used verbatim in the research to report aspects of the participants’ experiences in the analysis of data.

A semi-structured interview, which is a flexible data collection instrument, was fitting for a research of this nature. It provided the opportunity for the researcher to prepare questions based on preconceived themes and concepts. The semi-structured interviews also allowed room for interviewees’ freely expressing themselves on issues raised in the session (Cassell, 2009; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Wilkinson, 2004; Yin, 2003). As purported by Cassell, (2009) “the interviewees take an active role in constructing the nature of the interview, talk at length, and shape the direction of the interview as necessary” (p. 3).

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As a result, the use of semi-structured interviews with part-time undergraduate non-traditional students was appropriate for this phenomenological investigation because their lived experiences cannot be expressed briefly in a cursory manner. There is the need for in-depth discussions and explorations of the participants' lived experiences, to arrive at an informed conclusion of how they responded to and overcame issues in their environment. Resultant to that, this researcher prompted participants for more explanations on their given answers to arrive at a fuller and deeper understanding of the issues they faced as they strived to be retained.

A triangulation of data was created from the three distinct groups of participants: students, dean and lecturers and campus registrar. Data triangulation, which is “a powerful solution to strengthen a research design” (Holshausen, 2001, p. 3), provided a framework for analyzing responses from each group of participants to ascertain the level of consistence or inconsistency of information related. Such a process is important for contrasting responses captured and as a result having a true insight of the issues being investigated (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018; Groenewald, 2004).

***Interviews with students.*** Prior to conducting the interview sessions, the interview protocol was pilot tested by persons outside of the intended research group. The pilot test was done to ensure the adequacy of the questions, whether the intended participants were feasible and assessing the possibility of any potential problems that would surface during the data analysis period (Creswell, 1997; Guba, & Lincoln, 1994; Høffding, & Martiny, 2016; Tam, 2016). The interview questions were modified and found to be suitable for the interview process. Each interview was proposed to last between 40 and 45 minutes. The interview questions explored the following research questions

1. How do students perceive their experiences at the institution?

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2. What motivates students to enter higher education?
3. What are the challenges students face as they study in higher education institutions?
4. What influences students' decisions to leave or stay in higher education?
5. What can be done to assist the students to prevail against such problems?

There were four sections with a total of twenty questions in the interview protocol, which were substantially aligned to each research question (Appendix F). Those four sections were demographic data, preparation for higher education, staying retained in higher education and suggestions for retaining students.

***Focus groups with students.*** Focus groups are used to “collect data from multiple individuals simultaneously in an informal group discussion” (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009, p. 2). Jones, (2015) stressed the importance of the researcher understanding the characteristics of a phenomenon as it impacts and informs the investigation. Jones (2015) further notes that participants should be afforded the privilege of expressing themselves unhindered by other participants or researcher. This is to “capture the phenomenon as fully and as lived in the moment as possible” (p. 566).

Such diverse perspectives and wide range of information about participants' experiences provided an invaluable outlet for emergent themes, perceptions, ideas and thoughts that might have been lost in the face-to-face interviews. Researchers have purported that focus group interviews should have no more than “6 – 12” (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009, p. 3) participants. This number would provide enough varied recount of experiences from the participants. Furthermore, a small group provides a more intimate setting where participants feel comfortable sharing, than they would in a large group. As a result, the experiences shared in the smaller groups are richer and more in-depth, truly reflective of the participants' experiences.

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The focus group session was conducted in a quiet area, where participants were comfortable and would willingly share their experiences. Ten students participated in the focus group interview. The format of the interview was similar to that of the face-to-face interview protocol. The ten questions on the protocol were pilot tested and modified then used in the session. Questions were grouped in four sections; demographic data, preparation for higher education, staying retained in higher education and suggestions for retaining students. Appendix G presents the semi-structured interview protocol for the focus group participants.

***Interviews with Dean and Lecturers.*** The deans and lecturers were interviewed using the same interview protocol because they were all educators and have interacted with students. The interview sessions were conducted over a period of 30 – 50 minutes. The format of the interviews was semi-structured (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012; Phellas, Bloch, & Seale, 2011), which a relaxed and comfortable environment for the participants to speak freely and at length on the issues under investigation. One dean and five lecturers participated in the individual interviews. Appendix H presents the semi-structured interview protocol, which consisted of ten questions, for deans and lecturers.

***Interview with Registrar.*** There was a different interview protocol for the registrar. This is as registrars do not interface with students in a teaching-learning environment as do the dean and lecturers. Their focus is on students' records, which would present another perspective of the students' struggles as they aim to be retained. The interview session with the registrar lasted for 30 minutes. The registrar was asked to discuss their observation of the students' records, inclusive of their retention trends. Students have registered to begin higher education but how many have persisted and were retained in their programme until graduation? Additionally, how prominent are instances of students deferring their study for one year then eventually resume

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studying and what are some strategies which the institution can implement to improve the retention rate of the students? There were five questions on the interview protocol for the registrar (Appendix I).

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is the process of identifying, examining and interpreting observed patterns and themes in collected data, to determining how these patterns and themes can answer the research question under investigation (Creswell, 2007). This cyclical process of identifying, examining and interpreting themes prompts me, the researcher, to constantly check results thereby resulting in a nonlinear approach to arriving at results. As recommended by Creswell (2007), I kept an account of my self-reflective notes which included topical phrases, ideas about the topic and key themes and concepts, as the research progressed.

Creswell's (2014) recommended seven steps "bottom to the top" (p. 246) procedure for analysis of qualitative data was used in this research. These non-linear steps are: organization and preparation of data, reading and becoming familiar with data, coding data, creating descriptions of participants' responses which also resulted in the emergence of themes, deciding on how the descriptions would be presented, identifying the form of narrative to be used in reporting findings, and interpreting the findings from the lived experiences of the participants.

According to Creswell's (2014) seven steps analysis, I first transcribed the recorded participants' responses of the interviews and focus group questions. To ensure confidentiality of participants, a pseudonym was used to represent each person's response in the transcriptions. Most of my analysis was conducted on my computer, using Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel summary spreadsheets. This was a convenient strategy as I could print the documents for reading and making notes manually before adding comments on to the computer version.

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Similar responses in each column were highlighted using the same colour then coded as significant themes emerged. After manually coding the data I used qualitative coding software (NVivo 11) to assist in organizing the data.

In presenting the analyzed data, I used the *in vivo* (Creswell, 2007, p. 248) or direct quotes and perspectives from the participants to describe how they experienced and responded to the phenomenon under investigation. Analysis of the data was then done to indicate my interpretations of the participants' experiences, confirming or disconfirming previous explanations of the participants' lived experiences and finally suggesting the need for further research on the topic. The data findings of the interviews and focus groups discussions are presented in Chapter 4.

### **Researcher's Reflexivity Statement**

The aim of this research is to identify, outline, discuss and present an analysis of the lived experiences of part time undergraduate nontraditional students in relation to their academic attainment and educational progress as they aim to be retained in higher education. Selection of this research topic was based on personal experiences as a part time undergraduate nontraditional student, who had experienced and endured personal, social, learning and environmental issues.

Reflexivity, which is viewed as one of the significant aspects of qualitative research, speaks to the amount of researcher's influence, intentionally or unintentionally, on the research process and findings. Parahoo (2006), as cited in Jootun, McGhee, and Campus (2009), purported that reflexivity is a "continuous process of reflection by the researcher on his or her values, preconceptions, behaviour or presence and those of the participants, which can affect the interpretation of responses" (p. 42).

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Reflexivity further expands and extends the researcher's understanding of the magnitude of how their subjectivity can impact the research process. It therefore provides the medium through which researchers acknowledge assumptions, previous expectations, and personal values to contextualize participants' responses. Darasheh (2014) affirmed that reflexivity has an indelible impact on researchers as it causes them to "gain awareness of personal attributes that may influence the research process" (p. 562). Reflection is a reiterative process, which impacts the research, by constantly reminding the researcher of any course of action to be taken to complete the research. Reflection signals the need for researchers to understand personal values, views and biases as they can "influence findings and adds credibility to the research" (Jootun, McGhee, & Campus, 2009, p. 42).

Qualitative researchers usually investigate issues, which they have personally experienced. Qualitative research focuses on how participants respond to and "make sense of things" Kinmond (2012, p. 29) in a naturally occurring environment (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Scotland, 2012). A qualitative study investigates a wide range of beliefs to find out how the phenomenon occurred, why it occurred, and what happened. Sciarra (1999) noted that "the goal of qualitative research is to provide leads, hunches and hypotheses" (p. 38), which in effect assist the researcher in arriving at possible explanations for a phenomenon experienced by selected participants. As a result, this research and the research questions are formulated from a qualitative research frame of reference and approach, as the I seek meanings of the socially constructed behaviours of the participants.

An investigation in the academic, personal, and environmental issues part-time undergraduate non-traditional students experience as they aspire towards achieving their degree warrants an approach, which could present an exhaustive report of each participants



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“individually constructed reality” (Scotland, 1999, p. 11). Based on the nature of the problem and research questions in this research, it was relevant that a qualitative, more specifically phenomenological approach, was utilized. The phenomenological approach adequately facilitated the investigations in the struggles part-time undergraduate non-traditional students face in higher education environments as they strive to be retained.

Research in education is guided by distinct paradigms. As purported by Crotty (1998), Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Kuhn (1962), paradigms, which guide research in education, are a set of common beliefs or underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions, related to how problems can be addressed and understood. A paradigm represents how the researcher views the world, its nature, how they fit into the world and interacts with others in the world, thereby formulating beliefs and value systems. Crotty (1998) contended that “knowledge and meaningful reality are constructed in and out of interaction between humans and their world and are developed and transmitted in a social context” (p. 42). A researcher’s ontology, which influences his views of the research process, is based on his speculations of what is real. In addition, the researcher’s epistemology centers on how “knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated” (Scotland, 2012, p. 9), to result in a cohesive explanation of people’s view of their realities.

This research was formulated within the guidelines of the qualitative or interpretive research paradigm. The interpretative researcher is keen to understand the experiences from each person’s perspectives related to their social interactions, how they contextualize their realities and communicate such realities through their expressions in their language. Based on the subjectivity of participants’ reality, my view as a researcher is that there must be a withdrawal of my assumptions of reality and attachment to the phenomenon of the issues which part-time

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undergraduate non-traditional students may face as they aspire to be retained in higher education. This is “dislodging self from all bias, emotions, values, or anything subjective that would compromise the objectivity of the research” (Scotland, 1999, p. 39) will enable me to present findings based on participants’ worldviews credibly. My assumptions, as I embark on this research, are that non-traditional part-time students seek understanding of the environment within which they live, work and study, and formulate meanings of such experiences based on their reality or perspectives.

As a researcher, I am interested in empowering and improving the knowledge base of students, so they can by extension empower the students whom they teach. I have experienced varying problems and setbacks while studying as a part-time undergraduate non-traditional student and therefore, understand how the participants struggle to acclimatize to higher education environment, work full-time, having a family and contending with meeting the financial obligations of the institution, yet stay motivated to graduate. I am passionate about assisting persons in higher education who are policy makers, curriculum and social programmes developers to enhance such programmes and strategies conducive to the retention of part-time undergraduate non-traditional students to programme completion. As a result, as a qualitative researcher I cannot avoid being involved or affected by the research process.

Retention of part time undergraduate non-traditional students has been a lived experience for me. There were times while I was studying that I faced with militating factors:

1. Lack of finances to honour financial obligations to institution and other personal expenses,
2. Commuting from classes at night on public transportation, which takes longer to reach home, hence arriving home late.

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3. Tending to family obligations by taking care of children and preparing for the following day at work
4. Completing assignments at night after classes in preparation for the next class.
5. Facing health issues due to the stress of finding equity among full time employment, being full time spouse and parent and studying at nights.

These issues had to be addressed and resulted in either deferring my study for another year or simply discontinuing my studies.

I decided to stay retained to the end of my programme. I was determined to graduate based on the following factors;

1. To enhance and solidify my self-confidence and acceptance, which would enable me to achieve my possible self.
2. To calm my fears that if I did not complete my undergraduate, I would disappoint first myself then my family and relatives, who believed in my ability to excel and to be retained.
3. To engage the support of my motivators inclusive of family members, work colleagues and batch mates. They have all in one way or another through various means encouraged me to become more resilient and tenacious in overcoming obstacles to reach my goal of achieving my undergraduate degree.

Hirudayaraj (2011) and Burnell (2019) contended that first generation students enter higher education institution with hindrances: psychological, educational and financial. I entered higher education with all three. My parents could not offer educational advice for continuing my education. They did not continue their education after leaving secondary school, and so they did not fully understand all the requirement of higher education. There was, however, the tacit

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expectation, on the part of my parents and relatives, that after leaving high school I should transition to higher education. I successfully transitioned from high school into teachers' college to read for my diploma in teaching. I entered teachers' college ill-prepared, mentally in relation to what was expected of higher learning and the sacrifices which had to be employed to succeed in staying until graduation. I had to form bonds with batch mates to inculcate an attitude for studying consistently and formulating a strong self-confidence that I had the ability to excel. After graduating from teachers' college with a diploma in teaching, I recognized that an undergraduate degree had to be achieved to improve my teaching skills and strategies to meet the needs of the twenty first century students. I entered university to read for my undergraduate degree eight years after leaving teachers' college.

The greatest challenges I faced as a student in higher education was reading for my undergraduate degree, eight years after achieving my teaching diploma. As discussed by Busher, James, and Piela (2015), I now had a family, was working full time and studying part time. I had to develop "hybrid" forms of communication with my colleagues to ensure we keep abreast of assignments and course expectations as we all lived in different communities. Furthermore, it was sometimes difficult to attend classes on campus due to lack of finances and family obligations.

Although I had been to teachers' college this experience was different to that of the university's experience. I had a different social environment; I was uncertain of the rigors of reading for a degree and financially I struggled to honour my obligations. There were social programmes offered to students, but as a part time student who arrived on campus just in time for classes, there was not enough time to participate in those activities. My days started early, in preparation for work, ensuring the family obligations were addressed, assignments were

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completed and classes on the university's campus were attended, which ended late, followed by the journey home by public transportation and then, to work on assignments before going to bed. Tinto's (1999) suggestions for institutions keeping students retained was inherent in my decision to stay until graduation. I became engaged in groups with practitioners in my field of study, thereby forming our communities of practice. We became a strong united force of support and encouragement to each other where we formed study groups and scheduled meeting times for studying to ensure we achieved our goals.

Hirudayaraj (2011) and Burnell (2019) alluded that most first-generation students were from lower and middle-class families faced with financial woes and lack of resources to assist in the learning process. This finding precisely described my financial situation. I had to engage the services of my financial institutions to fund my studies. As the issues I faced while studying were addressed I was able to stay retained in higher education. I completed my undergraduate degree and felt a sense of achievement, which was in alignment to the postulations of Aardema and Wong (2020) and Markus and Nurius (1986) concept of possible selves. Initially I had fears and expectations of what was involved in studying in higher education, in addition to the benefits of improved qualification. My occupational and educational possible self (Aardema & Wong, 2020; Markus & Nurius, 1986) was evident as I became the first person in my family to have achieved this feat. I was now the first person in my family who entered higher education, completed my programme and graduated.

This research focusing on part time undergraduate non-traditional students in higher education, had some underlying subjective details based on my personal experience. As I engaged the participants, I constantly thought about my assumptions, how they would probably affect my interaction with the participants and situations, which would be limitations of the

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research. Based on recommendations by Jootun, McGhee, and Campus, (2009) and Darasheh (2014), while consciously acknowledging my personal assumptions, expectations and to present reliable findings, I created a personal journal. This journal was used as my guide and point of personal references to ensure that management of self throughout the research process was observed, acknowledged and addressed. At one point in the research process I had considered my position as a lecturer who had faced similar challenges as the participants, while studying as a part time undergraduate student, as a limitation.

Yet upon reflection it was evident that my position was not a limitation, but a point of reference, which could assist me in understanding the responses of the participants. This research topic; of the issues part time undergraduate non-traditional students face as they pursue their higher education, was a lived reality for me. I sought to find out; the students' experiences at the higher education institution, what were their initial motivation for accessing higher education, the challenges they face as they persist in achieving higher education, and what influenced their decision to be retained. Achieving my undergraduate degree had positively influenced my life's decisions and achievement. As a result, as I remained reflective during the process, I can bracket my expectations and present the voices of my participants as transparency of position as a researcher is crucial to reporting reliable findings.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approvals are required for any research involving humans as their rights are observed and respected. Prior to collecting any data for this research, approval was granted from the University of Liverpool EdD Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC). Each participant was sent an email requesting their participation in the study. A follow up email was sent after two weeks to confirm the participants' consent or refusal to

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participate in the research. Participants who consented were sent a consent form, which included the title, purpose of the study and information which indicated participation in the study is totally voluntary. Participants were asked to sign the consent form and returned to the researcher. Each participant was given a copy of the signed consent form while the researcher kept the original.

The data collection activities did not in any way threaten to harm or cause any discomfort to any participants. Participants were however advised if they felt the need to discontinue the activities they had the privilege to do so at their convenience. Each participant's identity was protected using pseudonyms. This information is stored on a computer, which is accessible by password known only by the researcher. All electronic storage disks are kept in a locked storage cabinet that only the researcher accesses. Data collected for the research will be stored for a period of five years after the publication the research, after which it is destroyed by the researcher.

Ethics in research, as discussed by Alderson and Morrow (2020) dictates that participants' views should be respected and protected. The integrity of the researcher is also tantamount to the prescribed ethical standards being observed. As the research progressed ethical implications were always forefront in every action I took. It meant implementing strategies such as keeping a journal which documented the ethical concerns I may have had as a lecturer interfacing with my students as researcher participants, how I tried to resolve any issue which would indicate any breach and the areas to avoid approaching or discussing during the data collection.

The ethical underpinnings of the research resulted in an expectation of respect and professionalism between researcher and participants. The students were comfortable and trusting as they recognized my dual role as lecturer and researcher. Their trust and confidence resulted in

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them frankly expressing their issues. Participants in return expected me to be fair, open-minded and confidential as I recorded and reported their issues. To maintain this transference of expectations and trust I ensured I employed “professional expertise and self-regulation” (Alderson & Morrow, 2020, p. 18) to ensure boundaries were not crossed and “conflicts of interest” (Resnik, 2018, p. 249) were alleviated. This was also aimed at avoiding conflicts of interest which can cause misunderstandings and possibly lead to professional misconduct (Resnik, 2018). Students never felt their progress in their lessons were threatened in any form being participants. There were clear lines drawn indicating they would never be impacted and this was consistent throughout the research process.

### **Summary**

The phenomenological approach, which was used to investigate the lived experiences of part-time undergraduate non-traditional students being retained until programme completion, was discussed in chapter three. The chapter began with an introduction of the research question then the researcher’s philosophy regarding the choice of the methodology. This was followed by the rationale for research, setting, and selection of participants, researcher’s positionality and procedures for ethical considerations and procedure. The procedure included sampling techniques, face-to face interviews and focus groups then analysis of data for the study. Chapter 4 presents the data collection procedures and results. Chapter 5 includes the summary, discussion of findings, limitations and suggestions for future research, implications and recommendations, and conclusions from the study.



**Chapter 4**

**Research Findings**

This chapter summarizes the key findings which emerged during the research. The findings relate to the research questions that guided the study. The five research questions were used as the guide to investigate the issues these, part-time non-traditional undergraduate, students face as they study. These research questions were used as the guideposts in establishing the interview questions from which the experiences of the participants could be used to answer the predominant question “What are the lived experiences of adult students, ages 21 years and older, in relation to their academic attainment and educational progress?”

A discussion of the findings from each group of participant’s responses to the face-to-face interviews and focus group interview is presented below. Prior to identifying the findings from each group of participants, the research question, is restated then findings presented.

Table 1

*Students’ perceptions of their experiences at the institution.*

Categories	Responses
Complicated and new	At times its very stressful Too much assignments Teaching methods different from what I was used to A new learning environment which requires change
Benefit of Higher Education	I have been improving and becoming more independent I will stay and complete my course Becoming more adjusted to this environment
Improved learning	My job prepares me for school and the school prepare me for work (job)
Achievement	Helping students to achieve their very best Students generally enter ready to learn
Collaboration Networking	Seek assistance to complete assignments from support group  Learn better from peers

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Gratefulness	Accepted by institution to study there
Ascent to higher education	Opportunity to improve self Empowered to learn Students successful transition into society afterwards End results rewarding Rewarding intellectually and socially Proud to assist students to succeed
Students' attitude to higher education	Students don't always feel a sense of belonging
Encouragement towards success	Learning environment not always comfortable Encourage them to be responsible Students don't always take responsibility for learning

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### **RQ 1. How do students perceive their experiences at the institution?**

All student participants viewed their ascent to pursuing higher education as a major milestone and achievement in their lives. The intellectual climate of the higher education institution in conjunction to the intellectual development and ability of the student impact the students' decision to persist to the end of their courses. Patrice, the participating registrar, noted that there is a strong connection between students' perceptions of their experiences in higher education with the requirements and provisions of the institution and responses to their enquiries from administrators. The students, according to Patrice's assertions, recognized the possibility of improving their standard of life through educational empowerment. It therefore becomes important that they pursue a higher education course of study based on their aspirations, expectations for their lives and by extension the lives of their family members. This improvement in qualification as discussed by Patrice, in Table 1, is also with the expectation of competing in the viable job market as "teachers are in great demand both locally and overseas." Improved qualifications enable a better-quality life and quality contribution to society.

Students in the interviews stated that based on their expectations and decision to enter higher education they had to relearn how to function in a higher education environment as they

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aim to self-actualize. This environment required a great amount of their time, energy, and emotions. Learning in the higher education environment required more discipline and commitment than they had expected. As the students reflected on their entry to higher education some noted they were prepared for the change in environment. Others were not prepared or thought it was the ideal time to begin. Collette noted “No, I was not but, as the time progressed, I became more adjusted to this environment.” Dorsetta also noted “No, I was not. I needed to achieve my degree, but was not totally ready to study, even though I was aware of the benefits.” Elaine however, thought that since her grown children were also in higher education, she could now seize the opportunity to improve herself. Even then Elaine said “I was partially prepared. I think as an older person who had left college for quite a while now and have grown children, who are also in higher education, it was time for me to upgrade my qualification.”

Students were conflicted with attending higher education at that time as they had family and work matters which impacted their lives quite profoundly. However, as they recognize the need to begin the journey in higher education, so they can achieve their dreams, they decided to enter the institution. Irrespective of their state of preparation for the new learning environment the students insisted they wanted to graduate. The experience of improving self is a major motivating factor for students to enter higher education institutions. The students reiterated that they recognized the positives in improving their educational status which would somehow impact their learning. Improved learning would also impact their social, economic and professional life. Collette, commented that receiving a first degree is a fundamental achievement to accomplish. This achievement will be used “as stepping stones to further my teaching career.” As students grapple with the reality of increased demands on their time as they started studying in addition to other personal matters, they recognize the importance of collaborating with each

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other. This collaboration incorporates their batch mates at the institution, family members and work colleagues. Students identified that as they arrive for classes sometimes, they experience fatigue, emotional distress, and intellectual challenges. Their intellectual challenges are manifested when they have modular assessments which they cannot complete due to one or more factors.

Here students would schedule group meetings where they can work together and generate ideas on completing the assessments. Lorn noted “I had to be on my feet to find a solution. I am trying to make it work because I want to finish.” Danielle concurred “I feel like most times we are on our own. There is a group we have formed. We will meet, ask questions, have discussions in the group and we get support.” When students collaborate with each other as they study, the result is usually positive. Here friendships formed are strengthened which help students become more motivated to persist. In addition, students tend to learn more from their peers who sometimes have the ability to explain terms and concepts in a simplified version for them to understand. This is so as each student may enter the conversation with different experiences and perspectives.

The initial sense of gratitude on the part-time non-traditional undergraduate students, experience is being accepted at the institution to study. The students related that as working adults they aspired toward achieving a first degree. However, various factors in their lives affected their entering earlier. Now that they are students in higher education and closer to achieving their goals, they are grateful for the experience towards accomplishing their life’s goals.

Some students, as Marie the Dean noted in Table 1, enter higher education ready to learn. This is evidenced by virtue of how they are focused in their lessons and seek assistance and

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interventions, from lecturers and the dean to clarify misconceptions. Students also ensure they seek assistance from administrators and discuss matters related to learning modules and retention. In contrast, some students do not adjust readily to the new environment and lack assertiveness in order to ensure they learn.

Marie further noted that some students become disappointed easily in the higher education environment. This is based sometimes on the difficulty they face in adjusting to their new environment. Sometimes it is the lack of tenacity and a persistent attitude in reaching their goals. Marie noted “some came ready to learn while some came unprepared and think it’s easy.” She further reiterated that some of the students reportedly had prior bad experiences and held on to them as they study. Marie expressed that based on her evaluation of reported cases, some students had experienced unpleasantness which are mainly caused from lack of communication between students and lecturers. Rachel recounted “I wanted to be in the competition, so this is a stepping stone. I want to become marketable. It was a push for me to enter higher education”. Sally also noted that entering higher education presented quality benefits. Sally noted, there are the “benefit of getting more money, also for educating myself, trying to keep up with what’s happening in the world and advancement in teaching skills.”

Marie, the dean, also stated that students should have quality and timely feedback from lecturers, as it helps in giving the students direction and sense of hope for achieving their goals. When students sacrifice their time and money to study in higher education, Marie discussed, it is important that a high level of professionalism is displayed between lecturers and students. As a result, their time spent studying should be respected and maximized. Marie emphasized that “when they (students) manage to accumulate money to pay for school fees, they should be considered and encouraged to continue until they graduate”.

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The lecturers indicated that based on their interactions with the students it was observed that the students enter the higher education institution with varying levels of preparedness. It was perceived by the lecturers that some students readily grasp the opportunity of being in higher education. This is evidenced by students' positive responses to the requirements and demands for them to complete their studies. Some students display drive, motivation and commitment by extending themselves to the rigor needed for achievement in higher education. As a result, the transition period to studying in higher education institution is easier for the more dedicated and motivated students. The lecturers also noted the student feels a sense of achievement when they succeed in completing tasks, which were quite difficult for them. The transition period of adjusting to higher education environment is more difficult and takes longer for some students. Natalie noted "Some students come ready to learn others seems to take a longer time in transition into higher education. This is due partially to their expectation of higher education." Steven agreed that the students' expectations of higher education can hinder their adjustment. Steven also noted, "It seems that though majority of the students, desire to stay, they sometimes express a level of frustration" with their progress and the institution.

The registrar who interacts mainly with students' records highlighted that at times the roles of the registrar is expanded as students do seek advice from them relating to their courses. As such the registrar noted that students do struggle to adjust at times as they feel displaced and underrepresented. This emotive is based on the fact they arrive for classes in the afternoon and by then much of the campus is closed for them to access.

### **Summary of Participants' Responses for Research Question One**

As the participants reflected on the students' perceptions of their experiences at the institution there were varying yet similar recounts. The students identified that they were at

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times unsure of their place in the institution as they struggled to adjust to the new environment. They needed to be assured by their institution they had made the right choice in entering higher education. The dean, lecturers and registrar alluded to the fact that students do have a right to experience quality educational provisions provided by the institution. The students however, should ensure they have the right attitude towards learning as the responsibility is theirs to seek the necessary assistance in adjusting to and studying in higher education. Students do perceive their experiences as valuable and essential to their life, irrespective of their initial feelings upon entering the institution.

Table 2

*What motivates students to enter higher education.*

Category	Responses
Self-affirmation	I recognize that I have the potential to excel. I am the role model for my family
Improved quality of life	Benefits of getting more money
Improvement of financial status	You need to be marketable
Improvement of self	To get more rewards as it relates to salary
Educational advancement	For educating myself, keep my brain active Trying to keep up with what's happening in the world. Keep abreast with the advances in my profession It's just a necessary decision I had to do an upgrade
Improved status	A stepping stone to be in a higher position for a better qualified job It's another milestone to see that I can achieve more if I set my mind to it
Contribution to education sector	To improve my educational status Aspirations to own my own early childhood institution To cater to the needs of the children who are in my care
Motivation	My little motivation is what helps me to push through
Intrinsic motivation	Time is passing by, I just wanted to get over with it
Extrinsic motivation	Friends support and are my role models Family support, they motivate me My motivation is my class mates
Self- management	Well at least you get to work, to finance yourself

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Financial advantage	Normally have to be finding the school fee for themselves
Economy of time	Part-time students they have to do their best because they don't have time to waste
Self-efficacy	I am able to pace myself better

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Intellectual transitioning	Experience challenges adjusting to their courses Cannot understand some of their courses Not prepared they find it's difficult and failed some courses Those who are prepared is kind of smooth journey for them. Came prepared they are achieving their objectives and getting the work done getting the work done
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### **RQ2. What motivates students to enter higher education?**

Motivation in academia is a combination of students' actions and self-affirmation. When the student participants were asked what motivated them to enter higher education, they responded they had goals to accomplish and expectations of family and friends to fulfill. The students did not enter higher education without some amount of planning. The students' ascent to studying in higher education institution as part-time students was viewed as a milestone and a personal achievement. This personal achievement initially encouraged students to persist and be retained in higher education.

The intention to persist was a motivating factor for the students interviewed. Intention indicates the will or determination to behave in a particular manner. Students attend higher education institutions based on varying reasons. Some students entered with the intention of upgrading their skills suited for their jobs. Students participants indicated they realized their success or failure in higher education was predominantly their choice. Students responded that at times they had considered dropping out and aborting their studies, but decided against doing so as they weighed their initial reason/s for entering the institution against the reason/s they may have felt the need to leave. Ariel stated that her intent to persist was based on her family's expectation of her to succeed. She, Ariel, is the "big role model as the eldest grandchild, I must



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set a good example for my siblings.” (see Table 2) While she experienced challenges during her years of studying, the need to excel proved to be a greater motivation “you slip up somewhere you have to push yourself” (Table 2) as the need to succeed was greater.

The interviewees as indicated in Table 2, disclosed that accessing higher education would afford them the opportunity to become more informed in educational development and advancements, which could empower them to significantly impact the job market and make greater contributions to their society. They will be able to transfer such knowledge by empowering persons with whom they come in contact. Danielle indicated that she had one major goal in entering higher education and becoming qualified. She stated, “for me, my intention is to own an early childhood institution, so I wanted to be more qualified.” As a result, to provide the quality and essential service which she envisioned she decided to advance herself. Kayla, another interviewee, responded that advancing herself had at least three benefits, “to keep abreast with the advances in my profession, keeping my brain active and getting more rewards as it relates to salary.” Lorna’s interest in advancing herself was mainly to excel in higher education where she can impact others and not only herself by the new knowledge she has gained. She responded “for me it’s not salary, it’s to advance myself in keeping up with the changes in the education field.” (Table 2)

Even though the interviewed students had varying reasons why they entered higher education, they were not all prepared for the existence in or the rigors of higher education. As they processed what they wanted to achieve and how to achieve it they recognized that there is need for mental preparation in addition to the will to persist. Students who have a predefined goal and expectation for the end of their programmes will most likely seek ways of ensuring they are retained. This psychological engagement of the student participants was evident where some

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students were either prepared or partially prepared for their studies. Irrespective of their levels of preparation, the students indicated they decided to face the challenge of their new learning environment. Sam was prepared as he had his family's wellbeing and survival as his main motivation. He entered higher education ready to learn as his family's survival depended on his success. His success in higher education promises not only improved qualification but the prospects of promotion on the job which eventually results in an increase of his remuneration. Other students even though they desired to study in higher education they were not mentally prepared at the time they actually started studying. Sally said "No I cannot say that I was." Kayla also stated, "mentally I wasn't prepared entering this institution of higher education." Students' mental capacity have to be conducive to learning as it sets the atmosphere for quality interaction and collaboration in higher education.

Some students, the dean noted, enter higher education "ready to learn while some came unprepared and think it's easy." This attitude is evidenced by virtue of how they are focused in their lessons and seek assistance and interventions from lecturers and the dean to clarify misconceptions. Students also ensure they seek assistance from administrators and discuss matters related to learning modules and retention. In contrast, some students do not adjust readily to the new environment and lack assertiveness in order to ensure they learn.

The participant lecturers in discussing why students entered higher education agreed that the fundamental reason is to improve their qualification and status in life (see Table 2). The lecturers also discussed that the psychological inclinations of students, motivate them to seek improvements in their lives. Students are motivated by their intrinsic needs to achieve a specific goal in their lives but are also motivated through extrinsic media such as their family members,

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top achievers in the society, close friends and co-workers. In other words, their main aim is to gain fulfillment of their dreams and aspirations.

Consequentially, in aspiring to achieve ones' goals, the students believe that improvement in self and acquiring the desired qualification will impact their lives and the lives of their family meaningfully. Steven responded "For me they all have motivated factors. As long as a student wants to achieve a goal, they will work harder to be successful." Natalie highlighted that family support is not only financial but mental. Mental support is very important as it is "crucial that students feel the support of their family. Every step of the way because it serves to cushion the intensity of the demands they encounter in higher education". Robert another lecturer, stated there was added value in society when the students complete their degree as they become "better contributors to society." This is positive for any progressive society as students are already stimulated to conduct research and this attitude continued in the workplace meant improvement in societal innovations and policies.

### **Summary of Participants' Responses for Research Question Two**

All student participants intimated their accessing higher education was beneficial to them in several ways. The students were motivated intrinsically and extrinsically as they worked towards preconceived outcomes. They would have increased salaries, self-actualized, become competitive in the market and feel a sense of prestige knowing their status has upgraded as they are in possession of a first degree. This achievement will propel them closer to goals which they have for their lives. The need to become outstanding contributors to society motivated some students to work hard at being retained. The students agreed they would be valued contributors, as is the case of Danielle, one of the student participants, who expressed her intention of

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establishing her own early childhood learning center. This desire has energized her to persist in all her studies. She had refused to stop until she completes her course of study.

The educators, lecturers and dean, also intimated that the students after their transition back into the work world with their higher degree will be poised to make significant contributions to society. Such contributions can materialize only through the decisions and efforts of the students as they progress in higher education. As students exist within the confines of the institutions it is necessary that students are prepared for their societal challenges and expectations. Students should be armored with skills necessary for employment which is promoted by the institution. As the students identified they are motivated through different means it is imperative that the institution, represented by the educators and registrar, advocate for and promote the environment of accountability as students continue to project towards achieving their goal of completing higher education.

Table 3

*Challenges students face as they study in higher education institutions.*

Category	Responses
Self and time-management	Schedule given assignments according to priority or difficulty Try to complete assignments on time
Support groups	Family members assist with some of the practical assignments
Balancing work and study	Establishing some framework of when is family time Ensure quality output in the work place and study time is scheduled
Coping with the new environment	Leave work and you are tired when you get to school At school it's like your brain starts shutting down

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Mental focus	<p>You start having migraines</p> <p>Need to keep up with the changing environment</p>
Course schedules	<p>I have been faced with many challenges such as course clashes</p>
Health Issues	<p>I decided that my mental health was important</p> <p>I had to listen to the language of my body</p> <p>I dropped out for a while due to ill-health</p> <p>I intend to remain healthy</p> <p>My health is important, if I have to stop it would be due to my health</p>
Lack of quality support and resources	<p>The reason why I stopped was because of my research paper.</p>
Issues with lecturers	<p>My research supervisor was not easily accessible</p> <p>With a failing grade I don't get to graduate so I just stopped</p>
Timely feedback	<p>Late feedback on course grades</p> <p>Grades not available or I had to re-sit the course</p>
Communication Lecturers	<p>Quality communication between students and some lecturers lacking</p> <p>Lack of timely and quality feedback of some students' grades</p>
Administrators	<p>No quality interaction with administrators</p> <p>Administrative offices are closed before the evening classes begin</p> <p>Administrators not easily contacted</p>
Environment	<p>Uncomfortable learning environment</p> <p>Lack of quality internet connectivity</p> <p>Insufficient number of computers in the library</p> <p>Commissary is closed early in the evenings</p>
Unattached	<p>Little sense of belonging on campus</p>

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Little time for social activities based on work schedule

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Finances	Worry constantly about finances
Financial woes	Focus on limited finances affect study sometimes

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### **RQ3. What are the challenges students face as they study in higher education institutions?**

The students as they study have indicated they face challenges which included lack of finances, health problems, uncomfortable learning environment and lack of quality feedback from lecturers. Honouring tuition obligations among other expenses while studying, such as tending to personal and family expenses, puts increased pressure on the students' already limited and sometimes non-existent finances. Responses from the student participants testified to their struggles. Students expressed how they worry constantly about their financial situation.

Dorsetta noted "I also have financial worries and have thought of leaving the institution due to all these pressures I face." Elaine stressed "I think about my finances all the time." Their lack of sufficient finances proves burdensome mentally, emotionally and physically they cannot focus clearly on their study. Elaine further noted that she had to ensure her health is maintained as "I am hypertensive and I do not intend to suffer another stroke anytime soon." Since the students are constantly concerned about their financial status, and become distracted by it, their health sometimes become affected which in effect affect their studies. There is a strong connection between ill-health, worrying about finances and quality output.

To address their financial problems students have sought financial assistance by applying for loans from financial institutions, from scholarships, and their family coffers. The student participants work and study part-time, which should afford them the opportunity to honour part of their tuition from their salaries. Danielle noted "When you are studying part-time you get to

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work, you are able to pay your school fees, or at least try to pay your school fee.” This however is not the reality as some students’ salaries are insufficient to maintain their families, which in the first place motivated them to access higher education to improve their financial standing. This reality of little salary and major expenses for tuition and personal expenses do impact their mental status. One student, Ariel, noted as she encountered her problems, she approached them positively and sought immediate resolution. This approach helped her to maintain a strong mental focus and resilience. Collette stated, “I also worry about tuition; unpaid tuition affects exams. I had to stop once due to ill-health while studying.”

The stress of their financial burdens weighs heavily on the students closer to the beginning of a semester when they are expected to pay their tuition. This stress is further compounded when they are denied access to their examination rooms to complete final exams for lack of course payments. Students stated they would rather concentrate more on their studies than think about the burdensome and distracting reality of their finances. Rachel in her quest to achieve her degree indicated that even though finances is a setback, her locus of control sets in as she is determined to persist. She also noted that the investments she had made were too much to lose and she intended to be successful. She stated “this is a lot of money, so I cannot fail. Failure is not an option” (Table 3). No one wants to repeat a module as this is indicative of additional money to spend and completion date for their degree extended for at least another year.

In addition to the financial constraints, students have to contend with their social, physical and educational learning environment. The learning environment for any student should be one which is comfortable and equipped with the necessary resources to enhance what was taught, as it affects the wellbeing of the students as they study. It is one of the deciding

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factors for the students if they stay or leave the institution. The environment which includes: the structure of the classrooms, ventilation of the classrooms and accessible or available instructional facilities in the teaching learning process should not be compromised for the students as they have struggled to contribute by paying their tuitions.

Participant students stated they had to struggle to receive feedback from some of their lecturers. This had caused a gap in their progress as they are unsure of the next step to take in their modules. When this happens, they are uncertain of their progress, which inadvertently impacts their mental focus. Marie, the Dean, indicated there is the need for consistent in-depth feedback to the students. She noted that there are times when students have completed their examinations and submitted course assignments, yet they are denied the opportunity of receiving feedback. This puts a strain on the students as they need to be knowledgeable of their progress and decide what to do for the next semester (Table 3).

One of the basic psychological needs, sense of belonging, influences peoples' behavior either negatively or positively. For students in higher education their sense of belonging is really based on feeling connected to their institution. The student participants noted they did not feel as if they belong to their institution, but instead felt disjointed. One of the ways in which this is experienced is when they arrive late evenings to meet their lecturers and some are absent or late without informing them prior. Students noted that when they are informed of the challenges of the lecturers prior to their arriving on campus, they can adjust their schedules accordingly.

As students exist in higher education environment, they are expected to learn new concepts and have new experiences, academically or socially. The feeling that they there are little newness to their experience is unsettling for some of the students. Danielle expressed "I am not getting the university feeling. Things I expected to be doing and to be taught I am not getting



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that.” Students further noted when they arrive for classes in the evenings, the administrative offices are closed. They cannot interact with any administrator unless they arrive on campus hours before their classes. As part-time students they feel that they exist outside of the doors of the institution. One student Lorn stated “we can’t go to the offices to get any information because they are closed by the time we get here. There is no one to talk to about the situation” (Table 3). As a result, they feel alienated from the institution.

Marie, the Dean, noted that from her interactions and observations of the students they struggle with various issues which affect their state of loyalty or belonging to the institution. These issues include; feeling disconnected to the institution, feeling insignificant, and having no voice to present their issues to administration. She further noted, “there have been students who feel a sense of confusion.” At times they are unable to contact the relevant administrators who can address issues which are related to their retention at the institution. When they are unsuccessful in having audience with the relevant administrators they have to resort to interfacing with the dean or lecturers, who sometimes are not equipped with the information they seek.

Support for the students from the institution is also evidenced in the provision of a comfortable learning environment. This is a positive stimulus for learning. It is the classrooms that usually provides a structured learning environment for the students. As undergraduate part-time students they usually do not interact in social activities much based on their evening schedules. The comfortable environment impacts the mental focus of the students, which eventually affect their academic output.

From the students’ perspective, the institution should improve its environment in which they learn. Collette reported “the facilities of the university need to be improved.” Ariel also

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agreed there was the need for “improvement on the library and the school facilities. In addition, most persons have difficulty understanding the course they are doing, so it’s kind of torture.”

Ariel’s perceived the course as a torture because she was uncomfortable in the environment and had difficulties understanding some of the concepts delivered in her courses. She was however positive in her outlook stating that “the environment will change their mind set so they can block it out” (Table 3). A mindset which was changed because of the supportive environment augurs well for the retention of students.

As students aspire towards optimizing their potential, they would have predefined goals. One important means of having these goals realized and being retained in higher education is receiving academic advising. Such advice enables the students to attend classes for their course specific modules. Students noted they were sometimes confused regarding the specific course to choose. They also recognized that participating in some modules were unnecessary as it added little value to their career choice. This experience showed a lack of quality academic advising when the students entered the institution. The student participants emphasized that they received little to no academic counseling upon entering the institution. They however capitalized on the lack and interfaced with lecturers where they received quality advice (Table 3). Kayla expressed “some of the lecturers, try to make us understand and try to guide us.” Rachel in agreeing with Kayla stated “Many of them (lecturers) understand that we left high school some years ago, so they help us to understand the course better.”

Students expressed their gratitude for the advice and assistance of their lecturers which for them substituted as the academic counseling they should have received initially. Sally noted “some of the lecturers are willing to go out of their way and work with you regardless of the situation.” Rachel responded “I received inadequate information at the start of my course. I

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eventually completed the non-essential courses. There is also a breakdown in communication with students and lecturers.” Kayla agreed with Rachel by stating “there is no relationship between student and faculties. I ended up doing the wrong courses, for the first semester.” Students felt that if they were properly initiated into the learning environment, they would have made better choices regarding modular choices for their career path.

As the students make their choices regarding the courses, they sit they usually attend classes in the evenings after they leave work. Sometimes based on their work and distance from the institution they arrive for classes late in the afternoons. The administrative and faculty offices are closed. Lorn, a student participant noted “we can’t go to the offices to get any information because they are closed by the time we get here” (Table 2). Students do try to contribute to their learning, but they need the assistance of their institution. Factors which militate against students effectively doing so, includes poor internet connectivity for the students. One student Kayla noted “The library is usually closed early and internet access is poor. Some students do not have internet access at home so it was necessary to have at school.” As a result, they cannot gain access to books, journals and other resources to assist with their assignments. They agree there are online journals which they could access, but access is hindered by the limited connectivity to the internet on campus. Rachel concurred with Sam by stating, “So if the library is going to be closed at least let us have access to the internet so we can get our information some students don’t have internet at home.” No connectivity at home indicates a slow response to given assignments.

In addition to internet access on the compound participating students noted when they arrive on campus, they would appreciate having refreshments. This is usually not possible as the commissary closes early. Sam, a student participant, stated that as “part time students we work a

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full day. Some of us didn't stop to get something to eat and when we get here the canteen is closed.”

### **Summary of Participants' Responses for Research Question Three**

Research question three focused on the challenges the students face as they study in higher education. Students faced various issues such as financial setback, ill-health lack of quality feedback and access to resources. Based on the various challenges they face they have had to be determined to persist based on their initial motivations for accessing higher education.

Students identified they have been cautioned by medical practitioners to employ strategies which will prove easier on their health. This they do as they study or simply abort studying until their health improves. Their stress level is compounded at times by the lack of or irregular feedback given by their lecturers. Students need to be assured of their progress academically as it signposts their achievements. The students also noted that the inconsistent and unreliable internet service negatively affected their search for articles to substantiate claims in their courses. In addition to the lack of reliable internet service students also lamented the services offered at the commissary and the library when they arrive in the evenings on campus.

The registrar affirmed that students do not always function at their best as they are not comfortable in their environment. Knowing that at any time they can be deregistered and prevented from writing final examinations based on their financial status. Ill-health due to poor diet, rigorous learning environment and sometimes lack of self-management are also other contentious issues for the students. They struggle many times to correct these issues because of their desire to complete their education. The students indicated they had to develop their self-efficacy as they realized that to persist in higher education and succeed, they have to first believe

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they had the potential to excel. This affirmation of self, motivates them to persist so when discouragement comes, they try to remain positive.

Table 4

*Factors which influences students' decision to leave or stay in higher education.*

Category	Responses
Intent to persist Intrinsic motivation	<p>Yes, I have motivation I want to finish</p> <p>I made up my mind to go at it at once to finish my course</p> <p>Just to motivate yourself</p> <p>Being the big role model as the eldest grandchild,</p> <p>Have to set good example for my cousins</p> <p>You have to push yourself to continue</p> <p>in the world there is lot of difficulties and challenges</p> <p>In school overall it teaches you certain tricks how to maneuver yourself through-out each challenge</p>
Extrinsic motivation	<p>My main motivator is my daughter</p> <p>I want my daughter to understand she can accomplish anything it doesn't matter how hard it becomes.</p> <p>When you have that drive of support behind you, it pushes you to not give up, not to quit</p> <p>Cannot let them (support group), down</p> <p>I lean on (family) especially during the times when it seemed as if I would quit higher education.</p> <p>Family helps me to cross hurdles which I didn't think I could have crossed.</p> <p>I had taken a year out of this university due to ill-health and family supported me.</p>
Lecturers as support group	<p>Some of the lecturers are very motivating and encouraging</p>

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They (lecturers), kinda understand us as students

Lecturers understand because they were once in our positions

Some of the lecturers assisted me in getting a better understanding of my courses.

I interact with dean only to query my courses and grades assigned.

lecturers, some of them, will accept our emails and telephone calls

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Strategies for success	Creating personal study timetables
Social connections	<hr/> Creating smaller groups for studying  Communicating with study group regularly through social media  We ensure no one is left behind  Had it not been for resources such as past exam papers we would be totally lost  I believe we did a good job working together  A support group is crucial to my staying here  Interacting with some of the lecturers
Communication	<hr/> The customer service we offer, have been shifting.
Students' services	Students do feel disjointed from the full-time students.
Open door policy	Students are our important customers.
Timely feedback	Students would be waiting for grade results for over a year

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Course grades

Course grade, might not be forthcoming for varying reasons

Social programmes

Not enough offered, there are clubs and Students' Council

Unsupported

Not supported by part-time students

Part-time students have tunnel vision for academics.

They have no interest in social activities

Lack of interest due to time constraints in the evenings

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### **RQ4. What influences students' decision to leave or stay in higher education?**

It is the students' ultimate responsibility for their learning. Irrespective of the challenges they may encounter they have to be resolute that based on their intended outcome they will persist. Students, stated Marie the Dean, must take responsibility for their learning. One way of taking responsibility, Marie suggested, is for students to seek the necessary assistance that will propel them towards their goals. Marie noted "when you use your initiative to achieve, it has a positive impact than when somebody is just trying to force you to do something." See Table 4. Students' initiative and the desire to excel will motivate them to persist. When students establish a structured approach to learning they are better able to function in a structured manner in higher education.

Time management is necessary to stay abreast of academic activities and the challenges that are attached. Therefore, student must take accountability of time and activities to manage them effectively. The participating students in the face-to-face and focus groups interviews identified that they encountered challenges in creating parity among all the different activities in which they are involved as they study. Ariel noted she was challenged in spending quality time

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in studying, and completing assignments. In her effort to stay in higher education Ariel stated “what I’m doing now is scheduling myself to put at least half an hour in each course”. To manage themselves better, students have developed strategies for studying, scheduling work, study, and family activities to ensure they are all addressed in a timely manner.

In the focus group interviews, students identified they are faced constantly with the reality of their limited financial resources, the requirement of their study modules, family responsibilities and personal needs. This has resulted in increased pressure on their mental focus, which they had to implement strategies on how to manage. To cope with the increased demands on their time and finances, students identified they first recognized they had to manage themselves emotionally and mentally. Danielle discussed “I feel like we are on our own for most of the time. There are a bunch of course where I am basically teaching myself.” Lorna noted “we were told to skip between two classes. I had to find a solution because I cannot attend two classes at the same time.” After taking charge and assessing their situation they created a support group of colleagues that encouraged continuity. Sally also reiterated, the group “will send out a little encouragement to someone having problems with any course. They will ask questions in the group if anyone who has an answer will give it in support of each other” (Table 4).

Students’ self-efficacy is challenged as they struggle to efficiently manage time while they study. The challenges the students face were not discussed with the lecturers by the students, but based on observation the lecturers asserted that the students needed to create parity among their studying and personal commitments. As parity is established, they better manage their studies and become less stressed and discouraged. Natalie, a lecturer stated that demotivation may cause students to “become frustrated and will opt to drop-out.” Robert



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another lecturer discussed that students can achieve better results from their work. To do so they need to have “more personal relationship with their work, more time to be engaged in their studies.” However, what was seen as an issue of management of self, was more of a structural issue, as Tamara, another lecturer, discussed, some of the students sometimes do not manage well because of their mindset when they entered the institution. They are not always focused on the tasks given. They attend classes and have many issues to contend with and are not always successful in scheduling themselves effectively. As such they become distracted and cannot focus effectively in classes. Those students who are more structured in their approach most naturally become more focused and sometimes achieve more.

One major strategy the students identified in ensuring they are retained is engaging in constant interaction with each other. This interaction has been beneficial as it empowers and motivates them to persist as they aim to achieve their goals. Collette responded “A support group is crucial to my staying here.” The connections are positive and encouraging to each other. The support group encourages each other to persist. Ariel agreed by stating “when you have that kind of support behind you, it pushes you to not give up, not to quit.” Students emphasized that their support groups have been a cushion in one way or another with regards to the various problems they face as they study. Elaine recounted that her support group “is very important because they help me to cross hurdles which I didn’t think I could have crossed.”

In cultivating their social connections students have engaged the support of persons from family members, lecturers, friends and colleagues studying the same courses. The student participants all agreed that social programmes are very important to their being retained in higher education. They however indicated that due to time constraints, family responsibilities and work schedules they are usually unable to participate in the available social programmes of the

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institution. Therefore, they have created social connections in their groups by utilizing the use of social media to interact and communicate.

A psychosocial form of collaboration is engaged with the students. This collaboration incorporates their batch mates at the institution, family members and work colleagues. Students identified that as they arrive for classes sometimes, they experience fatigue, emotional distress, and intellectual challenges. Their intellectual challenges are manifested when they have modular assessments which they cannot complete due to one or more factors. Here students would schedule group meetings where they can work together and generate ideas on completing the assessments. (Table 4). Lorn noted “I had to be on my feet to find a solution. I am trying to make it work because I want to finish.” Danielle concurred “I feel like most times we are on our own. There is a group we have formed. We will meet, ask questions, have discussions in the group and we get support.” When students collaborate, the result is usually positive. Here friendships formed are strengthened which help students become more motivated to persist. In addition, students tend to learn more from their peers who sometimes have the ability to explain terms and concepts in a simplified version for them to understand. This is so since each student enters the conversation with different experiences and perspective.

A collaborative list of implemented strategies was given by the students as they consciously recognize that higher education cannot be successfully completed in a vacuum, there is the need for community. These strategies include; developing personal study schedules, creating and utilizing study timetables for their social groups, forming smaller dynamic study groups of two or three members, sharing resources such as past examination papers, and communicating regularly with each other in their social groups.

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Based on students' lack of proper planning, missed schedules and improper eating habits, they have greatly compromised their health. Poor health also affects their output and mental focus. Dorsetta stated 'higher education is challenging; my health has been affected negatively by my studies' (see Table 4). Here some students become demotivated due to the increased pressures they face to satisfy the expectations of family, work and study. The lecturers agreed that students' diet and stress levels related to the rigors of higher education can greatly impact their health. Natalie stated "they may be faced with health issues and may become demotivated based on what they had expected." Based on the necessity of having good health the students have decided they need to take better care of themselves. As the students contend with their health issues there is also the matter of communication between students and lecturers. As students complete given tasks, it becomes necessary that feedback is extended so students can have a definite assessment of their progress.

Feedback is a necessary tool for students. It tracks the progress towards their ultimate goal. Without proper feedback students are not aware if they are meeting the requirements to accomplish their goal. As students' progress in their study there is the need to have quality feedback from lecturers. Marie the dean, indicated that due to the lack of quality feedback students become frustrated. "If students coming to class two or three times not seeing a lecturer they may wonder, why am I wasting my time?" Marie continued to express that students would also state in frustration "they pay for this course and are not getting the service paid for. That can discourage a student to stop."

Marie further identified that students' grades should be submitted in a timely manner so they are more aware of their progress. "When they write their exams, their grades should be ready for them. To know whether they are progressing or not." The length of time some students

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have to wait before being given their grades is too long. This delay in feedback causes students to become more frustrated. Marie noted “it’s very discouraging that a student wrote an exam in first semester and the students is in third semester or in another maybe second year now, and the grades are not available.”

Students are the most important customers for any higher education institution. Hence they should be treated with respect. This respect and importance, as discussed by Patrice, is evidenced in students being provided with timely feedback from lecturers, social programmes and communication with administrators. Such are aimed at ensuring students are retained in higher education. Students at any time, will have question regarding their courses. Patrice discussed that students at times feels demotivated because they are not treated as they should. She noted there are students who feel a sense of bewilderment because they, “don’t know, who to contact to get their questions answered.” Students should have their questions answered, and their grades submitted in a timely manner both to students and to the registry, stressed Patrice.

In addition to that the students should be informed of their progress especially in an environment where one module should be completed successfully before beginning another. “When grades are submitted on time, students are made aware of their progress and the need to re-sit a module or only pay for the future modules” indicated Patrice. Misinformation is costly to the students both financially and emotionally. When this is alleviated or controlled, students become more adjusted and comfortable in their environment.

Further to the educational aspects of the students’ lives Patrice noted that there is need for improvement in their social engagements on the campus. “There are not enough social programmes. I see an attempt to create it. You have clubs, you have the student council.” Patrice further argued that part-time students usually do not support social programmes. The

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students usually state they have little time to be engaged in anything outside of their structured classes. Patrice emphasized “part- time students just have this tunnel vision about academia, saying they are coming from work and don’t have time. They are just here to get their programmes done.” Irrespective of the social programmes available there is minimal support from part-time students.

### **Summary of Participants’ Responses for Research Question Four**

Question four sought to ascertain from participants what influences students’ decision to leave or stay in higher education. The student participants identified it is a personal choice to excel in anything they pursue irrespective of any extrinsic support they may receive. They have utilized strategies such as structuring study times, creating support groups with other students in their present modules, engaging the support of family members and lecturers to ensure they are retained.

Students further noted they have identified the need to be reflective practitioners. Here they note their strengths and weaknesses and create pathways to success for themselves. One such pathway was to develop and maintain social media groups to share ideas and encourage other students in their cohort. This has proven beneficial as they have conducted research based on their given tasks at places off campus due to the lack of consistent internet connectivity. Information found is usually shared among the group members. Students also indicated they have had to struggle to receive feedback on tasks completed from their lecturers. The dean being aware of the tardiness encountered by the students in relation to their feedback noted that lecturers’ absence or unpunctuality for class also affect students’ progress. She agreed that students should be given feedback in a timely manner so they can track their progress in an informed manner. The registrar also expressed that students are affected by non-submission of

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grades from lecturers. This greatly impact the students' progress as there are times when they need to be registered for the next semester and encounter major problems. Students are not allowed to take other courses if the foundation course are not completed. As students function in an environment of mixed emotions, they have decided that the expectation they have of completing their degree is greater than the obstacles they face. Hence they will try to stay retained as they have a goal of achieving success.

Table 5

*Strategies which can be implemented to assist the students to overcome issues they face*

Category	Responses
Financial assistance Advertised scholarships	<p>More scholarship information needed so less students' loan</p> <p>University needs to promote more on their scholarship</p> <p>Need more information on available scholarships</p> <p>Advertising the various scholarships more for the students to apply</p> <p>Develop a revolving loan programme at the institution</p> <p>For revolving loan the students could borrow and repay in increments</p>
Social programmes Insufficient time Few choices	<p>For part-time students this is a bit difficult</p> <p>There is not enough time in the evenings to join clubs and societies</p> <p>As a part-time student there is not enough time to spend outside of work, home or classes</p> <p>If you do find yourself doing it you must have a real love for it, to sacrifice your time to do it</p> <p>We cannot be part of them because when we get here it is just in time for classes.</p> <p>There are not enough social programmes</p>

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	Even then if they had more social programmes, I would not have much time to participate
Comfortable learning environment Unattractive	Improve on the library The facilities of the university need to be improved The environment can make you change your perspective in a sense  Let the school look more cheerful,
Communication Disconnect Accessible administrators Sense of belonging Necessary	lack of communication between lecturers and students. lack of communication especially students' grades and giving feedback Open the administrative office for part-time students Have evening staff who caters to evening students Engage students in quality discussions Interface with part-time students
Feedback to students	There needs to be a connection between the lecturer, deans and students' grades. Submit students' grades on time Lecturer who has a class to teach, should be in the class
Access to resources Internet provision  Reprographics	Access to the internet is unreliable  The library is closed before we get here. Need internet so we can get our information Need to copy and print documents in the evenings Reprographics services unavailable in the evenings on campus

### **RQ 5. What can be done to assist the students to prevail against such problems?**

As students enter higher education, they need to have a strong support system. Academic support is really critical towards retention. Participants identified what was considered important in assisting the students to persist. The suggestions were; timely and quality feedback, social programmes, administrative support, financial assistance and comfortable learning environment.

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Whenever students are assessed in one form or another it is expected that they are given quality and timely feedback. Evans (2013) in noting the importance of feedback indicated feedback aids students in monitoring, evaluating and regulating their learning. It assists them in understand their incremental progress as they are involved in the teaching and learning process. Marie, the dean, in discussing the frustration students feel as they are not accorded the opportunity of receiving regular feedback from some lecturers, agreed that they should “submit students’ grades on time”. (Table 5). Bean and Eaton (2000) in their psychological model highlighted the necessity of students’ self-awareness and focus as they interact and study. Astin (1999) indicated that as students become involved in their learning they should persist. Persistence of students is hinged on the feedback they receive. There is also some amount of interaction between students and lecturers taking place as the teaching learning takes place, hence the lecturers should ensure they are prepared and ready for classes. Astin in his Input-Environment-Output model emphasized the importance of communication with the lectures, students and administrators as it affects the students’ output. As such feedback is important for persistence and retention.

The interviewed registrar highlighted the importance of students receiving their feedback by noting that its lack can result in a holistic impact. Patrice stressed that students’ retention is a combination of their progress, which is carefully assessed, tracked and frequent quality feedback given. Such information relating to the students’ progress should be submitted to the relevant parties such as the registry so the students’ records can be updated. Updated records are invaluable data on where gaps can be observed relating to the students who are not functioning at their ultimate and need to have an intervention strategized before it is too late. A students’



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retention status should not be linked to only their grades but also to the established protocols for tracking students that have weakened over time.

Researchers have indicated that part-time students are not duly engaged in the affairs of their institution based on their schedules for the day. It was purported by Astin that as students become more involved they develop more awareness of their institutions' culture and become more loyal. As students become more involved in their institutions their level of participation in the activities of the institution and their work increases. Students however need to make the conscious efforts to become more involved in their institutions. There have been attempts on varying levels, noted by Patrice, but their lifespan was short. This was as there was a lack of planning, forecasting and support. As Patrice indicated (see Table 5) the part-time undergraduate non-traditional students are not supportive of the social programmes over the years. When the programmes are planned, in order for them to glean the desired results, they should be supported by the intended participants. Since the part-time students do not have the luxury of spending many hours before and after classes on campus adjustments need to be made to the activities planned for them. The registrar suggested the course developers and administrators should target all levels of learning abilities in the programmes offered. She noted "I think we will have to come together to see what other programmes could be attractive to the person who is coming from work and doing straight A." These students should be catered to so they persist.

The students disclosed that social activities were limited. Beryl recounted "I joined the choir at one time because I love singing." She further discussed that great sacrifice is involved when a part-time student is part of a social programme. This is so as they have little time in the evening to commit to any activities. For students to become involved in social activities the

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provisions could be made for such activities be held in the evenings thereby affording the students the privilege of participating.

The issue of honouring financial obligations is a major problem for the students. They welcome the provision of having scholarships to assist in alleviating some of their financial burden. Different factors however, militate against them all receiving scholarships. The students indicated that they need to be more informed of the available scholarships so they can apply. They are cognizant the offerings are limited but they would rather have the opportunity of applying rather than being ignored or ignorant of the possibilities available. While there may not be many scholarships offered to the students, Marie, the dean, noted that students are allowed to work on the campus to garner additional funds. This however is not quite beneficial to part-time students as they usually arrive on campus in the evening and most of them are working.

Further to financial assistance, the students felt that the institution needed to institute programmes which would address their need for academic counseling. Dorsetta alluded that “there is not much that is given, there is room for improvement.” Since students commute daily to classes the interaction they have with everyone is limited so it should be quality interaction.

The student participants noted that there is the need for greater collaboration and communication with the administrators. The students further asserted that they value the interaction they can experience with the administrators and non-academic staff when they arrive for classes in the evenings as they do have queries which need to be addressed. The students suggested that the administrators make themselves available in the evenings by extending the office hours. There should be an evening institution administrator who can address their issues. Another suggestion given by Faith was “we need students’ services for support in writing, giving us counseling and academic advising.” When this is done, they become more acclimatized to

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their environment and also feel a sense of patriotism to the institution as they feel they are valued.

Students should have a comfortable learning environment when they attend classes in higher education. Robert, one of the lecturers, stated “I don’t think there will ever be a university that has enough resources, but this university needs to probably do a lot more.” Since the institution is lacking in some of the provisions, Robert suggested that the institution “find new strategies of doing it well. They need to find a way how to include more resources.” When asked to expound on what could be improved, Robert responded “the library do not have a lot of resources, and more computers should be available.”

As a result, as Patrice noted, the institution should commit to improving their offerings to the students. “I find for this particular institution, our students feel, our competitors are more attractive than we are.” These competitors at times may attract the attention of the students, so they would enrol at that institution. As such, since the competition is great, she emphasized that administrators have a very important role to play. “Our administrators will need to change it in such a phenomenal way. Making it more attractive for students to interact.” Patrice suggested that to effect change they “would have to do a lot of marketing. Our whole recruitment methods will have to change.” This is one sure way of attracting more students. Patrice further indicated that since the students are not participating in social activities at the institution, the programme planners could infuse the social programme in at least one foundation module. This could be a practical rather than a theoretical module so students would be encouraged to sit that module, which as a result their being part of a social activity.

### **Summary of Participants’ Responses for Research Question Five**

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The student participants, dean, lecturers and registrar do agree there are entities lacking at the institution which need to be improved. When these are improved the chances of students dropping out of the institution should significantly decrease. The students indicated they needed academic advising as they realized if they were properly orientated into the institution, they would have avoided some of the mistakes they made when choosing their modules for studying.

The other participants did agree with the students. The dean reported that the teaching staff had taken the responsibility at times to assist the students in making the right choices based on their career. When students are effectively supported, they can make the credible connections to their studies, everyday lives and their job requirements. As this holistic development takes place, students become more appreciative of the institution and are motivated to be retained. Retention of the students is a collaborative effort which includes the effort of administrators, faculty, and students.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary and Discussion of Findings**

This chapter of the study recapitulates the findings of the investigation, and makes recommendations for policy, practice and future research. The findings address the five research questions:

1. How students perceive their experiences at the institution?
2. What motivates students to enter higher education?
3. What are the challenges students face as they study in higher education institutions?
4. What influences students' decision to leave or stay in higher education?
5. What can be done to assist the students to prevail against such problems?

The findings are then linked to the literature review as they relate to the challenges part-time undergraduate non-traditional students face as they strive to be retained in higher education.

Findings were generated from interviews of students, a dean, lecturers and one registrar.

Interested in the issues the students face and how they managed them with the aim of staying retained, a decision was taken to use the qualitative research design.

This chapter first presents a discussion on the findings of the investigations followed by a conclusion. Next there is the limitations encountered during the research progress followed by recommendations for practice and for policy makers. The chapter then concludes with recommendations for further research.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Information gathered from the participants revealed that indeed the students who enter higher education institutions as part-time undergraduate non-traditional have various issues with

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which to contend as they strive to be retained for the duration of their programmes. The findings will be discussed as they relate to the five research questions which guided the research.

### **RQ 1. How students perceive their experiences at the institution?**

The findings from the participants' responses substantiated Tinto's (1999) research that access and engagement in higher education has a profound impact on students' retention in higher education institutions. The student participants felt privileged to be accepted into the institution. However, as they became immersed into the environment, they believed they were ill-prepared emotionally and physically for the demands put in place by the institution and as a result became stressed and worried about the prospects of meeting these demands and eventually completing their course of study.

As discussed by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1988), students who enter environments that facilitate higher education are forced to contend with new norms, values and behaviours in learning which are different from their previous experiences. This was evident in the information garnered during the study as students related at times, they received more assignments than they could manage to complete for a given time or the teaching methods were different to that which they were accustomed in their earlier years of studying. As a result, adjusting to the different teaching methods prompted them to change their style of learning to that which would suite their environment. The students experienced emotional, physical and intellectual discomfort as they entered the institution, based on the changes they were suddenly experiencing. Students recognized that based on their decision to enter higher education they had to decide whether to adjust or not to their new environment.

Studies conducted by researchers such as Gunuc (2014) and Tinto (1999), reported that students enter higher education with their own goals and predefined behaviours. Such goals and

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behaviours at times interfere, either negatively or positively, with the learning which should take place with these students. It is then the students have to consciously identify their choice towards their goals, persist or drop-out of higher education. The student participants' responses resonated with the assertion of Tinto (1975, 1987, and 1988), which identified that students entered higher education with ideas of becoming more qualified in their field of practice but not the challenges which they encountered as they function each day. The reality and expectations of the experience were sometimes misaligned. Students' perceptions of their new learning environment can influence their learning outcomes. The students' expectations of higher education included the courses they would cover, their interaction with faculty, administration and their colleagues.

The findings showed that students did not expect higher education to be so rigorous. Students expected to interface with their lecturers at all the classes, have concepts discussed and given assignment understood. They experienced shock and disappointment when they realized they had to take a more controlled approach to their learning. Tinto (1999) cautioned that institutions should give clear information to students as they enter higher education. When this happens students have a better idea or understanding of the rigor and strain they will encounter. As such as the students in this research reported they had to teach themselves some of the modules, they would have been informed from beginning that in higher education students are expected to take a controlled approach to their learning. They had to even teach themselves some of the concepts to be taught as they were given a structure within which they were expected to operate as they progress through their modules. This experience was daunting for some students as they view this approach to teaching as abandonment. Students perceived that the lecturers should always be there to facilitate their learning and provide a more direct

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approach to concept absorption and intellectual development. They did not perceive in the beginning that as they progress in higher education learning takes on a new perspective. Students then gradually recognized they had become masters of their learning and had to take control of their future.

Students also struggled with the perception of the learning environment being one which they could function comfortably, physically, academically and emotionally. As indicated by Tinto (1975) students should be integrated into the learning environment in an almost seamless manner based on the provisions made for them, academically and socially. When there is lack of balance between both academic and social activities the students may opt to drop out based on unrealized expectations. As the students become ~~immersed~~ acclimatized to their learning environment they became more involved in the learning process as emphasized by Astin (2014).

Bodkyn and Stevens (2015) in their study indicated that students should have direction and self-regulation based on their intention to succeed. As a result, when they recognized that their environment had lacks and did not satisfy their initial expectations their responsibility as self-monitoring students who desired to learn will become activated as they sought various ways of surviving the environment. As non-traditional students become involved in higher education they are usually apprehensive of what to expect, based on their previous experiences as inclinations. This feeling as asserted by Burnell (2019) and Green (2018) enables the students to delve deeper in the activities which would benefit their academic achievements thereby widening participation in the process. The students in this research, noted they experienced the imbalanced of expectation and reality of situation, but opted to stay until course completion. Based on their intention to stay students weathered the challenges and had developed strategies of coping with and surviving in the learning environment.



### **RQ 2. What motivates students to enter higher education?**

Based on the responses of the participants, students were motivated to enter higher education motivated by their need to achieve a degree, improve their qualification, and upgrade their educational status. Echoing the research findings of Astin (1993), there is value and improved status, socially and intellectually, when a student enters higher education. Students enter higher education based on their value system and perceived benefit they can derive from the institution. Research has shown, (Bean & Eaton 2000; Bodkin & Stevens, 2015) that when students are motivated by a specific goal they want to achieve, this intrinsic motivation and attitude will push them to align specific tasks to their goal. For students to enter higher education institution without intrinsic motivation would be remiss of them. Students need the inner strength and desire to achieve through hard work to excel.

Responses from the interactions with the participants indicated that the need for academic improvement means improved quality of life, increased remuneration on the job and expectation of competing in better opportunities. It also increases students' self-efficacy, self-acceptance and bolster their sense of accomplishment. As students envision such improved quality of life, they recognized they were steps closer to the actualization of a goal. The students were not only motivated by intrinsic desires but also by external entities. The findings are also supported by Bean and Eaton (2000) that students' emotional reactions or psychological determination and feelings to their environment as they interact with others also solidify their determination to persist or leave the institution.

Education, as is highlighted in various research conducted through the years, is a fundamental means of prompting and improving economic development of any country. The very need to improve their financial standing as reported by Jaschick (2010) is initiated by their

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financial status. There is the need to improve financial status which inadvertently comes by an increase in remunerations which eventually result in creating a better financial future for self and family. Roberts (2011) discussed that there are two fundamental benefits of education to society: development of economy and social wellbeing of its citizens. The student participants in this research noted they entered higher education to improve their financial status. As a result, when they enter the institution, they are interacting with different person they never met before whom they can share ideas and expectations of their society. The result of such socializations empowers the students to return to their workplace and initiate changes which can significantly improve output, which inadvertently impacts society. Tinto (1975, 1987, 1988) in his Academic and Social Integration Model findings concurred that as students interact in their institutions, bonds are formed both with administrators and faculty and other students. Such bonds are beneficial to the students' and the society's development as students become more competitive and productive in a changing world. The participants, indicated that they were motivated either intrinsically or extrinsically through interactions with family member and other support groups to enter higher education institution. This decision they intimate should make an indelible impact on their lives.

### **RQ 3. What are the challenges students face as they study in higher education institutions?**

As one of the well-known and fundamental authorities on students' retention, Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) in his model of student departure, an interactionalist approach, viewed students' challenges and depart as a combination of varying factors. These factors which include: students' skills, their financial status, previous educational experiences, their inherent qualities in addition to their intellectual and social interaction with others, resonated in the findings of this research. Analysis of the participants' interviews and responses revealed that

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lack of finances, mental stress, health issues, self-management, comfortable learning environment, and support from lecturers and administrators are the major challenges the student participants face as they study. These issues they face are also impacted by their personal obligations to their work family and social life. These varied and many issues bombards the students' space and, as Bean and Metzner (1985) and Tinto (1975, 1987) Tinto (1975, 1987) noted, impact their persistence to be retained.

The support of lecturers is important for the intellectual, social and emotional development of the students as they exist in the higher education environment. The lecturer based on their multi-dimensional role as educator, researcher, leader, manager, motivator and supporter hold the esteemed position of experts in the field. Some form of negotiation takes place during this social activity of interacting in the learning space. This negotiation is manifested in a division of responsibility where students make every effort to learn that which is imparted from the lecturer. The lecturers on the other hand have to view their role as important and this should be evidenced by virtue of their facilitating and transferring of knowledge (McGhie, 2009). As the lecturers engender the belief that the non-traditional students are capable of achieving success throughout their programmes it is expressed and hence the students thrive off that positive energy (Wood & Tanner, 2012). Students contend with lack of quality support from their lecturers in addition to deficient financial support.

Student participants claimed that they chose to study part-time based on their financial status. They could not manage to enroll as full-time students as they could not afford to be jobless, they needed the security, stability and assurance of their jobs, which was their means of survival. Students further noted there were four options available for them to choose to assist with their finances, which they tried their best to access. First there were scholarships available

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either on campus or off campus from privately owned institutions. Next there was students' loans offered by the government. This is tedious process of selection of students by the government agency. Only the most qualified can access this loan as many students seek this avenue for assistance. Assistance from family and friends is one of the avenues which students indicated they tried to access as it proved more beneficial to them. The terms of repayments are usually less stringent than that of the other lending entities. According to the findings of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) and Tinto (1987), students who receive financial assistance such as students' loans, scholarships and loans from financial institutions had a better opportunity for retention. This is so as they are not constantly thinking of their financial obligations to their educational institution and expenses for their personal lives. Some student participants mentioned that they attempted to gain scholarships to bolster their financial standing. However, they were unsuccessful due to scholarships unavailability and the criteria to be qualified. Some became aware of the available scholarships after submission of application due date had passed. Those who applied and satisfied the criteria were usually successful. As Astin (2004) indicated, usually students who study part-time generally have little money to satisfy their needs. As a result, they needed assistance from as many support groups they could or they might not persist. The students reiterated that even though they encountered financial problems they were not daunted by its impact on their lives. They agreed that they had to ensure they could source the funds for their education or they have to suffer the consequences of deferring their semesters or basically dropping-out, but they were motivated by different ways to persist to the end.

As the students contended with their financial worries, they also endured mental stress. This psychological response to the rigors of studying in higher education affected the students negatively. Students mentioned that at times they have been overwhelmed with the pressures of

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managing their academic life with their jobs and other personal commitments. Such pressures sometimes resulted in lack of focus on their study, reporting less for classes and even becoming ill. Bean and Eaton (2000), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) in their discussion of students' mental stress when being engaged in higher education, purported that students can alleviate mental stress based on their approach or avoidance of the stressors with which they face.

Students have the capacity to structure their lives better so they can have parity in treating with all the activities they participate in each day of their lives, whether academically or socially.

Crosling, Heagney, and Thomas (2009) expand on the issue of pastoral care being offered in the institutions as it catered to the mental support of students. Pastoral care provides the opportunity for the students to better assimilate their lessons and adjust to the rigors of higher education better. Student participants also noted that due to the lack of mental or pastoral care they internalize the weight of operating in the institution. This causes internal problems which prompts them to seek medical attention. The diagnosis from their medical practitioner indicates poor diet, lack of rest and mental discomfort. Such a reality is not good for the students as they need to be functioning at their best to survive the higher education environment. Astin (1994) reiterated that the institutional policies and standards, academic and non-academic, impact the level of students' involvement. As such the care and compassion extended to students serve to motivate and engender renewed thrust to persist until course completion.

In addition to the medical issues and mental stresses which the students face, they also indicated they had communication problems. Communication is a necessary factor in the interaction of students and lecturers in the academic community. Students should be able to communicate with their lecturers and administrators on any academic matter. They should also be informed of their progress through timely and quality feedback from lecturers. The student

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participants stated they had challenges receiving feedback from their lecturers. This had negatively impacted their progress sometimes. First, they had to re-sit a course based on the reports of their lecturers that an assigned task was not submitted. Students usually deny the claims and stated they were prevented from entering some classes due to this set back. The registrar and dean also agreed that the students suffered with lack of quality and timely feedback from their lecturers. Pascarella (1980) in his findings discussed that an informal contract exists between students and lecturers when the classes begin. As a result, the students should be informed of their progress from faculty. Quality feedback is extended through discussion on areas which need improvement and encouragement for continued achievements as the uncertainty students face with the lack of feedback can be demotivating for them. This lack of quality feedback to the students resonates a lack of support for the students by their lecturers. Students viewed the support of their lecturers inclusive of feedback which identifies their progress. The comments which the lecturers would give were important for continuity in higher education. When this aspect is missing the students become uncomfortable and uncertain of their progress at times.

### **RQ 4 What influences students' decision to leave or stay in higher education?**

Research concerning students' retention in higher education indicate that students' have to take a conscious and structured approach to their study. As the students assess their reasons for entering higher education, they can implement strategies which will guide them to accomplish the task until completing their course of study. They must decide that the end product which they envision warrants the difficulties they face as their education is a lifetime investment. This lifetime investment not only incorporates the financial aspects of the students'

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decision to stay or leave but also focus on academics. They were motivated extrinsically by support groups to persist and the intrinsic need to improve their educational and financial status.

One major entity which is central to the students' retention is their institution. As Astin (2014) expanded, students will experience varying challenges, but in order to cope they need to seek quality assistance and implement measures to cope. They must become more involved in the social activities of the institution, interact with lecturers, faculty members, other students while maximizing time dedicated to studying. The institution should ensure that students receive the programmes and comfortable learning environment which they were promised upon entering the institution. Based on the expressed desire of the students to receive quality feedback from their lecturers, Astin (1991) expressed that students should be reactive and seek audience with the relevant persons to receive their feedback. The 'input' aspect of Astin (1991) input-environment-output model highlighted that students have a personal responsibility in their retention status. They have the innate power to determine their future by virtue of their actions in class and their study times. The students have the opportunity to interface with the lecturers or vigilantly seek intervention from their administrative representative.

The students in their responses indicated they had to implement personal strategies with the aim of learning concepts and ensuring they are retained. One of such activities implemented was to consciously assess their progress identifying their strengths and weaknesses. When they become and practice being reflective practitioners, they are better able to track their progress personally.

### **RQ 5 What can be done to assist the students to prevail against such problems?**

Higher education institutions pride themselves as the place of choice for prospective students. They expect the best quality, high achieving student to enter their institutions. This

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branding and imaging of the institutions requires strategic and intensive planning from all stakeholders. Higher education institutions' credibility and reputation are crucial for student seeking to study (Valitoy, 2014). Students need to be assured their university of choice has the best facilities, efficient and effective faculty members, relevant and competitive programmes, where they can pursue their degree of choice.

Students make their choice of institutions based on different factors. Students tend to enter institutions which cater to a specific need. As Bean (2005) identified, students enter higher education with the attitude to fit in with their environment and being loyal and committed to their institution. When students are loyal to their institutions, they are resolute in performing well in their studies, participating in the social programmes offered as much as they can and also recommend the institution to other prospective students. Student participants in this study expressed that initially they were loyal to their institution. However, as time goes by and access and participation which they were promised were not realized, they became disillusioned and at times entertained the idea of leaving the institution. They support the institution's mandate and are very appreciative of being accepted to study there. However, they desire to experience a sense of belonging and fulfillment as students in the institution. They chose this particular institution to read for their degree initially based on its location and competitive tuition fees. Secondary, the programmes they were expected to study seemingly met their needs. With such assertions, the students thought they would fit comfortably within the institution and achieve their goals. Fitting in an institution as purported by Bean (2005) is critical for retention. When students fit in the learning environment their self-efficacy becomes stronger, they value their educational advancement and aspire towards achieving their goals.



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When discussing their challenges academically, students identified that a competitive environment was created and fostered among their colleagues which pushed them to perform at their best, as everyone was striving for the same goal. They all insisted that since they have been experiencing lack of quality feedback and lack of consistent internet connectivity, they had to commandeered their situation and create paths to success. With regard to the internet connectivity, students would plan among themselves that students with connectivity at work or home could assist with researching concepts then share when they return to classes. Higher education institutions as emphasized by Tinto (1999), need to improve students' resources to increase the retention rates. The resources provided by the institutions foster collegiality, improved learning outcomes and the possibility of greater number of students persisting. The institutions need to increase student interaction with academic provisions that can positively impact the retention of students.

As the pressures of studying in higher education increases the students need to have the opportunity of speaking to reliable, efficient and qualified counsellors. The mental and physical health of students is imperative for success. Academic advising is critical for students' success. The students' reflected on their progress and reiterated that they would have welcomed assistance with their writing skills. Writing for higher education is entirely different from what they had previously experienced. In order to have better output writing coaches should be made available for students.

Quality and timely feedback of students' work is important for the students and institution to thrive. The students need to be supported so they can continue fitting in their environment. Astin (1984) argued that as students fit within their environment there are specific responsibilities which they have to employ. As students indicated their lecturers do not all

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provide feedback readily. The students should have the opportunity to insist on delivery of feedback as the institution has an obligation to ensure students are comfortable and progressing in their studies. This must be a cooperative effort between institution, lecturers and students.

When students fail to complete their programme of study the institutions enrollment will decrease as the population decreases and also their status in the market. Students should be provided with a comfortable learning environment and the academic support necessary for their retention.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

My investigation of the issues part-time non-traditional undergraduate students face as they aim to be retained in higher education exposed a paucity of research done in Jamaica. The students' experiences have brought to the forefront the challenges which must be addressed at the institution to implement policies that are expected to improve students' retention (Astin 1984, 1999, 2014; Foster et al., 2011; Fuller, Heath, & Johnston, 2011; Schofield & Dismore, 2010; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993, 2004). As the issues the students face as they study are revealed it became pertinent that the policy makers and stakeholders in education had to become more proactive in planning for the students.

According to theorists such as Astin (1984) and Tinto (1975, 1999) retention of students is a collaborative initiative among students, policymakers, administrators and other stakeholders. The students also need to positively interact with other students, administrators and facilitators in their institutions as it fosters high quality effort and output which impacts learning and by extension retention. Research has shown that the main issues faced by part-time undergraduate non-traditional students as they study spans from their personal attitudes towards their work to external factors such as financial problems, and institutional practices. Retention rates of

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students has positive and negative impact on the institutions and the country. Institutions are negatively impacted when the students' enrolment decreases and prospective students do not enter the institution. Furthermore, the economy of the country may also be affected as lesser skilled and qualified workers enter the job market.

The finding that academic advising aids in students' retention in higher education was also vital for this study (Astin, 1984). Based on Tinto's (1975, 1999) findings, when institutions recognize that students do need to be properly advised on the courses they should pursue in higher education and link the advising services to other social services the students are poised to perform better and decide to persist. Students in this study indicated that they did not receive quality advice regarding the modules they should sit in preparation for their degree. They also noted that even though they had foundation courses which were necessary for their particular degree, they would have appreciated advise on the electives they could choose. Students agreed that their course seemed to be disjointed and the connections among social services and courses had to be their personal choice. Research by Olbrecht, Romano, and Teigen, (2016) also showed that receiving financial support from private sectors, government agencies or family members positively impact the retention of students, hence findings of this study are supported.

This study contributes to existing literature by noting that part-time non-traditional undergraduate students do face issues in higher education which can cause them to drop-out. These factors when addressed by the administrators, faculty and students can positively impact the lives of the students. It was observed by Astin (1984) and Tinto (1975, 1999) that students enter higher education based on various reasons. These reasons serve as motivation for the students as they are faced with challenges in their academic journey.

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In the findings of Astin (1984) and Tinto's (1975, 1999) research it was identified that students need support from their institution which can greatly impact their retention. Hence it can be asserted that institutional policy and strategies are critical to retaining students. Policy should not be a theoretical concept posted in the annals of the institution, but a reality in its execution within the institution. Part-time non-tradition undergraduate students were aware of the struggles the institution experiences as it aims to educate and impact learners. As human resources who are critical to the continued development of the institution, students are interested in continuing with their institution, but the institution has to make changes to ensure this happens. The students noted they will adapt new knowledge based on improved technological provisions and become greater self-motivators, team builders and innovators. This they can do efficiently with the intrusive actions of their institution to providing the quality learning environment necessary for high output.

### **Limitations**

This study has some limitations which should be noted. First, this study was conducted at a small, private institution, therefore the results may not be representative of all groups of part-time non-traditional undergraduate students. It is difficult to know how part-time non-traditional undergraduate students that agreed to participate in the study are different from part-time undergraduate non-traditional students at different institutions, which creates a potential for a selection bias. This situation is quite in alignment to Tinto's (1993) caution that his theory should not be confined to any one type of institution as the departure from any institution can be caused by different reasons.

Another limitation in this study was that the range of the participants was limited to the number of selected students, which were sixteen. More student participants could have

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expanded the study to generate more information on the issues the students face and the retention strategies employed to persist. Generally qualitative researchers, such as Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran (2009), view data collection as non-generalizable to the population due to the use of small samples. As such when the participants were relating their experiences, such as Beryl who suffered a minor stroke while studying, would view it as unique and not applicable to other part-time non-traditional undergraduate students. While this experience might have been so in her situation, it had added value to scholarly inquiry as it expanded the view to the various health problems students may experience.

Finally, these students who participated in the research process were students of mine. They could have withdrawn from the process if some amount of trust was not developed. The fact that they stayed and had not withdrawn from the higher education institution and also from the research process proved they were indeed survivors. They weathered the storm of adjusting and being retained to their final year in university.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The findings from this research has provided a deeper understanding of the issues which can impact students being retained in higher education. The data indicated that each individual student entered higher education based on some particular stimuli or motivation. Based on the extent to which that stimuli resonates within a student's mind and expectation; their self-efficacy will become much deeper whereas the will to win and excel will become dominant.

The findings are in alignment with Tinto's (2008) assertions that "access without support is not opportunity" (p. 10). Students need various forms of support for retention in higher education. Academic improvement is the fundamental need driving students to the higher education institutions. The institutions have the responsibility to effectively plan and collaborate

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for students. With that in mind there is the possibility that the students could be catered for using different approaches (Astin, 1984). Tinto (1993) indicated that students should play a part in the decision making of their institution. It is prudent that the voices of the students be recognized as they have indicated the various issues they face as they study. Students bridge the divide between market and institution. Well prepared and educated students have the capacity to become strong nation builders. It is within this context that I present these recommendations based on the findings of this study where it is hoped they can be used to effect change in the institution.

1. Ensure the recruitment process, enrolment and ascent to higher education effects a smooth transition for the students so they feel welcomed and part of the institution thereby formalizing their sense of patriotism for the institution. Specific programmes and facilities which were introduced to students during their orientation process should be accessible during their years of study.
2. Support services such as reliable internet connectivity, writing coaches, academic mentors and financial assistance are basic provisions which encourage retention of students. Students need assistance from experts or experienced persons to write their papers in a scholarly manner. As a result, there should be a writing centre where students are offered quality and efficient assistance in completing their work. These centres should be accessible to the students in the evenings as they arrive for their classes. Internet connectivity is crucial for students researching information so they can efficiently participate in their classes and also ascertain credible information for course assignments.

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3. Student participants registered their disappointment in not having contact with the administrative staff in the evenings as the offices are closed. It then become necessary that there should be an established evening institute office that is staffed with personnel to cater to the needs of the part-time students. Students will then be able to access administrators and facilities in the evenings which will positively impact their stay at the institution.
4. All participants echoed the need for timely feedback and submission of students' grades. Administrators should ensure lecturers are held accountable as the students are many times prevented from proceeding to register for another course. This is so as students had to re-sit courses they had previously done, due to discrepancies which affected their feedback.
5. Admission counselors could advice students academically or provide the necessary information on how to access assistance when needed. This advice would provide the students with critical information which would empower them to making informed decisions.
6. Institutional policies and procedures should be assessed and revised at regular intervals to ascertain their impact on students and market. This assessment is beneficial for the institution in terms of increased number of students entering the institution and also being retained.

### **Recommendations for Policy Makers**

Policymakers are fundamental in creating a wholesome and effective learning environment for students. Gornitzka, (1999) noted “an organization does not and cannot exist in a vacuum it has to interact with its environment in order to achieve its basic objectives” (p. 6).

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Institutions need the support of stakeholders inclusive of policymakers. Policymakers are adept to ensuring systems thinking changes to benefit students, institution, and by extension society.

There are some policies which can be implemented to ensure students' retention.

1. Implement transition programmes for students that further informs students on the expectations and rigors of higher education. This aids in students adjusting to the new environment of higher education easier. Students could be awarded credits towards their degrees, as an incentive for participating in these programmes.
2. Provide opportunities for students to participate in social activities by hosting them in the evenings. These social activities could be structured so they link to the courses the students are studying. These would be beneficial to student's participation as they would be awarded credits.
3. Courses or modules of study should be revised at least every five years. It would provide the students with the skills and knowledge which the market requires. The market requires new and innovative programmes which will cater to the needs of the students. As an adjunct lecturer and a graduate who have studied was a part-time nontraditional undergraduate student, I have recognized that there is minimal change in the courses offered in higher education, yet the market is changing due to technological advances. Students should be studying concepts as discussed by Morey (2000), which will prepare them to be more aware, knowledgeable of and be skilled to effectively impact their communities and country,

### **Recommendations for Further Research**



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Appertaining to the literature review done in chapter two and the data presented and discussed in chapter four, the following recommendations are made for improving student retention.

1. The study could be replicated at another small privately-owned higher education institution in order to verify the findings of this study in relation to the lack of: quality and timely feedback, communication with administrators, quality and efficient academic advising and social programmes which cater to part-time students.
2. Given the advances in technology and the impact it has on students' lives, research could be conducted on the prevalence of part-time undergraduate non-traditional students choosing to study online, the challenges they encounter and strategies implemented to ensure they persist.
3. This study interviewed a dean, lecturers and a registrar who all represent the administration of the institution. They all had responses with regard to the retention of the students and reasons why they sometimes struggle and what they could do to be retained. As a result, a study can be done on the perceptions of faculty and administrators with regards to the retention of part-time non-traditional undergraduate students.
4. Astin (1984) identified that students learn through different methods and approaches. As a result, research can be done on the eclectic approach to teaching part-time non-traditional undergraduate students in higher education have and the impact it would have on retention in the institution.
5. Studies have been done on the retention of part-time non-traditional undergraduate students, both genders, in higher education. During this investigation it was recognized that there were more female students than males being interviewed. Research could be

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conducted to identify the programmes which attract either gender and comparing the gender which stays retained to the end of their programme.

### **Conclusions**

This research has explored the challenges part-time undergraduate non-traditional students face as they struggled to be retained in higher education. I have identified that while there are various reasons why students may abort their programmes before completion, there are those who persist against all odds with their degree as their motivation. Findings from the research indicate that students suffered from ill health as they study due to bad practices, afflicted with financial worries which sometimes impede their progress in their lessons, experience uncomfortable learning environment, and lack of quality and timely feedback from lecturers. Whilst it is the responsibility of the students to manage their learning experience to self-actualize, higher education institutions also have a responsibility to the students to ensure they are retained. Institutions have the mandate to cater to the needs of their students whom they had persuaded to enter their gates. Administrators and programme planners can adjust and masterfully initiate and execute programmes beneficial for part-time non-traditional undergraduate students' retention. Such programmes will cater efficiently and effectively to the needs of the students and the demands of the market.

Based on findings from previous research and this research, students stand a greater chance of being retained when they are involved in the activities of the institution, are involved consciously in their academic work and strategize meaningful ways of honouring their expectations as students. The participants in this study could not participate in the social activities of the institution due to time constraints. Students usually get to the institution late in the evenings in time for classes. That being their situation, participation in such activities are

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almost impossible. In addition to their late arrival for classes, students are disinterested in any activity unrelated to their modules. For the alert and reactive programme planners and proactive administrators, students could be provided with activities linked to their modules which could be manifested as social activities. Such a compromise could have students become more supportive of the social programmes.

It is crucial for students to have a support system as they study as it keeps them motivated to persist. The student participants in this research noted they benefitted greatly from their support groups. Based on their inability to attend social gatherings they had formed their socio-educational group. These groups had effect change in their resolve to persist. Students support each other by assisting with assignments and conducting research on the internet. Some students cannot access internet at their home so students would collaborate and assist each other with the search. Students bonded closer to each other as they realized they needed the strength of each other to motivate them towards their goal.

Students in higher education do contend with militating issues which can cause them to drop out of their institutions of higher education. There are however students who are determined to weather the conditions and persist. The institution needs to be more proactive and innovative as they aim to keep the students retained. Retained students are beneficially to the institution, financially, socially and nationally. Students are the lifeline of any institution and in order for the institutions to survive, care must be taken of the esteemed clients, the students.

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**Appendix A: Research Site Approval**

02/05/2017.

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Request for Research Support**

Mrs. Donna Michell-Jarrett is an adjunct lecturer in the Faculty of Arts and Education and also pursuing her doctoral programme at University of Liverpool.

Mrs. Jarrett is required to conduct a research as a partial fulfillment of her doctoral programme. Mrs. Jarrett has been granted a permission by the faculty to carry out this exercise in our institution. The title of her research is "Retention of learners: Challenges threatening part-time non-traditional undergraduate students in Jamaica."

The purpose of the study is to investigate the challenges faced by part-time adult/mature learners, as they strive to remain engaged in their higher education course of study.

The participants for this research will be part-time undergraduate third- and fourth-year non-traditional students who have completed at least two years of study. Students will be randomly selected from a list of part-time students provided by the university. The methods for data collection will be semi-structure individual interviews and focus group interviews. The interviews will be audio taped, after which the data will be transcribed verbatim.

Any assistance that she needs, should be granted to her by the University.

Yours sincerely,

**Appendix B: Request for Permission to gather data**

March 14, 2016

The V P Academics

Dear Dr.

**Re. Request for permission to gather data for research**

Currently I am a Doctor of Education student at the University of Liverpool. I have completed my preliminary modules leading up to my final assessment which is my research paper. My specialized area is in administration in higher education. I am seeking your permission to gather data on the campus, as it local and I am presently lecturing there on Mondays.

Please see attached Topic and abstract.

Thank you as I await a favourable response.

Yours truly

Donna Mitchell Jarrett

**Appendix C: Human Subjects Research Consent Form**



**Committee on Research Ethics**

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**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

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**Title of Research Project:** Retention of students: Challenges threatening part-time non-traditional undergraduate students in Jamaica

**Researcher: Donna Mitchell Jarrett**

**Please  
initial  
box**

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [July 31, 2019] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
  
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
  
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.
  
4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant Name	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____

Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____

Researcher: Donna Mitchell Jarrett	Date	Signature
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**Principal Investigator:**

Name  
Work Address  
Work Telephone  
Work Email

**(Version 4, 9/15/2015 or Version 1, 2/14/2016).**

## RETENTION OF PART-TIME NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

### Optional Statements

- The information you have submitted will be published as a report; please indicate whether you would like to receive a copy.
- I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications **[or explain the possible anonymity options that you are offering participants and provide appropriate tick box options accordingly]**.
- I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research and understand that any such use of identifiable data would be reviewed and approved by a research ethics committee.
- I understand and agree that my participation will be audio recorded /video recorded **(please delete as appropriate)** and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the following purposes **(which must be specified)**
- I understand that I must not take part if... **[list exclusion criteria, for example pregnancy]**
- I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.
- I would like my name used and I understand and agree that what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised.
- I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential **[only if true]**. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.
- I understand and agree that once I submit my data it will become anonymised and I will therefore no longer be able to withdraw my data.

### FOR MARIARC PROJECTS ONLY:

- I agree that my GP may be contacted if any unexpected results are found in relation to my health.

**Appendix D: Invitation to Students to Participate in a Research Study**



**INVITATION TO STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

I am an online student at the University of Liverpool and currently studying for my Doctor of Education. As part of my degree, I am carrying out a study about the challenges part-time undergraduate non-traditional students face as they study in higher education. I aim to better understand how these students treat with the challenges they face, what remediation practices they university has implanted to prevent students from dropping – out before they graduate. Finding from this research can be used by the university to improve in areas that deem improving and also to suggest additional strategies which can be used to keep students retained, until they graduate.

My research proposal has been approved by both my primary and secondary supervisor and ethical clearance has been granted by the University of Liverpool's research ethics committee. I am hoping to interview twenty (20) part-time undergraduate third- and fourth-year non-traditional students who have completed at least two years of study. The study looks at your lived experience to understand through the narratives gathered from your individual interview how you have been addressing the issue you face as you study, the assistance you receive from your institution and the support of your family and relatives.

The evidence gathered from the interview will not serve as a way of testing your personal performance nor the organization's productivity or efficiency level. It will only serve to find in narratives the underlying mechanisms that lead to students being retained until they graduate and how to effect additional changes in order to effect more students being retained. Your responses will be held in strict confidence.

There are no direct benefits for you to take part in this study. However, potential benefits can be expected from this study for you as a participant and for your institution, as well as for the academic and professional society. In effect when students identify the issues they face while studying the institution can become more informed and can create structure to enhance the learning environment. If you are interested in participating in this study, could you please email me to let me know at the following email address: [donna.mitchelljarrett@online.liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:donna.mitchelljarrett@online.liverpool.ac.uk).



## RETENTION OF PART-TIME NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Full details about the research project will then be provided to you. Thank you for having taken the time to read this.

## **Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet**



### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **Research Project Title:**

“Retention of learners: Challenges threatening part-time non-traditional undergraduate students in Jamaica.”

#### **Invitation**

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

#### **Purpose of the study**

This research seeks to incorporate the voices, aspirations, emotions, and decisions of mature learners in higher education returning to pursue a degree as it relates to their retention status. My aim in this research is to arrive at a deeper understanding of the phenomena of the issues which part-time students face and overcome as they pursue their course of study in higher education.

The findings will be contributed to the creation of policies and remediation practices which will address the issues prospective students may face as they study in higher education.

#### **Why have I been chosen to take part?**

You have been chosen to participate in this study based on the criterion that you are either a third or fourth year undergraduate part-time student who has completed at least two years of study.

You were also chosen based on the premise that while you have been studying you may have been faced with issues which have threatened your being retained while you study, you might have decided to drop out, but due to a strong support system and a strong belief in your ability to be retained you persisted to continue studying until you graduate.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

## RETENTION OF PART-TIME NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

No. You do not have to participate in this research. Taking part is totally voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time you deem it fit for you to do so without any explanation or penalty. If you do choose to withdraw you have the right to ask that any data related to you or your work while you were participating not to be used or mentioned in the research in any form.

### **What will happen if I take part?**

If you choose to take part you in the research you are agreeing to participate in one individual semi structured interview, lasting for no more than one hour, in a location of your choice and at a mutually convenient time. In addition to the individual interview you may be asked to be part of a focus group discussion. The aim here is to investigate more thoroughly the issues, identified in the individual interview sessions, which learners face as they strive to complete their course of study.

Before the interviews begin you will also be asked to complete and return a 'participant profile' which will be hand delivered or emailed to you in advance of the interview. If you decide to participate I will contact you to discuss the process in order for you to give your informed written consent.

With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded so that I can remember what was discussed and also to use a transcript of the recordings to aid analysis of the information you provide and for future dissemination. The recording of the interview will be kept in a file secured with a computer password.

### **Expenses and / or payments**

The interviews will be done in a quiet place on campus. As such should you need to be refreshed you will be provided with refreshment.

### **Risks**

It is not expected that you will be harmed as you participate in this research. If you however become distressed during the interview session the interviewer will seek credible assistance, pause or even abort the interview. After the interview session if you experience any form of discomfort as a result of your participation in the interview, please inform me at the contact information listed below.

### **Are there any benefits in taking part?**

## RETENTION OF PART-TIME NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

There is no great benefit to you as you participate in this research. You however may garner a better understanding of generating knowledge that can be used for your future research which is in partial fulfillment for your degree.

### **What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?**

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let me know by contacting me, Donna Mitchell Jarrett, donna.mitchelljarrett@online.liverpool.ac.uk and I will try to assist. If you still not satisfied or have a complaint which you feel you cannot discuss with me, then you should contact the Research Governance Officer at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

### **Will my participation be kept confidential?**

An audio technological device will be used to record the conversation during the interview. This is important as it enables the researcher to become more focused on the situation and also to produce real and current data. Additionally, in order to avoid misrepresenting the information collected the audio device can be replayed to facilitate credible responses.

Your participation in this research will not be discussed with any third party. All data you generate will be anonymized and stored securely in a locked metal filing cabinet. Such anonymous information will be kept for the duration of the research and for a period of five years, after which it is destroyed. In order to preserve anonymity for the duration of the thesis and possibly future publications, a pseudonym will be used.

### **What will happen to the results of the study?**

Participants' identity in the results of the research findings will remain anonymous. Such will be compiled and reported within the ambit of the University of Liverpool in order to fulfill the requirements of my course. All participants will have access to the result of the research. A copy will be made available upon request. It must be emphasized that no participant's identity will be revealed in the results unless they have consented to them being so. If the results of the research are published you will be given the website where it is accessible and also given a copy of the paper.

### **What will happen if I want to stop taking part?**

## RETENTION OF PART-TIME NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

You have the right to withdraw at any time in the research process with explanation. You can permit the use of any data up to the time of your withdrawal, if you want, otherwise you may determine that they are destroyed so they can no longer be used. All participants should understand that results may only be withdrawn prior to them being anonymised.

### **Who can I contact if I have further questions?**

Donna Mitchell Jarrett (Principal Investigator) Telephone contact 1 876 886 9950 or email [donna.mitchelljarrett@online.liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:donna.mitchelljarrett@online.liverpool.ac.uk)

For your future reference please keep a copy of the Participant Information Sheet. if you have any enquires or concerns, you may contact me Donna Mitchell Jarrett and/or the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool.

Donna Mitchell Jarrett  
Principal Researcher

Signature:

Date:

RETENTION OF PART-TIME NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

**Appendix F: Ethical Approval from the University of Liverpool**

Dear Donna Mitchell-Jarrett		
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.		
Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)	
Review type:	Expedited	
PI:		
School:	Lifelong Learning	
Title:	Retention of learners: Challenges threatening part-time non-traditional undergraduate students in Jamaica.	
First Reviewer:	Dr. Lucilla Crosta	
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Baaska Anderson	
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Josè Reis Jorge, Dr. Kalman Winston, Dr. Viola Manokore, Dr. Martin Gough	
Date of Approval:	05/08/2017	
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:		
<b>Conditions</b>		
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.

## RETENTION OF PART-TIME NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at <http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc>.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

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Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,

Lucilla Crosta

Chair, EdD. VPREC

## RETENTION OF PART-TIME NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS