

**Assessing Communication Strategies at Higher Education Institutions: A Case of
Walter Sisulu University**

By

Chulumanco Mgweba

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Durban University of Technology**

APPROVED FOR FINAL SUBMISSION

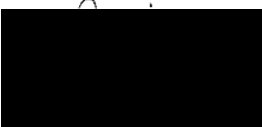
Supervisor:

.. 

Prof V.P Rawjee

D. Phil; MA; BA (Hons)

Co- supervisor:

 ..

Dr P. Naidoo

D. Phil, M-Tech, B-Tech

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DECLARATION

I, Chulumanco Mgweba hereby declare that the work presented in this research is my own and all sources have been duly acknowledged.



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C Mgweba

(20 October 2016)

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father who passed away during the process of my research. I dedicate this to you *“FAKU,NYAWUZA, THAHLA, HLAMBA NGOBUBENDE AMANZI EKHONA”*. Without your love, patience and encouragement, this dissertation would not have been completed.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BT	-	Border Technikon
CHE	-	Council for Higher Education
DHET	-	Department of Higher Education and Training
ECT	-	Eastern Cape Technikon
GST	-	General Systems Theory
HEI	-	Higher Education Institutions
MCD	-	Marketing, Communication and Development
MCA	-	Marketing, Communication and Advancement
NPE	-	National Plan for Higher Education
UNITRA	-	University of Transkei
WSU	-	Walter Sisulu University

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ABSTRACT

In South Africa the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE, 2001) brought with it distinct changes to the higher education landscape. Amongst the major changes were the mergers of various higher education institutions. In 2005, the Walter Sisulu University for Technology (WSU) was established through the merger of the former Border Technikon, Eastern Cape Technikon and the University of Transkei. The University caters for students from the Eastern Cape's Border and Kei regions resulting in communication with a large number of stakeholders. Effective communication as well as developing and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders therefore become pivotal. This study set out to examine the perceived effectiveness of communication strategies between the Walter Sisulu University and students. A mixed method approach found that although respondents felt that communication was satisfactory, concerns were however, raised about the effectiveness of the communication strategies being utilised. The study recommended e-communication as a key strategy to facilitate communication with students.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 PREAMBLE

In South Africa, the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE, 2001:167) brought with it distinct changes and challenges to the higher education landscape. Amongst the major changes were the mergers of various higher education institutions. In 2005, Walter Sisulu University for Technology and Science, Eastern Cape, (WSU), was established through the merger of the former Border Technikon, Eastern Cape Technikon and the University of Transkei. It became a new comprehensive university established in terms of the Higher Education Act no. 101 of 1997, as amended, to comply with the transformation of higher education throughout South Africa (CHE 1997:151). Walter Sisulu University (WSU) has four campuses, namely, Nelson Mandela Drive in Mthatha (NMD), Butterworth (Ibika), Queenstown and Buffalo City campus (BCC). The University caters for people of the Eastern Cape's Border and Kei regions. The Buffalo City campus has six (6) sites, namely, Potsdam, College Street, Chiselhurst, Arts, Heritage and, lastly, Border Rugby Union Stadium. As a result, the University attempts to communicate with a large number of stakeholders across the six sites. This vastness, therefore, presents various communication challenges.

McDonald and Hammer (2010:1) state that communication plays a significant role amongst stakeholders within the higher education environment. Effective communication supports the development of positive relationships with stakeholders and can be utilized to influence attitudes and behaviour within the wider environment. McDonald and Hammer (2009:1) further maintain that stakeholders are individuals or groups that can be or are influenced by the agency's actions. Students are, therefore, a part of pivotal stakeholders within a higher education setting and, therefore, forging effective relationships amongst these groups is essential for overall goal achievement. Effective communication within these groups is crucial. Ali and Haider (2012:38) maintain that communication may be formal or informal, verbal or non-verbal, written or oral; and its levels include interpersonal (or face - to - face) communication between individuals, group level communication among teams, groups and units. The current communication strategies, utilised by Walter Sisulu University (WSU), include both traditional communication and e-communication tools. However, the question remains; are these strategies effective and what are the challenges associated with using these strategies? Therefore, the overall aim of this study is to examine the perceived effectiveness of communication strategies between Walter Sisulu University and their students.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND SETTING

It is imperative to conceptualise the idea of a communication tool that informs and yet educates the stakeholders in all matters that concern them. Communication strategies utilised by the University do not necessarily affect the way students view and understand the content of these tools, but the challenge is the accessibility to utilise these tools, hence, the need to assess the communication amongst students at Walter Sisulu University. According to Baldwin, Perry and Moffitt (2004:5), communication is a process through which messages, both intentional and unintentional, create meaning. Communication, therefore, demands understanding and tolerance. However, Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2009:6) define communication as a process of creating meaning between two or more people through the expression and interpretation of messages. Lordache-Platis and Josan (2009:56) state that the act of communicating represents a process of transmitting information, ideas and feelings (attitudes, opinions) from one individual to another, from one individual to a social group and vice versa. Communication is the process by which the exchange of meaning between people takes place.

Therefore, communication plays an important role within a higher education context. Communication is the binding element and a critical factor that should be present in an organisation's communication plan. Planned and managed communication can, therefore, be seen as a core element in an organization. Within higher education institutions, student communication is a powerful tool. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the role of communication and its appropriateness and effectiveness within a higher education context.

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of this study is to examine the perceived effectiveness of communication strategies between Walter Sisulu University and their students. To achieve this aim, the following objectives have been set:

- To analyse and evaluate the current communication channels employed by Walter Sisulu University (WSU) in relation to management and students.
- To examine and evaluate communication barriers at WSU; and
- To identify alternative communication strategies that can be used to communicate between management and students.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Researchers have used various theoretical approaches to try and contextualize an organisation's communication effectiveness. A commonly used theory applied to organisations is the systems theory. The systems theory represents an approach to solving problems by diagnosing them within a framework of inputs, transformation processes, outputs and feedback (Helliegral, Lowm, Jackson, Louw, Staude, Amos, Klopper, Louw, Oosthisen, Perks, Zindiye 2012: 117). An organisation is a system that consists of sub-systems which function together to equal the whole organisation. A university, therefore, can be described as a system made up of many sub-departments that function together to create the university.

1.4.1 SYSTEMS THEORY

Smith and Cronje (2004:47) affirm that Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968:31) coined the phrase "general systems theory". The authors state that they noted certain characteristics common to all sciences, namely, the study of a whole, or organism, "the tendency of a system to strive for a steady state of equilibrium and lastly an organism is affected by and affects its environment and can thus be seen as an open system." The former statement supported by Lussier (2008:474), states that the systems theory stresses the need for conceptual skills to understand how an organization's sub-systems interrelate and contribute to the organisation as a whole. Botha *et al* (2007:60), refer to the systems theory within an organisation as made up of interrelated functions or sub-systems, such as public relations, marketing, human resources and production. Each sub-system, as well as the system as a whole, has boundaries which distinguish it from the rest of the environment. Management should maintain a balance between the various parts of the organisation as well as between the organisation and its environment (Smith and Cronje, 2004:46). This would mean that when changes occur in either the environment or a system, system participants will adapt in order to maintain balance.

Norbet Weiner (1894-1964) as cited by Smith and Cronje (2004:47), adopted the word "cybernetics" which indicates that all systems could be designed to control themselves through a communication loop, which fed information back to the organism, allowing it to adjust to its environment. Affected by the changes in its environment, Walter Sisulu University is experiencing changes in educational policies and framework that may affect the way the Institution will respond to its environment and its relationship with its various publics. Systems theory can be applied to WSU which is also an organisation made up of inter-related functions such as, Marketing, Communication and Development (MCD), Finance and transport sections amongst others.

The systems theory distinguishes between open and closed systems. A closed system is isolated and can only react on change within a system. Van Vuuren (2002:33) cited from Marias (1979:156) describes an open system as receptive to inputs of the environment and, as a result, conditions within the system are also influenced by influences from outside. Cutlip, Centre and Broom (2006:181) refer to closed systems as having impermeable boundaries, so they cannot exchange matter, energy, or information with their environment. These authors further state that open systems exchange inputs and outputs through boundaries that are permeable. Amagoh (2008:2) states that all conventional models and theories of organizations typically embraced the closed systems approach to the study of organizations by assuming that the main features of an organization are its internal elements. While the closed systems approach considers the external environment and the organization's interaction with it, to be for the most part inconsequential, the open systems approach views the organisations' interaction with the external environment as vital for organizational survival and success. Gupta (2009:1) elaborates that the organisation's external environment encompasses all the units that exist outside its boundary, but which nonetheless possess significant influence on its growth and survival. Though organisations have minimum or no control over their environment, they would need to constantly monitor and adapt to these external changes. Therefore, a proactive response leads to significantly different outcome where an organisation is able to exchange with its environment.

1.4.2 Closed systems

The extent at which systems are closed is an indication of their sensitivity to their environment. Closed systems do not take in new matter, energy, or information. Therefore, closed systems do not adapt to external change and eventually disintegrate (Cutlip, Centre and Broom 2006:181). Entropy, according to Smit and Cronje (2002:63), is when a system, including an organisation, does not make the necessary adjustments to enable it to continue its existence in a particular environment, and it is doomed to disintegrate and failure. The lack of coordination between the organisation and its external environment in closed systems inhibit the organization's capacity to import sufficient energy from its environment for sustenance.

1.4.3 Open systems

An open system is defined as a system that interacts with its environment by exchanging raw materials and energy for services and/or goods produced by the systems (Hayajneh 2007:3). Cutlip, Centre and Broom (2006:181), support the former statement by stating that survival and growth of open systems depend on interchange with the environment. In-terms of organisations, Van Vuuren (2002:33) states that organisations

are open systems that are formed by the relatively stable interaction pattern of their members. He also states that the open system is based on life and growth. Higher education institutions produce graduates and professionals through education and in return receive money and appreciation from its environment going forward.

According to Hayajneh (2007:3) an organization as a system has various inputs that are processed to produce outputs. A continuous feedback between the different components of the system ensures that the system is accomplishing the goals of the organization. The organization is seen as a system built by energetic input-output where the energy coming from the output reactivates the system (Mele, Pels and Polese 2010:127). This definition is supported by McNamara (2016), who refers to the components of the systems theory as organisations as *"Inputs would include resources such as raw materials, money, technologies and people. These inputs go through a process where they're planned, organized, motivated and controlled, ultimately to meet the organization's goals. Outputs would be products or services to a market. Outcomes would be, e.g., enhanced quality of life or productivity for customers/clients, productivity. Feedback would be information from human resources carrying out the process, customers/clients using the products, etc. Feedback also comes from the larger environment of the organisation, e.g., influences from government, society, economics, and technologies."*

This overall system framework applies to any system, including sub-systems (departments, programmes, etcetera.) in the overall organisation consisting of Higher Education Institutions. In terms of this study, WSU is the Higher Education Institution and is an open system that interacts with the environment to complete necessary trades to ensure survival and growth. WSU is a sub-system of the South African Department of Education and Training system. Additionally, these higher education systems are complex due to the large number of sub-systems such as Finance, Human Resources and Academic departments. Therefore, processes of regulation, control and communication within organisations are crucial. The theory associated with regulation, control and communication within an organisation is the cybernetics theory.

Oksiutycz (2006:32) refers to cybernetics as a discipline, which is concerned with processes of regulation, control and communication within systems, having originated in the 1950s and it is sometimes considered to be a sub-discipline of the General Systems Theory (GST). According McGarry (2008), Norbert Wiener (1948) published his book *Cybernetics* in which he develops a theory of communication and control. Norbert Wiener, coins the term "cybernetics" to elaborate on the existing theory of the transmission of messages by

incorporating his idea that people send messages within a system in an effort to control their surrounding environment. Theoretically, it is the transfer of information or messages from one person to another (Du Toit, Erasmus and Strydom 2007:198). Botha *et al* (2007:61) state that the more open the system's boundaries are, the greater the influence the environment has on the system. So, the influence is mutual. This is what characterises an open system. For Higher education institutions to have more interaction with the environment, they need to have penetrable boundaries so as to be in touch with their environment. The Higher Education Act of 1997 requires Higher Education Institutions to reposition themselves in response to the country's demands. This feeds WSU to the cybernetics theory, in that it forms part of an open system, influenced by, and also having an influence on its environment.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 Research design

Bhattacharyya (2006:41), explains that the research design can be regarded as the plan or structure of the investigation at hand. This structure assists in obtaining answers to the research question. This study set out to examine the perceived effectiveness of communication strategies between Walter Sisulu University and their students. According to Baxter and Babbie (2004: 22), quantitative research presents findings in numerical form, frequencies and averages. By nature, a quantitative study involves more closed-ended questions whilst a qualitative study will include more open-ended questions. A quantitative method research approach was most suitable, with an interview schedule as a qualitative approach instrument.

1.5.2 Target population

The study was confined to Walter Sisulu University, Buffalo City Campus, as it is strategically situated in the Eastern Cape Province. Buffalo City Campus has an estimated number of 6 878 students. The Campus has two Faculties, namely, the Faculty of Business Sciences and which has an estimated number of 3 750 students, and the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Technology with an approximate number of 3 128 students. These two Faculties make up 30 percent of the entire WSU population. In this population, only third-year students for each department were utilised as respondents and as well as the Head of each Department. These Departments included the Department of Public Relations and Communication, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Department of Information Technology and the Department of Building. The criteria for sampling

were the accessibility and availability of these respondents. As this study solely focused on Walter Sisulu University, Buffalo City Campus, a census study was used. A census study can be defined as an investigation in which all of the elements of that population are used (Zikmund *et al* 2013: 355). Interviews were conducted and quantitative questionnaires were distributed to 156 students, 4 heads of each department, and 6 supporting sections staff members of the target population.

1.5.3 Inclusion criteria

The chosen respondents were enrolled on a full- time or part-time basis in the Buffalo City Campus, and spoke IsiXhosa and/or English, the languages with which the researcher was well conversant. The enrolled students were chosen on the basis that they are registered students who have been studying at WSU for more than a year. Staff were chosen on the basis that they have been with the Institution for more than 5 years, and also have been line managers for more than 2 years. The reason for these criteria is because they were more experienced in the institution and have been exposed to many spheres.

1.5.4 Exclusion criteria

In this study, students in their first and second year were excluded because the researcher felt that, at this stage of their studies, they might probably not have enough information on their assessment of the communication strategies and might still be overwhelmed by being in a higher education environment.

1.5.5 Sampling method

WSU is a Higher Education Institution and, therefore, has a large number of staff and students according to Higher Education Management Information systems (HEMIS 2013:7). It was determined that 6 878 students enrolled at WSU in 2013, Buffalo City Campus. The researcher intended to use a probability sampling method where every element of the population has a known non-zero probability selection rating. Baxter and Babbie (2004: 141) state that probability sampling enhances the likelihood of accomplishing this aim and also provides methods for estimating the degree of probable success. They further elaborate that, in a random selection, each element has an equal chance of selection independent of any other event in the selection process. A random sample was drawn from the number of students. The reason for choosing a random sample is that it is a true reflection of the entire population, from which the researcher intends to draw conclusions. Due to the

importance of a descriptive study, a probability sample would be used, where each member of the population has the same chance of being included in the sample by means of a representative sample.

1.5.6 Data Collection methods

Data were collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods using questionnaires and interview schedules respectively. Questionnaires consisting of both open-ended and closed-ended questions were administered to both staff and students. An attached covering letter described the purpose of the survey. The sequencing of questions would be programmed into the survey, by progression from biographical data, general and specific questions. The questionnaires were formulated using the Likert scale. Bhattacharyya (2006: 119), purports that, in a survey, a Likert scale data collection method, asks the respondents to respond to a number of Likert scale items and a response is provided to each question in the form of agreement or disagreement. He further explains that at one end of the scale is strong disapproval, whilst at the other end is strong approval and between them are many intermediate points. The questions will focus on key communication strategy aspects associated with universities derived from the literature review.

Qualitative data was collected by using a face-to-face, semi-structured interview schedule with the identified respondents. The interview questions focused on communication strategies derived from the literature review.

1.5.7 Measuring Instruments

Welman, Kruger and Mitchel (2005:152), maintain that a survey questionnaire is a method to obtain biographical details such as age, education qualification, etc. They also state that a measuring instrument, in terms of primary data, is the original data collected by the researcher for the purpose of his/her own study. Individual interviews were conducted and a structured questionnaire was used as data collection instruments. A semi-structured interview schedule was selected because it enables the researcher to be consistent in asking questions and data yielded was easy to analyse with the help of a statistician and using the SPSS computer programme. Research respondents were interviewed directly to avoid misinterpretation and to ensure clarity on all issues.

The researcher designed an interview schedule with both open-ended and closed questions. The questionnaire was divided into four parts, as show below;

- Section 1:** comprised the demographic data, which sought to obtain respondents' details such as age, sex, marital status, and educational status;
- Section 2:** sought to determine the relevant knowledge about the frequency of internal communication;
- Section 3:** Aimed at finding out the respondents' opinions on the effectiveness of the tools, and of the communication strategy;
- Section 4:** Elicited the respondent's attitudes and knowledge of new media, social media; and
- Section 5** Open-ended questions.

1.5.8 Pilot testing

A pilot study is the administering of an instrument to a limited number of subjects from the same population (Welman, Kruger and Mitchel 2005:148). Bryman and Bell (2011:262) support the previous authors by stating that "if the main study is going to employ mainly closed questions, open questions can be asked in the pilot to generate the fixed choice of questions." The pilot study is conducted on a small sample of the population in the same manner as the main study. It gives the researcher the opportunity of checking if the respondents understand the questions in the same way, if all questions are relevant and if all the instructions are clear. A pilot study was carried out using a small sample of subjects, i.e., 10% of the main study population. Twenty subjects were chosen in the same manner as the subjects for the main study. The pilot participants were debriefed and checked for problems with the instruments and issues concerning them. The structure and content of the questionnaire and interview schedule were amended accordingly. This pilot study was conducted to test the questionnaire for reliability. Respondents with similar characteristics to the research sample, who are not part of the main study, were also interviewed. Following the pilot study, some ambiguous questions were rephrased to give greater clarity and some questions were left out as they proved irrelevant and were repetitions of the open-ended questions.

1.5.9 Validity

According to Fink (2008: 116), validity refers to the degree to which a measure assesses what it is intended to measure. Andres (2012: 117) explains that content validity refers to the extent to which a measure thoroughly

and appropriately assesses the skills it is intended to measure. Literature is often consulted and used as a framework for content validity. Questionnaires were developed using the literature reviewed to ensure content validity.

1.5.10 Reliability

Fink (2008:114) affirms that reliability refers to the data collection method being reliable and free from measurement error. The author further states that a category of reliability is referred to as homogeneity or internal consistency. For this category, a Cronbach's coefficient reliability (an average) of all correlations between each item was applied. It seeks to assess the same skill, characteristic or quality between all respondents. A pilot questionnaire was administered and questionnaires were amended accordingly before final administration.

1.5.11 Limitations

Lack of financial support was the first limitation of this study as all the finances were paid by the researcher, since all other avenues for financial support were exhausted. Financial support may contribute to a much more extensive research project and enable the researcher to get a much larger population for this study. Expenses included telephone calls, paper for questionnaires, printing and travelling. As a result of students' work-related commitments, some students did not have sufficient time to answer the questionnaires. Some of them submitted the questionnaire after due date.

1.5.12 Delimitations

The study only included WSU, Buffalo City Campus students, who were currently enrolled full-time or have been with the University since its merger, in 2005. Students had to have a minimum of 2 to 5 years within a Higher Education Institution. This period of years was a vital part of the study because Buffalo City campus has 6 delivery sites, where most students experience the WSU's communication problem. The data collection time frame for the research was three (3) to five (5) months.

1.5.13 Analysis of data

The quantitative data were captured and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Data were presented in graphs such as pie charts and bar graphs, as well as tables. Interviews were analysed qualitatively by assigning themes to questions, it also assisted in identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data collected in rich detail.

1.5 Ethical considerations

This study adhered to ethical standards. A written submission for ethical clearance was forwarded to the institution's research office. With that request, permission was granted to undertake the study and use the population. Elements of the population will remain anonymous, and all the information will remain confidential. The ethics committee was approached for the ethical approval of this study.

1.6 Confidentiality and Anonymity

The data collection process did not involve access to confidential personal data, including access to data for purposes other than this particular study without the consent of respondents. Participants were assured of anonymity and all information of the study were kept in confidence and disposed of after the study was completed. The data were coded and not linked to any respondent's name. The received data was kept in a secure place and also no personal data were revealed during the study and when publishing.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

Chapter One provides an introduction and background to the study.

Chapter Two looks at the theoretical framework on which the study is based.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the research methodology used in the study.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the data analysis and the interpretation of the results.

Chapter Five offers conclusions and recommendations of the study.

1.8 CONCLUSION

Detailed in the chapter was the introduction of research problem, objectives of the study and justified the necessity for the research. Limitation and the research methodology were also presented. Lastly, the chapter offered an overview of the chapters that follow and laid the basis for this thesis. On this foundation, the study now proceeds to providing an overview of communication strategies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a background to the study. Chapter one outlined the overall significance and objectives of the study. The overall aim of this study is to examine the perceived effectiveness of communication strategies between Walter Sisulu University and their students. This chapter provides a theoretical framework for understanding Higher education institutions' communication strategies, and how it affects communication between management and students. It will clearly define the different concepts in communication focusing on internal communication and the model of communication as determining factors to consider for effective institutional communication with students. This chapter also evaluates the strategic internal communication model which will capture all of the major components of stakeholder communication by using the systems theory to link them to each other and to the university's strategy and operations and also identifies alternative communication channels. In particular, it examines WSU's communication barriers and alternative communication strategies.

2.2 Higher Education Institutions: A global perspective

Rajasingham (2011:3) reveals that universities have undergone a series of paradigm shifts from the classic Aristotelian model of the Greeks to the Ptolemaic Library at Alexandria and then from the medieval European university to the modern university. The common objective in a higher education environment, where the university community is formed, is education. Quality education controlled by law, is assessed and monitored to ensure the goal of achieving universal primary education is attained.

Global changes and the evolution of knowledge have influenced the agenda for managing and governing higher education around the world (Perumal 2010:1). The author further elaborates that, being part of the higher education system, government has manipulated policies to influence how universities must operate, making them compete on an international scale. But stakeholders and certain groups coerce higher education to restructure. The rapid globalisation and the strong demand for the development of national economies, influence the agenda for social and economic transformation.

Devnarrian (2011:9) refers to the higher education in a global context as bringing in new competitors. International higher education providers have come into the South African economic market, bringing different ethical principles regarding level of integrity, intending to supplement the existing efficient higher education

providers. In South Africa, the government's policy to change higher education and the globalisation of HEIs has had an effect on the higher education system. Merging of technikons into universities as part of the transformation process did not only bring together different institutions but each has had its own history and legacy before these mergers. The number of prospective students wanting access to HEIs has grown; this can mainly be due to the government education policy in South Africa which has led to a growth in the number of applications from prospective students who want study in higher education institutions.

In this day and age, there is a need to have ranking or grading systems of all HEIs in the world. These systems are based on how each HEI performs and the reputation it possesses. In these systems, HEIs that are the bottom of the rank have a lower graduate outputs of students, who have graduated and in need of jobs, than those at the top of the scale. That shows that HEIs at the top have good academic quality, research and are internationally recognized with good reputations (Delgado-Márquez *et al* 2012:17).

According to De Wit (2011:243), globalisation has impacted significantly already on higher education. Globalisation can be defined as the reality that has been created by the rise to predominance of a world financial system, latest information and communications technology (ICT), the materialisation of an international knowledge network, and new forces that HEIs cannot control (McGregor 2009:1). On the other hand, internationalisation can be defined as the mixture of policies and programmes put in place by HEIs and the government to exercise and to react to globalisation. These responses, would therefore, assist HEIs in adjusting their needs within a global perspective.

The South African higher education sector faces numerous challenges as it wrestles with the internationalisation requirements to address the many and diverse opportunities and imperatives presented by the overwhelming forces of globalization.

Jowi (2009:272) identifies the following challenges of internationalisation, which will be discussed:

- Institutional drawbacks;
- Quality of academic programmes;
- Research productivity;
- Regional frameworks and policies; and
- Funding and resources.

2.2.1 Institutional drawbacks

Higher education in Africa faces serious challenges as they attempt to effectively react to internationalisation demands, such as, inadequate funding, weak governance and leadership, low quality of academic programmes, and stifled academic freedom. The inspirations of HEIs to internationalise would be for the commercial advantage, knowledge and language acquisition, and enhancing the curriculum with international aspects in the content. A major challenge is that HEIs have insufficient institutional structures in place and also capacities. i.e poor planning of programmes and requiring huge funds for internationalization.

2.2.2 Quality of academic programmes

The key interest and focal point in African higher education for internationalization is the quality of offered programmes. African universities are perceived to have a low quality of academic programmes. These programmes and the weak regulatory frameworks, present a major hindrance to internationalisation. HEIs would have to overcome these barriers that would enable them to meet the international standards.

2.2.3 Research productivity

International research collaborations could prove to be tremendous and very productive for African HEIs. It is through this platform that Africa could have a chance to be recognized internationally and be able to build a strong force to be reckoned with in terms of research capacity. The only way to achieve such collaboration as African HEIs is to have research collaborations with international HEIs. Research conferences are a great way to meet other research champions in similar fields of expertise. This will decrease the high level of dependency of funding and academic dialogue. Higher education in Africa is being restricted in relation to its identity and international influence in the international higher education systems. African HEIs must strike a balance between enhancing cooperation in research and to set perimeters of dependence on the international higher education system.

2.2.4 Regional frameworks and policies

According to Dzvimbo and Moloi (2013:6), Local and regional governments and institutions have rallied to make a shared effort in support of intra-Africa initiatives for internationalization. This means that those new structures for transformation will reflect and facilitate frameworks to ensure that HEIs work together and cooperate in a mutually benefiting platform from different regions. Internationalization can have many implications and consequences that may affect diverse regions and HEIs. HEIs should be able to coordinate

these frameworks and be able to promote the development of African continent by promoting the African research initiatives and innovations.

2.2.5 Funding and resources

Detering African HEIs from taking advantage of the global opportunities is the low, inadequate funding of the higher education sector by the government. Countries that offer a significant amount of support for research and scholarship are mostly industrialized, but come with contradictory consequences. The cost of maintaining and sustaining an internationally- originated university requires sufficient funding for:

- The recruitment of international students;
- Marketing of programmes;
- Faculty exchanges;
- Technology needed for distance learning; and
- Training of faculty for content development.

2.3 Higher Education Institutions: A South African perspective

The National Education White Paper 3 (South Africa 1997:3) states that South Africa's transition from apartheid and minority rule to democracy requires that all existing practices, institutions and values are viewed anew and rethought in terms of their fitness for the new era. Higher education has a role to play in developing the economy of the society. The culture also has several related purposes. In South Africa, Higher education must contribute to a better life for all, in terms of supporting the process and drive of societal transformation as tabled in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

Soudien (2010:6) affirms that part of the government's important policy statements is the White paper 3 of 1997. Contained in the White paper 3 of 1997 are the following objectives:

- Promoting equity of access and fair chances of success to all, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequities;
- Meeting, through well-planned and coordinated teaching, learning and research programmes; national development needs ... [for] a growing economy operating in a global environment;
- Supporting a democratic ethos and culture of human rights; and

- Contributing to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, and, in particular, addressing the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, Southern African contexts and upholding rigorous standards of academic quality (White Paper 3 of 1997:14)

The South African higher education landscape is the most diverse and advanced in the region and the continent. According to Sarua (2010:22), South Africa is one of the countries in Africa with the longest higher education history. The reason for this is somewhat due to the path followed by the country, in relation to socio-political and historical paths, as opposed to other Sub-Saharan countries.

The recent developments in higher education in South Africa have made tremendous strides trying to put South Africa on the global map. These developments will have an input into what strategies can be put in place and how they will work in terms of ensuring quality education. Sarua (2010:83) explains that the higher education landscape tries to keep abreast of new and changing higher education challenges facing the world, but at the same time, working on improving the quality. Hence, it is necessary that higher education, research and government institutions forge relations to encourage knowledge in development planning. This means that these stakeholders have to be able to understand the cutting-edge research and interpreting it into relevant policies, thus creating a knowledge-integrated development pathway.

Although subsidized by the state, the universities are autonomous, reporting to their own councils rather than government. Therefore, for the creation of a differentiated and an innovative South African Higher Education landscape to be effective, it was imperative institutional restructuring was pursued (Moloi, Mkwana and Bojabotseha 2014:470). Institutional restructuring via the merging of institutions and incorporations into existing ones, has resulted to in the reduction of 36 HEIs to 23 based on a variety of criteria. To deal with globalization and its impact on higher education, the mergers would seek to produce world class graduates, equipped with suitable skills and proficiencies to ensure that there is a satisfactory provision of high-level personnel to meet the varying needs of the South African economy, higher education and society.

The transformation of higher education in South Africa started in 2002 and was completed in 2005. Subsequent to the reduction, 11 universities, six comprehensive universities (one distance) and six universities of technology were born. In the same progression, two institutes of higher education were created to bring academic programmes to provinces and regions that previously did not have Institutions of higher learning (Badat 2010: 7).

The merger of universities was premeditated with the purpose of bringing about the excellence in the South African higher education landscape. The education legacy entrenched in uneven quality and infrastructural gap, which manifested itself in a sector separated along the lines of historically and previously advantaged and disadvantaged legacy institutions, was rectified. According to the Council for Higher Education (CHE) Audit report 33 (2011:8), the Walter Sisulu University (WSU) came into existence in 2005 by merging the three previously disadvantaged institutions (PDI), comprised of (1) Border Technikon, (2) Eastern Cape Technikon and the (3) University of Transkei. WSU offers programmes on four campuses in Mthatha, Butterworth, East London and Queenstown. All four campuses combined have the following eleven (11) delivery sites.

Buffalo City campus (BCC)

1. Chiselhurst delivery Site (Former Eastern Cape Technikon (*ECT*) campus)
2. Potsdam delivery site (Former Border Technikon (*BT*) main campus)
3. College street delivery site (Former Border Technikon (*BT*) campus)
4. Heritage building delivery site (came into existence when WSU was formed)
5. Cambridge street site delivery (Former Border Technikon (*BT*) campus)
6. Absa stadium delivery site (came into existence when WSU was formed)

Mthatha campus (NMD)

1. Nelson Mandela Drive delivery site (Former Unitra campus, now WSU head office)
2. Zamukulungisa delivery site (Former Eastern Cape Technikon (*ECT*) campus)
3. Nkululekweni Delivery site (came into existence when WSU was formed)

Queenstown campus

1. Masibulele delivery site (Former Eastern Cape Technikon (*ECT*) campus)

Butterworth campus

1. Ibika delivery site (Former Eastern Cape Technikon (*ECT*) main campus)

WSU straddles across the urban and rural areas of the Border-Kei region in the Eastern Cape. The positioning of the institution allows WSU to interact with and be part of the development and progress of the region, province and the country. As a development institution, WSU tries to tailor-make programmes that will benefit the region. As of 2014, WSU operates under a divisional model of governance and management. All four

campuses are managed by a rector per campus, who reports directly to the Vice Chancellor. WSU has approximately 26 592 students inclusive of all campuses, which employ approximately 1 400 academic and support staff.

As recognized in terms of the Higher Education Act no 101 of 1997, WSU, as a new comprehensive university, complies with the transformation of higher education throughout South Africa. The history of higher education points to a natural disposition by colleges and universities towards guarding their autonomy and, to a significant extent, preferring to operate independently. Despite this history of wishing to “go it alone”, higher education institutions were not spared the mergers which occurred in the late twentieth century (Chetty 2010:1), cited from Lang and Eastman (2001: 5). Therefore, the implementation of mergers has had implications for the stakeholders involved, such as, the prejudiced distribution of access and opportunity for students and staff in terms of race, gender, class and geography. There are also gross inconsistencies in the involvement rates of students from different population groups.

2.4 Challenges faced by Higher Education Institutions

The stakeholder summit on higher education transformation report (2010:6), suggests that the higher education sector is still plagued by its apartheid legacy and accompanied by features of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. Since 1994, the sector has been going through a meticulous process of restructuring itself at both institutional and national levels. Noteworthy, beneficiaries of such restructuring are the previously disadvantaged groups, including the Black population, providing them with access to higher education. In-terms of the economy, higher education aims to remedy problems that were created by the fragmented higher education system by correcting the skills divide. The second national higher education transformation summit report (2015:109) states that higher education’s system transformation has been an ongoing process, aimed at achieving a more impartial, responsive and incorporated system in support of national development. It must be noted that the level of subsidy reduction in allocations to universities may not ensure the realization of an effective and relevant education, nor to provide satisfactory vital services to the formerly underprivileged groups. As consequence of the insufficient funding to be paid to universities, numerous less privileged institutions may remain unable to upgrade their facilities and infrastructure for its students’ libraries.

Higher education institutions are now left with the challenge to respond quickly and decisively to the changes in the higher education sector. Due to these changes, higher education institutions are confronted with

competition, a decrease in government funding, an increase in marketing costs, and non-payment of student fees and changing the ways they traditionally produced and packaged their primary product. Due to restricted financial resources, higher education institutions have to re-evaluate their marketing and recruitment strategies in order to attract the desired first year students (Konyana 2012:12-13).

Varghese, Panigrahi and Heslop (2015) describe the following key issues facing HEIs:

2.4.1 Rapid expansion globally

Although economic growth slowed down during the global financial crisis, the worldwide expansion of higher education this century has continued undisturbed: global enrolment increased from 100 million in 2000 to 177.6 million in 2010. While developed countries have universalized access to higher education, middle-income countries are in the process of massifying higher education and the sector is fast expanding in low-income countries. A major share of the recent expansion of the system is accounted for by the large-system countries. The private sector is booming in many large-system countries. Reforms are reducing state control in higher education, making institutions self-reliant and reinforcing market processes.

2.4.2 Hidden tale of inequality

Some large-system countries, such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Pakistan, take affirmative action and use a quota system to support enrolment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As much of the expansion of higher education is being driven by the private sector, economic accessibility is becoming an important concern. Disparities between social groups and geographies are challenging these large systems and many young people are getting left behind. Low gross enrolment is, however, evident in countries that have gender inequalities. The expansion of the sector and multiplicity of providers have intensified discussions on the quality of higher education.

2.4.3 Financing concerns

The financing of an expanding system of higher education is an important and immediate concern in all developing countries and high on the agenda of large-system countries. Many that used to rely on public funding have steadily moved towards market-oriented strategies to finance higher education. Cost reduction, cost recovery and income-generating activities have become common in many public universities. Student loans have become a reliable common mode of financing higher education in many countries. Although many universities rely on market processes, many of them still follow a traditional public-service model of

governance and management. Some countries, mostly Anglophone, have established buffer organizations to mediate between the institutions of higher education and the respective ministry.

2.4.4 Education-skills mismatch

Graduate unemployment is a serious issue in most large-system countries. Although the economic crisis may be a reason for an increase in unemployment among university graduates in the United Kingdom and United States, the major concern in other countries is that universities are not producing graduates with the relevant skills to be readily employed in the production sectors. Internationalization is highly uneven, but the picture is changing rapidly. Among the large-system countries, the United States and United Kingdom are the most internationalized in higher education.

Wangenge-Owuma (2012:832-839) supports Varghese, Panigrahi and Heslop (2015) statements and also cite the following challenges facing higher education in South Africa:

- Access to higher education

One of the key issues in higher education in South Africa is access to higher education. This has been on the national list of national priorities. Access to higher education has been a predominant policy of both the apartheid and post-apartheid governments, to allow access to higher education by non-white communities, as previously referred to by the apartheid government. Compulsory was fully implemented with regard to white and lesser to non-white.

- Funding and higher education access

When the democratic government came into effect in 1994, it established funding mechanisms for financially needy students to improve access and involvement in HEIs. One of these mechanisms was the establishment of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). It can be understood, evidenced by statistics, that higher education is characterized by inequality, where marginalized communities still continue to see themselves studying in higher education institution as an illusion.

- Free higher education in South Africa

Existing structures of inequality in higher education, access and participation in South Africa have been affected by numerous difficulties, such as financial challenges that hold back access and participation in the South African higher education system.

The challenges that face higher education are not new. In scale and severity, however, they might be said to be intensifying. Until the sector faces up to the realization that educational under-preparedness is a majority phenomenon that cannot be addressed through fringe activities, and that the numbers of students needing support are bound to rise in line with participation rates, there seems to be little hope of improvement in terms of either efficiency or quality (Nan 2010:31).

Mekoa (2011:105) mentions the role of history in shaping South African higher education, by stating that any talk about the transformation of higher education (HE) and education, in general, in South Africa is incomplete without reference to this history, which is littered with elements of injustice, inequality, repression and denial. Access to HE and education, in general, has particularly been a problem for Black Africans. Various indicators have shown clearly that access to HE in South Africa has been unequal. He further elaborates that Black Africans have a very small chance compared to White people of entering the university system. The major causes of these inequalities in access can be found in the socio-political circumstances of South Africa, and, again, in particular, in unfavourable schooling offered to Black Africans.

In the quest to understand the history of HEIs, the researcher understands that there is little uncertainty that South Africa's modern higher educational system has come a long way. Undeniably, in the short period since the democratic elections of 1994, the system has undergone many significant changes. However, problems of inequality, inequity and undesirably low standards of educational delivery have persisted since the inception of the transformation.

Delport, Hay-Swemmer and Wilkinson (2014:21-22) state that HEIs are known for being managed by academics not always familiar with the best means of communicating effectively on a managerial level. The authors maintain that given the complexity of higher education institutions and the numerous challenges this poses for communication, there is a need – especially in the South African multi-campus university environment – to find effective communication models that can improve the efficiency of internal communication.

2.5 Factors affecting Higher Education Institutions as open systems

2.5.1 Globalisation

According to Mitchell and Nielsen (2012:7), globalisation is one of the factors that have affected HEIs. The events of the world and the new trends of how HEIs operate, such as the social process transformation perspective, mean that globalisation has a transformative effect on the core purposes of institutions of higher education where higher educational institutions are developing a commercial

approach which transforms the entire education into an exchangeable product on the market. By producing good students and staff development, HEIs gain the respect and recognition. Research productivity and participation could be said to be examples of factors affecting HEIs in terms of global academic rankings which encourage the search for lucrative grants from funders and government.

2.5.2 Policy Developments for transformation

The second factor affecting HEIs is policy developments. The education vision of the apartheid era and higher education was to segregate higher education into two institutions, one reserved for White South Africans and the other for Black whose institutions were tasked with providing limited tertiary education. The range of programmes offered in Black institutions reflected assumptions about the kind of careers for which students of different races were being prepared (CHE 2010:2). Previously disadvantaged HEIs are still affected by the historical white supremacy that is still continuing to be prevalent against White majority HEIs, such as Stellenbosch University and University of the Free State that still prefer White supremacy to that of a democratic country (Bunting 2006:39).

2.5.3 Competition

Higher education institutions are encouraged to take the risks required for innovation and productivity, yet competition in HEIs habitually discourages risk taking consequently leading to excessively careful short-term decisions by splurging on physical structures and establishments (Roberts 2012). To attract more potential students, HEIs build better structures and develop new academic programmes at great cost. This causes HEIs to undergo extreme funds reallocation and debt though they are facing dire financial challenges. Well-funded Institutions often start the phase by setting the bar higher up and institutions with limited resources lag behind.

2.5.4 Funding

Mohamedbhai (2008:41-42) states that though the government funding could be allocated to HEIs, the question would be, is the funding sufficient to sustain and cover operational, budgetary costs? Even though the funds were to be increased to the institutions, the allocation has not been sufficient to cater for institutional needs. Some of the universities in Africa have learnt to use the allocation carefully and also they need a minimum amount of funding to effectively fulfil their mission of teaching. The proportion of government's grant in the institution's budget differs from one institution to another,

and has also been increased or decreased over the years. The allocation of grants also varies between well-established institutions and developing institutions.

2.5.5 Mergers

Citing from the Ministry of Education (2001), Arnolds, Stofile and Lillah (2013:2) explain that Professor Kader Asmal, the then South African Minister of Education in 2001, released a National Plan for Higher Education in March 2001 when the number of public higher education institutions was reduced from 36 to 23 through mergers. The plan suggested that eleven of the 36 institutions would be traditional universities, with six universities of technology, formerly known as technikons, and six comprehensive universities, inclusive of programmes offered by technikons and universities. The motivation for the mergers was to create a co-ordinated system of higher education to redress the inequalities created by the apartheid era into the democratic era. To achieve a normal HE system for all, the South African higher education system had to be incorporated within a fast-changing and technology- determined environment under the pressure of globalisation.

2.5.6 Access to Higher Education

Since 1994, the South African Government has succeeded creating an accessible higher education system. The accessibility is made evident by the growing number of students enrolled in South African higher education institutions, such as technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges and universities (Nxasana, 2016). The partaking rate in higher education between the ages of 20-24 increased from 15.4% in 2003 to 19.5% in 2013. One of the South African Government's strategies of redressing the inequalities of the past is the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) introduced in 1999 to make Higher Education accessible to thousands of poor students. The Government committed itself to the financial aid scheme aiming to tackle the rising student debt problem in higher education institutions in the country.

Examples of some of these mergers are

- University of Limpopo designed by the merger of the University of the North and Medunsa;
- Tshwane University of Technology resulted in the merger of Technikon North West, Technikon Northern Gauteng and Technikon Pretoria in 2004;
- Walter Sisulu University formed by the unification of Eastern Cape Technikon, Border Technikon and University of Transkei (UNITRA) in 2005;

- North West University formed by the merger of Potchefstroom University and University of Bophuthatswana;
- University of KwaZulu-Natal formed by the merger of University of Durban-Westville and University of Natal;
- Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University formed by the merger of University of Port Elizabeth, Port Elizabeth Technikon and Vista University (Port Elizabeth campus); and
- Durban University of Technology formerly known as Durban Institute of Technology, was formed by the merger of ML Sultan Technikon and Technikon Natal in 2002.

2.5.7 FessMustFall 2015-16

One of the challenges faced by HEIs is the funding of and expensive tuition fees. The recent fess must fall protest action by students in South African Universities sparked a lot of debate among higher education leaders and the government. The action erupted in universities where fees have become too expensive. The country wide protests on university campuses have been accompanied by violence by students and against students. According to Gasa and Dougan (2016), state that experts have been busy debating the possibility of free education for South Africa, but the country's failures to adequately address the root causes of the fees problem brought higher education into chaos. Education leads to transforming an economy and social structure, by creating skills and expertise which open up access to jobs and ownership. Affected universities were the University of Witwatersrand, Rhodes University, University of Cape Town, University of the Western Cape, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, to name a few.

At the beginning of 2015, A student movement called hashtag fees must fall was formed, in response to a proposed fee increase of up to 8% in 2017 at individual universities across the country, proposed by the Minister of Higher Education and training Mr Blade Nzimande. The movement does not have elected leaders who act from a mandate from members it can be accountable to. Student Representative Council leaders from the various universities serve their constituencies and not the movement as a whole.

The demand for free education encompasses many complex factors that contribute to the bigger issue of current and future educational funding opportunities, such as Inflation, university budget constraints, and the struggle of NSFAS to collect bursary money from its debtors .

Higher education is a system, where higher education institutions and the government are sub-systems of the higher education system in the country. The higher education system of South Africa is made up of higher education institutions as sub-systems, and these institutions are, on their own, systems made up sub-systems, such as faculties and department. For the systems to interact, achieve their goals and work together, they need to communicate with sub-systems to ensure the smooth flow of information. Coen (2012) states that, building effective communication plans for prospective students can be daunting, due to students who use many forms of technology to communicate, including Web, e-mail, social media, and texting, whilst they still rely on written communication as well.

Higher education institutions are complex systems where decision-making is distributed and change is fundamentally difficult to implement throughout the organization. Therefore, lack of communication and consultation is evident where effective communication should prevail. Not only should communication prevail within HEIs, but also communication with the government should be integrated to avoid crisis.

According to Hussain (2010:7), cited in Higher Education South Africa (HESA, 2008:1), the sole purpose of HEIs is to meet the learning needs and ambitions of current and prospective students. HEIs are responsible for teaching and training young people to fulfil specialized functions. Therefore, when their primary objectives are at risk, these institutions face crises that may affect safety, security, financial stability and even their reputations.

2.6 Importance of communication

Nel (2012:93) declares that the importance of communication as the basis of human relations cannot be over emphasised. To ensure that the value of their key messages, reputation and image are offered steadily in verbal, printed and electronic communication media. It must ensure that the universities' online communication is an accessible and a reliable source of information for all internal and external publics. According to Newstron (2011:50) organizations cannot exist without communication. The author further states that communication helps accomplish basic management function, since communication assists in planning, organizing, leading and controlling. This will enable particular organisations to achieve desired goals and solve obstacles that tend to be challenges.

The university must make it a point to inform academics and students consistently about the vision, aims and strategies put in place for it to effectively communicate. Higher education institutions' initiatives set a platform of a two-way communication directed at forming what key audiences believe and understand about communication. Higher education institutions' (HEIs) goals and objectives must be understood by their audiences. Audiences, as part of the HEI's stakeholders, provide information and must be involved. Then the institution can, therefore, seek feedback and also invest in an assortment of communications channels, to continually communicate a reliable set of messages.

The world is now shifting into the world of information technology as the communication revolution comes into effect. By developing new ways of communication, the education system has changed. Especially in the quality processes such as stakeholder specify communication, people need clear and understandable communication tools. According to Eisler (2001:71), the rapid growth of information technology (IT) and communications networks has created wonderful opportunities for meaningful change in higher education. Access, growth and innovation have been greatly affected by momentous policy changes, such as gender, government funding and racial domination. It is, therefore, important that HEIs develop clear policies for access, content, acceptable and responsible use, privacy, and security for computing technology and network usage.

Maughan (2001:17) supports the former author by stating that "to function efficiently, HEIs need an integrated, agile, secure, robust, and mature communication and information systems infrastructure". Some of the uses are to store, transfer, process and retrieve information within an environment. With the need to communicate, old and new systems still coexist whilst performing their basic tasks, as mentioned above.

WSU needs a corporate communication strategy for it to maintain a noble image and for stakeholders' relationships. This will guarantee a right mind set within WSU. A recognised team of experts in communication must manage the organisation-wide activity. De Beer (2014:141) strongly advocates that forms of intellectual capital, such as relations, networks, competencies and trust, require strong communication skills of staff, while the organisation itself must have appropriate communication structures that promote openness and dialogue.

Communication is, therefore, important when going through a merger and it benefits the organisation to realise its value. Effective communication can benefit the WSU community to make a personal transformation and transition as the institution endeavours to build confidence. Suher (2010:3062) discusses Thayer's 1975

model of systems theory where corporate communication takes organisations as open systems that are fed on knowledge (information). The organisations owe their presence to the communication between the sub-systems which form them and their interaction with their environment.

Researchers have used various theoretical approaches to try and contextualize an organization's communication effectiveness. A commonly used theory applied to organisations is the systems theory. By using a framework of inputs, transformation processes and outputs to produce feedback, the systems theory moves towards solving problems (Helliegre *et al* 2012: 117). An organisation is a system that consists of sub-systems which function together to equal the whole organisation. A university, therefore, can be described as a system made up of many sub-departments that function together to create the university. With this approach, it therefore, can be said that the system of higher education, whether it is a stand-alone or part of the sub-system within the HE systems, is rooted in an environment. The environment includes the social, political and economic conditions in which the HEIs exist. The higher education system, as an open system, is open to its environment. This suggests that HEIs, using the systems theory components, are competent of receiving inputs (in the form of students, finances, and other resources) and sending outputs (in the form of graduates).

This investigation will examine how internal communication is managed within an institution, issues related to an effective organisation, and identification of alternative channels to remedy any communication challenges.

2.7 Systems theory: An overview

Watson, Watson and Reigeluth (2008:694), point out that Von Bertalanffy (1969) was among a group of scientists, who in the mid-20th century, had a mutual understanding that, in science, the analysis of simple isolated disciplines of basic mechanisms and how they operate as a system. These scientists established "general systems theory". The theory noted that there are common principles to which all other system can be applicable to regardless of association to other systems. The key point of departure is the connection and interaction of components making the whole.

This study will be based on the systems perspective by Von Bertalanffy (1969), who is generally regarded as the father of the general systems theory. In this regard, the approach of a general system theory is applied in order to focus on standalone components and their relationship between elements. Newson, Vanslyke Turk

and Kruckeberg (2004:117) assert that if systems ought to be open to change from the outside environment or condition, then the quantity of change depends on how open the system is. Suter, Goldman, Martimianakis, Chatalasingh, DeMatteo and Reeves (2013:58), state that Von Bertalanffy (1968), believed that organisations are made up of numerous co-dependent parts that as a whole, constitute far more than the sum of their parts. The solution was to come up with a concept called a “system”, to remedy and extend the boundaries of individual disciplines in solving multifaceted social problems. Skyttner (1996:17) believes that a system is distinguished from its parts by its organization. He further reveals that systems differ in the manner in which they are organized, and how they relate to each other in terms of mechanisms and dynamics of parts within the environment. Bertalanffy (1968) states, that in the “*trans-disciplinary*” scientific discipline, the same principles were required in different sciences, especially the feedback principle. The feedback principle is part of other principles, such as, the control or regulation of certain values, the portion of the world studied (system) must exhibit some predictability and highly complex system may have to be broken into subsystems so each can be analyzed and understood before being reassembled into a whole. These were central to Wiener’s cybernetics and Bertalanffy found that a system consists of a set of objectives and their relationships. His sentiments are that in the organizational structure, a unified principle of sciences of the individual areas must be sought.

Molnar (2009:16-19) explains that the only GST goal is to be the general theory of wholeness, where numerous variables interact and produce strong interaction. That goal is clearly limited due to the fact that it does not deal with an isolated or secluded process, as standard science procedure. Boulding (1956) as cited by Stewart and Ayres (2001:81) states that, GST is situated between the universal constructions of untainted mathematics and theories of dedicated disciplines. Coetzee and Van Niekerk (2012:1) believes that, as a meta-theory within science, the GST serves as a common language whereby the common underlying principle of widely separated phenomena can be explained. Von Bertalanffy (1969:91) aimed to apply the description to a concrete phenomenon. He aimed to find the connection of interacting parts, mechanisation and completion of the sum of the whole and to apply it in a true organization. To be able to be understood within the GST theory, higher education systems should operate as an organization with comparable features to that of normal organizations. These features or characteristics, namely, goals, structure and hierarchy, should form part of the daily organizational processes where officials function under policies established by the management. This, however, unfolds by interpreting how HEIs perform basic functions of education, where they accomplish roles of reviving ideological, social and economic development assigned to them by the government. Juarrero and Rubino (2008: 109) explain in support of the former author, that GST is a logico-mathematical field, simplified

as the subject matter of which is the formulation and deduction of those principles which are valid for 'systems', in general. The authors elaborate that although the discipline is purely formal, it is applicable to all sciences concerned with systems. Consequently, it is impossible to separate HEIs from the environmental conditions in which they operate, because they face challenges that determine their survival, development and growth.

Lowe (2002:26) cited in Scott *et al* (1981:47) states that general systems theory can be understood to be the foundation of organisational or management theory. If organisations could be regarded as an organism and, consequently as a living system by taking input from the environment for transformation into output for the maintenance of the system, that provides the strong link between organisational theory and the general systems theory.

In terms of GST and how it unfolds in higher education in South Africa, for the purpose of internal governance, the higher education system strengthens institutional autonomy of higher education institutions but agrees that each higher education institution is self-governing based on policies put in place by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). DHET would then be the mother governing body by instilling government policies and then narrowed down to institutional governance as a sub-unit of the higher education systems in SA. Higher education in South Africa is a business organization with its components such as DHET, Government and higher education institutions, all working together to create a good higher education environment that would benefit the community and potential students at large. Each of the components in the higher education system, such as private and public institutions is a sub-system on its own, whether it is a university or a college.

According to Van Deuren (2013:3), a higher education system is a system that incorporates learning opportunities in a society, be it formal or informal in the higher education system. The system consists of parties who participate in the provision, financing, regulation, and use of learning services within national and local governments, where participants include students and their families, communities, private providers, and non-state organisations. The relationships with these parties bond them and they make it possible to deliver education services using resources at their disposal.

In HEIs, communication is key for a well-oiled, smooth running machine. Information would, therefore, flow from one person to another or from across various departments which would link to a broader communication network that benefits the larger community.

Cited in Kehm and Lanzendorf (2006) Campbell and Carayannis (2012; 46), interpret the HE governance dimensions as “state regulation, external guidance, competitive pressure, managerial governance and academic self-governance”. Therefore, the HEI in SA is a system whereby the HE system has sub-units that comprise of HEI and DHET and government. Lowe (2002:26) purports that the systems perspective of higher education institutions will enable understanding of the impact of influences and which values/beliefs and the social construction of context have on education and its curriculum, and which policies and influences cannot be separated from the supra-system (DHET) in which higher education takes place.

According to CHE (2007:77), the relationship between the government and HEIs in South Africa has progressed since 1994, from controlled governance to cooperative governance and limited autonomy, which defines the current HE policy. Hence, HEIs would enjoy the freedom of self-governance and development of a HE system. Therefore, it can be said that the HE system, could be seen as an open and dynamic system, in reference to the latter statement, that constitutes patterns of interacting elements and sub-systems firmly attached to one another and the environment. The SA higher education system, as a whole, comprises of inter-related and inter-connected forming network sub-systems, whether private, public, technical and vocational education and training colleges (Higher Education Institutions) as units within the country (NPHE 2001:36). Each sub-system has its own function with operational boundaries within the higher education institutions system. Higher education institutions, like universities and colleges, are sub-systems of the HE system, where HEIs have their own sub-systems such as faculties, departments and sections ranging from the examinations department and finance department to name a few.

The whole being is the HE system and the interrelated sub-systems of the whole is the HEI. HEIs are related in advancing the education system of SA where surrounding communities form part of a greater number of their constituencies. Internally, HEI communities include students and staff as part of their internal stakeholders, administration and management, while external communities include the actual communities, alumni, local and national businesses and governments. Higher education institutions’ community relationships and with the environment, bring upon expectations by the communities, and its responsibilities as a university. The notion of expectation on both sides is caused by a need of exchange between the two sub-systems (i.e. the university and the community) is beneficial to both.

In summary, the SA HE system comprises of Government departments as sub-units and HE systems with HEI as sub-units and, lastly, WSU with sub-units such as academic and support departments. These stakeholders form part of a SA HE system. All of the previously mentioned stakeholders operate within a broader society where there are inputs in terms of students and outputs in terms of graduates. Their operations are based on local, provincial and national boundaries. The role of universities in communities is far broader than what meets the eye. HE has a role of improving social and economic development.

Therefore, universities within the HE system in SA respond to the changes in the environment forcing them to adapt. HEI cannot work in isolation, but with external partners such as the government and the society. The relationship with Government and HEI within the HE system should be strengthened to ensure maximum interaction, support and efficiency of the system.

Cited in Bertalanffy (1969), Molnar (2009:16-17) states that if organisations function as a system, then the GST is applicable to it. At the same time, it can be said that organisational concepts are unfamiliar to those of usual science, but they tend to appear in other sciences such as biological, behavioural and social sciences. These concepts are crucial in dealing with living organisms or social groups. The only basic challenge of science is how these concepts are organized. Therefore, GST is a general science of wholeness.

The authors state that for an organisation to be seen as open, it has to represent common characteristics of science. These characteristics are studying the system of a whole, how a system attempts to have a stable state of balance and is affected by and affects its environment. The former statement is supported by Lussier (2008:474) who states that, to understand how an organisation's sub-systems interrelate and contribute to the organisation to function as whole, conceptual skills are needed. Botha, Chaka, Du Plessis, Krause, Rawjee, Porthen, Veerasamy and Wright (2007:60) refer to systems theory within an organization as made up of inter-related functions or sub-systems, such as public relations, marketing, human resources and production. Each sub-system, as well as the system as a whole, has boundaries which distinguish it from the rest of the environment.

The onus of the smooth running of the higher education system depends with the government to ensure that the system meets the needs of the general society. To ensure productivity, the government has a responsibility of shaping the knowledge society.

Management within organisations should strive for a balance between the various parts such as academic departments and support services within the organisation and between the organization and its environment (Smith and Cronje, 2004:46).

Norbet Weiner (1948), as cited in Smith and Cronje (2004:47), adopted the word “cybernetics” that explains that all systems could be designed to control themselves. This can be possible through a communication loop that feeds information back to the organisation, thus allowing the organisation to adjust to its environment. Walter Sisulu University is experiencing changes in educational policies and frameworks that may have an effect on how the Institution will respond to its environment and its relationship with its various publics. Systems theory can be applied to WSU which is also an organisation made up of inter-related functions such as, Marketing, Communication and Development (MCD) and Finance, amongst others.

WSU is an open system where there are open channels of communication and feedback is encouraged. WSU uses most forms of communication, such as intranet, publication and new media. It receives inputs from the environment and produces outputs to the environment. This enables WSU to sustain itself within the HE systems as a sub-system of higher education in SA. The above is very crucial for a new comprehensive university such as WSU to survive, bearing in mind the competition with other local institutions of higher learning. The factors of an open system relate to the WSU system cycle. With hostile and dire financial challenges as a province, and as a new developmental university, WSU has adapted within the situation and adjusted to the environment. Being an open system, WSU has relationships between the community and the Government and how it manages to adapt in the semi-urban areas. WSU exchanges with the environment by taking in students and converting them into graduates who then plough back to the community.

Affecting WSU as a predominantly Black university, are the dramatic environmental changes that have been happening all over the world, such as the political, economic and social instability which have created a shift in the relationships between HEIs, Government and the community. In trying to keep up with new political and social demands, South African HEIs face a problem of converting problems into changes for the betterment of adaptable institutional governance with the HE system (Mouton, Louw and Strydom 2013:289)

If a university could be defined as a system, it would mean that there are departments and sections that form part of a sub-system feeding to the whole system operationally. These departments and sections are disciplines on their own as entities that are inter-related. WSU has these sub-systems as parts of a larger institution as a university. The support sections in relation to other sections at WSU interact with the environment and their

goal is to probe and determine changes in its environment. This means that WSU has a vision and mission by striving to preserve a continuous relation with its environment.

Oyedabe (2001:39) explains that the environment is made up of several social, economic and political institutions, which are constantly interacting and inter-dependent. Everything in an environment is a complete system on its own. However, it is a unit or sub-system of yet a larger system and all units are inter-dependent. The same is true of the higher education system in South Africa. The author further states that advanced schools are essentially living systems and that, without people, they are nothing but concrete and paper. As living systems, they are in the constant process of interaction with their communities and other institutions in them. They see the school system as a living and dynamic organisation, and though a complete system on its own, yet it is a sub- system of the nation's educational system which, in turn, subsists in the larger social supra-system called the environment.

As stated by the above mentioned scholars, it is clear that higher education institutions are open systems that maintain themselves by exchanging of materials with their environment. These open systems depend on their environments to survive and maintain themselves, only if they import energy from their environment in the course of transformation.

In South Africa, to achieve a vision of a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic higher education system, *The Ministry of Education* (2002), provides the following three fundamental objectives as outlined in Education White Paper 3 of July 1997;

- Meet the demands of social justice, that is, to address the social and structural inequalities that characterise the higher education;
- Address the challenges associated with the phenomenon of globalisation; and
- Ensure that limited resources are effectively and efficiently utilised.

The higher education system has had a past of having inequalities. It is, therefore, the aim of the *National Plan for Higher Education* (2001) to transform higher education. Highlighted in the White Paper 3 of 1997, the transformation will attempt to change the system and to provide a new social order. This will enable the country to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities. The key challenges facing the South African higher education system, as outlined in the White Paper are: “to redress past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities”

The *Department of Higher Education and Training's* (DHET) strategic plan (2011 – 2015:30), aims for a diverse and differentiated higher education system, where significant and logical learning pathways should be formed. Higher education must be responsive to the needs of the country, and developed across institutional and workplace education and training forums as it could be key to the country's economic development. The differentiation of the system must distinguish between the distinctive function and character of the sub-systems, and the further differentiation of mission and purpose of institutions within these sub-systems.

2.7.1 Closed systems

Closed systems can be identified as being insensitive to the environment and resistant to change, which means that they do not take in new energy or matter. Thus it is said that they do not adapt to external change and eventually disintegrate (Cutlip, Centre and Broom 2006:181). When the system disintegrates, it is usually called entropy. Smit and Cronje (2002:63) refer to entropy in a system as a state of an organization that cannot adjust itself to be able to continue or survive, in that environment. It limits its existence and will eventually fail and collapse. For organisations to survive they have to import enough energy for survival, but if it limits the importing of these energies, there is a lack of co-ordination between the organisation and its external environment in closed systems. Basadur, Basadur, and Licina (2012:669) state that the degree to which an organisation pays attention to its external environments determines whether it is "open" or "closed".

Customers, the ecology, the government, competitors, suppliers, technology, and society, as a whole, are examples of the external environment.

2.7.2 Open systems and its applicability to higher education institutions

Open system organisations transform the changes into improvements, on an on-going process. Stewart and Ayres (2001:81) state that systems vary in their structural characteristics from relatively simple, closed forms, or more open, complex and dynamic systems. Another term commonly used by authors is "Linear systems". It describes a time or event that take place where management plans without interference, thus resulting in a predictable outcome. The interference comes from the outside environment. The basic characteristic of every organic system is that it maintains itself in a state of perpetual change of its components (Juarrero and Rubino 2008: 113).

When an organisation exchanges raw material and interacts with the environment, it is defined as an open system (Hayajneh 2007:3). Cutlip, Centre and Broom (2006:181) support the former statement by stating that survival and growth of open systems depend on interchange with the environment. Van Vuuren (2002:33) states that organisations are open systems that are formed by the relatively stable interaction pattern of their members. He also states that the open system is based on life and growth. Higher education institutions produce graduates and professionals through education and, in return, receive money and appreciation from its environment going forward. A supplementary detailed interpretation of the open and closed systems is that they both define operations of model. Juarrero and Rubino (2008: 114) distinguish between open and closed systems by describing the open system as more general to that of a closed system as it is always possible to come from open to close by equating transport terms to zero, but not vice versa. Valentinov (2012: 538) points out that the open system maintains itself. It does so by a non-stop flow and outflow whilst building up and breaking down components. The open system always maintains a steady state which is distinct from the latter. A closed system's state of equilibrium is constant. Furthermore, Ward (2005:3) states that a closed system looks at an organisation in terms of its internal operations. The open system looks at an organisation in terms of its relationship with outside influences.

The crucial goal of open and closed systems is survival. Tench and Yeomans (2006:27) state that, when the environment changes take effect, organisations have to adjust and adapt. Newson, Vanslyke Turk and Kruckeberg (2004:117) elaborate that it is open where the idea of a goal-directed, self-regulating, information processing systems. This happens within an organisation where there is feedback to adjust actions fixed toward achieving that goal.

HEIs can be perceived as organisations since they are subject to the identical systems' philosophies to be understood as open systems. Lowe (2002:263) distinguishes between Informal and formal education sectors where HEIs, falling under the informal sector, aim to make a profit by only registering their programmes in the mother body of higher education, whereas the formal sector may receive benefits from the government as they operate within recognised higher education sector. Since HEIs operate within a certain and unstable environment, they are in constant interaction with their external environments. The interaction may be cause for need for dependency on the government resources. Their interdependency is characterised by one needing something from the other, i.e, HEIs need funding from the government whereas the government depends on HEIs to educate the country.

Variations in higher education institutions as per *National Plan for Higher Education* (2001) in terms of policies and regulations, as experienced by WSU, affect the way the institution responds to the environment and also

its relationship to the public. According to the National Plan for Higher Education's goals and policies, the need for the higher education system will enable the country to guarantee diversity in the organisational form and institutional landscape of the higher education system. In pursuit of social and economic development, through the mission and programme differentiation, the country will be able to address the need of regional and national education. Outside an organisation, there is an environment consisting of groups of publics. In this study, these groups were considered to be WSU students as stakeholders. Stakeholders are defined by Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman and Toth (2004:47) as customers, media, the community, financial institutions and the government.

In general, the system framework is applicable to any system, whether it is sub-systems within a system (departments, programmes, etcetera.) in the largely organized organisation of HEIs. In terms of this study, WSU, is the higher education institution, i.e, an open system that constantly interacts with the environment to ensure survival and growth by completing the necessary trades. WSU is a sub-system of the South African Department of Education and Training system. Additionally, these higher education systems are complex due to the large number of sub-systems such as Finance, Human Resources and Academic departments. Therefore, processes of regulation, control and communication within organisations are crucial. The theory associated with regulation, control and communication within an organisation is the cybernetics theory.

The open system theory also emphasises the necessary dependence of any organisation upon its environment. Figure 2.1 reveals that an organisation brings in numerous forms of energy from the environment where it is situate. It then transforms that energy into output during the production progression. At the processing stage, the organisation will create a new product as process material that trains people, or provides a service. Something is done to the input. The output is then exported (with value added) to the environment. It then becomes input for another system or the system itself. The cycle is eventually renewed and the process begins again (Oyebade 2001:37).

Agreeing to open-systems' opinions, HEIs constantly interact with their environments, be it internal or external. When dealing with forces in this particular environment, these institutions need to structure or restructure themselves.

In contrast, a closed-system theory views HEIs as sufficiently self-governing to make clear their problems through their internal arrangements, without making an allowance for forces in the external environment. In

all these publications, five elements of the open system are common as depicted by Lunenburg (2010:2) in figure 2.1;

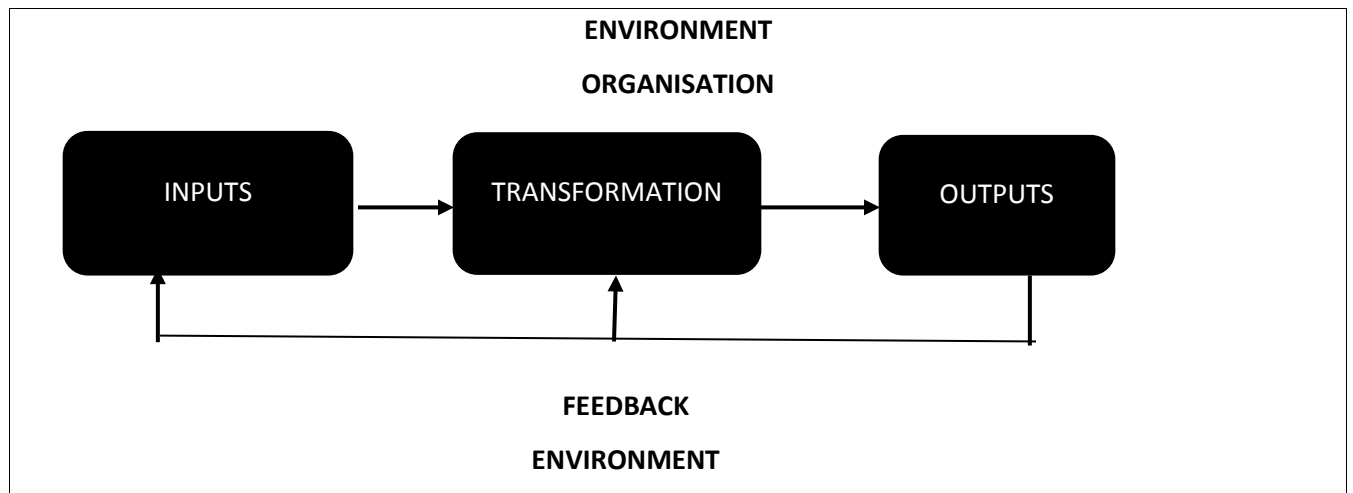


Figure 2.1 : Five elements of an open systems

These five essentials, identified by Lunenburg (2010:2-4), will be used as a basis and will be further exemplified by means of different proficient opinions and views on how the open systems function.

2.7.2.1 Inputs

With reference to the HEI's system, the environment produces four kinds of inputs or resources to the systems, such as *human resources*, *financial resources*, *physical resources* and *information resources*. The human resources can include administrative and staff talent and labour. Money or capital for ensuring on-going operations will sustain that system. Lastly, supplies, materials, facilities, and equipment form part of physical resources. Information capital is the knowledge, curriculum, and other kinds of information utilized by the HEI. Inputs include raw material, energy and resources processed to produce the outputs of the organization (Hayajneh 2007:2).

2.7.2.2 Transformation process

The interaction between students and teachers is part of the transformation or learning process by which students become educated citizens capable of contributing to society. The system adds value to the work in

process. This transformation process includes the internal operation of the organization and its system of operational management.

Throughput, processes are used by the system to convert raw materials or energy (inputs) from the environment into products or services that are usable by either the system itself or the environment (Hayajneh 2007:2).

2.7.2.3 Outputs

In social systems, outputs are the attainment of goals or objectives of the school district and are represented by the products, results, outcomes or accomplishments of the system (van Vuuren 2002:34)

2.7.2.4 Feedback

Feedback is crucial to the success of the school operation. Hayajneh (2007:2) states that feedback is information about some aspect of data or energy processing that can be used to evaluate and monitor the system and to guide it to more effective performance.

2.7.2.5 Environment

The environment in the open systems model takes on added significance today in a climate of policy accountability.

Variations in the environment forces open systems to adjust and adapt, at same time being accommodative of the forces. These environmental Inputs can be result of change of the system's own outputs or independent of the outputs of the system. In whatever way we try to explain the environment of the system, if the conditions of inputs are perfect for the system, then they will have an impact on system goal state. Those conditions the system holds as "ideal" or "desired". Inputs can cause variations from these system goal states (Frederick 2012: 152).

The below figure (2.2) illustrates an open systems model of public relations.

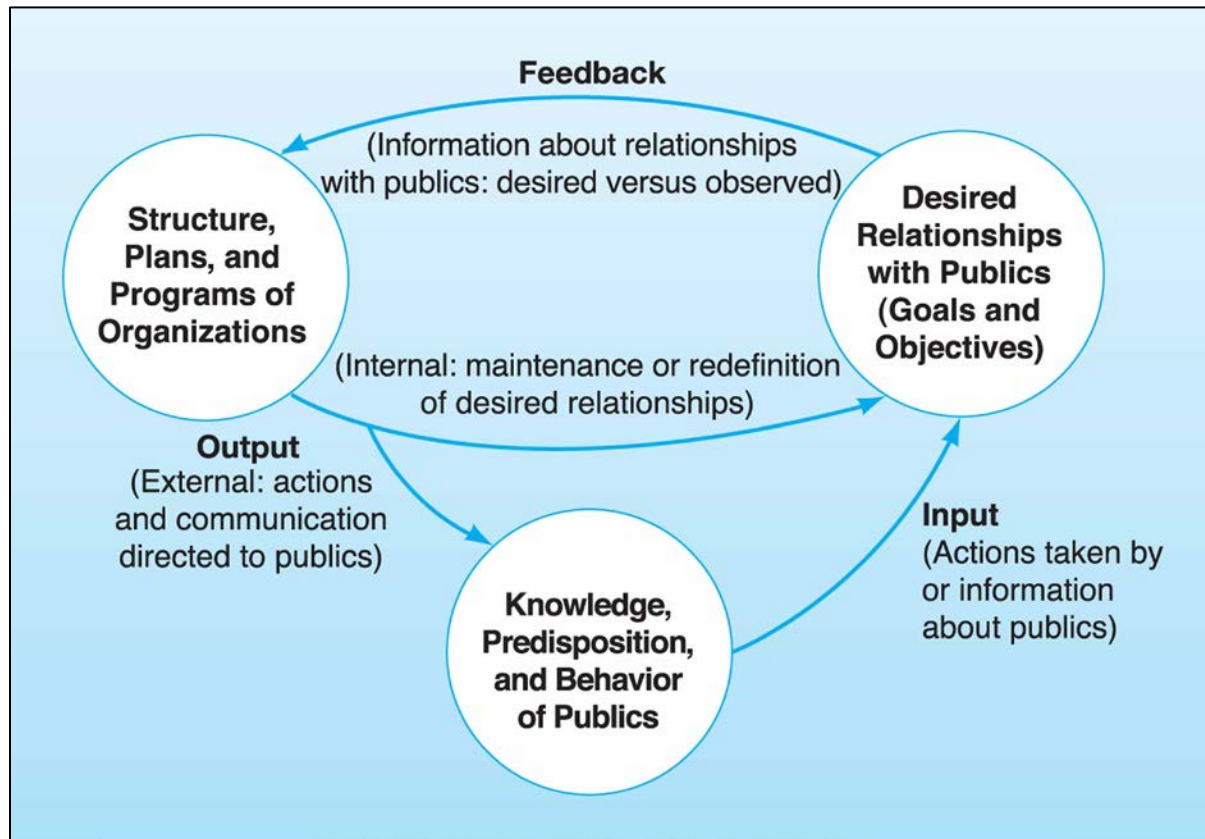


Figure 2.2 Cutlip, Centre and Broom Homeostasis

Cutlip, Centre and Broom (2006:182) mention a state of **Homeostasis**, which means that it is the differentiation of *dynamic* states of relatively open systems from the *static* state of a relatively closed system. **Homeostasis** is used to evade the stagnant connotations of equilibrium and to bring out the active, processual, likely - maintaining properties of basically unstable systems.

2.8 Characteristics of systems theory

Quible (2001:335) identifies the following characteristics of systems:

- Flexible: Although an effective system is structured, it should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate special or unusual circumstances;
- Adaptable: If it is well designed, changes in the system can be made without destroying or hindering its functioning;

- Systematic: An effective system is systematic and logical;
- Functional: For the system to be effective, it must serve the purpose for which it was intended;
- Simple: The system should be simple as circumstances will allow; and
- Resourceful: A well designed system makes appropriate use of organizational resources;

However, Van Vuuren (2002:31), mentions that the systems theory focuses upon the principles of all systems' organisations, regardless of type. He declares that all systems are seen to possess the following five qualities:

- Wholeness: Systems have properties that are different from those of their individual parts because of the relationship and interdependence that exist between parts;
- Hierarchy: every system is a part of system hierarchy, which means that there are sub-systems of a greater system;
- Self - regulation: There is a quantity of self-regulation in each and every system, so self-regulation guides the systems operation into that direction of a goal state;
- Openness: The benefit of having permeable boundaries is that open systems can evolve into greater complexity. These boundaries allow the exchange of information and raw material with the environment; and
- Stability: There are two tendencies in a system, such as an integrative tendency that functions as part of the larger whole, and a self- assertive tendency which preserves its individual autonomy.

2.9 Key concepts of systems theory

Cornell and Jude (2015:1) define systems theory, as a system that focuses on the associations between the parts, and on the arrangement of and relations between the parts and how they work together as a whole. The authors further outline that, the manner the parts are organized and their interaction with each other, defines the properties of that system. The behaviour of the system is independent of the properties of the elements. Thus, completing a holistic approach. Therefore, a system is a collection of interrelated parts acting together to achieve a goal which exists in the environment.

HEIs are in interacting with their environments constantly by structuring themselves to deal with forces around them (Lunenburg 2010:1)). Botha *et al* (2007: 282) offer a distinction between the elements of systems theory and concepts of open systems theory. A system has to have all the necessary parts for it to fully

function. Without the parts, the systems will eventually fall into environmental pressures and die. Below are the key components of a system;

- Feedback: Open systems are influenced by the environment and, in turn, influence the environment;
- Balance: A system's survival depends on balance between energy input and product output;
- Input: Open systems need energy, people, material and information to maintain the system;
- Transformation: This can be described as a process that changes inputs to outputs;
- Output: These are whatever the system exports in the form of a product or service;
- Interdependence: This refers to the relationship between the sub-system and the whole system, and a change in one part of the system will bring change in the other parts as well; and
- Boundaries: An organisation is both separated from and linked to the environment by functions in by a boundary which determines where the organisation ends and the environment begins.

Lowe and Doolin (2002:260-268) elaborates that;

- **Inputs** in open higher education system can be defined as potential students who meet the admission requirements of the institution in order for them to fulfil their mission of providing education. The students enter the higher education system as raw materials to be processed as graduates who meet the national employment standards. Some of the examples of inputs are human resources, state subsidy, suppliers and lecturers;
- **Transformation** is understood to be the change of the input (students) where the students are lectured using a given curriculum by lecturers and are transformed in order to gain qualifications. After the transformation, students are now converted into outputs as a product and fed into the country's environment;
- **Output** in the open system's application into higher education could be said to be the competent students who had graduated with certificates, diplomas and degrees as the throughput of the institution, who then project a good image of the institution. The students, as outputs, would be representative of goods and services in an organizational form, which they can be also fed back into the system as the labour force. Students are the output or products of the educational system in the form of educated people who are better equipped to serve themselves and society at large;

- **Feedback** occurs when higher education institutions use student assessment and of lecturing in order to identify areas that need improvement. The feedback would be meditative remedy for change, if negative or positive, to prove environmental interaction with the institution. That being said, institutions will then adjust and adapt to the environmental changes; and
- **Environments** are other HEIs which are part of the higher education system, thus forming an education environment. Communities and other parties related to the operations of the HEIs form part of the core environment. Though there is a larger environment that lays down laws on institutional governance, it is the other systems that direct input into and absorb output from the HEIs. The HEIs' environment includes the social, political, and economic forces that impose laws, policies and structures governing them in their organization.

2.10 Environment vs the systems approach

Botha *et al* (2007: 60-61), explain that the internal environment includes all the functional departments such as Public relations, Marketing and Accounting that make up the business organisation and the people who work there. They further mention that the external environment includes everyone outside the organisation, such as competitors, Government, media and the community and the people who represent them. Within the organisational environment, there are different stakeholders. Kinicki and Williams (2006:67) refers to internal stakeholders as employees, owners and board of directors. External stakeholders can be divided into two, namely:

- **Task environment:** This includes suppliers, distributors, strategic allies and employee organisations, local communities, special interest groups and, lastly, mass media. A set of forces in relation to the task environment in a HEIs affects its ability to obtain inputs and dispose of its outputs. In HEIs, this may include students, potential students, parents, political leaders, and employers; and
- **General environment:** comprehensive forces such as economic, technological, socio-cultural, demographic, political and legal, and global forces affect the institutions and its task environment. These also include financial forces, scientific forces, socio-cultural forces, demographic forces, political forces and institutional forces. In HEIs, this may include public confidence or student aid legislation as industry factors affecting institutions.

There is a specific interaction between the system and the environment, and, therefore, changes in the environment will affect the organisation. In order to survive, organisations must anticipate change and respond (Smit and Cronje 2002:46). As institutions of higher learning, open systems HEIs should be able to survive and thrive in their environments and not only see the present but also plan for the future. As stated by Jesús (2015), changes to be anticipated can be summarised as follows:

- Changes in universities as institutions and at the level of internal organisation;
- Changes in knowledge creation;
- Changes in the educational model;
- Changes aimed at tapping the potential of information and communication technologies in the creation and dissemination of knowledge; and
- Changes for social responsibility and knowledge transfer.

Mehta and Xavier (2009:193) declare that the notion of ecology to public relations was introduced in 1952. They elaborate that, in ecological systems, organisms depend on the environment for survival. Therefore, if they can assimilate ecology, they will be competent to adjust and adapt to changes in the environment. As stated by Besio and Pronzini (2010), “an important advantage of systems theory is that it is a theory of society and therefore fully equipped to address issues of the relationship between organizations and their environment”. It becomes apparent that systems theory stresses that the organizational level should be evidently notable from other communicative levels, predominantly from the functional systems of modern society. Furthermore, the two systems mentioned (organization and functional) possess their own internal structures, which enable them to solve their problems, respectively.

Hayajneh (2007:2) states that a dynamic state in a system is whichever system that endlessly influences and changes its environment. That very system can be and is being influenced and changed by its environment. Usually, it has components that are structured and interrelated. This means that if there is a change in one of the components; it does not automatically affect other components of the system.

As previously mentioned, the study is based on the systems perspective, with special reference to *cybernetics* as expounded by Bertalanffy (1968). Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006:183) refer to cybernetics as the study of input-output self-regulation process in systems. Therefore, *cybernetics* studies show how systems use

messages to control and maintain them. These authors further add that such a model has five (5) elements, namely:

- Goal establishment in a control centre;
- Outputs related to the goals;
- Feedback to the control centre on the effects of the output;
- Comparison of the new system state with the goal state, and;
- Control centre determination of the need for corrective output.

Figure 2.3 below is cybernetics control model, taken from Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006:183).

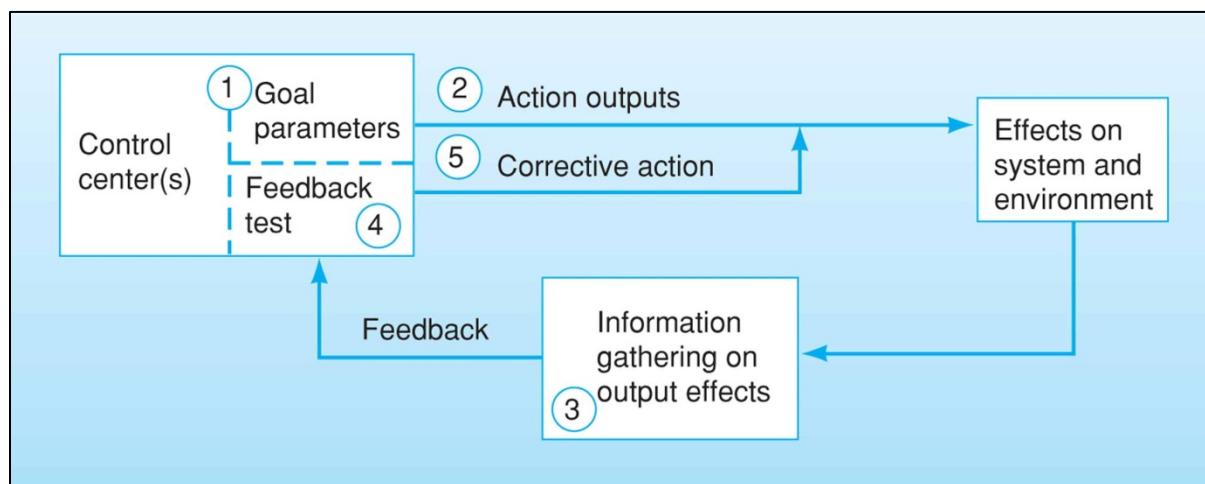


Figure 2.3 Cybernetics control model

Wang (2004:398), elucidates that cybernetics emphasizes the control of the system through the monitoring of flows, principally energy and information. Moreover, the idea of cybernetics led to the development of Taylor's scientific management systems that enforce control. According to Seising (2010:4466), central to the idea of feedback, was the perception of information, as a standard of control in machines and animals. Feedback processes, as understood by Weiner (1948: 97) relates to those processes where the information manipulation occurs and decision making are influenced, as stated by Mingers and White (2010: 1148). Cybernetics is a recent discipline that was established by Wiener (1948). It was mainly seen as the scientific study and mathematical modelling for an understanding of regulation and control in any system. These authors indicate that cybernetics studies refer to the flow of information through a system and the way in which that information is used by the system as a means of controlling itself. However, organisations are complex and

diverse. These organisations define themselves as having inter-connectedness with what is around them, and also distinguishing themselves from the more traditional approach.

Duaning and Ivancevich (2004:19) add that from the systems perspective, management should focus on efficiency and effectiveness in each part of the organisation, with the understanding that actions taken in one part of the organisation affect other parts of the organisation. Organisations should work together to achieve a common organisational goal. The systems approach recognizes that an organisation is an open system because it interacts with, and is affected by the external environment (Lussier 2006:40). Ward (2005:3) states that open systems imply that organisations and individuals can interact with a potentially limitless horde of other organisations and individuals.

After its interpretation and uses, the systems theory gained popularity, and was often known as a communication theory that helped define and sustained a system. Without effective communication, a system will fall out of homeostasis since the feedback loop or channel is not functioning properly (Heil 2011). Therefore, communication is key in keeping an interpersonal system going and helps develop strategies for effective communication in an organisation.

In closing, communication, in line with the systems theory, can be defined as the exchange of oral, non-verbal and written messages within or across the boundaries of the system, that are interrelated and interdependent for the people working to achieve the organisation's requirements. Moreover the communication system can be used to maintain the patterns in organisational activities, not only the predicted patterns, but also the surprising ones (Yusuf, Zulkifli, Rashid and Kamil 2014:102).

2.11 Basic communication model

Mhango, Kawasal, Khonje and Nsitu (2015) state that, communication mechanisms must be in place for an organisation to exchange information with its environment, by providing the flow of information to sub-systems. In the context of systems theory, and the importance of communication, the nature and connectedness of the components and their relationship is what makes effective communication in a manageable fashion.

A good communication process model in higher education institutions must be defined as the complete model that includes a proper communication channel, an understandable message, and evaluation of the feedback by creating communication that is adaptable to student and staff needs. With that in mind, it creates positive communication mechanisms in the institutions. This should be the principle of communication within higher education. These institutions should depend on capitalising on a process of communication based on two-way management of information to student and staff, thus creating active participation within. The above statement may transform the communication process to a more integrated communication strategy that may lead to better quality of internal communication.

A basic communication model explains the process of communication between two people, or between groups of people. The basic elements of the communication model include: the sender, receiver, message, channel, feedback, the environment and noise interference (Botha *et al* 2007:58). There is no doubt that WSU has internal communication structures put in place. Hybells and Weaver (2007:8) defines the process of sharing information, ideas and feelings by people as communication. Communication does not only take the form of the spoken and written word. If it adds meaning, body language, personal mannerism and style can be considered as a form of communication. These communication elements are further explained by Hybells and Weaver (2007:8 – 12) below.

2.11.1 Sender – Receiver

When people get together, it is mostly for the need to share information, ideas and feelings, where each person can be both the sender and receiver at the same time. Cutlip and Centre (2009: 208), states that those characteristics of message sources affect the receiver's initial acceptance of the message but have little effect on the impact of the long – term message. They further mention that “although source characteristics affect the communication process, their impact varies from situation to situation, from topic to topic and from time to time”.

2.11.2 The message

The message is made up of ideas and feelings that the sender-receiver want to share (Badenhorst- Weiss *et al* 2007:198). They further state that the message may convey ideas, opinions, plans, orders or explanations. In

the interest of effective communication, the message should be conveyed in a simple, clear and it must be understood by the receiver.. There are two types of symbols in communication:

- Verbal symbols: which stand for particular things or ideas; and
- Non-verbal symbols: they include facial expression, gestures, posture, vocal tones, cues, signals and objects.

2.11.3 Channel

The channel is the route travelled by a message; it is the means a message uses to reach the sender- receiver. In face – to - face communication, the primary channels are sound and sight.

2.11.4 Feedback

It is the response of the receiver-sender to each other. It is vital in communication because it lets the participants see whether ideas and feelings have been shared in the way they were intended.

2.11.5 Noise

It is the interference that keeps a message from being understood or accurately interpreted. Noise occurs between the sender- receiver and it comes in the following three forms;

- External noise: it comes from the environment and prevents the message from being heard or understood. It does not always come from sound;
- Internal noise: It occurs in the minds of the sender - receiver when their thoughts or feelings are focused on something other than the communication at hand; and
- Semantic noise: it is caused by people's emotional reactions to words. It can interfere with all or part of the message.

2.11.6 Setting

The setting is the environment in which the communication occurs. Settings can have a significant influence on communication. Formal settings lend themselves to formal presentations. As in many cases, communication will change when the setting changes.

Newsom, Turk and Kruckeberg (2004:119) depict communication flow model in figure 2.4;

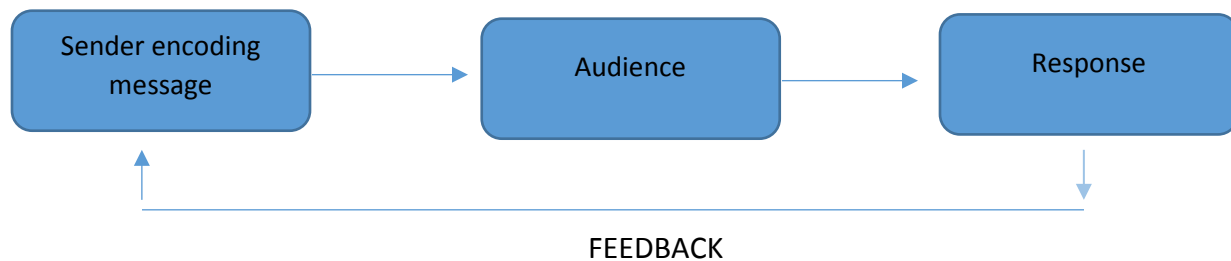


Figure 2.4 Communication model

2.12 Forms Communication

WSU's Marketing, Communication and Advancement, (MCA), previously known as Marketing, Communication and Development (MCD), has the obligation of developing a corporate communication strategy and policy for the institution. This has placed emphasis on the message identification, by determining what should be communicated to stakeholders, and to unravel glitches that develop in the relationship. Communication is a crucial part of daily life. People communicate and interact with each other daily. Communication flows in three directions, as stated by Rudansky-Kloppers (2002:58 – 87) i.e, downward, upward and horizontal communication.

Ganguly (n.d:151) who states that, in an organisation, communication charts detail how communication travels internally. Communication, therefore, takes place vertically (between levels), horizontally (between sections) and diagonally (between different levels and sections). These communication charts must be open and effective.

The author details the forms of communication in an organization as follows:

2.12.1 Downward communication

The most frequent form of communication within an organization is the downward communication, in which the higher levels in the organizational hierarchy communicate with staff at the bottom of the hierarchy. This comprises of communication types like memos, notices, in-house newsletters, company handbook, and procedure manuals. Each of the HEI's communications department disseminates information to the institution's community about policies and regulations, and information that will benefit the institution.

This type of communication flow starts from the organisation's upper management flowing downwards through the hierarchy. Its uses are stated below:

- It is used by managers to communicate with subordinates;
- Messages include job instructions about what needs to be done or how to do it;
- Job rationale explains how one task relates to the other;
- Procedures and practices involve information about rules and regulations, policies and benefits; and
- Feedback involves information aimed at motivating employees by impressing the business mission and specifying how they should relate to it.

Within the context of communication, organisations are responsible for the establishment and implementation of communication channels to ensure the smooth running of the organisation. In WSU, there was a problem with establishing the lines of communication during and after the merger process.

2.12.2 Upward communication

This form of communication is equally as important as the downward communication flow. It is unlike the downward communication flow where communication is directed towards the hierarchy of managers, supervisors or directors by using memos, reports, meetings, informal discussions. This flow of communication can be summarized as follows:

- It is used by stakeholders to communicate with the superiors; and
- Certain types of messages include: Unresolved work problems; how subordinates feel about each other and the job.

2.12.3 Horizontal communication

This communication flow transpires between people of equal status i.e. sales staff, departmental heads, directors, supervisors. The communication tools utilized in this form of communication are memos and reports. Horizontal communication flow may possibly include committee meetings, seminars and conferences. Below are the characteristics of this flow of communication:

- It is used by employees on the same level interacting with one another; and
- Types of messages include: requirements; labour relations; social, procedure and work-related issues;

However, Robbins (2005: 301) maintains that:

- Downward communication is the communication that flows from one level of a group to a lower level; it does not have to be oral or face-to-face; and
- Upward communication is used to provide feedback to higher offices, to inform them of progress towards goals: it keeps managers aware of how employees feel about their jobs.

Formal communication channels are established by the organization to establish messages that are related to the professional activities of members and informal communication channels are channels that are spontaneous and emerge as a response to individual choices (Kurtz 2009:334).

2.12.4 Diagonal communication

Tasks in this form of communication may include more than a single department and regularly there is no apparent line of power. It often relies largely on co-operation, goodwill and respect between the parties concerned.

2.12.5 Unofficial communication

Grapevine is the word to describe this form of communication. If there are no correct lines of communication, the grapevine often manifests. The term is used to describe an unofficial communication system, which is continuously changing. Distortions of the truth come with it as rumours and gossip. If employees spread

incomplete information or rather exaggerated information, it causes too much damage to an extent that it results in low morale, cynicism, fear and an unsettled workforce (Ganguly n.d:151).

Ganguly (n.d:151). In times of crisis in the organisation, correct information should be communicated, as the grapevine may cause uncertainty to employees. Even though the grapevine may never be completely eliminated, confidence of an organisation's employees is vitally important, so it may be said that satisfactory and precise information ought to be made available. To avoid further damage, people concerned must be informed at their earliest stages as soon possible via correct channels.

Men (2012:58) states that examples of traditional print publications are the newsletter, phone calls, voicemails, face-to-face communication, internet tools and internal social networking sites. The current times in society require almost all communication channels to be used to communicate in an organisation. Therefore, organisations must possess inter-connected communication channels for receiving, processing and sending internal and external messages. Information can be managed, decisions made, feedback gathered and further corrections (if need be) made through these information channels. Communication is also significant in creating and maintaining a suitable organizational climate and culture. Satisfactory information flow in an organization is a central factor that allows employees to feel as part of the organisation.

Kataria, Kataria and Garg (2013:47) assert that companies combine the use of traditional and online channels for communicating. The old-fashioned sources of communication consist of face - to - face and written communication, where the former channel would require the receiver to listen and observe the non-verbal communication transmitted by the sender and reply with instant feedback. The authors further indicate that, falling within a broad spectrum of written communication, such printed channels are newsletters, brochures and annual reports. The intranet, e-forums, online chat rooms, e-mail and social media fall under the online communication tools. Communication channel effectiveness can be evaluated on how it contributes to goals and objectives of the organization and how it fits in a strategic communication process.

Fenech (2013:30) shares similar sentiments as the above authors, and identifies traditional internal communication as media such as "employee magazines, intranet news, corporate television, e-mail and the 'board-of-directors' newsletter as well as face-to-face communication and employee meetings".

2.13 Communication Strategies

Kanny (2013:35-35) identifies the following communication tools:

- An *internal newsletter* is a proactive way to keep your employees informed. Internal newsletters are especially beneficial for businesses that operate in different locations and have many employees. The internal newsletter for students is a great way to keep students informed, build loyalty, motivate and help perform better. Newsletters are relatively easy and inexpensive to produce. As WSU has four campuses and eleven delivery sites, the internal newsletter is beneficial to the institution to disseminate information across the institution;
- *Social media*. According to Strauss (2013), social media provides HEIs with a new way to communicate with their stakeholders to create a better learning and development environment. By using the various common social media platforms to communicate with their stakeholders, innovative ways of sharing lectures, facilitating discussions, providing information support to students and staff to building campus communities could work to their advantage. Social media is an umbrella term, which contains a wide range of internet tools that integrate technology and promote social interaction and content creation (Ntimbane 2013). These social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, mySpace, youtube and instagram which offer a wide variety of services as per personal preference. HEIs cannot be controlled by the communication department only as the stakeholders have their own ways of creating groups and be followed to disseminate information;
- *Inserts and Enclosures*. The insert is a valuable medium for important notices and news. One obvious advantage of the insert is that the message goes to a strategically targeted public who is interested in the message. A small, lightweight printed insert need not add to postage;
- *Intranet*. The intranet is basically a computer network that is behind a firewall. The firewall separates the public internet to the business's intranet. Anything within the intranet is not open to the public because it is behind the network's firewall. Businesses use their intranet commonly to host a private website only viewable while at work or when logged into the private network. This website can keep employees up to date on business issues and events as well as provide resources without having to worry about who can see information from the public side; and
- *Face-to-Face Communication*. The heart of communication inside an organisation is verbal communication. Verbal communication has a significant impact on organisational culture and deserves attention.

Supporting the above author is Sarka (2014:53) who cites in Hislop (2005), and declares that there are various characteristics of communication media. Table 2.1 below distinguishes such media.

Medium	Characteristics of medium
Face-to-face communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information rich (social cues such as facial expressions, voice, gesture visible). Plus, synchronous communication, potential rapid high-quality feedback/ interaction. – Most relevant for sharing of tacit knowledge – Spontaneous/ informal interactions possible when people geographically proximate – Conditions amenable to development of trust (other factors excluded) – Expensive when people geographically dispersed
Video-Conferencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information rich (social cues, and virtually real time, synchronous medium) – Expensive to set up – Set up time inhibits spontaneity
Telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Intermediate information richness (tone of voice conveys some social cues, but gesture, expression invisible. Also synchronous, facilitating detailed, immediate feedback) – Cost variable – Spontaneous/ informal interactions possible irrespective of geographic proximity – Can facilitate development of trust where face-to-face interaction difficult
E-mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Suitable for sharing of highly codified knowledge – Relatively low information richness (all social cues lost) – Inexpensive (cost unrelated to geographic proximity) – Asynchronous, with variable feedback speed – Spontaneous/ informal interactions possible irrespective of geographic proximity – Permanent record of interactions exists – Development of trust based on e-mail alone difficult

Table 2.1 Sarka (2014) Characteristics of communication media.

Wandjiva (2011:20), states that, in order to achieve desired results in an organisation, effective communication must be used. An organisation functions by means of all employees working together. Therefore, strategic planning ensures a constant flow of communication. This will ensure that every employee within the organisation is on the same footing ranging from the most senior position to the lowest level in the organisation.

Gunbayi (2007:789) purports that an effective communication is processed in multi-channels and networks. He further states that formal communication takes place in an organisational hierarchy. Oke and Oke (2010:444) elaborate that the extent of media richness depends on the type of communication channels used as they cite from the theoretical framework of *Daft et al. (1987)* of the information systems field. They further affirm that the channel or media richness is the capacity of a communication channel to convey information effectively. In view of the changes in higher education in South Africa and in relation to the WSU, it is imperative to have communication systems in place that will motivate the stakeholders to be able to perform their tasks, and also to be acquainted with the state of the organisation in relation to any uncertain issues. According to Roberts-Lombard (2011:348), it is impossible for any organisation to function without two-way communication as it would be difficult to convey essential information to employees, whether it is downward communication, upward communication and even external stakeholders. As a merged institution, WSU needs to have an organised communication structure that will ensure that there is a free flow of information within the institution.

The aforesaid states that for WSU to have a noble image and stakeholder's relationships, it must have a good corporate communication strategy to ensure that the WSU community has the right attitude. Communication ought to be regarded as an organisation-wide activity managed by communication professionals. Forms of intellectual capital, such as relations, networks, competencies and trust require strong communication skills of staff, while the organisation itself must have appropriate communication structures that promote openness and dialogue (De Beer 2014:141).

Communication is, therefore, important when going through a merger and it benefits the organisation to realise its value. Effective communication can benefit the WSU community to make a personal transformation and transition as the institution endeavours to build confidence. The organisations owe their presence to the communication between the sub-systems which form them and their interaction with their environment.

Dobkins and Pace (2003:14) make a specific distinction between communication channels, namely; oral communication and verbal or nonverbal communication. They differentiate the three channels by stating that;

- Oral communication consists of messages expressed through a formal language, and they can be either written or oral. It is usually less formal and more personal than written. It is also more interactive and transient than written;

- Non-verbal communication consists of messages expressed through symbols other than words. They include had gestures, facial expressions, touching, the inflection of your voice and the clothes you wear; and
- Verbal communication consists of messages expressed through a formal language. They include oral discussions, written messages and mediated communication.

However, Robbins and Judge (2013:374) mention that communication channels entail the following tools of communication in each channel:

- *Oral communication:* the chief means of conveying messages are oral communication, such as speeches, formal one-on-one and group communication;
- *Written communication* includes memos, letters, fax transmission, email, notices on notice boards and any other device that transmits via written words and symbols. It is often tangible and verifiable as both sender and receiver have a record of the communication, and can be stored; and
- *Non-verbal communication* includes body movements, the emphasis given to words, facial expressions and the physical distance between sender and receiver.

Internal communication is communication amongst management and staff at various levels of the organisation. In order to reach organisational goals and objectives. WSU, as an institution, communicates with students via intranet, newsletters, notice boards and the WSU Facebook page. Supporting the above statement, WSU has a significant role to play in keeping all stakeholders informed and for the positive image of the institution. This can only be realised if stakeholders are kept up-to-date on the undertakings of the institution, which requires having an effective internal communication strategy.

Hawthorne (2016) links system theory and organisational management, where organisational managers recognize how different systems affect a worker and how a worker affects the systems. Systems theory is a broad perspective that permits managers to scrutinise patterns and events in the workplace. This assists managers to co-ordinate programmes to work as a collective whole for the overall goal or mission of the entire organisation rather than for isolated departments. The following examples of communication strategies that can help make the workplace programmes successful are explained by Juggernath (2010:34):

- Communicating key and clear goals of the organization to employees by communicating key activities such as policies that facilitate transparency and openness of the organisation;

- By involving employees in the development of the workplace in-terms the assessment of their needs;
- Using multiple channels of communication is important to employees for a productive workplace environment;
- Information concerning the outcomes and success of specific workplace practices must be communicated to all members of the organisation; and
- To provide regular, on-going opportunities for employees to provide feedback or respond to management using communication vehicles such as employee surveys, suggestion boxes, town hall meetings, individual or small group meeting with managers, in support of organisational culture that supports open, two-way communication.

Alternative communication channels for stakeholders intended to be receivers (students) and senders of information (Management) should be employed in higher education institutions. The creation of alternative communication channels for each scenario assists in keeping both stakeholders informed and drive appropriate action. The most common channels have been discussed above, however, new and strategic alternative channels should be used as secondary to primary communication channels to improve how the management communicates both electronically and traditionally with students. These alternative communication channels, would therefore, be re-enforcing channels through which HEIs communicate with students whether they respond, engage and act based on that information conveyed.

Communication researchers have also addressed students' engagement and satisfaction with modern communication channels, teachers' and students' use of communication channels, and multitasking through communication channels (Ziska 2014:48).

Zivrbule (2015:18), discusses the below mentioned alternative communication channels;

- Discussions: this type of communication channel provides a valuable, direct and trustful exchange of opinions, views and information.
- Conversations with students provides possibility to instantly receive your sender's feedback, which undoubtedly makes these conversations completer and more productive.

However, Trumpia (2016) reveals that for effective alternative communication channels between management and students in HEIs, below tool should be considered:

- Text messaging is incredible for connecting with students and for coordinating staff. Text messages sending of important memos about policy changes or last minute meetings guarantee that they would be delivered and read, rather than lost in the great piles of paper memos.

The use of the above mentioned alternative communication channels, are not only for communication purposes but for educational purposes. So (2016:33) identifies with the statement by stating that in higher education, text messaging is used a form of communication. He further states that, even for administrative communication between management and students in higher education institutions, the type of messages included notifications of class cancellations, reminders on assignment submission and collection and notifications of relevant instructional activities.

2.14 Functions of communication

Organisations are occasionally perceived in terms of their flow of information and information processing to the publics, where a dominant phenomenon is communication. This has significantly abetted these organizations to understand the flow of information as well as the effect it has on behaviours. With this in mind, organizations use the information flow to co-ordinate how they communicate, by means of certain communication networks.

Robbins (2005:299) indicates that there are four major communication functions within a group or organization:

- Communication acts to control member behaviour in several ways;
- Communication fosters motivation and how employees can improve performance;
- Feelings and frustrations can be released via an emotional expression which underlies the fulfilment of social needs; and
- For decision making purposes and to identify and evaluate alternative choices when receiving information.

It is, therefore, evident that for communication to function effectively, all four functions of communication, as mentioned above, ought to be considered.

2.15 Application of communication tools in Higher Education Institutions

According to Gobind and Ukpere (2014:740), posters are often regarded as the easiest and cost effective way to communicate a message to a large mass audience. Posters have been a powerful force in shaping public opinion and spreading propaganda. One of the many objectives of posters, as with other forms of communications media, is to influence attitudes, market a product or change behaviour patterns. These authors further distinguish between small media and posters as part of dissemination of communication:

- *Small media*: Leaflets and other small media fulfill a larger purpose to ensure that a comprehensive source of information on a specific topic was achieved. They are written and printed resources which are usually distributed to a target audience. They include pamphlets, flyers, newsletters, booklets, posters or cards and are presented in a variation of shapes and sizes; and
- *Posters* are effective tools in raising awareness. Posters are the primary non-electronic communication piece utilized to reinforce messages in a communication plan. When strategically placed, posters spark interest in order to get individuals curious and involved in a programme. Posters are typically displayed in areas with high user traffic like corridors, common rooms, meeting rooms and offices. Posters are unlike billboards, which are huge and attract attention by their sheer size. Posters are designed to be attached on the walls and designed to communicate a message. They need to be attractive, eye-catching and informative.

Welch (2013:615) claims that internal communication is a pressing issue for communication practice as organisations strive to achieve employee engagement and organisational effectiveness. For organisations to achieve their goals and objectives, internal communication is vital. Internal communication is communication between management and staff at various levels of the organisation. Vercic, Vercic and Sriramesh (2012:224) acknowledge four domains within internal communication, which are:

- Business communication (concerned with communication skills of employees);
- Management communication (focused on management skills and capabilities for communication);
- Corporate communication (focused on formal communication);
- Organisational communication (addressing more philosophical and theoretically oriented issues).

There are many considerations about the definition of internal communication from various authors. Internal communication can be probably clarified into internal marketing, organizational communication, employee

relations, management communication, internal media, cross-departmental communication, business or corporate communication, strategic communication or integrated internal communications (Cuong 2013:13). Cuong (2013) elaborates that internal communication could be seen as a appropriate issue in an organization to give functions competently: they assume exchange of information; motivation is an important factor to achieve quality and can be improved by communication; and processes of change cannot do without communicative support. To guarantee effective internal communications, it is important to have an accurate, precise and relevant communication structure. The internal communication structure is seen as forms, channels (flows) and (digital) means that are available within an organisation along which information exchange and dialogue can take place.

The above statement is supported by Adnjani and Prianti (2010:3), who state that internal communication is communication which is aimed at the groups of the public in the internal environment of an organisation. Internal communication deals with how communication can support the process of production or the supply of services, how the involvement of the employees in the organization can be improved, and what role communication can play to help realize changes in the organization.

There are several techniques of internal communication that can be utilized, e.g., notice boards, closed circuit TV, radio stations, an idea box, work committees, video presentations, visits by management and staff visits.

Whatever communication task one is undertaking, asking the following six (5Ws and H) questions before you start will give your communication a better chance of success and make tasks easy.

- Who are the receivers (audiences, personality, Education, age and status)?
- When will the communication take place and the context?
- What is the purpose of the communication and message, is it clear, concise and correct?
- Why: What does the communication sent want to achieve?
- Where is the best place to speak to them?
- How: How will the communication be structured; in words or pictures, and the tone?

The content that is to be communicated may be different depending on the type of channel to be used. Below are some of the forms of communication tools mostly used by universities when communicating to their publics, inclusive of alternative communication channels;

- Brochures and leaflets;
- Television and internet presentations;
- Site meetings;
- Face-to-face meetings;
- Press releases;
- Press conferences;
- Text message sending;
- Discussion groups; and
- Conversations.

Forssberg and Malm (2001:26) state that, for internal communication to be effective, it must meet a number of different criteria:

- For the receiver to understand and comprehend the message, it must be clear. This will allow the receiver to understand the information without distortions of the receiver's culture, background, language and frame of reference; and
- The internal communication should be co-ordinated and should also focus on the significant aspects of the information to maintain a reliable message.

Welch and Jackson (2007:183) purport that the identification of stakeholders is vital and significant so as to maintain interaction and relationships. This forms part of the internal communication as a strategic management tool. In the case of WSU and the study, stakeholders can be identified as the management, staff and students. Steyn, Steyn and van Rooyen (2011:132) define internal communication as the full series of strategies people in an organization use to communicate with each other. As such, it is a catalyst for organizations to reach their goals and objectives, as it enables them to effectively develop structure and culture.

2.16 WSU's internal communication strategies and systems

WSU is undergoing radical transformations. MCA is in the process of developing an internal communication strategy that would adapt to the vision and mission of the university. Welch and Jackson (2007:182) define internal communication as the professional management of interactions between all those with an interest or 'a stake' in a particular organisation. They further state that this is useful because it suggests

a strategic approach and focuses on the participants or stakeholders in internal communication. These authors assert that Van Riel's (1995) integrated corporate communication model developed an approach that described the common starting points for communications activity as strategy, image and identity. They identify three types of corporate communication: management, organisational and marketing. Though internal communication strategies are defined, the participant's familiarity with these strategies is important. Understanding the perceptions of students regarding the effectiveness of technology use and their proficiency and knowledge of specific types of ICT tools are both influential and critical to the success or failure of integration of ICT in higher education settings (Venkatesh, Croteau and Rabah 2014:110).

Hume and Leonard (2014:47) support the above statement by describing strategic internal communication as the "promised land" and the "secret weapon" of successful organisations, particularly when managed strategically. Internal communication can be defined as strategic when it is managed for the purpose of aligning internal stakeholders with the organisation's strategic intent. Some current students expect brochures to be mailed to them via email or posts and students would have to rely largely on a university paper to get their news. With the technological strategies and new forms of media, institutional stakeholders can communicate like never before. This allows messages to be disseminated faster through a variety of different media. Online networking platforms, such as face book, twitter and WeChat, are providing institutions with a new way to reach out to the large number of students across campuses and sites.

"Though the students of these institutions are largely driving the usage of social media, college administrators across the nation are beginning to see the value in the information obtainable from successful implementation of a social media communication strategy. Social networking sites allow internal stakeholders (i.e. faculty, staff, administrators, etc.) to get feedback from various external stakeholders (i.e. students, prospects, alumni) in real time and often with better response rates than emailed surveys" (Kelly 2014:2).

Robinson and Stubberud (2012:105) vow that the internet generation, inclusive of higher education students use the internet on a daily basis to communicate and stay connected with friends. They further elaborate that "the new and different mobile technology and the internet (in short "Net") is preferred by contemporary students". The technology is provided by the use of cell phones and smart phones which have a capability to send text messages. Talking and online communication methods such as e-mail, chat and social networking provide additional methods to keep in touch .However, the approaches of communication are most favoured by students for social purposes are not essentially those they favour for school or work deeds.

As a result of the merger of the three historical institutions, WSU has four campuses and 11 various sites. The Marketing, Communication and Advancement department (MCA) plays a role in the effective internal communication within the university. The strategic function for MCA, as it is referred to in WSU, is to inform the WSU community using various communication media at their disposal. Communication departments from the three previous institutions had to amalgamate and propel the newly merged university forward. This has been a mammoth task for MCA, with one office in Mthatha and another in Buffalo City. Its role is to disseminate information internally and externally, and reporting directly to the university principal.

MCA is accountable for newsletters, bulletins, posters, official WSU website and other WSU media as official internal communication channels. All internal communication at the WSU carries the approved brand imagery of WSU as per the corporate Identity. According to the WSU strategic plan (2008 -2017:32), MCA's objective is to develop an integrated communication strategy. During the merger in 2005, MCA worked with the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) department to assist in the dissemination of information to the entire WSU community via Helpdesk.

Since 2005, MCA has grown from strength to strength, striving to make sure that communications reach everyone and that most internal communication tools are used. The use of new media has a significant role to play in ensuring that the community is well informed. Print media, such as newsletters and posters, also contribute to internal communication that encourages feedback.

Walter Sisulu University (WSU) via MCA makes use of in-house communication strategies aimed at building an understanding and support within WSU with its key internal and external publics. WSU achieves these goals through:

- Internal communication via WSU web page as part of electronic media;
- Monthly newsletter, made available on print and on the website;
- Posters and notices that are distributed in all campuses
- Official Facebook page;
- Special projects, campaigns; and
- Media liaison.

The aim of the MCA is to grow the WSU by developing positive attitudes and to enhance the image of the university by offering a professional and pro-active marketing, communication and information service to all

stakeholders. WSU's communication network is intended to be an overall information resource for the entire university by utilizing the above-mentioned tools. This MCA office is accountable for the management facets of external communication and public relations, particularly the building of receptiveness amongst external target publics via corporate advertising, publications, newsletters, and media liaison.

2.17 Alternative communication channels and new media

Hwang (2011:924) advocates that the development of the latest interpersonal communication media technologies, such as mobile phones, through a computer monitor and in person, enable people to communicate. People communicate daily sharing different topics through different channels.

The digital world has given organisations tools to communicate with their stakeholders and act as a catalyst to effective organisational communication. Tejeda –Lorenre *et al* (2014: 52) state that the World Wide Web (called Web) is a popular and interactive medium to collect, disseminate and access an increasingly huge amount of information. Due to its spectacular growth, related to both resources (pages, sites, and services) and visitors, the Web is nowadays the main information repository.

Conventionally, when one defines internal communication, one says that “it is the communication of employees within a given organisation”. Nonetheless, with the introduction of latest technologies such as emails and internet, the message could no longer be guaranteed to stay within the organisation. With the messages no longer remaining within, they have a potential to dent the organization's reputation.

Computer technologies have made a trouble-free creating and production of documents by storing, distributing and multiplying documents. They assist in exchanging messages regardless of the distance between receiver and sender. Nowadays, organisations use emails, intranet and video-conferences to communicate with employees and to stay informed of new developments and activities.

WSU, as part of its communication strategy, has developed a website and also an official facebook page to communicate with the university community, mostly students. They are means of trying to keep the university abreast of the digital world. The collaboration with the ICT department is of supreme significance, as it communicates with the entire university, using intranet via helpdesk. However, a variety of communication tools exist, and can be used to ensure that there are effective internal communications in place. During the

merger period, the university used only the university website, monthly newsletter and posters on notice boards to communicate. After the merger, more tools were developed and proved fruitful. The use of new media, such as the regular updating of the WSU website has a significant role in ensuring continuous flow of information, consistently and also on time.

Seitel (2004:444) mentions that email has become the most pervasive organisational communication vehicle. He further states that it is the internal medium of choice for newsletters, bulletins and internal announcements. As WSU is geographically dispersed, focus on internal communication needs to be increased. Students mostly receive information on their cell phones via face book and they are able to respond quickly. This strengthens the efficiency and effectiveness of WSU's communication with students.

Though WSU uses its own web site, monthly newsletter, official facebook page, and posters to communicate, some of other effective media are not considered for the purpose of internal communication. These are, but not limited to, online communication, face –to – face communication from other campuses and student and staff briefing sessions. The use of new media, such as the regular updating of the website homepage, has a substantial role in guaranteeing that stakeholders receive information constantly and on time. The print media, like the internal newsletter, also contribute to the effective internal communication, as it reassures feedback from all stakeholders.

As the institution is currently undergoing a transformation phase, the Department of Marketing, Communication and Advancement is involved in a turn-around strategy, as part of the communication plan for effective internal communication. To counter any problem that may arise during the transformation phase, MCA has put in place an internal communication strategy via:

- Helpdesk: Working with ICT services to the entire WSU community and communication sent via helpdesk to reach everyone within the WSU; and
- Via the Office of the Vice-Chancellor. MCA also makes use of this medium for updates and for distribution of specific information.

Some of the foremost points that WSU may consider via MCA for effective internal communication are listed below by Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006:239– 246):

- Letters : They are perceived as more formal, directed, personal and costly than emails, and, therefore, generate more attention from the recipient;
- Inserts and enclosures: They are a valuable medium for appealing to natural constituencies for support and for important notices and news; and
- Face –to –Face communication: Employees prefer direct communication from their superiors over e-mails, memo, voice mail or any other form. Verbal communication has a significant impact on organizational culture and deserves attention, even though it is often an informal medium.

Computer-assisted communication opened the internet and Web as especially potent communication. Heath and Coombs (2006:326 – 327) provide the following description of the new technology and events:

- Internet: The internet has changed the way organisations interact with key constituencies. It offers fast, effective interactive communication with minimal interference. Communication can be public, as in chat rooms, or private, between individuals. People utilise the internet in the comfort of their homes, offices, and at a time that they designate; and
- Multimedia: These can be created as stand-alone computer applications or set up on a website. This use of technology allows for media- sight, text and sound to come together.

2.18 Social Media in Higher Education

Social media encompasses undertakings that include socializing and networking via the web online through words, pictures and videos. It has redefined how one relates and communicates with others as people and also how to relate to organisations that serve one. The main purpose is a dialogue of a two-way communication that brings people together to discover and to share information (Reuben 2010).

Tess (2013:60) as cited in Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr (2010), explains that social media and other Web 2.0 technologies have grown extraordinarily, they have become essential elements of daily activity. One of the activities in social media technology is generating content, sharing sentiments and games. Social media is prevalent even in HEIs, where student interaction, communication and academic activities are transformed by the growing technology.

Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar and González Canché (2014:1) state that “Social networking sites” is a commonly used term to refer to all social media and computer-mediated communication, such as to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Myspace.

WSU has an official Facebook page that makes interaction easy for the stakeholders, where official information is disseminated. The official WSU was created by the Marketing, Communication and Advancement Department for the benefit of the WSU community, such as staff members, students and Alumni. However, there are other un-official Facebook pages created by students to communicate with each other, such as class or study groups where students interact in terms of academic information. Consequently, lecturers have adopted the use of social media to communicate with their students for change of lecture dates and information about a test or an assignment. Al-Rahmi, Othman, and Yusuf (2015:178) concur by stating that within an HEI, through social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, academic activities are conducted. Through social networking, HEIs connect with current and potential students by instructional content.

Using social media to engage with their stakeholders, HEIs use new media channels to communicate with their audience. Due to their low cost, such channels are fast tools to communicate with the large number of the student population (Hall 2014:3).

Below are three main benefits of social media provides, as stated by Zog Digital (2013):

- **Recruitment.** Social networks allow HEIs to reach potential students in their comfortable environment, such as at home when looking for an HEI of their preference. Most of the time, Facebook is the preferred channel of researching an institution on its visibility online. WSU used social media to reach out to high schools around its communities and beyond.
- **In the Classroom.** HEIs, who utilise social media, are able to transform learning and make it more efficient depending on the literacy of the user. Information, such as assignments, tasks and tests can be disseminated using social media. WSU uses E-learning as an on line interactive platform for its students. Another activity is WiSeUp where lecturers post academic activities to their online students.
- **General Outreach.** One of the benefits of evolving social media for HEIs is the ability to reach an enormous number of people at a glance. HEIs can not only reach potential students, but current

students, the community, alumni and staff members. This permits not only the projection of a good image but the benefits of enrolling with the institution.

2.19 Communication Barriers

Wilcox and Cameron (2012:168) assert that barriers to communication tend to mount as one advances to large-group meetings and, ultimately, to the mass media. Organisational materials can reach millions of people at the same time through traditional media and the internet, but the psychological and physical distance between sender and receiver is considerably lengthened. Van Staden, Marx and Erasmus (2007:12) define a communication barrier as interference. During the communication process, something may prevent communication from taking place successfully. As stated in chapter 1, most WSU students come from areas that are poverty stricken in which the 3 campuses are situated, namely, Mthatha, Butterworth and Queenstown.

Buffalo City is regarded as the semi-urban area. Poverty may be regarded as the first barrier to communication. As the university tries to use all communication tools at its disposal, some students do not even have cell phones to gain access to information disseminated via the new media. Several factors can limit the effectiveness of communication. Each of these is a “type” of noise within the communication. These barriers form part of the study as they identify potential problems with the current WSU communication strategies. This study focuses on the following communication barriers identified by Lussier (2006:390 - 392):

- Perception: As messages are transmitted, receivers perceive them and translate them so that they can make sense;
- Information overload: There is a limit to the amount of information people can understand at any given time. It is also a common problem;
- Channel selection: The use of an appropriate channel can result in missed communication;
- Noise: Noise during transmission of a message can disturb or confuse the receiver. It interferes with the message transmission;
- Trust and credibility: During communication, receivers take into account the trust they have in the sender, as well as the sender’s credibility. This causes the receivers to be reluctant to accept the message;
- Poor listening: It is sometimes the result of not paying attention or other distractions.

- Emotions: They can interfere with communication and make it difficult for people to be objective and to listen; and
- Filtering: It is the process of altering or distorting information to project a more favourable image;

Barrows and Powers (2009: 635), maintain that communication barriers consist of the following:

- Semantic Barriers: Different people attach different meanings to words. A communicator must, therefore, choose words that convey the meaning to the sender in such a way that the receiver understands the meaning;
- Cultural background: People from different countries may not find it easy to communicate with one another. Their way of thinking varies when they come together and some might be shy to communicate, while others open up for communication.
- Immediate environment: The place where communication occurs can have an important effect on what gets understood.

Transmission of communication via communication channels can also be regarded as a barrier in this study. People can interchange messages through a variety of channels suitable for both visual and oral information. The objective of the communicator must be the same, irrespective of the channel chosen for transmission. The last communication barrier is the *language* literacy of students. Learning academic literacy involves engaging in academic and social interactions. The effort entails much more than learning to speak or write in a new language. Some students come from high schools in which their mother tongue was preferred as a medium of communication. These students may have difficulty understanding certain types of communication directed to them. Thus they may be at a greater risk of misinterpreting information. The misinterpretation of communication may feed into misinformation that will cause a vacuum. It is, therefore, difficult to characterise students to their cultural, linguistic and educational background.

Organisational barriers to communication flow include obstacles to the movement of information that result from the organizational structure and the nature of the roles members occupy within that structure (Fisher 2007:35).

There are barriers to each flow of communication, as stated by Fisher (2007: 38 -41);

2.21.1 Barriers to downward communication;

- Differences in value and perceptions.

- Mistrust.
- Psychological conflicts of leadership.

2.21.2 Barriers to upward communication;

- Attitudes of the subordinate.
- Attitudes and actions of the superior.
- Characteristics of the organization.

2.21.3 Barriers to lateral communication;

- Increased specialisation.
- Lack of management recognition and reward.
- Supervision of differences.

According to Pincher (2012), the process of speaking, writing and using body language can be called communication. Inclusive into the definition is that one is able to share information, ideas and feelings. For effective communication, information passed on must be understood the way it is supposed to. That can be made possible by the reduction of communication barriers. Examples of communication barriers are listed below as:

- Background noise: Background noise can have an insightful impact on effective communication by preventing a person from what has been conveyed. That causes the receiver to misunderstand the information. A minor background noise may disturb and interrupt both the sender and receiver. One cannot actually say that there will not be any disturbances in messages, but they can be prevented from occurring. Examples of preventing background noise in a work environment are:
 - Turn off all computers and mobile phones when having a meeting;
 - Sound proof walls;
 - Put signs outside doors.

Examples of background noise are traffic, air conditioning units, power supplies and ringing phones.

- Distractions: When the messages are conveyed, distanced individuals often get lost in the information flow and take some time before they understand the information again. Some distractions are man-made, such as tapping on the table and beeping mobile phones. Distractions can be physical such as a

bad smell, being uncomfortable or being in an unsettling environment. These distractions interrupt the flow of thought in the receiver and could stop listening for a while. When that happens, the sender may need to re-send or re-convey the message again to ensure that the receiver is understanding the message. One needs to prevent distractions to ensure that the correct message is put across accurately without distraction.

- Lack of concentration: The human mind can process information and listen up to a certain point and cannot beyond that. This affects people's concentration into thinking about something irrelevant from what is being said. There are many reasons for the lack of concentration; example., the information received does not concern the receiver, resulting in his/her being inattentive. Lack of concentration allows a person to be easily distracted.
- Language used: This indicates that there is language difficulty in conveying messages, and it occurs where there is no common ground to verbally communicate. Some languages are difficult to understand unless they are similar. One cannot say that it is the language difference only without considering an accent. Examples of language barriers are slang or jargon, incorrect language and too much technical information on presentation (Mishra 2016).

The above literature has outlined how communication is used to regulate an open system and, therefore, locates communication as a central component of an open system. Using the components of an open system and the main communication tools of an open system, this study devised a questionnaire to examine the perceived effectiveness of communication strategies between Walter Sisulu University and their students.

2.22 CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted that Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are social systems where two or more persons work together in a synchronised method to reach common goals. HEIs and organisations are open systems, which consist of five basic elements: inputs, a transformation process, outputs, feedback and the environment. The resources from the environment through inputs undergo a transformation process. After the transformation process, a product is exported into the outside environment as an output. Feedback serves as a control mechanism. Whether it is negative or positive from the outputs or environment, it can be recycled to

rectify deficiencies in the inputs or the transformation process, or both. This study uses the literature to compile a questionnaire to examine the perceived effectiveness of communication strategies between Walter Sisulu University and their students. The next chapter looks at the research methodology employed to conduct this research in terms of the research design, as well as the methodology selected for the purpose of the study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The researcher's previous chapter (Chapter 2) discussed the literature surrounding internal communication. It highlighted components of communication plans and strategies for an organization. Hussein (2010:50) cited in Welman, Kruger and Michell (2005:52), argues that research is conducted to examine a research question or problem, where data is collected and gathered from objects of enquiry to solve a problem at hand. It is with that reason that the received results would, therefore, sustain or defend the hypothesis. This chapter outlines the research design and methodology employed in this study. It explains the steps taken for data collection methods and instruments used.

The field work on this study aimed at gathering information about the assessment of communication tools employed by students in a higher education institution at WSU in Buffalo City campus. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to explain how the data were collected and analyzed.

This chapter aims to describe the participants in the study and the results of analyses used to examine the research questions. To examine the perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of communication strategies between WSU and students, a survey questionnaire was distributed and conducted from September 2015 to December 2015 among a group of students and staff of WSU in Buffalo City Chiselhurst campus. Approval and ethical clearance for conducting the project was received from the WSU's research directorate. With written and verbal approval from Deans and Heads of Departments, an email was sent to lecturers prior to the survey encouraging student participation to complete the instrument during the study periods. The questionnaire was distributed to participating students with a consent form, signed by the respondent and the researcher. Upon giving consent, respondents were then requested to respond to the questionnaire.

The findings of this study were deduced from 156 responses at WSU Chiselhurst campus out of the intended 500 respondents. Due to time constraints experienced by lecturers in completing the syllabus, the overall response rate was 33%. The questionnaire used a Likert scale and opened-ended questions to determine attitudes with regards to internal communication at WSU Chiselhurst campus. Data from the questionnaires were captured and analysed using SPSS version 22. The questions were designed according to specific sections such as biographical data, perceived effectiveness and satisfactory communication by WSU. For the purpose of this study, questionnaires were used as data collection instruments, which included responses received using the Likert scale with headings such as *strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree*. The data

collected from the responses were analysed using the SPSS 22 version to test Cronbach alpha coefficient of reliability. Percentages were used to indicate student responses.

The last section of the questionnaire included open-ended questions. These questions were used to uncover whether WSU Chiselhurst students are informed about what is going on at WSU and whether the disseminated information reaches them on time, and which other alternative communication tools they would like to be utilized by WSU. The need for the open- ended questions was to elicit student responses concerning issues appropriate to communication for a multi-campus institution. Some of the issues related to communication challenges experienced by students, preferred communication tools, use of new media communication and satisfaction of current communication strategies.

Finally, consistency between different data sources was investigated to identify patterns of meaning and to describe the emerging themes in order to explain specific patterns and phenomena. The questionnaire consisted of 42 items, with a level of measurement at a nominal or an ordinal level. The questionnaire was divided into 5 sections, as illustrated below:

- Section A – Respondents demographics;
- Section B – Frequency of tools of Communication;
- Section C – Effectiveness of Communication Tools;
- Section D – Impact of Social media & Technology in Communication; and
- Section E – Open- ended questions.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

In social science research, there are two primary research approaches, namely quantitative and qualitative research (Olckers 2013:103) . Olckers distinguishes these approaches:

- A quantitative research approach is based on positivism, which focuses on scientific explanations by collecting data in the form of numbers. Data collected is thereafter analyzed using statistical software. Therefore, it aims to measure objectively and to test hypotheses.
- Qualitative paradigm is based on the anti-positivistic interpretative approach. The approach focuses on research that draws a participant’s account of meaning form the participant’s own written or spoken words to produce descriptive data.

Communication covers a very broad spectrum in our daily lives, either at a work environment or socializing within a given community. The study was conducted within mixed methods.

According to Punch (2012:3), in a quantitative research, the data take a numerical form. Therefore, it is called an empirical research. In a quantitative research, the data consist of numbers as opposed to a qualitative research that collects data from the respondents in the form of words. The research design focuses on the end product and all the steps in the process to achieve the outcome anticipated.

However, De Vos *et al* (2011:144) purport that experiments, surveys and content are part of a sequence within a research design, noting that within a quantitative paradigm, there are two categories, namely, the experimental and non-experimental. The former is used in descriptive studies, where, at a specific time, the selected units in the research are measured without manipulation.

In order to satisfy the study's objectives and to come to significant and momentous conclusions, a quantitative method approach would lead to providing ample insight into the study to be conducted. The data collection methods consisted of both the questionnaire and an interview schedule that comprised of a total of 28 questions posed to the respondents. The objective of the first four questions was to find out the respondent's position in WSU. 19 of the questions were quantitative in nature (closed ended-questions) while 26 were of a qualitative nature (open-ended questions). The use of both research approaches in data collection assisted in providing accurate and complete data.

According to Patidar (2013), descriptive studies serve as a preliminary point for generating the hypothesis for the development of a theory. He further states that these studies also observe and describe, with documentation, the traits of a situation as it naturally arises. For the convenience of the collection of data from a large population, a census approach was adopted as it is advantageous for the limited time of the study. For the means of data collection, a questionnaire was distributed to 3rd level students at WSU Buffalo City Campus and semi-structured interview schedules were distributed to staff.

The above process is synonymous with government surveys, where the government would use a census to collect data from every household in the country. For the study, the researcher attempted to use a census method, where the data were collected from every member of the population to be studied rather than selecting a sample.

Kumar (2014:121) cited in Kerlinger (1986:279), state that

“A research design is a plan, structure and strategy of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions or problems”.

There are two functions of research design, as stated by Kumar (2014:121);

- An operational plan has to be conceptualized so as to embark on a range of tasks and measures needed for the completion of the study; and
- To obtain valid, objective and also accurate responses to answerers, sufficient procedures for such must be ensured.

3.3 TARGET POPULATION

Alpaslan, Du Plooy, Gelderblom, Van Eeden, Van Rensburg, and Wigston, (2010:150) define a population as an entire group of individuals, set of objects and events to be studied by a researcher. They elaborate that the population should contain all the variables that interest the researcher. Therefore, the population can be defined as a group that possesses the variables that are of interest to the researcher. Defining the sample of a population, Sekaran and Bougie (2013:241) state that a population comprises some members selected from it. In other words, not all features of the population form the sample. A sample is, therefore, the sub-class or sub-section of the entire population. The researcher should, therefore, be able to draw conclusions in the studied sample that are generalised to the population of interest.

The target population for this research was limited to students and staff at WSU BC campus. There were two faculties with approximately 4 Departments each. 3rd level students and staff that have been with the institution for more than 5 years were chosen as respondents. The research required respondents who had knowledge and might add value to the study.

WSU, in 2015, Buffalo City Campus has approximately 6 878 students, with two faculties, namely the Faculty of Business Sciences with an estimated number of 3 750 students and the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Technology with 3 128 students. These faculties make up 30 percent of the entire WSU population. The target population was third-year level students in the two faculties who enrolled between 2011 -2012 as respondents and also Heads of Departments. These departments include the Department of Corporate Communication and Marketing, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Department of Information Technology and the Department of Building.

The Department of Marketing, Communication and Advancement is solely responsible for dissemination of public domain information by using WSU communication tools. As the population consists of four academic departments, a census was conducted. A census is defined by Sapsford (2007:7) as a data collection method of including every individual in a given population. It is usually used in survey research, where a population is defined as the overall objects on which one desires to report on.

3.4 SAMPLING METHOD

In this study, the census included 3rd year students and staff at Walter Sisulu University, Buffalo City Campus. All students and staff were interviewed since they receive the disseminated information and best suit the study at hand as the target population.

Each group of respondents had their own experiences and uses of communication tools. Therefore, the use of a census was justified.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

To assist the researcher in ascertaining the perception of communication tools used by WSU and for the purpose of data collection, the researcher used a survey. Survey research, as stated by De Vos *et al.* (2011:310) is a data collection technique that selects samples of respondents by using a pre-determined sequence of placing a set of pre-formulated questions in a data collecting instrument. A structured questionnaire is used as the instrument for determining attitudes, values and beliefs of that sample of individuals drawn representing a larger population. All 555 respondents were selected to participate in the study.

For this study, the sample was made up of 530 students and 20 Staff members. A census was also conducted on the sample. The WSU BC campus is of interest because the researcher was a student in the campus from 2005 to 2010 and as a staff member from 2010 to 2015. Pieces of information collected by the study researcher are usually called data, be it from a primary or a secondary source. In-terms of empirical data, Punch (2012:100) states that data collected can only be as worthy as the material which data is based on, taking every precaution possible to produce good results.

The researcher distributed the questionnaires to the relevant students for completion. The questionnaires were then collected after the period granted for the session lapsed. The researcher was not present during the completion of questionnaires to prevent respondents from being pressured. Questionnaires consisting of both open and closed questions were administered to both staff and students.

Punch (2012:191) mentions the following pre-requisites for data collection:

- The respondents must be motivated to share information with the researcher. At the same time the researcher must be transparent of the need for the study;
- The questions must be clear so as to assist respondents to understand what is required of them and what type of responses are expected by the researcher; and
- As the sample chosen, the respondents must be able to answer the questions, possessing the required information from them.

3.6 MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

As stated by De Vos *et al* (2011:171), that there are six (6) measuring instruments for data collection methods in a quantitative study for acquiring quantifiable data. These are:

- Structured observation schedules;
- Structured interview schedules;
- Questionnaires;
- Checklists;
- Indexes; and
- Scales;

Punch (2012:100) states that the following two general points should be kept in mind when collecting data:

- It must be ensured that all respondents have been approached well, being fully aware and informed about the context and purpose of the study; and
- Respondents must be guaranteed their confidentiality and anonymity of the information they provide.

With these points in mind, the researcher made sure that there was no sensitivity in all the listed questions. This technique allowed the respondents to feel at ease, encouraged and comfortable to proceed in the research collection process. The researcher assured respondents that all information shared will be confidential.

The data collection methods were administered within WSU BC campus to students and staff by hand since the respondents are situated there. The advantage for the choice is that the questionnaires were administered collectively in classrooms in all the sites mentioned in chapter 1.

3.6.1 Questionnaire

De Vos *et al* (2011:186) define a questionnaire as a document designed to solicit information from respondents. It contains a set of questions and/or other types of pieces. These structured questions have been tested to get reliable data from a sample chosen. Babbie (2013:237) states that besides the nature and wording of the questions asked in a data collection method, the format of the questionnaire is also important.

For an effective questionnaire, certain factors must be considered. Kumar (2014:178) list four (4) of these factors:

- The questions must not be ambiguous. They must be easy to understand and straight to the point;
- The layout must be user friendly and easy to read, in-terms of font and colour;
- Easy flow of question sequence; and
- It must be interactive to respondents.

Citing from Hussey & Hussey (1997:161), Morrison (2011:52) refers to a questionnaire as a carefully designed list of questions, chosen after substantial testing on a sample, by means of producing reliable answers. The aim is to unearth what a particular group of individuals feel about what affects them, and what they think about it. The population sample of WSU BC Chiselhurst campus students was 530 3rd year level students and 20 permanent staff members, but due to time constraints, numbers were decreased to 156 students and 10 staff members.

In this study, the questionnaire begins with questions regarding biographical data which are essential to group the respondents accordingly. Then to explore the perceptions, attitudes and preferences of WSU communication strategy, a series of closed-ended questions were used. The questionnaire then concludes with opened-ended questions. This survey design was preferred because closed questions allow the respondents to select and to choose among other selections and also they assist the researcher to code the received information easily for analysis (Sekaran and Bougie 2013: 150).

A structured questionnaire using the Likert scale was used in this study. This was vital to collect data from the respondents when the study uses a census method. The respondents were given an option to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the questions using a five-point likert scale starting from strongly disagree; disagree; neutral; agree to strongly agree (**see example below**). Some of the statements in the questionnaire indicated a negative attitude although others advocated a positive attitude towards an item

posed. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were given a chance to respond on some open-ended questions.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
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Table 3.1 Likert Scale.

Table 3.2 differentiates between the advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires (Kumar 2014:181):

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – They are less expensive to administer; – They offer unlimited anonymity; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The literacy level of respondents is restricted; – With less information provided, respondents may not return the questionnaire; – Lack of clarity to questions; – Respondents have to choose from a set pre-determined questions; – There is no chance of unprompted responses;
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Respondents cannot supplement nor rationalize a response;

Table 3.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Questionnaires.

These questionnaires were tested by professionals in the fields of communication and the researcher's supervisor to establish whether the instrument was satisfactorily testing what the study intends to achieve as a means of validating the instrument. The main tools for collecting data were the questionnaire and personal interviews. The questionnaire was shortened to 10 pages, tested for accuracy, appropriateness and relevance to the problem situation. When designing the questionnaire of this study, the researcher's questionnaire was divided into five sections which included 5 questions in Section 1, 5 questions in Section 2, and 10 questions in Section 3, where respondents were asked closed-ended questions. The last section, Section D, comprised of 25 open-ended questions.

Respondents were required to select one appropriate answer by ticking on the lists provided on the closed – ended questions. The list was provided as prearranged answers to questions by the researcher. The questions focused on obtaining the following information:

Section 1: Demographic information (information on education, site, faculty, designation, number of years in the designation) was requested and is important for statistical reasons;

Section 2: Frequency of communication tools at WSU. The aim of this section was to gather information on how respondents view the frequency of communication tools employed by WSU;

Section 3: Effectiveness of communication tools. This section was essential to elicit information on how respondents perceive the effectiveness of communication tools employed by WSU; and

Section 4: Impact of social media and technology in communication. This section was essential to gather information on how social media impacts on their lives in both communication and academically.

Section 5: Open-ended questions

According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:193), choosing how the questionnaire would be administered, whether it would be emailed, by telephone or group-administered and other type of questionnaire influences the questionnaire format. They further state that the circumstances and choice of respondents to complete it must be considered. All questionnaires would be accompanied by a covering letter, which would serve to initiate and explain the questionnaire to the respondent. As part of the requirements of a questionnaire, it must be clear and formatted well for the recording of responses by respondents.

Using this method of data collection requires the respondent to read the questions and tick, mark with an **X** or fill in the answers on the questionnaire. Usually, it is done in the presence of an interviewer with the aim of providing assistance, if necessary.

When distributing the questionnaire, the researcher included the background and purpose of the study, with contact should any respondent wish to interact personally. The respondents were informed of the time allocated for the data collection, which was 15 minutes, as respondents had to go to class. The traditional approach of distributing questionnaires for research purposes was employed and started 10 minutes earlier.

3.6.2. Interviews

Russell- Bernard and Ryan (2010:27) define interviewing as being the most reactive in data collection, and is a common practice in societies, where one asks questions and answers are provided. Conducting Interviews, whether they are personal or telephone, are forms of data collection. They facilitate the process of question

and answer by the researcher to respondents by providing clarity on questions, if needed. Therefore, interviews can be said to be inter-active and inter-actional processes involving an exchange of beliefs, opinions and information. The information a researcher seeks to receive depends on the type and structure of the interviews.

The participants who were involved in the study as respondents were staff members. The role played by employees in the Institution is very important as they are the stakeholders at WSU. Interview questions were kept simple and permitted respondents to be able to be free to articulate openly about their experiences with WSU communication.

The explicit purpose of the interviews is to validate relevant topic areas based on communication, and to gain a deeper understanding of the WSU communications culture. The findings gained through these data sets were supported by WSU's documents and observations. Different WSU official documents with communication tools' topics, such as the use of newsletters, memos, notice boards, and intranet were discussed. Observation by the researcher took place during the interviews over a number of days at WSU Chiselhurst offices.

Ten different interview sessions, varying from 10 to 15 minutes, were conducted from December 2015 to January 2016. The focus of these interviews was WSU communication practices and strategies relating to the use of communication tools, and on ways to achieve its organisation goals and objectives. These strategies may include the use of different media to disseminate information and engage the stakeholders.

The questions were presented in English. The recorded responses were later transcribed and notes were also taken by the researcher. The qualitative data were obtained through observing for patterns in the results and noting the idiosyncratic perceptions of each individual participant.

According to Russell- Bernard and Ryan (2010:28-34), interviews can be divided into three (3) categories, which are:

- Unstructured interviews – they provide in-depth and a wealth of information as they allow respondents to talk freely. They are in a form of a casual conversation with respondents but require self-discipline and a good memory;
- Semi- structured interviews – the order of questions is flexible, where identical questions are asked. The interviewer is in control on how the conversation flows and he/she may choose to modify questions when needed; and

- Structured interviews – The interviewer uses a set of predetermined and pre-arranged set of questions. The questions are standardized and the interviewer reads out the same set of questions to respondents, which enables less interaction between them.

Kumar (2014:182) mentions that using interviews as a method of data collection has the following advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages

- They are more suitable for multi-faceted situations;
- They are very valuable for generating in-depth data;
- They allow the researcher to elaborate on the questions;
- They can be applied on any type of respondents or population; and
- Respondents can explain and supplement information;

Disadvantages

- They are expensive and time consuming;
- Hard to tabulate responses;
- Use multiple interviewers may comprise the data quality; and
- Quality of interaction with respondents may be compromised;

Another method of data collection used in the study was interview schedules given to staff at the WSU BC campus. The interview schedule comprised of open-ended and closed-ended questions. According to Kumar (2014:184), open-ended questions in a research instrument do not provide potential response categories, but allow responses to be written in the respondent's own words, whereas, in an interview schedule, responses are recorded by summing up responses. Fowler (2009:34) supports Kumar by stating that respondents are allowed to respond in the own words, making it possible to capture their own ideas about the problem. With open-ended questions, more data are produced but the only challenge is that it is a labour-intensive task.

Open-ended questions are generally more satisfactory in creating data. Fowler (2009:101) provides the following four (4) ways to create data:

- When response alternatives are provided, respondents can perform reliably with caution;
- With the provision of alternatives, the researcher can perform reliably because it makes is easy to interpret responses;
- It increases the likelihood of acquiring enough data; and
- It is easier to record from checking provided responses than close-ended questions that need narratives responses.

According De Vos *et al* (2011:23), closed-ended questions provide a set of responses, depending on the instrument, where a respondent will choose one or more answers from a list of choices. It is the most widely used form of data collection using a Likert scale. He further states that, in the questionnaire, respondents choose from a set of possible answers listed by ticking the desired response. The interviews were recorded and the responses were transcribed using thematic analysis.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2009:219), data analysis applies when the researcher appends a numerical value to represent a category. Codes are assigned to a category on a variable. For the analysis of information from the respondents, the researcher used selected themes. Numerical data were analysed in terms of frequency, effectiveness and satisfactory levels of responses from closed-ended questions in the questionnaire. These themes were designed and analysed the assessment of communication tools utilized by students in WSU, BC campus. The primary objectives were to ascertain the commonalities or differences of responses from respondents. Therefore, the study's overall objectives were harmonious with the analysis of these themes. The quantitative data were captured and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Data were presented using graphs (pie charts, histograms or bar graphs) as well as tables.

Remenyi and Bannister (2012:118) allude that data analysis is the chapter in the research process whereby the data collected are measured, administered and verified/assessed for meaning in terms of theory or a formulation of a new theory.

Data analysis is a process which involves many stages of conducting different analysis, creating an in-depth and better understanding of the data being analysed (Creswell 2009:218). De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2011:248) state that quantitative data analysis is a process whereby researchers convert data to represent

numerical form and subject this data to statistical analysis. The purpose of analysis is to interpret, test and draw conclusions from the data. Quantitative data for this study were analysed using the SPSS version 22. Researchers have explained the importance of researchers being conversant with statistical software packages. This would permit accurate presentation of information immediately.

3.8 PILOT TESTING

According to Kumar (2014:184), pilot testing is generally carried out under authentic field environments on a group with similar characteristics to the study population. One of the purposes for a pilot study is to identify areas where predicted problems may arise.

For this study, the following pilot study approach was adopted:

- The questionnaire was given to 3rd year level students at the WSU Ibika campus, Butterworth, to respond on the wording, content and also the questionnaire layout. They indicated that the instrument was user friendly;
- Remarks and recommendations from respondents were used to improve the questionnaire to be handed to the targeted population;
- Some of the open-ended questions were confusing. Therefore, relevant corrections were done; and
- Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed as per the letter of consent issued to each respondent.

Pilot studies are defined as dress rehearsals for the main investigations, meaning that they are done on a small scale (group) resembling a larger scale (population) in an effort to bring to the fore challenges that may arise, timeously. (De Vos *et al* 2011:73). This is mainly an effort to test the data collection instrument to be used and the feasibility of the study.

Fowler (2009:122) purports that pre-testing an interview schedule is a method of testing the usability of the data collection instrument. By testing the instrument's usability, the questions and layout are taken into consideration. One of the generally used tools to pre-test, from an interviews perspective, is to use audio recording for evaluating survey question. A self-administered questionnaire can be best pre-tested in person or by a group of respondents.

3.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

If a higher education institution that has multi campuses, such as WSU, is threatened by the lack of communication between students and management and also between management and staff members, a need for good communication strategy increases. The role played by internal communication is important for institutions that have gone through a merger and now need to streamline all its communication strategies. Firstly, this study focused on communication strategies and tools at the WSU as a higher education institution in South Africa, at its Chiselhurst site which limited the scope of the study. The discoveries of this study can only be symbolic of the effectiveness of the internal communication tools employed by WSU in that site within the Buffalo City campus, and, therefore, cannot be generalised to other campuses and sites of WSU as part of a higher education institution scope in South Africa.

3.10 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

For the purpose of this study, the researcher guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity by designing a questionnaire that would not divulge the respondents' information. The respondents' information were guaranteed through the informed consent letter that all information gathered would be confidential and not shared with a third party.

3.11 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The accuracy of validity and reliability, in terms of research, is the most important aspect. According to Sydorenko (2012:17), Cronbach's α is a widely spread measure for internal consistency of a latent construct, which is considered to be represented through the set of particular variables. Reliability, means the degree to which the results of a study can be reproduced and would generate similar results to that of the first study, i.e., by matching comparable samples, in comparable conditions to that which would generate matching findings. Data collection instruments must be designed in a manner that are clear and easy for respondents to understand and answer, so that if participants were to repeat this process, they will provide the answers as they did in the previous process.

Cited in Lee and Hubona (2009), Venkatesh, Brown and Bala (2013:31) state that, in quantitative research, two primary validation issues are addressed (i.e., reliability and validity of measures). These two validation

approaches are applicable to both formative and summative validity. They further state that related to the quality of measurement is reliability, meaning that for a measure to be considered reliable, it should produce the same results when done over and over again. With that said, a quantitative study may be considered invalid if there are no reliable measures as is a requirement in a quantitative study. According to Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtler (2010:93) state that reliability and validity are the two criteria used to judge the quality of all standardized quantitative measures. Bourton and Mazerolle (2011:28), purport that reliability and validity are necessary entities of instrument development if researchers are to report with confidence the results obtained from the survey.

Cronbach alpha, also known as coefficient alpha, hereafter denoted by $C\alpha$, has been very widely used to quantify the internal consistency and reliability of items in clinical research and beyond, although internal consistency and reliability are not exchangeable psycho-metric concepts in general (Heo, Kim and Myles 2015:2). The researcher chose the use of internal consistency reliability estimate due to the use of a particular measurement instrument administered to a group of people on one occasion to estimate reliability. Before data collection, the researcher had administered a test questionnaire to ensure validity to the population of 30 students. After correction of grammatical errors and clarity on the questions, it was discovered that the questionnaire was long (18 pages) and had 41 questions. The researcher then decided to convert other questions to open-ended questions, for quality purposes. Thereafter, after the corrections had been made, the researcher proceeded to the actual study, where 156 respondents were given the questionnaire.

We can, therefore, state that when conducting a survey, the sampling of separate components from a population can be used to reveal what a complete collection might reveal. This method of data collection methods can be used for improving the quality and accuracy of responses to surveys.

3.1.1 Validity

According to Kumar (2014:214) the objective of validity of the instrument depends upon the logical consequence between the study's questions and objectives. Once the link has been established, the instrument is valid. Questionnaires were developed using the literature reviewed which, ensured content validity.

3.11.2 Reliability

An instrument is said to be reliable if it is consistent and stable, thus ensuring the predictability and accuracy of the instrument (Kumar 2014:215). Kumar (2014) further states that the effective reliability of an instrument

depends on the degree of consistency and stability. For this category, a Cronbach's coefficient alpha (an average) of all correlations between items was applied. It seeks to assess the same skill, characteristic or quality between all respondents. Lee Cronbach, in 1951, designed it to measure the internal consistency of a test or scale by expressing it as a number between 0 and 1 (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011:53). These authors further state that internal consistency describes the degree to which all the objects in a test would measure the same notion, i.e., the inter-relatedness of the items contained by the test. A pilot questionnaire was administered and questionnaires were corrected before final administration. This ensured that the repeated use of the questionnaire, under the same conditions, will produce the same results.

3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher complied with all ethical principles as prescribed by the WSU's research directorate in order to uphold the integrity of the research. The purpose of the study was explained to all respondents in a covering letter and word-of-mouth to ensure clarity. Each respondent was assured of confidentiality and anonymity as stated in their consent letters. All sources, research information, publications or other individuals in this study have been properly and accurately acknowledged.

3.13 CONCLUSION

The overall aim of this study is to examine the perceived effectiveness of communication strategies between Walter Sisulu University and their students. Therefore, this chapter discussed the research methodology that had been used in terms of the research design, target population and data collection methods. It also highlighted how the collected data was analysed and the reliability and validity of the study were tested. Therefore, the chapter used the research methodology to collect data on the assessment of communication Strategies between higher education institutions and students: A case of the Walter Sisulu University. The next chapter will analyze and interpret the data collected.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter three outlined the methodology for this study. This chapter presents a summary of the analysis of the data gathered throughout the research process. It further presents the results and discusses the findings obtained from the study. The analysis presents data attained from the questionnaires and interviews. The following variables were derived from the research questionnaire:

- Section 1 – Respondents demographics;
- Section 2 – Frequency of tools of Communication;
- Section 3 – Effectiveness of Communication Tools; and
- Section 4 – Impact of Social Media & Technology in Communication.
- Section 5 – Open-ended questions

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the questionnaire and interview data by addressing the following objectives of the study:

- To analyse and evaluate the current communication channels employed by WSU in relation to management and students;
- To examine and evaluate communication barriers at WSU; and
- To identify alternative communication channels that can be used to communicate between management and students.

In addition, the collected data are presented in the form of graphs, figures and tables.

When assessing data collection instruments in a study, *reliability* and *validity* normally ensure the credibility and accuracy of the results. Fundamentally, validity in research refers to the accuracy of measurement, and how accurately a study does what it intends by answering the study questions. Accordingly, reliability and validity ought to be reported and examined for each assessment instrument used to measure study outcomes (Sullivan, 2011:191).

Tavakol and Dennick (2011:53) support Sullivan (2011) by stating that validity focuses on the degree to which an instrument measures what it is proposed to measure. Another element of accuracy is reliability, which is the ability of an instrument to measure consistently producing the same results if done repeatedly. It is for this reason that the two aspects of precision are closely associated, i.e, validity and reliability depend on each other

for credibility and accuracy. They further state that Cronbach's alpha is expressed as a number between 0 and 1, by measuring the internal consistency of a test or scale and describing the extent to which all the items in a test measure the same concept.

A reliability test, such Cronbach's alpha, as used in the study, is commonly used to check the reliability of questions in a multiple Likert scale questionnaire.

Table 4.1 reflects the Cronbach's alpha score for all the items that constituted the questionnaire.

4.2 CRONBACH'S ALPHA INTERNAL CONSISTENCY RELIABILITY SCORE

	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Cases <i>Valid</i>	141	90.4
<i>Excluded</i>	15	9.6
<i>Total</i>	156	100
<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	.820	
<i>Standardized Items</i>	0744	
<i>Number of Items</i>	197	

Table 4.1: Reliability and Validity

The overall reliability score of 0.82 satisfies the minimum recommended value of 0.70. This indicates a high (overall) degree of acceptable, consistent scoring for this study.

Table 4.2 is based on the overall scale statistics of the data collected

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	Number of Items
487.16	716.295	26.764	197

Table 4.2 Scale Statistics.

The overall score of all items in the questionnaire and the data collected illustrate the Mean of 487.16 and variance of 716.295. The table also shows that standard deviation was 26.764 of 197 items asked in the research.

Table 4.3 Overall Biographical statistics of respondents

Table 4.3 summarises the biographical characteristics of the respondents. This table also indicates the educational distribution of respondents. The analysis presents the profile of the research participants. The Chiselhurst Campus of WSU has a total population of 3 185 which was used as the sample frame for this study. However, only registered students of the WSU campus were surveyed since the study is confined to the campus only.

<i>Biographical variables for Respondents (N156)</i>	<i>Variable Description</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Education level</i>	<i>Year 1</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>3.8</i>	<i>156</i>
	<i>Year 2</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>39.1</i>	
	<i>Year 3</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>45.5</i>	
	<i>Year 4</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>11.5</i>	
<i>Sites attended</i>	<i>Potsdam</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>156</i>
	<i>Chiselhurst</i>	<i>145</i>	<i>92.9</i>	
	<i>Cambridge Street</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>4.5</i>	
	<i>Heritage</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1.3</i>	
<i>Faculty</i>	<i>Business Studies</i>	<i>122</i>	<i>78.2</i>	<i>156</i>
	<i>Engineering, Science And Technology</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>21.8</i>	
<i>Designation</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>154</i>	<i>98.7</i>	<i>156</i>
	<i>Support Staff</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1.3</i>	
<i>Number of Years in Designation</i>	<i>0-5 years</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>96.8</i>	<i>156</i>
	<i>6-10 years</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1.9</i>	
	<i>11-15 years</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0.6</i>	
	<i>16+</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0.6</i>	

Table 4.3 Biographical data of respondents.

Table 4.3 presents a frequency table of respondents, highlighting a 45.5 % response rate from 3rd year students. Though the study targeted level 3 students, 39.1 % of level 2 students started from the extended programme, formerly known as bridging course that prepares students for mainstream level. WSU's extended programme (ECP) is a one year course that is not part of the mainstream. ECP students then progress into the mainstream as second year level students, which would be their second year with the Institution, but in level one of the mainstream. Therefore, when they reach level 2, it would be their third year with the Institution, therefore

regarded as 3rd year and not 3rd level students in 2016 due to the duration of time of four years with the University and not by academic progression.

Table 4.3 also indicates that 92% (N=145) of the respondents are Chiselhurst site students, whereas the other 1.3% of the students (N=2) are at the Heritage site, 4.5 % (N=7) are at the Cambridge street site and, lastly, 1.3 % (N=2) are students who attend a particular course in Chiselhurst but could be based at other sites. It must be noted that, during the time of data collection, the respondents were based at Chiselhurst.

Table 4.3 also affirms that the study was conducted at Chiselhurst, with 78.2 % (N=122) students belonging to the Faculty of Business Sciences and 21.8% (N=34) belonging to the Faculty of Engineering, Science and Technology (FSET), resulting in a total number of 156 respondents. During the field work, most of the FSET level 3 and 4 students were completing their practicals, which made it difficult to gather data from them. Hence, the researcher worked with respondents who were available and willing to participate.

Lastly, Table 4.3 indicates that 98.7% (N=154) were students and 1.3 % (N=2) were student support staff. The researcher noticed the obvious omission in the number of respondents, where two registered students are part-time student library assistants. Table 4.3 shows that 96.8 % (N=151) of the respondents have been with the Institution for at least 5 years whereas only 3 students have been with the Institution for more than 5 years (1.9 %). This means that the respondents are within the allocated time frame to finish their undergraduate studies.

4.3. SECTION ANALYSIS

The following section analyses the scoring patterns of the respondents per variable per section. The levels of disagreement and agreement were tabulated to show how respondents reacted to different variables.

The questionnaire comprised of three sections and data generated will be presented as follows:

- The first section comprises of demographic data such as age, sex, years of study, and Campuses.
- The second section comprises of data describing the frequency of tools of communication used.
- In the third section data obtained from the analysis of the impact of social media and technology in communication.

The results are presented using summarised percentages for the variables that constitute each section in the questionnaire, as highlighted in the beginning of this chapter. Results are based on key concepts and ideologies that stemmed from the feedback received after the collected data were further analysed and presented.

SECTION B

4.3.1 FREQUENCY OF COMMUNICATION

The figure below indicates the frequency of communication tools used by WSU.

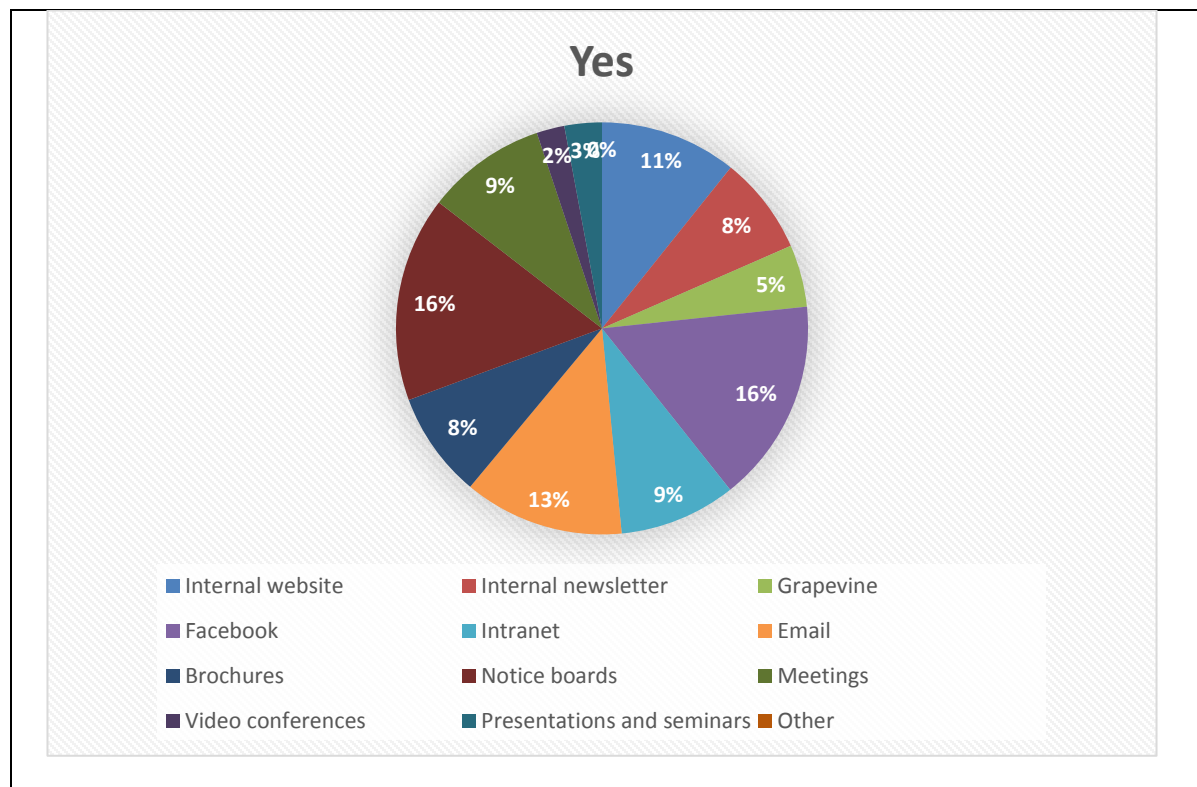


Figure 4.1 Communication tools used by Walter Sisulu University (WSU).

Figure 4.1 indicated that only 16% of the respondents indicated that Facebook and noticeboards were the most frequently used communication tools at WSU. Emails were rated as the second most frequently used communication tool, with 13% while 9% of the respondents agreeing that the intranet was the most frequent communication tool used. Interestingly, 8% of the population indicated that brochures and internal newsletters were also used as a frequent communication tool.

The three least used communication tools at WSU are presented in descending order:

- Grapevine is used as a communication tool (5%);
- Presentations are used a communication tool (3%); and
- The least used communication by WSU is video conferencing facility (2%).

As stated in the literature review, Tench and Yeomans (2009: 334) purport that the term “internal communication” describes how an organisation manages communication coordination where employees are regarded as stakeholders. For communicating with stakeholders, a variety of communication tools are usually used, for example, newsletters, notice boards and intranets. The tools are therefore designed to disseminate and inform employees about the businesses’ activities, such as sharing of information about policies and events within WSU. The findings therefore support that, most commonly used communication tools used by WSU are Facebook and noticeboards. These findings are supported by Falahaha and Rosmala (2012:157), who explain that the most popular means of communication among the traditional college-age demographic is social networking, and higher education institutions have started employing these technologies to communicate with their students.

4.3.2 The table below indicates communication tools frequently used by respondents.

Tool	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Internal website	6	3.8	5	3.2	63	40.4	44	28.2	38	24.4
Internal newsletter	8	5.1	9	5.8	77	49.4	36	23.1	26	16.7
Grapevine	16	10.3	24	15.4	82	52.6	13	8.3	21	13.5
Facebook	7	4.5	4	2.6	18	11.5	38	24.4	89	57.4
Intranet	4	2.6	12	7.7	71	45.5	30	19.2	39	25.0
Email	2	1.3	6	3.8	51	32.7	50	32.1	47	30.1
Brochures	7	4.5	7	4.5	64	41.0	44	28.2	34	21.8
Notice boards	5	3.2	3	1.9	32	20.5	39	25.0	77	49.4
Meetings	7	4.5	4	2.6	50	32.1	56	35.9	39	25.0
Video conferences	25	16.0	24	15.4	94	60.3	7	4.5	6	3.8
Presentations and seminars	23	14.7	20	12.8	92	59.0	11	7.1	10	6.4
Other	1	0.6	154	98.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.6

Table 4.4 Communication tools frequently used by students at WSU

In Table 4.4, 40.4% of the sample population were neutral whilst 28.2 % agreed that the internal website was frequently used by students. Table 4.4 indicates that the majority of 57.4% strongly agreed that Facebook is a tool commonly used by students at WSU Chiselhurst site. Interestingly, 49.4% strongly agreed that noticeboards are also viewed as the most frequently used tool for communication. However, a larger percentage (52.6%) chose to be neutral on the grapevine, as the frequent communication tool used by students. The least frequent (3.8%) communication tool used was video conferences.

According to Berena, Chunwijitra, Okada and Ueno (2013:1), technology advancement and need for information by the society are some of the aspects that paved the way for shifting the teaching methodologies in the higher educational system. The development has happened in a form of transition from traditional classroom-based method to the use of information and communications technology (ICT) by higher education institutions. Therefore, video conferencing, moreover for communication purposes, has great potential for learning in Higher Education Institutions. Discussion and dialogue may be between tutors and learners, staff and students or amongst students. Nevertheless, the success of video conferencing, as a communication tool, may well be dependent on factors such as institutional issues, reducing costs and user attitudes towards these technologies.

4.3.3. Communication tools frequently used by each student

Tool	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Internal website	4	2.6	6	3.8	62	39.7	45	28.8	39	25.0
Internal newsletter	8	5.1	13	8.3	78	50.0	31	19.9	26	16.7
Grapevine	11	7.1	27	17.3	89	57.1	15	9.6	14	9.0
Facebook	5	3.2	3	1.9	26	16.7	38	24.4	84	100.0
Intranet	3	1.9	5	3.2	76	48.7	35	22.4	37	23.7
Email	2	1.3	2	1.3	52	33.3	46	29.5	54	34.6
Brochures	5	3.2	6	3.8	73	46.8	42	26.9	30	19.2
Notice boards	3	1.9	4	2.6	35	22.4	43	27.6	71	45.5
Meetings	2	1.3	7	4.5	62	39.7	48	30.8	37	23.7
Video conferences	22	14.1	28	17.9	90	57.7	11	7.1	5	3.2
Presentations and seminars	14	9.0	27	17.3	91	58.3	12	7.7	12	7.7
Other	155	99.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.6

Table 4.5 Tools frequently used by EACH student at WSU

As depicted in table 4.5 above, 84 % of the respondents indicated that Facebook is used frequently as their choice of communication at WSU, while 50% were neutral in using the internal newsletter, and 30.8% agreed that meetings was their preferred frequently used choice at WSU.

Though there are numerous communication tools available at WSU, respondents reacted the most to communication tools with which they are familiar. A significant number of respondents are neutral regarding most of the communication tools.

Cited from Decarie (2010) and Lazaroiu (2011), Brady (2012:11) states that social media platforms allow users to communicate with people across geographical boundaries. The boundaries do not restrict their ability to meet but make it possible to interact and communicate.

From the analysis depicted in table 4.3, it can be concluded that students prefer Facebook, notice boards and internal newsletters as the most frequently used forms of communication by WSU. Higher education institutions are now using social media to engage with an audience, such as students, who are well versed in new media channels. Higher education institutions see social media as a viable tool for to communicate with students due to its low cost, immediacy, and use by a large number of audiences (Hall 2014:3). This is supported by Heffner (2016:6) who elaborates that some of the various social networking sites such as facebook, twitter and instagram, are used by college students and are the most popular ones.

4.3.4 The frequency use of WSU communication tools

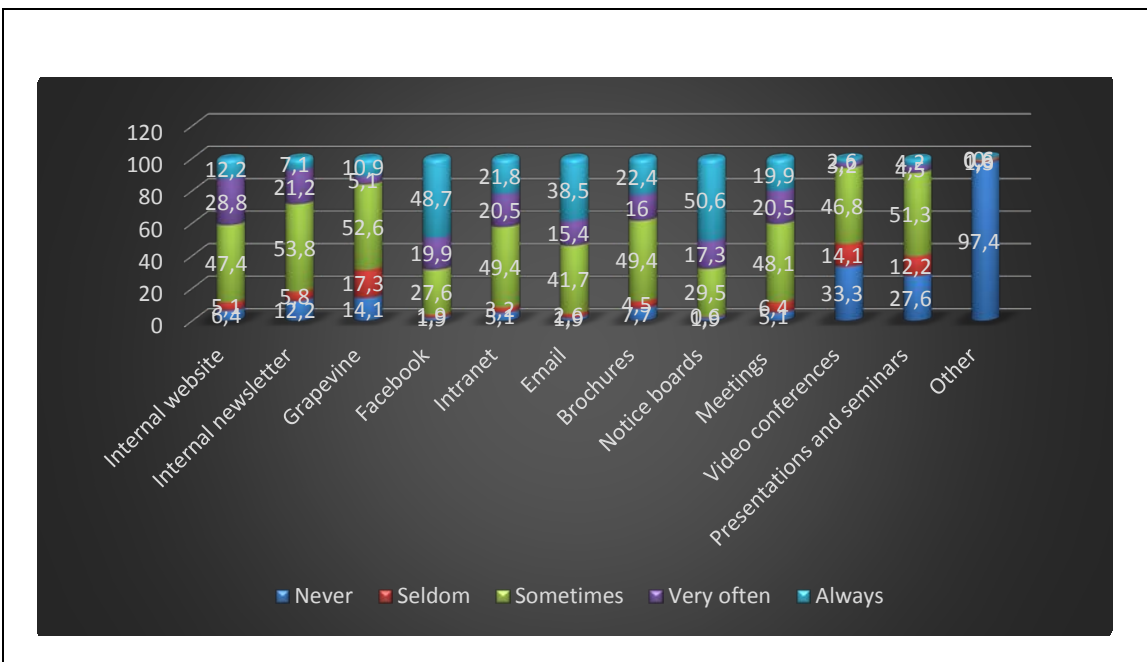


Figure 4.2 Frequency of use of WSU's communication tools

Figure 4.2 clarifies how frequently the WSU tools of communication are used by the respondents. The results indicate that the various tools differ and the capability to use them may have an effect on the respondents. The majority of the respondents (53.8%) indicated that they sometimes use internal newsletters, followed by the grapevine (52.6%) and presentation and seminars (51.3%). However, 47.4% of the respondents rarely use the internal website and 49.4% sometimes used the intranet.

A total of 48.7% of the respondents said they always use Facebook and 50.6% preferred noticeboards, while other forms of communication such as video conferences (33.3%) and presentations and seminars (27.6%) were never used by the respondents. Interestingly, 28.8% used the internal website, 21.2% often used internal newsletter and 15.4% often used email as a choice of communication.

In view of the above findings regarding the frequency of communication tools at WSU, the researcher discovered that there is less activity in the frequency of use of the internal website and internal newsletter, with each being scored at 12.2% and 7.1 %, respectively.

Selection of the suitable communication channels is a major factor in this study. The choice of the communication tool that contributes strongly can be considered to be more effective by the student. Their choice can be credited with their familiarity and convenience of the newsletter as a communication tool. Richards (2016), concurs that for effective communication, employees should be able to receive information about the organization, via a simple newsletter and in an inexpensive way to reach everyone.

SECTION C

4.4. EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Effective communication and sharing of knowledge takes place through different communication tools and approaches that suit the nature and type of information to be shared and exchanged, and that take into account the dynamics within which the target groups exist is important (Assefa, 2012:8).

4.4.1 How students view the effectiveness of communication tools

Tool	Strongly Disagree		Dis agree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Internal website	4	2.6	5	3.2	67	42.9	43	27.6	37	23.7
Internal newsletter	7	4.5	10	6.4	75	48.1	43	27.6	21	13.5
Grapevine	16	10.3	23	14.7	92	59.0	13	8.3	12	7.7
Facebook	5	3.2	1	0.6	24	15.	39	25.0	87	55.7
Intranet	7	4.5	7	4.5	70	34.9	32	20.5	40	25
Email	3	1.9	3	1.9	56	35.7	31	19.9	63	40.4
Brochures	3	1.9	6	3.8	71	45.5	38	24.4	38	24.4
Notice boards	1	0.6	3	1.9	32	20.5	40	25.6	80	51.3
Meetings	5	3.2	7	4.5	59	37.8	37	23.7	48	30.8
Video conferences	23	14.7	29	8.6	91	58.3	10	6.4	3	1.9
Presentations and seminars	18	11.5	29	18.6	89	57.1	9	5.8	11	7.1
Other	155	99.4	0	0.0	1	0.6	0	0.0	0	0.0

Table 4.6 Effectiveness of the communication tools in receiving information at WSU

According to table 4.6, a majority of 55.7 % of the respondents strongly agreed that Facebook is the most effective tool of communication at WSU, while 40.4 % said that email is the most effective tool. Interestingly, 0.6% of respondents strongly disagreed and 51.3% strongly agreed that notice boards are the most effective tool.

It was interesting to note that 59% of respondents were neutral about the grapevine being the most effective tool of communication. 27.6% stated that they agreed that the internal website is the most effective tool of communication at WSU.

Fortado (2011:218) points out that informal communications are not just for lazy people. An organization's members' activities are centred on their interpretations of happenings. Employee opinions are shaped by the grapevine which allows perceptions about the organisation and specific people within it.

An advantage of Facebook, according to Baruah (2012:1), is the online sharing of knowledge and information among the different groups of people. Baruah (ibid), further states that online sharing of information also

promotes the increase in the communication skills among people, particularly among the pupils/learners of educational institutions.

4.4.2 The effectiveness of WSU's communication system for a merged Institution

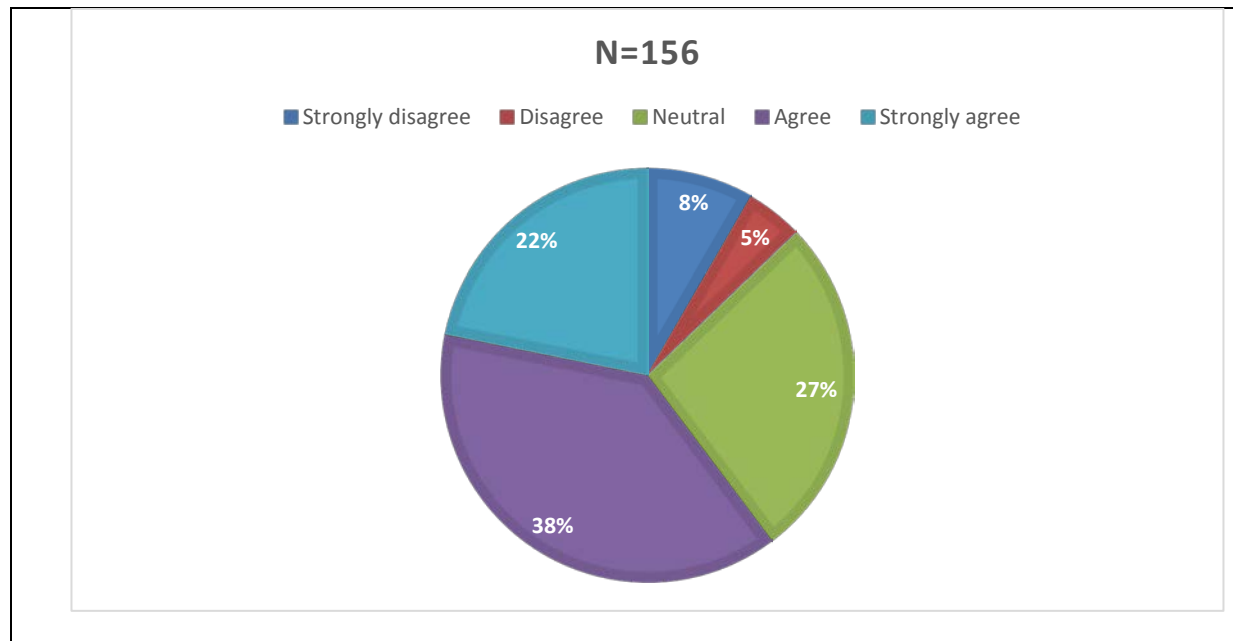


Figure 4.3 Effectiveness of WSU communication system towards a merged Institution

In Figure 4.3, the majority (38%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that effective communication tools contributed to the success of a merged institution. However, 27% remained neutral. 22% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. As little as 8% strongly disagreed to the statement, while 5% disagreed.

Cornelissen (2011: 220) alludes that the corporate communication of changing organizations should support change and communicating with employees during and after a change. To avoid resistance and rumours, proper communication management should be put in place as communication has an essential auxiliary role at certain stages of change in the formulation of change messages to employees. Therefore, the author supports the 38% majority of respondents who agree that effective communication contributed to the success of a merged institution.

4.4.3 The most effective tools of communication

Tool	Strongly Disagree		Dis agree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Internal website	5	3.2	5	3.2	71	45.5	41	26.3	34	21.8
Internal newsletter	8	5.1	5	3.2	87	55.8	34	21.8	22	14.1
Grapevine	13	8.3	22	14.1	81	51.9	15	9.6	25	16.0
Facebook	3	1.9	3	1.9	27	17.3	37	23.7	86	55.1
Intranet	3	1.9	5	3.2	81	51.9	36	23.1	31	19.9
Email	1	0.6	5	3.2	53	34.0	37	23.7	60	38.5
Brochures	4	2.6	5	3.2	80	51.3	38	24.4	29	18.6
Notice boards	1	0.6	2	1.3	36	23.1	34	21.8	83	53.2
Meetings	2	1.3	3	1.9	67	42.9	39	25.0	45	28.8
Video conferences	23	14.7	18	11.5	102	65.4	7	4.5	6	3.8
Presentations and seminars	18	11.5	17	10.9	97	62.2	16	10.3	8	5.1
Other	155	99.4	0	0.0	1	0.6	0	0.0	0	0.0

Table 4.7 Tools considered the most effective forms of communication at WSU.

Only 26.3% agreed while 45.5% of the respondents were neutral to the internal website as most effective tool of communication at WSU. However, the majority (55.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed that Facebook is the most effective form of communication followed by 53.2% of the respondents who said they strongly agreed that notice boards are the most effective form of communication at WSU.

It should be also noted that in table 4.7, the most common forms of communication are the ones that receive the most reaction. 25% of the respondents said they are neutral in meetings.

The use of electronic communication channels, such as internal website and Facebook, would improve the glitches of noise, since messages but are more easily misread than in face-to-face communication, and are less effective at conveying “honesty, integrity and trustworthiness” (Djordjevic and Cotton, 2011:383). Furthermore, the authors state that effective internal communication is a crucial issue for HEIs, as for other organisations. Internal communication is, therefore, a way of enhancing employee commitment, performance, motivation and empowerment as basic functions. In addition, the findings are supported by Hampton (2016:1), by stating that for positive stakeholder relationships, education institutions should improve the way of communicating with stakeholders. Moreover, a study conducted in a Canadian postsecondary institution, by

Bullen, Morgan and Qayyum (2011:2), concurs that students at the institution utilized a set of limited technologies to communicate based on three key issues, such as familiarity, cost, and immediacy.

4.4.4 Most important user-friendly communication tools when receiving information

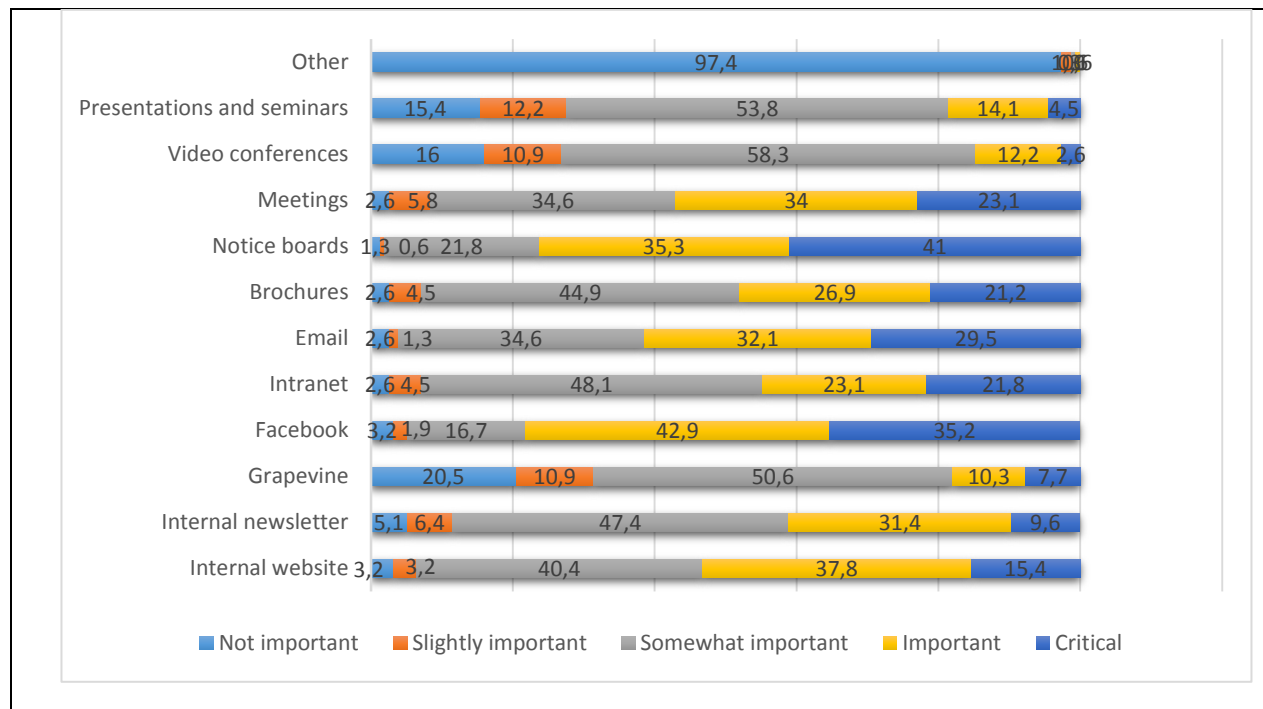


Figure 4.4 Communication tools most user-friendly in receiving information at WSU

Figure 4.4 show that 37.8% of the respondents regarded the internal website as an important user-friendly communication tool and 40.4 % as somewhat important. An important observation was that 41% of the respondents said noticeboards are a very critical tool of communication at WSU, as well as Facebook (35.2%). Presentations and seminars (53.8%) and video conferencing (58.3%) were regarded as somewhat important. A critical observation was made on Facebook as important (42.9%). 50.6% and 34.6% of the respondents agreed that meetings and grapevine were somewhat important, respectively. Consequently, internet technologies are very popular among college students who use other communication media to communicate than traditional media, including email, social networking sites. This is evident with the 42.9% of the respondents who agreed that Facebook was an important communication tool.

4.4.5 Perception levels of communication tools at WSU

Tool	Very satisfied		Slightly Satisfied		Somewhat Satisfied		Important		Critical	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Internal website	36	23.1	5	3.2	61	39.1	32	20.5	22	14.1
Internal newsletter	28	17.9	12	7.7	76	48.7	27	17.3	13	8.3
Grapevine	25	16.0	34	21.8	74	47.4	11	7.1	12	7.7
Facebook	36	23.1	4	2.6	28	17.9	47	30.1	41	26.3
Intranet	23	14.7	13	8.3	71	45.5	31	19.9	18	11.5
Email	32	20.5	4	2.6	50	32.1	39	25.0	31	19.8
Brochures	26	16.7	13	8.3	69	44.2	28	17.9	20	12.8
Notice boards	36	23.1	2	1.3	29	18.6	46	29.5	43	27.6
Meetings	26	16.7	4	2.6	67	42.9	41	26.3	18	11.5
Video conferences	11	7.1	22	14.1	92	59.0	20	12.8	11	7.1
Presentations and seminars	8	5.1	23	14.7	92	59.0	19	12.2	14	9.0
Other	1	0.6	1	0.6	154	98.7	0	0.0	0	0.0

Table 4.8 Perception levels of communication tools at WSU

Proctor (2014:1) states that high frequency, openness and accuracy, performance feedback, and adequacy of information about organizational policies as diverse facets of effective organizational communication are positively related to employees' feelings of happiness in the work place and job performance.

23% of respondents felt that they are very satisfied with the internal website whereas 48.7% said they are somewhat satisfied with the internal newsletter. A total of 21.8% of the respondents said they are slightly satisfied with the grapevine. An interesting observation was that 26.3% said Facebook is critical to their satisfaction.

With the intranet, 45.5% of respondents said that they are somewhat satisfied and 44.2% said that they are somewhat satisfied with the brochures. Noticeboards were regarded as important by 29.5% of the respondents.

4.4.6 Satisfactory levels of communication after the divisional management model

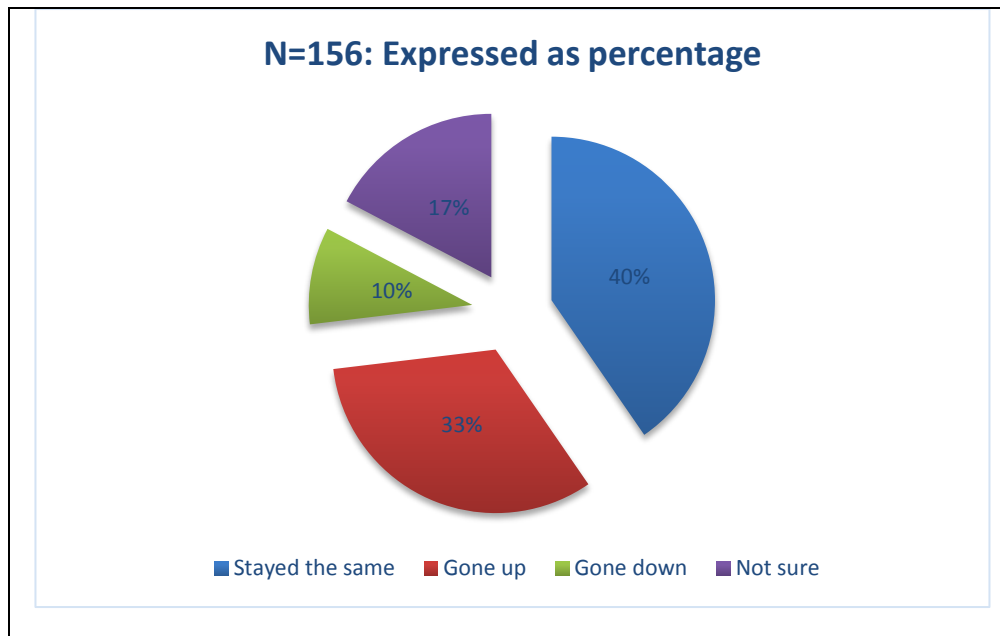


Figure 4.5 Participants' level of satisfaction in the last six months

The students at WSU Chiselhurst campus were asked to rate their levels of satisfaction with the communication they received at WSU since the commencement of the divisional management model of institution (18 months ago). It was discovered that 40% of the respondents said that their satisfaction levels remained the same while 33% said it had increased. Also in Figure 4.5, 10% of the population sample indicated that their level of satisfaction decreased and also 17% said they were not sure.

Communication generally covers how information is conveyed and the response from that communication. Communication can take place between management and students as is in the case of this study. With communication satisfaction, Engin and Akgöz (2013:110) reveal that the communication satisfaction concept covers the movement of communication, i.e., communication and feedback between the levels, across departments in an organisation and the hierarchy of the organisation. The disseminated information may carry work-related information. Therefore, communication satisfaction may differ from one person to the other where one person has a different view of that communication. Therefore, before the divisional management model, WSU used approved institutional communication tools, which catered for all 4 campuses. However, since the inception and commencement of the divisional management model, campuses designed their own approved tailored communication tools, which catered for students in that particular campus, being Buffalo City campus in this study. Thus satisfaction levels of 33% of the respondents had gone up and majority (40%) of the respondents had stayed the same.

It is with the above understanding that for an organization to achieve its goals and accomplishments, effective communication is key. Gülnar (2014:191) cited in Hargie *et al* (2002), shares the same sentiments as Engin and Akgoz (2013), by stating that it is important that employees are satisfied with communication because it plays a central role for employees' organisational effectiveness. Contrary, inefficient organisational communication would result in low organisational commitment and less productivity.

4.4.7 Usefulness of information received

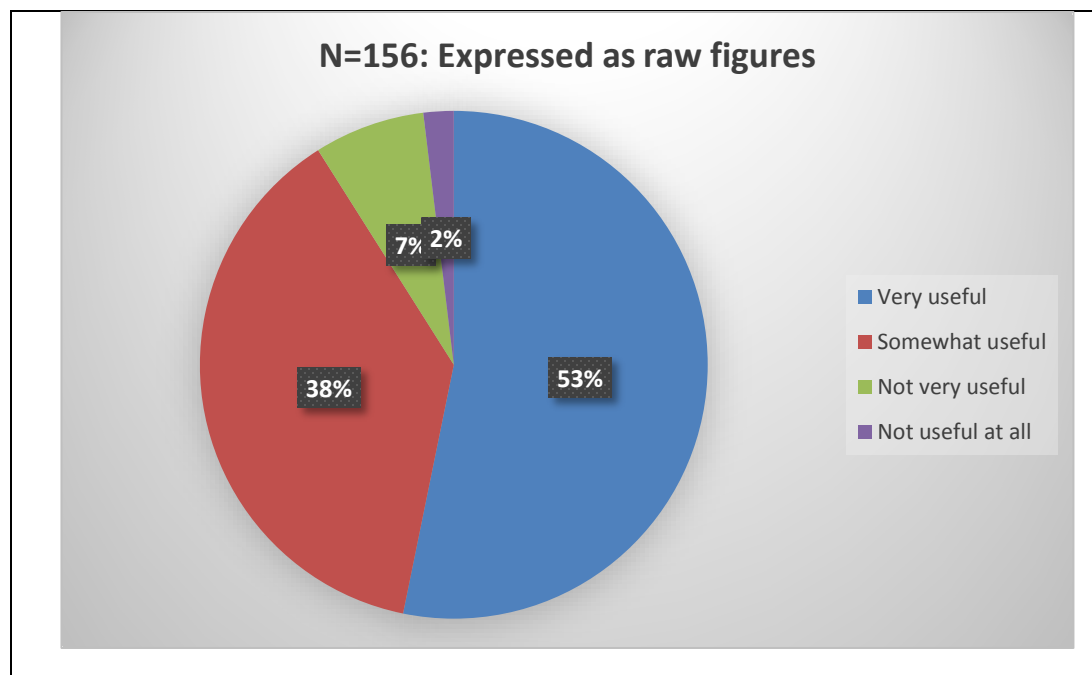


Figure 4.6 Usefulness of information respondents currently receive at WSU

Figure 4.6 above shows that 53% of the respondents found the information received from WSU via the various communication channels very useful whereas 38% said the information is somewhat useful. Contrary to the latter statements, 7 % said the information was not useful and 2% said it was not useful at all.

Arins (2013: 9) purports that “communication is an instrument used by humans in their everyday interaction”. The author further states that since communication is a process where information is transmitted from sender to receiver, it is important to send clear messages to get successful feedback. Therefore, information exchange between two parties is a sign of good communication and the receiver needs to know how to respond or communicate in the modern age. Therefore, the statement concurs with the findings of the majority of respondents (53%) who agree that the information received from WSU is very useful.

4.4.8 Strategic direction, policies and other issues ratings

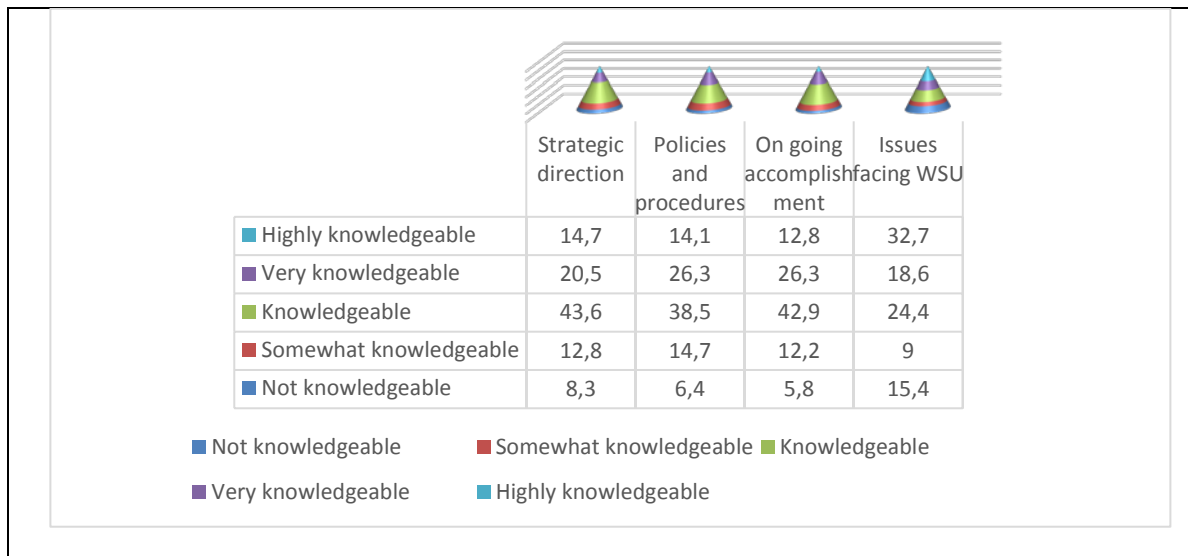


Figure 4.7 Rating of WSU's strategic direction, policies and other issues

The majority of the respondents (43.6%) said they were knowledgeable of WSU's strategic direction whereas 20.5% said they were very knowledgeable. It is also observed that 14.7% said they are highly knowledgeable with the strategic direction.

A total of 14.7% of the respondents said they were somewhat knowledgeable with WSU's policies and procedures, with 38.5% said they were knowledgeable with policies and procedures. 6.4% said they were not knowledgeable with WSU policies and procedures.

42.9% of the respondents reacted to be knowledgeable with ongoing accomplishments at WSU whereas 12.8% said they were highly knowledgeable. 12.2% believed that they were somewhat knowledgeable to the ongoing accomplishments at WSU.

Lastly, 32.7% of the respondents said they were highly knowledgeable to issues facing WSU and 18.6% said they were very knowledgeable. 24.4% of the sample population said they were knowledgeable.

A thriving strategy requires the support of all the employees of the organisation to accomplish a mission. Hence, the whole process of strategic management is a good way to motivate all managers and employees dedicated to the company. Some of the reasons for a good strategy are to enhance communication as they begin to know more, to achieve a goal and be involved (Huiru 2011:18).

4.4.9 Communication tools used to receive information about WSU events

Tool	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Internal website	75	48.1	81	51.9
Internal newsletter	49	31.4	107	68.6
Grapevine	42	26.9	113	72.4
Facebook	133	85.3	23	14.7
Intranet	59	37.8	97	62.2
Email	68	43.6	88	56.4
Brochures	57	36.5	99	63.5
Notice boards	109	69.9	47	30.1
Meetings	82	52.6	74	47.4
Video conferences	3	1.9	153	98.1
Presentations and seminars	11	7.1	145	92.9
Instant messaging	9	5.8	147	94.2
Other	5	3.2	151	96.8

Table 4.9 communication tools currently used by participants to receive information about WSU events

Table 4.9 indicates that the majority of respondents (85.3%) currently receive information via Facebook at WSU. 69.9% receive information via noticeboards. It is also noticeable that 63.5% of the respondents receive information about what is going on at WSU in brochures and 56.4% in email.

68.6% said they do not use the internal newsletter to receive information about what is going on at WSU but 52.6% said that they use meetings to get information.

The researcher found that the respondents receive information suitable for them via a variety of channels including the Facebook, meetings and emails, but they found that only some of the information was relevant to them.

According to the PR Academy (2013:7), “communication can be defined as formal, i.e., relying on impersonal channels such as written memos or team meetings, or it can be informal, personalised and often impromptu, i.e., face-to-face interactions such as individualised coaching.”

4.4.10 The Table below on the type of information received about topics

Tool	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
WSU's strategies and vision	48	30.8	108	69.2
University policies and procedures	31	19.9	125	80.1
Issues affecting WSU	89	57.1	67	42.9
Students and staff initiatives	66	42.2	90	57.8
WSU success stories	49	31.4	107	68.6
Other	14	9.0	142	91.0

Table 4.10 participants receiving communication about the indicated topics about WSU

Table 4.10 indicates that the majority (69.2%) of the respondents do not receive information about WSU's strategies and vision whereas 30.8% agreed that they do receive information.

When questioned about WSU's policies and procedures, 80.1% stated that they do not receive that information whilst 19.9% agreed with the statement.

57.1% of the respondents said they do receive information about issues affecting WSU but 42.9% disagreed.

42.2% agreed to receiving information about student and staff initiatives and 57.8% disagreed saying they do not receive information.

Below is a summary of the findings of the last two questions:

- 68.6% agreed that they do not get receive communication regarding WSU's success stories whilst 31.2% said they do receive information; and
- With other general information, 91% said they do not whilst 9% said they do.

In conclusion, the findings for this particular question have uncovered interesting effects on the respondents. 5 of the 6 variables had a majority of disagreements, i.e, respondents said they do not receive information about them. Arising from the responses, the researcher found that the respondents do not completely identify with the strategic direction of WSU, policies and events. Meid (2014:19) alludes that communication can be clarified as the progression of information conveyed by one person to another. The process of communication can be more effectively accomplished in many ways with numerous media. It is, therefore, obvious that issues affecting WSU are communicated via feedback (57.1%).

4.4.11 Frequency in reading the Newsletter and Bulletin' by students

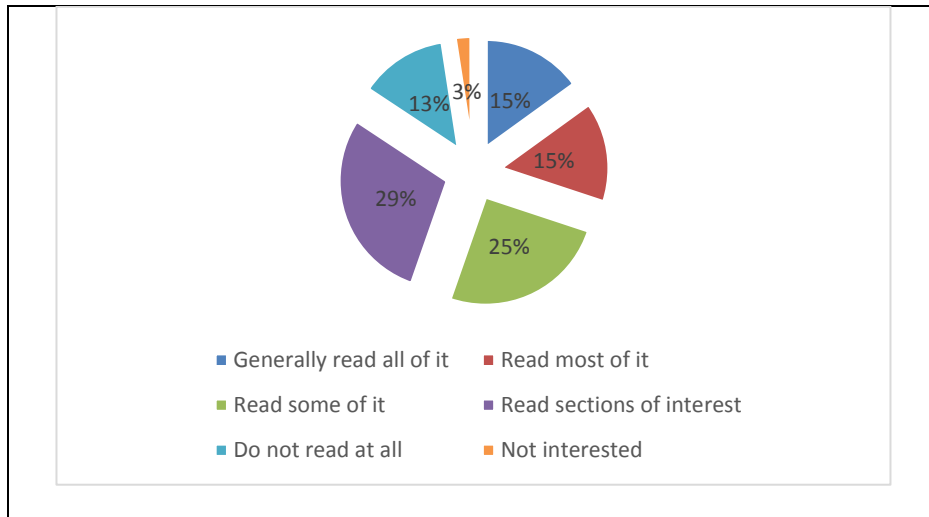


Figure 4.8 How much of WSU newsletter and bulletin is read?

The majority (29%) of the sample stated that they read a section of interest while 25% stated that they read some of it. A total of 13% of the respondents said they do not read newsletters and bulletins at all. However, 15% of the respondents stated that they generally read all of it. Surprisingly, 3% of the sample population stated that they were not interested in the newsletter nor the bulletin.

Cited in Argenti (2009;184), Arins (2013:12) recommends a corporate culture building tool such as internal communication to broadcast, or to daily publicise the regular interactions between an organisations' employees. Furthermore, one of the main aspects of creating a well-integrated internal communication module, is to strengthen the relationships with employees.

WSU started an official internal hardcopy newsletter called "Pulse" and 13% of the sample population said they generally read most of it. Finch, Hansen and Alexander (2010:38) state that a bulletin board is used to post or put up information in areas that are more accessible to most staff members. It is convenient to employees, in this case, to students who do not have access to computers or emails.

Some of the tools are used for specific purposes such as the conveyance of academic or administrative information. Ozaeta and An (2014:20) state that, in the workplace, communication is inevitable and should be managed properly in order to achieve its purpose. Furthermore, communication management is a fundamental part of any organization dealing with the planning, implementing and monitoring of all channels of communication within the organisation or outside of it.

SECTION D

4.5 IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY IN COMMUNICATION

Reider (2014) reported on an administered to over 800 college students, on how they saw the role of social media in their personal lives, how they read news and education and create and maintain relationships. The survey revealed that 9% of the survey respondents reported that social media made them feel closer to friends, while 26% of the sample said they had more friends because of social media. Drago (2015:14), agrees that advancements in communication technology have enabled billions of people to connect with people great distances away with ease, but that they are oblivious that the frequent presence of these devices used in social settings influence face-to-face interactions.

4.5.1 Choices of using of social media

Tool	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Social networking	135	86.5	21	13.5
Video sharing	8	5.1	148	94.9
Blogging	7	4.5	149	95.5
WiSeUp	59	37.8	97	62.2
Youtube	52	33.3	104	66.7
Wikis	5	3.2	151	96.8
Podcast	4	2.6	152	97.4

Table 4.11 Use of social media

According to Table 4.11 above, 86.5% said they use social networking and 13.5% stated they do not use social networking. 94.9% engage in video sharing whereas 5.1% do not.

The question was also asked as to the type of social media used to solicit information on their choice of communication. 37.8% said they use WiSeUp while 62.2% said they do not. 66.7% of the respondents said they do not use YouTube but 33.3% said they did.

The findings clearly reflect that respondents use social networking in a variety of ways and for numerous reasons besides personal or academic. Based on the above results, it is evident that the respondents do have access to social networking sites and are much more exposed to reasons to use them.

Social media has developed to be prevalent, impacting the social fabric of society and, consequently, changing the nature of social relationships. It has modernized the way one communicates, interacts and socializes in

one's daily life. New technologies have been developed and now help facilitate and provide flexibility in communicating and sharing of resources (Al-Sharqi, Hashim and Kutbi 2015:122). The authors are supported by Alassiri, Muda and Ghazali (2014:51), by referring to the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICTs) that have improved people's access to information, changed the flows of information and communications, and provided previously and traditionally disadvantaged groups with communication channels.

4.5.2 Media used to access social media networking sites

Tool	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
3G	19	12.2	137	87.8
ADSL	6	3.8	150	96.2
Phone as modem	3	1.9	153	98.1
Cellphone	57	36.5	99	63.5
Smartphone	111	71.2	45	28.8

Table 4.12 Social media access

Based on Table 4.12, the findings illustrate that 71.2% of the respondents, which is the majority, said they use a smartphone to access social media whilst 28.8% said they did not use smartphones to access social media. When asked about whether they were using social networking via their 3G, 87.7% disagreed whereas 12.2% agreed. A total of 36.5% said they use their cellphones and 63.5% said they do not, meaning that they did not have cellphones and/or were using computers to access social media.

Using their smartphones demonstrated that the majority of students tend to access the internet from their own smartphones, making it much easier for them to access social networking sites at their fingertips and on the go.

4.5.3 Duration accessing social media networking sites

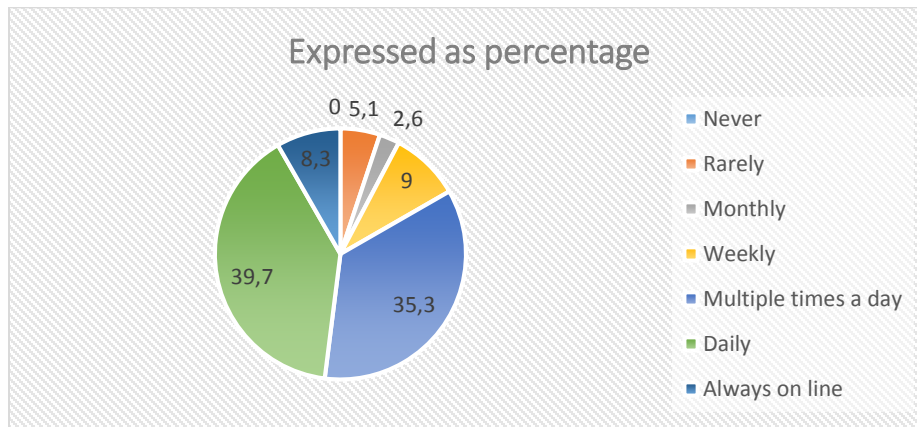


Figure 4.9 Time using social media by participants

In Figure 4.9, respondents were asked about the specific time they spend using the social media and how often do they log in to the social media of their choice. The results were quantified as 39.7% use social media daily, 35.3% said they use it multiple times a day and 8.3% said they are always on line. The survey also shows that 9% access social media weekly, 5.1 % rarely and lastly, 2.6 % of the respondents said they access social media monthly.

4.5.4 The choice of social media networking sites

Tool	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Facebook	132	84.6	24	15.4
Twitter	57	36.5	99	63.5
WhatsApp	130	83.3	26	16.7
Youtube	55	35.3	101	64.7
Skype	11	7.1	145	92.9
LinkedIn	16	10.3	140	89.7
Instagram	50	32.1	106	67.9

Table 4.13 Social media networking sites used by participants

Respondents were then asked which social network they use. Facebook was the mostly used social networking site by 84.6% of the respondents. WhatsApp (83.3%) is the second most used social networking application. The results found that WhatsApp is used because it is cheap, easy to send and receive messages. The uses of

the following social networking sites and applications were as follows: Twitter received 36.5%, YouTube (35.3%) and Instagram (32.15).

Wang, Niiya, Mark, Reich and Warschauer (2015:2) indicate that the use of social media is not only highly predominant among college students but also socially important as they can improve social fluency. They further state that using social media can similarly help maintain friendships that are geographically far apart, which may be mainly significant with college students as they transition through their educational levels, such as high school to college and beyond college. So, participating in social media may help satisfy psychosocial needs during these times of transformation.

4.5.5 The period using social media networking sites

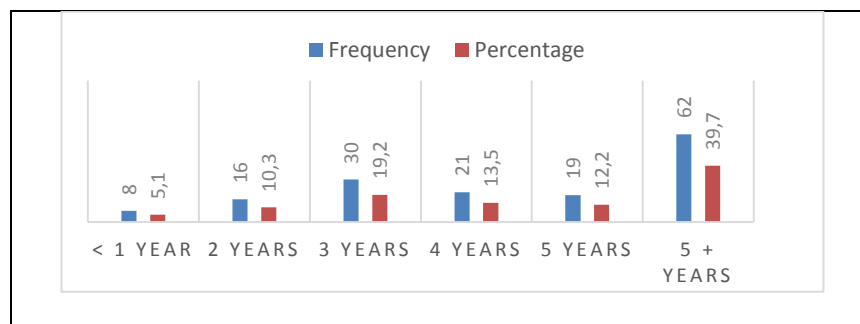


Figure 4.10 Period participants using social media

In this question, the researcher wanted to uncover the time or period that the respondents have been using social media. It was found that 62% have been frequently using social media for more than 5 years, and 30% have been using social media for approximately 3 years.

Rather interestingly, 30% of respondents who have been using social media for 3 years are more familiar with social media than those who have been using social media for 4 years (21%) and 5 years (19%). Only 8% of the respondents have frequently started using social media for less than a year.

Mbondila, Ndebele and Muhandji (2014:117) purport that social media have been used in many niche areas, and one of the largely used areas is higher education. Various social network applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace, are the new media technology. They have gained enormous popularity in the higher education sector between multiple age groups in same or different educational institutions, places, and countries over the past few years.

4.5.6 The purpose for using social media

Purpose	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Academic	97	62.2	59	37.8
Socialising	102	65.4	54	34.6
To communicate	102	65.4	54	34.6
Networking	66	42.3	90	57.7
Looking for jobs	60	38.5	96	61.5
Finding friends	46	29.5	110	70.5

Table 4.14 Purposes of using social media networking sites.

This question inquired to develop an understanding of the purposes of using social media. The majority (65.4%) of the respondents use social media to socialise and to communicate, respectively, scoring the same frequency. About 62.2% of the sample population said they use social media for academic purposes whereas 29.5 % said they use it to find friends. The study's findings revealed that 38.5% use social media to look for friends.

Cited from Barker (2013), in Eke, Omekwu and Odoh (2014:8), it is alluded that there are plenty of opportunities for learning and interactivity offered by social media and it is not too hard to see how students and its users benefits from using social media. They further mention the following benefits of using social media:

- **Web engagement:** For academic purposes where students use social networking sites daily to interact with their fellow students and even teachers about class-related matters; and
- **Education:** Social networking support in university academic programmes help influence a traditional classroom environment by increasing the academic outcomes using social networking sites, e.g, WiSeUp in the case of WSU.

The above narrative is supported by Tartari (2015:393) who states that “the association of social media is the social interaction, which gives the participants the possibility to share opinions, thoughts, and knowledge in a global forum where time and place are insignificant”. Students are increasingly using social media to look for friends, newsfeeds, personal updates, events and activities which may affect academic performance by the increased usage of social media and by using a substantial amount of time for studying and completing assignments.

4.5.7 Awareness of WSU's social media presence

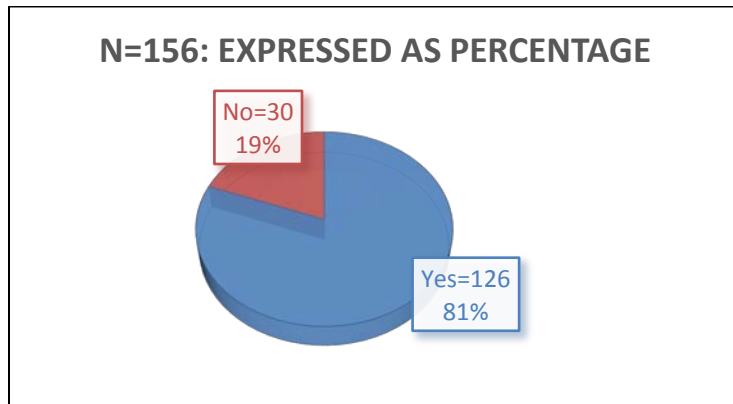


Figure 4.11 Awareness of WSU's social media presence by participants

For the question “if students are aware of WSU’s social media profile”, 81% of the respondents said yes whereas 19% said they are not aware of WSU’s social media presence.

In 2012, WSU created an official Facebook page to communicate with the WSU community. The intention was to convey messages to all stakeholders who are not able to get information via traditional media. Other than WSU’s official page, all other WSU Facebook pages were false. It is for this reason that WSU issued a memo to all WSU stakeholders informing them of the official Facebook presence. On that presence, anyone who wished to know about the information could join the official page.

Pugh (2010:5) explains that engaging in online identity construction not only allows users to define themselves by more than just their actual identity, but provides users with the opportunity to share interests, ideas (blog), and their identity amongst a public network.

4.5.8 Awareness of other WSU's official social media profiles

Profile page	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Student clubs	30	19.2	126	80.8
Student newspapers	33	21.2	123	78.8
Institutional programmes	55	35.3	101	64.7
Alumni groups	22	14.1	134	85.9
Events	58	37.2	98	62.8
Notifications	69	44.2	87	55.8

Table 4.15 Awareness of WSU's social media profile pages.

There was an interesting finding in all the variables in Table 4.15 above. Most of the respondents disagreed that WSU has any of the listed social media profiles. A total of 80.8% of the population in this study disagreed that WSU uses student clubs to communicate, 78.8% said no to student newspapers, 64.7% said no to institutional programmes.

Though the majority of the respondents disagreed, 14.1% agreed that WSU uses alumni groups to communicate and 37.2% agreed that WSU events social media profile is used to communicate. Lastly, 44.2% agreed that the notification social media profile is used to communicate with the WSU community.

As part of the problem statement, WSU uses various strategies to communicate with students. One of its strategies was the creation of a social media presence. Through this strategy, the study intended to learn about the impact and perceptions of social media as strategic communications tools on college students' attitudes. It is important for strategic communications to understand students' attitudes and perceptions of social media particularly in higher education institutions. Therefore, as previously mentioned, social media are an important practice nowadays in technological revolution.

Lewis (2009:17) explains that "social media refers to messages created and disseminated through digital, mobile and Internet-based technologies". With the creation of social media platforms, people can connect with each other, and produce and share content with others. She reiterates that content is created and shared through: (1) online networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter; (2) Social bookmarking; and (3) Blogs and video, photo and music sharing.

The basic features of communication that are included in any social networking sites are inboxes, walls, status messages, notes, and comments. A countless number of people prefer to use social networks as the primary means of communication. Originally with these social networks, there was a simply a profile picture, profile details, and some form of a wall where friends can write and comment, and this drove most of their usage in terms of communication (Baruah 2012:3).

4.5.9 Knowledge of virtual classroom

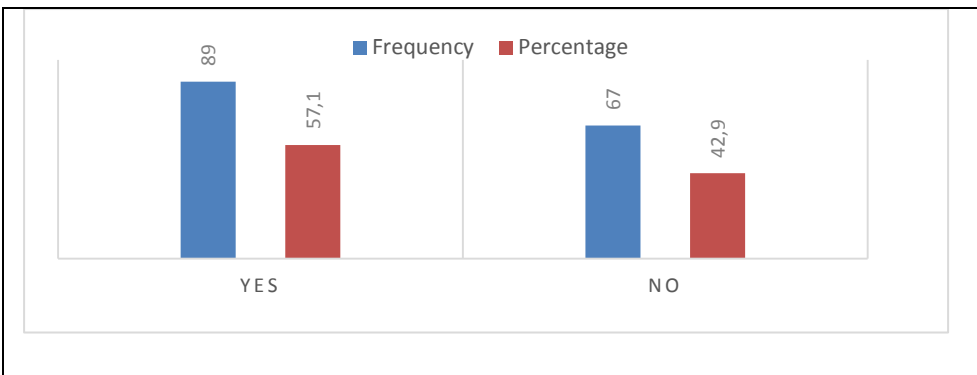


Figure 4.12 Virtual classroom

The findings relating to knowledge of online classrooms are as follows; 57% of the respondents know what an online classroom is, and 42.9% said they do not know what an online classroom is.

In 2010, WSU started with an online class, a web-based learning management system to supplement a traditional classroom with a digital classroom. WSU named its web-based learning tool “WiSeUp”. The system is managed by the Learning and Teaching Development unit who liaises with lecturers to upload courses for students to access online and submit assignments online. Each lecturer is linked with his/her own subject code that is also shared with students when they login.

According to Yu *et al* (2016:2), the development of technology continues to progress at a rapid pace. Educational institutions are increasingly adopting online contexts for teaching and learning. They further assert that learners in today's technology-saturated world need to develop strategies and skills to undertake new literacy activities in which technologies and the Internet play a crucial role.

4.5.10 Familiarity of social media learning and teaching by students

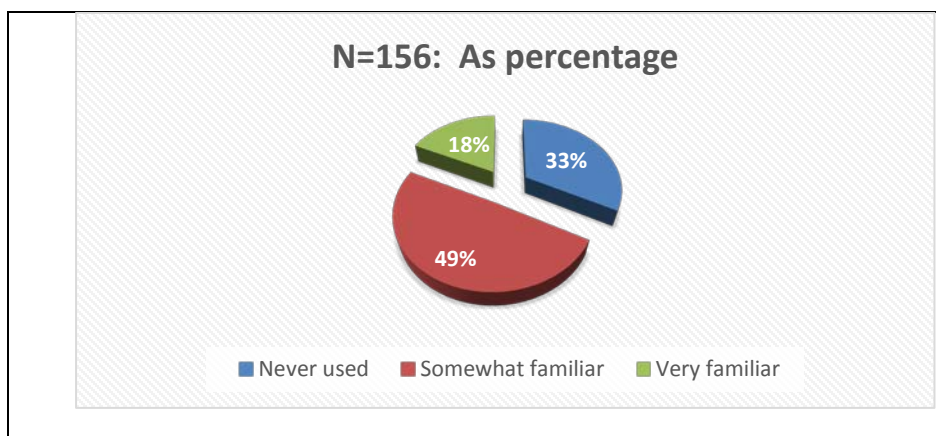


Figure 4.13 Social media learning and teaching.

Almost half (49%) of the respondents said they are somewhat familiar with learning and teaching via social media. 18% agreed that they are very familiar, and, lastly 33% said they never used learning and teaching via social media.

WSU has been exercising online teaching for the past 5 years. The basis of this question is how students at WSU, as a higher education institution, use a Web Based learning program to engage in learning activities within its student population. The researcher can, therefore, seek to explain how social media learning fits within the Web-based learning landscape. The findings describe that the programme used as WiSeUp to form WSU's E-learning ecology has not been given the broad and dynamic exposure as a Web 2.0 technology and how it can be used within higher education.

Web 2.0 technologies are defined by their facilitation of collaborative, user-generated content as explained by Scott, Sorokti and Merrell (2016:75), who elaborate that Web 2.0 technologies have transformed instructional design theory and practice in education. They also identified “four defining Web 2.0 affordances”, centred on the user's ability to create:

- Multimedia content;
- Links with other users to share content;
- Customized personal profiles; and
- Interfaces with other Web service.

4.5.11 Awareness of E-Learning in WSU

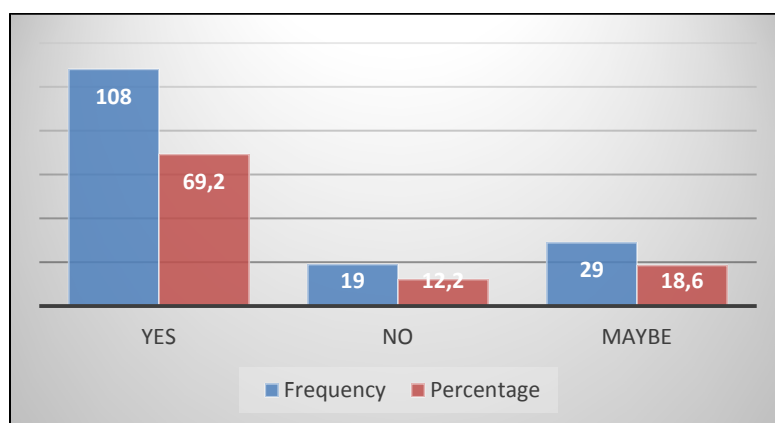


Figure 4.14 Awareness of E-learning

A majority of 69.2% of the respondents indicated that they are aware of the use of E-learning by WSU, whereas 12.2% indicated that they are not aware and 18.6% were not sure. A little above a half of the respondents have

knowledge of e-learning. This could perhaps be because they lack knowledge of what E-learning entails as a computer-based learning tool that enhances learning performance in higher education institutions. The Learning and Teaching Development (LTD) unit is responsible for educating students via their lecturers who send them to the unit to be taught about on-line education. E-learning specialists would first check if the students are computer literate, before referring students to end –user computing introductory classes.

Kar, Saha and Mondal (2014:669) indicate that the term “*e- learning* covers a broad spectrum of pedagogical tools and approaches that continue to evolve to meet the needs of students and educators”. Also the web content has grown richer and more interactive for users with the global communication and internet connection speed. These E-learning systems provide an extra, more flexible means of communication that enables students to interact easily with others.

The latter statement is supplemented by Collazo, Elen and Clarebout (2015:83) who believe that the tool delivery mode also affects the use of tools in two different ways, namely, quantitatively and qualitatively. These two ways are distinguished as follows:

- Quantity of tool use refers mainly to either the time learners spend using a certain tool or to the frequency in which learners access a certain tool; and
- Quality of tool use refers to optimal tool use.

It can, therefore be concluded that, the majority (69.2%) agree that they used e-learning and spent time understanding how the tool works and for educational purposes, whereas, 18.6 % could be summarized as not being sure, due to not being interested in using E-learning. Thus, by not using E-learning as a communication tool optimally, they are not exposed the quality of the tool.

4.5.12 Knowledge of available E-Learning tools

e-learning tool	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
CourseLab	15	9.6	141	90.4
WiSeUp	136	87.2	20	12.8
Blackboard	63	40.4	93	59.6
Elucidate	1	0.6	155	99.4
Easygenerator	1	0.6	155	99.4
Notifications	10	6.4	146	93.6

Table 4.16 Available E-learning tools

In Table 4.16, the majority (87.2%) of the respondents indicated that they are aware of WiSeUp as an e-learning tool used at WSU. 40.4% of the respondents said they are aware of Blackboard while 90% of the respondents stated that they are not aware of courselab as an e-learning tool at WSU.

Rhema and Miliszewska (2014:170) are of the view that, in developing countries, university students have varying attitudes towards E-learning but normally their attitudes are positive. The above statement was emphasised by Nassoura (2012) who pointed out that students had a positive attitude towards E-learning because it had a positive impact on their motivation as well as their self-esteem.

Higher education institutions in developing countries that want to implement e-learning as a tool often encounter various obstacles, such as poor infrastructure and access, lack of support from institutions, necessary resources or Internet access, and poor technological skills. However, to be able to adopt and use e-learning in educational activities, higher education institutions should have already existing, sufficient resources and conditions (Holmström and Pitkänen 2012:9).

The findings of this study revealed that students (87.2%) are constantly using WiSeUp from first-year to third-year levels. Even though the respondents were aware of E-learning tools, there was a follow-up question on how they feel about such a tool.

Dzvpatsva, Mitrovic and Dietrich (2014:3) add that E-learning platforms are different from traditional classroom learning. The E-platforms necessitate accurate development, monitoring and management. Dzvpatsva, Mitrovic and Dietrich (ibid) further elaborate that “electronic platforms, such as portals, require real subject experts to generate new skills in content and to verify the existing knowledge”.

4.5.13 The social connectedness of on-line classroom students to traditional classroom

Figure 4.15 displays the participants’ ability to communicate with other students as compared to a traditional classroom setting. Being connected would probably mean how fellow students in the same class communicate via web-based teaching and learning. A majority (46%) stated that they are connected and 25% also stated they were very connected.

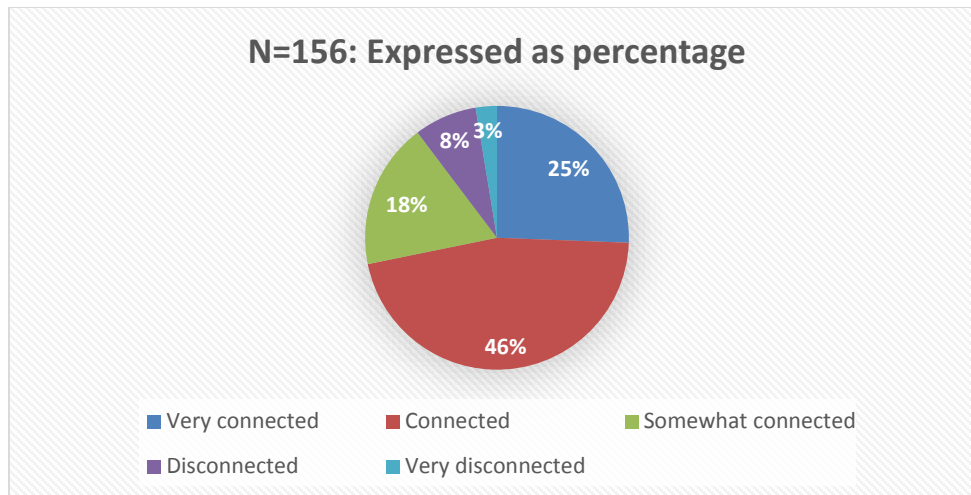


Figure 4.15 Student connectedness compared to traditional classroom

Figure 4.15, also shows that 18% of the respondents felt that they were somewhat connected, while 8% felt disconnected and the remaining 3% indicated that they were very disconnected.

In support of these findings, Bollinger and Inan (2012:43) elucidate that the term “connectedness” refers to a person’s belief that a relationship exists between two or more individuals. Therefore, connectedness is the sense of belonging and acceptance. However, when students feel disconnected from their social world (classroom), they may feel alone. The impact of student isolation is one of the major problems for online learners because students, who feel connected, are more willing and able to engage with others and participate in activities. Consequently, students’ attitudes towards E-learning may have a detrimental effect on the achievement of E-learning goals of the lecturer.

Further, the findings indicated the use of E-learning or web-based education, as part of instructional medium, has grown at an increasing rate along with the growth of internet and the World Wide Web. Nevertheless, E-learning has brought fundamental changes to the higher education landscape. In WSU, E-learning was introduced by the LTD unit focusing on providing online assessments and assignments by lecturers.

D’Alba (2014:5) states that there is a distinct difference between online or web-based environments and traditional classroom instructional settings. He explains that online environments are multi-faceted, considering other factors that are not part of the traditional classroom setting, such as the following:

- The type of networking or media used to house the online class;
- Network and infrastructure support;
- Instructor setup and preparation time; and

- Learner or user participation.

4.5.14 Comparison based on the connectedness to lecturer via E-learning as compared to a traditional classroom

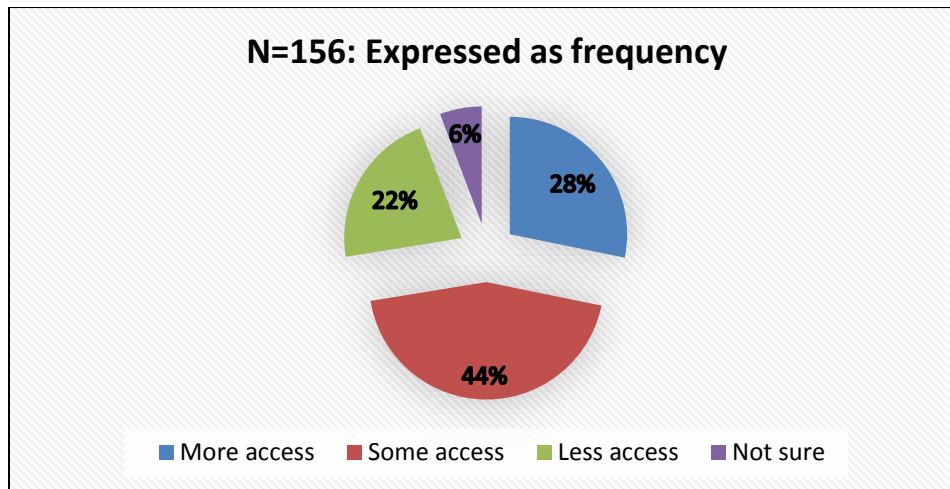


Figure 4.16 Connected to lecturer as compared to traditional classroom

Figure 4.16 indicates how students have access to their lecturer through E-learning tools as compared to a traditional classroom. 44% of the sample population stated that they have some access to the lecturer as opposed to 28% who said they have more access to the lecturer. A thought-provoking finding was that 22% said they have less access and also 6% said they were not sure.

As compared to a regular classroom setting, students who participate in E-learning have access to their lecturer but the lecturer is not present in the online classroom. WiSeUp is an interactive web-based programme between the student and lecturer. It may be said that, in terms of preference, some students might choose the traditional classroom. The interactivity between the student and lecturer may be regulated by time or not being exposed to such platforms.

Minaar (2011:88) explicates that included in E-learning is the use of the internet for accessing learning materials, interacting with learning content and with instructors and students. The goal of the exercise is to obtain support during the learning process in order to gain knowledge and personal meaning and to grow. E-learning happens when students have electronic access to resources and where they are in regular online contact with their peers and tutors.

Minaar (2011:89) adds “in the online environment interactions are mediated through technology, which changes the character of the interactions and can change the ways in which they are perceived”. The researcher concluded that the Web, as part of its function, has a central and self-evident role in teaching. New media or digital technology has paved the way for new teaching potentials for on-campus students and distance learning courses.

4.5.15 New technology learning and communication

Tool	Not at all		Fits somewhat		Fits better		Enjoy learning this way	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reading	9	5.8	34	21.8	56	35.9	57	36.6
Listening	4	2.4	23	14.7	65	41.7	64	40.9
Discussing	7	4.5	23	14.7	55	35.3	71	45.5
Watching	11	7.1	43	27.6	41	26.3	61	39.1
Searching for information	6	3.8	23	14.7	52	33.3	75	48.1

Table 4.17 Learning and communicating via new technology

Findings, as depicted in table 4.17, reveal that 48.1% of the respondents indicated that they enjoy searching for information using new technology, whereas, 41.7% indicated that listening fits better in new technology. A few (21.8%) stated that reading fits somewhat in new technology. 45.5% of the respondents answered that they enjoy discussing via new technology.

Interpreting the above findings, the researcher discovered that WSU students’ perceptions on the use of educational technology for learning seem to be lacking since there are many considerations in the use of new technology. Variables that determine the effectiveness of learning and communication via new media are numerous. These variables are listed by Kahveci (2010:185-186), as follows:

- Gender;
- Previous experience in using new technology;
- Grade level difference in using new technology; and
- Content area of interest in using new technology.

With reference to the variables highlighted in table 4.18, findings revealed that, even though students were exposed to an array of new media, their level of literacy using the new technology determines their manner of learning. Moreover, the literacy level of subject lecturers using these tools is questionable.

Hence, it can be assumed that although social media is not new, it is still not widely accepted in the learning and teaching environment. Setting regulations for the use of social media, specifically for educational purposes could yield positive results when it is supplemented with an existing medium (Dzvapatsva, Mitrovic and Dietrich 2014:3).

4.5.16 Understanding of student portal

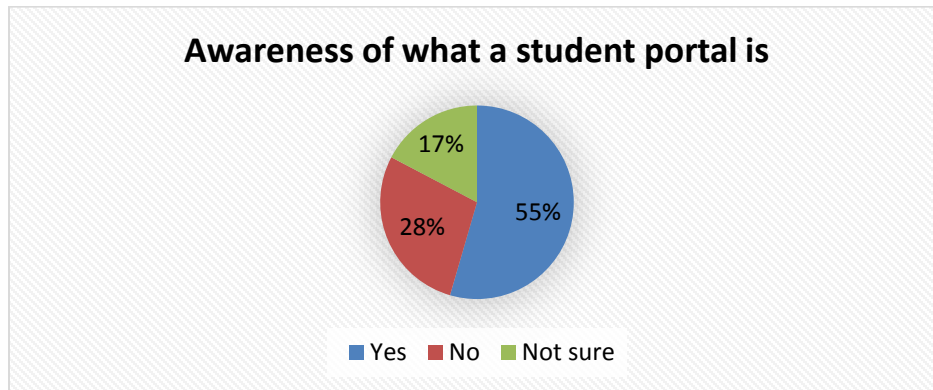


Figure 4.17 Awareness of student portal

The majority of respondents (55%) indicated that they know what a student portal is, however, 28% indicated that they do not know what it is, and 17% said they were not sure.

Although the majority (55%) of the students know what a student portal is, in the interim, WSU is in the process of piloting a student portal for the examination results purposes, as the Institution primarily uses the intranet to communicate with students. However, the intranet is not used in isolation but with other available communication tools. Students can access their results in an online format where students enter their details to get results. Unfortunately, most students are not aware of this facility. Higher education institutions have had student portals since the inception of new technology for communicating with their students. These institutions have managed to create a personalized and interactive platform to both improve the learning experience and to enable students to combine social learning with their academic study. This was done to engage students about the progress in their academic study and to access information.

Windsor (2016) refers to a student portal as an online gateway where students can log into a school website to access important programme information. She further states that the portal contains information on courses

offered by the Institution, transcripts of students' academic performance, timetables, exam schedules and department contact numbers.

HEIs are hugely supported by Information technology systems to support their core functions, thereby allowing students access to institutional and faculty information. HEIs need the student portal to communicate with their constituencies in terms of disseminating information, and granting access to more information.

4.5.17 WSU has a student portal

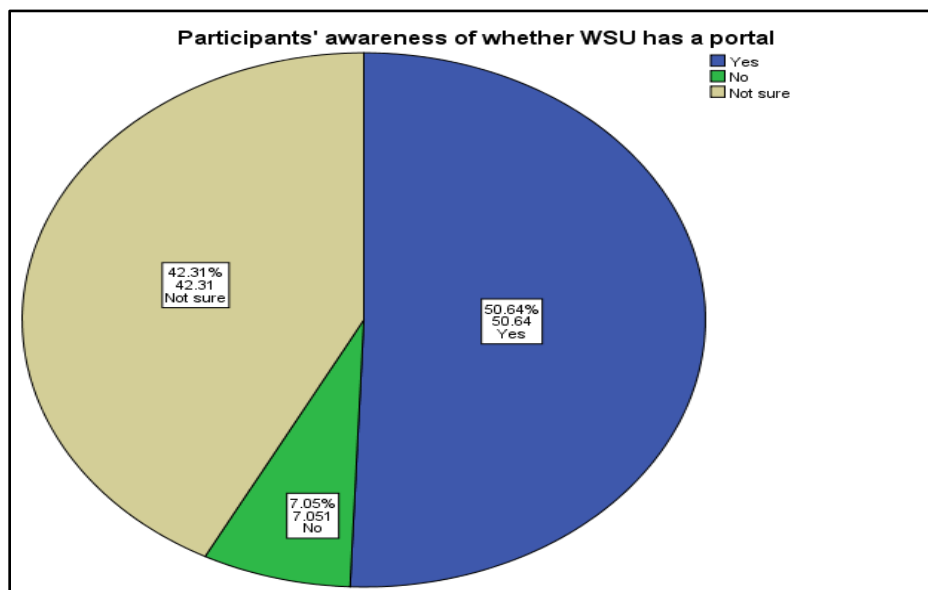


Figure 4.18 Awareness of whether WSU has student portal

Figure 4.18 analyses the awareness of whether the respondents know if WSU has a student portal or not. 50.64% indicated that they know that WSU has a student portal, 42.31% indicated they were not sure, whilst 7.5% said they do not know.

The findings revealed that respondents who indicated “yes” are those who have knowledge that examination results can be accessed via the pilot student portal and WSU website. Those results only show how a student has performed in the examination and cannot be used as an unofficial submission. Results are also hidden if a student owes fees for that particular academic year.

Team Santronix (2015) state that a student portal system is a “portal website for colleges or institutes to offer a facility to their students and faculties for creating and maintaining their own web pages (profiles) which anyone can view online by visiting the website”. Some of the features are tailored for students and academic support administrators, features such as; uploading of self-photograph, images and documents by creating an

online presence (online profile). Lastly, they help institutions of higher learning in achieving the communication levels and avail global exposure to their students. Successively, the number, after the pilot student portal, would increase and knowledge of such a tool would benefit the Institution.

4.5.18 The frequency of the use of the pilot student portal

Frequency	Yes	
	N	%
Daily	2	1.3
Weekly	11	7.1
Occasionally	56	35.9
Just once	20	12.8
Not at all	67	42.9

Table 4.18 frequency of logging into student portal

The majority (67%) of the respondents indicated that they do not use the pilot student portal at all, 56% indicated that they use the pilot student portal occasionally and 20% stated that they used the pilot student portal only once.

The findings reveal that WSU does not have a student portal, but has a pilot portal used in conjunction with short messages sent to request for examination results. If WSU had introduced a student portal earlier, allowing prospective student to apply for admission, it would then give an access via their reference number to track their application to the university. Now continuing students from level 2 to postgraduate level do not have some access to it.

4.5.19 The use of functions of the pilot student portal in last six months

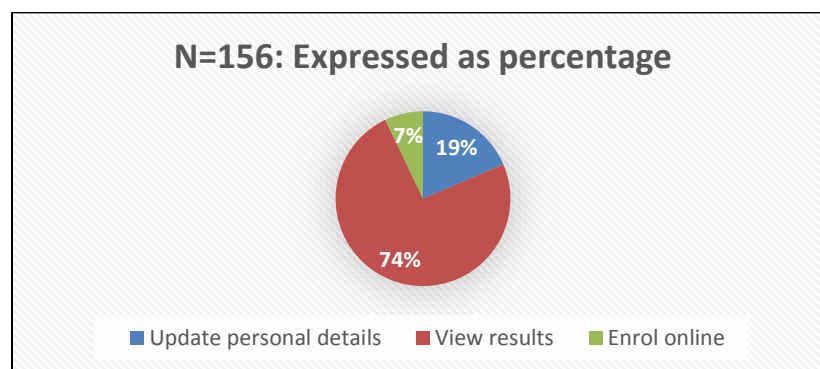


Figure 4.19 Functions of student portal in the last six months

Figure 4.19 clearly indicates that the majority (74%) of the respondents indicated that they use the pilot student portal to view results, 19% said they use the pilot student portal to update information and 7% indicated that they use the student portal to enrol online.

4.5.20 The usefulness of student portal

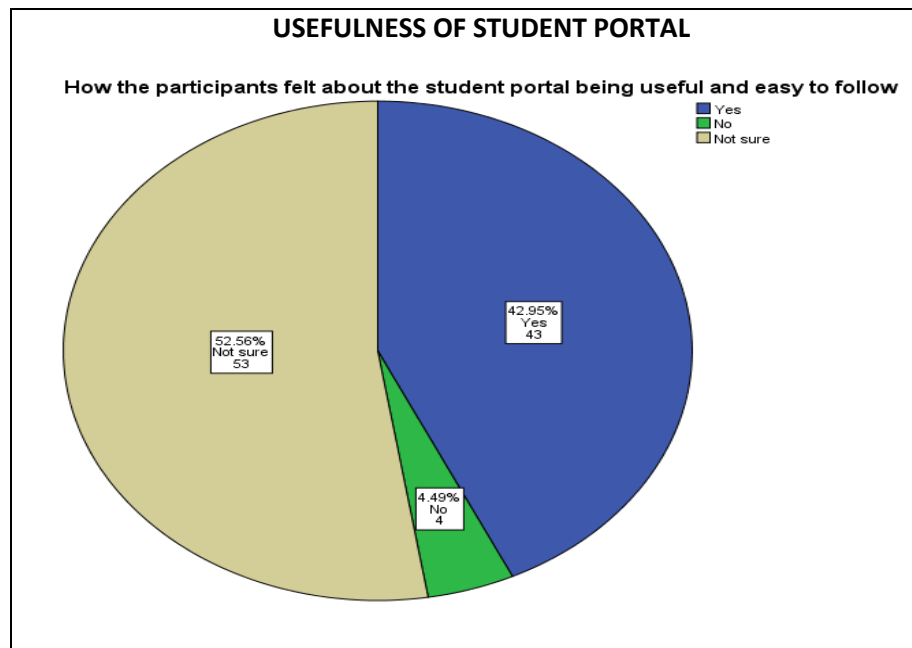


Figure 4.20 Usefulness of student portal

Respondents were asked to indicate the usefulness of the student portal. 53% indicated that they were not sure but 43% responded that the student portal is very useful. A small number (4%) said it was not useful to them.

Judd and Kennedy (2010:1564) allude that university students' familiarity to use Internet technologies has been taken for granted, with the establishment of reliable internet services and access to those internet services within the Institution.

4.5. INTERVIEW DATA CONDUCTED WITH WSU STAFF MEMBERS

As stated in Chapter 1, staff members were also interviewed to understand their perceptions about the communication channels used and information disseminated by WSU.

4.6.1 Biographical data of participants.

Position	Sex	Years worked at WSU	Interviewee code
Transport officer	Male	11 years	R1
Network technician	Male	19 Years	R2
Senior lecturer	Male	19 years	R3
HOD/Senior lecturer	Male	16 years	R4
Secretary	Female	16 years	R5
Switch board operator	Female	8 years	R6
E-learning specialist	Male	7 years	R7
E- Learning Administrator	Male	9 years	R8
Acting skills Development Facilitator	Male	6 years	R9
Examinations assistant	Male	7 years	R10

Table 4.19: Biographical data of interview participants

Table 4.19 presents the background information of the participants who were interviewed. The group encompassed both lecturers and support staff at WSU BCC Chiselhurst campus. From the academic enterprise participants, only 3 were actively involved with students and the other 7 were support departments. Most of the respondents were male (N=8). The target sample was staff, in general, but because of the recent student protest that affected the core business of the Institution and final examinations, the researcher managed to interview 10 of the intended 20 interviewees. In terms of the respondents' gender 7 of the respondents were males, and two were females. Table 4.20 also shows that 5 of the 10 participants that were interviewed have been with WSU for more than 10 years and the other 5 less than 10 years. The researcher was not focused on finding a representative for each section at WSU, i.e., support and academic enterprise, but was focused on the experiences of the participants in their respective sections selected.

Prior to the interviews, participants were each given consent letters and were informed that the interview would be recorded. At the stage that the study was conducted, WSU had been under fire with student protests. The selection of participants, as shown in table 4.20 were staff members who are directly affected by the WSU communication strategy. The researcher noted and recorded their answers. Each interview had a duration of approximately 12 minutes.

4.6.2 Responses from WSU Chiselhurst staff

The following subsection provides feedback and analysis of the responses provided by ten (10) participants who were interviewed at WSU Buffalo City Campus, Chiselhurst (WSU; BCC). It refers to the responses of the scheduled interview questions attached at the end as Annexure 4. Codes were used to label respondents as: R1 who was the first respondent to R10 as the last respondent.

4.6.2.1 Position held at WSU?

Seven respondents stated they were in the support section of the WSU Chiselhurst site and three were in the academic enterprise. This small representation (percentage) of the academic enterprise did not matter much as the student sample was a representation of the larger population.

4.6.2.2 Number of years worked at WSU?

The findings reveal that 5 of the respondents were with WSU for less than 10 years, while the longest service staff member was at WSU for 19 years. Hence the less and more experienced staff members were adequately represented.

4.6.2.3 Understanding of the term “Communication”

Generally, the respondents understood what the process of communication is and what it meant. Although there were different explanations and definitions, most of the respondents conveyed the idea that communication is the flow of information from sender to receiver.

R1 answered that *‘it is the flow of communication’* and was supported by respondents R4, R5, R6, R7, R8 and R9. Their responses mentioned that it is *“means of transmitting information to the next person”* and is *“transmitted from one person to the other”*. The majority (70%) of the respondents seemed to agree with each other that communication relates to information to be conveyed and transmitted. R3 and R8 slightly agreed that communication is *“how messages are transferred”* and *“communication is a two way stream involving two people who share information”*. Interestingly, R2 stated that *“every information is needed to own a business”*.

The communication practice at WSU has demonstrated itself by establishing lines of communication between the WSU communities. The communication may be formal or informal depending on the nature of communication. In support, Molefe and Van Deventer (2014:53) affirm that internal communication refers to all communication activities within the organization aimed at progressing the goals of the organization which

are important to an organization's success. Therefore, line managers have the duty to align internal communication activities with organizational goals, and to ensure accomplishment of operational goals.

4.6.2.4. The purpose of communication?

The respondents reported that the main purpose of communication is to make people or respondents aware of the particular information as stated by R2 and R4. To strengthen the latter responses, R5, R6, R7, R8 and R10 seem to be knowledgeable by responding that, when communication takes place, the purpose is to *"make sure that people understand"* the *"message is spread"*, *"Transmitted and conveyed"*, and *"message is sent and feedback received"* respectively by expecting feedback from the receiver.

However, R9 stated that the purpose of communication *"depends on the intention and if the information is understood."* All the above responses were correct, indicating the researcher that the interviewees were aware of the purpose of communication, given the time and years with WSU. Remarkably, R1 and R3 responded with their personal interpretation of working at WSU by, respectively, stating that communication is *"for managing documentation and data across staff and management"* and it is the *"process when working in a multi-campus Institution"*.

Based on the findings, it can then be assumed that communication is created for the purpose of informing employees about the vision, achievement and goals of WSU.

It is evident that communication is the basis for creating and maintaining relationships between an organization and its employees. When employees align themselves with the mission of the organization, they create a positive impact on retention. A good employee is, therefore, essential to achieve an organizational objective (Gonzalez 2014: 120).

4.6.2.5. The benefits of communication

The results of the question indicate that the respondents, as employees of WSU, believe that WSU communication benefits them by keeping them informed frequently. In the context of WSU, respondents agreed unanimously that communication benefits both the student and the sender. R1, R2, R3, R4, R6, R7, R8 and R10 were in agreement that it benefits the *"WSU community of students and staff members"*. R5 and R9 said communication benefits *"the sender and receiver"*. Therefore, the researcher concludes that WSU communication benefits both stakeholders.

Borca and Baesu (2014:497) concur with the above findings and mention it is not an easy process to create efficient and effective internal communication. Managers are required to communicate goals and tasks to

employees, while the employees also need to understand their tasks to be able to achieve the goals of the organization as a team.

4.6.2.6 Internal and interpersonal communication.

The bureaucratic structure of WSU was recognized as a fact. With WSU having many departments and a large number of staff, the respondents recognized the flow of information from the hierarchical structure down to the employees. However, R1 to R8 shared an understanding that WSU uses internal communication tools, which were stated as *"Email, Facebook and memos"*. Undeviating dissemination of information from management and across levels seemed to prove that information is credible and trustworthy, due to the fact that the emails and memoranda were commonly used communication tools by most staff members. The intention of the question was to acquire a distinction of the two categories of communication.

Furthermore, it was not clear to them what *"internal communication"* and *interpersonal communication* meant, but they gave examples of internal communication as best known to them. R9 and R10 seemed to have a clear cut understanding that internal communication is how an organization communicates internally by stating that *"helpdesk and Notice-boards"* are internal communication tools used at WSU. Both respondents (R9 and R10), understood that interpersonal communication occurred when there is an *"exchange of information, whether verbal or non-verbal"*.

4.6.2.6.1 Internal and interpersonal communication used by WSU?

One of the major functions of the communication process in any given organization is effective co-ordination. The information disseminated is usually directed to crucial sections within an organization. The respondents were mostly aware of internal communication tools, because it is via internal communication tools, such as Email, that they receive information. Hence, the majority are in agreement of the said channel. Despite the convenience of *"emails"* used by WSU, as stated by R2, R3, R4, R5, R8 and R9, R7 believes that WSU uses *"conferences and video conferences"* as part of its internal communication. WSU established numerous channels from written, verbal to electronic resources. The idea to use a variety of communication tools was to facilitate the broader dissemination of information throughout the Institution, whether internal or external. All of WSU's employees have a chance to use any of their choice or all of the channels at their disposal. However, in the study, it was evident that they have an affinity for emails and it is what WSU uses most for internal

communication to staff members. R1 and R10 stated that WSU uses “*internal communication*” whereas R6 responded that WSU uses both “*internal and interpersonal communication*”, and the responses were correct. The challenge with the respondents was to comprehend what each of the two communication categories meant.

Similar comments have been made by Omilion-Hodges and Baker (2014:436) by providing recommendations that organizations would be better obliged by exploiting communication as intentionally and frequently with employees as they do with external stakeholders. These authors endorse internal communication by engaging, informing and dialoging with associates in a strategic, purposeful, and authentic manner.

In this study, the most satisfactory tool of internal communication was found to be “*Emails*” and it was evident that their preferred tool of communication was email, which falls under internal electronic media.

4.6.2.7 Communication plays an important role in the University

The intention of this question was to comprehend how employees on different positions, as indicated in Table 4.20, feel about WSU’s communication, and what role does it play in their daily working lives at WSU. It was also imperative for the researcher to comprehend how the respondents see the role of communication at WSU, and what their opinions are about it. During the interviews, there was a positive relationship between the information disseminated and the tool of communication used by WSU. Understanding their responses, the researcher uncovered that for the sense of belonging and feeling part of the WSU community, WSU has to make sure that every important information is disseminated. This would assist in creating a positive, unique interaction which would later implant a much needed sense of belonging. All of the respondents answered “yes” to the question supporting how WSU disseminates information using *helpdesk* and *emails* communication tools as stated by R1 to R7. However, R8 and R10 agree that, since WSU is a “*multi-campus Institution*”, attributing to the fact that for WSU to communicate with other campuses, it should make use of the established communication channels. R9 supports the notion by stating that WSU should make use of “*electronic media*”.

The findings indicate that communication plays an important role. Considering the fact that WSU was born after a merger of three historical disadvantaged institutions, it would be imperative for communication to be effective and understood by all stakeholders.

The above findings confirm Avram’s (2015:274) view that higher education institutions have significantly developed their communication systems by engaging in modern technologies. Through meeting the ever

evolving knowledge needs on the market, HEIs have tried to accomplish their mission and objectives by depending on the achievement of communication objectives.

4.6.2.8 Communication strategy

A communication strategy is an essential part of the transformation management strategy, especially in the case of WSU. It facilitates the transformation process by allowing change messages to flow down from the top of the organization to the operational level. It also refers to the identification of an effective communication channel to ensure the accurate message is delivered to the target group at the right time. Definition is agreement with the following statements from respondents.

Being informed and having access to information make staff feel appreciated and important. R5, R7, R8 and R9 agree that a communication strategy is a *“plan or way of carrying out information dissemination among different units within WSU”*. Remarkably R1 and R10 appeared to have an unclear understanding of communication strategy by stating that it is *“a movement of information via levels of structures and across staff”*, while R2, R3, R4 and R6 state that it is *“a way of communication between management, students and staff members”*. However, while the respondents acknowledged their job designations at WSU, they are aware that communication strategy exists within an organization. They used words like *“Movement of information, a plan of carrying out information, a way of conveying important issues”*, which can be attributed to having some knowledge of strategy.

80% of the respondents confirm Djordjevic and Cotton's (2011:383) view that, in HEIs, effective internal communication is a key issue, as a way of enhancing employee commitment, performance, motivation and empowerment. In addition to the latter functions, *“internal communication is an important tool in enhancing the understanding of corporate strategy, mission and values, strengthening corporate culture and enabling change”*.

4.6.2.9 WSU Communication strategy activities.

When asked if the respondents knew if WSU has any communication strategy, seven of the respondents agreed that WSU has a communication strategy. It was evident that a communication strategy exists in WSU. However, the challenge was the respondents or “employees” have no idea what the communication strategy entails but are very much aware that some of the communication tools at their disposal form part of the communication strategy. A clear guideline of the communication should be provided to all WSU employees to illustrate the

direction WSU wishes to take, and strategy should be backed up by a detailed plan of action. Though there was not any documentation of communication strategy that they are aware of, the communication they receive via some of WSU's official communication channels is enough for them.

R3 mentions that they receive communication *"via emails, Facebook and notice boards"*. Other respondents shared similar sentiments were, R4, R8, R9 and R10 who mentioned *"Facebook and emails (intranet)"* are the most common in the workplace. R5 and R6 said they were not aware, whereas R2 responded that WSU does not have a communication strategy because *"most of the things are not communicated"* with staff members.

The researcher concluded that a combination of communication practices, within a communication strategy, is used by the respondents depending on the information that is being communicated or the preferred choice of a tool to receive that information. A sound comprehension of the communication strategy by WSU employees could increase productivity as they would be central to such a communication strategy.

The inclusive knowledge of the WSU's communication strategy is reasonably high. Therefore, it is very well known.

The responses are in line with Djordjevic and Cotton (2011:383) who state that effective internal communication is present in organizations whereby employees are well-informed about the future directions of the organization and, at the same time, have influence on decision-making processes. This effective internal communication is done by the combination of upward and downward communication. For organizations that are in the process of merger or organizational change, effective communication is essential for them in order to get employees to commit to the change and to make the change happen.

4.6.2.10 Internal stakeholders play an important role in communication

The intention of the question was to find out if the *"internal stakeholders do participate in WSU's communication and to understand if there is a relationship between the stakeholders and WSU"*. Respondents were unanimous in answering the question, in agreement that internal stakeholders do play a role in WSU's communication. The stakeholders in the study were students, staff and management. In this case, the question is directed to the general internal WSU community. Eight respondents answered *"yes"* to the question whilst two said *"no"*.

The researcher found that the majority of the respondents agreed with the statement, indicating that they do feel part of WSU and participate in playing a role as internal stakeholders.

Marques (2010:50) provides a strong argument by stating that through various modes of corporate communication, such as innovative designs, advertisements, programmes, and news releases, organizations seek to effectively educate, entertain and inform their stakeholders, and establish and modify relationships with them.

The above explanation is supported by Cornelissen (2011:10) who states that organizations progressively recognize the need for a holistic management approach that involves actively communicating with all stakeholder groups. The organization depends on the stakeholder groups.

4.6.2.11 WSU'S stakeholders assist in developing communication

The interview question relates to the action taken by the stakeholders to participate and assist in developing WSU's communication. A total of 7 of the respondents agreed that the stakeholders "*do assist*" and 3 disagreed. When dealing with internal communication, it is a company's prerogative to manage the interaction with stakeholders. The approach could be used as a part of a strategic drive to develop communication internally. With that strategic drive, the WSU stakeholders need to be identified not as one but as different parties within WSU. This could be easily done by identifying what stakeholders prefer and how they communicate with the management.

According to the results, WSU does work with its stakeholders when developing communication, introducing new media technology as well as maintaining the traditional approach to communication.

The responses are in line with Shams' (2015:314) view that stakeholders' perception epitomises corporate reputation. Their perception of an establishment or its offerings constructs a kind of influence that motivates stakeholders to associate or not to associate with a company's businesses.

4.6.2.12 Stakeholders are committed to the communication strategy

For stakeholders to fulfil their obligation to the communication strategy, they first need to understand it and what it entails. The researcher found that, in order for the stakeholders to be committed, a sound knowledge could be advantageous to the respondents to apply their everyday work towards fulfilling that strategy. According to the results, seven of the respondents said "yes" whilst the other three respondents said "no". It is interesting that even after the merger some staff members feel that they need to be included when WSU develops its communication strategy. However, it is disturbing to know that after 10 years since the birth of

WSU, three respondents disagreed the stakeholders are not committed. Could there be an underlying cause to such a statement. It was very unfortunate that none of the three respondents were willing to engage the researcher on that matter. The disagreeing respondents were R2, R7 and R8. The researcher found that the three respondents fall under the support section in WSU Chiselhurst campus, and also in the user technical support.

The researcher concluded that, with the negative responses, WSU needs to make sure that the people who are responsible for developing the communication strategy meet every need for every section in the campus. Commitment should be one of the core pillars for stakeholder engagement by WSU. The communication strategy formation is done by MCD, now the MCA department (Marketing, communication and advancement). WSU's communication strategy needs to be evaluated for it to measure the effectiveness of communication tools utilized.

4.6.2.13 Stakeholders assist when communication problems are experienced

From the findings, it is evident that an effective communication strategy directed at stakeholders is paramount. At WSU, there are certain communication channels that were introduced after the merger, such as wise up and Facebook. The traditional channels had to co-exist with the new media tools. The choice of tools used by the stakeholders could be attributed to communication breakdown from their part. However, the content and style of the disseminated information do penetrate boundaries to get to the target audience. In this study, respondents are the stakeholders, and some may refer to other staff members as stakeholders. With regard to the problems experienced, detailed information for a certain unit or section could be directed to that section, by referring to the content of the information. Regular participation in WSU events and happenings, with particular reference to proper internal communication, could eliminate problems and increase interaction.

Evidence shows that nine of the 10 respondents agreed that the stakeholders do assist when communication problems are experienced. One respondent disagreed.

The above findings reveal that WSU's stakeholders do assist when communication problems are experienced. To counter the negative perception that stakeholders do not assist, WSU's management need to position themselves amongst the WSU community and be proactive rather than reactive. The management has been mainly proactive but sometimes reactive to some major issues that have engulfed the Institution. For obvious reasons, the researcher cannot divulge such information.

4.6.2.15 WSU communication problems

In this question, participants were asked what communication problem they encounter at WSU. The main objective of this question was to identify problems experienced by the employees on different levels and fields, and how they see the main problem in communication from their position. R1 said that *“most of the information is distorted”*, and elaborated that *“most of the information or data, documentation, policies do not reach the intended recipient”*. The researcher interpreted this response to the existence of barriers in communication. Interestingly, R6 and R2 stated that *“there are no proper channel or strategy to communicate, and also no policy that regulates communication”* and *“WSU communicates when problems arise”*, respectively. R10 stated that *“WSU needs more development to avoid more communication breakdown”*, which R3 and R5 supported in stating that *“the breakdown of intranet communication, e.i, via Email”* can be credited to *“most of the students do not read email”*. R7 stated that *“WSU fails communicate to all staff when communication breaks down.”* Surprisingly, R8 observed that she sees no problem with WSU communication because *“every communication is approved by a line manager”*. This response shows that there is a certain protocol that has to be followed before any communication is disseminated to WSU the community. One of the challenges that could hinder the progress of WSU communication was the surprise element of being reactive to problems, as referred to by R2, who said that *“WSU communicates when problems arise.”* It is with the above responses that the researcher felt that WSU needs to ensure that its communication is effective and that it reaches the targeted audience without any barriers. WSU’s management should take into consideration these mentioned problems in order to achieve its objectives. R4, R8 and R9 did not answer the question.

4.6.2.16 WSU is dependent on communication strategies, explain your answer

It was relatively clear that the 10 interviewees understood what WSU’s communication strategies are and what it entails. While different definitions of communication strategies were presented in question 11, they related to basically passing information to employees within the company from management to staff, detailing plans, visions and activities. Respondents who agreed that WSU is dependent on its communication strategy. This was seen to be key, as stated by R2 who said WSU is dependent on communication strategies for *“awareness”* purposes. It was also evident that there is a communication method, as stated by R3 who stated that *“emails are easy and a quick method to staff considering that WSU is a multi-campus Institution”*.

4.6.2.17 Satisfied with WSU communication

This question sought to get an insight into whether the interviewees are informed about internal changes and events within WSU. The intention of the question was to enquire whether the information is shared between management and employees, and whether they are satisfied with how WSU communicates with them. Eight of the respondents agreed that they are satisfied and two respondents disagreed. Opinions on WSU's communication was evident as the majority of respondents were satisfied, meaning they were happy with the sharing of information with management and employees.

Hence, information sharing is key to a positive working environment on any level or section of employment. This would ensure that all employees are informed of the events and are happy with the information they receive. Management should, by all means, communicate, inform and share knowledge with all relevant stakeholders.

4.6.2.18 It is crucial to maintain relationships using communication tools at your disposal

All respondents agreed that it is crucial to maintain relationships with stakeholders using communication tools at WSU's disposal. R7 felt that, at WSU, *"things happen haphazardly and communicated properly"*. The other respondents had similar sentiments, in contradiction to R7, that it is crucial for reasons such as *"for building unity at WSU, keeping staff informed, information reaches every stakeholder at WSU"*. Therefore, communicating tools such as Emails and Facebook are catalysts for maintaining such relationships.

Internal communication characterizes the communication and interactions between the employees and members of an organization and can also be defined also as *"internal relations"* or *"internal public relations"* (Mutihac 2010:37).

4.6.2.19 Your future relationships with these stakeholders

Five of the respondents said they see the relationships *"improving"*. Notably enough, R1, R4, R7, R8 and R10 preferred *"improving"* via workshops and technology. Interestingly, some respondents suggested remedial action to rescue what they perceive might be a problem in the near future. R6, said that he sees *"crisis in the near future if WSU communication does not change"*. Clearly the respondent is critical of WSU's current communication situation with stakeholders. R2 and R3 said the relationship would *"not improve"*. Clearly, according to their observations in relation to the stakeholders, the possibility of maintaining the status quo is probable. Two of the ten respondents (R5 and R9) stated that the future relationships with stakeholders would *"remain the same"*.

Thus, the researcher found that the practice of stakeholder engagement occurred via workshops and technology. As WSU is a higher education Institution, its stakeholders can be categorized into internal stakeholders (students, staff members) and the external stakeholders, such as the community, businesses and government departments. It is, therefore, crucial to maintain these relationships as they may affect the running of the Institution. Both categories of stakeholders can have an impact on the strategic goals, objectives, core business and other activities, and the developments of stakeholder relationships. Consequently, the success of the HEI depends on its ability in maintaining particular management styles. (Kettunen, 2015:56).

4.6.2.20 Why is communication important in organizations?

The question sought to understand whether respondents understood why communication is important in an organization or an institution such as WSU. The researcher wanted to know if the respondents could relate to the need for communication in WSU.

Respondents 1, 4, 5 and 6 appeared to know the need by stating that it is important *“for the flow and dissemination of information to all stakeholders”*. However, R8 said communication is important *“to make staff members aware of policies, vision of the company”*. Similar sentiments were echoed by R2, R7 and R9 who said that communication is important because *“it addresses issues and information awareness for the smooth running of an organisation.”* R3 and R10 stated, respectively, that communication is important in the *“running of the organisation”* and communication would be *“ideal for a multi-campus institution”*, like the WSU.

4.6.2.21 Do you believe that WSU’s current communication tools are adequate?

For WSU, adequacy of current communication tools refers to how the management use these tools, disseminate information, and communicate to WSU stakeholders in a way that is conducive to employees. Nine of the participants said *“yes”* whilst one said *“No”*. It became apparent to the researcher that the majority of the respondents were conversant with most of the tools, as nine of the ten agreed that they do believe that WSU’s current communication tools are adequate for them. The statement could mean that WSU does communicate effectively. The researcher can, if more information was revealed, attribute the current communication tools’ adequacy to factors such as, but not limited to, access, frequency and availability of information.

4.6.2.22 What recommendations can you provide to improve current communication strategies?

The suggestion on how to improve the current communication strategies lies with WSU management and MCA. This improvement could be a result of a direct engagement with all relevant stakeholders. The question was

open to comments, and the interview respondents could be free to express their suggestions and recommendations on how to improve the current communication strategies at WSU. R5 said *“relevant authorities need to carry out an investigating (sic) to find out if the stakeholders are satisfied, if not what needs to be done”*. R1, R2 and R5 stated that WSU’s communication strategies could be improved by *“training of staff members on new strategies”* through *“meetings and workshops”* by engaging in a *“stakeholder satisfaction analysis”*. R6 alerted the researcher to the possible improvement on *“policies and guidelines that should be put in place.”*

R4 and R7 seem to have no recommendation in-terms of their contribution to the improvement of the current communication strategies. This could be a result of not being part of the team that is responsible for the improvement, or rather that they had nothing to contribute to WSU. Communication is an everyday part of the organizational lifecycle, the respondents had shown that new and impressive solutions do not come without problems, and there is a need to relook at the overall communication strategy.

Lastly, R3, R8, R9 and R10 suggested that the Marketing, Communication and Advancement (MCA) and Information Technology and Communication (ICT) departments should check if the disseminated information had reached its audiences and that the WSU communication strategy should be reviewed.

4.6 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The study established that the support section of the WSU campus has an understanding of the meaning of the term communication. According to the respondents, communication is how information flows by transferring information from one person (sender) to the other (receiver) with the hope that the receiver understands what is being said and gives feedback. Successful internal communication contributes to business objectives in supporting reciprocated understanding between different departments (Wimmer & Dominick 2010).

Mumby (2013), states that to improve overall work performance and increased employee dedication, great attention should be directly assigned to the company's internal communication. In terms of conveying messages, respondents felt that there was a need to make stakeholders aware of what was taking place in the campus. This was achieved by means of spreading the message and getting feedback.

The communication strategy at WSU was designed to benefit the WSU community as a whole, especially students and staff members as the primary stakeholders of the Institution. According to Bronn (2010), what makes up the organization’s reputation is its brand, product and employees. From the responses, whether an employee is in the support section or academic departments, the choice of the medium solely depends on

whether they are conversant with the preferred choice of communication. Largely, the choice of communication medium, considering their responses, was an electronic media, comprising emails and Facebook. Very few of the respondents preferred the traditional communication of notice boards and memos which were at the bottom end of the hierarchy, as recipients of information.

The WSU internal communication practices that are used are not effective and sufficient enough for employees because most messages are focused on WSU happenings such as strikes and not on academic or staff development issues. The norm is to update employees on information by sending messages via institutional communication channels. The majority said that the only effective form of communication at WSU was emails. The consensus was that emails is the only preferred choice with which they were acquainted. They believed that, without effective communication, WSU would not get any work done efficiently.

It was also established that, without a communication strategy, there would be many shortcomings associated with internal communication. The major advantage was that WSU has an established communication strategy to deal with communication challenges. Periodically, there is more use of the electronic tools than traditional means of communication. Employees pursue the use of electronic tools that they consider to be more effective to them and that they can easily access at their workstations. Very seldom would they receive complete information and would then seek more details from other employees. Student who do not know if WSU has a communication strategy could be those that are less informed or do not have a documented communication strategy at their disposal. A copy of the WSU communication strategy was provided to all members. It could be that a small number of employees have never read the communication strategy.

The findings reveal that stakeholders do play a role in WSU communication in shaping the overall vision and mission of WSU. Participating in communication means that employees are making a difference. The focus of the stakeholder engagement at WSU was to familiarize stakeholders about the outline and framework of the institution's communication objectives. Based on the findings, the researcher notes that WSU has clearly defined methods, processes and guidelines for stakeholder engagement processes. Bhattacharya (2010:84) and Lotila (2010:397) purport that the communications strategy guides how to engage with its diverse stakeholders, to maintain a consistent brand image, and build long-term relationships with them.

Assessing the current communication strategies at WSU would contribute fundamentally to the achievement of the Institution's goals and objectives. Preceding the communication, the management should consider the medium or media to be used to deliver the message to staff, which would, in turn, if received, give feedback to the management. By conveying the message in an accepted media and receiving feedback, the objective of

that communication would be achieved. Due to the size of the Chiselhurst site and the close vicinity of the offices, managers, as per the divisional management model, have a more direct interaction with line managers, which makes it easy for the chain of command.

Respondents did not know the term 'interpersonal communication', unless the researcher elaborated on the term. Internal communication was the only preferred choice of communication because it ensured that the message was delivered and feedback was expected. Given the geographical nature of WSU, emails were a better way of communication as WSU is a multi-campus Institution. WSU now has adopted the divisional management system, which means that WSU is run as a unitary Institution with four campuses, namely Mthatha, Butterworth, Queenstown and Buffalo City. Each campus operates as a business unit of the same Institution, with the Campus Rectors as the academic and administrative heads responsible for the promotion of quality education, research and community engagement and the provision of academic and administrative leadership at a campus level.

Finally, the study revealed that future relationships with WSU stakeholders could improve if there was continuous engagement by means of workshops. The views of the majority of respondents were in agreement that they were satisfied with how WSU communicates with them. Stakeholders found communication to be satisfactory owing to the continuous use of emails by management.

The apparent relationship between employee engagement and internal communication was notable. It cannot be denied that the undertaking of management and MCA does not solely lie with the WSU management but with the stakeholders too. The communication function of WSU should be addressed and an investigation should be conducted on the current tools of communication. If the tools of communication are adequate, it would mean that employees are aware and are satisfied.

4.8 CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this chapter was to bring to the fore a summary of the discoveries from the research undertaken. It also provided insight into the understanding of communication processes and feelings of the workforce, declared as staff members who are also stakeholders. The findings were gathered from the assessment of communication strategies which as the overall purpose of the study.

Attention was given to the assessment of communication strategies between higher education institutions and students, as perceived by students at WSU Chiselhurst campus.

Lastly, the researcher divulged how the findings could assist in developing a further understanding of the research, which could contribute to the implementation of the findings.

In closing, this chapter also summarized the findings of the study. Previous chapters brought to light the numerous issues that provided critical insights into the strategic communication practices at WSU. These strategies have assisted in the promotion and achievement of WSU's goals and objectives. This insight has informed the recommendations of the study which are addressed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 presented an analysis of data collected during the research process. Chapter 5 concludes the study and presents recommendations. These conclusions are centered on the research findings of the student responses to the questionnaire and staff responses to the interviews conducted.

Chapter five offers recommendations to improve the communication strategies employed by a higher education institution. In this study, the institution is the Walter Sisulu University, Chiselhurst campus.

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

An empirical investigation was conducted at WSU, Chiselhurst campus using a questionnaire and interview schedule. The following is a summary of the findings.

5.2.1 Frequency of communication tools

The results have shown that respondents were aware of all the WSU communication tools that are part of WSU's communication strategy. This strategy includes frequently used communication media by both students and staff. Frequently used tools, in this case, were noticeboards and social media.

Staff members felt that WSU does not always communicate on time, but the delays in communication caused by line managers or MCA has changed their perception of WSU's communicating strategy. However, they agree that they do receive information but the time factor was a problem.

5.2.2 Effectiveness of communication tools

The majority of the respondents are aware of the effectiveness of communication and which tools make communication effective in their campus. The majority of the students perceived that Facebook and emails were the most effective communication tools. Employees on the other hand, felt that email was very effective as a communication tool. It was also found that students opted for communication tools that they were conversant with for various types of information, information on issues facing WSU, university policies and strategic vision.

Interviewed staff members were of the opinion that not all information reached them on their emails. The MCA department should not only focus on the effectiveness of communication tools but it should undertake an investigation to determine whether the communication reached its target.

5.2.3 Impact of social media and technology in communication

The findings showed that the majority of the respondents felt that social networking was convenient for them to communicate via their smartphones but with new technology, such as E-learning, there is still room for improvement if WSU wants to supplement traditional classroom learning. New media were a preferred choice of communication by students. Staff members preferred emails to communicate with other staff members and management.

Social media has grown to be part of everyday use by university students, whether in the classroom or outside. Certain strategies to engage students on E-learning have been used but an obstacle was time consuming nature of using the platform.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the objectives of the study, the following conclusions were derived:

5.3.1 Current communication channels employed by WSU.

The methods and techniques used to send information are used for numerous reasons, i.e, effortlessness use, experience in the media, or simple preference, which may contribute to the success of the overall message (Zizka 2014:1) as cited in Wrench *et al.*, (2008). This statement highlights the importance and use of communication channels in any organization. The findings of the study indicate that the majority (57%) of the students preferred Facebook and noticeboards (49%) whereas staff members preferred emails, memorandums and Facebook. Interestingly, both students and staff members agree that Facebook, as the new media communication, is the preferred communication tool at WSU.

Respondents indicated that, within the communication strategy, Facebook, noticeboards and intranet (email) are their preferred choices and have been used effectively.

5.3.2 Communication barriers at WSU

Communication plays a vital role in institutions of higher learning. There is no preference as to who sends what to whom as long as the information has reached the receiver. The communication activity at HEIs is in the form of a channel. The respondent's perception would be the effectiveness of the channel before it becomes a barrier. By not being able or proficient to use various communication channels and traditional communication tools, placed in areas less frequented by students and staff caused a communication barrier.

Therefore, the use of social media and new technology for online classroom caused a barrier for the technologically challenged students and staff; hence, it is important not to isolate this faction of students from the entire population.

These communication barriers caused dissatisfaction to students and staff members, therefore, WSU needed to be proactive in communication problems and able to inform its stakeholders constantly and be prepared by identifying issues, developing strategies and maintaining stakeholder relationships.

Communication is often distorted during the dissemination of information. To counter such distortion, WSU needs to adopt a more simple approach to communication, taking into consideration the need to alleviate and eliminate communication problems.

5.3.3 Alternative communication channels that can be used to communicate between management and students.

The findings indicate that not the entire WSU community received information conveyed by the management. The study revealed that Facebook, email and noticeboards are the most commonly used channels to send and receive information at WSU. Bear in mind that not all of the students and staff are familiar with other forms of communication. There is a need for a new alternative communication channel that would reach as many students and staff members that would promote a dialogic horizontal and vertical communication through the institution.

WSU's students' and staff members' database, with all the contact numbers, can be used to send emails, information via Facebook and short message Sending (SMS) to the WSU community to supplement and ensure that everyone has received the relevant and important communicate. However, the database with staff and student details must be updated regularly to ensure that the relayed information reaches the current staff and student complement.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STUDY

The following recommendations can assist WSU in its communication strategies and information management.

- The research revealed that, even after the merger of former HDI such as Eastern Cape Technikon, Unitra and Border Technikon, there was a need for an effective communication strategy that would focus on encouraging communication between management, students and staff. Some of WSU's communication tools are not used optimally. Therefore, the MCA (Marketing, Communication and Advancement) should work closely with management to ensure that information reaches the targeted audience.
- It was also discovered that, in some instances, the grapevine was a preferred choice of sourcing information. WSU should eliminate this source as it will not only cause confusion but would derail the entire purpose of the communication strategy. For control purposes, WSU should work tirelessly to ensure that correct information is disseminated on time and strategic communication should be considered a priority. Prioritizing communication and identifying potential communication problems may reduce communication barriers.
- The study laid bare that WSU direction, policies and vision are only communicated when there is a problem or when WSU needs consultation with staff. This type of information is of paramount information for the survival of the institution. All students and employees need to be aware where the institution is heading and how the goals would be achieved.
- The study exposed that the intranet was not used to its utmost by students, with staff opting for other channels. For the purpose of internal communication, as part of WSU's communication strategy,

information must be circulated to allow the intranet to supply information timeously and with up-to-date information.

- The investigation showed that, in support sections, information does not reach employees on time. Only line managers receive information from management. These line managers only send information too late or not at all. It is imperative that line managers should always pass on information within their respective departments to fight rumors and gossip.
- There is a need for a communication policy at the WSU, with a detailed reference to social media. Social media is a modern phenomenon and not just another tool of communication. At the WSU, currently, communication with staff takes place mainly through email and the staff portal (intranet) and students with notice boards and meetings. However, various faculties, support sections and academic departments make use of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to communicate with staff and students. A common communication channel would be a better and more up-to-date communication tool to use in the future.
- Lastly, since WSU is a multi-campus university, the study revealed that it causes communication problems. Some information is not filtered down from institutional level down to delivery-site level. Delivery-site communication tools vary from campus to campus, which normally causes confusion for most students. That information may be delayed or does not reach each delivery site on time. Chiselhurst site, as per interviews with staff members, relies on emails to communicate with the other. It is, therefore, recommended that MCA should look into personalizing communication tools for each delivery site or conduct an investigation of preferred choice(s) of communication.

5.5. LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study has had the following limitations;

- a) Before the study, the researcher faced challenges obtaining the desired population, due to busy line managers and lecturers;
- b) The role designation of staff members interviewed ranged from five years to 20 years work experience at WSU. The student sample ranged from second year to fourth of year of study. Second-year students

were those that started from the extended programme as their first-year of study, but during the period they were in second level, but in third year of study in the main stream.

- c) It was a challenge to fit interview sessions with staff members as they had a busy schedule. Regardless, sufficient information prior to the study was given to respondents which allowed the attainment of adequate information to make the study wide-ranging and reliable; and
- d) An additional restraint of this study was the use of quantitative research method, as the results only provide numerical descriptions and commonly deliver fewer elaborative accounts of perceptions.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study was limited to WSU Chiselhurst site as a delivery site within the Buffalo City campus. Both students as well as staff members formed part of the study. It is, therefore, recommended that further research be done comparing the manner in which higher education institutions' communication strategies are used. Furthermore, the future researcher should also acquire the opinions and remarks from students and staff members at the higher education institutions.

The identified communication problems about WSU affected the relationship with management, lecturers, students and their peers. The following recommendations for further study were identified from this research:

- a) Results have shown that respondents were aware of communication tools available at their disposal. However, their choices revolved on the convenience and proficiency of these communication tools. The majority of the communication tools were included in the institutions communication strategy. Common communication tools used by respondents were print and electronic media. Therefore, lack of an effective use of all communication tools caused problems;
- b) Though there were numerous communication tools available at WSU, respondents reacted the most to communication tools with which they are familiar. Facebook, notice boards and internal newsletters were the most frequently used forms of communication by WSU. The time spent on each communication was significant. It should also be noted that the WSU website and internal newsletter had been less used due to the use of social media, such as Facebook. In addition, there were high

satisfactory levels of how WSU disseminates information and communicates with the staff and student compliment;

- c) The findings undoubtedly validate that respondents used social networking for both personal and academic purposes. However, the period of using such social media networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube increased over the period since learning how to use the communication tool. The respondents used their cellphones and smartphones to access the tool for the purpose of communication to their friends, colleagues and family;
- d) E-learning and WiSeUp and other on-line based education systems have been widely used, but the challenge was that students were not every was familiar with E-learning. Lectures have tried to introduce such media but not to the utmost. Therefore, respondents preferred contact means of learning and the low number of student using E-learning should increase to bring the number of students using new media technology to a balance; and
- e) The delay in introducing the student portal had caused difficulties on accessing relevant information at their disposal without going to campus physically. Some of the reasons mentioned were the possibilities of getting examination results, tuition statements and general information sent to all students at once via the portal.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The study found that students at WSU had a variety of communication tools at their disposal as per WSU's communication strategy. It was, therefore, up to students to choose from that variety, considering the preference of these communication tools. Staff members, as the other group of respondents, had a limited choice of communication tools. Although other tools are available, they choose to use emails. The communication from management at a multi-campus institution does not personalise communication per campus and per site, but only assumes that the disseminated information has reached the intended target.

After the merger of the three institutions, the communication strategy has developed to counter any communication barriers that might affect the process. It was before the merger that the stakeholders of WSU raised concerns and experienced problems. However, if students and staff members want to be part and feel

a sense of belonging to the institution, they should have a sense of purpose, which, in turn, would have a positive effect on academic progression and employee morale, productivity and confidence at WSU.

From the analysis of WSU communication strategies, students and staff revealed that effective internal communication can improve productivity and lead to academic excellence. It is, therefore, apparent that internal communication is a key factor in a multi-campus institution that strives to broaden the communication strategy to be inclusive of all stakeholder needs.

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ANNEXURE 1



**DIVISION OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND RESEARCH
DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT**

Nelson Mandela Drive
Mthatha Campus
Private Bag X1
MTHATHA 5117
Tel: + 27 47 502 2947/2647
Fax: +27 47 502 2185

Web Fax: 0866 541 093
E-mail: ecishe@wsu.ac.za
bandlac@gmail.com

Buffalo City
Potsdam Campus
EAST LONDON
Tel: + 43 708 5444
Fax: + 43 708 5458

27 May 2014

Mr. C. Mgweba
Durban University of Technology
South Africa

Dear Sir

Re: Request to conduct a Research study among Staff and Students at WSU

Provisional permission is granted for you to undertake your study (An assessment of Communication Strategies between Higher Education Institutions and Students: A case of the Walter Sisulu University). You are required to submit ethical clearance certificate from your university before you can be allowed to collect data from WSU.

Regards



Dr. E.N. Cishe
Acting Director: Research Development

Walter Sisulu University

ANNEXURE 2



MANAGEMENT SCIENCES: FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (FREC)

03 September 2015

Student No: 21242783
FREC No: 24/14FREC

Dear Mr C Mgweba

MASTERS DEGREE IN TECHNOLOGY: PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT

TITLE: AN ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND STUDENTS: A CASE OF THE WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY.

Please be advised that the FREC Committee has reviewed your proposal and the following decision was made: Ethical Level 2 -Full Approval

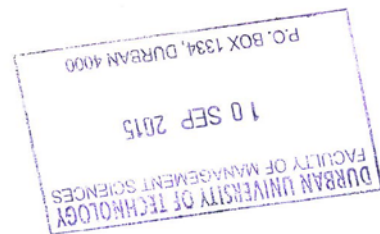
Approval has been granted for a period of two years, after which you are required to apply for safety monitoring and annual recertification. Please use the form located at the Faculty. This form must be submitted to the FREC at least 3 months before the ethics approval for the study expires.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the FREC according to the FREC SOP's.

Please note that ANY amendments in the approved proposal require the approval of the FREC as outlined in the FREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely

Prof N Dorasamy
Chairperson: FREC



ANNEXURE 3



Title of the Research Study: Assessing communication strategies at Higher Education Institutions: Case of the Walter Sisulu University.

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Chulumanco Mgweba

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Prof V.P Rawjee (D.Phil.) & Dr P Naidoo (D.Phil)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:

The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE, 2001) brought with it distinct changes and challenges to the higher education landscape. Amongst the major changes were the mergers of various higher education institutions. In 2005, Walter Sisulu University for Technology and Science, Eastern Cape, (WSU), was established through the merger of the former Border Technikon, Eastern Cape Technikon and the University of Transkei. Walter Sisulu University (WSU) has four campuses, namely Nelson Mandela Drive in Mthatha (NMD), Butterworth (Ibika), Queenstown and Buffalo City campus (BC). The University caters for people of the Eastern Cape's border and Kei regions

As a result the university attempts to communicate with the large number of stakeholder's across the six sites. This therefore presents various communication challenges. The overall aim of this study is to examine the perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of communication strategies between Walter Sisulu University and students. To achieve this, the following objectives have been set:

- To identify and evaluate the current communication channels employed by Walter Sisulu University (WSU) in relation to management and students.
- To identify and evaluate communication barriers at the WSU.
- To explore alternative of communication channels that can be used to communicate between management and students.

Outline of the Procedures:

As a participant you will be required to answer questions as honestly as possible. The interview comprises of 18 questions and will take approximately 10 – 15 minutes to. The analysis of the results will enable the researcher to provide sound recommendations to Walter Sisulu University regarding

the importance of internal communication. Prior permission has been obtained from Walter Sisulu University Research committee to proceed with this research.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant:

There is no known or anticipated risk to you or your organisation as a participant of this research.

Benefits:

This research aims to assist in understanding the importance of effective communication strategies and how successfully applying these communication strategies can enable Higher Education Institutions to foster stronger bonds with key stakeholders. It is also envisaged that this research will contribute in highlighting the importance of strategic communication tools and how they can be addressed if there is communication breakdown between the Institution and students. The potential benefit to the researcher will be publications in accredited journals and conference papers and the award of an MTech: Public Relations Management.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study:

As a participant you may decide to withdraw yourself from this study at any time, without any negative consequences, by advising the researcher that you wish to discontinue participation.

Remuneration:

As a participant you will not receive any remuneration or compensation.

Costs of the Study:

As a participant you will not be liable to cover any costs for this study.

Confidentiality:

As a participant all information provided by you will remain confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or research paper resulting from this study. My supervisor, statisticians and I will be the only individuals with access to the data you provide.

Research-related Injury:

This research does not pose any danger to the participants. Questionnaires will be asked to all participants and follow-up interviews will be conducted with those who wish to further participate in the study.

Persons to contact in the event of any problems or queries

- Researcher - Chulumanco Mgweba – 043 709 4067 or cmgweba@wsu.ac.za
- Supervisor- Prof V.P Rawjee – 031 373 6826 or rawjeeve@dut.ac.za
- Co- supervisor – Dr P Naidoo- 031 373 5277 or paulenep@dut.ac.za
- Institutional Research Ethics administrator: 031 373 2900
- DVC: TIP – Prof F Otieno: 031 373 2382 or dvctip@dut.ac.za

General:

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. This study has been reviewed and accepted by the Faculty of Business, Management Sciences Research Committee. Should you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information, please contact me on the above details. A copy of this information will be provided to all participants.

CONSENT

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Chulumanco Mgweba, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study – Research Ethics Clearance number 24/14 FREC
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware of the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings develop during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

☐

I have read the consent form and agree to participate in this study.

Full Name of Participant

Date

Signature

I, Chulumanco Mgweba herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Full Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

ANNEXURE 4



5 December 2015

LETTER OF CONSENT

RE: Postgraduate studies in Master of Technology: Public Relations Management.

Dear participant,

I am currently an MTech student at the Durban University of Technology – student number 21242783. My research topic is “Assessing communication Strategies at Higher Education Institutions: Case of the Walter Sisulu University”. My supervisor is Prof V.P Rawjee and co-supervisor is Dr P Naidoo. The overall aim of this study is to examine the perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of communication Strategies between Walter Sisulu University and their students.

This letter therefore serves as an invitation for you to consider participating in this study. The interview will take approximately 10 – 15 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons, and without prejudice or any adverse consequences. The information you give will only be used for research purposes and will be aggregated with other responses and only the overall information will be used. Your identity and individual answers will be kept totally confidential. Should you wish to discuss this further, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor Prof V.P Rawjee, telephone: 031 373 6826 or Email at Rawjee@dut.ac.za.

Your assistance will be much appreciated,

Yours faithfully,

Chulumanco Mgweba

(cmgweba@wsu.ac.za)

073 078 3937

ANNEXURE 5

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STAFF

1. What position do you hold at WSU?
2. How long have you worked at WSU?
3. What gender are you?
4. What does the term “Communication” mean to you?
5. What is the main purpose of Communication?
6. Whom is it designed to benefit?
7. Communication is generally divided into categories, which are Internal and Inter-personal.
 - 7.1 What do you think each of these categories are?
 - 7.2 Which of these does WSU use?
8. Do you believe that communication plays an important role in the University? Explain your answer.
9. What do you think is a “Communication Strategy”?
10. Does WSU have any Communication Strategy?
 - 10.1 If not explain why?
 - 10.1 If yes, List some of these activities.
11. Does WSU’s internal stakeholders play an important role in communication?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
12. Does WSU stakeholders assist in developing WSU’s communication?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

13. Are these stakeholders committed to the communication strategy?

☐ Yes

☐ No

14. Do they assist when communication problems are experienced?

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. What problems do you see when it comes to communication at WSU?

16. Is WSU dependent on these communication strategies? Explain your answer.

17. Are you satisfied with how WSU communicates with you?

☐ Yes

☐ No

18. Would you agree that it is crucial to maintain relationships using communication tools at your disposal with the WSU community? Explain your answer.

19. How do you see your future relationship with these stakeholders?

20. Why is communication important in organisations?

21. Do you believe that WSU's current communication tools are adequate?

☐ Yes

☐ No

22. What recommendations can you provide to improve your current communication Strategies?

ANNEXURE 6



Title of the Research Study: An assessment of communication Strategies between Higher Education Institutions and students: A case of the Walter Sisulu University

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: ChulumancoMgweba

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Prof V.P Rawjee (D.Phil.) & Dr P Naidoo (D.Phil)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:

The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE, 2001) brought with it distinct changes and challenges to the higher education landscape. Amongst the major changes were the mergers of various higher education institutions. In 2005, Walter Sisulu University for Technology and Science, Eastern Cape, (WSU), was established through the merger of the former Border Technikon, Eastern Cape Technikon and the University of Transkei. Walter Sisulu University (WSU) has four campuses, namely Nelson Mandela Drive in Mthatha (NMD), Butterworth (Ibika), Queenstown and Buffalo City campus (BC). The University caters for people of the Eastern Cape's border and Kei regions

As a result the university attempts to communicate with the large number of stakeholder's across the six sites. This therefore presents various communication challenges. The overall aim of this study is to examine the perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of communication strategies between Walter Sisulu University and students. To achieve this, the following objectives have been set:

- To identify and evaluate the current communication channels employed by Walter Sisulu University (WSU) in relation to management and students.
- To identify and evaluate communication barriers at the WSU.
- To explore alternative of communication channels that can be used to communicate between management and students.

Outline of the Procedures:

As a participant you will be required to complete the questionnaire as honestly as possible. The questionnaire comprises of 4 pages and will take approximately 10 – 15 minutes to complete and after arrange an interview (if you are willing to participate) that should take about 15 minutes of your time. The responses of the questionnaire will be analysed using the SPSS (version 20) software. The results of the analyses will enable the researcher to provide sound recommendations to Walter Sisulu University regarding the importance of internal communication. Prior permission has been obtained from Walter Sisulu University Research committee to proceed with this research.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant:

There is no known or anticipated risk to you or your organisation as a participant of this research.

Benefits:

This research aims to assist in understanding the importance of effective communication strategies and how successfully applying these communication strategies can enable Higher Education Institutions to foster stronger bonds with key stakeholders. It is also envisaged that this research will contribute in highlighting the importance of strategic communication tools and how they can be addressed if there is communication breakdown between the Institution and students. The potential benefit to the researcher will be publications in accredited journals and conference papers and the award of an MTech: Public Relations Management.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study:

As a participant you may decide to withdraw yourself from this study at any time, without any negative consequences, by advising the researcher that you wish to discontinue participation.

Remuneration:

As a participant you will not receive any remuneration or compensation.

Costs of the Study:

As a participant you will not be liable to cover any costs for this study.

Confidentiality:

As a participant all information provided by you will remain confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or research paper resulting from this study. My supervisor, statisticians and I will be the only individuals with access to the data you provide.

Research-related Injury:

This research does not pose any danger to the participants. Questionnaires will be e-mailed to all participants and follow-up interviews will be conducted with those who wish to further participate in the study.

Persons to contact in the event of any problems or queries

- Researcher - ChulumancoMgweba – 043 709 4067 or cmgweba@wsu.ac.za
- Supervisor- Prof V.P Rawjee – 031 373 6826 or rawjeeve@dut.ac.za
- Co- supervisor – Dr P Naidoo- 031 373 5277 or paulenep@dut.ac.za
- Institutional Research Ethics administrator: 031 373 2900
- DVC: TIP – Prof F Otieno: 031 373 2382 or dvctip@dut.ac.za

General:

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. This study has been reviewed and accepted by the Faculty of Business, Management Sciences Research Committee. Should you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information, please contact me on the above details. A copy of this information will be provided to all participants.



CONSENT

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, ChulumancoMgweba, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study – Research Ethics Clearance number 24/14 FREC.
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware of the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings develop during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

☐

I have read the consent form and agree to participate in this study.

Full Name of Participant

Date

Signature

I, ChulumancoMgweba herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Full Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

ANNEXURE 7



5 Perks Road
Morningside
East London
5247

30 September 2015

LETTER OF CONSENT

RE: Postgraduate studies in Master of Technology: Public Relations Management.

Dear participant,

I am currently an MTech student at the Durban University of Technology – student number 21242783. My research topic is “Assessing communication strategies at Higher Education Institutions: Case of the Walter Sisulu University”. My supervisor is Prof V.P Rawjee and co- supervisor is Dr P Naidoo. The overall aim of this study is to examine the perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of communication Strategies between Walter Sisulu University and their students.

This letter therefore serves as an invitation for you to consider participating in this study. The attached questionnaire will take approximately 10 – 15 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons, and without prejudice or any adverse consequences. The information you give will only be used for research purposes and will be aggregated with other responses and only the overall information will be used. Your identity and individual answers will be kept totally confidential. Should you wish to discuss this further, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor Prof V.P Rawjee, telephone: 031 373 6826 or Email at Rawjee@dut.ac.za.

Your assistance will be much appreciated,

Yours faithfully,
ChulumancoMgweba
(cmgweba@wsu.ac.za)
073 078 3937

ANNEXURE 8

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS

1. The questionnaire must be filled in by PEN and returned to the researcher.
2. You may ask for clarity where needed.

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY BEFORE COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Information provided will be treated in strict confidence.
2. You do not have to put your particulars to the questionnaire (*i.e. Name and student number*)
3. Information provided will only be used for research purposes.
4. Information provided will be used to contribute to the WSU research database

Section 1

Respondent demographics

Please tick the list provided

1. Education Level(*Please Tick on list*)

Year 1	
Year 2	
Year 3	
Year 4	

2. In which of the below mentioned WSU sites are you attending?(*Please Tick on list*)

College Street	
Potsdam	
Chiselhurst	
Cambridge Street (Arts)	
Heritage	
ABSA Stadium	

3. In which faculty?(*Please Tick on list*)

Business Sciences	
Science ,Engineering and Technology	

4. Please state your designation.*(Please Tick on list)*

Student	
Academic	
Administration	

5. Number of years as a student/in your designation at WSU*(Please Tick on list)*

0 -5 years	
6 – 10 years	
11 – 15 years	
16+	

Section 2

FREQUENCY OF TOOLS OF COMMUNICATION

1. The following communication tools are **frequently** used by WSU?*(Please Tick on list)*

Internal website	
Internal newsletter	
Grapevine	
Facebook	
Intranet	
Email	
Brochures	
Notice boards	
Meetings	
Staff and student meetings	
Video conferences	
Presentations and seminars	
Instant messaging	
Other	

2. The following tools are frequently used by **STUDENTS** at WSU(*Please tick on list*)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Internal website					
Internal newsletter					
Grapevine					
Facebook					
Intranet					
Email					
Brochures					
Notice boards					
Meetings					
Video conferences					
Presentations and seminars					
Other					

3. I use the following tools most **frequently** for communication at WSU?(*Please tick on list*)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Internal website					
Internal newsletter					
Grapevine					
Facebook					
Intranet					
Email					
Brochures					
Notice boards					
Meetings					
Staff and student meetings					
Video conferences					
Presentations and seminars					
Other					

4. Please tick on list, how often do you use these WSU tools of communication? (**Please tick on list**)

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Very Often	Always
Internal website					
Internal newsletter					
Grapevine					
Facebook					
Intranet					
Email					
Brochures					
Notice boards					

Meetings					
Staff and student meetings					
Video conferences					
Presentations and seminars					
Other					

Section 3

EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS

1. I find the following communication tools the most **effective** in receiving information at WSU?(**Please tick on list**)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Internal website					
Internal newsletter					
Grapevine					
Facebook					
Intranet					
Email					
Brochures					
Notice boards					
Meetings					
Video conferences					
Presentations and seminars					
Other					

2. WSU's effective communication systems have contributed towards a successfully merged institution(**Please tick on list**)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree

3. **STUDENTS** consider the following tools as most effective forms of communication at WSU? (**Please tick on list**)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Internal website					
Internal newsletter					
Grapevine					
Facebook					
Intranet					
Email					
Brochures					
Notice boards					
Meetings					

Video conferences					
Presentations and seminars					
Other					

4. I find the following tools the most user-friendly in receiving information at WSU (Please tick on list)

	Not important	Slightly Important	Somewhat important	Important	Critical
Internal website					
Internal newsletter					
Grapevine					
Facebook					
Intranet					
Email					
Brochures					
Notice boards					
Meetings					
Staff and student meetings					
Video conferences					
Presentations and seminars					
Other					

5. I find the following communication tools satisfactory at WSU (Please tick on list)

	Very satisfied	Slightly Important	Somewhat important	Important	Critical
Internal website					
Internal newsletter					
Grapevine					
Facebook					
Intranet					
Email					
Brochures					
Notice boards					
Meetings					
Staff and student meetings					
Video conferences					
Presentations and seminars					
Other					

6. In the last six months, what has happened to your level of satisfaction? (Please tick on list)

Stayed the same	
Gone up	
Gone down	

Not sure	
----------	--

7. Which of the following communication tools best describes your impression of communication channels at WSU? **(Please tick on list)**

	Keeps me informed	Keeps me fairly informed	Keeps me adequately informed	Gives me a limited information	Does not tell much at all about what is going on
Internal website					
Internal newsletter					
Grapevine					
Facebook					
Intranet					
Email					
Brochures					
Notice boards					
Meetings					
Staff and student meetings					
Video conferences					
Presentations and seminars					
Other					

8. How useful do you find the information you currently receive at WSU? **(Please tick on list)**

Very useful	
Somewhat useful	
Not very useful	
Not useful at all	

9. How would you rate your knowledge of WSU, its strategic direction, policies, an ongoing turnaround, issues facing the institution?. (Rating: 1 being not knowledgeable at all to 5 being highly knowledgeable)

Rating	1	2	3	4	5
Strategic Direction					
Policies and procedures					
Ongoing accomplishment					
Issues facing WS					

10. Where do you currently receive information about what is going on at WSU? **(Please tick on list)**

Internal website	
Internal newsletter	
Grapevine	
Facebook	

Intranet	
Email	
Brochures	
Notice boards	
Meetings	
Staff and student meetings	
Video conferences	
Presentations and seminars	
Instant messaging	
Other	

11. From the following topics, which one do you receive communication about? **(Please tick on list)**

WSU's strategies & Visions	
University policies & procedures	
Issues affecting WSU	
Student & Staff initiatives	
WSU success stories	
Other	

12. How much of WSU newsletter & bulletin do you read? **(Please tick on list)**

Generally read all of it	
Read most of it	
Read some of it	
Read sections of interest	
Do not read at all	
Not interested	

SECTION 4

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY IN COMMUNICATION

1. Which type of social media do you use? **(Please tick on list)**

Social networking	
Video sharing	
Blogging	
WiSeUp	
Youtube	
Wikis	
Podcast	

2. How do you access social media? **(Please tick on list)**

3G	
ADSL	

Phone as modem	
Cellphone	
Smartphone	

3. When do you use social media? **(Please tick on list)**

Never	
Rarely	
Monthly	
Weekly	
Multiple times a day	
Daily	
Always on line	

4. Which one(s) of these social networks do you use? **(Please tick on list)**

Facebook	
Twitter	
Whatsapp	
Youtube	
Skype	
LinkedIn	
Instagram	

5. How long have you used social media? **(Please tick on list)**

<1 year	
2 years	
3 years	
4 years	
5 years	
5 + years	

6. For what purpose(s) do you use social media for? **(Please tick on list)**

Academic	
Socialising	
To communicate	
Networking	
Looking for jobs	
Finding friends	

7. Are you aware that WSU has a social media profile to communicate? **(Please tick on list)**

Yes	
No	

8. Which of these social media profile pages does WSU have to communicate? **(Please tick on list)**

Student clubs	
Student newspapers	
Institutional programmes	
Alumni groups	
Events	
Notifications	

9. Do you know what an online classroom is? **(Please tick on list)**

Yes	
No	

10. How familiar are you with learning & teaching via social learning? **(Please tick on list)**

Never used	
Somewhat familiar	
Very familiar	

11. Does WSU use E-Learning? **(Please tick on list)**

Yes	
No	
Maybe	

12. Which type of these e-learning tools are you aware of? **(Please tick on list)**

CourseLab	
WiSeUp	
Blackboard	
Elucidat	
Easygenerator	
Notifications	

13. Compared to the traditional classroom setting, how connected are you with other students? **(Please tick on list)**

Very connected	
connected	
Somewhat connected	
unconnected	
Very unconnected	

14. Compared to the traditional classroom setting, do you have more access to the lecturer through available communication tools at WSU, such as WiSeUp and E-mail? **(Please tick on list)**

More access	
Some access	
Less access	
Not sure	

15. How you think that you best learn and communicate via new technology? **(Please tick on list)**

	Not at all	Fits somewhat	Fits better	Enjoy learning this way
Reading				
Listening				
Discussing				
Watching				
Searching for information				

16. Do you know what student portal is? **(Please tick on list)**

Yes	
No	
Not sure	

17. Does WSU have student portal? **(Please tick on list)**

Yes	
No	
Not sure	

18. In the past months, how often have you logged into the student portal? **(Please tick on list)**

Daily	
Weekly	
Occasionally	
Just once	
Not at all	

19. In the past months, have you used any of the following functions? **(Please tick on list)**

Update personal details	
View results	
Enrol online	

20. Did you find the student portal useful and the menu system easy to follow? **(Please tick on list)**

Yes	
No	
Not sure	

SECTION E

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS.

1. Does WSU's communication makes you identify with it or feel a vital part of it and how?
2. Do your receive information about management actions, accomplishments and/or failures before you hear the information informally?
3. Communication often follows a certain channel, either up-to-down, down-to-up or horizontal, what would you say communication in WSU is?
4. What is the best thing about communication at WSU?
5. Do you agree that interactive online teaching create a better Teaching and Learning environments?
6. How would you rate your current ability to use social media?
7. Does online teaching & Learning give you a better understanding of your learning processes?
8. Do you feel connected to the lecturer when using online teaching & Learning?
9. What made you start using social media?
10. What do you think student portal is?