# Communication Challenges: An exploratory study of international students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

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I would not have been able to complete this degree without the help of the following people:

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To all of you – Thank You!

# Declaration

I, Maroonisha Maharajh, do hereby declare, that this dissertation is the result of my own research and that it has not been submitted before in part or full or any other degree or to any other university.



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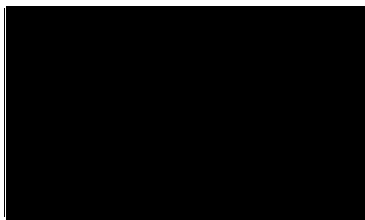
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# Abstract

Globalization is impacting on education worldwide. As a result, the University of KwaZulu- Natal (UKZN), like other universities worldwide, have identified an opportunity to increase their profit margins by expanding their marketing initiatives internationally in order to recruit foreign students. The purpose of conducting this study was to investigate the sustainability of UKZN's Student Exchange Programme in an increasingly competitive industry.

The rationale behind the research is that communication challenges between UKZN, International Partner Universities and students, are threatening the overall success of the student exchange programme, with partners threatening to reduce their student exchange numbers. This rationale was tested via primary research in the form of a questionnaire distributed to international partner universities, who then randomly selected a target sample from students who had recently returned from a UKZN student exchange. Interviews were also conducted with a smaller sample and secondary research, in the form of a literature review of previous research findings and theoretical perspectives, was conducted.

The sample comprised of ninety nine international students from first-world countries, who participated in a student exchange to UKZN. Respondent profiles included both male and female second-year tertiary respondents, from the European Union (EU) and the United States of America (USA).

The major findings of the investigation revealed that the majority of respondents agreed that communication challenges at UKZN posed a credible threat to the future success of the exchange programme. UKZN should, therefore, focus on implementing long and short-term communication's strategies. The research also found that, by addressing international concerns through the training and development of student exchange officers, will help equip officers to deal with a continually changing international relations' climate.

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# Chapter 1 – An introduction to the study

## 1.1 Introduction

In a world that is in the throes of multiple and conflicting forces of globalization, the internationalisation of education is increasingly being regarded as an essential component to cross-cultural understanding and global awareness. Taylor (2004: 149) found that towards the end of the 20th century, international academic institutions from first world countries recognized that strategic planning assumed new importance within the management of higher education at the institutional level. Driven by pressure on resources, the growth in public accountability, and the emergence of market forces influencing teaching and research, institutional leaders have been forced to assess their activities and to prioritise for the future. Against this backdrop, many universities have moved to develop institutional strategies for internationalisation.

From a South African perspective, the term internationalisation is a relatively new concept which can be traced back to the early 1990's. The whole idea of bringing the many disparate international activities of universities under the umbrella term internationalisation is relatively recent. It has involved a far reaching re-interpretation of the basic missions of the university, effecting cultural change directly linked to the growing presence of international influences in people's daily lives. Bond & Lemasson (1998: 34-36) agreed that higher education in all sectors is being transformed to prepare today's students to work in a world that is undergoing a wide-ranging process of integration and globalization, education must do better to prepare its beneficiaries to think in both a global and differentiated context, help them take a cosmopolitan view and be more aware of cultural differences and promote an open, understanding mind.

The end of apartheid in South Africa (SA), in 1994, saw the opening of a multitude of opportunities to South Africans. This new era also created opportunities for international students to participate in exchange programmes, so that they too, could experience life in South Africa. Prior to democracy, the concept of international student

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exchanges was simply not possible.  When South Africa finally broke down its segregation barriers and opened its doors to other countries, there was an identifiable need for student exchanges in line with government driven initiatives, which steered the country towards the international arena.  This need for international acceptance and the ability to compete on a global scale saw the country encouraging relations with the international community.  There is huge emphasis on the need for globalization and South Africa has actively sought the role of partnering with international institutions to achieve this need.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), previously known as the University of Natal, had sought to drive this initiative, through policy, by increasing the access of education to all.  The need for a student exchange programme was identified and, in 1999, an international office was established with the aim of sending local African students abroad, as well as attracting international students to UKZN.

The Student Exchange Programme, as identified in UKZN's Foreign Student Guide (2009:  10), is a reciprocal arrangement between UKZN and foreign universities.  The aim of the programme is to provide local students with the opportunity of studying abroad for one semester and it allows for international students to experience life in South Africa for the same period.

It is further defined as a programme whereby undergraduate students participate in a reciprocal exchange with an international university.  The student is responsible for paying fees directly to their home institutions and, in return, they receive a waiver of fees at the elected host institution.  The choice of country/university is governed by the negotiated agreements that have been established between the institutions and all courses completed at the host institution will be credited at the home institution whereby students will benefit by receiving credits towards their degrees.

Despite the positive opportunities that student exchanges have created, Brown (2008: 5) found that international students studying in foreign countries are experiencing

increased stress levels. This could be attributed to the demanding nature of the institutions' programmes, the need for a high level of English language, and the vast differences between the host country and the student's academic culture at his/her home institution. Lin & Rancer (2003: 146) also found that intercultural communication apprehension to be inversely correlated with a measure of "intercultural willingness to communicate". It seems that individuals with a high level of intercultural communication apprehension would be more likely to have negative expectations of international contact situations and thus of a negative study-abroad experience.

The noted increase in repetitive complaints received from foreign students participating in the exchange programme relating to communications problems, is of special concern to the UKZN international relations department. The seemingly minor problems are impacting on the university's credibility to host international students and there appears to be a growing concern among international universities to send students on exchanges to UKZN, Singh (2009: 4). Singh also noted that constant complaints from students and criticism from international universities are harming the reputation of UKZN as a university of choice for student exchanges. Repetitive comments received by Singh (2009: 4) from various international partner universities appears to indicate that there is cause for concern regarding the ability of UKZN Student Exchange Officers (SEO) to manage their responsibilities in line with international expectations. Unchecked, these problems may affect the mutual agreement between the universities, with a possibility of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) being questioned.

This study, therefore, sets out to investigate some of the communication challenges facing international students from first-world countries that choose to spend a semester studying at UKZN. A key focus of the study will be aimed at understanding the communication challenges facing the students by carefully assessing the communication's tools that are currently being used to liaise and communicate with prospective international students entering into the UKZN student exchange programme.

## 1.2    Problem Statement

Gacel-Avila (2005: 54-70) found that the conceptualization of comprehensive internationalization is still unfamiliar and unknown to the majority of policy and decision makers.  Basic theories and concepts of internationalization are not very popular topics for researchers of higher education, thus making these concepts fragile and unknown. The use of effective communication tools can help to ease communication challenges and problems by informing and educating international students of the various challenges involved in studying at an African institution before their participation in the programme.  If communication challenges affecting the harmony of the programme are identified, then this may alleviate and better prepare international students for their stay in SA.  Careful planning and strategic communication could ensure a harmonious experience for the international exchange student.  This study, therefore, sets out to investigate the communication challenges that international students experience during their exchange visit to UKZN.

## 1.3    Aim and objectives of the study

The overall aim of this study is to identify the major communication challenges experienced by international students during a four month student exchange programme at UKZN. The sub-objectives of this study are:

- To identify the communication tools used by UKZN's International Relations Department to liaise with foreign students.

- To assess the communication tools used to communicate to students on the student exchange programme.

- To assess the effect that these communications challenges pose to the UKZN international office; the student exchange officers and the foreign student; and

- To identify ways of addressing these communication challenges.

## 1.4    Rationale of the study

This research will be focused on the International Relations office at UKZN, with core emphasis on the student exchange programme.  The researcher worked in this department for a short period of five months and as such was able to observe repetitive communication complaints from foreign students participating in the exchange programme.  With the guidance of UKZN management, this topic was chosen as a means of identifying some of the problems experienced, with a view to finding solutions to the issues highlighted.  According to Sillars and Vangelisti (2006: 364-377), social, cultural, and historical factors influence the way people interpret messages.  Therefore, the interpretation of messages, communicated from UKZN to the international students in their home countries, is subject to their influences and understanding.  The issue of misinterpretation of communication can be avoided if the student exchange programme is planned, managed and facilitated by clear and effective communication.  Consequently, UKZN will be able to take a proactive, rather than a reactive stance with regards to communication barriers.  Communication is the binding element and is a critical factor that should be enforced in the institution's protocols when dealing with international students.   Planned and managed communication during both pre- and post- student arrival can, therefore, be seen as a core element that addresses the need to overcome communication barriers.  Therefore, it is crucial to investigate and develop an understanding of the role of communication during the planning, management and recruitment of international students into local South African universities.

## 1.5    Assumptions of the study

UKZN will be able to enhance its reputation as an international university of choice by identifying and finding solutions to the communication's criticisms and complaints received.   By finding solutions to its problems, UKZN will be able to enhance its reputation and instill trust in its ability to host foreign students.  It is hoped that this study will contribute to an increase in foreign student numbers to the university.

## 1.6    Research methodology

The research is both qualitative and quantitative in nature.  It draws conclusions based on data collected from the target sample comprised of ninety-nine international students from first world countries, who participated in a student exchange to UKZN. Respondent profiles include either male or female second-year tertiary respondents, from Europe (EU), or the United States of America (USA).

## 1.7    Format of the study

The dissertation is divided into five chapters.  Chapter One introduces the research topic; provides a background and gives an outline of the study.  It further highlights the problem statement; outlines a set of objectives and, finally, provides the scope of the study.

Chapter Two presents a theoretical foundation to the study.  This is a basis for the design of the research instrument.  This chapter critically reviews the relevant literature and how it relates to the study.  Emphasis is placed on the industry driving forces that affect communication and the communication challenges faced by the international students, as well as UKZN staff.  A detailed discussion further emphasises how these driving forces may affect the growth and survival of the student exchange programme.

Chapter Three examines the methodology employed in the study. This was achieved by determining the research instrument, sample, and the method of obtaining data, reliability and validity of the research study.

Chapter Four presents the results of the field work conducted. It sets out to analyse and interpret the data gathered from the interviews and questionnaires and uses these findings to either confirm or reject the literature review.

In chapter Five, conclusions are drawn based on the findings from the study. Based on the interpretation of the results, this chapter further offers a set of recommendations pertaining to the current role and positioning of international communications and public relations within UKZN.

## 1.8    Conclusion

This chapter has provided an outline for the study by introducing the problem of communications challenges experienced by foreign students studying at UKZN under the student exchange programme. The next chapter will provide an overview of the literature review for this study.

# Chapter 2 - Literature Review

## 2.1    Introduction

The previous chapter has given an outline of the study; which sets out to seek and investigate the communication's challenges facing international students in the student exchange programme.  This chapter reviews the literature related to the following areas:

- The impact of industry driving forces on student exchange;
- International relations trends and communication;
- Barriers to intercultural communications; and
- The functions and roles of communications in the exchange programme at UKZN.

## 2.2    The impact of industry driving forces on student exchange

The driving forces in any industry is said to be any trend, practice, policy or decision that influences or has an impact on the industries direction.  In the case of the student exchange programme, this particular industry is influenced by global trends and policies.  Any decisions or policies implemented in this regard influences the number of student exchanges and the destination and quality of the exchange experience. Thomson (2005:74) identifies three steps in analyzing industry driving forces, viz:

2.2.1  Identifying the driving forces;

2.2.2  Assessing the effects of the driving forces on industry; and

2.2.3  Identifying and implementing strategy changes to prepare for the impact of the driving forces.

These steps are discussed below:

## 2.2.1      Identifying the driving forces

Information Analysis Incorporated (www.infoa.com 2009), states that driving forces are defined as the changing needs that affect the strategic outcomes of business systems. Education, like other businesses, is affected by new trends and developments, especially when dealing with international students.  Changing standards, needs and technologies in international countries creates the need for UKZN to strive towards similar goals, in order to meet the needs of its foreign students.  The four major driving forces affecting foreign students include:

- *Customer needs* – The capability and quality of such systems to fulfill the needs of customers often differentiate an organization from its competitors;
- *Regulatory changes and emerging standards* – Concurrently, organizations are continually under pressure to respond to changes in laws, regulations and policies that govern their operations. Similarly, emerging industry standards may require changes in system functionality;
- *Evolving technologies* – New functionality in new versions of products or entirely new products provide opportunities to enhance systems. Sometimes, as technology evolves, vendors discontinue support for a component of a system, which in some cases, puts mission-critical legacy systems at risk; and
- *Budget and time constraints* – Leaders responsible for legacy systems must endeavor to balance all driving forces with the cost of systems development and operations. In fact, organizations typically face the need to provide more and better functionality in shorter time frames and reduced budgets.

The marketing and recruiting of international universities and students needs to be taken into cognizance when marketing UKZN as a first choice for student exchanges in light of the above driving forces.

### 2.2.1.1 Marketing UKZN as a first choice for student exchanges

Sorrel (2007:1) states that effective research creates sustainable strategies and an increased market share. In order for an organization to stand out from the rest, it needs to demonstrate that there is a clear understanding of its market and must spear-head a marketing strategy. Walters & Adams (2001: 270) found that many institutions are beginning to examine ways of integrating their international recruiting strategy with Web marketing, online applications and other facets which have become generically known as e-commerce or e-business.

Even though its core function is education, UKZN is ultimately a business. Students participating in the exchange programme from first-world countries bring with them strong international currencies that buy them a semester at UKZN, at quadruple the price of a local student. Student fees, combined with residence fees and daily expenses, result in huge profits, for example:

*Fee Structure 2009/2010:*

| | |
|---|---|
| Registration: | $970 (per course, average number of courses x 3) x current exchange rate R7.25 = R21097.50 |
| Accommodation | R14240 (per semester) |
| Meals | R14835 (per semester) |
| Inclusive Total: | R50172.50 (per student per semester) |
| Total students (2009) | 97 (Semester 1-50, Semester 2-47) |
| Total Received: | R4 866 732.50 |
| Services offered: | The same as a local student |

Figure 1.1: Excerpt from Student fee guide, UKZN (2009)

Figure 1.1 reflects that the recruitment of students into the student exchange programme is extremely profitable. Therefore, an increase in the numbers of international students recruited will expand the bottom line of the university considerably. All efforts should, therefore, be aimed at increasing student numbers in order to generate bigger profits. To achieve this increased number, a clear marketing plan should be put in place. According to Kotler (2006:43), a basic marketing plan must be able to define a business niche, summarize objectives and present strategies for achieving desired goals.

Together with good planning, a marketing plan must also involve appropriate strategies for implementation. This may include effective communications; the use of negotiated, agreed upon targets that are fair but challenging and that are backed by supporting mechanisms for resource allocation; and the identification of key bodies and individuals with specific responsibilities for implementing specific parts of the strategy. Taylor (2004: 169) found that such detail is crucial within the planning process and is very important if success is to be achieved. Repetitive communication problems that are not effectively addressed have the potential to threaten the overall success of the exchange programme.

The industry driving forces was discussed in this section. The impact of these driving forces will now be examined in the next section.

## 2.2.2   Assessing the effects of the driving forces on industry

Current trends naturally impact on the outcome of the intended message or action. By being aware and up to date on trends, the impact on the message outcome can be foreseen before the action takes place, thereby allowing the message to be manipulated to suit the particular trend. Student mobility has grown in popularity in recent years as developments in communication infrastructure have evolved. The internet is bridging the global divide between countries as information is made available at the click of a mouse. The e-revolution has meant that one can literally travel the globe without

leaving the comfort of one's homes. For young eager student travelers, this has meant that information about foreign countries is easily accessible and travelling to places like South Africa is now an easy, available option. The communication's challenges facing eager young travelers however can be daunting especially when a student encounters problems in the very department that he/she requires answers from.

## 2.2.2.1    Communication challenges facing international students

Over the years, several articles have been published on the benefits of students living and studying abroad. Van Hoof et al (2001: 3-7) has related these experiences to the benefits of international education. When asked what they saw as the greatest benefits of studying abroad, by far the most common comments were that it had brought them a greater understanding of other cultures, that it helped them appreciate their own culture more, it enabled them to learn more about themselves, and that it had enriched them personally (Hoof and Verbeeten, 2005: 3-7). In spite of the many benefits student exchange and study abroad programmes bring, the period of adaptation and acclimatization that it takes for students to adjust to the UKZN environment is reported by student exchange staff as being between one and three months. The length of the student exchange programme is only four months, which means that the student spends a considerable bulk of his/her international experience being uncomfortable for whatever reasons, until he/she reaches a state of acclimatization. Brown (2008: 5 – 28) cited Persaud (1993), who states that all students are challenged by the demands of higher education, but many international students are particularly placed under pressure by the confrontation of an alien culture. Further, a review by Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002: 125) demonstrated that international students experience difficulty including culture shock, language difficulties, adjustment to customs and values, differences in educational systems, isolation and loneliness, homesickness and a loss of established social networks.

Chaney and Martin (2007: 75) cited Engholm (1991) who recognized that a special form of culture shock was experienced by US travelers, namely, the f*rustration* with the

culture. This also included aspects such as language, food and local customs; the *unwillingness to understand* the rationale behind the local ways of doing things and are quick to label behaviour as backward and inefficient without trying to understand the basis for the behavior. *Ethnocentricity* such as labeling Asians as dishonest because they say one thing and do another failing to realize that Asians consider the behaviour to be face saving rather than dishonest. *Racism* including unflattering labeling such as Coolies or Japs and *avoidance of the culture* whereby own clubs are formed where they communicate about their difficulties instead of intermingling with the people of the culture.

The points listed above encompass a broad perspective of students throughout the world. In order to isolate conditions specific to UKZN, however, one needs to examine some of the challenges facing the UKZN's international students specifically.

**2.2.2.2      Communication challenges faced by international students at UKZN**

Communication barriers, according to Chaney & Martin (2007: 12), are the obstacles that prevent effective communication from taking place.

Jack London, in his 1900 story "In a far country", stresses that a visitor to another culture should be prepared to acquire new customs and abandon old ideals. He suggested sojourners (people who visit or temporarily reside in another country) should find pleasure in the unfamiliar because those who could not fit into the new culture would either return home or "die" of both psychological and physical ailments (Chaney & Martin, 2007: 74). A century on and this statement still rings true even today. Other external communication barriers have also been identified in contributing to the foreign students at UKZN experiencing difficulties namely student orientation; security concerns and housing which will now be further discussed below:

- **Student Orientation**

According to the Cambridge dictionary (1999), the word 'orientation' is defined as the particular interests or aims of the organization, business or project. It is a formal arrangement or direction. Peacock & Brown (2006: 21) found that academic orientation before commencement of the programme can help to prepare students for academic and cultural differences. In the case of the student exchange programme, the term orientation is referred to as the sharing of information processes whereby new students to the university, will be orientated on, for example, the map of the campus, indicating where they should register, where their residences are situated, etc.

According to Brown (2008: 5), it is widely agreed that, at the start of their stay most sojourners will experience some degree of culture shock. Culture shock is defined as anxiety that results from losing all one's familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse, which do not carry at the level of conscious awareness.

Samover & Forte (2004) as cited by Chaney & Martin (2007: 74) also identified culture shock as a communication problem that involves the frustrations of not understanding the verbal and non-verbal communication of the host culture, its customs and its value systems. Frustrations may include lack of food, unacceptable levels of cleanliness, different bathroom facilities and a fear for their personal safety.

Foreign students go through enculturation when they first arrive and are faced with adapting to their new society. Some students however experience acculturation, where they are resistant to abandoning their past and, hence, acculturate new ideas into their existing culture. Resistance in accepting the new culture stemming from inadequate communication results in enormous personal struggle for the visiting student (Chaney & Martin, 2007: 74).

Students participating in student exchanges to South Africa and UKZN specifically should ideally receive a pre-departure orientation in the home universities, with the

assistance of the UKZN international office.   This should not only cover basic cultural knowledge and the language of the host country, but should also address expectations for classroom interactions.   Although culture specific knowledge is important, cultural general knowledge and understanding of some communications concepts, theories and research (e.g. communication-accommodation theory, theories of cross cultural adjustment, anxiety uncertainty management theory and models of intercultural communication competence) can further facilitate ethical and culturally appropriate teaching and learning (Crabtree (2004: 25).

- **Security concerns**

Brown (2008: 19), cited in Ballard (1997), states that in the first three months of the academic sojourn, the greatest pressure relates to the ability to understand and be understood.  Compounding the fear of student housing is the issue of security.  Most students are unprepared for the reality of security issues in a developing country.  Having to deal with virtually no telephone support (in terms of American 911 response) and the internal policies of sub-contracted security companies, students become extremely fearful for their safety when faced with difficult situations.  This fear, combined with already high levels of anxiety over having to adapt to a new environment, could mean even minor misunderstandings in communication and could be the basis for explosive situations.

- **Student housing**

Brown (2008: 5-28) cites Gundykunst (1998) who maintains that sources of strain for foreign students include racial discrimination, weather and food differences, language, accommodation, separation from home, dietary restrictions, money, diminished social interactions, role and status change and different educational systems.  Among the many symptoms of culture shock are physical illness, bitterness, home sickness, anxiety, depression, role strain, identity confusion, stress, hostility, irritability and fear.

Hybels & Weaver (2007:60) attest that when a message is created by a member of one culture and this message needs to be processed by a member of another culture, intercultural communication takes place.  In the case of the student exchange process, the student exchange officer will ultimately be the person advising the student on what to expect.  If the student has not been adequately prepared to handle these changes, then stress and hostility on the onset will be major problems to overcome.  Similarly, if the student exchange officer is unhappy for whatever reason in his work environment, then this to will also impact on the service that students receive.  In order to alleviate some of the communications challenges experienced by students from student exchange officers, we first need to identify the internal challenges facing UKZN student exchange staff that is inadvertently affecting the international students exchange experience.

## 2.2.2.3      Internal challenges faced by UKZN student exchange staff

A communications plan or strategy is only as strong as the staff or team who are in charge of implementing it.  Regardless of how effective a plan might be, if the person responsible for enforcing it is indifferent to its outcome, for whatever reason, then the plan is ultimately ineffective. In order to ensure that the university's vision for international relations is instilled, the needs and concerns of the staff concerned are to be addressed regularly.  Dissatisfaction in the ranks means poor performance overall. Figure 1.2 depicts the current reporting and operating structure of the international office at UKZN.  The student exchange head office is situated in Glenwood, at Howard College, and is ultimately responsible for the overall success or failure of the exchange programme.  The three sub-branches, i.e., Westville, Pinetown and Pietermaritzburg report directly to the head office at Howard College.  The head office takes its mandate and instruction from the UKZN central communication's office which is also based at the Westville campus and in charge of aligning the university's overall goals, but do not liaise directly with international partner universities.  The student exchange head office liaises directly with international partner universities in order to confirm programmes and protocols, and to ensure that the exchange programme takes place (UKZN MOU).
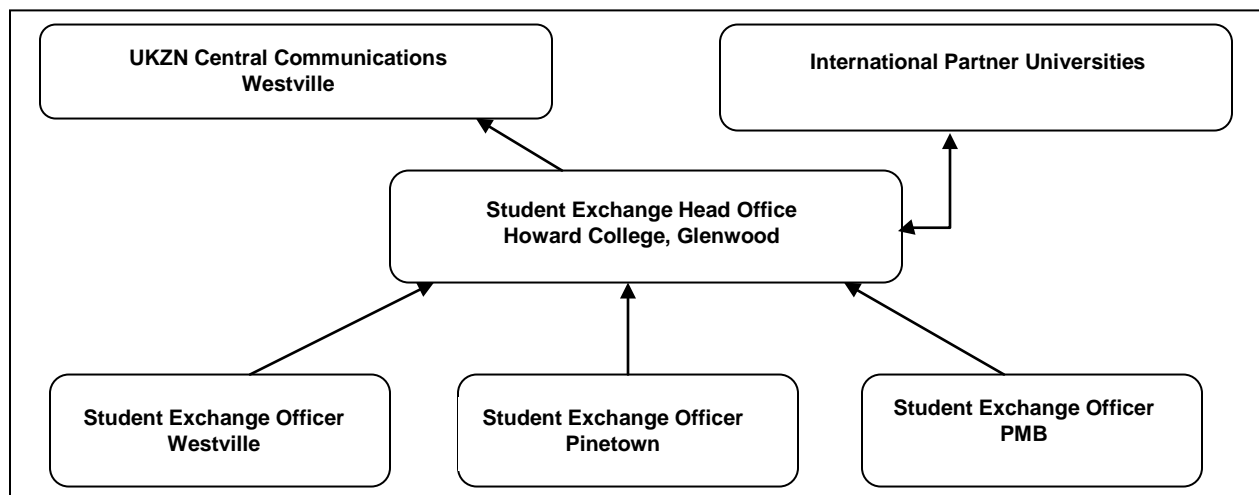
Figure 1.2: IR Organogram (IRO, 2010: 5)

The international office is ultimately responsible for the overall management of the student exchange programme. According to Chan (2004: 41), the structure of international offices varies, but the following are usually managed, coordinated by, or closely integrated with the international office:

- International student recruitment;
- First point of contact for individuals and outside organization interested in international education;
- Close monitoring of application processing (if the applications are processed outside the international office, manage and monitor minimal turn-around time; negotiation and monitoring of university-wide institutional links;
- Repository of information on the university's international activities;
- Promotion and administration support of student exchange programmes (for both incoming and outgoing students);
- International student welfare and support, including services on multi-campus universities (if these are not closely associated with the international office, students can have difficulties with accessing services and the international office loses the critical feedback mechanism gained by close interaction with the students);

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- Effective referral to other student services that are not specific to International students (study skills, counseling and health);
- Management of international projects and offshore programmes (it would be expected that student support services would be established for students studying by distance); and
- Source of intelligence for international opportunities; International alumni support (in association with general alumni office); Liaison with the providers of pre-university studies (ELICOS, foundation and academic bridging).

In the area of student exchanges, the needs of students and, in particular, students from first-world countries have to be acknowledged by those dealing with international relations and student exchanges. Strategic measures can then be put into place that counteracts problems relating to miscommunication before it becomes a fully fledged public relations crisis situation.

For this to happen, management needs to play a key role in implementing change. To do this, the following aspects of the research relating to internal challenges faced by staff will be discussed further: Management and perceptions; facing a continually changing student exchange climate; employee morale; job satisfaction; providing feedback and rewards; and developing the employee through training programmes:

- **Management and perceptions**

Management is defined as the act of a group of people working together in order to achieve a certain goal. A manager is responsible for ensuring that these goals are met. Tracy (2008: 1) recognizes that leaders are made and not born and reveals that one learns to become a good leader by doing what other excellent leaders have done before them. A good leader will have the ability to clearly communicate his/her objectives, negotiate when the situation demands and influence others to his/her way of thinking in order to ensure that the organization's goals are met. The student exchange person, therefore, plays this vital role of managing the exchange

programme.  Any failures, mismanagement or poor communication on her/his part will result in problems being experienced on the onset.

Chaney & Martin (2007: 6) state that it is, therefore, imperative to recognize that the success of the exchange programme is influenced by culture that is learned through perception and that "no two individuals view the external world the same because no two individuals receive exactly the same stimuli or share the same physical sensory receptors.  Because we know what we have personally perceived and cannot know for sure what someone else has perceived, intercultural communication involving different cultures becomes particularly difficult".  The student exchange person therefore has the added responsibility of bridging these gaps in perception.  This can often be a difficult task, especially in the face of the continually changing student exchange climate.

- **Facing a continually changing student exchange climate**

Brown and Harvey (2006:7) recognize that change is unavoidable in a dynamic environment.   In order to cope with change one's organization must therefore continually adapt one's strategies to suit the situation.

Jack Welch, chairman of General Electric (mbadepot.com, 2009), was quoted as saying that, "We've long believed that when the rate of change inside an institution becomes slower than the rate of change outside, the end is in sight.  The only question is when?"  The international relations' climate is continually changing and UKZN needs to stay ahead of the developing trends.  By actively empowering staff with the opportunity to liaise with their international counterparts, enforces their ability to adapt to a changing climate.  By conversing on international forums and attending important seminars and workshops, staff will have the means to excel in their fields of expertise.  When change is not embraced, the risk of staff becoming bored and unmotivated to think outside of their comfort zones is a distinct possibility.

- **Employee morale**

Pan (2008: 1) defines motivation as giving reason, incentive, enthusiasm or interest that causes a specific action or certain behaviour.  In order for staff to consciously strive towards achieving the goals of an organization, they need to be continually valued and stimulated.  When they are not, problems arise and their attitudes to their work may decline, often resulting in unhappy exchange students.  At UKZN, the student exchange people are responsible for the ultimate happiness and pleasant experience of the international students.  If, for whatever reason, the officers are unhappy, then this will transcend towards the students and a disinterest in addressing their minor complaints have the potential to become larger problems, if not handled correctly.

Wilcox and Cameron (2006: 172) assert that the goals of communication are to inform, persuade, motivate or to achieve mutual understanding.  Steinberg (2007: 49 – 50) states that any stimulus that interferes with the transmission and reception of messages, so that the meaning is not clearly understood, creates a barrier between the communicator and the recipient.    In order to better understand the role that communication barriers play during the messages between UKZN and the international student, a model for communication will, therefore, be used.

Shramm's Transactional Model of Communication, as adapted from Verderber and Verderber (2002: 112), depicts communication as a dynamic process in which both participants are actively engaged in encoding, transmitting, receiving and decoding messages.  This model also highlights that the creation of meaning is negotiated between the participants.  The outcome of the encounter is determined by the mutual involvement of the participants in negotiating the meaning of the messages.  Rather than depicting transmission and feedback as two separate processes, the transactional model indicates that messages are continually passing between the participants.  While communication is taking place, external, internal and semantic noise may be occurring at various places in the model.  These noises may affect the ability of the communicator and recipient to share meanings.  This study is, therefore, concerned with the exchange

of messages during this communication process.  It takes into account communication barriers or noise factors that may affect the communication process (Figure 1.3).
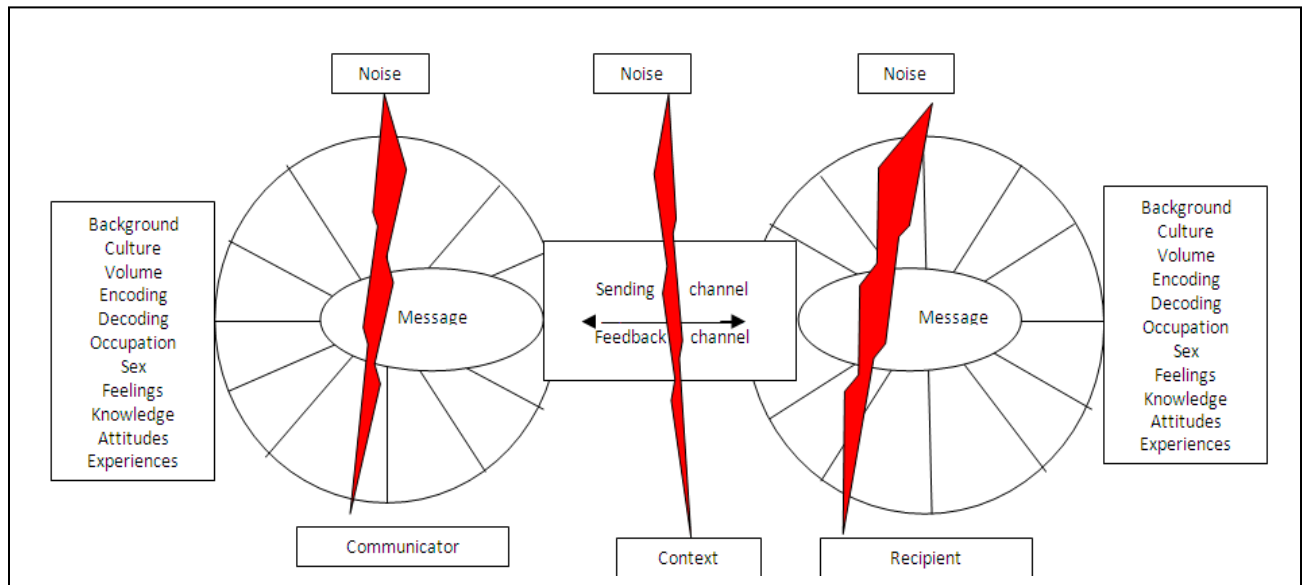


Figure 1.3: Shramms Transactional Model of Communication (Verderber & Verderber, 2002: 112)

The issue of misinterpretation of communication can be avoided at UKZN if the student exchange programme is planned, managed and facilitated by clear and effective communication channels.

Planned and managed communication during both pre- and post- student arrival can, therefore, be seen as a core element that addresses the need in overcoming communication barriers that could affect employee morale.  By addressing this need, a climate of job satisfaction can be created.

- **Job satisfaction**

Herzberg's (1959: 314) two factor theory, as cited in Nel et al. (2004: 314), is based on his research that revealed that there are two different sets of factors affecting motivation at work, namely:  hygiene and motivator factors.  Some of these factors are said to motivate while some de-motivate.

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*Hygiene factors* are related to the work environment and are thus extrinsic to the job. If these factors are not met then it may cause dissatisfaction at work. If the student exchange staff is unhappy with their work environment, for whatever reason, then this will affect the quality of their work.

*Motivator factors* relate to the job itself and are said to be intrinsic. These factors lead to feelings of satisfaction that can motivate employees. By dealing with feelings of dissatisfaction directly and then motivating staff towards a particular goal, may lead to an increase in job satisfaction among the student exchange staff.

According to Brown et al. (2008: 370), job satisfaction occurs when employees experience work situations that result in increases in achievement, recognition, challenging work, responsibility and advancement. This is further supported by providing feedback and rewards to deserving staff.

- **Providing feedback and rewards**

Vroom (1963) stated in his expectancy theory of motivations that people are influenced by the expected results of their actions. In an organization like UKZN, this means that the greater the reward for the employee, the more likely it is that their performance will be enhanced. Rewards and incentives are used to ensure that an employee's performance objectives have been achieved in line with the organizations goals.

Regular performance objectives, as stated by Gray (2003: 3), will further help to define an employee's job description, provide feedback on strengths and weaknesses set mutual and meaningful goals and provide guidance on improving employee performance. If an employee understands his/her own role in assisting the organization to reach its ultimate goals, then he/she will be more willing to strive towards these goals. By valuing the employee, one ultimately ensures that one has been entrusted with a crucial part of one's business and that one is the only one who can complete this task. It is also important to develop the employees' potential through training programmes.

- **Developing the employee through training programmes**

In order to ensure that UKZN's employees grow with its business and grow according to its needs, they have to be continually educated through in-house training programmes that develop them in line with their goals.  Investing time, money and effort in UKZN's student exchange staff will create a mutually beneficial climate for both the employee and employer.  Harris et al, (2004), as cited by Chaney & Martin (2007: 81), found that computer-aided training or learning has immense potential for multicultural education because it cuts across language barriers.  They further stated that the following approaches to intercultural training be used:

*The Intellectual model* – whereby classroom training is provided through the use of instruction, lectures, group discussions and educational DVD's; *the Area Training Model* – whereby simulation-type learning is used so that people can interact from different cultures; *the Self Awareness Model* (or Human-Relations Model) is based on the assumption that staff will self understand and adapt to the new culture; *sensitivity training* – where staff have their inappropriate behaviour pointed out; *Cultural Awareness Model* – emphasizes cultural insight and stresses effective goals and experience; *Interaction Approach* – where employees are given the opportunity to interact with their counterparts in other countries and the *Multidimensional Approach* – that combines cognitive, effective and behavioral aspects of training.

The impact of industry driving forces was discussed in this section.  Identifying and implementing strategy changes to prepare for the impact of these driving forces will now be examined in the next section.

### 2.2.3 Identifying and implementing strategy changes to prepare for the impact of the driving forces

Knight (2004: 5) states that Internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization.  The world of

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higher education is changing, and the world in which higher education plays a significant role is changing. This change is brought about through advances in communication and technology, labour mobility, private investment, as opposed to decreasing public support, and lifelong learning. Institutions around the world have always been competitive to achieve high academic standards. Moreover, one now sees an increase in the competitive need for an international profile. Many international universities, such as Liverpool University in the UK, are now seen advertising in South Africa. The need to strive towards being the leading global university of choice is, more often than not, influenced by the bottom line. More students equal more profit.

Institutions and private education companies are competing for market share in the recruitment of international, fee-paying students and serious efforts are being made to create an international reputation by developing a name brand for institutions in order to gain a competitive edge. Knight (2004: 23) further states that there has been a definite shift from alliances for cultural purposes to economic purposes. The international mobility of students and academics as well as collaborative research and education initiatives are being seen as productive ways to develop closer geopolitical ties and economic relationships. Chan (2004: 32) also found that massification and marketisation of higher education in recent decades have led to severe competition for funds as well as for students and faculty. In order to place UKZN in a competitive position the following points will be discussed further: The threat of a decrease in the number of international students participating in the exchange programme at UKZN; and the survival and growth of the UKZN student exchange programme:

## 2.2.3.1    The threat of a decrease in the number of international students participating in the exchange programme at UKZN

According to Berry (1994), as cited in Brown (2008:9), when confronting a new environment necessitating the learning of new behaviour, stress is a common reaction, which can become chronic until adjustment is reached. UKZN like other universities before it, has made a concerted effort to develop its international reputation through

collaborative research efforts and more regularly, through student and staff exchanges and is not only competing to increase its services on a global scale, but it is also competing locally with other universities to attract international students. In order to achieve this, the issue of stress when coping in a new environment such as S.A needs careful consideration and addressing.

## 2.2.3.2    The survival and growth of the Student Exchange Programme

Ramalho (1986:84) cites Bennet (1986) who states that one's cultural understanding grows from his or her perception of cultural differences – from defensive to adaptive to integrative. A focus on similarities results in the development of individuals from a minimization of the differences toward an acceptance stage leading to culturally sensitive behaviour. It can therefore be assumed that in order for the student exchange programme to grow, one needs to take into account the amount of time that a student would need adapt to a new environment in order to reap its full benefits. A short 3 – 4 month stay may not be adequate time for a student to adapt to his/her environment. One may therefore need to consider an extension of the programme in order to achieve this.

The impact of industry driving forces on the UKZN student exchange programme was discussed. International relations trends and communication in light of student exchanges will now be explored.

## 2.3  International relations trends and communication

The driving forces behind academic student exchanges are linked to South Africa's partnership with the EU and USA, the strongest players in the global economy. Based on bilateral agreements and partnerships, decisions taken at presidential level ultimately dictate the course of South African interaction with foreigners and down the line to UKZN's interaction with foreign students.

- **Relations with USA**

  The USA is one of the single largest foreign investors in the SA economy. An important aspect of SA bilateral relations, is people-to-people interaction. In this regard, a wide range of institutions and individuals continue to interact on a regular basis, through training and capacity building, concluding Memorandum of Understanding (MOU's) in education, agriculture, etc. The USA is the second largest source of tourists to SA.

- **Relations with the EU**

  SA and the EU have built a comprehensive partnership based on Trade, Development and Co-operation. The Trade, Development and Co-operation Agreement (TDCA) was signed in 1999 and, in 2005, SA and the EU agreed to work towards a strategic partnership based on open and concrete dialogue. Following the establishment of a strategic partnership between SA and the EU in 2007, information and communication technology and social dialogue were identified as areas for bilateral enhancement.

Keeping these partnerships in mind, Altbach & Teichler (2001: 46) state that academic exchanges have historically been a largely elitist enterprise, serving students mainly in the most prestigious universities. This has been the case both in industrialized and developing countries. The function of foreign study for many students from the West, was a cultural experience that would broaden the students' perspective and provide knowledge of a foreign language and civilization. The vast majority of student exchanges involved students from Western countries going to other Western countries. Interest in studying in a developing country like South Africa, however, is becoming more popular as more foreign students are entering the country. Kishun (2007: 235-243) states that the number of international students in South Africa have more than quadrupled in recent years.

In order to identify the driving forces influencing the students' choice of an exchange programme at a particular university, understanding the trends in international relations

and communication, as a whole, is imperative. International university cooperation is no longer a choice but a developmental need in today's global market. Most graduates will work across national boundaries and deal with people on a daily basis from different cultures. Chan (2004: 42) depicts the process and strategies for international cooperation in higher education as follows:

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │ Awareness of needs,     │
                    │ purposes and benefits   │
                    │ of international         │
                    │ cooperation             │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
┌──────────────┐    ┌─────────────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐
│ Refinement & │    │ Selection of partners   │    │ Commitment through│
│ improvement  │    │ in accordance with      │    │ Mission statement │
│              │    │ Goals, Objectives and   │    │ and Strategic Plan│
└──────────────┘    │ Compatibility           │    └──────────────────┘
                    └─────────────────────────┘
┌──────────────┐    ┌─────────────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐
│ Review and   │    │ Implementation and      │    │ Organisational   │
│ assessment   │    │ resource provision      │    │ structures       │
└──────────────┘    └─────────────────────────┘    └──────────────────┘
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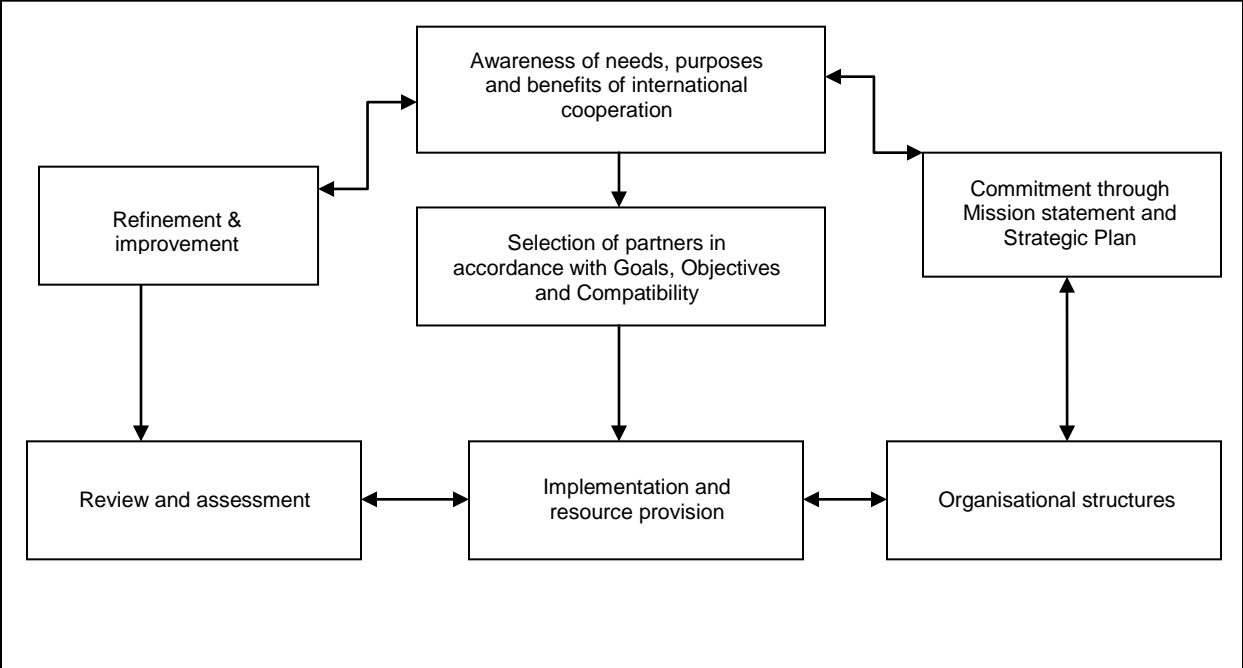
Figure 1.4: Process and Strategy for International Cooperation (Chan, 2004: 42)

Figure 1.4 illustrates the necessary organizational support needed for international cooperation to be successful. Academic alliances, such as the student exchange programme, enable students to gain international exposure and credentials. The formation of strategic alliances between universities is the key for successful international cooperation. By being aware of the needs and benefits of international cooperation, international partner universities can work towards a common goal for international exchange. If each university's alliance is the same, then there would be a

common use of resources, which would enable the partners to review the programme and provide assessment so that it can continually be improved.

International relations trends and communications influencing UKZN student exchanges was discussed. Barriers to intercultural communications affecting the student's ability to adapt will now be explored.

## 2.4    Barriers to intercultural communication

Funakawa (1997:12-13) states in his Cultural Iceberg model, that what one sees culturally can be a barrier to your ability to communicate effectively. Funakawa explains that, as shown in Figure 1.5, the values that are below the 'waterline' represent those on which behaviours are based, such as our norms; rules; networks; sub-culture groups; values; business philosophy; stereotypes and perceptions. However, one responds to surface values that one can sense, i.e., one's environment; ethnic; dress; non-verbals; religion; language and behaviour. To truly understand culture, one must explore the behaviours below the 'waterline'. The common elements of trust, sincerity and integrity are necessary to building successful business relationships when cultural differences exist.
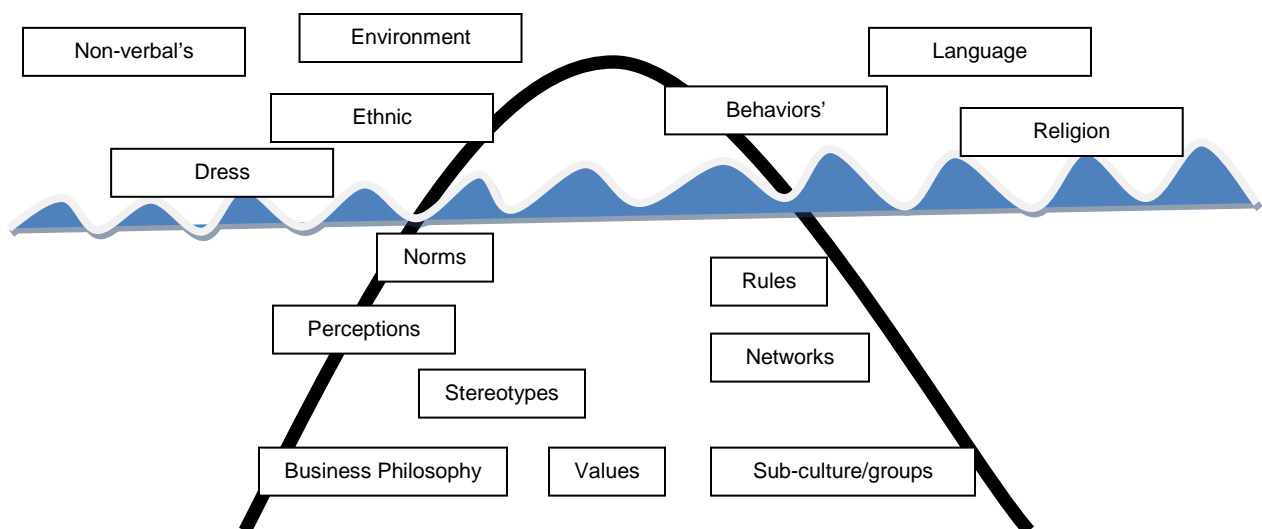


Figure 1.5: Cultural Iceberg (Funakawa, 1997: 12/13)

Chaney and Martin (2007: 1-2) observed that every cultural pattern and every single act of social behaviour involves communication. To be understood, the two must be studied together. Jandt (2000: 16) also stated that culture cannot be known with a study of communication alone and communication can only be understood with an understanding of the culture it supports.

According to Sillars and Vangelisti (2006: 364-377), social; cultural; and historical factors influence the way people interpret messages. Therefore, the interpretations of messages, communicated from UKZN to the international students are subject to their influences and understanding. Chaney and Martin (2007: 5) also recognised that communication is a process; culture is the strength through which the communication is formulated and interpreted. Culture deals with the way people live. When cultures interact, adaptation must take place for the cultures to communicate effectively. As this contact occurs between cultures, diffusion takes place whereby the different cultures learn and adapt materials and practices from each other. Diffusion, according to Rogers (2005: 1), is the trickle-down process by which an innovation (communication idea or message) is communicated through certain channels. If a significant number of cultural differences are absorbed and a number of similarities are found, then cultural synergy takes place with the two cultures merging to form a stronger overriding culture. If, however, this does not take place, then problems arise in the form of communication barriers. In this research instance, culture is seen as a major contributing factor that influences the communication process and will, therefore, form the core element of this study.

Chaney & Martin (2007: 5) identified the "Dimensions of Culture", a cultural graphical representation of culture as having three (3) primary dimensions, namely: Languages, Physical and Psychological, which are interdependent. He further stated that no one dimension is more important than the other and that the individual dimensions develop in harmony with each other.
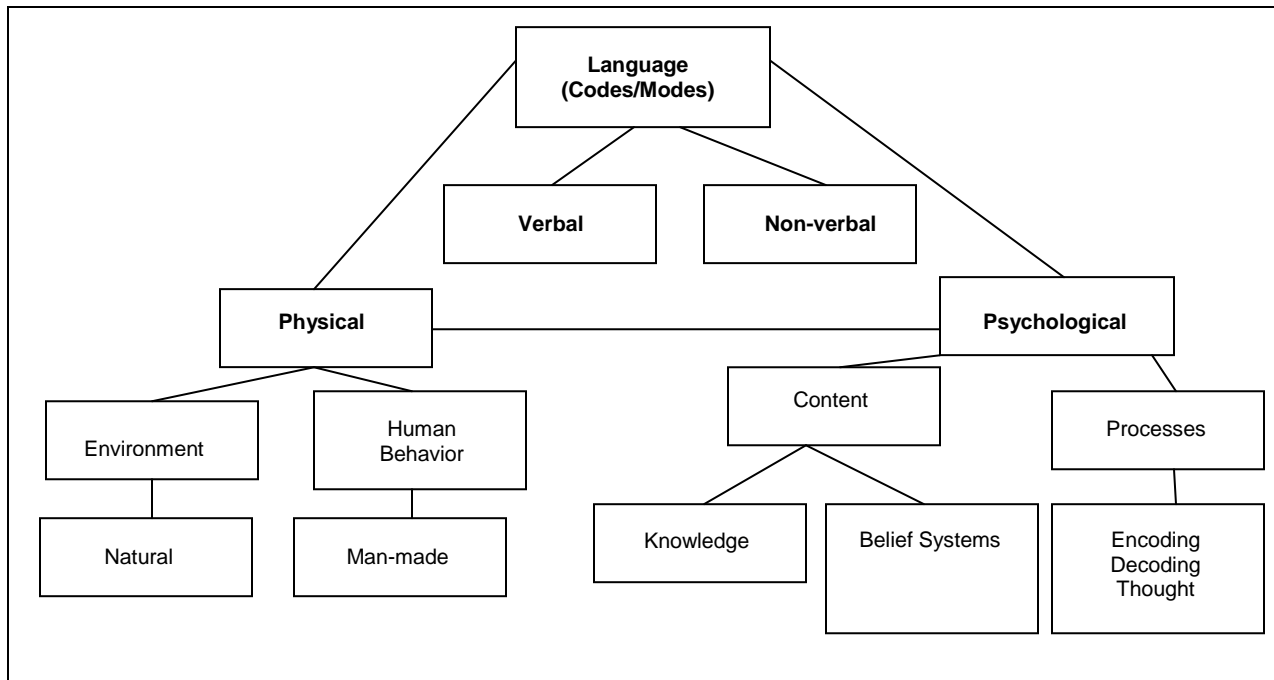
Figure 1.6: Dimensions of Culture (Chaney & Martin, 2007:171)

Figure 1.6 has been explained by Borden (2007:  171) as follows:

- *Language* – is used to communicate with people who have similar values and beliefs.
- *Physical reality* – of one's environment and the cultural activities of the people and is measured by one's objectivity.
- *Psychological dimension* – relates to one's knowledge, beliefs and mental activities and is measured subjectively.

Bearing this model in mind, and using UKZN's marketing DVD as an example, UKZN's intended message can be successfully conveyed by realizing that the DVD is only as powerful as its interdependent dimensions.  In order for the message to be truly effective, it needs to address all three dimensions (i.e., Language, Physical reality and the Psychological dimension) equally. All cultural perspectives are incorporated in the

message so that it is clear and will be interpreted by the recipient. Likewise, culture influences all aspects of marketing. In order for the UKZN marketing campaign to be successful, it should directly relate to its target market.

Barriers to intercultural communication influencing UKZN student exchanges were discussed above. The functions and roles of communication in the exchange programme at UKZN will now be discussed further.

## 2.5 Functions and roles of communication in the student exchange programme at UKZN

Education has played a major role in positioning South Africa internationally. In order to be a global player, communication is regarded as the central and binding element that bridges the gap between foreign students and their expectations in a new environment.

Figure 1.7 below is a graphic illustration of the basic communication process. The communicator or sender encodes a message and sends it via a medium, such as e-mail to the recipient who then decodes the message and gives it meaning. At the UKZN, International Relations Office of the University (the sender) sends a message (converted to a sign or symbol), via a communication medium (website, email, internet, prospectus, etc), to prospective students (recipients), where the message is then interpreted and given a meaning (Mersham & Skinner, 2010: 8).

Under the student exchange programme, the medium used to communicate with prospective foreign students, is via the university website (online marketing and applications), e-mail correspondence (students can contact a representative in the international office with their queries), international student guide (students can read the universities prospectus in hard copy) and a DVD prospectus (students are able to view general information about the university) (UKZN International Policy Guide, 2009: 24).
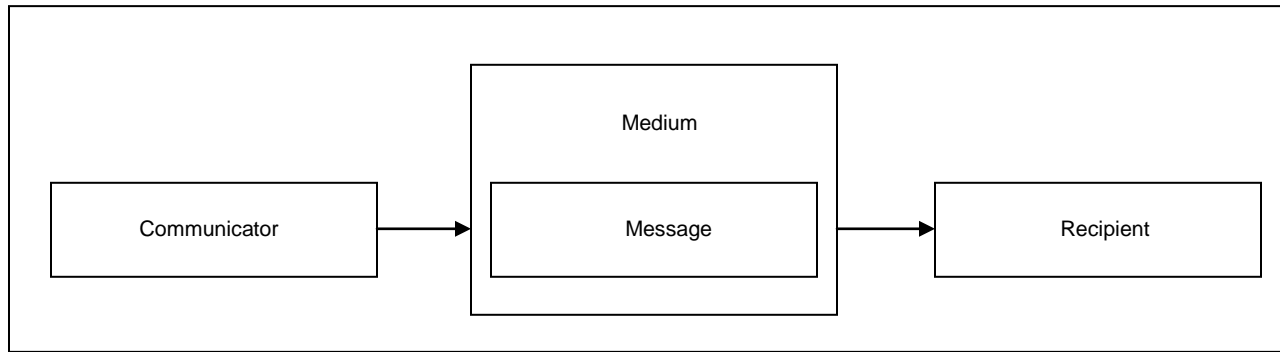
Figure 1.7: The movement of the message (Mersham & Skinner, 2010: 8)

Even though the communication process in figure 1.7 appears to be a simple one, it is a series of processes that creates an outcome that may not have been what was envisioned, for example, UKZN's international relations web page. The student exchange officer converts the university's message into a meaningful symbol such as an introductory page with the heading, 'Study at UKZN'. The information is then uploaded (a set of symbols) onto the computer system, which is a technological device that converts the signal and carries it over a distance to another device that converts the signal into a message that can be read or viewed, if it is a DVD.

By accessing UKZN's web page on the internet (the medium), the message is generated. The symbols travel to the recipient of the message. If the website is online and running smoothly, then the message is received. If it is not, then the receiver may need to re-access the website at a later time. The receiver accesses the symbols and interprets the message request as, '*Do you want to study at UKZN?'* In response, the receiver may ask, *'What is this about? I am interested at studying at UKZN'*. The receiver then contacts the university to enquire about the application criteria and after a number of email message exchanges agrees to apply to the exchange programme. Following his/her application he/she then enquires, *'By the way, I am married with a child. Can my family also join me on the programme?'*

Through this interaction, the communication model in Figure 1.8 below has now been modified to include signs and symbols that are used and contained in the medium. The

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collection of signs and symbols that is shared by the communicator and the recipient contains the message and the meaning that one wishes to convey. In this situation, it is a written language in the form of a question which converts her thoughts into symbols: '*By the way, I am married with a child. Can my family also join me on the programme'?* In this instance, the medium is the email/internet (Mersham & Skinner, 1998: 9).
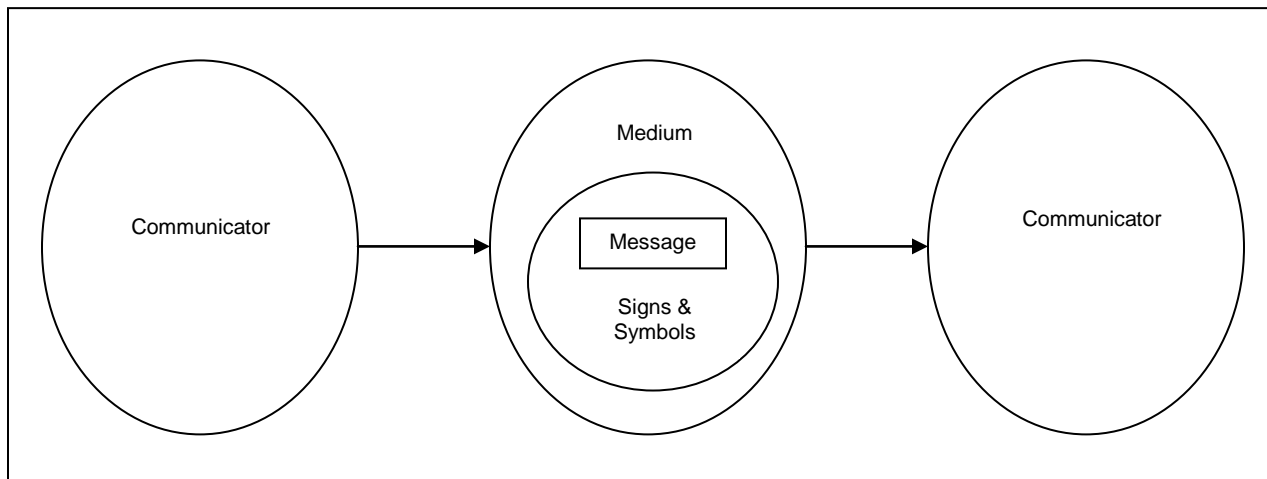


Figure 1.8: The modification of the message (Mersham & Skinner, 1998: 9)

It is, therefore, important to understand the power of the communication message by ensuring that the tools used to communicate with the students are just as effective as the message itself.

Schramm (in Steinberg, 2008: 32) viewed the communication process; as more complex and his model describes communication as a dynamic interaction in which meaningful messages are exchanged by two active participants. Both the communicator and the recipient are responsible for encoding, transmitting, and receiving, decoding and interpreting the messages. They both play the role of the communicator and the recipient. Instead of a linear process, the feedback is now two-way.

In his second model of communication in Figure 1.9, Schramm (in Steinberg, 2008: 32) was aware that in order for a message to be understood by the recipient in the manner that it was intended by the communicator, the participants should share a common

language, common background and a common culture.  In this model, Schramm suggests that if people do have a common background, noise (such as internal prejudices) may be introduced and could cause misunderstanding in a difference of interpretation of the message by the participants.
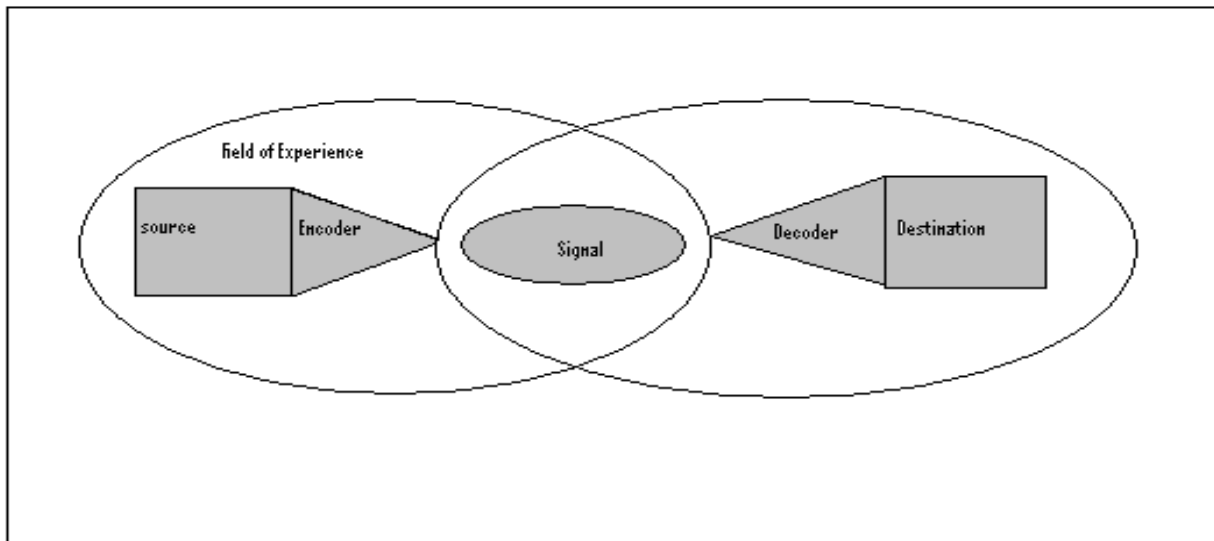


Figure 1.9: Schramms Second Model (Steinberg, 2008: 31)


Bearing Schramm's 1965 adaptation of his second model, the communication's tools used by UKZN to communicate with international students are just as important as the message itself.  For example, if we look at the DVD prospectus of UKZN, spoken in local dialect using familiar names and explanations, may be difficult to interpret by foreign students.  Once viewed, the difficulty in relating to the content may cause the student to project his/her own internal prejudices, which could distort the interpretation of the intended message.  Therefore, in order for the DVD to have the necessary impact that it was intended, it needs to speak to the recipient of the message directly.  By using a common language, background or culture, the DVD can be used as an effective tool that speaks to the foreign student directly in his own dialect or in references that are familiar to him/her.  Adopting a shared code system, acknowledging differences in beliefs and behaviours and learning to be tolerant of others beliefs contributes to effective communication.

## 2.6 Conclusion

This literature review explains the driving forces influencing communication's challenges at UKZN. It further discusses the effects of these forces on the student exchange programme and the morale of UKZN employees in the International Relations department. By knowing beforehand and identifying the problems that students experience, the student exchange officer can be prepared to cope with challenges. It then uses this review to underpin the research instrument with the intention of probing the communication challenges of international students. The next chapter will discuss the research methodology that will be employed in this study.

# Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

## 3.1       Introduction

The previous chapter identified the industry driving forces that are influencing the student exchange programme. This chapter discusses the research methodology and design that have been used to carry out this study. Based on the literature review that highlighted the factors that contribute to communication's problems experienced by students under the student exchange programme, a questionnaire and interview schedule were formulated to analyse the factors contributing to communication challenges at UKZN. The overall aim of this study is, therefore, to identify some of the major communication challenges experienced by previous international students during their four month student exchange to UKZN. The sub-objectives of the study are to identify the communication tools used by the UKZN International Relations office to liaise with foreign students; to identify how these communication tools have contributed to the communication challenges of the student exchange programme and their effects on the future growth of the programme; to assess the effect that these challenges in communications pose to the UKZN International Office, the student exchange officers and the foreign student and to identify ways of addressing these communication challenges.
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## 3.2       The Research Design

The research design and methodology of this study are both qualitative and quantitative. A census study was conducted among the (99) international students who participated in the exchange programme during the first and second semester of 2009. Cohen et al. (2000: 156-193) attest that a qualitative research design allows for the incorporation of different methods and methodologies in social science. Babbie and Mouton (2005: 265) state that survey research is appropriate for making descriptive and

explanatory studies of large populations.  Therefore, for the purpose of this research, the following research instruments will be used:

- In-depth questionnaires (completed by students); and
- Telephonic Interviews.

### 3.2.1  Sample

The selected sample will comprise of 60 students.  Of the 15 international universities contacted, 12 confirmed their participation.  Each of the 12 universities selected 5 students (convenience sample) who recently returned from the exchange programme to UKZN during the period of January 2009 – November 2009).  All 60 of the respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire.

Further to this, five students were randomly chosen from those who recently returned from the exchange programme, to participate in an interview.  The interview was structured to last about fifteen minutes each.

### 3.2.2  Data collection methods/sampling

The methods used in the collection of data included questionnaires and interviews. Cohen et al. (2000: 48) refer to three types of interviews:  namely, the structured, unstructured and semi-structured interview.  For the purpose of this study, a semi-structured interview was used.  The research interview was defined as a 'two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him/her on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation' (cited by Cannel and Kahn, 1968, in Cohen et al. 2000: 156-193).  In addition, the interview was standardized with open and closed-ended questions and email was used as the preferred method of delivery for the questionnaires.    According to Cohen et al. (2000: 156-193), the advantages of this type of interview is that the respondents answer the same questions,

thus increasing comparability of responses and the data is completed for each person on the topics addressed in the interview.

Prior to the whole interviewing process, respondents were informed of the aim of the study for the purpose of confidentiality and to avoid unwarranted ethical issues. Students were also informed that they were free to withdraw at anytime during the process. The respondents were also assured that their personal details and identity will not be linked to the data collected. A covering letter containing information outlining the above was presented to respondents for future reference. Chase (2003: 273-296) suggests that rather than listen to reports, interviewers (involved in qualitative research), should "…invite others to tell their stories, to encourage them to take responsibility for their meaning of their talk". Hence, the interviewee will not be prompted into a subjective bias.

### 3.2.3  Research instrument

The measuring instruments for this study were a semi-structured interview and a questionnaire. The interview schedule was derived from the literature review. It consists of open-ended and close-ended questions and was conducted telephonically with partner universities, as their students had already returned to their home countries after the exchange programme. The questionnaire also consisted of open and closed-ended questions but, was target specific in order to probe the respondent's experiences.

All responses to the questions were recorded using the Likert scales with five responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Uebersax (2006: 2) noted that Likert scales were developed to measure psychological attitudes in a scientific way. The questionnaire was structured as follows into six sections:

A) Demographic information;
B) Four questions relating to UKZN's website and link to the exchange programme;

C) Four questions relating to the student information pack (Brochures, Prospectus, Guide and DVD);

D) Four questions relating to the application process;

E) Four questions relating to Email correspondence; and

F) Six questions relating to the student's post-arrival and orientation.

The interview schedule was structured as follows:

A) Four general questions relating to housing, security and pre-arrival support;

B) Five questions probing the growth of the exchange programme; and

C) Six questions invoking recommendations for future exchange programmes.

## 3.2.4 Pre-Test

According to Saunders *et al. (*2004: 252), pilot testing is a process that involves trying out the research instrument on a small group of individuals before using it in one's research project. The main aim of pilot testing is to give the researcher an indication as to whether the research instrument will be effective in the study. The research instruments for this study were the interview schedule and the questionnaire for students. The interview schedule comprised of open-ended and closed-ended questions. It was tested amongst five academics who were involved in the international relations/communications field.  An email questionnaire eliciting responses from five respondents was also used to test the student's responses on his/her personal views and experiences of the exchange programme.  The students were randomly chosen and the comments were as follows:

*Academic comments:*
A) A repeated question was identified;
B) Two questions needed to be rewritten; and
C) Spelling – it was pointed out that local spelling terms be used as opposed to the American spell check.

*Student comments:*

None – students filled in the questionnaire and no comments were received.

## 3.3 Research compilation

### 3.3.1 Eliciting questionnaire responses

See appendix 1. A covering letter stating the aim and importance of the research was sent to all respondents via the student exchange directors in each international university. The respondents were asked to confirm their participation and support of this research. The letter highlighted the importance of this study and its effects on future students who will be participating in the exchange programme.

Of the fifteen international universities contacted, twelve confirmed their participation in this research and acknowledged its effect on their students. The questionnaire was then emailed to six of the universities who randomly chose five students, who recently returned from the exchange programme to UKZN, to complete the questionnaire. Cooper and Schindler (2003:342) found that one of the major weaknesses of a self-administered study is that some participants fail to respond to the survey. In order to avoid this weakness, the importance of this research was stressed to the student exchange directors who then ensured the follow-up with respondents. The universities were allowed one month to complete the questionnaires. Those who did not submit their completed questionnaires by the final submission date were contacted via email to do so. One week after the final submission date, a telephone call followed the email to those who did not respond. Using Microsoft Excel, all responses were then collated and recorded for graphical depiction.

The interviews were conducted telephonically since the international student exchange officers were not in South Africa at the time of the interview. It was also important to obtain the responses from students after the culmination of their exchange programme so that they could provide a complete evaluation of the programme. Also, students tend

to be more relaxed in their home countries and would be able to provide a clearer and honest account of their experiences which are not marred by emotional stresses that they may have been experiencing at the time.

### 3.3.2  Analysis of data

Braun and Clark (2006:1) describe thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting on patterns (themes) within the data that is collected.  For this research, thematic analysis was used and a semi-structured interview and questionnaire was developed and administered to the participants of the student exchange programme via email. Thematic analysis assisted in interpreting the results derived from the interview schedules. Common themes were identified and analyzed from the interview. Thereafter, a comparative analysis was done between the results obtained from the semi-structured interview, the questionnaires and the literature review and any other studies that have been conducted on the student exchange programme. Using an Excel spreadsheet, closed-ended questions were analysed and thematic analysis was used to analyse the open ended questions.

All responses from the questionnaires and interviews were then compiled into Excel format and analyzed by a statistician who also provided reports and graphical depictions.  In order to test that all categories contain the same proportion of values, the frequency of findings were used to compile frequency tables and single-sample chi-squared tests which compared the actual/observed and expected frequencies in each category, in order to ensure that all categories contain the same proportion of value.

### 3.3.3  Reliability and validity

Babbie and Mouton (2001: 122) maintain that validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concepts under consideration. White (2003: 25) explains that validity is concerned with the idea that the research design fully addresses the research questions and objectives one is trying to achieve.  In order to satisfy the criteria of validity and reliability, the field data, written

field notes and or text were reviewed and read by a colleague to agree with the coded categories used in order to avoid subjective biases in analyses, and the interview questions was refined to ensure consistency and reliability on the responses given.

Thematic content analysis (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999: 111-197) was used to analyze the research material from the interviews. The extracted research material was transcribed into Microsoft excel format, and common threads or themes were identified.

## 3.4    Limitations of the study

This study was an exploratory study into the factors contributing to the communications problems being experienced by international students under the exchange programme. The limitations of this research and its methodological design is that the method used (semi-structured interview) was time consuming and difficult in the collection and data analysis. The sample of five interview respondents also presented a large volume of data to be transcribed.  Since this study was conducted after the culmination of the exchange visit to UKZN, the geographical locations of students and exchange officers posed a problem.  The fact that the researcher relied on the respondent to fill out the questionnaire during her absence means that the information or accounts may not always be accurate.

## 3.5    Elimination of Bias

A small amount of bias in any research is inevitable and, therefore, expected.  The difference is ensuring that the research has been realistically appraised in line with the outcomes.  Babbie and Mouton (2005: 265) found that bias is inevitable and unavoidable in all research.

Therefore, targeting strictly students from first-world countries participating in the exchange programme eliminated the possibility of bias in sampling.  By focusing on broader communication issues, minor biases such as those relating to race or gender

were avoided.  Even though all attempts were made to collect as many responses as possible, some respondents chose not to participate in the research.  Due to the geographical separation of the researcher and the subjects, there could be no way of verifying the accuracy of the respondents.  The responses were, therefore, based on trust.

The response questionnaire was also conducted in Microsoft excel format, which eliminated the need to transpose data, therefore, eliminating human errors.

## 3.6    Conclusion

This chapter focused on the research methodology employed in this study. It explained the necessary research steps, the instruments used to gather data and the procedures followed in the administration and co-ordination of the research instrument.

Based on the data gathered from the interviews and questionnaires, the next chapter will deal with data analysis.  It will analyse and interpret the information from the interviews and questionnaires.

# Chapter 4 – Findings and Analysis of Data

## 4.1    Introduction

The previous chapter explained the methodology used for this study.  This chapter will present the findings and analyse the responses from the conducted interviews and questionnaires.  These findings will be divided into two sections and will be presented as follows:

Section A – will cover the findings from the questionnaire and
Section B – will cover the findings from the interview

## 4.2        Section A:  Questionnaire Findings and Analysis

The findings below represent the findings from the questionnaire. The results are graphically illustrated and clearly indicate the percentage representation of each response.

### 4.2.1        General

The findings below are a reflection of the general questions that appeared in the questionnaire and are reported under Gender demographic breakdown and Country of Origin

## 4.2.1.1     Gender and country of origin
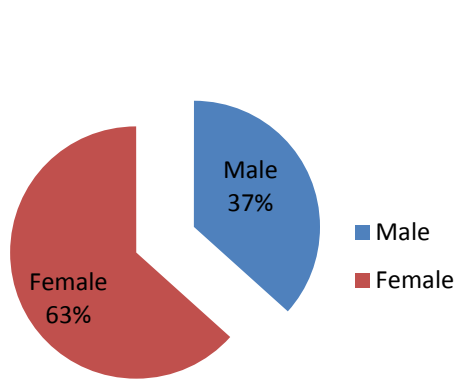


Graph 4.1: Gender demographic breakdown
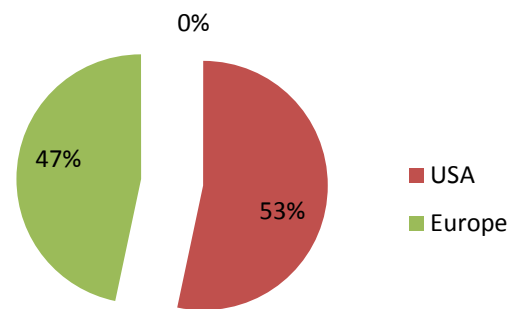


Graph 4.2: Country of Origin

Findings in the analysis of gender composition reveal that a higher ratio of female students 63% as compared to male students 37% chose to participate in the research (depicted in graph 4.1).  The increase in female student responses to the questionnaire could reinforce that there is an increase in the number of female exchange students. Kishun (2007: 235-243) also found that the number of international students in SA had quadrupled in recent years, which may be an indication of the rising numbers of females choosing to study and travel.

Findings in the analysis of country of origin reveal that the USA was responsible for sending the highest number of exchange students, with 53% sent during the course of this study (depicted in figure 4.2).  This was closely followed by 47% of students from greater Europe.  This confirms Albach & Teichler (2001: 46) who argue that interest in studying in a developing country like SA is becoming more popular as opposed to previous student exchanges that involved students from Western countries going to other Western countries.

**4.2.1.2    Number of students that previously visited a developing country**
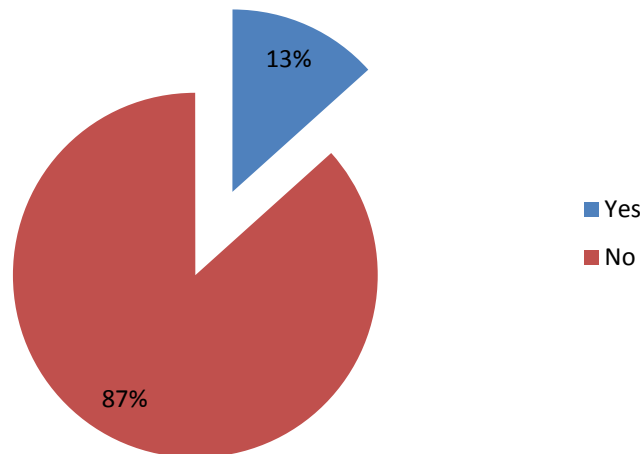


Graph 4.3:  Previous visit to a third world country

Findings revealed that when analyzing students with previous developing country experience, only 13% indicated they had visited a developing country and had some experience of life and the challenges of studying in a developing country (depicted in graph 4.3).  87% of the respondents on the other hand had no real experience of the challenges facing them.  As pointed out by Brown (2008: 5 - 28), all students are challenged by the demands of higher education, but many international students are particularly placed under pressure by the confrontation of an alien culture.  This further confirms that students did not know what to expect and were therefore reliant on the information provided to them by their host county.

### 4.2.2  Website applications

UKZN's Website was assessed as a tool for communication and the findings thereof are as follows:

### 4.2.2.1    Number of students that accessed the UKZN website for information

Findings reveal that 100% of the respondents accessed the UKZN's website and used it as a primary source of information.  These findings are therefore a strong indicator that the webpage is an effective communication tool for reaching students.  It is also indicative of the respondents' reliance on the contents of the information contained as a key factor in their choice of student exchange.  This confirms Walters & Adams (2001: 270) who found that many institutions are beginning to examine ways of integrating their international recruiting strategy with Web marketing.   This further confirms that the UKZN webpage link to the student exchange programme is an effective communication tool that can be fully utilized to address all of the communications needs of potential students.

### 4.2.2.2    UKZN Student Exchange webpage was easy to locate
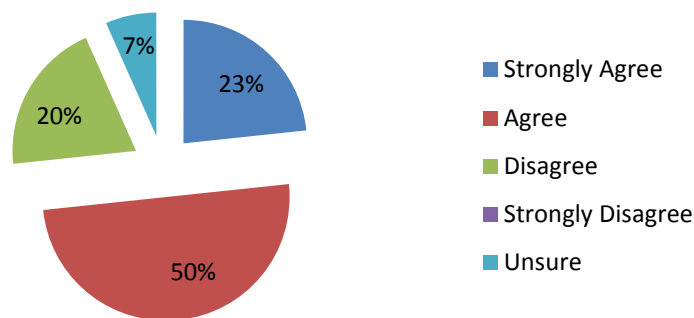


Graph 4.4: Web Access

Findings indicate that the student exchange webpage was considered to be easily accessible with 73% of respondents able to access the webpage easily. 20% of respondents experienced some difficulty in locating the link to the student exchange page and 7% could not comment because they could not recall specifically visiting the student exchange page. As identified in 4.4, the webpage was found to be the primary source of information for potential and visiting students. This confirms Sorrel (2007: 1) who argues that in order for an organization to stand out from the rest, it needs to have a clear understanding of its market and spear-head a marketing strategy aimed at achieving this.

**4.2.2.3        Evaluating the clarity of the communication message via the website**
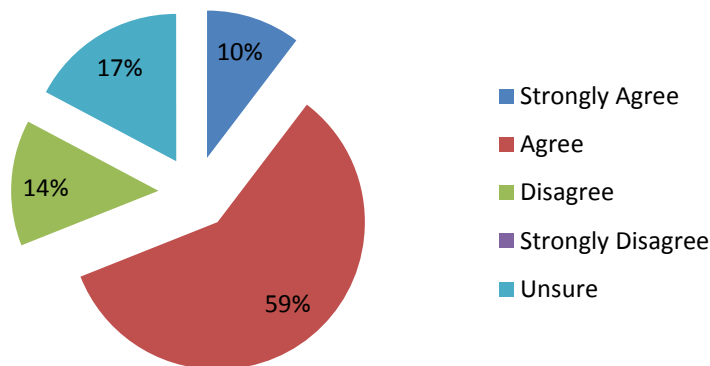


Graph 4.5: Clarity of communication message

Findings reveal that 69% of the respondents indicated that they were able to understand the message easily and it provided them with the information they needed. A smaller number of 14% experienced some difficulty in understanding the content of the message and 17% were unsure. This confirms Rogers (1997) argument of diffusion that states that the trickle-down process of a communication idea or message is communicated through certain channels that leads to cultural synergy if a certain amount of similarities are present. It further confirms that by providing clear and

concise messages on subject matters, students have the ability to greater understand the content and clarity of the communication message.

## 4.2.2.4 Downloading of Application Forms
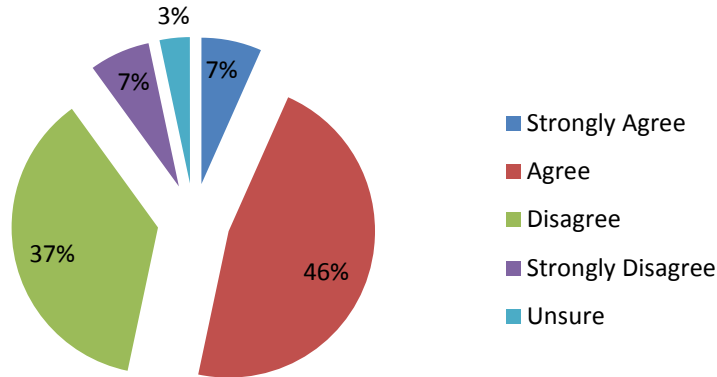


Figure 4.6: Downloading of Application Forms

Findings reveal that 53% had no difficulties downloading the application forms. However, 44% of respondents found that they had difficulties printing the application forms off the website and 3% were unsure.

## 4.2.3 Assessing communication tools: Student Exchange Information Pack (Brochures/Prospectus/Guide/DVD)

The student exchange information pack was assessed in order to test its effectiveness as a communication tool. The findings thereof are as follows:

**4.2.3.1      How did you hear about the UKZN Student Exchange Programme?**
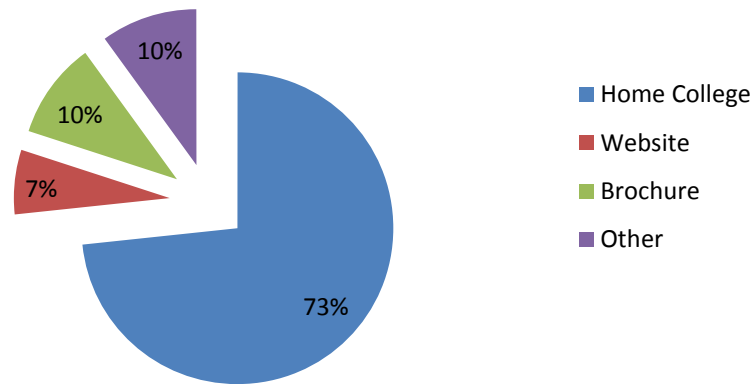


Graph 4.7:  Publicity of the Exchange Programme

Findings revealed that 73% of the respondents heard about the UKZN student exchange programme through their home universities. This is indicative that support and championing of student exchanges to UKZN by the international partner universities ultimately contributes to the overall success of the programme.  What this means for the study is that relations between the partner universities cannot be strained or jeopardized in any way.   This supports Chan (2004: 42) point that the formation of strategic alliances between universities is the key for successful international cooperation.  If each universities alliance is the same, then the common use of resources would enable partners to review the programme and provide assessment so that it can continually be improved.

**4.2.3.2     Availability of (Prospectus/DVD/Guide/Brochure)**
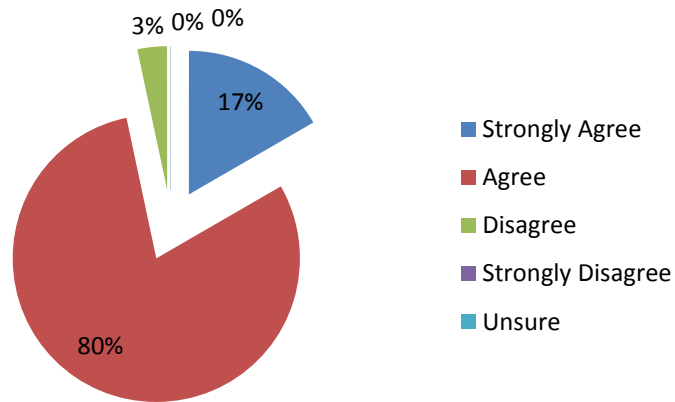


Graph 4.8:  Availability of Student Exchange information

Findings reveal that 97% of the respondents indicated that a student exchange pack containing a prospectus, DVD, guide and brochures was readily available.   This percentage of respondents indicates that the international partners are actively promoting the UKZN exchange programme to their students, by making promotional material and information available to them.

**4.2.3.3    The quality of the communication regarding the brochures and DVD**
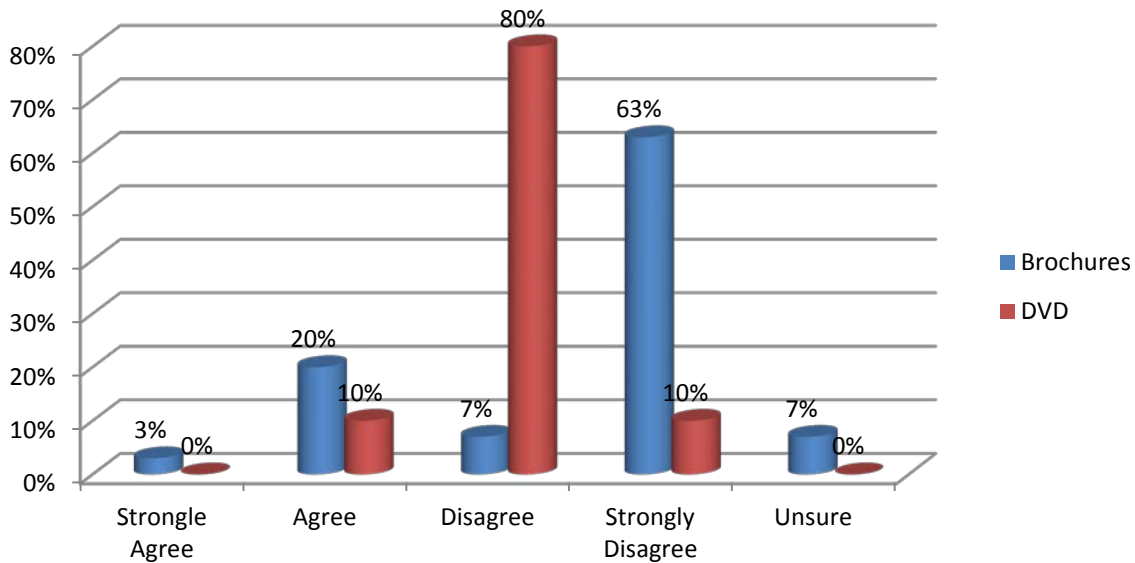


Graph 4.9: Students views on Brochures and DVD

Findings revealed that 70% of the respondents found that the brochure did not adequately answer their questions.  A further 27% of respondents did however feel that the brochure was adequate for their needs and 3% were unsure.  Based on these findings, it can be safely assumed that an improvement in the quality and content of the brochure is required.

Bearing Shramm's 1965 adaptation as cited by Steinberg (2008: 32) of his second model, the communication's tools used by UKZN to communicate with international students are just as important as the message itself.  In this instance, the brochure, spoken in local dialect using familiar names and explanations, may be difficult to interpret by foreign students.  Once viewed, the difficulty in relating to the content may cause the student to project his/her own internal prejudices, which could distort the interpretation of the intended message.  Therefore, in order for the brochure to have the necessary impact that it was intended, it needs to speak to the recipient of the message directly.  By using a common language, background or culture, the brochure can be

used as an effective tool that speaks to the foreign student directly in his own dialect or in references that are familiar to him/her. This finding is further supported by (The movement of the message, Mersham & Skinner, 2010: 8) as depicted in graph 1.7.

With regards to the questions pertaining to UKZN's DVD content, the responses revealed that 10% of the respondents agreed that the DVD provided a general overview of the university, whereas 90% felt that the DVD did not speak specifically about the student exchange programme, but rather on the university itself.

**4.2.4       Application process (assessment)**

The application process for enrolling in the UKZN student exchange programme was assessed in order to test its effectiveness. The findings thereof are listed below:

**4.2.4.1       Application process regarding registration forms, times and on-line registration**
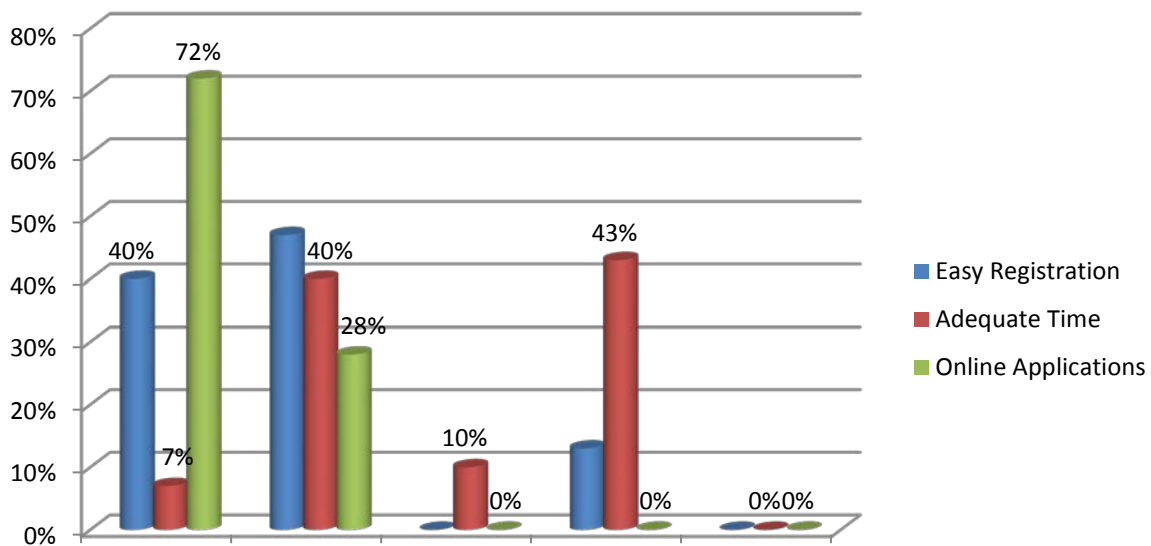


Graph 4.10:  Students views on application process

Findings reveal that 87% of the respondents confidently felt that the application forms were clear to understand, straightforward and easy to complete as opposed to the 13%

that disagreed.  This is an important point of the study as it confirms that the content of the application forms were considered acceptable.  The fact that students found the application forms easy to complete means that the tedious downloading process is considered a problem and therefore needs to be addressed – not the application form itself.

Findings regarding registration times revealed that 53% of respondents felt that the time allocated for the registration process were not adequate, whereas 47% of students felt that the time allocated for the completion of applications was sufficient.  If we look at Figure 1.7: The movement of the message (Mersham & Skinner, 2010: 8) this confirms the basic communication process whereby the communicator (UKZN), encodes the message (registration forms) and sends it via a medium (e-mail) to the recipient (applicant) who then decodes the message and gives it meaning.  If there is barrier in the communication process such as insufficient time allowed to complete the application process, then this can hinder the success of the communication.

Findings regarding an on-line registration process revealed that 100% of the respondents agreed that an online registration process was a better alternative to hard copy applications that needed to be posted.  These differences are statistically significant at the 95% level (chi-square = 81,032 p<0.05).  Interpretation of the chi-square rule dictates that the statement that an online registration process would be quicker and more convenient is therefore true. This further confirms Mesham & Skinner (2010: 8) movement of message which confirms that the current application process is contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience and that a streamlined online application process would more suitable.

**4.2.5**     **Assessment of e-mail as a communication tool and student exchange officers responses to e-mail enquiries**

The e-mail was assessed in order to test its effectiveness when communicating with international students.  These findings together with SEO's effectiveness in responding to e-mail enquiries are listed below:

**4.2.5.1**     **Ease of e-mail enquiries; response rates of e-mail enquiries; SEO clarity of feedback and helpfulness**
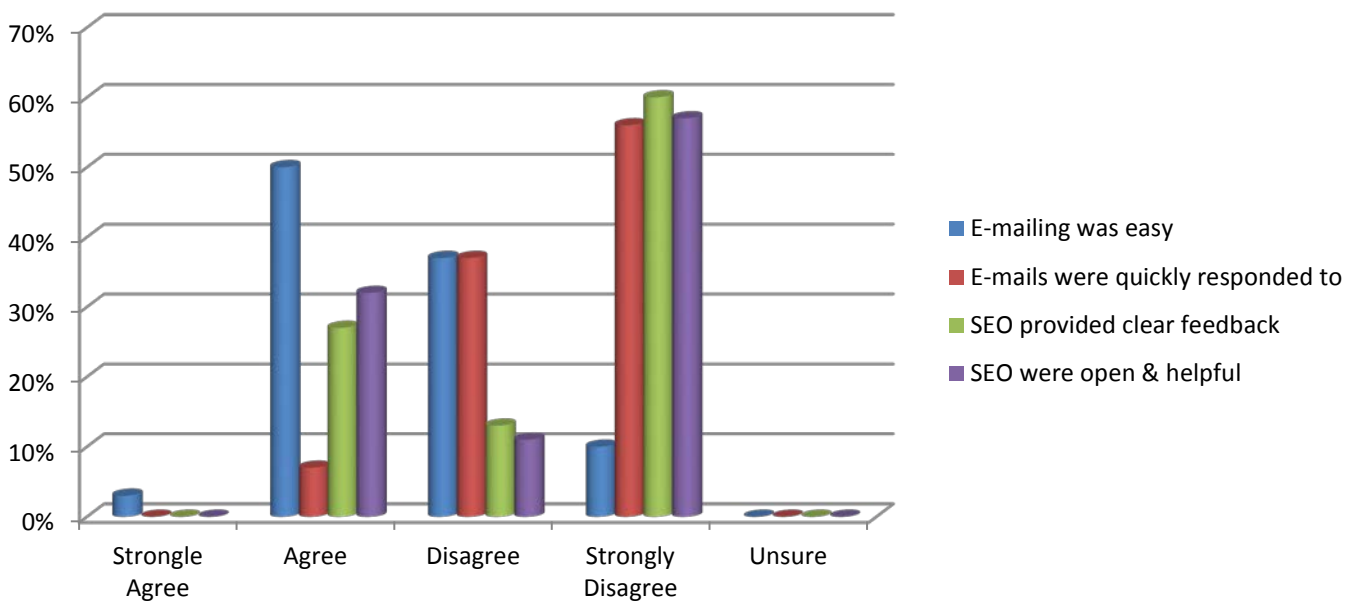


Graph 4.11: Student views on Email correspondence and student exchange officers

Findings reveal that 47% of the respondents agreed that it was easy to e-mail the international office, whereas 53% disagreed that emailing the international office and receiving a response was an easy process.  This confirms Steinberg (2008: 32) argument of Shramms communication process, whereby communication is described a dynamic interaction in which meaningful messages are exchanged by two active participants.  The communicator and the recipients are responsible for encoding, transmitting, and receiving, decoding and interpreting the message which ensures a

two-way communication process. These findings further confirm that students are not able to easily e-mail and receive a response from the UKZN international office. The process of e-mailing is in itself not a problem, but rather the poor quality of responses; delay in responses or total lack of responses to enquiries are said to be problematic. This is an important finding, as it indicates that there is a problem with the international office responding to email enquiries. This is a clear breakdown in the communication channel and one that impacts greatly on the challenges that international students face. Findings regarding email response times revealed that 93% of respondents disagreed that e-mails were quickly responded to as compared to 7% that agreed. This analysis is summarized in graph 4.11. These differences are statistically significant at the 95% level (chi-square = 81,032 p<0.05). Interpretation of the chi-square rule dictates that this statement is therefore considered true. This further confirms Steinberg's (2008: 32) argument above, that two-way communication is essential to the communication process. From these findings it is evident that the current response rate for email enquiries is contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience.

It was also found that 90% of respondents disagreed that they received clear feedback to their enquiries as compared to the 10% that agreed. These differences are statistically significant at the 95% level (chi-square = 81,032, p<0.05). Interpretation of the chi-square rule dictates that this statement is therefore considered true. This is once again confirmed by Steinberg's (2008: 32) argument above, that two-way communication is essential to the communication process. From these findings it is evident that the current response rate for email enquiries is contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience.

68% of respondents disagreed that student exchange officers were open and helpful to their email enquiries as compared to the 32% that agreed. This is confirmed by Chaney & Martin (2007: 5) who recognized that when different cultures interact, adaptation must take place for the cultures to communicate effectively. From these findings it is evident that the student exchange officers are not being as helpful as they should and this is

contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience. This could be due to the differences in cultures and the inability of student exchange officers to relate to or identify with a student from a different culture. This inability to interact with the student can be a barrier in effective communication between the parties.

### 4.2.6 Post Arrival Assessment of Orientation at UKZN

The orientation programme held for incoming international students was assessed in order to test its suitability. The findings thereof are listed below:

### 4.2.6.1 UKZN explained the challenges of studying in a developing country?

The responses revealed that 100% of the respondents agreed that that they did not receive any information from UKZN regarding the challenges of studying in a developing country. These differences are statistically significant at the 100% level (chi-square = 81,032 $p<0.05$). Interpretation of the chi-square rule dictates that the statement that students did not receive any information is therefore true. From these findings it is evident that there is a complete lack of communication surrounding this issue. This is supported by Brown (2008: 5 – 28) who cited Persaud (1993), by finding that all students are challenged by the demands of higher education and that many are placed under pressure by the confrontation of an alien culture. In light of the challenges that students experience in acclimatizing to a developing country, this issue is clearly one that is lacking at UKZN and needs to be addressed.

### 4.2.6.2 The orientation was informative and answered all of my questions?

Findings revealed that 100% of respondents disagreed that UKZN provided information on what to expect on arrival in SA/UKZN. This analysis is summarized in graph 4.20. These differences are statistically significant at the 95% level (chi-square = 81,032 $p<0.05$). Interpretation of the chi-square rule dictates that this statement is therefore considered true. This finding is enforced by Toyokawa & Toyokawa (2002: 125) who

demonstrated that international students experience difficulty including culture shock, language, etc. It is also supported by Peacock & Brown (2006: 21) who found that academic orientation before commencement of the programme can help to prepare students for academic and cultural differences. From these findings it is evident that no significant information is being given to students for their arrival and this is contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience post-arrival.

**4.2.6.3 The Orientation program was informative and the length was adequate**
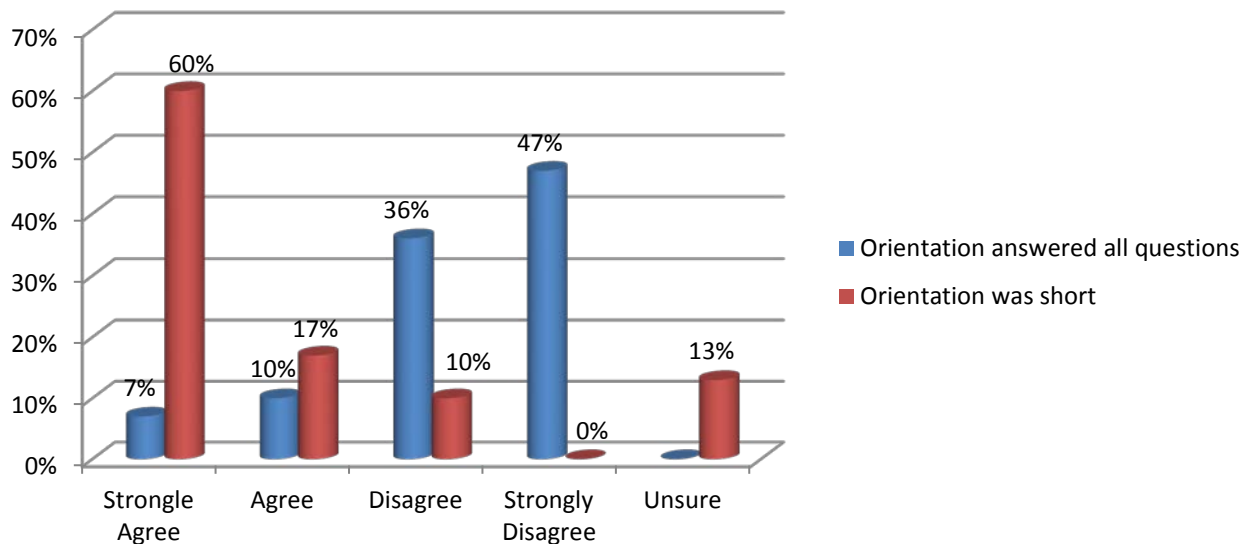


Graph 4.12: Student views on the Orientation Programme

83% of respondents disagreed that the orientation programme was adequate. 10% agreed that it was and 7% of respondents were unsure. This analysis is summarized in graph 4.21. These differences are statistically significant at the 95% level (chi-square = 81,032 p<0.05). Interpretation of the chi-square rule dictates that this statement is therefore considered true. This once again confirms Peacock & Brown (2006: 21) claims that academic orientation before the commencement of the programme can help prepare students for academic and cultural differences. It also supports Brown (2008: 5) who stated that at the start of their stay most sojourners will experience some degree

of culture shock that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols.      From these findings it is evident that the orientation programme is not addressing all the needs of the students and this is contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience.

Findings reveal that 77% of respondents agreed that the orientation programme was not long enough.  10% disagreed that it was and 13% were unsure of their answer.  This is a very important finding as it suggests that an extension in the duration of the orientation programme might be necessary to facilitate the needs of foreign students.  It is also indicative that students are not receiving adequate information for their needs. The duration and content of the orientation programme is an issue that can greatly influence some of the challenges in communication that students face.   This is supported by Crabtree (2004: 25) who found that culture specific knowledge is important and that cultural general knowledge and understanding of some communication concepts, theories and research can further facilitate ethical and culturally appropriate teaching and learning.

**4.2.6.4      Student Exchange Officers were available and took students concerns seriously?**
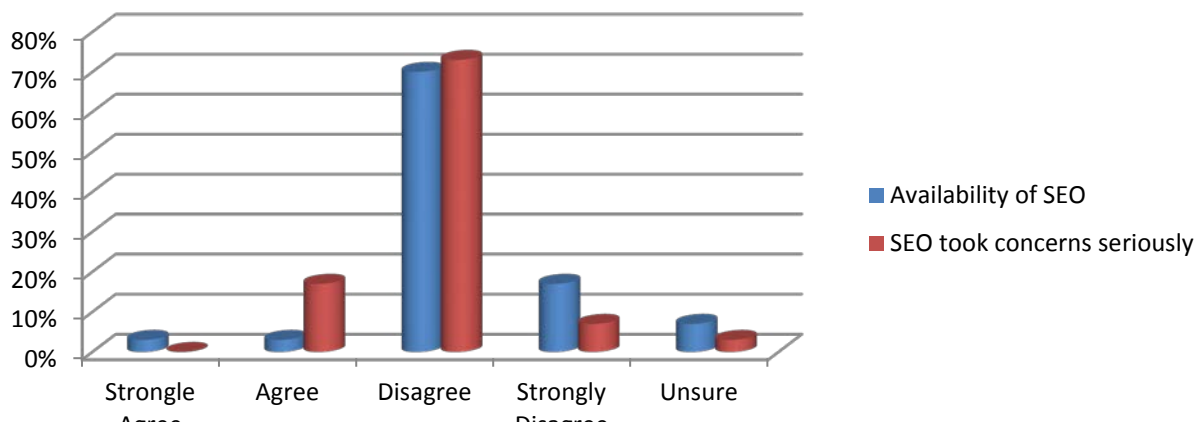


Graph 4.13:  Views on student exchange officers

87% of respondents disagreed that the student exchange officers were available to them during the duration of their stay.  6% agreed that they were available and 7% were

unsure.  From these findings it is evident that the student exchange officers are not always available to address the needs of the students and this is contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience.  This in turn affects the quality of communication exchange process.  This is confirmed by Hybels & Weaver (2007) who attest that in order for intercultural communication to take place the message created by one member of a culture needs to be processed by a member of the other culture.

Findings also revealed that 80% of respondents thought that the student exchange officers did not make enough of an effort to assist them.  17% agreed that they did and 3% were unsure.  From these findings it is evident that the student exchange officers are not always available to address the needs of the students and this is contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience.  This clearly is an area that needs to be addressed.

**4.3**         **<u>Section B: Telephone Interviews - Findings and Analysis</u>**

The findings below represent the findings from the telephone interviews that were conducted with five of the respondents. Using thematic analysis, common themes and responses were highlighted. The following results are a reflection of the most common responses to questions that elicited the most responses.

**4.3.1**         **General: Sufficient information was provided on student housing and housing was conducive to learning**

The suitability of student housing was assessed in order to test its effectiveness in meeting the requirements of international criteria. The results thereof are listed below:

**4.3.1.1**         **Prior information was provided on Student Housing and the housing environment was conducive to learning**

80% of respondents disagreed that they had received adequate information on student housing. This analysis is summarized in graph 4.24. These differences are statistically significant at the 95% level (chi-square = 81,032 p<0.05). Interpretation of the chi-square rule dictates that this statement is therefore considered true. Further evidence is reflected in the following quotes:

Interviewee 1 indicated that:

> *"I was not informed about state of housing. I did not know what to expect."*

Interviewee 2 indicated that:

> "*No I did not receive any information about student housing. I only found out when I got here".*

Interviewee 3 indicated that:

> "The only information I received on student housing was the rental prices I would have pay.  No other information was provided."

Interviewee 4 indicated that:

> "Prior to my arrival I had to enquire about student housing.  No information was otherwise volunteered."

Interviewee 5 indicated that:

> "My friends in SA warned me not to stay in student housing so I decided to rent a private flat instead.  But no, I did not receive any specific information on student housing."

From these findings it is evident that there is not an adequate amount of information available to students on UKZN housing and this is contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience – a clear breakdown in communication.

80% of respondents were living at UKZN student housing and felt that the environment was disruptive and not conducive to learning.  20% of respondents were unsure, as they chose to live in outside residences.  This analysis is summarized in graph 4.27.  These differences are statistically significant at the 95% level (chi-square = 81,032 $p<0.05$). Interpretation of the chi-square rule dictates that this statement is therefore considered true.

Interviewee 1 indicated that:

*"Yes, I stayed at UKZN student housing. It was very disruptive. It was full of local students and I did not relate very well to them."*

Interviewee 2 indicated that:

*"I had no idea that student housing was so noisy and chaotic. There was no respect for peoples study time."*

Interviewee 3 indicated that:

*"There was a lot of screaming and people who did not belong there were constantly walking in and out – even though security was at the doors. I felt very unsafe."*

Interviewee 4 indicated that:

*"It was always noisy and I couldn't study or sleep. Students would be shouting and talking loudly at all hours of the night and day and nobody did anything about it even though I complained many times."*

Interviewee 5 indicated that:

*"I chose not to stay at student housing so I cannot comment."*

From these findings it is evident that students view UKZN housing as being not conducive to learning and this is contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience.

## 4.3.1.2 UKZN security made me feel secure and responded in time

Findings revealed that 80% of respondents disagreed that campus security helped them to feel secure. Comments received indicated that they were not provided with adequate

information on local laws and practices.  These differences are statistically significant at the 95% level (chi-square = 81,032 $p<0.05$).   Interpretation of the chi-square rule dictates that this statement is therefore considered true.  Brown confirms this finding by stating that in the first three months of the academic sojourn, the greatest pressure is on the ability to understand and be understood.   Further evidence is reflected in the following quotes:

Interviewee 1 indicated that:

*"I felt uncomfortable with the security guards as I had difficulties understanding them.  I felt that they were slightly intimidating and threatening as they were constantly calling me aside and asking me questions.  I did not feel safe in their presence."*

Interviewee 2 indicated that:

*"I had forgotten my residence card in my room and could not swipe myself out the door.  My friend used her card to get me out instead.  As I passed through the gates, I was pulled aside roughly by the residence security who demanded to know where my card was.  I explained to him that I had forgotten it, but he was being very aggressive towards me.  I also felt very uncomfortable because he was looking me up and down in an inappropriate manner.  I told him that I had to leave and he blocked my way while brushing up against me – I felt his penis! This was no accident because he was laughing at me.  I felt very threatened and so I ran.  I have seen him various times since then and he is always watching me.  I am fearful for my life and I feel that he will try to attack me.  I have informed the security office to have him removed, but nothing has been done."*

Interviewee 3 indicated that:

*"I have complained many times to security office about the conditions at student housing, but nothing has been done. The residence advisors have also been of no help as they don't take my complaints seriously."*

Interviewee 4 indicated that:

"*My complaints about the noise levels late at night were completely ignored by security even when I told them that I felt threatened.*"

Interviewee 5 indicated that:

*"Again, I did not live at student housing so I cannot comment."*

From these findings it is evident that respondents view UKZN security as being inadequate and this is contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience.

Findings relating to security response times indicated that 60% of respondents felt that their needs were not met by campus security and 40% were unsure, as they did not at anytime request the assistance of campus security. Further evidence is reflected in the following quotes:

Interviewee 1 indicated that:

*"I was locked in my residence room at about one 'o clock in the morning, when a group of about 30 students came banging and shouting at my door for me to come out. The students were being very abusive and I felt terrified. I telephoned the security on campus and they just laughed. I repeatedly called them about four times and they refused to come out to assist me. I even asked them to call the police – which they did not. I eventually had to place my chair against the door because I felt that the students would break down the door."*

Interviewee 2 indicated that:

*"After my experience with the residence security I did not trust any of UKZN's security and that's why I chose leave the exchange programme."*

Interviewee 3 indicated that:

*"Security ignored my complaints and nothing was done to assist me."*

Interviewee 4 indicated that:

*"I did not request the assistance of security at any time."*

Interviewee 5 indicated that:

*"I did not request the assistance of security at any time."*

This is an important aspect of the findings as it indicates more needs to be done to provide a student user guide on campus security and how to best utilize this service.

**4.3.2       Factors affecting the growth of the UKZN Exchange Programme by management and an increase in student numbers?**

The effects of internal challenges relating to UKZN student exchange management and staff were researched in order to assess its affect on the growth of the exchange programme.  The findings thereof together with the question of UKZN's ability to handle an increase in student numbers are listed below:

**4.3.2.1    The management of the SEP and UKZN's ability to handle an increase in student exchanges**

Findings reveal that 60% of respondents disagreed that the programme was well managed, whereas 40% agreed that the management of the programme was average. This is an important finding as it indicates that students were aware of problems within the management of the programme.  Further evidence is reflected in the following quotes:

Interviewee 1 indicated that:

*"It was chaotic.  I didn't know who responsible for anything."*

Interviewee 2 indicated that:

*"I was constantly referred to different people.  Nobody seemed to want to take responsibility for anything."*

Interviewee 3 indicated that:

*"Management was poor.  Feedback to enquiries was extremely slow or did not happen without follow-up from me and no information was volunteered.  I had to find out things for myself."*

Interviewee 4 indicated that:

*"I didn't approach management for anything."*

Interviewee 5 indicated that:

*I relied on my own initiative and didn't really require the assistance of management."*

This is an essential point to address as it clearly indicates that students were able to pick up on internal problems and this led their lack of faith in the student exchange office.

60% of respondents disagreed on UKZN's ability to manage an increase in student numbers, while 20% believed that UKZN could handle an increase in foreign student numbers.  A further 20% were unsure and could not comment.  Further evidence is reflected in the following quotes:

Interviewee 1 indicated that:

*"Until they address their current problems with security, etc, I don't think they should increase their student numbers."*

Interviewee 2 indicated that:

*"Definitely not!  After my bad experience I don't think anyone should participate in the programme until the problems are addressed."*

Interviewee 3 indicated that:

*"No I don't think it's a good idea."*

Interviewee 4 indicated that:

*"I really have no idea."*

Interviewee 5 indicated that:

> *"Yes possibly. I'm not sure what the numbers are now, but I don't see any reason why they won't be able to handle more students."*

When probed, students commented that they were aware of internal issues such as poor management and insubordinate student exchange officers. This affected the quality of the programme and they formed the opinion that UKZN was not ready to handle more students.

**4.3.2.2    The exchange programme had enough social events; communication channels were well defined and recommending the exchange programme**

80% of respondents felt that there were not enough social opportunities arranged by UKZN. 20% of respondents however agreed that there were enough opportunities to socialize. Van Hoof (2001: 3 – 7) confirms this finding by stating that students regarded the greatest benefits of studying abroad was that it brought them a greater understanding of other cultures, it helped them to appreciate their own culture, it enabled them  to learn more about themselves and that it enriched them personally. Further evidence is reflected in the following quotes:

Interviewee 1 indicated that:

> *"I was not invited to any social events that were culturally valuable."*

Interviewee 2 indicated that:

> *"No, there weren't enough social events arranged by the university. I would have liked to experience more scenic tours, cultural excursions, etc."*

Interviewee 3 indicated that:

*"I refused to participate in any activities. I was very unhappy and just wanted to return to my country."*

Interviewee 4 indicated that:

*"Yes, it was adequate I suppose."*

Interviewee 5 indicated that:

*"Tours and social events were poorly planned and we didn't really have a choice of areas to visit. Also the outings were not really interesting. I was approached by outside tour operators who provided much more interesting excursions than the one's arranged by UKZN – at a cost of course."*

From these findings comments from the respondents, it is evident that students view the social program as being inadequate. This could be contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience.

All 100% of the respondents stated that they had experienced problems with the communication channels and had difficulties liaising with exchange officers. This analysis is summarized in graph 4.33. These differences are statistically significant at the 95% level (chi-square = 81,032 $p<0.05$). Interpretation of the chi-square rule dictates that this statement is therefore considered true. Further evidence is reflected in the following quotes:

Interviewee 1 indicated that:

*"I had trouble e-mailing UKZN when I first applied. It took a tremendously long time to get a response and information was often vague and unclear."*

Interviewee 2 indicated that:

*"I turned to various people in different departments for help but I received none. I was constantly being sent to different people, but nothing was done to help me. I eventually gave up."*

Interviewee 3 indicated that:

*"I didn't really know who the correct person to approach was. There were too many departments and people who seemingly did the same thing. I was often referred to other people and I had trouble finding the right offices."*

Interviewee 4 indicated that:

*"I suffer from sickle cell disease which is life threatening. I had no prior knowledge of SA health systems and believed that my standard issue USA health insurance was sufficient cover for my needs. I fell in and an ambulance was called. It was only then that I found out that my insurance would not cover me at a private hospital and I had to be taken to a government hospital. I was shocked at the conditions and received no assistance in the trauma unit for about nine hours. I was just left there! I eventually left on my own to go to a private hospital that would only treat me once I paid the fee. I am not a rich student and cannot afford the additional expense, but had to charge the fee to my credit card. I am now in serious financial problems. I am shocked and appalled that no one informed me prior to my arrival of the medical situation in SA. Had I known, I would have planned better. In all probability I would not have come if I'd known that I would jeopardize my health and finances in this way."*

Interviewee 5 indicated that:

*"I had a problem getting a SA visa and as a result I arrived late - missing the orientation.  No consideration was made for me.  I did not know who to contact for assistance and no one seemed to know that I was there or enquired about my whereabouts.  I was totally helpless and lost.  I turned to my home university to help who in turned contacted the UKZN international office, who then contacted me.  It was only then that some attempt was made to assist me, other than that, I was left to fend for myself."*

From these findings it is evident that students view the communication channel as inadequate and this is contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience.   Verderber and Verderber (2002: 112) supports this finding by adopting Shramm's transactional model of communication as depicting communication as a dynamic process in which both participants are actively engaged in encoding, transmitting, receiving and decoding messages.  Meaning is negotiated between the participants and the outcome of the encounter is determined by the mutual involvement of the participants in negotiating the meaning of the messages.  Rather than depicting transmission and feedback as two separate processes, the transactional model indicates that messages are continually passing between the participants.   While communication is taking place, external, internal and semantic noise may be occurring at various places in the model.  These noises may affect the ability of the communicator and recipient to share meanings.

80% of respondents equally agreed and disagreed that they would recommend UKZN. 20% were unsure about their recommendations.  Of the comments received from respondents who agreed to recommend UKZN as a destination for student exchange, it was suggested that a longer practice of trial and error could do much to improve UKZN's ability to host foreign students.  By continuing the programme, the student exchange office would have the opportunity to improve on their services as well as overcome any challenges that they face by taking heed off and finding suggestions to the problems highlighted by previous exchange students.

## 4.4 Conclusion

Chapter 4 analyzed the responses generated by the research instrument. The responses were then captured on an Excel spreadsheet, using a Likert Scale. Statistical conclusions were reached from these findings. The results of the demographic analysis identified strata according to gender, home country, and previous experience in a developing country and were representative of the population. Communication challenges and perceived barriers have had a significant influence on the students exchange experiences, with international universities questioning if future students will be sent to UKZN. It was also found that respondents agreed with the researchers' recommendations. It was determined that in order to address the external problems of students, a focus should be made on improving the communications tools used to communicate with international students. Training and development would address the internal factors. Conclusions will be drawn in Chapter 5 and recommendations will be made.

# Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

## 5.1    Introduction

Chapter four discussed the findings of the research instrument and established links to the secondary research.  It analysed and interpreted the data gathered from the interviews.  The findings of the study were then compared to the literature review as well as Shramms Communication Model to determine the communication process within the UKZN student exchange programme.  This chapter, therefore, presents conclusions that were drawn from the study.  It further presents a set of recommendations based on the interpretation of the results.  It will also highlight the summary, conclusions and limitations of the study and offer recommendations based on the interpretation of the results.

## 5.2    Summary of the study

The overall purpose of this study was to identify some of the major communication challenges experienced by previous international students during their four month student exchange to UKZN. The sub-objectives of this study are:

- To identify the communication tools used by UKZN International Relations to liaise with foreign students.

- To identify how these communication tools have contributed to the communication challenges of the student exchange programme and its affect on the future growth of the programme.

- To assess the effect that challenges in communication pose to the UKZN international office; the student exchange officers and the foreign student; and

- To identify ways of addressing these communication challenges.

Shramms Communication Model was investigated as well as its application to communication barriers. The literature review revealed that students viewed internal problems with staff and the medium used to communicate with them, such as DVD's; brochures and e-mail, as key factors responsible for difficulties in the communication process. The study also revealed that two-way communication is an important if not integral part of the student exchange programme. The data analysis revealed that the majority of the sample supports the development of a clear communications plan aimed at overcoming current student complaints, through effective marketing and communication channels, as well as through staff development. One of the significant results emerging from this study is that effective two-way communication is the most important ingredient for a successful student exchange programme.

## 5.3    Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to identify some of the major communication challenges experienced by previous international students during their four month student exchange to UKZN. A sample of sixty students, representing fifteen international universities was used in this study. Based on this, the following section presents the conclusions to the study based on the objectives set out in chapter 1.

### 5.3.1  Identify the communication tools used by UKZN international relations to liaise with foreign students?

The primary research identified that both internal and external factors are contributing to the communication challenges being faced by the international student. With the increase in the number of complaints received from students who participate in the

exchange programme, it is evident that UKZN did not anticipate these communications problems and were therefore unprepared. This together with stagnant operational plans, poor management and lack of employee recognition and rewards has resulted in student exchange officers feeling demoralized and thus dissatisfied with their jobs. This in turn has led to poor job performance, which directly affects the incoming international exchange student. Findings also reveal that change is regarded as unavoidable and therefore educational institutions must factor it into future strategies. Marketing the university internationally as a product or brand is vital to stimulating and maintaining the interests of students, while ongoing training of international relations staff on global education issues and developments is essential for reaching optimum levels.

## 5.3.2 Identify the impact of the communications challenges on the UKZN international office; the student exchange officers; and the foreign student.

Maintaining a stable workforce is imperative to UKZN's success, but this is proving difficult as constant criticisms are affecting staff morale. This is also compounded as partnerships with international universities are being jeopardized as student complaints continue to increase. This has seen a notable increase in students opting to quit the exchange programme before their four month exchange is up. It is evident that other educational institutions are increasing their brand awareness by focusing on e-based marketing and online recruitment. Student exchange officers are often not aware of the impact that their service delivery is having on the overall exchange programme because their job levels prevents them from understanding the overall aims of the university in line with international recruitment of students. Key to reviving its ability to host international students, UKZN employee patriotism can be stimulated through rewards and recognition.

### 5.3.3 What procedures or methods can be implemented to minimize the effects of these communication challenges?

Most respondents agree that a defined communications plan that incorporates communication channels is vital for the success of the programme.  A well implemented training programme will help employees to cope with and overcome the demands, criticisms and complaints of international students and partners.  Emphasis should be placed on improving the communication tools used to communicate with international students.  Training of student exchange officers is essential to improving the service delivery of UKZN to host international students.  Also reassessing UKZN's marketing material to meet the requirements of prospective exchange students as well as implementing a communications strategy with at least a ten year goal plan is paramount.

### 5.3.4 Identify how the communication tools have contributed to the communication challenges of the student exchange programme and its effects on the future growth of the programme?

Respondents unanimously agree that the communications challenges experienced under the student exchange programme is affecting the overall success of the exchange programme with international partner universities increasingly voicing their concerns.  The communications tools used to communicate with international students namely the DVD prospectus and the brochures have been highlighted as key areas that need to be developed in line with international student expectations.  Student exchange officers are also not taking cognisance of the impact of their jobs on the success of the exchange programme.  This compounded with deterioration in housing and security has increased the discomfort factor of students.   Reigniting confidence in hosting international student exchanges is the greatest challenge facing UKZN.

**5.4    Recommendations**

The following recommendations are proposed in order to address the current communications challenges at the UKZN student exchange programme:

**5.4.1        Additional staff training is needed**

Findings revealed that respondents were of the opinion that UKZN exchange officers would benefit from additional training programmes.    It is evident that students believe that exchange officers need additional training and this is contributing to some of the communications barriers that students experience.

**5.4.2        A defined communication channel is essential to improving the**
**                student exchange programme?**

Respondents reported that a defined communication channel would ensure a good student exchange experience overall.   The ability to do things rather than hear a communication message means that the intended message may not always be received.   This can be stressful initially for the sender and then the recipient who may struggle to comprehend later on.   This confirms Kotler (2006: 43) argument that a basic marketing plan must be able to define a business niche, summarise objectives and present strategies for achieving desired goals.   From these findings it is evident that students believe that a defined communication channel would ease some of the communications challenges that students experience.

Respondents also agreed that a communications plan would improve the UKZN student exchange experience.   This confirms Taylor's (2004: 169) finding that good planning, together with a marketing plan must involve appropriate strategies for implementation. This may include effective communications; the use of negotiated, agreed upon targets that are fair but challenging and that are backed by supporting mechanisms for resource

allocation; and the identification of key bodies and individuals with specific responsibilities for implementing specific parts of the strategy.

### 5.4.3 The Student Information Pack should contain more information on SA Laws, Security and Medical Aid?

Prospective foreign students often have a mindset of what their expectations are and they tend not to be easily dissuaded from their beliefs. This can prove stressful for the receiver who is attempting to convey a particular message. If, for example, the sender (the student exchange officer) is trying to convey a message on the legal requirements of his/her application to the receiver (the student), but the student instead of listening, already has a mindset of the application process in his/her country, then he/she will not be inclined to pay too much attention to the message that is being given to him/her. If the exchange officer can somehow impress on the student the importance of the communication message, then only, with additional effort, can this barrier be handled.

From the findings, respondents also agreed that additional information on SA Laws, Security, Medical Aid, etc., would improve the student pack. From the findings it is evident that students believe that the student pack needs more information, as its current form is contributing to some of the communications challenges that students experience.

### 5.4.4 Quicker process time for Emails, Telephone calls and Applications

Respondents agreed that a quicker turnaround and response time is needed for emails, telephone enquiries and application processes. It is evident that students believe that a quicker turnaround time is needed, as the current delays in responses are contributing to some of the communications challenges that students experience. Some of the physical challenges influencing response times may include the time difference prevents potential students from communicating directly with a UKZN representative. As reported in the interviews a delay in relaying messages and waiting for responses

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often leads to frustration.  The medium of communication can also be a barrier, e.g., the telephone.  Poor connections and delayed sounds also make communication difficult. E-mail enquiries are also reliant on the timeous response of the recipient.  Delayed responses create an impression of lack of concern or interest.  This is once again supported by Shramms Movement if the message as cited by (Mersham & Skinner, 2010: 8) in figure 1.7.

## 5.4.5        More education is needed on cultural differences

Respondents agreed that more education was needed to understand the different cultures in SA.  From these findings it is evident that students believe that more cultural information is needed in order to help them settle into the country and campus quicker. Foreign students go through enculturation when they first arrive and are faced with adapting to their new society.  Some students however experience acculturation, where they are resistant to abandoning their past and hence acculturate new ideas into their existing culture.  Lack of similar experiences means that students are fearful and often weary of asking important questions, leading to dissatisfaction later on.  This confirms Chaney & Martin (2007: 74) who identified culture shock as a communication problem that involves the frustrations of not understanding the verbal and non verbal communication of the host culture, its customs and its value systems.   Differences in ethnicity, religion and social differences can also be a barrier to effective communication, e.g., a student with an American accent may have difficulty understanding the dialect of local African representatives and this could put a strain in relations as each tries to convey his/her message to the other.  Local traditions, customs and body language can also create barriers, as the foreign student grapple with understanding his/her new environment.  Also the listener's mental inertia may prevent him/her from listening and understanding the message that is being conveyed and this can be frustrating to the sender.  From comments received during the interviews, it was felt that students, by nature, are self absorbed in their own issues and find it difficult to focus on additional instructions that are being presented to them.  As a result, important messages are overlooked as being insignificant and cognisance of the

message may not have been absorbed as it should. Differences in language or the use of certain vocabulary can also create communication problems between the participants.

From the responses obtained, we can safely verify that the responses received on both the questionnaire and interviews are supportive of the findings and the following additional recommendations can also be made:

- It is recommended that an immediate communications strategy plan, identifying short and long term goals for the recruitment and retention of international students needs to be implemented;
- an immediate marketing strategy plan identifying the short and long term goals for attracting international students needs to be implemented;
- a designated student exchange officer should be identified as the contact person who is to assist students with all of their email, telephone and in-person enquiries;
- students currently on an exchange to UKZN need immediate orientation support programmes to educate them on the local culture, housing, security, etc.;
- Improving online support via email and telephone support is crucial for overcoming communication barriers;
- online applications would be a faster and less stressful alternative for international applicants;
- marketing material on the student exchange programme needs to be redesigned to address the questions and needs of the international student;
- student Exchange Packs should contain additional information on country laws, medical aid, policing, etc.;
- a DVD prospectus on the student exchange programme should be developed;
- a cultural awareness programme should be implemented prior to the students departure from their home countries. This can then be further enforced at UKZN's orientation programmes; the orientation programme for exchange students should ideally begin with a brief workshop in their home countries. This

should then be followed by their immediate arrival at the airports, whereby they are made to feel comfortable. An initial orientation workshop followed up with weekly ongoing support programmes should be implemented;

- an open door policy at the international office should be implemented with immediate effect;

- social programmes aimed at encouraging interaction with locals should be ongoing on a weekly basis and offering a wide range of aftermarket accessories can be added as an attraction.

## 5.5    Concluding Remarks

The ability to retain the confidence of international partners in order to increase profitability is slowly being eroded due to basic communications challenges. Internal and external factors have been identified as the primary contributors to a problem that is affecting the image of UKZN internationally. The findings of this study thus collaborates these views and clearly identifies communications challenges as being the catalyst to increasing disillusionment of the UKZN student exchange programme. For UKZN to create mutual understanding and maintain balanced relationships between itself, the international partner university and the visiting student, it is crucial that two-way communication channels and communication strategies be formulated. Overcoming communication barriers has a crucial role to play in acknowledging the importance of relationship building. It can therefore be concluded that overcoming current communications problems is imperative to the success of the communication process within the student exchange programme.

It emerged from the results of the study that the communications tools used to recruit and inform international students are falling short of meeting the needs or answering the questions of its intended market. The literature revealed that by identifying industry driving forces, its impact on the student exchange programme could be identified and strategies could be implemented to prepare for the affects of these driving forces. Addressing and overcoming communications barriers must be selectively sensitive to

specifically defined publics that are mutually affected or involved by UKZN's policies, procedures and actions. Furthermore, in implementing Shramms transactional communication model, two-way communication can be encouraged that initiates corrective actions within UKZN and affects knowledge, predisposition and behaviour of both internal and external publics. The outcomes sought are the achievement of goals that reflect the mutual interest of UKZN and its' public. Thus, organisations employing Shramms transactional communication model will encourage two-way communication that will maintain their relationships by adjusting and adapting themselves and their publics to ever changing needs. Therefore Shramms transactional communication model approach will enable UKZN to recognise changes in industry and advise its partner universities and students on how the exchange programme should adapt itself to respond to the needs of its foreign students. Based on the literature review and empirical research, this study recommends that an effective communications plan aimed at overcoming communications barriers be implemented in order to achieve a mutually beneficial arrangement.

## 5.6    Conclusion

The increase in globalization and internationalization has impacted on the education industry. As such, this study has endeavored to show that communications challenges experienced by students have the impact of threatening future exchanges to UKZN. The researcher supports this view with literary and statistical evidence and provides recommendations to improve on the said conditions. This study therefore not only strives to draw attention to the research problem but also paves the way for future research to be conducted in this field.

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## Appendix 1: Permission Letter

<div align="right">

M. Maharajh (Ms)
C/o UKZN Student Exchange
Howard Campus
Durban-South Africa

15 March 2010

</div>

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re:** **Research: UKZN Student Exchange Programme**

I am a Master of Technology (MTEC) student, registered at the Durban University of Technology, where I am currently conducting research that aims to identify the communications challenges facing international students participating in the UKZN Student Exchange Programme. The purpose of this study is to establish to what extent exchange students have been affected by communications problems.

As a part-time employee of UKZN, I have been granted the necessary permissions to continue this research. In order to ensure that an accurate survey is conducted, I require a response from your institution. To do this, I kindly request that you take fifteen (15) minutes of your time to make yourself available for a telephone interview (date and time to be confirmed by yourself)?

I also request that you identify five (5) random students that have recently returned from a student exchange to UKZN, in order to complete the attached survey? This survey is designed to help me identify the unbiased views of students following their exchange experience. The results are strictly anonymous and all information received will be published as part of my dissertation in which no individual response will be identifiable.

Attached please find the survey questionnaire in an Excel format. Please may I ask that your five (5) representative students fill in the questionnaire electronically? All five of the completed responses should then be returned to me via email on the following address: meryl.maharajh@gmail.com by no later than Wednesday, 31 March 2010.

I appreciate your time and effort utilized in contributing to this research. I know that you will agree that the findings of this research will be extremely beneficial to your future exchange students and I look forward to sharing my findings with you.

Sincerely

M. Maharajh (Ms)
27312099308 / 2773 771 9797

**Appendix 2: The research instrument-Questionnaire**

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3"><strong>Questionnaire: UKZN Student Exchange Programme</strong></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Please answer all questions by choosing (1) option from the drop down menu</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td><strong>General</strong></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>Gender?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>Home country?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>Before my student exchange to UKZN I previously studied/visited a third world country?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td><strong>Website</strong></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>I accessed the UKZN website, for information on the Student Exchange programme (SEP)?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td>I found the SEP webpage easy to locate on the UKZN website?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td><td>I found the information on the UKZN SEP informative and easy to understand?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>7</td><td>I was able to easily access and download the application forms?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td><strong>Student Exchange Info Pack (Brochures/Prospectus/Guide/DVD)</strong></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>8</td><td>I heard about the student exchange programme to UKZN through?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>9</td><td>A UKZN student exchange pack was available for me to read/view in my home country?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>10</td><td>The brochures were attractive, easy to understand and answered all of my questions?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>11</td><td>The DVD gave me an idea of what to expect on the exchange programme?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td><strong>Application Process</strong></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>12</td><td>The criterion for application was straightforward and the registration forms easy to complete and I did not mind that I had to print my application and post it back in hard copy?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>13</td><td>The time allocated for the completion and submission of my application was adequate?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>14</td><td>I think that a fully online registration process would be more convenient and quick?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td><strong>Email Enquiries</strong></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>15</td><td>I was able to easily email the UKZN International Office for information?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>16</td><td>I received a quick response to my email enquiries?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>17</td><td>The Student Exchange Officer provided clear feedback (answers) to my enquiries?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>18</td><td>I thought that the Student Exchange Officer was open and took the time to help me with my enquiries?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td><strong>Post Arrival - Orientation at UKZN</strong></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>19</td><td>UKZN explained the challenges I would face studying in a third world country</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>20</td><td>I received adequate information from UKZN of what to expect when I arrived in SA/UKZN</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>21</td><td>The orientation programme was informative and answered all of my questions?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>22</td><td>If felt that the UKZN student exchange officers spoke clearly and were easy to understand</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>23</td><td>I thought that the Orientation Programme was too short?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>24</td><td>The Student Exchange Officers were available to assist me during my entire 4 month stay?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>25</td><td>I felt that my concerns were understood by UKZN staff and all efforts were made to assist me</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.  By responding you are helping us to improve our service delivery for future exchange students.

# Appendix 3: The research instrument-Interview Schedule

| | | Interview | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **General** | |
| | 1 | I was informed prior to my arrival of what to expect from UKZN student housing? | |
| | | | |
| | 2 | The environment in the student residences was conducive to learning? | |
| | | | |
| | 3 | Campus security made me feel safe and secure | |
| | | | |
| | 4 | Campus security responded to me quickly and took my complaints seriously | |
| | | **Factors affecting the growth of the UKZN Exchange Programme** | |
| | 5 | I feel confident that the UKZN student exchange programme was well managed | |
| | | | |
| | 6 | I feel that UKZN is adequately equipped to handle an increased number of foreign exchange students | |
| | | | |
| | 7 | I thought the exchange program was fun and educational with enough opportunities for me to socialise | |
| | | | |
| | 8 | I found communication between myself and UKZN easy and communication channels well defined | |
| | | | |
| | 9 | I would recommend that other students attend an exchange program with UKZN | |
| | | **Recommendations** | |
| | 10 | I feel that the UKZN student exchange office needs training on how to handle foreign students | |
| | | | |
| | 11 | I think that communication channels should be clearer and more defined | |
| | | | |
| | 12 | I think that the UKZN exchange office will do better if they had a clear communications plan | |
| | | | |
| | 13 | I think that the Student Info Pack should inform us more about: Country laws, Medical aid, Security, etc? | |
| | | | |
| | 14 | I think that emails, telephone calls and applications should be quickly addressed? | |
| | | | |
| | 15 | I think more should be done to prepare students for the cultural differences that they will experience | |

**Appendix 4: Interview exerts. Comments by student**

Hanna Block and Anna Krifors, visiting exchange students from the Karolinska Institute in Europe arrived a week late in South Africa due to visa problems. As a result of this, they had missed the 2-day orientation programme as well as the welcome bus arranged for students at the airports, to transport them to their residences.

*"We had to find out own way to the Westville campus and had great difficulties going through the channels of registration and settling into our residences. This was very stressful and traumatic since we were new to the country".*

The student exchange officers who were responsible for ensuring that the students were welcomed and assisted with settling in, overlooked the fact that Hanna and Anna were not there. They were of the opinion that the students would contact them, if they needed any assistance, but no attempts were made to contact the students in order to check if they were okay. The students were naturally very uncomfortable. They did now know who the UKZN student exchange people were, much less where to find them and they struggled to cope. With no support, they turned to their home universities, who notified UKZN that their students were in fact at the university but was not receiving any welcome assistance.

This gap in support was viewed by the international university as very poor support and orientation practices. UKZN exchange officers were criticized for their poor handling of the foreign students and the international university expressed their dissatisfaction with the overall management of the exchange. This relatively minor oversight in ensuring that the late arrivals (Hanna and Anna), received the necessary orientation information, was seen by the international university as incompetence or an inefficiency on the part of UKZN to handle the exchange programme. Due to this instance, the karolinska University has been wary of sending students to UKZN. Even though they did not indicate outright that they would not be sending anymore students, since this incident, no other students have visited UKZN from Karolinska to date.

**Appendix: Interview exerts. Comments by student**

Felicia Hunt a visiting student from Pitzer College in America in 2009 experienced great difficulties in adapting to her student accommodation. When talking to the international exchange officer at UKZN, she complained that her residence was not conducive to learning. The layout or floor plan of the residence was constructed in such a way that the common room where everyone congregated to chat, eat and do laundry was open and situated at the very centre of the residence with the rooms located around it. This meant that there was noise at all parts of the day and night and she and other students had difficulties learning and even sleeping. Further she could not understand why the residence officers did not take her complaints seriously when she had asked them to warn students about tuning, down the noise levels, especially at night. She felt that her concerns were not being addressed and nobody was taking her requests seriously.

She had complained to the UKZN residence officers, the residence managers and finally to the international office, but still felt that nothing was done. Her frustrations finally resulted in her complaining to her home university. With the support of her own university behind her, her problem was elevated to an international scale with the threat of the university cancelling all future exchange students to UKZN if the problem was not handled to their satisfaction. Felicia was understandable upset because nobody had really taken the time to explain the culture of local students to her. She could not understand why African students shouted when they spoke to each other. She saw this as being very rude and did not realize that it was part of the culture. Had she been told in advance of what expect, then she may not have reacted so strongly. Her frustrations at not getting the correct communication from those in charge heavily contributed to the escalation of the problem. Felicia's problem was finally solved when this was explained to her and she was moved to another residence. The effects of the relatively minor problem however have unfortunately tarnished the reputation of UKZN and Felicia's university now has reservations about sending more students on the exchange programme.

Complaint 2:  I suffer from sickle cell disease which is life threatening.  I had no prior knowledge of SA health systems and believed that my standard issue USA health insurance was sufficient cover for my needs.  I fell ill and an ambulance was called.  It was only then that I found out that my insurance would not cover me at a private hospital and I had to be taken to a government hospital.  I was shocked at the conditions and received no assistance in the trauma unit for about nine hours.  I was just left there!  I eventually left on my own to go to a private hospital that would only treat me once I paid the fee.  I am not a rich student and cannot afford the additional expense, but had to charge the fee to my credit card.  I am now in serious financial problems.  I am shocked and appalled that no one informed me prior to my arrival of the medical situation in SA.  Had I known, I would have planned better.  In all probability I would not have come if I'd known that I would jeopardize my health and finances in this way.

**Appendix 6: Interview exerts. Comments by student**

American students, Emma Kerr of American University and Megan Kerr of Millersville University (no relation) complained to UKZN student officers of similar problems relating to security concerns. Both students in their first month at UKZN seemed to experience problems adjusting to the climate and felt that their personal safety was at risk.

**Emma's complaint was as follows:**

"I was locked in my residence room at about one 'o clock in the morning, when a group of about 30 students came banging and shouting at my door for me to come out. The students were being very abusive and I felt terrified. I telephoned the security on campus and they just laughed. I repeatedly called them about four times and they refused to come out to assist me. I even asked them to call the police – which they did not. I eventually had to jam my chair against the door because I felt that the students would break down the door. No one at UKZN would help me so I telephoned my parents back in the states and told them that I was being attacked and the security would not help me. The students left about an hour later".

Emma's parents frantic with worry that their child was in grave danger contacted her local university who in turn contacted the US Embassy in South Africa. The UKZN student exchange officers were not aware of this situation until the next day when the American University exchange officers notified them of the situation. Emma was not aware of who the UKZN student exchange officers were or how to contact them, as she had only seen them at the orientation session for about ten minutes – she indicated that she did not formally meet the officers on a one to one basis, so she could not recall them in this situation. This pertinent issue blatantly points out the breakdown in communication between the foreign students and the UKZN student exchange officers. Emma's problem was escalated to a crisis situation because of pressure from her parents and the American University who felt that her cries for help were not being addressed.

If Emma had known to contact the UKZN student exchange officer in charge, then this problem could have been sorted out quickly without the need of interference from her parents, home university and the American Embassy. When Emma finally did meet with the UKZN exchange officer in charge, it was explained to her that she was not being attacked – she was in fact being initiated by the other students (a local practice of hauling students out of bed at odd hours and being dumped in a pool, etc. Emma did not at that time understand the loud toyi-toying and boisterous nature of local African students and was therefore terrified because she had not experienced this before. Her complaints against the security however were valid. Even though they knew that students were partaking in initiation practices, it was still their duty to investigate the matter. A formal investigation was therefore lodged against the company in this regard. Emma on the other hand, felt slightly foolish for panicking. She did say, "If someone had explained to me that I could expect this, then I would not have panicked".

**Megan's complaint was as follows:**

"I had forgotten my residence card in my room and could not swipe myself out the door. My friend used her card to get me out instead. As I passed through the gates, I was pulled aside roughly by the residence security who demanded to know where my card was. I explained to him that I had forgotten it, but he was being very aggressive towards me. I also felt very uncomfortable because he was looking me up and down in an inappropriate manner. I told him that I had to leave and he blocked my way while brushing up against me – I felt his penis! This was no accident because he was laughing at me. I felt very threatened and so I ran. I have seen him various times since then and he is always watching me. I am fearful for my life and I feel that he will try to attack me. I have informed the security office to have him removed, but nothing has been done. I have also informed the residence officers but they aren't taking my complaints seriously. I have therefore notified my home university, Millersville and have requested to leave UKZN as soon as possible".

Like Emma, Megan was also not aware that she could turn to the UKZN student officers for help. She felt alone, desperate and unable to cope in a foreign place. Millersville University stepped in and notified UKZN that there was a problem with Megan. Only then was action taken. Megan met with the relevant staff in the international office, where she explained her problem and was offered assistance in terms of lodging a formal complaint against the security. Due to Megan feeling very threatened however, she did not want the matter investigate formally until she had left the country. She insisted on leaving as she was extremely fearful for her safety. All efforts were made to help Megan and she returned safely home. On her departure her formal complaint was lodged with UKZN and the matter was being investigated further.

This issue like Emma's clearly indicates a breakdown in communication between UKZN student exchange and the foreign students. Relatively minor problems have exploded into larger scale international concerns because of the barriers in communication with the exchange officers. Had a clear, concise and well managed orientation and emergency support programme been in place, then these issues could have been handled quickly and effectively, without outside interference.