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- Good feedback should clearly explain, standards, goals and expected outcomes;
- The need to facilitate the development of self-assessment;
- Delivering high quality information to students about learning;
- The provision of information to lecturers that can be used to assist in shaping teaching;
- The need to encourage lecturer and peer dialogue around learning;
- Encouraging positive motivational belief and self-esteem; and
- The provision of opportunities for students to close the gap between the present and desired performance (Nicol & Macfarlene-Dick, 2006).

In addition, Nicol & Macfarlene-Dick (2006) suggest strategies that can be used to implement these principles, which include: engaging students in identifying standards or assessment criteria to be applied to their assessed work; the provision of feedback that relates to pre-defined criteria; the provision of corrective advice; and prioritizing areas where students need to improve (Nicol & Macfarlene-Dick, 2006).

Rae and Cochrane (2008) conducted a qualitative study with eight (8) registered nurses, undertaking a part-time, top-up degree programme at a higher education institution in UK, to capture and interpret students' perspectives of written assessment feedback. The data collected suggested that students fall into two distinct categories – passive and active learners. The active learners actively engage with written feedback to improve their performance, while the passive learners are not committed to learn. Rae and Cochrane (2008), therefore, suggest that lecturers should encourage their students to develop the skill of self-regulated learning, in order to facilitate students' engagement with written feedback, as well as maximize learning.

Orsmond, Merry and Reiling (2005) also conducted a semi-structured interview with sixteen (16) third-year biology students at a higher education institution in United Kingdom, to ascertain students' utilization of lecturers' feedback. The results indicated diversity in the utilization of feedback by students, as follows: 14 students used feedback to enrich their learning environment; 8 students demonstrated that specific lecturers' feedback would influence their utilization of the feedback; and others utilized feedback for clarification and enhancing their motivation. Orsmond et al., (2005) state that lecturers cannot provide all the needs of students with regards to feedback. They further state that the utilization of lecturers'

feedback by students is a skill and, in order to develop this skill, an awareness of the diversity of possible feedback utilization, must be enhanced, in order for students to recognize the fact that individual needs cannot be met. Lecturers also need to provide written feedback of student assessments in a manner that broadens and helps to improve learning, evaluate the effectiveness of their feedback and its utilization by students.

Lecturers need to encourage and empower their students to become active learners, who manage or self-regulate their own learning, as it has been suggested by authors of these studies that self-regulated learners actively engage with written feedback to enhance their performance.

### 2.5.2. Discussions between lecturers and students

Various research studies (Price, Handley & Millar, 2011; Rae & Cochrane, 2008) have shown that students wish to have discussions with their lecturers on feedback, but lecturers' availability and approachability was a concern to students. Certain studies (Price, Handley & Millar, 2011; Rae & Cochrane, 2008; Murtagh & Baker, 2009) have recommended the need for lecturers to encourage dialogue after written feedback has been delivered, in order to enhance students' comprehension and engagement of feedback.

Murtagh and Baker (2009) conducted an action research study with undergraduate students in a higher education institution in the UK, to explore students' perceptions of assessment feedback and the impact of an intervention to enhance its use. The results indicated that students engage with written feedback when they are encouraged to set goals, and there are one-on-one discussions of feedback with lecturers. Murtagh and Baker (2009) implemented an intervention strategy – one-on-one tutorials with first year students. Firstly, assignments with traditional written feedback were provided to the students. Secondly, students were told to prepare for one-on-one tutorials, by noting questions on the feedback, or next the assignment, that they would want to ask, identifying any of the feedback comments they did not understand, and setting goals for development. Thirdly, the implementation of the intervention questionnaires were distributed to first-year students to assess the effectiveness of the strategy. Of the 158 first-year students, 83% and 38% rated one-on-one tutorials 4 and 5 respectively, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was not at all effective, and 5, was highly effective (Murtagh & Baker, 2009).

The results of a study by Rae and Cochrane (2008) also indicated that student nurses wanted opportunities to discuss the written feedback with their lecturers, in order to comprehend and utilize the written feedback for the improvement of their future work. Rae and Cochrane (2008), therefore, suggest that lecturers should guide their students, who might be having difficulties with the understanding and interpreting of the written feedback, by encouraging, and being available for, face-to-face discussions.

Although discussions between lecturers and students are recognized as essential for the improvement of learning, large class sizes could affect the lecturer's ability to have one-on-one discussions with all their students (Nicol, 2010). Lecturers could, however, arrange tutorials with students after they had received the written feedback. Students could then be assigned to groups where they could share and discuss the feedback (Nicol, 2010).

It is evident from the results of these studies that discussions on written feedback between lecturers and students encourages students to engage with written feedback, which could improve performance, as students get to understand the feedback comments, as well as the reasons behind the grades or marks received.

### 2.5.3. Consistency in the timing and quality of written feedback

Several studies (Rae & Cochrane, 2008; Weaver, 2006) have shown that students would like to use written feedback to improve their performances. However, anecdotal evidence suggest that negative factors, such as unconstructive, vague, incomprehensive, and undetailed feedback, as well as the timing inconsistency of written feedback delivery, does not help to promote the process.

A research project by Kandiko and Mawer (2013) investigated students' expectations and perceptions of the quality of their learning experience, as well as the academic standards of their chosen programmes, in higher education institutions across the UK, in the years 2012 and 2013. The results indicated that students were unhappy with the inconsistencies in the length, details and effectiveness of feedback received from their lecturers. Additionally, Ghazal, Gul, Hanzala, Jessop and Tharani (2014) conducted a qualitative study at a private university in Pakistan, with 15 graduate students studying medicine, nursing and education. The aim of the study was to appraise the quality of written feedback in the graduate programmes and to ascertain the students' perceptions thereof. The results of the study indicated that there were



differences in the quality, quantity and frequency of the written feedback received. These differences were not only recognized in the programmes, but also in the courses and faculty of the same programme.

Gibbs and Simpson (2004) assert that if feedback is not delivered swiftly enough, it becomes insignificant to the students' ongoing studies, as they would have moved on to a new subject and the effort of the lecturers in providing the feedback would have been wasted. Carroll (1995, cited in Gibbs & Simpson, 2004), described a formative assessment workshop, which consisted of a multiple choice questions test for a class of three hundred (300) medical students. The feedback was provided immediately after the assignment and students were permitted to study for period of time, before moving on to next topic. 85% of the students wanted more such sessions. Although, large student numbers might affect the quick turn-around of feedback to students, Higgins, Hartley and Skelton (2002) assert that the timing of feedback is crucial and suggested that feedback should be returned to students as soon as possible after the submission of an assignment.

Additionally, if lecturers could abide by institutional policy, students could be provided with consistent quality and timely feedback. Rust (2002, cited in Rae & Cochrane, 2008) suggests that, in order to maintain consistency in channeling communication, lecturers need to follow a timely and standardized approach that is guided by institutional policy. Rae and Cochrane (2008) also recommend that, in order for written feedback to be consistent, institutional policy on feedback should be open, clearly explained and accessible to everyone, and lecturers must abide by the time-frame set within the feedback policy. Inconsistencies in written feedback received by students are not only recognized in an individual lecturers' feedback, but also across disciplines. Higgins, Hartley & Skelton (2002) suggest that there is a need for open discussions between lecturers to prevent students receiving inconsistent feedback across disciplines.

#### 2.5.4. Students preference for written feedback

According to Giles, Gilbert and McNeil (2014b), and Glover and Brown (2006), there is a need for lecturers to be aware of their students' feedback preference, as well as their difficulties/weaknesses when they submit their assignments, in order to encourage them to engage with feedback; thereby making feedback effective. Being aware of students' feedback

preferences reduces the likelihood of unproductive feedback comments by lecturers. It also empowers students more than only receiving written feedback, which is based on the lecturers' interpretations of students work (Nicol, 2010)

In a review activity conducted by Giles et al. (2014b) with 248 third-year students in a higher education institution in Australia, a questionnaire was constructed to explore students' preferences for written feedback. Of the 248 students, 73% preferred a grade with written feedback throughout the assignment and marking guide, 26% preferred written feedback with a grade on the marking guide, but not throughout the assignment, and 1% preferred only a grade. The findings suggest that the students were happy when asked about their preferences, and that the majority will choose the particular type and amount of written feedback they want on their assignment, if given the opportunity to do so (Giles et al., 2014b).

Students' preference for feedback has also been linked to the method of engagement. Rowe and Wood (2008) conducted a principal component analysis on a survey that was based on the themes identified in their previous studies, to explore students' perceptions of feedback with undergraduates and postgraduate students from two universities in Australia. The study identified two preference dimensions, preference A and B, and a possible connection between students feedback preferences and learning approaches. Students that fall within 'Preference A' preferred feedback that allows them to understand and reflect on a subject matter. On the other hand, students under preference B preferred feedback that provides answers about the lecturers marking criteria and were less concerned about understanding and reflecting on a subject matter. However, Rowe and Wood (2008) concluded that good feedback practice was more essential than accounting for individual differences.

It is evident from these researches lecturers should inquire about the preference of their students, as it aids them to provide feedback that suit their students' needs.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the literature on assessment and feedback practices, students' perceptions of written feedback and engaging students with written feedback.

Chapter Three (3) discusses the research method and design employed in the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodology employed in this study to achieve the research objectives. It discusses, in detail, the research approach, design and setting, the population and sampling, development of the data-collection instrument, reliability, validity and data analysis of the study, as well as the ethics considered and ensured.

#### **3.2. Research Approach**

Quantitative research is a formal, objective, systematic process, in which numerical data are utilized to acquire information about the world (Burns & Grove, 2005). According to Polit and Beck (2012), in quantitative research, a phenomenon is investigated which leads to precise measurement and quantification. The quantitative research approach was selected for this study because the researcher wanted to gather information and generate new knowledge about student nurses' perception of written feedback on assessment.

#### **3.3. Research design**

According to Polit and Beck (2012), research design is the overall plan to address a research question, which includes specifications for enhancing the research study's integrity. Burns and Grove (2003) concurs that research design guides the researcher to plan and implement the research study in a manner that is most likely to obtain the intended objective. This current research study employed a quantitative, descriptive survey design to describe student nurses' perceptions of written feedback, on assessment.

A descriptive research design describes variables with the intention of answering the research question (Brink, Van der Walt & Van Rensburg, 2006). Brink et al. (2006) state that, in descriptive research, more information is required in a particular field of study, through the provision of a picture of the phenomenon, as it takes place naturally. According to Burns and Grove (2003), a descriptive research design is useful in generating new knowledge of concepts, on which few or no studies have been conducted. This research design is most suitable for this

study because the researcher has no intention of establishing a cause-effect relationship (Brink et al., 2006), but aims to describe the students perception of written feedback.

According to Burns and Grove (2005), a survey is a data collection technique, in which questionnaires or personal interviews are utilized to collect data about an identified population. Brink et al. (2006) defines a survey as a research study, in which self-reported data are collected from a sample, so that the characteristics of the population will be determined. A survey was employed in this current study because it is a very important source of data, which could also be used in descriptive research (Burns & Grove, 2005), as it is flexible and allows participants to answer a series of questions (Polit & Beck, 2012).

### **3.4. Research setting**

The research setting is the site where a research study is conducted (Burns and Grove, 2003). The research setting for this study was the SoN, UWC, in the Western Cape Province. The SoN, UWC, is one of two universities in the Western Cape, offering the four year undergraduate nursing degree. The SoN, UWC, has the largest number of nursing students registered for the Bachelor of Nursing degree and offers both a four (4) year and 5 year ECP in the Bachelor of Nursing degree programme. The SoN is part of the Faculty of Community Health and Sciences at the UWC (Jooste, 2014)

### **3.5. Population and sampling**

Burns and Grove (2005) defined population as an entire aggregation of cases that meet a designated set of criteria. Sampling is the process of selecting cases to represent a whole population, in order to make inferences about the population (Polit & Beck, 2012).

#### **3.5.1. Population of the study**

The population for this study was all student nurses registered towards a BN degree at the SoN, UWC in 2015. There are a total of one thousand and fifty-eight (1058) undergraduate students registered for the Bachelor of Nursing degree programme. The target population, which is the aggregate of cases about which the researcher wants to generalize (Polit & Beck, 2012), in this study was one hundred and six (106) students registered in, both, first (51) and second-year (55) of the BN foundation programme. The foundation programme student nurses were

selected because it is uncertain if these students are satisfied with the written feedback received on assessment and were part of the ECP.

### 3.5.2. Sample of the study

A sample is a subset of the population that is chosen for a particular research study (Burns & Grove, 2003). This study employed all-inclusive sampling, meaning that all foundation programme student nurses, who had registered towards a BN degree programme for 2015, were included.

## 3.6. Data collection

Polit and Beck (2012) defines data collection as the gathering of information to address a research problem. Burns and Grove (2003) also defines data collection as the precise, systematic gathering of information relevant to address the research objectives of the study.

### 3.6.1. Data collection instrument

According to Brink et al. (2006), a research instrument is a device utilized to collect data in a research study. The research instrument employed in this study was an existing questionnaire, adapted from Khowaja et al. (2014), as well as Gibbs and Simpson (2003). Polit and Beck (2012) defines a questionnaire as a document that is used to collect self-report data, through self-administration of questions. Permission to use the questionnaire for this study has been obtained from the respective authors (see Addendum 6).

The questionnaire consist of four (4) sections. Section A, B and D are adapted from a questionnaire used by Khowaja et al. (2014) on written feedback in nursing. Section C is adapted from the Assessment Experience Questionnaire, developed by Gibbs and Simpson (2003). Section A elicits demographic data; Section B obtains data about the practice of written feedback and consists of thirteen (13) closed, and one (1) open- ended question; Section C consists of a five (5) point Likert scale, which has two sections – amount and time has six (6) questions, and quality of written feedback has ten (10) questions; Section D is a closed-ended question on how written feedback practices can be improved. There are a total of 31 questions in the questionnaire (see Addendum 1). It required about 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

### 3.6.2. Pre-testing of instrument

Pre-testing of the questionnaire was carried out by the researcher with the intention of determining the accuracy in information, time required to complete questionnaire, whether participants understood the questions, and also to ensure that the objectives of the study will be attained. The questionnaire was pre-tested on 10 student nurses, who were registered for the BN foundation programme, and excluded from the main study.

The following questions; 9, 12, 13 and 31 (see Addendum 7) were corrected after the pre-testing. A correction was made on question 9 because the researcher wanted to know the mode of communication for written feedback to the students. Question 12 was amended because the researcher wanted to know the focus of written feedback on the test, and alterations were made on the items under questions 13, to make it easier for the participants to read. Additionally, the researcher wanted to know specific views of students on written feedback process and, therefore, changed it from an open-ended question to closed-ended question. The questionnaire was retested on the same 10 students, who participated in the pre-testing of the instrument, after amending the questionnaire.

### 3.6.3. Data collection process

The proposal for this study was sent to the University Senate Higher Degree and Senate Research committees for approval. After approval, a letter was sent to the Dean of research (see addendum 3) and the Head of SoN, UWC (see addendum 5) to obtain permission to conduct the study. The researcher began to collect data after permission was granted.

Data collection was carried out from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2015. The researcher first contacted the coordinator for the foundation classes, after which a date and time was set for data collection. The researcher visited the classes (foundation 1 and 2) before data collection and explained the purpose of the study, the reasons for selecting the foundation student nurses, the rights in, and possible risks of, the study. The researcher also informed the participants that participation in the study was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any stage of the study, and that confidentiality and anonymity would be ensured.

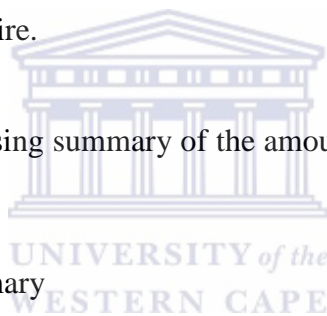
The researcher administered information sheets, informed consent forms and questionnaires to each participant at the end of the class session. Each participant was asked to sign the informed consent form before completing the questionnaire. A total of 74 questionnaires were distributed

as not all the 106 students were willing to participate in the study, and some were absent for reasons, such as sickness. The researcher was available to clarify any misunderstanding and collected the questionnaires after they had been completed by the participants. Sixty-nine (69) of the seventy-four (74) returned questionnaires as some students had left to attend to personal issues.

### 3.7. Reliability

According to Polit and Beck (2012) reliability is the consistency with which an instrument measures the target attribute. Reliability plays a vital role in selecting scales for use in a research study (Burns & Grove, 2003). Cronbach’s Alpha, was used to test the reliability of the instrument and was done by the researcher with the assistance of a statistician. Burns and Grove (2003) stated that for a newly developed instrument reliability of 0.70 is considered acceptable. The reliability coefficient was, therefore, set at 0.70, in order to maintain the test retest reliability of the questionnaire.

Table 3.1 depicts the case processing summary of the amount of cases that participated in the pretesting of the instrument.



**Table 3.1:** Case processing summary

Case Processing Summary		
Cases	n	%
Valid	10	100.0
Excluded	0	0.0
Total	10	100.0

Table 3.2 depicts the reliability coefficient of the scale: amount and timing of written feedback.

**Table 3.2: Reliability of amount and timing of feedback**

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.792	6

Table 3.3 depicts the reliability coefficient of the scale: quality of written feedback.

**Table 3.3: Reliability of quality of written feedback**

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.738	10

### 3.8. Validity

Validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it intends to measure (Polit & Beck, 2012). Face validity basically verifies whether the instrument appears to measure the relevant content that it purports to measure (Burns & Grove, 2003). Face validity was established in this study by consulting the experts in nursing science and the supervisor to provide feedback about the validity of the instrument.

Content validity refers to the extent to which an instrument covers that scope and range of information that it sought (Brink et al., 2006). Content validity was established by means of the researcher presenting the questionnaire for review by the statistician, the research ethics committee and the supervisor to provide input, because of their experience in the practice and quantitative research.

### 3.9. Data Analysis

According to Polit and Beck (2012), data analysis refers to the systematic organization and synthesis of research data. Data analysis is carried out in order to reduce, organize and give meaning to data (Burns & Grove, 2003). In this study, descriptive statistics were used to



analyze and describe student nurses' perceptions of written feedback on assessment. According to Polit and Beck (2012), descriptive statistics are used sometimes to directly address the research question in studies that are primarily descriptive and also to help set the stage for the understanding of quantitative research evidence.

The questionnaire were divided into the following sections: demographic data; practice of written feedback; the amount, time and quality of written feedback, and the improvement of the written feedback process, to facilitate the presentation of the results. Questions under the practice of written feedback were grouped into sub-categories, such as; assessment and feedback, focus of written feedback, improvement of performance and factors that prevent the use of written feedback. Questions under the amount, timing and quality of written feedback were grouped under two scales, namely, amount and timing of written feedback, and quality of written feedback. The mean for the items in each scale was calculated (See Table 4.5 and 4.6).

The completed questionnaires were counted and coded to facilitate the capturing and auditing of the data after data collection. Next, the data was entered into the computer software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 to collect basic descriptive statistics on student nurses' perceptions of written feedback, on assessment. Nominal data was measured and ordinal data was ranked. Nominal data was obtained from question 1, 3-14 and 31 (see addendum 7), question 2 (see addendum 7) which was a scale. Question 14 to 30 (see addendum 7) generated ordinal data. Nominal and scale data were analyzed by means of descriptive analyses.

Section C of the instrument had two scales (see Addendum 7), namely, amount and timing, and quality of written feedback, that were ordinal data. The data was analyzed by scoring the items in each scale from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree) (Gibbs, 2010). However, items marked with (\*) in Table 4.5 and 4.7 were scored in the opposite direction (1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree) (Gibbs, 2010). The average (mean) student rating was calculated for each question, in a scale, and next the average score for all the questions in each scale was calculated (Gibbs, 2010). The mean scale scores for this study were compared with the typical range of scores for each scale in Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet (Gibbs, 2010). The range of the mean scale score for 'amount and timing' and 'quality of feedback' was as follows: the lowest programme mean scale score (2.58) and the highest programme mean scale score (3.76) (Gibbs & Dunbar-Goddet, 2007). Lastly, the mean scale scores for both scales were

calculated to determine the overall students' perceptions of amount, timing and quality of written feedback.

The data was presented in percentages, frequency tables and bar graphs (see Table 4.1 and 4.2).

### **3.10. Ethics**

The approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Senate Higher Degree Committee and the ethics clearance from the Senate Research Committee at the UWC (see Addendum 1) before the study commenced. Permission was also obtained from the Dean of Research (see Addendum 3) and the Head of SoN, UWC (see Addendum 5). The following ethical principles were ensured in the study:

- **Principles for respect of persons**

The participants were not forced to participate in the study and had the right to withdraw at any stage of the study, without prejudice. The participants' information sheets (see Addendum 9) and consent letters (see addendum 8) were administered to all the participants, explaining the purpose of the study, ethical considerations and guidelines for participation.

- **Principle of beneficence**

Polit and Beck (2012) state that the principle of beneficence imposes responsibility on the researcher to minimize harm and maximize benefits. The researcher ensured that the questionnaires were carefully structured and devoid of sensitive questions, which posed the risk of causing harm or discomfort to the participants. Furthermore, the necessary arrangements were made, by the researcher, to refer the participants to an experienced counsellor at the university, in the event of emotional distress as a result of participating in the study.

- **Principle of Justice**

The principle of justice involves the participants' right to fair treatment and privacy (Polit & Beck, 2012). The researcher selected the participants for the study with fairness (Brink et al., 2006), by selecting all the students in the ECP to participate in the study and treating all participants equally. The researcher respected all agreements made with the participants, such as the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without being penalised.

- **Right to Privacy**

The researcher ensured that the right to privacy of the participants was respected throughout the study. The participants had the right to determine the degree to which their information was shared or withheld (Brink et al., 2006). All the participants' information was held in strict confidence and they could decide the extent to which their information should be shared.

- **Anonymity and confidentiality**

Brink et al., (2006) state that anonymity is the researchers' act of keeping participants' identities secret. Anonymity is the most secure means of protecting confidentiality (Polit & Beck, 2012). The researcher ensured that questionnaires did not contain information that would identify the participants as only codes were placed on the questionnaires. In addition, completed questionnaires were secured and locked in a cabinet. A password was assigned to the captured data.

- **Informed consent**

Informed consent refers to the participants' having adequate information about the research study, understanding that information and having the ability to consent or willingly decline participation (Polit & Beck, 2012). The researcher ensured beforehand that participants were well informed about the research study, and were given opportunities for clarification. The participants had to sign the consent forms before participating in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any stage of the study, without prejudice. However, none of the participants withdrew from the study.

### **3.11. Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the research method and design used in the study. The following was also discussed: research setting; population; sampling; data collection process; and the ethical considerations.

Chapter Four discusses the results of the data analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 4.1. Introduction

This study sought to determine and describe the student nurses' perceptions of written feedback after assessment. In this chapter the results of the study is described under the following headings: Demographic data; Practices of written feedback; Amount, timing and quality of written feedback; and Improvement of written feedback processes. Additionally, the key findings of the study are discussed. A total of 74 participants were recruited for the study, of which 69 submitted questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 93.2% (n=69).

#### 4.2. Section A: Demographic data

This section covers the gender distribution, age distribution, nationality, home language, medium of instruction prior to enrolling in nursing, and the academic performance of the participants. Table 4.1 depicts the demographic data of the study participants.

**Table 4.1: Demographic data**

Demographic data		n=69 (%)
Gender	Male	15 (21.7)
	Female	54 (78.3)
Age	18 -19	25 (36.2)
	20 – 21	34 (49.3)
	22 – 25	10 (14.4)
Nationality	South African	68(98.6)
	Other nationality	1 (1.4)
Home language	English	14(20.3)
	Afrikaans	12(17.4)
	IsiXhosa	37(53.6)
	Others	6(8.7)
Medium of instruction before enrolling in nursing	English	49(71.0)
	French	1(1.5)
	Afrikaans	10(14.7)
	IsiXhosa	9(13.2)
Academic performance	Below average	2(2.9)
	Average	26(37.7)
	Good	37(53.6)
	Excellent	4(5.8)

The sample of this study consisted of 78.3% (n=54) females and 21.7% (n=15) males. The age groups of the participants ranged from 18 to 25, with almost half, 49.3% (n= 47) of the participants between the ages of 20 and 21 years.

Most of the participants were South African, 98.6% (n=68), with more than half, 53.6 % (n=37), speaking IsiXhosa as their home language. English was the medium of instruction at school for the majority of the participants, 71% (n=49). More than half of the participants, 53.6% (n=37), rated themselves as good, based on their academic performance at the university.

### 4.3. Section B: Practice of written feedback

This section covers the mode in which written feedback was communicated to the participants, the focus of written feedback received from the lecturers, and the factors that prevented the use of written feedback. The following questions were posed to the participants: (i) Do you receive assessment criteria before assignments?; (ii) Do you receive feedback after assignments and tests?; (iii) Does the feedback received reflect the assessment criteria?; (iv) How often do you receive written feedback from your lecturers? (see Table 4.2).

#### 4.3.1. Assessment criteria and written feedback

Table 4.2 depicts the assessment criteria and written feedback that the participants received from their lecturers.

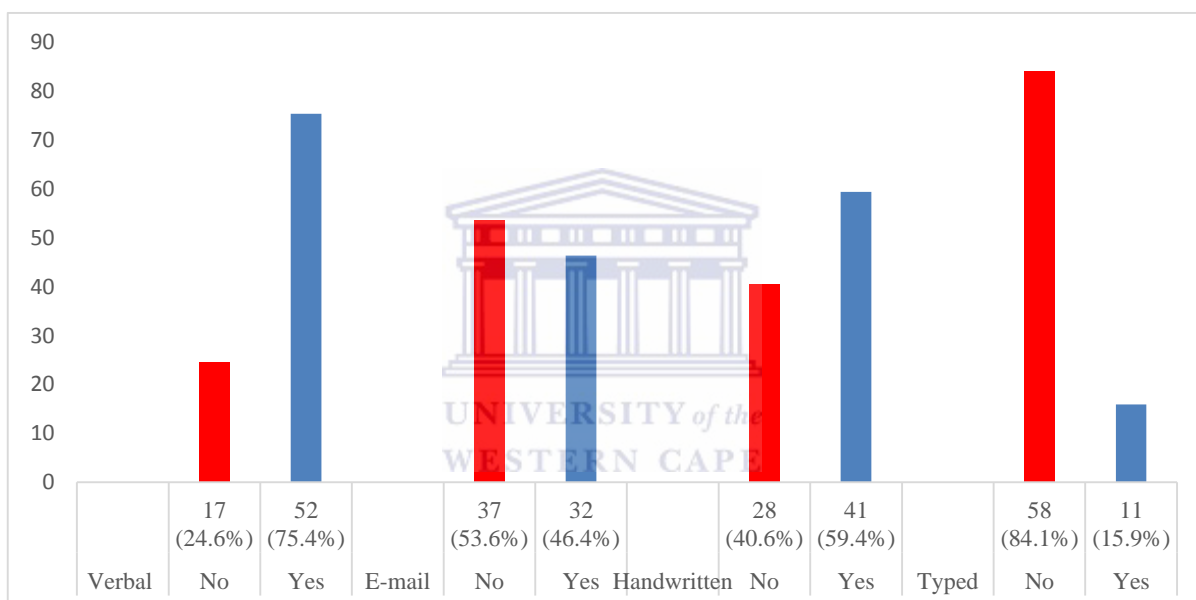
**Table 4.2: Assessment criteria and written feedback**

Variables		n=69 (%)
(i) Do you receive assessment criteria before assignments?	No	2 (2.9)
	Yes	67 (97.1)
(ii) Do you receive feedback after assignments and tests?	Yes	69 (100)
(iii) Does the feedback received reflect the assessment criteria?	No	6 (8.7)
	Yes	63 (91.3)
(iv) How often do you receive written feedback from your lecturers?	Never	2 (2.9)
	Sometimes	27 (39.1)
	Always	40 (58.0)

The responses showed that most 97.1% (n=67) of the participants receive assignment guidelines or criteria from their lecturers before written assignment whilst all 100% (n=69) of the participants received feedback after assignments and tests. Most 91.3% (n=63) of the participants responded that the feedback received reflect the assignment criteria provided by the lecturer. More than half 58% (n=40) of the participants responded that they always received written feedback from their lecturers, whilst less than a third 39.1% (n=27) of the participants responded that they sometimes receive written feedback from their lecturers.

#### 4.3.2. Communication of feedback

Figure 4.1 depicts the participants' responses regarding the mode of communicating feedback.

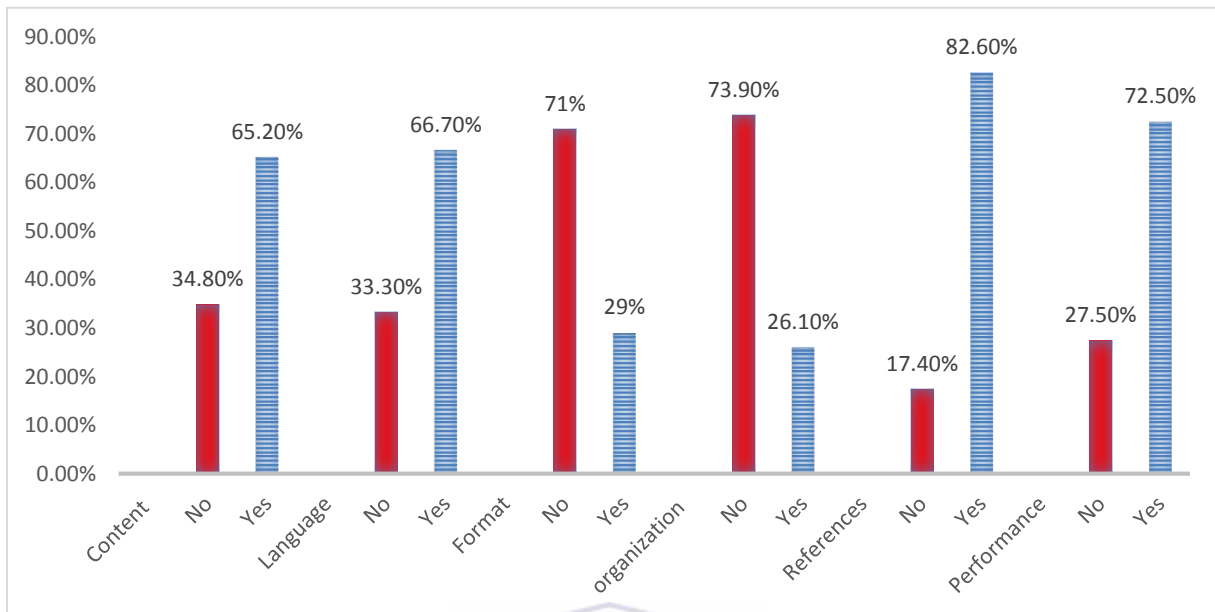


**Figure 4.1: Communication of feedback**

The students were assessed on the various modes of receiving written feedback (see figure 4.1). The responses showed that less than half of the participants, 46.4% (n=32), received feedback via e-mail, while more than half, 56.4% (n=41), received handwritten feedback, and only 15.9% (n=11) received typed feedback. Additionally, most of the respondents 75.4% (n=52) revealed that they receive feedback through verbal communication.

### 4.3.3. Focus of written feedback

Figure 4.2 gives an account of participants' responses regarding the focus of written feedback



**Figure 4.2: Focus of written feedback**

The majority of the participants, 82.6% (n= 52), responded that the written feedback received focused on referencing, while over half, 72.5% (n=50), reported that the focus of written feedback was on performance. More than half, 66.7% (n=46), reported that the written feedback focused on language, while 65.2% (n=45) reported receiving written feedback that focused on the content of the paper (see Figure 4.2). It is important to note that a participant could select more than one focus of written feedback, when they responded to this question.

### 4.3.4. Improvement of performance

Table 4.3 gives account on participants' responses regarding improvement of their performance on learning outcomes on Fundamentals of Nursing.

**Table 4.3: Improvement on performance**

<b>Variables</b>		<b>n=69 (%)</b>
<b>Management of persons' hygiene needs</b>	No	13(18.8)
	Yes	56(81.2)
<b>Interacting sensitively with individuals from diverse cultural groups</b>	No	15(21.7)
	Yes	54(78.3)
<b>Basic concepts on ethical and legal codes of nursing</b>	No	15(21.7)
	Yes	54(78.3)
<b>Providing health education</b>	No	6(8.7)
	Yes	63(91.3)

The participants were assessed for improvement of performance on selected learning outcomes of one module (Fundamentals of nursing) after receiving written feedback from their lecturers. The findings showed that the majority, 91.3% (n=63), reported that their performance on providing health education had improved due to written feedback, while 81.2% (n=56) responded that management of persons' hygiene needs had improved due to written feedback received. Most of the participants, 78.3% (n=54), admitted that interacting sensitively with people from diverse cultural groups had improved, while 78.3% (n=54) responded that basic concepts on ethical and legal codes of nursing had improved due to written feedback.

#### 4.3.5. Factors that prevent the use of written feedback

Table 4.4 depicts participants' responses on factors that prevent the use of written feedback.

**Table 4.4: Factors preventing the use of written feedback**

<b>Variables</b>		<b>n= 69 (%)</b>
<b>Low grade received on assignment</b>	No	53(76.8)
	Yes	16(23.2)
<b>Negatively written comments</b>	No	51(73.9)
	Yes	18(26.1)
<b>Inability to understand the comments</b>	No	46 (66.7)
	Yes	23 (33.3)
<b>Disagreement with feedback</b>	No	50 (72.5)
	Yes	19 (27.5)
<b>Limited opportunity to clarify the feedback comments</b>	No	39 (56.5)
	Yes	30 (43.5)
<b>Delayed feedback</b>	No	58 (84.1)
	Yes	11 (15.9)



Most students indicated more than one factor that prevented them from using written feedback (see Table 4.4). Less than half of the participants, 49% (n=34), indicated that achieving low grades and negatively written comments were common hindrances, while 43% (n=30) indicated that delayed, and disagreement with, feedback prevented its use. Less than half of the participants, 43.5% (n=30), responded that limited opportunities to clarify feedback comments was an obstacle and 33.3% (n=23) indicated that the inability to understand feedback comments prevented the use of written feedback.

#### 4.4. Section C: Amount, Timing and Quality of Written Feedback

This section covers participants' accounts of the amount, timing and quality of written feedback that they received in Fundamentals of Nursing Science.

##### 4.4.1. Amount and timing of written feedback

Table 4.5 depicts the mean participant rating for each of the items under the amount and timing of written feedback received in Fundamentals of Nursing Science.

**Table 4.5: Mean ratings for amount and timing of written feedback**

Amount and Timing of Written Feedback	n	Min.	Max.	M	SD
There is hardly any feedback on my assignments and tests, when I get them back*.	69	1	5	4.12	.993
On assignment, I get enough written feedback on how I am doing.	69	2	5	4.25	.755
I receive written feedback within a 2 week period, after my assignment.	69	2	5	3.39	.911
Written feedback comes too late to be useful*.	69	2	5	3.88	.963
When I get things wrong or misunderstand them, I don't receive guidance in what to do about it*.	69	2	5	4.16	.779
I would learn more, if I received more written feedback*.	69	1	5	2.17	1.175

Question 16 (see Addendum 7) that asked the participants to rate from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' whether they received enough written feedback on assignments, had the highest mean of 4.25, while question 20 (see Addendum 7) that required a response on whether they would learn more if they received more written feedback, had the lowest mean rating of 2.17 (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.6 depicts the mean scale score for the amount and timing of written feedback.

**Table 4.6: Mean scale score of Amount and timing of written feedback**

Scale	n	M	Range		SD
			Min.	Max.	
Amount and timing	69	3.66	3.60	3.73	.525

The mean score for all the items on amount and timing of written feedback was 3.66 (see Table 4.6).

#### 4.4.2. Quality of written feedback

Table 4.7 depicts the mean participant rating for each item on quality of written feedback for Fundamentals of Nursing Science.

**Table 4.7: Mean participant rating for quality of written feedback**

Quality of feedback	n	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Written feedback mainly tells me how well I am doing in relation to others*.	69	1	5	2.81	1.275
Written feedback shows me how to do better next time	69	3	5	4.52	.559
Written feedback helps me to understand things better	69	2	5	4.52	.633
I can hardly see from the written feedback what I need to do to improve my performance*.	69	1	5	3.32	1.207
Once I read the written feedback, I understand why I got the marks I received.	69	1	5	4.04	.812
I do not understand some of the written feedback that I receive*.	69	1	5	3.42	.991
Written feedback encourages me to improve my performance.	69	2	5	4.33	.657
I can easily read the written feedback received on assignment.	69	2	5	3.90	.910
Written feedback received on assignment is too brief to be helpful*.	69	1	5	2.09	.887
Written feedback on an assignment can be useful in subsequent assignments.	69	3	5	4.12	.654

The highest mean rating was 4.52 for questions 22 and 23 (see Addendum 7) that required responses to whether the written feedback received, presented ways to improve future assignments, and whether the written feedback aided better understanding and comprehension, respectively (see Table 4.7). Additionally, the lowest mean participant rating was 2.07 (see

Table 4.7) for question 29 (see Addendum 7) that required participants to rate, from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’, whether the written feedback received, was perceived to be beneficial.

Table 4.8 depicts the mean scale score for the quality of written feedback for Fundamentals of Nursing Science.

**Table 4.8: Mean scale score for quality of written feedback**

Scale	n	M	Range		SD
			Min.	Max.	
Quality of feedback	69	3.71	3.67	3.75	.324

The mean scale score for all the items on quality of written feedback was 3.71 (see Table 4.8).

#### 4.4.3. Overall mean score for Amount, timing, and quality of written feedback

Table 4.9 depicts the overall mean score for the amount and timing, and quality of written feedback on Fundamentals of Nursing Science.

**Table 4.9: Overall mean scale score**

Scale	n	M	Range		SD
			Min.	Max.	
Amount, timing and quality of feedback	69	3.68	3.64	3.73	.370

The overall mean scale score for the amount, timing and quality of written feedback was 3.68 (see Table 4.9).

### 4.5. Section D: Improvement of Written Feedback Process

This section covers suggestions that could improve the written feedback process of assignments and tests.

Table 4.10 gives an account of participants’ suggestions that could improve the written feedback process.

**Table 4.10: Improvement on written feedback process**

Variables		n=69(%)
Delivery of written feedback within a two week period	No	24 (34.8)
	Yes	45(65.2)
Understandable written feedback	No	14(20.3)
	Yes	55(79.7)
Written feedback that relates to assessment criteria/assignment guidelines	No	20(29)
	Yes	49(71)
Discussions between lecturers and students	No	15(21.7)
	Yes	54(78.3)
Written feedback delivered through an electronic approach	No	44(63.8)
	Yes	25(36.2)
Handwritten feedback	No	31(44.9)
	Yes	38(55.1)
Provision of written feedback based on students' preference	No	47(68.1)
	Yes	22(31.9)

Most of the participants, 79.7% (n=55), and 78.3% (n=54) suggested that understandable written feedback and discussions with lecturers on feedback could improve the written feedback process, respectively. The majority of the participants, 71% (n=49), responded that the written feedback process could greatly improve, if the written feedback related to the assessment criteria/assignment guidelines. More than half of the participants, 65.2% (n=45), responded that the delivery of written feedback within a two week period could also improve the written feedback process. In addition, 36.2% (n=25) suggested that written feedback delivered through an electronic medium could improve the written feedback process, while 55.1% (n=38) were of the opinion that handwritten feedback could improve the written feedback process. Finally, 30.9% (n=21) believed that written feedback that is based on students' preferences could improve the written feedback process. However, it is important to note that a participant could select more than one suggestion on improvement of the written feedback process.

## **4.6. Discussion of the findings**

This section discusses the key findings of the study under the following headings; the practice of written feedback and factors that improve the written feedback process.

### **4.6.1. The Practice of Written Feedback**

This sub-section is further sub-divided into the following sub-headings: Assessment criteria and written feedback; Communication of feedback; The focus of written feedback; factors that prevent the use of written feedback; Amount and timing of written feedback; and The quality of written feedback.

#### *4.6.1.1. Assessment criteria and written feedback*

The results of this current study revealed that most of the participants received assignment criteria or guidelines before their written assignments and that these assignment criteria reflected the feedback received. In addition, the majority of the participants received feedback that reflected the assessment criteria or guidelines. These findings are similar to those of a study by Khowaja et al. (2014), in which 96% (n=364) of the participants indicated that they received assignment criteria before written assignments and 84% (n=314) of the participants reported that the assignment criteria reflected the feedback that they received.

However, the findings in this current study contradicts the qualitative findings of a study conducted by Weaver (2006) with n=22 students who were studying Business and Design, which showed that the feedback received was not related to the assessment criteria. The results also indicated that students were given suggestions about what constituted a good work and not specific assessment criteria. In addition, the results of a study by Glover and Brown (2006) indicated that students viewed assessment criteria as vague, and did not understand how the assessment criteria related to feedback. The results of that study also indicated that students were not always given assessment criteria before an assignment.

The similarities between the results of this current study and the study of Khowaja et al. (2014) could be that the participants were nursing students, and their lecturers (nurse educators) valued the provision of assignment criteria before assignments because they focus on human science as opposed to management science (Business) and therefore ensured that the feedback given, reflected the assignment criteria.

#### *4.6.1.2. Communication of feedback*

The findings of this study indicated that all the students received feedback after assignments and tests. The results suggest that the students in this study knew what feedback was about and that the provision of feedback was a common practice. Similar findings were reported by Orsmond et al. (2005), in which all participants, 100% (n=16), reported that they receive feedback on their coursework. Additionally, the results indicated that feedback was communicated to the participants via various means, as the majority of the participants disclosed that they received feedback verbally, while more than half of the participants revealed that they received handwritten feedback, with more than a third responding that they received written feedback, via e-mail. These findings concur with a statement by Brown and Glover (2006) that students received feedback from their lecturers in a variety of forms, which could be computer-generated, orally, written and through grades or marks. Additionally, Orsmond et al. (2005) study in UK, indicated that feedback was received in various forms, as all participants (n=16) admitted receiving written feedback, and 3 participants also admitted to receiving verbal feedback.



#### *4.6.1.3. The focus of written feedback*

The findings of this current study revealed that the written feedback received, focused more on referencing, than content, language and organization, as disclosed by the majority of the participants. This finding contradicts the findings of a study by Brown and Glover (2006), in which a total of 4,428 feedback comments from 112 Open University students' assignments, as well as 577 feedback comments from 35 Shellam Hallam University students' assignments, after analysis, indicated that most feedback comments focused on content. Over half of the feedback comments analyzed at both, Open and Shellam Hallam, Universities focused on the use of the English language and omissions, and were classified under content, while the feedback comments on reference, was only 0.7%. Additionally, the findings of a study by Khowaja et al. (2014) indicated that most of the written feedback received, focused on content rather than references.

The differences in the results could be that the Brown and Glover (2006) and Khowaja et al. (2014) studies were not conducted in Africa, but rather in the UK and Asia, respectively. It is

unknown what the educational purpose of the use of feedback as applied by these two institutions used in these studies. According to literature (Brown & Glover, 2005; Giles, Gilbert & McNeil, 2014a; Weaver, 2006), written feedback is an important component of learning cycle and its purpose is to provide information about the gap between student present and desired performance, and help student to take an appropriate action to close the gap.

#### *4.6.1.4. Factors that prevent the use of written feedback*

Gibbs and Simpson (2004) state that when students do not receive feedback promptly, by the time it arrives, students might have moved on to a next topic and the feedback, therefore, becomes irrelevant. Surprisingly, only a few participants in this study reported that the delay in the provision of written feedback impeded its use. This result indicates that most of the students did not acknowledge delayed feedback as useless or irrelevant, and still made use of it. The reason for the feedback use, even when delayed, could be because participants in this study valued written feedback and its importance in improving their performance.

Additionally, participants in this current study selected more than one factor that prevented the use of written feedback, as less than a third of the participants indicated factors, such as the inability to understand feedback comments, low grades and negatively written comments. Additionally, less than half of the participants indicated that the limited opportunities to clarify feedback comments prevented the use thereof. These results are in line with the results of a study conducted by Giles et al. (2014b) in which 43.9% and 27.2% of a total of 362 participants, indicated that too much critique (negatively written comments) and unclear comments were hindrances in the use of feedback, respectively. The results of a qualitative study by Carless (2006) indicated that some barriers to the use of feedback by students included, low grades and the inability to understand and translate feedback comments.

### **4.6.2. The Amount, Timing and Quality of Written Feedback**

This subsection discusses the amount, timing and quality of written feedback.

#### *4.6.2.1. Amount and timing of written feedback*

Gibbs and Simpson (2003) inform that on the Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ), a high score of quantity and timing of feedback indicates that students are satisfied with the amount and timing of feedback, while a low score indicates that students perceive feedback as



insufficient and too late to be useful. In this current study, the results showed a high mean score of 3.66, which indicated that students perceived that they were receiving enough feedback, fast enough (within a two week period) for it to be useful (Gibbs & Simpson, 2003). This finding, therefore, suggests that the students received feedback within the time frame set under the university policy on assessment, which is, two weeks. Additionally, this result indicates that the amount of feedback received was enough to be useful, supported learning and improved performance.

This result contradicts with the findings of a study by Weaver (2006), in which the majority of the participants 96% (n=21) in Business, and 75% (n=16) in Design, strongly agreed that the feedback provided by lecturers was not enough.

#### *4.6.2.2. Quality of written feedback*

The findings from this current study indicated that the participants perceived written feedback as understandable and useful, as the mean scale score (3.77) for quality of written feedback was high. However, one of the items (written feedback is too brief to be useful), under quality of written feedback, showed the lowest mean scale score of 2.07, which indicated that the participants did not perceive written feedback received, as detailed enough.

Some of these results differ from the NSS results on feedback that showed a lower rating than other course features since the survey started, and its items on feedback focused mainly on quality (Nicol, 2010). For example, in 2012, out of the 286 000 participants, the satisfaction of feedback was as follows: 53% were of the opinion that feedback assisted in clarification, 69%, that feedback was a detailed comment on work, and 65% were impressed with the promptness of feedback (University Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee, 2013)

The differences between the current study findings and the NSS results could be due to the fact that the participants for NSS were final-year students, while those of this current study were foundation student nurses. In addition, the participants in this study were in the foundation programme, and providing quality written feedback would help students to have a strong foundation, in order to succeed in the nursing degree programme. According to literature (Gibbs & Simpson, 2003), students are more likely to engage on written feedback to improve on their performance when they are provided with quality written feedback, which is sufficiently detailed and well understood.



### 4.6.3. Improvement of Written Feedback Process

This sub-section will be discussed under the following sub-headings: Delivery of written feedback within a two-week period; Assessment criteria relating to written feedback; Understandable written feedback; Discussions between lecturers and students; Methods of delivering written feedback; and Provision of feedback based on students' preferences.

#### *4.6.3.1. Delivery of feedback within a two-week period*

Feedback is timely, when it is received by students, while it still matters, and in time for them to act on it, in order to improve their performance (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). The results of this current study indicated that more than half of the participants suggested that delivery of written feedback, within a two week period, can improve the written feedback process. This result suggests that students perceived feedback received within a two-week period, which is the period stipulated in the university's policy on feedback, as timely (early enough) and useful for the improvement of their performance. This result is aligned with the findings of a study by Poulos and Mahony (2008), which concur that participants perceived timely feedback as effective, impacting their performance as it could be acted upon.

According to literature (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2002) the timing of feedback is crucial and therefore feedback should be timely, that is, should be delivered to students as early as possible after submission of assignment. However, these studies do not allude to the duration in which feedback needs to be delivered to students, which is vague because timely can be perceived differently to different students.

#### *4.6.3.2. Understandable written feedback*

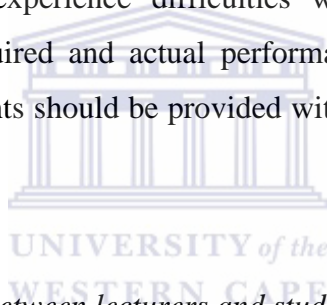
The results of this current research study indicated that most of the participants recognized the provision of understandable written feedback as a factor that could improve the written feedback process. This also suggests that students perceived understandable written feedback as an effective feedback practice, which resonates with a suggestion by Gibbs and Simpson (2004) – when feedback is understandable, feedback becomes effective and there is the possibility for students to act on it, in order to improve on their learning and future work.

The results from this current study also concur with the findings of a qualitative study by Rae and Cochrane (2008), in which most of the participants, overwhelmingly, expressed the need

to be provided with clear, constructive and informative feedback comments that they could easily interpret. Additionally, Rae and Cochrane (2008) also state that when feedback is understandable (meaningful explanation) it could encourage students to engage in reflection of their work and promote self-managed learning.

#### *4.6.3.3. Assessment criteria relating to written feedback*

In this current study, the majority of the participants suggested that assessment criteria relating to written feedback could improve the written feedback process. This finding concurs with a statement by Gibbs and Simpson (2004) – feedback that relates to the purpose of the assessment criteria is likely to improve students’ performance and learning. Gibbs and Simpson (2004), also suggest that students’ assessment criteria should be clear and comprehensible, so that students would understand the reasons behind a high or low grade. Similarly, Nicol and Macfarlene-Dick (2006) assert that when students are unable to connect the assessment criteria with the feedback, they will experience difficulties when attempting to evaluate the discrepancies between their required and actual performance. Nicol and Macfarlene-Dick (2006) further suggest that students should be provided with written documents that describe the assessment criteria.



#### *4.6.3.4. Discussions between lecturers and students*

In this current study, the results indicated that the majority of the participants considered discussions between lecturers and students on written feedback as vital to the improvement of the written feedback process. This result is aligned with the results of Rae and Cochrane (2008), in which focus group discussions with students (n=8) revealed that most students would welcome discussions with their lecturers, after they had received written feedback, in order to understand the written feedback and use it to improve their performance.

This current study’s result also concurs with an assertion by Price, Handley & Millar (2011) that students acknowledge the need for discussions with their lecturers as a way to fully engage with feedback. Price et al. (2011) added that dialogue (discussions) that support the relational dimension of feedback, creates scope for developing understanding and re-working staff-student relationships, engendering a high level of engagement. Additionally, Nicol and Macfarlene-Dick (2006) state that discussions with lecturers on feedback, assist students to

develop an understanding of the expectations and standards to be met, correct misunderstandings and obtain immediate responses to problems.

#### *4.6.3.5. Methods of delivering written feedback*

The results of this current study indicated that more than half of the participants suggested that handwritten feedback as a method of delivering feedback, which is a traditional approach, could improve the written feedback process. About a third of them suggested the electronic approach. The results are surprising, given the era in which these students are born, millennial generation (born after 1980), where students are exposed to and use digital technology.

These findings concur with a statement by Budge (2011) that in this era, where technology plays a major part in people's lives, there is a human aspect to feedback that is delivered via non-electronic means, which is highly valued by the students. Additionally, this current study's findings are in line with the results of a study conducted by Edeiken-Cooperman and Berenato (2014) which revealed that of the 236 participants, 50% preferred the electronic approach, while the remaining 50% preferred handwritten feedback.

The results of this current study, however, contradicts the findings of Chang et al. (2012), in which more than half of the participants (68%) preferred the electronic approach, while 32% preferred handwritten feedback. This current study's findings also contradict the findings of Stone (2014), in which 65% of 75 students preferred the electronic approach. However, the reason for the contradiction could be because the participants in this current study do not frequently receive feedback delivered electronically. This statement is supported by the results of this current study that 59.4% (n= 41) of the participants received written feedback as handwritten, while 46.4% (n= 32) received feedback via e-mail.

#### *4.6.3.6. Provision of written feedback based on students' preference*

The findings of this current study showed that the participants did not perceive the provision of written feedback based on students' preference as a means of improving the written feedback process, as less than a third of the participants responded in affirmation. This result contradicts the result of a study by Giles et al. (2014), which suggested that students were pleased when questioned about their feedback preferences, and that the majority would select a specific type and amount of feedback, if given the opportunity. However, the reason for the differences of these results could be because students in this current study were assessed on their perception

of the provision of feedback, based on their feedback preference generally. The study of Giles et al. (2014) assessed students' perceptions of specific preferences, that is, the type and amount of feedback.

In summary, this research study described student nurses perception of written feedback on assessment. The findings of this research study has highlighted some effective written feedback practices and areas which needs to be improved in order that the role of written feedback, as improving students' performance can be actualized. According to Gibbs and Simpson (2004), written feedback becomes effective and is likely to improve students' performance if it is timely, sufficient, detailed enough, link to the purpose of the assessment criteria, understandable and support learning. Findings of this study indicated that students perceived written feedback received as timely (within 2 week period), understandable, in line with assessment criteria, supporting learning and useful to improve their performance. However, students indicated that written feedback was not detailed and the focus of written feedback was mostly on referencing. Students' also indicated that written feedback was communicated via handwritten (traditional) than via e-mail (electronic) and also students perceived handwritten feedback (traditional) as improving written feedback process than electronic feedback. Although, various studies (Stone, 2014; Watkins *et al.*, 2014) has alluded that students perceive electronic feedback as an effective feedback practice and recommended its use.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

This chapter presented and discussed the findings of this current study. The results of this study indicated that, after assessments, students received feedback that was related to the assessment criteria provided before the assessments. The findings of this study also revealed that written feedback on assignments, mostly focused on references, rather than content. Additionally, the identified hindrances to the use of feedback were as follows: the inability to understand written feedback; and the limited opportunities to clarify feedback comments. Finally, the results revealed that students perceived the amount, timing and quality of written feedback received, after assessment, as adequate and conducive to performance improvement.

Chapter Five (5) concludes the study, briefly discusses the limitations and makes recommendations.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a summary on this study's findings, limitations, conclusion, as well as recommendations. The purpose of this study was to describe the student nurses perceptions of written feedback on assessment. After a detailed literature search, the researcher became aware that there has not been a study conducted on student nurses' perceptions of written feedback at the institution under study. In addition, there was limited information pertaining to this subject. The researcher, therefore, employed a quantitative descriptive survey design to address the research question of this study.

#### 5.2. Summary of findings

##### 5.2.1. Assessment criteria and written feedback

Nicol and Macfarlene-Dick (2006) assert that when students are unable to connect assessment criteria with feedback, they experience difficulty in evaluating the discrepancies between their required and actual performance. The majority of the participants in this study acknowledged that they had received assessment criteria before formative assessments, and that the assessment criteria related to the feedback received.

##### 5.2.2. Communication of feedback

Students receive feedback from their lecturers in various forms, namely, orally, computer-generated, written or through grades and marks (Brown & Glover, 2006). All the participants in this study acknowledged that they had received written feedback after formative assessments. The feedback was mostly communicated verbally and/or written – via e-mail, handwritten or typed.

##### 5.2.3. Focus of written feedback

The results of this study revealed that the written feedback comments mostly focused on referencing, rather than content. However, in previous studies (Brown & Glover, 2006; Khawaja et al., 2014) the results indicated that most written comments focused on content.

#### 5.2.4. Factors that prevent the use of feedback

The participants in this study indicated that the inability to understand feedback, limited opportunities to clarify feedback and negatively written comments, were hindrances to the use of written feedback.

#### 5.2.5. Amount and timing of written feedback

The results of this study showed a high mean score for the amount and timing of written feedback, which indicated that students perceived receiving plenty of feedback; early enough to be useful, aided the feedback process (Gibbs & Simpson, 2003).

#### 5.2.6. Quality of written feedback

The overall mean scale score for quality was high, which indicated that the participants perceived the written feedback received, as understandable and useful as it explained the significance of good and bad grades; was free of misunderstandings; and offered hints on how to improve future assignments (Gibbs & Simpson, 2003). However, students did not perceive the written feedback as detailed enough.

### 5.3. Factors that can improve the written feedback process

The participants in this study acknowledged that the mode of delivering written feedback, namely, the traditional approach (handwritten) and the electronic approach (e-mail, electronic annotations on students' work) could improve the written feedback process. However, the majority of the participants perceived handwritten feedback as a better means of improving the written feedback process, as opposed to the electronic approach.

Additionally, more than half of the participants suggested that the provision of understandable written feedback, encouraging discussions between lecturers and students, assuring that the assessment criteria relates to the written feedback and delivering written feedback within a two (2) week period, were factors that could improve the written feedback process.

## **5.4. Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study.

### **5.4.1. Mode of delivering of written feedback**

Lecturers should take advantage of using electronic approaches to deliver written feedback. Although delivering feedback electronically might have its own disadvantages, it has been recommended as the best suited means to meet students needs (Rae & Cochrane, 2008). However, students do not often receive their written feedback electronically, and, therefore, do not have much experience with it.

### **5.4.2. Focus of written feedback**

Nicol and Macfarlene-Dick (2006) suggest that to increase the quality of their feedback, lecturers must provide corrective advice to students, and not just a record of strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, lecturers need to highlight areas for improvement, when providing feedback to students (Nicol & Macfarlene-Dick, 2006). It is, therefore, important that lecturers provide written feedback, based on the individual students' needs, instead of focusing on a specific aspect of formative assessment for all students. Also, written feedback should contain advice that students can use to improve their performance and that will encourage them to be self-regulated learners (Nicol and Macfarlene-Dick, 2006).

### **5.4.3. Discussions between lecturers and students on written feedback**

Students acknowledge the need for discussions with their lecturers to fully engage with feedback (Price et al., 2011). Lecturers should create a rapport with their students and be accessible for discussions on written feedback, after they had been delivered. However, large class sizes might make individual discussions with students difficult, therefore, students could be placed in tutorial groups to discuss their feedback collectively, and lecturers could address the groups, rather than the individuals.

### **5.4.4. Future studies**

A qualitative research study should be conducted on lecturers' and students' perceptions of written feedback, on assessment, at the same institution under study.

### **5.5. Limitations**

This study focused only on foundation nursing students registered for the year 2015, and, therefore, cannot be generalized as all student nurses' perceptions of written feedback.

### **5.6. Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to describe student nurses' perceptions of written feedback after assessment. The results indicated that students received feedback after assessments that related to the assessment criteria. In addition, students acknowledged that the amount, timing and quality of written feedback positively aided the feedback process. However, there is the need to provide written feedback that improves the performance of students and meets their needs. Finally, the need to provide feedback electronically has been strongly recommended.





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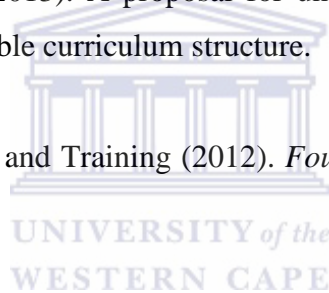
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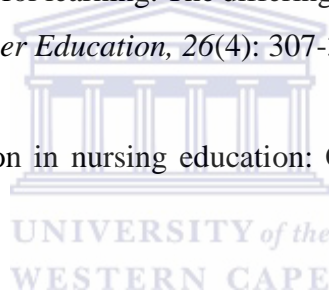
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# ADDENDUMS

## Addendum 1: Ethics letter



UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE

### OFFICE OF THE DEAN DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

08 September 2015

#### To Whom It May Concern

I hereby certify that the Senate Research Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the following research project by:  
Ms A Amuah (School of Nursing)

Research Project: Student nurses perception of written feedback after assessment at a university in the Western Cape.

Registration no: 15/6/15

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patricia Josias'.

*Ms Patricia Josias  
Research Ethics Committee Officer  
University of the Western Cape*

**Addendum 2:** Letter seeking permission from Deputy Registrar

33 Charl Uys Street  
Parow Valley  
7500.

Deputy Registrar  
University of the Western Cape  
Bellville, Cape Town.

Dear Madam,

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY**

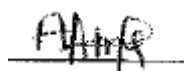
I am a postgraduate student, doing my Masters in Nursing Education. I wish to conduct a research study with the Foundation students at School of Nursing, University of the Western Cape in order to successfully complete my Masters' degree. The title for the research study is "Student nurses perception of written feedback after assessment at a university in the Western Cape".

Ethics approval to conduct the research study has been obtained (registration number: 15/6/15). Data will be collected by administering questionnaire and participants will not be forced to participate in the research study. Anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured throughout the study. This study will provide useful information on students' perception of written feedback after assessment and also assist lecturers to develop strategies and policies which will motivate their students to actively engage on written feedback.

Please find copies of proposal, ethics clearance letter, questionnaire, informed consent and information sheet for your scrutiny.

Hope to hear from you soon. Thank you.

Yours faithfully,



Abigail Amuah.

(E-mail address: 3474615@myuwc.ac.za).

### Addendum 3: Permission granted to conduct study at the University

Re: Fwd: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Inbox x



**Ahmed Shaikjee** <ashaikjee@uwc.ac.za>

Sep 14 ☆



to me ▾

Dear Abigail

We have received your submission to conduct research at UWC and you are approved to do so in terms of conducting your survey. Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

Regards

**Dr Ahmed Shaikjee**

Manager: Student Administration

*Student Administration – Office of the Registrar - University of the Western Cape*

Tel : +27 959 2110/2295

Fax : +27 959 2345

Email : ashaikjee@uwc.ac.za

*mamos@uwc.ac.za (Admin Assistant)*

Student Administration

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag x17, Bellville 7535, South Africa



UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE

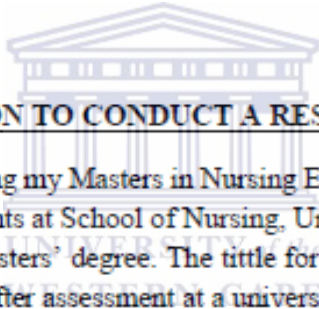
FROM DEED TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

**Addendum 4:** Permission letter from the Head of School of Nursing

33 Charl Uys Street  
Parow Valley  
7500.

The Director  
School of Nursing  
University of the Western Cape  
Bellville, Cape Town.

Dear Madam,



**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY**


I am a postgraduate student, doing my Masters in Nursing Education. I wish to conduct a research study with the Foundation students at School of Nursing, University of the Western Cape in order to successfully complete my Masters' degree. The title for the research study is "Student nurses perception of written feedback after assessment at a university in the Western Cape".

Ethics approval to conduct the research study has been obtained (registration number: 15/6/15). Data will be collected by administering questionnaire and participants will not be forced to participate in the research study. Anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured throughout the study. This study will provide useful information on students' perception of written feedback after assessment and also assist lecturers to develop strategies and policies which will motivate their students to actively engage on written feedback.

Please find copies of ethics clearance letter, questionnaire, informed consent and information sheet for your scrutiny.

Hope to hear from you soon. Thank you.

Yours faithfully,



Abigail Amuah

## Addendum 5: Letter granting permission to conduct the study at School of Nursing



**SCHOOL OF NURSING**  
Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa  
Tel: +27 21-9592274, Fax: 27 21-9592271  
E-mail: kjooste@uwc.ac.za

### PERMISSION LETTER

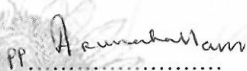
3 November 2015

**Mrs A Amuah 3474615**

**Title of Research Project: Student nurses perception of written feedback after assessment at a university in the Western Cape**





You are granted permission to conduct your study at the School of Nursing. You have to arrange the data collection with the appropriate level coordinator(s) for a convenient time. During this phase you have to adhere to the ethical principles outlined in your study.

I wish you success with your studies.








PP .....  
Prof K Jooste  
Director  
School of Nursing

## Addendum 6: Permission from the authors to use questionnaire

Permission  Inbox x   

---

 **ABIGAIL AMUAH** <3474615@myuwc.ac.za> Mar 19   


to Tansy.jessop 





Dear Mr. Jessop,


I am currently doing my Masters in Nursing Education in University of the Western Cape. Please, i will like to use the Assessment Experience Questionnaire by Dr. Gibbs for my research study on written feedback. Please i have been told that Dr. Gibbs is retired. Please can you help me in getting permission to use the scale in the questionnaire. Thank you.

Best regards,  
Abigail Amuah.

---



 **Tansy.Jessop** <Tansy.Jessop@winchester.ac.uk> Mar 19   

to me 

Dear Abigail

You are welcome to use it. It is open source. We are developing a revised one but it's not quite ready.

From a fellow Western Capey!

Tansy

*Dr Tansy Jessop*  
*Head of Learning and Teaching*  
*TESTA Project Leader*  
<https://j.mp/TansyJessop>  
[www.testa.ac.uk](http://www.testa.ac.uk)  
[www.fastech.ac.uk](http://www.fastech.ac.uk)  
[seed-research-centre.com](http://seed-research-centre.com)  
01962-826439  
Skype call: Tansy.Sharpe

## Addendum 7: Questionnaire

**Questionnaire:** Student nurses perception of written feedback after assessment at a university in the Western Cape.

**Questionnaire code:** ..... **Date of collection:** .....

### Section A: Demographic data

1. Your sex/gender       Male                       Female
2. Your age                      Please specify .....years
3. Your nationality    South African                       others, please specify .....
4. Your home language  
 English       French    Afrikaans    IsiXhosa    other, please specify.....
5. What was the medium of instruction in the school you attended before enrolling in nursing?  
 English       French    Afrikaans    IsiXhosa    other, please specify.....
6. Based on your academic performance how would you rate yourself as a student?  
 Excellent     Good                       Average                       Below average

### Section B: Practice of written feedback

7. Do you receive assignment guidelines or assessment criteria from lecturers before your written assignments or test on fundamentals of nursing science?    Yes       No
8. Do you receive feedback after assignments and test?    Yes       No
9. If yes to 8, how is it communicated to you? Please tick (✓) yes or no

	Yes	No
<b>Verbal</b>		
<b>Written</b>		
Email		
Handwritten		
Typed		

Other.....

10. Does the feedback received reflect what is in the assignment guidelines or assessment criteria?

- Yes  No

11. How often do you receive written feedback from your lecturers?

- Always  Sometimes  Never

12. On which of these categories do you receive written feedback on assignments and test? (You can tick more than one)

- Content of the paper (e.g. quality and depth of information)
- Language (Grammar /Spelling error/ Organization of thought)
- Format/ Style
- Organization of information
- References
- Performance

13. On which of the following has your performance improved due to written feedback on assignments for Fundamentals of Nursing Science? Please tick (✓) yes or no

	Yes	No
Management of persons' hygiene needs		
Interact sensitively with individuals from diverse cultural groups		
Basic concepts on ethical and legal codes of nursing		
Providing health education		

14. What factors prevent you from using the feedback you receive about your assignments or test? (You can tick more than one which seems true to you)

- Low grade received on the assignment
- Negatively written comments
- Students' inability to understand the comments



- Disagreement with feedback
- Limited opportunity to clarify the feedback comments
- Delayed feedback
- Others, please specify.....

**Section C: Amount, time and quality of written feedback**

Please answer every item in this section. Tick (✓) the appropriate (Box) to show your response to written feedback on Fundamentals of Nursing Science.

No	Amount and time	Responses				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15	There is hardly any feedback on my assignments and test when I get them back					
16	On assignment, I get enough written feedback on how I am doing					
17	I receive written feedback within a 2 week period after my assignment					
18	Written feedback comes too late to be useful					
19	When I get things wrong or misunderstand them I don't receive much guidance in what to do about it.					
20	I would learn more if I received more written feedback					
	<b>Quality</b>					
21	Written feedback mainly tells me how well I am doing in relation to others					

22	Written feedback shows me how to do better next time					
23	Written feedback helps me to understand things better					
24	I can hardly see from the written feedback what I need to do to improve my performance					
25	Once I read the written feedback I understand why I got the marks I received					
No		<b>Responses</b>				
		<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
26	I do not understand some of the written feedback that I receive					
27	Written feedback encourages me to improve my performance					
28	I can easily read the written feedback received on assignment					
29	Written feedback received on assignment is brief to be helpful					
30	Written feedback on an assignment can be useful in subsequent assignments					

#### Section D

31. Which of the following suggestions do you think can improve written feedback process on assignment and test? (You can tick more than one suggestion)

- Delivery of written feedback within a two week period after assignment and test
- Understandable written feedback
- Written feedback which relates to assessment criteria/assignment guidelines

- Discussions between lecturers and students on written feedback
  - Written feedback delivered through an electronic approach (e.g. E-mail, Word-processed feedback forms, electronic annotations)
  - Handwritten feedback
  - Provision of written feedback base on students' preferences
- Others, please specify .....

Thank you for participating in this study.



**Addendum 8: Consent form**



**UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE**

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa  
Tel: +27 21-959 2271, Fax: 27 21-959 2274  
E-mail: amaamuah@yahoo.com

**CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Research Project:** Student nurses perception of written feedback after assessment at a university in the Western Cape

The study has been described to me in language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.

**Participant's name.....**

**Participant's signature.....**

**Date.....**

## **Addendum 9: Information sheet**



## **UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE**

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa  
Tel: +27 21-959 2271, Fax: 27 21-959 2274  
E-mail: amaamuah@yahoo.com

### **INFORMATION SHEET**

**Project Title:** Student nurses perception of written feedback after assessment at a university in the Western Cape

#### **What is this study about?**

This is a research project being conducted by Abigail Amuah at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are registered for the Bachelor of Nursing Foundation programme at the University of the Western Cape in 2015. The purpose of this research project is to describe student nurses perception of written feedback after assessment at a university in the Western Cape.

#### **What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?**

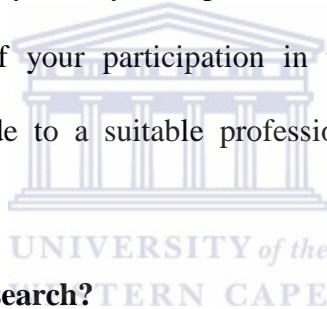
You will be required to complete a questionnaire will be administered to you by the researcher at the end of a class session at the School of Nursing, University of the Western Cape. It takes 15minutes to complete the questionnaire and it will be collected after you have completed. The questionnaire has four (4) sections; section A: Demographic data, section B: Practice of written feedback, section C: Time and quality of written feedback and section D: an open-ended question on how written feedback can be improved.

#### **Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?**

Your identity and personal information will be kept confidential. To help ensure confidentiality, your name will not be included in the questionnaire and a code will be placed on the questionnaire. The questionnaire will not contain information which will identify you. The completed questionnaires will be secured and locked in the cabinet and only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the questionnaires. Also, a password will be assigned to computerized files containing data.

**What are the risks of this research?**

There may be some risks from participating in this research study. All human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. We will nevertheless minimise such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional at the university for further assistance or intervention.



**What are the benefits of this research?**

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about student nurses perception of written feedback after assessment. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of student nurses perception of written feedback after assessment in higher education institution.

**Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

**What if I have questions?**

This research is being conducted by Abigail Amuah, at School of Nursing at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Abigail Amuah at:

**Address:** 33 Charl Uys Street, Parow Valley, 7500

**Telephone number:** +27743574322

**E-mail address:** amaamuah@yahoo.com

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Head of Department:

Prof. Karien Jooste

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

Telephone: 021-959 2274

E-mail: kjooste@uwc.ac.za



Dean of the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences:

Prof José Frantz

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

E-mail: chs-deanoffice@uwc.ac.za

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee.

## Addendum 10: Editorial Certificate

30 November 2015

To whom it may concern

Dear Sir/Madam

### RE: Editorial Certificate

This letter serves to prove that the thesis listed below was language edited for proper English, grammar, punctuation, spelling as well as overall layout and style by myself, publisher/proprietor of Aquarian Publications, a native English speaking editor.

#### Thesis title

STUDENT NURSES' PERCEPTIONS OF WRITTEN FEEDBACK  
AFTER ASSESSMENT AT A UNIVERSITY IN THE  
WESTERN CAPE

#### Author

Abigail Amuah

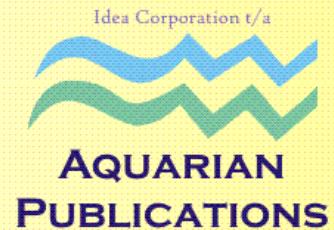
The research content or the author's intentions were not altered in any way during the editing process, however, the author has the authority to accept or reject my suggestions and changes.

Should you have any questions or concerns about this edited document, I can be contacted at the listed telephone and fax number, e-mail address or website.

Yours truly,



E H Londt  
Publisher/Proprietor



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