ETHICAL CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY PART-TIME STUDENTS IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN LESOTHO

by

MOLIKO MOHALE

submitted in accordance with the requirements for
the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the subject

EDUCATION

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: Professor Mbusiseni Celimpilo Dube

CO-SUPERVISOR: Professor Doniwen Pietersen

2026

DECLARATION

Name: Moliko Mohale

Student number: 24666378

Degree: PhD (Education)

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled ***Ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho*** is my own original work and that all sources which I have consulted, cited or quoted have been duly acknowledged through complete and accurate referencing. I further certify that this thesis has been submitted to originality-checking software and that the resulting report meets the institution's prescribed requirements. I also affirm that this work, in whole or in part, has not been submitted previously for examination or for the purposes of obtaining any qualification at the University of South Africa (UNISA) or at any other higher education institution.

Signature:



Date: 04 September 2026

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my beloved family, whose unwavering support, patience, and encouragement have been my strength throughout this journey.

To my mother, Motselisi Mohale, whose strength and love have shaped the foundation of who I am. Thank you for believing in me even when I doubted myself!

To my wife, 'Mantolo Mohale, my partner and confidante. Your endless understanding and quiet sacrifices have carried me through the longest nights. This is as much yours as it is mine.

To my brother, Thapelo Mohale, for your unwavering encouragement and for walking beside me every step of the way, your presence has been a gift.

To my daughter, Ntolo Mohale, may this work remind you that no dream is too distant and no mountain too high. Pursue your passions with courage and know that your father always believes in you.

To all part-time students in Lesotho and beyond, who juggle multiple responsibilities in pursuit of knowledge, this is for you. May you find strength in the struggle and joy of your academic journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude to God Almighty for planting a seed of life in me and for giving me the strength and resilience to complete this thesis.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors Prof. Mbusiseni Celimpilo Dube and Prof. Doniwen Pietersen for their invaluable guidance, motivation, and the countless hours they devoted to shaping this work. To Prof. Dube and Prof. Pietersen, your critical eye, scholarly rigour, and constructive feedback have elevated this thesis beyond what I could have achieved by myself. You are truly AMAZING!

I am sincerely thankful to my colleague, Dr. Letseka-Manka, whose unwavering encouragement and belief in my potential inspired me to pursue the path of blended learning. Your push in the right direction laid the foundation for this work.

Special thanks to all my colleagues at the National University of Lesotho (NUL) who always inspired me to excel in our journey (PhD Outing).

In loving memory of 'Mathabang Claudia Moletsane, a dear family friend whose warmth, wisdom, and kind spirit left an indelible mark on my heart. Though you are no longer with us, your legacy of love and resilience continues to inspire me. This work is dedicated in part to your beautiful memory.

Finally, with the deepest gratitude, I wish to thank every person who has come into my life and inspired me along the way.

ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. The study was guided by three research questions, which helped the study to examine the nature of ethical challenges faced by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. The study also examined the reasons behind the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students and strategies that could be used by institutions of higher learning to reduce ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in Lesotho. A qualitative research approach was used in this study, and the data were collected using focus group interviews in which 36 part-time students who were enrolled in one of the three institutions of higher learning in Lesotho were interviewed. The data were analysed using Braun et al.'s six-phased approach to data analysis with the help of Atlas.ti software. The study was mainly underpinned by two theoretical frameworks: the social justice theory and the equity theory.

The findings from this study revealed seven main themes. The ethical challenges revealed by this study included financial hardships because of exclusion of part-time students from government sponsorship; academic dishonesty which came from systemic marginalisation; and institutional neglect of part-time students manifested when part-time students were denied access to resources. The study also uncovered student representation; structural disorganisation in academic scheduling; and poor communication and work-life balance difficulties. This study further revealed that unethical behaviour by part-time students, which included AI dependency, false participation in group work and academic dishonesty, was not the result of individual moral failures but were adaptive survival strategies used by part-time students in response to systemic institutional injustices faced by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. The findings of this study also uncovered gender and cultural dimensions where female part-time students shouldered disproportionate caregiving roles while studying and Basotho cultural norms of harmony and hierarchical respect, which discouraged part-time students from reporting their grievances.

The study also contributed the Mohale Ethical Compromise Framework (MEC), which is a three-stage model showing how systemic injustices in institutions of higher learning

result in perceived inequities, which then lead to ethical compromises among part-time students. The recommendations from this study were directed to higher education institutions, the government of Lesotho and to part-time students in Lesotho, emphasising equitable access to resources, integration into institutional governance, and financial assistance. The study concluded that the reduction of ethical challenges for part-time students required a change in how things are done in institutions of higher education and not just focusing on individual student integrity.

Keywords:

part-time students, ethical challenges, higher education institutions, social justice theory, equity theory, working adults, systemic marginalisation, Mohale Ethical Compromise Framework

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CLT	Cognitive Load Theory
MEC	Mohale Ethical Compromise Framework
NMDS	National Manpower Development Secretariat
NUL	National University of Lesotho
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SRC	Student Representative Council
RQ	Research Question
FG	Focus Group
UNISA	University of South Africa
UK	United Kingdom
WI-FI	Wireless Fidelity

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION i
DEDICATION ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii
ABSTRACT iv
ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS vi
LIST OF FIGURES xiii
LIST OF TABLES xiii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1
1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Background of the research 3
1.3 Problem statement 4
1.4 Rationale 5
1.5 Definition of key concepts 5
1.5.1 Part-time student 5
1.5.2 Challenge 5
1.5.3 Ethical challenge 6
1.5.4 Institution of higher learning 6
1.6 Literature review 6
1.7 Theoretical framework 7
1.8 Location of the study 8
1.9 Research question 8
1.9.1 Main research question 8
1.9.2 Secondary research questions 8
1.10 Aim and objectives 9
1.10.1 Aim 9
1.10.2 Objectives 9
1.11 Research design and methodology 9
1.12 Ethical considerations 10
1.13 Limitations of the study 11

1.14 Chapter summary 11
1.15 Chapter outline 12
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 13
2.1 Introduction 13
2.2 Defining part-time students 13
2.2.1 Working adults 13
2.2.2 Mature students 14
2.2.3 Multi-role students 14
2.2.4 Geographically dispersed students 15
2.2.5 Demographically distinct students 16
2.3 Reasons for studying part-time 16
2.3.1 Financial necessity 16
2.3.2 Career advancement 17
2.3.3 Family obligations 18
2.3.4 Geographical constraints 20
2.3.5 Delayed entry to higher education 20
2.4 Needs of part-time students 21
2.4.1 Academic flexibility needs 22
2.4.2 Financial support needs 23
2.4.3 Technological access needs 23
2.4.4 Work-life balance needs 24
2.5 Ethical challenges encountered by part-time students 25
2.5.1 Conflict of commitments 25
2.5.2 Equity and access in higher institutions' environment 26
2.5.3 Academic integrity under pressure 27
2.5.4 Institutional responsibilities and ethical design 28
2.5.5 Problems with identity, well-being, and ethics of self-care 29
2.5.6 Power dynamics and advocacy 31
2.6 Causes of ethical challenges encountered by part-time students 32
2.6.1 Work-life conflict and competing demands 32
2.6.2 Financial pressure 34

2.6.3 Institutional structure and support deficits 35
2.6.4 Isolation, marginalisation, and lack of community 36
2.6.5 Personal and situational factors 38
2.7 Effects of ethical challenges encountered by part-time students 39
2.7.1 Academic performance consequences 40
2.7.2 Psychological and well-being effects 41
2.7.3 Professional and career implications 41
2.7.4 Institutional and systemic effects 42
2.8 Mitigating ethical challenges encountered by part-time students 43
2.8.1 Designing flexible and accessible learning pathways 44
2.8.2 Asynchronous and hybrid course delivery models 44
2.8.3 Extended hours for advising, counselling, and tutoring 45
2.8.4 Promoting fair workloads and flexible work arrangements 45
2.8.5 Tuition assistance and study leave 46
2.9 Conclusion 47
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 49
3.1 Introduction 49
3.2 Social justice theory 50
3.2.1 Core tenets and key proponents 50
3.2.2 Principles of social justice theory 52
3.2.3 Application of social justice theory to part-time students in Lesotho 53
3.2.4 Limitations of the social justice theory 54
3.3 Equity theory 55
3.3.1 Core tenets and key concepts of equity theory 55
3.3.2 Principles of equity theory 56
3.3.3 Application of the equity theory to part-time students in Lesotho 58
3.3.4 Justification for the use of equity theory 60
3.3.5 Limitations of the equity theory 61
3.4 The significance of using both the social justice theory and the equity theory 61
3.5 Conclusion 65
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY 66

4.1 Introduction 66
4.2 Research design and methodology 66
4.2.1 Research paradigm 67
4.2.2 Ontological assumptions 68
4.2.3 Epistemological assumptions 69
4.2.4 Research approach 70
4.2.5 Research design 71
4.3 Data collection 72
4.3.1 Focus groups 73
4.3.2 Population and sampling 75
4.4 Data analysis 78
4.5 Trustworthiness 81
4.5.1 Credibility 81
4.5.2 Transferability 82
4.5.3 Dependability 82
4.5.4 Confirmability 82
4.6 Ethical considerations 83
4.7 Conclusion 84
CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION 86
5.1 Introduction 86
5.2 Description of the case and participants 88
5.3 Linking findings to the study's research objectives 89
5.4 Data coding 91
5.5 What are the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho? 92
5.5.1 Financial challenges and economic vulnerability 93
5.5.2 Academic compromise 102
5.6 Why do part-time students face ethical challenges in higher education institutions in Lesotho? 115
5.6.1 Institutionalised marginalisation and resource deprivation 115
5.6.2 Structural disorganisation and communication breakdown 124

5.6.3 Work-life balance 132
5.7 Which strategies can be used by higher education institutions to reduce ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho? 142
5.7.1 Establish legitimate communication channels and integration into the school governance structure 142
5.7.2 Ensure financial affordability and predictability 154
5.8 Theoretical framework contributions 164
5.9 Conclusion 165
CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 166
6.1 Introduction 166
6.2 Reflections on the research journey 166
6.3 Summary of findings 168
6.3.1 RQ1: What are the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho? 168
6.3.2 RQ2: Why do part-time students face ethical challenges in higher education institutions in Lesotho? 169
6.3.3 RQ3: Which strategies can be used by higher education institutions to reduce ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho? 169
6.4 Interpretation of findings 170
6.4.1 Systemic marginalisation of part-time students 170
6.4.2 The harmful nature of institutional exclusion 171
6.4.3 Adaptive responses to systemic failures 172
6.4.4 The ethical contradiction of part-time education 173
6.4.5 The gender side of ethical challenges 174
6.4.6 The cultural side of ethical challenges 174
6.4.7 Theoretical integration 175
6.5 Recommendations 177
6.5.1 Recommendations for higher education institutions 177
6.5.2 Recommendations for the government of Lesotho 179
6.5.3 Recommendations for part-time students 180
6.6 Future research 181
6.6.1 Use of quantitative study 181

6.6.2 Conduct studies on specific sub-populations 181
6.6.3 The use of action research 181
6.6.4 Institutional perspectives 182
6.6.5 Using different theoretical lenses 182
6.7 Own unique contribution (model/framework) 182
6.8 Limitations 184
6.9 Conclusion 184
REFERENCES 186
APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE 212
APPENDIX B: PERMISSION LETTER FROM UNIVERSITY 215
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT 216
APPENDIX D: TRANSCRIBED SAMPLE INTERVIEWS 217
APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE 225
APPENDIX F: LANGUAGE EDITOR CERTIFICATE 227
APPENDIX G: TURNITIN 228

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: Integrated theoretical framework 64
Figure 4.1: The research onion 80
Figure 6.1: Mohale ethical compromise framework 184

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Demographic and enrolment characteristics of part-time students 77
Table 5.1: Emerging themes from the data aligned with research questions 87

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Part-time students often navigate unique challenges that can render them particularly vulnerable to ethical breaches within higher education institutions. These challenges include managing academic demands while juggling obligations to their families and professional commitments (Dulalas et al., 2025). Thus, the complex demands brought about by their private lives and academic lives put them at a heightened risk of ethical lapses. In Lesotho, part-time students in one institution of higher education often encounter several ethical challenges such as a poor time management, financial constraints, and poor infrastructure, which hinder their academic success (Morena et al., 2024). Some of these ethical challenges include feeling isolated from institutions of higher learning and being discriminated against by the employees of the higher education institutions. Feeling isolated and facing discrimination within higher education institutions presents ethical challenges because they represent a fundamental responsibility of the institution's moral duties to treat all students with justice, respect, and fairness (Kong, 2024; Taff & Clifton, 2022). This highlights the urgency of the need for institutions of higher learning in Lesotho to address these challenges and facilitate a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for part-time students.

The phenomenon of working and studying has been in existence for a long time, as Libago et al. (2024) state that students who study full-time often use 35 hours of their time weekly to work while continuing with their studies. Additionally, Davitadze (2023) remarks that working while studying can lead to better labour market opportunities for students through the accumulation of work experience, professional connections, and the development of soft skills. These skills include time management, effective communication, and solving any problems that may come their way, which ultimately contributes to both academic and professional success.

Doherty-Restrepo et al. (2023) state that a growing number of students take up work to close the gap between higher education costs and available financial resources. Additionally, in the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Germany, about 70% of undergraduate students work while studying in school, and recently enrolled students are

more likely to work more hours than in the past (Lessky & Unger, 2023). Lessky and Unger (2023) also highlight that this student population is extremely diversified, notably varying in the qualification aimed for, the level of study, the length of the full course, and how the study is funded (if there is any form of funding). These differences attribute to the various challenges experienced by students while studying, further highlighting the need for direct investigation into the specific challenges faced by part-time students.

However, as pointed out by Horsley (2022), there has been limited targeted research on the experiences of this group of students who study on a part-time basis. This has, however, begun to be rectified, as this study has shown. Although some information is known about the aspirations and study experiences of part-time students, there is still limited research on the ethical challenges these students face, which warrants a thorough investigation (Ntelo, 2024).

In Lesotho, part-time students have become a critical pathway for individuals seeking to enhance their qualifications while navigating the complexities of work and family life (Morena et al., 2024). This study showed that part-time students in Lesotho face several challenges, such as feeling isolated and discriminated against, lack of time management, financial constraints, and infrastructural limitations. Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) highlight that part-time students' engagement in their education becomes meaningful once they have a sense of belonging, which removes barriers to learning such as anxiety, stress and depression.

As such, there is a need to critically examine the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho (Ntelo, 2024). These challenges are not merely academic, but they have profound implications for the quality of education provided by higher education institutions and the integrity of such academic institutions. Therefore, this study explores the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in higher education institutions of learning in Lesotho. By using a qualitative approach, the study collected data that deepened the understanding of ethical challenges faced by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. The study focused on the ethical challenges related to academic work, by exploring the ethical implications of having to balance work, study, and personal life of part-time students.

1.2 Background of the research

Globally, higher education plays a crucial role in societal development by fostering ingenuity and passion among students to develop themselves (Pacheco & Franco, 2023; Porkodi et al., 2023; Rasethuntsa, 2022). In Lesotho, where economic opportunities are limited and there is a high unemployment rate (Mashao, 2024), several workers choose to study part-time to enhance their qualifications while still securing their employment (Motsomotso, 2025). Therefore, people who choose to study part-time face unique challenges in institutions of higher learning that hamper their academic performance and holistic learning experience. Despite the rapidly growing number of part-time enrolments in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho, there is an evident gap in studies on challenges that part-time students face (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023; Morena et al., 2024).

The existing literature on challenges encountered by part-time students underscores immense challenges that students face, mainly related to time management, financial issues, and feelings of isolation (Rahman et al., 2024; Liu & Taresh, 2024; Ramli et al., 2025). However, most of these studies largely focus on developed countries, and do not pay much attention to the African continent, particularly Lesotho. Lesotho has a unique socio-economic context, which is marked by widespread poverty, unequal access to education between rural areas and urban areas, and infrastructural constraints. As such, the challenges encountered by part-time students in Lesotho are most likely different from those encountered in developed countries. Moreover, while some scholars have explored general barriers in higher education in Lesotho institutions (Ayanwale et al., 2022; Matee et al., 2023; Nkisi, 2021), none have focused on the challenges experienced by part-time students in higher institutions of Lesotho.

The current study is significant because it addresses a crucial but under-researched topic in the Lesotho higher education landscape. Understanding the challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho has benefited policymakers, university administrators, and prospective part-time students. This has provided them with the strategies to promote equity and accessibility to part-time students and improve policy development.

1.3 Problem statement

The dynamics in the education field have evolved drastically in recent years. This has resulted in several higher education institutions introducing part-time studies (Kabanova & Vetrova, 2022); higher education institutions in Lesotho have also embraced this trend. As such, the Basotho (Lesotho nationals) are upgrading their qualifications while maintaining their professional and personal responsibilities (Makhata et al., 2021). Despite the advantages brought about by part-time studying, it also brings distinctive ethical challenges that justify the need for a thorough investigation. Dewaele and Li (2021) note that globally, part-time students face numerous ethical challenges from their private life, workplaces, and academic life, which stem from their multifaceted roles as students. They further show that these challenges range from accessing educational resources to maintaining good academic performance and navigating financial constraints. Part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho are not an exception as they also find themselves facing such challenges (Morena et al., 2024).

Amzalag et al. (2022) also highlight that challenges faced by part-time students have a direct impact on the behaviour of students, which leads to concerns about academic integrity in higher education institutions as far as part-time students are concerned. More importantly, Dabis and Csaki (2024) add that several challenges faced by part-time students come from such students' multi-roles and time constraints, making such students susceptible to unethical academic practices such as cheating in tests or in examinations, plagiarism, and relying on AI to do their academic work. Thus, it can be noted that this complex, unique situation faced by part-time students creates opportunity for them to compromise academic standards for their survival.

Therefore, this study seeks to identify prevalent ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho. The findings of the study have deepened the understanding of the ethical challenges that part-time students face in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. The findings have further helped institutions of higher learning in Lesotho to adopt policies that best promote ethical behavior among part-time students.

1.4 Rationale

Globally, the landscape of higher education has been evolving, which has prompted diversity in student enrolment options, with part-time study emerging as a popular form of studying, particularly in developing countries such as Lesotho (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023; Morena et al., 2024). Part-time study is preferred by students as it offers crucial access to tertiary qualifications for those who cannot study full time (Tesema & Fathoni, 2023). However, the structural demands of part-time studying create unique pressures on students that often lead to significant ethical challenges, which are connected to questions concerning equity, fairness, accessibility, and the educational contract between institutions and part-time students. In the specific socio-economic and cultural context of Lesotho, which is characterised by high levels of poverty, limited infrastructure, and pronounced gender roles, these ethical dilemmas are likely to be intensified by students' choices to study part time. Hence, there is need to examine ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

1.5 Definition of key concepts

1.5.1 Part-time student

A part-time student is an individual who has enrolled in fewer courses than what is considered a full-time status. This is normally done to allow such an individual the opportunity to work while studying (Meredith & Zhang, 2024). Although Haririan et al. (2024) examine part-time students in nursing, the present study adopts a broader definition of a part-time student is a person who is balancing work responsibilities while pursuing studies. Therefore, the current study has adopted Meredith and Zhang's (2024) description, which defines a part-time student as an individual who has enrolled in an educational institution but has a course load that is below that of a full-time student.

1.5.2 Challenge

Calikoglu (2019) defines a challenge as a certain situation that stimulates a person to exert a conscious effort by their own free will for the opportunity of personal progress with uncertainty regarding whether the desired end has been achieved. A challenge is a problem that exists in an activity, such as a teaching and learning environment, and

requires appropriate and quality solutions (Koichu et al., 2022). Both definitions have been adopted by the researcher in this study.

1.5.3 Ethical challenge

Ethical challenge refers to moral dilemmas and moral conflicts, as well as other scenarios where difficult choices have to be made (Schofield et al., 2021). Ethical challenges arise when norms and values collide with one another, as well as in cases of doubt, uncertainty, or disagreement about the best course of action (Akgun & Greenhow, 2022). For this study, the above meanings have been adopted.

1.5.4 Institution of higher learning

An institution of higher learning is a formally organised, accredited entity dedicated to post-secondary education and knowledge creation, typically granting academic degrees (Juhnke & Haley, 2024). An institution of higher learning is the stage of formal education that follows secondary education, which is provided by universities, colleges, and institutions offering academic, technical, and professional development programmes (Mapetla, 2022). The definition provided by Mapetla (2022) has been used in this study.

1.6 Literature review

Part-time students are a unique population of students in institutions of higher education as they are working adults and they manage many roles at the same time while studying. Part-time students are motivated to pursue higher education due to financial needs, career development and family obligations (McKinney et al., 2022; Conway et al., 2021). The literature shows that unlike full-time students, part-time students have distinct needs, including the need for academic flexibility, financial needs and work-life balance (Harris et al., 2020). These needs arise due to part-time study while balancing professional responsibilities and family obligations.

Research shows that part-time students have conflicts of commitments while studying (Morena et al., 2024). Moreover, part-time students experience systemic inequities as they do not have access to resources and support services unlike full-time students (Cardellino & Deed, 2024). These challenges are compounded by institutional structures and systems that often do not accommodate part-time students. Understanding these

ethical challenges that part-time students face, is essential for the development of policies and support systems that promote access and equity for part-time students in institutions of higher education in Lesotho.

1.7 Theoretical framework

This study was underpinned by two theoretical frameworks: the social justice theory and the equity theory. The social justice theory by Rawls (1971) helped to critique the systemic marginalisation of part-time students in institutions of higher education. This theory helped the researcher understand ethical challenges faced by part-time students not as individual moral failures but as issues of redistribution, recognition and representation. Through redistributive justice, the theory helped the researcher understand how part-time students experienced unequal access to resources like library services. The recognitive justice showed how higher institutional policies mainly focused on full-time students and excluded part-time students from student governance and decision-making structures in institutions of higher learning. The social justice theory was therefore necessary to understand how Lesotho's higher education institutions' systemic inequities created conditions for ethical challenges for part-time students to emerge.

Alongside the social justice theory, the equity theory by Adams (1963) was used. The equity theory helped the researcher understand how part-time students viewed fairness as compared to full-time students based on their input outcome ratio. The inputs for part-time students were payment of fees, time and effort while balancing academics with work and family responsibilities. The outcomes showed inequity when part-time students compared themselves to full-time students, as they received limited access to educational resources and access in institutions of higher education. When part-time students observed that full-time students were getting better treatment than them, that brought about feelings of inequity. To restore equity, this led to reduced engagement, ethical compromises and withdrawal within the institutions. The use of the two theories helped to explore the ethical challenges that are faced by part-time students in institutions of higher education in Lesotho.

1.8 Location of the study

The current research was conducted within the Kingdom of Lesotho, which is a landlocked country that is surrounded by South Africa. The specific locus of the was the institutions of higher learning operating within Lesotho that offer part-time learning programmes. These institutions represent the main environments where the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students manifest themselves and are navigated by students. The study was focused on prominent higher education institutions within the Maseru District, which is the district where key higher education institutions are located.

The selection of these institutions is deliberate because by focusing on institutions within Maseru (the capital town of Lesotho), the research has captured the experiences of students in the primary hubs of higher education in Lesotho, where the concentration of part-time programmes and students is high.

1.9 Research question

1.9.1 Main research question

How do ethical challenges affect part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho?

1.9.2 Secondary research questions

The study addresses the following secondary research questions:

1. What are the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho?
2. Why do part-time students face ethical challenges in higher education institutions in Lesotho?
3. Which strategies can be used by higher education institutions to reduce ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho?
4. What model can be used to understand the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in institutions of higher education in Lesotho?

1.10 Aim and objectives

1.10.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to explore how prevalent ethical challenges affect part-time students in higher education institutions.

1.10.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify prevalent ethical challenges faced by part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho.
2. To explore reasons for part-time students to face ethical challenges in higher education institutions in Lesotho.
3. To propose strategies that can be used by higher education institutions to reduce ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho.
4. To propose a model that can be used to understand the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in institutions of higher education in Lesotho.

1.11 Research design and methodology

This study was located within the interpretivism paradigm, as it provides a participant-centred approach needed to understand the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in Lesotho's higher education institutions. This study also adopted a qualitative approach because it collected some type of non-numerical data to help answer research questions in a study (Mulisa, 2022). Furthermore, this study used a case study research design because it helped the researcher to explore ethical challenges. The population for this study was part-time students in Lesotho, using purposive sampling of 36 part-time students.

The data were generated using six focus groups with six members in each group from three institutions. Therefore, there were two focus groups made up of six participants per group in each higher institution of learning since there were three institutions of higher learning, thus bringing the total participants to 36. To analyse the collected qualitative data from focus group interviews, thematic data analysis was used. Thematic data

analysis was advantageous as it provided detailed insights into participants' experiences, enhancing a researcher's understanding within various research contexts (Dawadi, 2020). The thematic data analysis advocates for several main steps to be followed to promote a comprehensive understanding of the collected data as proposed by Braun et al. (2022) and Naeem et al. (2023) which were subsequently followed in this study. To ensure trustworthiness of the study, this study used credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability.

Data analysis in qualitative studies involves segmenting and taking apart the collected data and rearranging it back together (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The thematic data analysis was used in this study to identify, analyse, and report themes that were identified from the data.

1.12 Ethical considerations

Before taking part in the study, all participants were provided with detailed explanations of the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of taking part in the study. For the current study, to ensure ethical considerations, ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and minimising harm to participants were strictly adhered to (Nii Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023). A written consent form was issued and obtained from participants before they participated in the study, hence ensuring that participants participated voluntarily.

To also safeguard participants' privacy, all collected data was anonymised by removing personal identifiers such as names, surnames, and addresses. Confidential information was securely stored in the researcher's laptop and was only accessible through a password known to the researcher. Lastly, the researcher requested ethical clearance from the UNISA College of Education and permission from the three universities before commencing the study. By adhering to these ethical guidelines, this study aims to contribute valuable knowledge while also safeguarding the rights and welfare of all participants.

1.13 Limitations of the study

Every research study has its limitations and boundaries, which shape its scope and applicability (Ringsten et al., 2025). One major limitation of this study was the potential shortage of participants as the target population in the study was not always physically present at institutions of higher learning. Time constraints also limited the current study, thus forcing the researcher to rely on smaller sample sizes, which could have compromised the reliability of the study. Lastly, financial limitations restricted the researcher from accessing some necessary resources, such as digital tools or travelling to collect data.

1.14 Chapter summary

This study aimed to explore how prevalent ethical challenges affect part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho. This chapter introduced the study by giving the context of part-time students in Lesotho and highlighted the pressures they face while studying. It provided a background on the growing popularity of part-time study both globally and locally and showed a significant research gap in the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho. The chapter then defined the problem statement, which focused on how the demands of part-time study create opportunities for unethical academic practices, and gave the study's rationale, aims, and research questions. It further defined key concepts, reviewed relevant literature, and described the theoretical framework, which combines social justice theory and equity theory.

The chapter also detailed the research design and methodology, justified the use of an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative case study approach. It went on to show that data collected from 36 participants through focus groups would be analysed using thematic analysis. Finally, the chapter outlined the ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, that were followed to protect participants, and acknowledged the study's limitations, including potential participant shortages, time and financial constraints.

1.15 Chapter outline

In Chapter 1, the researcher has introduced the topic and the background to the study. The researcher has provided highlights of the theoretical framework that was used, provided terminology, and definitions of key terms of the study. The problem statement was also discussed alongside the aims and objectives of the study. The research methodology and the rationale behind the methodology was also clearly explained. Overall, the chapter referred to the measures employed by the researcher to promote trustworthiness and, finally, outlined the ethical considerations.

Chapter 2 encompasses the literature review, which explores all the relevant literature, internationally and locally, to determine gaps in the literature. Further, Chapter 3 focuses on the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The chapter discusses the dual lens of the social justice theory and the equity theory to better understand the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher education in Lesotho. Chapter 4 covers the research methodology which outlines the research design that guided the study. Moreover, the data collection methods, sampling strategies, instruments, and techniques for data collection and evaluation are discussed and the procedures to ensure trustworthiness of the study has been highlighted. Chapter 5 mainly focuses on data analysis and interpretation. The researcher suggested possible directions for future studies. Finally, Chapter 6 outlines the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The exploration of ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho is an important area of academic study that connects various dimensions of education, ethics, and social dynamics. This chapter aims to respond to the main research question on the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. The chapter presents scholarly literature on the experiences of part-time students in institutions of higher learning. The challenges faced by part-time students are descriptively conceptualised from a global context to a local context. The chapter further explores the reasons why part-time students encounter ethical challenges and how such challenges can be overcome.

2.2 Defining part-time students

A part-time student is someone who pursues their studies at a reduced pace, dedicating fewer hours per week compared to full-time students (Rainford & Guccione, 2024). In the context of higher education, this approach to learning offers flexibility, allowing students to pay attention to their studies simultaneously with other commitments such as work, family responsibilities, or personal interests (Barua & Lockee, 2024). This results in part-time students being characterised as taking longer to complete their studies, because most of their time to complete their studies is negotiated between the student, their lecturer(s), the university, and other work-related issues. Thus, to understand ethical challenges encountered by part-time students, it is crucial to appreciate the unique characteristics of part-time students, which shape how they behave and interact with their studies.

2.2.1 Working adults

Working adults mainly refer to individuals who are employed and engaged in the workforce, often balancing their professional responsibilities with other aspects of adult life, such as family, education, or leisure activities. According to Johansson and Hart (2023), working adults are university students who are employed part-time or temporarily while pursuing their studies. Working adults refer to part-time students who balance their

professional careers with their studies. These individuals typically have prior work experience and enrol in educational programs for career advancement, professional development, or personal growth. They may also seek to change their career paths or obtain new skills relevant to their current or future employment (Jung et al., 2025). Therefore, part-time students are adults who are already committed to their work and sign up to study in institutions of higher learning.

2.2.2 Mature students

Mature students are individuals who enter higher education at a later stage in their lives, typically being over the age of 30, and often after a significant gap since their previous formal education (Mujallid, 2024). They are usually employed full-time and may have additional responsibilities such as family and financial obligations. Mature students often pursue higher education to upgrade their skills, improve career prospects, or achieve personal enrichment (Lourens et al., 2022). They tend to value education highly and are motivated by the potential for a better future after completion of their studies. Additionally, Chen et al. (2023) highlights that mature students are individuals who enrol in university education later in life, typically over the age of 21. This demographic distinctiveness is starkly illustrated in the UK, where the decline in part-time study has been noticed. Research by Callender and Thompson (2018) demonstrates that part-time students are not a homogenous group, but they are mainly mature, with a large number being over the age of 30 and female. They are also more likely to be from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds as compared to their full-time peers, with a higher proportion coming from low-participation neighbourhoods (Callender & Thompson, 2018). This evidence underscores that part-time students are often the very individuals that higher education's widening participation agenda seeks to support. Mature students are therefore older than their full-time counterparts, hence they approach their studies with caution.

2.2.3 Multi-role students

The multi-role of students in institutions of higher learning refers to the simultaneous responsibilities that part-time students manage as both students and parents (Roy et al., 2022). These roles require part-time students to be responsible for their academic work, which includes attending classes, completing given assignments, and participating in

group projects. Part-time students also have parenting duties such as taking care of their children and balancing the daily stressors that come with being a parent (Abalos et al., 2022). Moreover, their role includes financial responsibilities where part-time students balance school with work to support themselves and their families, adding to their workload and stress. Most importantly, they have social and emotional roles that require them to maintain good relationships with their partners, family members, and peers, while dealing with feelings of isolation due to their unique schooling situation (Nirmalasari & Minai, 2023). The multi-role reality of balancing these duties places part-time students at a greater risk of role strain, as they must constantly decide where to best allocate their time and energy. This multi-role reality is often overlooked or hidden unless the student self-discloses their situation, hence the need for the current study.

2.2.4 Geographically dispersed students

Due to their physical location and schedules, part-time students often have limited opportunities for in-person interactions with their peers and faculty, ultimately hindering their ability to make meaningful connections within their institutions (Bravo, 2022). This necessitates higher learning institutions to promote supportive structures such as online communities and networking opportunities to foster collaboration and communication among part-time students and lecturers. The intent will be to enhance their sense of belonging and commitment to their studies.

In a study conducted in Ghana, there was an emphasis on the importance of offering both in-person and part-time courses, along with professional development, for faculty and students who are geographically dispersed (Gorni et al., 2024). This approach is particularly necessary for part-time students, as it assists in building a sense of community among them despite their physical distance. Gorni et al. (2024) further highlight that promotion of a sense of community in institutions of higher can potentially enhance engagement, collaboration, and knowledge sharing, which can positively impact part-time students regardless of their geographical location. Due to their geographical location, part-time students may therefore face some barriers in accessing facilities in institutions of higher learning in person. Therefore, this warrants a special approach to understanding the ethical challenges that they may face during their academic journey.

2.2.5 Demographically distinct students

Part-time students come from diverse backgrounds, including those who are low-income individuals, single parents, and youth (Kaufman, 2025). These demographic factors can influence part-time students' availability, motivation, and ability to engage fully in their educational activities. In addition, part-time students from different socio-economic backgrounds might have varied experiences and need different support systems that impact their educational success (Fiorini et al., 2022). Such support systems can include having flexible course schedules, providing financial aid, and counselling services that cater specifically to part-time students. Thus, there is a need to study tailored support systems that consider the demographic differences of part-time students to improve their educational experiences.

2.3 Reasons for studying part-time

Academic literature shows that people select to study part-time for various reasons. The accessibility of part-time education has helped people balance work and study commitments to achieve academic excellence (Smith et al., 2022). The choice to pursue part-time education has seen increasing attention in the higher education landscape, which reflects how accessible it is (Hill et al., 2023). It is therefore crucial to study the reasons why students select to study part-time to relate such information to ethical challenges that part-time students face in institutions of higher learning.

2.3.1 Financial necessity

Financial assistance plays a major role in shaping the educational choices of individuals. Research by McKinney et al. (2022) indicates that financial aid significantly influences students' decisions to enrol full-time or part-time. According to the study, financial considerations such as the costs associated with additional courses, transportation, and child-rearing can act as constraints for community college students. This results in many students prioritising employment and personal financial stability when determining their course load, often weighing the costs of taking more courses against their financial capacity.

Financial necessity significantly influences part-time students in various ways. In a study conducted by Ates Ozdemir et al. (2024), it was revealed that students in a university in Istanbul, Turkey, preferred to study part-time while working to achieve financial security. It was further revealed that part-time students preferred balancing work and studies, even though it had its challenges and was time-consuming. However, the income from working and studying helped students manage their expenses and reduced anxiety about financial instability. In addition to financial aid, support systems within institutions of higher education can also impact students' choices. According to a study by Taylor and Rouillard (2021), institutions that provide robust advising and financial literacy programmes can positively influence students' decisions regarding their study modes. These support systems can help students navigate financial challenges and make informed decisions about their educational pathways.

Part-time studying in institutions of higher learning is a flexible and financially viable option for many people in South Africa, particularly those faced with constraints in pursuing full-time education (Rahman et al., 2024). Studying part-time allows individuals to balance work, family, or other commitments while gaining new skills or qualifications. This is particularly relevant in South Africa, where financial limitations often pose a significant barrier to accessing higher education.

In Lesotho, financial necessity constitutes a primary, potent force channelling students towards part-time university study. The option for part-time studying is mainly influenced by limited government support for tertiary education, rendering full-time study an unattainable luxury for many (Morena et al., 2024). As a result, studying part-time is often favourable among students as it offers them the opportunity to spread the cost of tuition fees over a longer period.

2.3.2 Career advancement

Career development is valued as a skill enhancement process used by people to grow personally and professionally. Recent studies highlight the complex relationship between career advancement and part-time education in the field of education (Nirmalasari & Minai, 2023; Teng & Chan, 2022). Pursuing higher education, particularly master's and doctoral programmes, is often motivated by career advancement and personal growth (Jung et al.,

2025; Marotta, 2024). Research indicates that motivations for part-time study in education are often driven by a combination of personal growth aspirations and the need for credentials that signal competence and capability to employers (Huong, 2024; Jung et al., 2025).

A study conducted in Indonesia demonstrated that employees seeking university degrees acknowledged the significance of additional formal education for career advancement in developing contexts (Nirmalasari & Minai, 2023). The study also revealed that pursuing education at the university level as a part-time student was advantageous for employees and would not affect teachers' work performance.

In Hong Kong, the government has focused on developing its higher education sector into a regional education hub to attract more non-local students, and most universities have launched new and competitive self-financed educational programmes (Jung et al., 2024). These institutions have reinvented their degree courses to meet social and economic demands by expanding their range of part-time programmes and targeting emerging professions. This move has led to an increasing number of part-time adult learners enrolling for career advancement and personal growth.

According to a study done in one institution of higher learning in Lesotho, part-time studying is viewed as a way for primary school teachers in Lesotho schools to advance their careers while continuing to work (Morena et al., 2024). It is evident from the literature that part-time studying is a convenient form of studying that is used by several students to advance their careers.

2.3.3 Family obligations

Substantial familial responsibilities mainly lead to the pursuit of higher education on a part-time basis. This mode of study represents a valid and pragmatic solution, allowing students, particularly primary caregivers, to harmonise their academic objectives with indispensable responsibilities for their dependents (Novak et al., 2025). Part-time studying thereby helps sustain progress towards educational goals while maintaining family obligations.

A study conducted in America by Conway et al. (2021) found that parents, especially those with young children, were more likely to enrol part-time due to their family obligations. This was mainly driven by parents' limited discretionary time, which was constrained by childcare responsibilities and other family commitments. Most importantly, part-time enrolment was seen as a common strategy for student parents to balance their education with parenting duties; however, it was associated with lower persistence and degree completion rates (Conway et al., 2021). The need to accommodate family obligations often results in people opting to enrol in institutions of higher learning on a part-time basis.

A recent study in Switzerland highlighted family obligations as a significant factor that influenced the ability of working student parents to balance their academic and family responsibilities (Andrade et al., 2024). The study further indicated that family support played a crucial role in facilitating part-time study, especially because part-time students often need to adapt their schedules and share household and childcare duties to manage their commitments to their studies effectively. Additionally, the need for flexible scheduling and active planning, involving family members, is emphasised as fundamental for accommodating family obligations alongside part-time studies (Andrade et al., 2024). There is a need to involve family when people decide to study part-time because family obligations can sometimes limit the time available for studying, leading students to opt for part-time programs to better balance these competing responsibilities.

Student mothers in South Africa often select to study part-time to balance their family obligations and academic responsibilities (Maluleka et al., 2023). Familial support was an important facilitator that influenced student mothers to study part-time, as it helped them manage their dual roles as students and mothers. However, the absence or lack of support from family members, including the child's father, was identified as a significant barrier that compounded the difficulties student mothers experienced in fulfilling their academic and parenting commitments, even when they studied part-time (Maluleka et al., 2023). The above literature points to the importance of family obligations and how they act as a motivating factor for students to favour studying part-time.

2.3.4 Geographical constraints

Geographical constraints have a significant influence on an individual's decision to pursue part-time study. Given the strong rural demand for part-time courses, policies should both incentivise institutions of higher learning to offer places to study and safeguard students against being deterred from studying by loans (Agyekum, 2023). Geographical constraints such as distance from institutions of higher learning and local availability of programmes, significantly influence individuals' decisions to pursue part-time studies (Van Der Wouden & Youn, 2023). This results in many people opting for part-time study to balance education with work or family commitments, especially when full-time options are not feasible due to travel or relocation challenges. Additionally, advancements in online learning have made part-time study more accessible, allowing individuals to engage in education without the need for physical proximity to institutions of higher learning (Van Der Wouden & Youn, 2023).

Even though geographical constraints may influence people to study part-time, Morena et al. (2024) highlight that in Lesotho, studying part-time often involves geographical constraints, such as limited access to reliable internet and transportation, which can hinder students' participation in classes and academic activities. These infrastructural challenges disproportionately affect part-time students in remote areas in Lesotho, making it difficult for them to engage fully in their studies (Morena et al., 2024). Consequently, geographical limitations can exacerbate feelings of isolation and detachment from the academic community, impacting overall educational experiences.

2.3.5 Delayed entry to higher education

Delayed entry into higher education is the inability of some people to transition into tertiary education immediately after their completion of secondary education. This unique situation is influenced by accumulated life responsibilities and altered motivations (Munro et al., 2023). As a result, the option of studying part-time in institutions of higher learning emerges as the only viable option, hence enabling the fulfilment of pre-existing commitments while pursuing academic advancement.

People with delayed entry in institutions of higher learning often pursue higher education for beneficial reasons, such as career advancement within their current field, a necessary career change, or the acquisition of specific professional credentials needed by their employer. The option of studying part-time is a vital one, as it has minimal disruption to people's existing employment (Nedelsky & Malleson, 2023). Part-time studying also allows people who delay going for higher education to apply learning concurrently in the workplace, enhancing immediate practical relevance, and to demonstrate ongoing commitment to their employer.

In Finland, students with vocational backgrounds or those who take a delayed route into higher education are more likely to study part-time, often because their entry is not immediate after secondary education, and they have other responsibilities, such as work or family, influencing their study patterns (Haltia et al., 2022). This part-time enrolment can also relate to such students' feelings of being less integrated in institutions of higher learning due to their life circumstances and educational route. In the United States of America, due to delayed entry, part-time studying is popular among adult learners because of their life circumstances and responsibilities (Gardner et al., 2022). Due to delayed entry, part-time studying provides the flexibility needed to balance responsibilities, making it a practical pathway for those who delay their entry into higher education or who need to work and support their families while studying.

In Lesotho, delayed entry into tertiary institutions is attributed to several factors, including inadequate provision of tertiary education to support the influx of students from free primary education, socio-economic challenges, and issues related to academic performance and documentation (Nkisi, 2021). These factors contribute to the delay of some individuals to transition into higher education institutions, therefore making part-time studying a more viable option. It is vital for the researcher to keep in mind that various reasons influence people to study part-time in institutions of higher learning.

2.4 Needs of part-time students

Unlike full-time students, part-time students in higher education institutions face unique challenges that lead to them having special needs. The identification and addressing of specific needs of part-time students, such as support in education and personal growth,

are vital for the enhancement of their well-being and potential success in their educational journey (Mariana & Veronika, 2023). It is therefore crucial to study the needs of part-time students to relate such needs to the ethical challenges that part-time students face in institutions of higher learning.

2.4.1 Academic flexibility needs

To succeed academically, part-time students in institutions of higher learning require flexible academic support. A study conducted in Slovakia revealed that full-time enrolment policies made by institutions of higher learning can be restrictive and may unfairly disadvantage part-time students (Ardissone et al., 2021).

The provision of adaptable course delivery frameworks is a prerequisite for supporting part-time students in institutions of higher learning. In the absence of such flexibility, part-time students, whose academic pursuits are always interwoven with fundamental professional workloads and complex family obligations, face significant barriers to participation and persistence, thereby undermining institutional goals of inclusivity and educational equity (Rahman & Mehnaz, 2024).

There is increasing demand for flexible education models in institutions of higher learning, which has led many universities to adopt hybrid learning environments, where students can access classes online or at alternative times to accommodate work schedules. A study on personalised learning found that students who had access to self-paced courses, recorded lectures, and asynchronous learning modules reported lower stress levels and improved academic performance (Al-Qudah, 2024; Chong, 2025).

In Lesotho, to address the need for flexible learning, there is a requirement to introduce mobile learning in higher education institutions. The introduction of mobile learning allows part-time students to learn at their own pace and convenience and enables instructors to engage with their students more dynamically (Thaanyane & Jita, 2024). The need for flexible learning ensures that part-time students can study at their own pace and from anywhere, thereby promoting their chances of academic success.

2.4.2 Financial support needs

Many part-time students are low-income, working adults, and their enrolment is often motivated by economic necessity. Part-time students require access to scholarships and financial aid that recognise their unique circumstances, especially since many policies often require full-time enrolment to qualify for financial assistance in higher education (Ardissone et al., 2021). Even though the current study will focus on undergraduate part-time students, Ari and Korkmaz (2024) state that increasing doctoral scholarships to a level that allows students to sustain their lives may be beneficial for full-time working PhD students, thereby enabling them to quit their jobs and focus on their doctoral education. This implies that a lack of financial support necessitates students to work full-time, which in turn creates challenges in doctoral education, effectively making them part-time students. As such, there is a need for scholarships or financial aid that do not solely rely on full-time enrolment criteria to allow part-time students to access financial support and academic resources essential for their success (Ardissone et al., 2021).

2.4.3 Technological access needs

Technology critically enables flexible learning environments by ensuring continuous access to educational resources for students regardless of where they are. Part-time students face many barriers in accessing appropriate computing devices for their educational needs. Many students with poor financial backgrounds do not have personal computers or must share devices with family members who may also be working or studying from home (Harris et al., 2020). The sharing of devices creates scheduling conflicts and limits students' ability to complete assigned academic work during their available study time. Students with outdated or non-functioning computers face additional challenges, with survey data showing that 21% of students had computers that were old and/or ‘broken’, while others had to share device usage with multiple family members (Hug et al., 2022).

Part-time students need scaffolding and training on how to use digital learning platforms and how to assess online resources to help them overcome technological barriers, thereby promoting their confidence in the digital learning environments (Staddon, 2023). Part-time students have different levels of understanding when it comes to their digital

literacy levels, and this situation creates barriers to their academic success. Research reveals that students have different technology skill levels, with some being highly proficient while others struggle to understand and use basic technological tools required for learning (Darsih et al., 2025). This variation in digital literacy among part-time students reflects broader individual differences in learning styles and cognitive approaches that adult educators must recognize. As Knowles et al. (2012) observed, adult learners exhibit diverse cognitive styles and learning preferences that influence how they process information and engage with educational content. The digital skills gap of part-time students is exacerbated by the time pressures that are associated with studying part-time. Addressing these digital literacy gaps requires comprehensive and targeted interventions, hence the need for the current study to examine ethical challenges that are encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

2.4.4 Work-life balance needs

Unlike traditional full-time students who can focus mainly on their studies, part-time students must manoeuvre the combination of work obligations, academic demands, and personal commitments while pursuing their studies. Research shows that part-time students often experience work-related stress, and their ability to manage time effectively is crucial for maintaining both their work and academic performance (Ghassan El Ali & Kandil, 2024; Saputro et al., 2025).

The multiple demands from work, personal life, and study create negative impacts on part-time students' academic performance and overall well-being. In the United Kingdom (UK), research revealed that excessive focus on studies while working can lead to work–life conflict, as part-time students may sacrifice their time to fulfil these extra-role behaviours, leading to increased work–family conflict and work–leisure conflict (Johansson & Hart, 2023). Although the current study is conducted in Lesotho using a qualitative method, a similar study was also done in Zimbabwe using a mixed-method approach. It was revealed that part-time students found it challenging to fit higher education learning into their already busy lives due to full-time career demands (Mutanana & Pedzisai, 2020). It is evident from the literature that part-time students need

tailored support services and policies that acknowledge their challenges, hence the need for the current study.

2.5 Ethical challenges encountered by part-time students

Even though the pursuit of higher education is often perceived by many as a transformative journey, it is sometimes presented with unique challenges for part-time students globally (Hunter-Johnson, 2021; Morena et al., 2024). The combination of earning a living and studying is detrimental to students in institutions of higher learning, as it increases stress among students and reduces academic success (Akhter & Iqbal, 2021).

2.5.1 Conflict of commitments

Part-time students frequently serve multiple roles concurrently, as employees, parents, caregivers for aging relatives, community members, or students. The complex arrangement of responsibilities creates a challenging environment for part-time students, where competing demands on time, energy, and attention can lead to significant ethical dilemmas about which commitments to prioritise when conflicts arise (Ghassan El Ali & Kandil, 2024; Huong, 2024). It is therefore apparent that part-time students are confronted with unique pressures, making the navigation of conflicting obligations a central challenge in their educational journey.

Part-time students across European countries experience several distinct types of conflicting commitments that compete for their time, energy, and attention during their academic journey. In a study conducted in the UK, it was revealed that the most common conflicts occur between work and scholastic responsibilities that part-time students have, which leads to part-time students struggling to balance employment demands with school requirements (Grozev & Easterbrook, 2022). Although not conducted in the education field, a qualitative study aimed at exploring the research challenges faced by part-time postgraduate nursing students in China revealed that part-time students often struggle to balance their health, family, work, and research obligations (Xu et al., 2025). The same study further concludes that many commitments consume considerable time and energy of part-time students, creating conflict with their academic commitments.

An African study focusing on two universities, one in Nigeria and another in South Africa, revealed that many part-time students in African countries are simultaneously engaged in full-time employment while studying, creating direct conflicts between work and academic responsibilities. The same pattern of working and studying extended even to students officially enrolled as full-time, as many engaged in full-time work or gig work to sustain themselves financially, since most were not sponsored but self-sponsored (Daramola, 2021).

Using Moore's theory of transactional distance, a study conducted in one university in Lesotho focusing on primary school part-time students revealed that students often struggle to balance their professional responsibilities, personal obligations, and academic pursuits simultaneously (Morena et al., 2024). This conflict arises because managing multiple roles can lead to time constraints, fatigue, and stress, as a result, making it challenging for part-time students to pay attention to each commitment effectively. The current study will use the social justice theory and the equity theory in three institutions of higher learning, which are believed to shed new light on the conflict of commitment as connected to ethical challenges encountered by part-time students.

2.5.2 Equity and access in higher institutions' environment

Ethical considerations are significant to ensure equitable educational experiences for all students. However, part-time students frequently encounter unique challenges that raise significant ethical dilemmas within higher institutions of learning (Cardellino & Deed, 2024). These challenges often come from the fundamental design of educational systems, which historically have been structured in such a way that they favour the needs of full-time students (Cardellino & Deed, 2024). Therefore, these issues necessitate a critical examination of institutional policies and pedagogical practices to enhance inclusive and fair learning environments in institutions of higher learning.

A study in Spain highlighted that part-time students often face challenges such as limited flexibility, financial constraints, and balancing studies with work or family commitments, which hinder their access to and participation in higher education (Savall Ceres, 2024). To align with European strategies that emphasise inclusion, flexible study pathways and lifelong learning, higher education institutions have promoted equity by creating policies

and practices that directly address these barriers as a result providing equitable opportunities for all students, whether they are full-time or part-time (Savall Ceres, 2024).

These findings on inequity are consistent with research in England, which shows that the higher education systems have systematically disadvantaged part-time students. The financial support system is designed for full-time students and does not address the reality that part-time students have significant non-tuition costs (Hordósy, Clark & Vickers, 2018). This has created a 'double deficit' where low-income part-time students are pressured into work to cover immediate costs, which subsequently damages their academic outcomes and their capacity to engage in career-enhancing activities, a privilege more readily available to their full-time peers (Hordósy et al., 2018).

Part-time students consistently experience differential treatment within higher education institutions, receiving less attention and fewer opportunities compared to their full-time counterparts in Lesotho. Research conducted in one higher institution in Lesotho revealed that part-time students were excluded from key educational experiences, including inadequate contact sessions, communication breakdowns with faculty, and limited access to guest lectures by field experts (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). The study further revealed that part-time students lacked equal access to library facilities and faced unfair treatment from both full-time students and non-academic staff during their campus visits in one institution of higher learning in Lesotho (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). Given that the current study focused on three institutions of higher learning, the expectation was to obtain different results or to corroborate the existing knowledge about part-time students in Lesotho.

2.5.3 Academic integrity under pressure

Upholding academic integrity under pressure is a central ethical challenge for part-time students. Part-time students are characterised by juggling full-time employment, family responsibilities, and other personal obligations alongside their academic studies (Manyeneng et al., 2021). These responsibilities consume time for studying and promote temptation, where the pressure to succeed can lead to ethically questionable choices by part-time students (Dawar, 2025; Gauci & Carabott, 2025). The extreme time constraints and fatigue inherent in such schedules can elevate the risk of academic misconduct,

including plagiarism or contract cheating on assignments (Grigoreva et al., 2025). The temptation to resort to academic dishonesty by part-time students is intensified by a lack of time to engage deeply with the material or to produce original work, leading to a compromise of scholarly honesty.

Research undertaken across 27 European countries shows that awareness and implementation of research integrity measures vary greatly, with imbalanced consciousness persisting despite recent policy advances and innovations. This inconsistency is further complicated by the fact that almost every European country maintains its national-level code of conduct for research integrity, creating divergences on most aspects except for defining academic misconduct (Desmond & Dierickx, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). Therefore, the research gap in these studies is that the studies above do not contain any specific information or discussion on the academic integrity of part-time students or how external pressures might uniquely affect them; therefore, the current study is of great importance in adding to the literature.

2.5.4 Institutional responsibilities and ethical design

Higher education institutions have a profound ethical responsibility to ensure that all students have equitable access and support, especially to the growing population of part-time learners. This is because these students often balance academic pursuits with employment, family obligations, or other significant life commitments, therefore exposing them to a unique set of ethical challenges that need careful consideration in higher education institutional design and policy (Dawar, 2025; Huong, 2024). The failure of higher education institutions to address these challenges may be disadvantageous to part-time students, as a result, compromising their educational experience.

Informed by the critical theory and emancipatory education principles, a study by Strohschen (2020) critiqued the institution-centric design of educational programmes in institutions of higher learning, which often overlook the perspectives of various stakeholders, including part-time students, teachers, and community leaders. Institutions of higher learning have the responsibility to align their mission statements with the educational needs of part-time students. Furthermore, resource allocation by institutions of higher learning presents a significant ethical test to part-time students. Support

services such as academic advising, tutoring, counselling, and career services are crucial for student success (Yifei et al., 2025). Evidence shows integrated support models improve service delivery efficiency, resulting in higher student satisfaction and attainment (Li, 2024). However, these resources are mostly designed and structured with full-time students in mind, leading to operational hours or delivery models that are inaccessible to part-time students as they are not always readily available on campus daily.

A study focusing on the ethical challenges faced by Zimbabwean doctoral students conducting fieldwork in Zimbabwe while registered at South African universities found that there is a significant disconnect between formal ethical compliance procedures and the realities of fieldwork. Importantly, this study highlights the challenges associated with studying part-time in institutions of higher learning (Maunganidze & Ruggunan, 2021). The study highlights the necessity for South African institutions of higher learning to enhance research integrity oversight for part-time students working beyond South Africa's borders. This can be achieved by increasing student and supervisor autonomy and adaptive strategies to overcome the contextual challenges posed by Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape.

In Lesotho, to promote a conducive learning environment for part-time students, it has been recommended that institutions of higher learning should provide financial aid programmes, grants, and scholarships specifically for part-time students to make higher education more accessible (Morena et al., 2024). This is recommended in contrast to the existing policies of higher education institutions, which favour funding and scholarships to full-time students only.

2.5.5 Problems with identity, well-being, and ethics of self-care

One of the primary ethical challenges faced by part-time students revolves around their identity, well-being, and the ethics of self-care. Unlike their full-time counterparts, part-time students frequently juggle multiple demanding roles, often including full-time employment, family responsibilities, and community commitments, alongside their academic responsibilities (Huong, 2024; Morena et al., 2024). This unique, multifaceted existence can lead to a fragmented sense of self, where their identity as a student is constantly negotiated against other pressing responsibilities (Rahima & Tumin, 2025).

The pressure to excel academically often clashes with essential well-being, creating an ethical dilemma where students must make difficult, often unhealthy, choices (Kibuuka, 2024). The ethics of self-care, in this context, becomes not just a personal choice but a moral obligation to prevent self-harm and maintain the capacity to fulfil various responsibilities by part-time students.

Furthermore, part-time students frequently experience marginalisation and a diminished sense of belonging, which impacts their identity within institutions of higher learning (Khanal, 2022). This is because normal university culture is often centred around the full-time students' experience, characterised by on-campus activities and consistent class schedules.

A study undertaken in the UK and Australia indicates that students' identities, particularly their status as part-time students, can directly affect their sense of belonging in institutions of higher learning (Ajjawi et al., 2025). During class, part-time students find it difficult to connect and feel a sense of belonging because other full-time students are already familiar with each other. Additionally, the study also highlights that the pressure to fit in and the stigma of not belonging can take a toll on individuals, potentially leading to the internalisation of unbelonging as a personal deficit rather than a result of institutional structures (Ajjawi et al., 2025). Moreover, part-time students with full-time jobs often face the challenge of balancing regular work with academic responsibilities while experiencing hierarchical system pressures that can lead to feelings of alienation within academic groups, despite having greater job security than full-time students (Caldwell et al., 2025). The current study was confined within one country, Lesotho, therefore opening possibilities to different outcomes from the ones above. Moreover, the existing research landscape shows gaps in addressing the specific challenges faced by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. Current educational research in Lesotho tends to focus on full-time primary school students in rural settings, where education is often framed in terms of basic survival needs rather than exploring deeper issues of identity formation, well-being support, or the ethics of self-care for part-time adult learners (Dungey & Ansell, 2020). This gap suggests that the unique experiences and

needs of part-time students, who must balance educational pursuits with work, family, and community responsibilities, remain underexplored in the academic literature.

2.5.6 Power dynamics and advocacy

Ethical challenges faced by part-time students are often exacerbated by power dynamics within educational institutions, particularly regarding their voice and representation. Unlike full-time students in institutions of higher learning, part-time students often find that their needs and contributions are ignored in institutional governance and decision-making processes (Quan et al., 2021). The oversight can be caused by several factors, including the perceived transient nature of their engagement, a lack of dedicated channels for part-time students to provide feedback, or when institutions focus more on the full-time student experience than the part-time students (Quan et al., 2021). Consequently, decisions regarding educational experiences in higher education institutions may create ethical challenges for part-time students, who might find themselves disadvantaged by policies which are often made with full-time students in mind.

A recent study broadly discusses power dynamics in higher education institutions and challenges related to sexual violence disclosure, which can be relevant to understanding the experiences of marginalised student groups, including part-time students (Jones, 2025). The study conducted by Jones (2025) in Canada highlights that despite increased awareness and available supports, many students do not disclose their experiences with sexual violence in institutions of higher learning due to institutional barriers and systemic oppressions such as racism, ableism, and transphobia. The study advocates for transformative practices that prioritise student survivor choice and equitable care, emphasising the need to challenge the one-size-fits-all response models when it comes to part-time students and full-time students.

Part-time students encounter systemic discrimination and marginalisation within higher education institutions, creating different ethical challenges around fairness and inclusion. Research conducted in one university in Lesotho revealed that universities have failed to create trusting and inclusive climates, where full-time students are favoured while part-time students are discriminated against and disregarded. Therefore, they do not experience the same treatment from the institutions of higher learning (Letseka-Manka et

al., 2023). The study further showed that discrimination appears where part-time Bachelor of Education students felt disrespected, discriminated against, and marginalised by their institutions, leading to feelings of disconnection and a lack of sense of belonging within that institution of higher learning. Moreover, a study by Morena et al. (2024) indicates that part-time students in the same institution of higher learning face challenges beyond social discrimination, including practical and structural barriers that institutions often fail to address. Part-time students in the study report feelings of isolation and discrimination, while struggling with time management difficulties, financial constraints, and infrastructural limitations. The studies by Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) and Morena et al. (2024) only focused on one institution of learning in Lesotho, disregarding others. In contrast, the current study will collect data from three institutions of higher learning to explore ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho to get a deeper and wider understanding of the phenomenon.

2.6 Causes of ethical challenges encountered by part-time students

Higher education institutions, which are largely structured to accommodate traditional full-time students, increasingly serve a growing population of part-time students who balance work, family, and their studies. This unique position exposes part-time students to distinct ethical challenges. Navigating complex lives while studying often forces part-time students to make difficult choices between competing responsibilities, creating ethical tensions that threaten their educational goals and personal values (Tortola, 2024). To effectively support these learners and foster truly inclusive educational environments, institutions of higher learning must understand the specific moral and practical challenges they encounter.

2.6.1 Work-life conflict and competing demands

Unlike full-time students, who can devote most of their time and energy to their academic work, part-time students often find themselves juggling multiple competing demands, which can create ethical tensions. Work-life conflict comes about when the expectations and responsibilities from one aspect of life, such as work, significantly interfere with those of another area of life, such as family or personal pursuits (Horan & Su, 2025). Additionally, work-life conflict is a form of inter-role conflict where demands from different life domains

are slightly incompatible, making it difficult to fulfil obligations in multiple roles simultaneously (Carvalho et al., 2024). A quantitative study done in Croatia found that for part-time students, work-life conflict emerges specifically as work-school conflict, defined as the situation that occurs when addressing work-related demands drains student workers' resources and constrains their ability to fulfil school responsibilities (Vokic et al., 2021). The current study was conducted in Lesotho using a qualitative method to obtain different results.

To understand work-life conflict, the researcher explored three distinct types based on the underlying mechanisms, namely time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based conflict. Time-based conflict occurs when the time given to the requirements of a particular role makes it difficult to fulfil the requirements of another role (Pacheco & Franco, 2023). This concept resonates with Knowles's (1980) andragogical principle that adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions and lives. In the case of part-time students, this happens when work hours, study commitments, and family responsibilities compete for part-time students' limited time (Vokic et al., 2021). This situation results in part-time students being unable to allocate their time appropriately across all their responsibilities. Another type is strain-based conflict, which refers to situations where stressful situations in one domain lead to negative emotions and physical strain, such as tension, anxiety, depression, or energy depletion, which then reduces a person's capacity to accomplish other domains (Pacheco et al., 2021). For part-time students, this type of conflict is widespread as they may experience emotional conflicts when competing demands are placed on them in fulfilling their multiple roles as workers, students, and family members. Behaviour-based conflict occurs when specific behaviours required by one role make it difficult to fulfil the requirements of another role (Carvalho et al., 2024). Part-time students may face situations where professional behaviours expected at work conflict with collaborative learning behaviours required in academic settings, or where the independence valued in workplace roles conflicts with the mentoring relationships important for academic success. The above types of conflict affect part-time students differently and contribute to the ethical challenges they encounter.

2.6.2 Financial pressure

One of the most significant challenges facing part-time students in higher education is financial pressure. Many students struggle to manage the rising costs of education and living expenses (Aria et al., 2020). Many part-time students are responsible for paying their tuition fees, which creates an additional financial responsibility that significantly influences their decision-making processes. The financial pressures faced by part-time students are heightened by the fact that in most institutions of higher learning, part-time students are generally ineligible for financial assistance, as it is typically assumed that they are earning an income and therefore can afford to pay for their studies (Welsh, 2024).

A study conducted in Pakistani higher education institutions revealed that financial difficulties among part-time students can lead them to engage in academic dishonesty to achieve higher marks, which negatively impacts their academic and professional lives. The study revealed that students facing financial issues often juggle jobs to support their education while studying, which makes it difficult for them to focus on their studies. Ultimately, this leads to academic and job-related stress, potentially resulting in academic dishonesty (Welsh, 2024). In the UK, it has been found that the financial burden creates a cost-benefit calculation that can motivate cheating behaviour. With the rising tuition fees, students facing potential failure may choose to cheat because the cost of repeating a unit far exceeds the relatively small cost and low risk of purchasing assignments to help them pass (Rahimi et al., 2024).

Part-time students face substantial indirect costs, including transportation, childcare, and foregone income from reduced working hours. Research in South Africa indicates that part-time students experience financial stress related to their inability to pay bills, purchase required academic materials and manage work schedules that conflict with study demands (Zungu, 2022). A recent study in South Africa also revealed that financial pressure significantly impacts part-time students as they often juggle work and study, leading to competing demands on their time and resources (Ramli et al., 2025). Many part-time students end up prioritising immediate financial needs, such as supporting their families or covering living expenses, over academic requirements. This leads to misallocation of funds aimed at educational purposes, ultimately affecting their academic

success and engagement (Masuku et al., 2025). The above studies show that there is a strong connection between financial pressure and part-time students; however, since the current study was done in Lesotho, the results might be different.

In Lesotho, a study was conducted using a qualitative research methodology and a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of how financial pressure impacts part-time students (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). The findings revealed that financial pressures on part-time students are significant and exacerbate part-time students' feelings of not belonging. Further, it was revealed that part-time students faced challenges in paying tuition fees, especially when registration deadlines were communicated late or inconsistently. This led to additional costs, such as penalties for delayed registration and added financial strain. Students also perceive that they were treated differently by the university, as they pay high fees but did not receive equivalent access to facilities and services (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). These financial difficulties contributed to feelings of exclusion and discrimination, further undermining part-time students' sense of belonging on campus. The study by Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) only focused on one institution of higher learning, whereas the current study focused on three institutions of higher learning, thus offering more perspective from various institutions.

2.6.3 Institutional structure and support deficits

The increasing prevalence of part-time higher education reflects a societal need for flexible learning pathways, yet this demographic often encounters significant ethical challenges stemming from institutional structures and support deficits. Many colleges operate under a bureaucratic, hierarchical framework shaped by structural functionalism, which emphasises efficiency and order but often neglects the complexities of students' lives (Virtue et al., 2023). Due to frameworks in colleges, part-time students frequently face support deficits because institutional policies and structures are primarily focused on full-time, residential students. As a result, support systems such as advising, financial aid, and success programmes may be less accessible or less tailored towards part-time students' specific circumstances, such as balancing work, family, and education (Virtue et al., 2023). The traditional focus of institutions of higher learning on full-time students

often does not accommodate the unique needs of part-time students, which exacerbates the systemic inequities they experience.

A qualitative study conducted by Fynn and Mashile (2022) in South Africa revealed that the structural barriers and challenges faced by part-time students in higher institutions raise profound ethical questions about the moral defensibility of institutional practices. The study further showed that the treatment of part-time students reflected a fundamental ethical failure where institutions expected students to perform academically without providing the necessary conditions for success (Fynn & Mashile, 2022). In Lesotho, institutions of higher education are overwhelmed with the high student population because of massification driven by free primary education. In higher education institutions, there is insufficient infrastructure, including classrooms, libraries, and technology, which directly affects the quality of support services available to students, particularly part-time students who may require more flexible access (Tlali et al., 2019). The lack of adequate institutional support portrays itself as an ethical issue because part-time students may be more disadvantaged than full-time students. This raises questions of fairness and equal opportunity in access to quality education in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. Moreover, institutions' failure to accommodate the unique needs of part-time students may be seen as neglecting their ethical responsibility to provide equitable educational opportunities (Tlali et al., 2019). The study by Tlali et al. (2019) was conducted more than five years ago; therefore, the current study might find different information about challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

2.6.4 Isolation, marginalisation, and lack of community

Despite the value of pursuing higher education, it presents a unique array of ethical challenges for part-time students that are often overlooked. Unlike their full-time counterparts who are typically fully immersed in the campus environment, part-time students frequently navigate their academic journeys with significant constraints, leading to issues of isolation, marginalisation, and a diminished sense of community (Hari Rajan et al., 2024; Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). These factors collectively contribute to a distinct set of ethical dilemmas that can disrupt part-time students' academic success, personal

development, and integration into the broader environment in institutions of higher learning.

In Australia, a study revealed that part-time students consistently reported feeling isolated and disconnected from the broader university community, with this isolation manifesting in several distinct ways (Canty et al., 2020). The most commonly reported challenge was social isolation, where part-time students struggled to develop meaningful connections with peers due to limited opportunities for interaction (Canty et al., 2020). The social disconnection is mainly made prominent because part-time students often attend classes during non-traditional hours and have limited time for campus activities, making it difficult to form any informal relationships that are crucial for developing a sense of belonging in institutions of higher learning (Hayman et al., 2022). Additionally, in the UK, it has been discovered that part-time students often juggle multiple responsibilities such as work and caregiving, which limits the time and opportunities they may have to engage with their peers or participate in campus activities. As a result, this leads to feelings of isolation, as part-time students may miss out on informal social interactions and peer support networks that full-time students experience (Wilbraham et al., 2024). The unique characteristics of not being fully physical all the time in institutions of higher learning, therefore, compound to part-time students' feelings of isolation, marginalisation, and lack of community.

In South Africa, it has been shown that part-time students often multitask, switching between focusing on work to focusing on family, and later focusing on studying, which limits their ability to engage fully with campus life and peer networks (Sikhwari et al., 2020). This results in part-time students feeling isolated from their peers and academic staff. Additionally, the study found that part-time students often come from diverse or non-traditional backgrounds and face additional challenges such as conflicting time commitments and limited access to support services because institutional structures and support systems were designed around the traditional full-time student (Sikhwari et al., 2020). This led to the marginalisation of part-time students, who felt that their specific needs were overlooked or inadequately addressed.

In Lesotho, a study by Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) revealed that part-time students in one university in Lesotho experienced systemic exclusion from educational opportunities

and resources that were readily available to their full-time counterparts. The study also showed that the marginalisation of part-time students occurred through inadequate teaching and learning contact sessions, communication breakdowns, and exclusion from guest lectures by field experts, creating an educational environment where part-time students did not receive the same attention and opportunities as full-time students (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). Since the current study collected data from three institutions of higher learning, the results varied from the study conducted by Letseka-Manka et al. (2023), as they only collected data from one university.

2.6.5 Personal and situational factors

Part-time students must balance academic pursuits with significant personal and professional commitments. This unique position presents a distinct set of ethical challenges, influenced by both individual and situational factors. Understanding these underlying dynamics is crucial for educational institutions to provide adequate support and foster an ethical learning environment.

The most significant personal factor driving ethical challenges for part-time students is financial challenges, where most part-time students, especially those from low-income backgrounds, face financial difficulties. Another factor is family responsibilities, where part-time students often have caregiving roles for their children, which can conflict with academic obligations. Last is the lack of academic preparedness, where the majority of part-time students may lack confidence or academic skills that are required for higher education success (Maynard II & Slate, 2021).

Personal and situational factors combine to create ethical challenges for part-time students. A recent study in the UK revealed that personal factors that cause ethical challenges for part-time students include financial difficulties, family responsibilities, and limited academic preparedness (Fang & White, 2025). The study also showed that situational factors that cause ethical challenges for part-time students are connected to institutional barriers such as inflexible schedules, limited support, and a lack of community in institutions of higher learning. Combined, these challenges can lead to marginalisation and hinder academic success for part-time students. The study recommended that ethically, higher education institutions must address these interconnected issues by

offering flexible policies, inclusive support, and resources to ensure fairness, equity, and student wellbeing for part-time learners (Fang & White, 2025). The above study was done in the UK, and the results may be different from the current study as it is conducted in Lesotho.

A study conducted in Zimbabwe focusing on challenges for postgraduate part-time students found that both personal and situational factors are intertwined as ethical challenges faced by part-time postgraduate students. Personal factors, such as family responsibilities, financial difficulties, and social commitments, influenced students' ability to meet academic demands ethically and responsibly. These individual circumstances often create conflicts that challenge students' commitments to their studies, potentially leading to issues such as late submissions or incomplete work, which pose ethical questions about fairness and academic integrity (Mutanana & Pedzisai, 2020). The current study will be conducted in Lesotho focusing on undergraduate part-time students which might bring different results from the Zimbabwe study which focused on postgraduate part-time students.

The cumulative effect of personal and situational factors creates a profound negative impact on part-time students' well-being and academic experience in Lesotho's higher education institutions. Research findings reveal that the challenges outweigh the opportunities presented by part-time study, with students reporting challenges such as feeling isolated and discriminated against, lack of time management, financial constraints, and infrastructural limitations, among others (Morena et al., 2024). Despite some coordinators and lecturers providing psychosocial support, the overall experience remains predominantly unchanged, challenging for these students. The current study will focus on three institutions of higher learning with the aim of coming up with different or more information than the study by (Morena et al., 2024).

2.7 Effects of ethical challenges encountered by part-time students

Balancing academics, work, and personal life presents part-time students with unique ethical challenges. These can lead to pressures such as conflicts of interest, maintaining academic integrity under time constraints, and navigating both professional and student obligations.

2.7.1 Academic performance consequences

The literature consistently highlights the complex relationship between part-time studying and academic performance. Part-time students frequently experience reduced class attendance, missed lectures, and difficulties with cumulative assessments, all of which directly affect their grades and academic performance (Baja, 2024; Paintsil et al., 2020). Moreover, it has been noted that part-time students who work over 20 hours per week demonstrate lower school performance as compared to those working fewer hours, with the combination of full or part-time work and education leading to insufficient study time that negatively impacts academic outcomes (Baja, 2024). The academic performances of part-time students are affected by the ethical challenges they encounter.

A study in Chicago showed that part-time students, mainly because they handle multiple responsibilities, are particularly susceptible to impacts on learning quality and cognitive overload. The cognitive load theory (CLT) outlines that human working memory has limited capacity, and when instructional demands exceed this capacity, learning effectiveness diminishes (Zhao, 2023). The same study further shows that for part-time students, the constant demands of work, study, and personal life can contribute to an excessive extraneous cognitive load, making it difficult to process new information, retain knowledge, and engage in deeper meaningful learning (Zhao, 2023). The inability to dedicate sufficient focused time to academic tasks due to external pressures often leads to superficial learning, reduced comprehension, and a diminished ability to integrate new knowledge into existing knowledge. Therefore, the endless state of cognitive strain on part-time students can significantly impair their overall quality of educational experience.

A study was conducted across multiple countries, including Lithuania, Japan, Sweden, the UK, and several Asia Pacific countries. The aim was to explore part-time students' professional and personal commitments that lead to learning discontinuity, emotional disturbances from prolonged digital device use, and health issues that compound their educational challenges (Senanayake et al., 2023). Despite having covered many countries, the above studies were not conducted in Lesotho, where the results may be different from the current study.

2.7.2 Psychological and well-being effects

The psychological and well-being effects on part-time students are extensive and multifaceted, emanating from the complex demands of managing work, academic, and personal responsibilities simultaneously. This is why part-time students demonstrate significantly lower levels of life satisfaction and emotional well-being compared to their full-time counterparts (Duvnjak, 2020). As Nashich and Palupi (2020) add that the challenge of being both an employee and a part-time student directly influences the psychological well-being condition of students. The pressures of multitasking are directly linked to psychological well-being, which is influenced by ethical challenges that part-time students encounter in institutions of higher learning.

A study conducted in South Africa showed that students experience exceptionally high levels of psychological distress that demand immediate attention. The high levels of depression and even suicide among South Africa's student population provide prima facie evidence that the understanding of the reasons determining students' subjective well-being is in urgent need of re-evaluation (Pretorius & Blaauw, 2020). Moreover, part-time students face additional unique challenges that compound these general student well-being issues. A previous, pre-pandemic study revealed that part-time students experienced significant challenges with balancing work and home life in addition to the stress of studying part-time (Lourens et al., 2022). Additionally, the pandemic resulted in mature, part-time students being even further marginalised by removing them from university life and the accompanying support services geared to facilitate social, academic, and mental well-being (Lourens et al., 2022). As a result, these challenges create complex emotional experiences for part-time students. Strong emotions of displacement, anxiety, and guilt can all be part of the daily lives of part-time students (Pretorius & Blaauw, 2020). This shows that the psychological well-being of part-time students is affected by the ethical challenges they encounter.

2.7.3 Professional and career implications

Part-time students face unique challenges as they balance academic responsibilities with their professional commitments, which can significantly impact their professional careers. The various commitments of part-time students can lead to many professional and career

implications, including potential workplace repercussions, reputational risks, skill transfer barriers, and effects on long-term career trajectories (Dawar, 2025). Additionally, balancing part-time studies with professional responsibilities can frequently lead to workplace repercussions, impacting relationships with colleagues and managers, and potentially hindering promotion opportunities (Brown, 2023). The demands of coursework, such as late-night studying or weekend assignments, may reduce the time or energy available for workplace socialising, potentially leading to strained relationships with colleagues who might perceive a lack of commitment or availability (Harahap & Siregar, 2023). Furthermore, the need to take time off for exams, study groups, or project work can create friction with supervisors, particularly if not managed effectively (Harahap & Siregar, 2023). The above shows the possible impacts caused by ethical challenges encountered by part-time students on their professional and careers.

Balancing academic and work responsibilities can lead to increased stress and the temptation for part-time students to engage in academic misconduct (Ghassan El Ali & Kandil, 2024). Factors such as tight schedules, financial pressures, and workload can create an environment where students feel compelled to prioritise immediate professional demands over academic integrity. Many part-time students experience significant challenges in managing their time effectively, which may lead to procrastination and a higher likelihood of engaging in dishonest practices (Zhao, 2023). The implications of ethical challenges on part-time students may be different in Lesotho, as this study will be conducted in Lesotho.

2.7.4 Institutional and systemic effects

Part-time students encounter significant difficulties in managing multiple competing demands on their time and energy. Higher education institutions systemically discriminate against part-time students through policies and practices that were designed around full-time students. This systemic bias creates significant obstacles for part-time students, as institutional systems privilege certain types of students over others and actively limit full participation opportunities for part-time students (Crawford & Emery, 2021). The discrimination appears when institutions of higher learning fail to create trusting and inclusive climates, with full-time students receiving preferential treatment while part-time

students experience disregard and unequal treatment (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). The structures of institutions of higher learning that disadvantage part-time students perpetuate unethical behaviour of part-time students.

Profound psychological impacts on part-time students are created by the lack of fairness and equality in institutional policies. When students perceive that school rules are unfair and that they are not treated equally, it undermines their sense of belonging and connection to the university (Dost & Mazzoli Smith, 2023; Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). Bachelor of Education part-time students in Lesotho, for example, reported feeling disrespected, discriminated against, and marginalised by their institutions, leading to disconnection and significant stress that contributes to dropout rates (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023).

The systemic nature of the discrimination against part-time students extends beyond individual student interactions to broader institutional culture and accessibility issues. Part-time students often face additional barriers to accessing peer support and engaging with institutional research culture compared to full-time students (Casey et al., 2023; Jackman et al., 2023).

Institutional oversights are pervasive among part-time doctoral students to an extent that they are often referred to as "invisible students," which reflects the systemic failure of supervisory structures and institutional systems to recognise and address such students' distinct needs (Caldwell et al., 2025; Turner, 2023). The academic culture of high achievement and long working hours particularly disadvantages part-time students and creates an environment where part-time students experience these institutional and systemic effects more (Caldwell et al., 2025). The current study focused on undergraduate part-time students, rather than part-time postgraduate PhD students, which could yield different results.

2.8 Mitigating ethical challenges encountered by part-time students

As the number of part-time students continues to grow, institutions of higher learning are increasingly recognising the need for tailored approaches to address the challenges they encounter. Part-time students face multifaceted challenges that are often more dire than

those faced by full-time students (Gyourko et al., 2025). Effective strategies are necessary to address the challenges faced by part-time students, enabling them to learn smoothly.

2.8.1 Designing flexible and accessible learning pathways

Part-time students encounter ethical challenges that institutions often fail to address. A primary concern for part-time students is the congestion of assessment deadlines, where students face multiple submission dates clustered together without consideration of their total workload experience (Fynn & Mashile, 2022). This creates a situation where the expectation is that part-time students are expected to perform well without providing them with sufficient time to complete their schoolwork.

To address the challenge of deadlines, institutions of higher learning can design programmes with maximum flexibility in timing and structure. Institutions of higher learning should allow part-time students to have more time than traditional full-time students for completion of their work and permit lighter course loads to help part-time students balance work and family responsibilities with learning demands (Tatel et al., 2022). This flexibility will help part-time students focus more on their studies while dealing with family and work demands.

2.8.2 Asynchronous and hybrid course delivery models

Part-time students encounter various barriers that raise questions about educational equity and access in institutions of higher learning. Many students report experiencing difficulties performing their academic work simultaneously with their employment expectations, hence preventing them from continuing with their education if courses maintain rigid, synchronous schedules with fixed class schedules (Mazur et al., 2021). Asynchronous and hybrid course delivery models are helpful to part-time students because they cannot follow a fixed, on-campus class schedule. Asynchronous learning models enable part-time students to learn at their own pace, providing deadlines that are flexible so that part-time students can study while working (Childs et al., 2024). These models of studying are beneficial for part-time students as they help them to balance work,

family, or other responsibilities. They also reduce the need for physical attendance on campus.

2.8.3 Extended hours for advising, counselling, and tutoring

Part-time students often face unique academic and personal challenges that necessitate tailored support services. Institutions of higher learning must adapt their existing resources to be accessible and relevant to part-time students (Muthanga et al., 2024). Institutions of higher learning should offer counselling and advisory services outside traditional hours to accommodate part-time students' schedules, ensuring they can seek help when needed without conflicting with their work or study commitments (Kont et al., 2021). This will help part-time students have all the necessary mental support they need during their challenging academic journey.

Enhancing academic and well-being support services can significantly benefit part-time students by providing tailored resources that address their unique challenges. According to Taylor et al. (2023), the creation of a safe and accessible environment where part-time students feel comfortable disclosing disabilities and seeking support is essential in institutions of higher learning. This can be achieved by offering flexible academic advising, mental health services, and peer mentoring programmes that acknowledge the unique demands of part-time students' schedules. Additionally, institutions can integrate clear lines of communication about available support options for part-time students, thereby reducing confusion and fostering trust. Supporting well-being alongside academic success helps part-time students manage stress, balance work and study commitments, and develop confidence in navigating their educational journey.

2.8.4 Promoting fair workloads and flexible work arrangements

Part-time students encounter a complex web of challenges that come from having to balance multiple demanding roles simultaneously with their studies. The workplace environment often compounds these difficulties through employment challenges related to high workloads and employers who may not grant study leave or flexible arrangements for pursuing part-time studies (Stoddart, 2024). While it may not directly be an institutional policy, universities can play a role in advocating for and promoting fair workloads and

flexible work arrangements for part-time students. Universities can advocate for and support flexible work arrangements for part-time students who are also employees (Radovan, 2024). This is because employees with flexible working hours are more likely to participate in part-time education.

The issue of the silence of institutions of higher learning regarding the workload regulation of part-time students significantly impacts students' well-being. This institutional silence on workload regulation contributes to increased psychological and health problems for students who are already burdened with managing blurred boundaries between their studies, work, and home lives (Fahs et al., 2023). Additionally, working while studying part-time has been associated with lower overall professionalism scores and reduced academic performance; this is likely due to the higher burden and poor time management that employed students have to deal with (Alameddine et al., 2022). The cumulative effect of these challenges can adversely impact both academic performance and professional performance of part-time students, but institutions of higher learning can play a role in the reduction of this challenge.

2.8.5 Tuition assistance and study leave

Financial considerations are often a primary reason for students to choose part-time studying. Institutions of higher learning also have a role in advocating for fair employment practices that support their learners. Forging partnerships with employers to facilitate tuition assistance programmes and provide study leave can significantly benefit part-time students (Krieger, 2022). These partnerships can also lead to curriculum alignment in institutions of higher learning through making the education even more relevant to part-time students’ workplaces.

Traditionally, scholarships and grants are channelled towards full-time students, which creates a significant barrier for part-time students to pay for their studies. To help part-time students, institutions of higher learning should develop scholarships and grants specifically targeted at part-time enrolment, which will assist in the reduction of financial stress on part-time students (McKinney et al., 2022). Additionally, flexible fee structures and amendments in university policies are essential to make higher education more

financially viable for part-time students (AlKharouf et al., 2024). This direct financial support can alleviate stress and improve retention amongst part-time students.

2.9 Conclusion

This review of literature has established that part-time students in higher education institutions, particularly in Lesotho, navigate a complex landscape of intersecting roles, responsibilities, and systemic barriers, which lead to significant ethical challenges. Part-time students encompass working adults, mature students, and multi-role individuals who are driven primarily by financial necessity, career advancement, family obligations, geographical constraints, and delayed entry to further their studies.

The unique circumstances surrounding part-time students trigger profound ethical challenges that they come across. Part-time students routinely face conflicts related to commitment, struggling to prioritise academic duties against professional and familial responsibilities. They encounter systemic inequities in accessing resources, facilities, and support services as compared to full-time peers, raising fundamental questions about fairness and institutional justice. The intense pressure on part-time students while juggling multiple roles heightens their vulnerability to academic integrity breaches. Furthermore, institutional structures often fail to ethically accommodate their needs, leading to feelings of marginalisation, isolation, and a fractured sense of identity and belonging in institutions of higher learning.

While mitigation strategies exist, such as promoting flexible learning pathways, extended support hours, and advocacy for fair workloads or employer support, the Lesotho-specific literature reveals significant gaps. Existing research is often limited to single institutions or programmes, lacks comprehensive exploration of identity and well-being as ethical concerns, and offers insufficient multi-institutional data. Furthermore, the application of theoretical frameworks such as social justice and equity theory to understand these challenges holistically remains underexplored. Consequently, focused research within Lesotho's higher education sector is critical. Understanding the specific nature, causes, and impacts of ethical challenges across multiple institutions, grounded in relevant theoretical perspectives, is vital to inform ethically sound policies, pedagogies, and

support structures that promote equity, inclusion, and success for this growing student population, promoting higher education's social justice mandate.

The next chapter focuses on the theoretical framework, concepts, and assumptions and how they help guide the current study.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter focused on the literature, thus revealing that part-time students in Lesotho's higher education institutions study within a complex connection of intersecting social, academic, and professional roles. These intersections of responsibilities often create significant ethical challenges about time allocation, financial pressures, and academic integrity. While the literature review successfully identified these challenges, it primarily described the phenomenon. This chapter, therefore, presents and justifies the theoretical framework that underpins this research.

A theoretical framework is a structure that guides research by providing a set of theories, concepts, and ideas that underpin and inform the study (Charli et al., 2022). A theoretical framework, therefore, helps researchers clarify the relationships between concepts or phenomena being studied and provides a foundation that can be used to interpret results. Most importantly, it supports the research by grounding it in existing knowledge and guiding the methodology and analysis.

The researcher selected two complementary theories for this study, the social justice theory and equity theory. The social justice theory, which mainly draws on the work of Rawls (1971), provides a macro-level lens to critique the systemic and institutional structures that marginalise non-traditional learners. It allows this study to frame the barriers not as individual failings but as issues of redistribution, recognition, and representation. Complementing this theory is the equity theory, which draws from the work of Adams (1963), offers a micro-level lens to understand how part-time students perceive fairness in the investment-reward ratio they put in their studies, especially when juggling competing demands of work, family, and academia.

The integration of these two theories was not random but was a deliberate choice to capture the full scope of the part-time student experience in Lesotho’s institutions of higher learning. This chapter will critically engage with these theories, articulate their core assumptions, and, most importantly, justify their relevance by demonstrating how they directly inform the research questions, data collection, and analysis. It is through this

synthesised theoretical framework that the study developed a clear understanding of the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students and worked towards actionable, context-specific recommendations.

3.2 Social justice theory

The social justice theory by Rawls (1971) is the first theory that was used to best explore ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

3.2.1 Core tenets and key proponents

The social justice theory is a systemic concept that supports the idea that individuals within a society should be given equal rights, protections, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits. It emphasises that specific measures should be used to acknowledge and remedy historical inequalities within societies (Clinton-Lisell & Gwozdz, 2023). This theory encompasses principles of redistributive justice, recognitive justice, and representational justice to promote inclusivity and equity within societies for marginalised members.

From a redistributive justice perspective, the study highlighted the unequal allocation of resources, such as limited access to financial aid or library services, which form material inequity for part-time students. Recognitive justice, on the other hand, helped to identify misrecognition and a lack of cultural respect for part-time students, where institutional policies and curricula were predominantly designed for full-time students, ignoring part-time students and perpetuating status hierarchies. Finally, the principle of representational justice was linked to the frequent exclusion of part-time students from student governance and curriculum design committees, thereby denying them a voice in the decisions that directly affect their academic journeys while enrolled in institutions of higher learning.

The social justice theory is heavily influenced by the 20th-century writings of John Rawls (1971). John Rawls was an American political philosopher who advocated for the social justice theory. His theory mainly advocated for principles of justice to ensure equal basic rights and opportunities for all individuals. Rawls's ideas were instrumental in shaping

contemporary discussions on social justice, political theory, and ethics (Sari, 2020). At its core, social justice theory focuses on understanding the root causes of unfairness and inequalities within societies. Unfairness and inequality can be caused by socially constructed idiosyncrasies such as ethnicity, gender, level, gender identity, differentiated abilities, and other sources of discrimination. Social justice theory in education, therefore, uses both a philosophical framework and a practical approach to address educational inequities to create equitable learning environments and outcomes for all students (Watkins & Smead, 2020). The use of social justice theory can be viewed from different perspectives, with some scholars emphasising that social justice can be seen as a process and a goal that can be used to ensure that there is equal participation of different groups within society, while others may view it as a systemic process that can be used to remove all educational barriers and impediments in society (Makoelle & Burmistrova, 2020).

The social justice theory mainly focuses on the provision of an extensive framework for understanding and trying to address inequalities that are found in societies and different institutions (Fenton, 2022). According to Fenton (2022), fundamentally, the social justice theory advocates for the principles of fairness, equality, and the equitable administration of resources and opportunities. In relation to the current study, the principle of fairness examined whether institutional rules and academic schedules unfairly disadvantage those who work or have care responsibilities while studying. Equality helped underscore the importance of part-time students having the same access to the quality of education as their full-time peers. Finally, the equitable administration of resources and opportunities, which directly challenge the unequal distribution of support, such as limited access to financial aid and library hours, which are often tailored for full-time students, hence hindering part-time students' ability to study effectively.

In the context of education, social justice theory aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their enrolment status or background, have fair chances to succeed and benefit from educational opportunities provided by institutions of higher learning (Rentzi, 2024). This shows that the social justice theory advocates for intentional actions, policies,

and decisions aimed at the removal of all forms of social inequality and advocates for the promotion of equity and inclusivity in schools. The application of social justice theory in this research enabled the researcher to identify systemic inequalities that may promote unfair learning environments for part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

3.2.2 Principles of social justice theory

The social justice theory operates through two fundamental and interconnected principles that guide educational practice and policy. The first principle is equality, which views all people as deserving the same treatment, with equal rights, equal access, and equal opportunities, regardless of their background or circumstances (Mercan Kucukakin & Gokmenoglu, 2025). The second principle is equity, which recognises that students have different needs and circumstances, thereby requiring differentiated support and resources to assist all of them to achieve similar outcomes by providing unequal treatment to make all equal (Mercan Kucukakin & Gokmenoglu, 2025).

The theoretical framework is further strengthened by Fraser's perspectival dualism approach, which identifies recognition and redistribution as two essential and mutually reinforcing dimensions of justice (Lafaye, 2020). The redistribution dimension addresses material inequalities by working towards changing social structures that create unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, while the recognition dimension focuses on challenging cultural patterns that privilege some groups over others (Lafaye, 2020). This emphasises that social justice must work to undo socially created and maintained differences in material conditions of living, to reduce and eventually eliminate the perpetuation of the privileging of some at the expense of others. The social justice theory is therefore appropriate for this research as it provides guidance on actions required to make active efforts to reduce oppression through consultative, collective, participative, and empowering processes that promote meaningful social change, particularly in marginalised communities.

3.2.3 Application of social justice theory to part-time students in Lesotho

Using the social justice theory lens, which advocates for the equitable distribution of opportunities and the removal of systemic barriers in education, the unique situation of part-time students in Lesotho is ideal for applying this theory. Using social justice theory to explore ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho revealed how part-time programmes may be a tool to promote justice and where such programmes may have pitfalls in achieving equitable inclusion for part-time students.

To expand on educational opportunities for all students, particularly the marginalised ones, higher education institutions in Lesotho have recruited and given access to their facilities (Mosia & Phasha, 2020). This act can be viewed as an act of social justice as it ensures that those students who would otherwise be excluded from accessing higher education are prioritised. Higher education recruitment in Lesotho targets working professionals, civil servants, those living in rural areas, and those with family responsibilities who are not catered for under the usual full-time residential university mode of learning. The existence of part-time programmes as a response to geographical and temporal exclusions that displace most of the population from higher education is clear. However, there is still significant exclusion keeping its equal access beyond reach.

The social justice theory provides invaluable guidelines for understanding and addressing systems of injustice and the moral issues that arise in the educational field. This is largely achieved by fostering a more comprehensive understanding of what is at stake when it comes to injustices in the education field (Kawasaki & Chang, 2024; Mapuya, 2023). The social justice theory is helpful as it provides a broad framework that not only considers economic injustices through redistribution but also addresses the obstacles that individuals face, hindering their participation in educational institutions. This framework can therefore be effectively used to construct social justice teaching practices in higher education institutions by promoting students' voices and agency.

Social justice theory is seen as effective in addressing ethical challenges within the educational spectrum by advocating for a focus on the systemic nature of social problems and requiring a critical consideration of the identity and life experiences of students to understand their perceptions of educational issues. The framework recognises that changes in deficit and systems thinking about marginalised communities require deliberate deconstruction as part of the educational process. It also ensures that community partners' views and definitions of ethical obligations are centred beyond formal institutional compliance guidelines.

The contemporary relevance of social justice theory is underscored by the need to champion the infusion of social justice objectives into global issues that confront educational institutions today. This approach ensures that ethical considerations move beyond individual compliance to address structural inequalities and systemic challenges that affect marginalised student populations in educational settings (Desjardins & Florentin, 2024; Izawa, 2024). For the current research, part-time students are identified as a marginalised group in institutions of higher learning because their needs are often ignored as more attention is given to full-time students. The challenges that part-time students face are most of the time not individual deficits but are often manifestations of structural inequity. Therefore, using the social justice theory lens necessitates a critical examination of institutional policies, curriculum delivery, and resource allocation to actively remove the barriers that systemically disadvantage part-time students and inhibit their academic success.

3.2.4 Limitations of the social justice theory

The social justice theory has the potential to be limited by the victimhood paradigm, which can display part-time students as victims who are passively weak and require external intervention to assist them (Mofokeng & Tlou, 2022). This view has the potential to obscure the complex realities experienced by part-time students in higher education institutions and overlook their resilience. This idealised and often static view can hinder social justice theory’s efforts by oversimplifying the causes of harm, mischaracterising the

needs and capacities of those affected, and potentially focusing on simplistic solutions that do not address systemic issues.

Core social justice concepts, such as privilege and systemic oppression, are rooted in Western philosophical traditions (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2023). Adapting Western practices to align with the cultural, spiritual, and social realities of specific communities, particularly within African and marginalised contexts, can be challenging (Maphosa & Makama, 2025). Unlike Western models that often emphasise individualism, cultural translations often involve reinterpreting concepts of community and resilience through indigenous epistemologies, languages, and spiritualities. Based on these, the social justice theory may not directly translate into the Basotho socio-cultural context, where community, kinship obligations, and respect for hierarchy play a different role in shaping perceptions of fairness in part-time students.

3.3 Equity theory

The equity theory is the second theory that was used to explore ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

3.3.1 Core tenets and key concepts of equity theory

A unique framework for comprehending how people perceive fairness in social and institutional settings is given by the equity theory (Steven & Fuyane, 2020). Moreover, this theory asserts that individuals experience inequity by comparing the ratios of their inputs to outcomes with those of other individuals in the same situation, which helps them to create a basis for evaluating whether treatment can be seen as fair or unfair (Steven & Fuyane, 2020). This implies that naturally, people evaluate how they are treated based on the input they have made. Most importantly, this suggests that the more a person invests in a particular situation, the more they expect to receive in return to be treated fairly.

The equity theory was originally proposed by Adams in 1963. The equity theory predicates that people determine fairness by comparing how much of their inputs, such as time, money, or effort, to their outcomes, such as grades or recognition, with that of

others (Issafi & Ouladhadda, 2024). According to the equity theory, when people notice that their input-to-outcome is unfavourable as compared to others, they tend to experience psychological distress in the form of annoyance, resentment, or demotivation, as they feel their efforts go without being noticed or that the system they are a part of fails to account for inequality (Issafi & Ouladhadda, 2024). Therefore, if there is a perceived imbalance, that will trigger a motivation to bring back equity, either by people modifying their inputs, like reducing the effort they put into an activity, or they may re-evaluate the system they are in. In educational contexts, the imbalance between inputs and outputs can lead to a reduction in motivation for students who feel disadvantaged, plausibly leading them to disengage from academic tasks.

3.3.2 Principles of equity theory

There are five main principles that are highlighted by the equity theory. Firstly, the equity theory centres on perceptions of fairness in different organisations, primarily focusing on the rewards and motivation that individuals receive. The principles of equity theory state that individuals are motivated by the perception of fairness during social exchanges, based on a comparison of their own inputs and outputs against those of other people in the same situation (Chepkiyach & Thomas, 2025). Therefore, this means that people are driven by a strong sense of fairness, motivating them to seek a balance between what they contribute, which is referred to as inputs, and what they receive, which is referred to as outputs, as compared to other people. In the context of Lesotho, the equity theory framework highlights a central ethical dilemma in higher education institutions, which is that part-time students' view of inequity when their inputs outweigh the institutional outputs relative to full-time students. This perceived imbalance obliges institutions to ethically re-evaluate resource allocation between part-time students and full-time students.

Secondly, the equity theory highlights that the evaluation made by people of inputs/outputs as compared to those of others in social exchange relations is critical. The perception of equity is derived from an individual's ongoing comparative assessment of their own inputs and outcomes against those of others (Chepkiyach & Thomas, 2025).

Fundamentally, people view equity as being fair when the person's input-to-output ratio is judged to be approximately equal to the ratio of a chosen referent. This comparative process can involve a specified individual, including one's own past self, or a generalised other based on prevailing social norms (Chepkiyach & Thomas, 2025). Furthermore, these referents are categorised as internal, originating from within one's own social group, or external, coming from outside it. Ultimately, this complex comparison process is crucial in determining whether a situation is deemed equitable or inequitable. This principle, therefore, highlights that individuals engage in social comparisons continuously, assessing their own input-output ratios against those of their peers to gauge their sense of equity. It therefore shows that part-time students are constantly judging how they are treated compared to full-time students.

Third, equity theory suggests that an unequal distribution of rewards in comparison to contributions leads to an inequity perception. The perception made by people of inequity is a direct psychological consequence of a perceived misalignment between an individual's contributions (inputs) and the rewards they receive (outputs) (Chen et al., 2023). This foundational principle, which is rooted in equity theory, points out that individuals engage in a continuous comparative assessment, and a perceived imbalance, whether real or subjective, triggers a state of distributive injustice (Chepkiyach & Thomas, 2025). Therefore, unequal distribution of rewards as compared to contributions that individuals make leads to inequity perception. This implies that part-time students view inequality based on how they are treated in comparison to what they have contributed to institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

Fourth, the equity theory indicates that the perceptions of inequity generate a state of psychological discomfort, coming from a cognitive inconsistency between their own outcomes and those of a referent other. This tension can arise in two main ways: firstly, through negative inequity, where a person feels under-rewarded for their contributions, and secondly, through positive inequity, where a person feels over-rewarded for their input (Chepkiyach & Thomas, 2025). Both these states predominantly trigger emotional distress, manifesting as anger in the case of negative inequity and guilt in the case of

positive inequity. A fundamental principle of equity theory is that the intensity of this psychological distress is directly proportional to the magnitude of the perceived imbalance. Therefore, when individuals perceive an imbalance, they will take actions to restore equity, such as altering their own inputs or outputs, adjusting their perceptions, or seeking changes in their environment.

Lastly, the equity theory maintains that when individuals perceive inequity, they are motivated to restore a sense of fairness to eliminate the associated emotional tension. The restoration of fairness can be achieved through either physical or psychological means (Chepkiyach & Thomas, 2025). Chepkiyach and Thomas (2025) further show that physical restoration involves tangible actions, such as changing inputs or outputs, while psychological restoration involves cognitively redefining the situation to reduce distress. Therefore, when inequity is perceived, individuals aim to restore equity, either psychologically or physically, to alleviate emotional tensions. This theoretical framework is crucial for understanding the motivations behind potential ethical breaches by part-time students. When these students perceive an inequity in the effort-reward balance compared to full-time students or in the institutional support they receive, the resulting emotional tension can motivate them to behave unethically to restore a sense of fairness.

3.3.3 Application of the equity theory to part-time students in Lesotho

For this study, the focus is on part-time students and how equity theory helps to explore the ethical challenges they come across in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. When the equity theory is applied to the context of part-time student experiences, noticeable patterns of institutional discrimination emerge that raise significant fairness concerns. Research shows that institutions of higher learning in Lesotho often fail to create inclusive environments for part-time students because full-time students usually receive preferential treatment (Morena et al., 2024). In contrast, part-time students face discrimination and disregard through unequal institutional treatment (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). The differential treatment between part-time and full-time students violates basic principles of educational fairness, which requires that educational institutions' rules

be fair so that all students receive equal treatment regardless of their enrolment status (Dost & Mazzoli Smith, 2023).

The institutional barriers that part-time students face create multiple forms of inequity. Institutions of higher learning often charge part-time students high tuition fees that students perceive as excessive, given the limited services and poor treatment they receive in return (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). Additionally, since part-time students are not always on campus in institutions of higher learning, they frequently lack access to essential academic resources, such as library facilities that are readily available to full-time students, which leads to disparities in educational support despite the fees they pay (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). These systemic inequities experienced by part-time students have profound psychological and academic consequences for them. The combination of discrimination and marginalisation can lead to feelings of disconnection and absence of belonging within the higher education institutions' community among part-time students (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). The stress caused by the inequitable treatment of part-time students may become so severe that some may ultimately choose to drop out rather than continue facing these challenges.

When applying the equity theory to part-time students' experiences, clear imbalances emerge that create perceptions of unfairness. According to equity theory, students compare their inputs against outputs when measuring their educational experience, where inputs include costs such as financial, time, energy, and psychic costs, while outputs represent the specific educational services, support systems, and institutional efforts designed to help them succeed (Mahande et al., 2024). For part-time students, the input side of the equation is very demanding. They invest financial resources through payment of tuition fees, often while managing work and family responsibilities that require significant time and energy commitments (Morena et al., 2024). As such, the output aspect reveals obvious disparities when compared to full-time students. Part-time students receive limited access to essential educational resources, with many lacking access to library facilities that full-time students enjoy, while simultaneously paying what

they perceive as exorbitant tuition fees that do not reflect the quality of treatment and services they receive.

When part-time students observe full-time peers receiving better treatment, more support, and greater access to resources despite potentially similar or lower financial investments, they experience feelings of frustration, resentment, and demotivation as their efforts appear undervalued by the institutional system (Issafi & Ouladhadda, 2024). This unfavourable input-output ratio creates the conditions for perceived inequity that equity theory predicts will lead to psychological distress and behavioural changes. According to equity theory, this perceived imbalance motivates students to restore balance by adjusting their inputs, which in academic contexts can manifest as reduced effort, disengagement from academic tasks, or, in severe cases, dropping out entirely to escape the inequitable situation.

3.3.4 Justification for the use of equity theory

The psychological and behavioural effects of perceived inequity among part-time students align closely with equity theory's predictions about how individuals respond to unfair treatment. When part-time students observe that they are discriminated against and disregarded while full-time students receive favoured treatment in institutions of higher learning, they experience extreme feelings of disrespect, discrimination, and marginalisation that create a sense of disconnection from the institutions of higher learning (Beckwith, 2023). The lack of belonging experienced by part-time students becomes a source of significant stress that affects their entire educational experience in institutions of higher learning.

The emotional responses documented among part-time students match the equity theory's description of psychological distress connected to unfairness in institutions of higher learning. Part-time students have reported feelings of frustration, resentment, and demotivation when they observe full-time students achieving better outcomes with seemingly less effort or when they feel their honest efforts are undervalued by institutions of higher learning (Yusof et al., 2023). These negative emotions create a cycle where the

stress from inequitable treatment compounds the already challenging experience of balancing part-time studies with other responsibilities.

The equity theory predicts that when individuals perceive inequity, they will be motivated to restore balance by adjusting their inputs or re-evaluating the system itself (Yamanaka & Hassell-Goodman, 2025). In the context of part-time students, this restoration mechanism manifests itself in several ways, ranging from reduced academic engagement to complete withdrawal from the educational system. The most severe response occurs when students choose to drop out entirely rather than continue enduring the stress and unfair treatment they experience (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023). This dropout behaviour represents the ultimate adjustment of inputs, complete disengagement, as part-time students seek to escape an inequitable situation they cannot otherwise change.

3.3.5 Limitations of the equity theory

The theory suggests that perceived inequity leads to distress and motivation to restore equity. However, in a hierarchical society and within a power-laden institution, part-time students (often older, working-class) may accept significant inequity as the way things are, or fear reprisal for speaking up. The equity theory is, therefore, weak at explaining why power-imbalanced groups often do not revolt against perceived inequity.

3.4 The significance of using both the social justice theory and the equity theory

Part-time students in Lesotho's institutions of higher learning encounter varying ethical challenges that need careful examination. The use of one theoretical lens has the potential to miss important ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho. This is why the combination of social justice theory and equity theory is essential to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the ethical landscape that part-time students navigate in higher education institutions in Lesotho.

Both the social justice theory and equity theory share important theoretical foundations that make them naturally complementary for examining educational challenges. The social justice theory and equity theory provide the basis for understanding how students evaluate fairness in their academic experiences, with both theories helping to explain how

students assess the exchanges they make with their institutions (Steven & Fuyane, 2020). The combination of the two theories creates a space for critical reflection on what is needed for change towards a socially just system where students experience equity (Perumal et al., 2021).

The complementary nature of social justice theory and equity theory becomes clear when examining their distinct yet overlapping focuses. The equity theory provides a detailed framework for understanding individual perceptions of fairness through input-output comparisons, while social justice theory addresses broader systemic issues of power, privilege, and institutional change (Perera & Sutha, 2021; Steven & Fuyane, 2020). This combination, therefore, strengthens this study by focusing on individual perceptions of fairness through the equity theory and how individuals view systemic power structure in institutions of higher learning through the social justice theory to create a comprehensive understanding of injustice in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

The social justice theory advances a dual approach to inclusion: it ensures fair distribution of resources while also affirming people's differences, offering a more complete solution than just providing access (Musara et al., 2021). This combination allows the researcher to examine both the immediate fairness concerns of part-time students' experience in their daily interactions with institutions of higher learning through equity theory. Simultaneously, it reveals the deeper structural inequalities and policy decisions that shape those experiences through the social justice theory. The result is a comprehensive strategy that bridges individual perceptions of fairness with the systemic actions required to dismantle disparities and foster inclusivity.

The application of both the social justice theory and equity theory to part-time student challenges in Lesotho provides a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the complex ethical issues these students face. The social justice theory offers a lens for analysing the impact of power, privilege, and identity on part-time students (Shabalala, 2025). This reveals how their subjective experiences, shaped by often-overlooked structural factors like class and caregiving duties are implicated in the reproduction of systemic inequities (Hoshaw et al., 2021). This lens is particularly

important for examining how institutional practices might harm underrepresented students who choose part-time study options due to economic or social constraints.

From the perspective of the equity theory, part-time students can evaluate whether their investments of time, money, and effort in institutions of higher learning are matched by appropriate institutional support and services (Ahmadpour-Samani et al., 2022). It becomes significant when these part-time students compare their input-output ratios with those of full-time students who may receive more comprehensive support services, better scheduling accommodations, or greater faculty support. The equity theory thus helped identify specific areas where part-time students may feel unfairly treated in their exchanges with educational institutions (Shabalala, 2025). By combining these frameworks, this study can thus propose develop programmes focused on eliminating disparities in higher education outcomes for all students, irrespective of their study status, identity, or background.

More importantly, the social justice theory guides institutions towards intentional actions, policies, and decisions designed to eradicate social disparities and promote equity and inclusivity for part-time students (Makoelle & Burmistrova, 2020; Musara et al., 2021). This means institutions should develop specific plans that engage and support part-time students who have traditionally been excluded from full participation in higher education.

While the social justice theory captured the unique structural barriers that part-time students in Lesotho may face, equity theory, on the other hand, enabled the researcher to understand how part-time students internalise challenges they may encounter and how that internalising may cloud their ethical decision-making. The use of social justice theory on its own had the potential to overlook how part-time students' ethical decision-making is influenced by how they internalise the challenges they encounter during their studies. Also, the use of equity theory on its own had the potential to overlook the main causes of ethical challenges within institutions of higher learning in Lesotho and only pay attention to how individual part-time students are affected by challenges they encounter. As a result, using the dual lens of both social justice theory and equity theory was vital, as it provided

a holistic and rigorous understanding of the complex ethical challenge landscape that part-time students in Lesotho's institutions of higher learning are confronted with.

This study was therefore guided by an integrated conceptual framework that synergistically employed the social justice theory and equity theory to form a comprehensive analytical lens. The framework, depicted in Figure 3.1, illustrates how these theories operated at different but interconnected levels to illuminate the ethical challenges faced by part-time students.

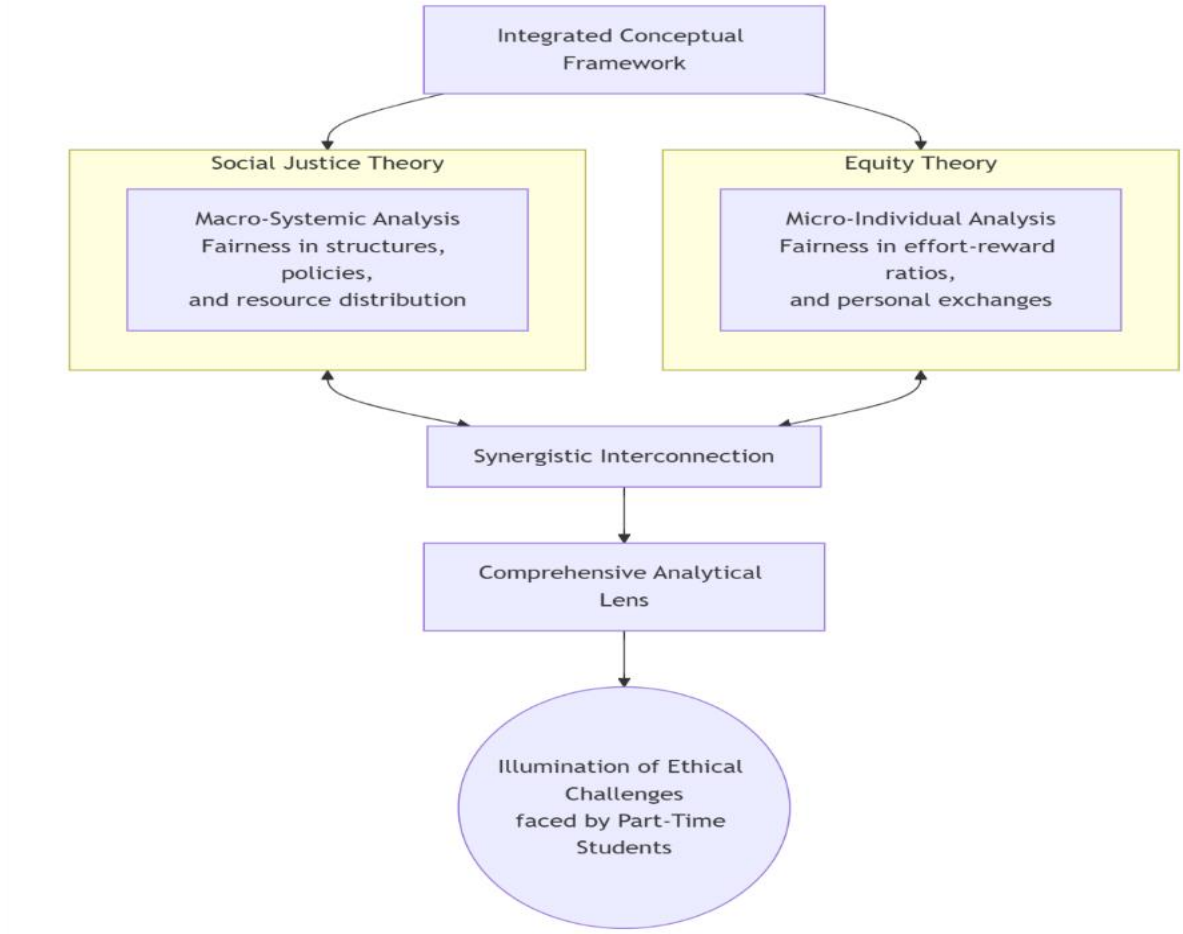


Figure 3.1: Integrated theoretical framework

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has established the study's theoretical framework by presenting and justifying the complementary use of the social justice theory (Rawls, 1971) and the equity theory (Adams, 1963). This chapter outlined how social justice theory provided a macro-level lens for analysing systemic barriers and structural inequities faced by part-time students. Simultaneously, the chapter detailed how the equity theory offered a micro-level lens for examining the psychological consequences, such as perceptions of unfairness and demotivation, that arise from these inequities. The chapter concluded by justifying the complementary integration of these two theories to ensure a comprehensive analysis that connects broad institutional mechanisms with their immediate impact on the individual part-time student experience. By synthesising these two theories, the chapter has constructed a comprehensive analytical tool that ensures that the research can effectively examine both the broad institutional mechanisms of injustice and their immediate, lived consequences on the individual part-time student's experience and ethical decision-making in Lesotho's higher education institutions.

This robust theoretical foundation paves the way for the empirical phase of this research. The following chapter, Chapter 4, outlines the research methodology. It further outlines the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis strategies that were employed to operationalise this theoretical framework and investigate the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho's institutions of higher learning.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter, Chapter 3, focused on the theoretical framework that underpinned this study. It presented and also justified the complementary use of the social justice theory (Rawls, 1971) and the equity theory (Adams, 1963) as the lens through which the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho were examined. Chapter 3 outlined that the social justice theory provided the macro-level perspective that helped critique the systemic structures in institutions of higher learning, focusing on issues of redistribution, recognition, and representation that marginalise non-traditional learners. Simultaneously, Chapter 3 also helped position the equity theory as the micro-level lens used to understand how individual part-time students perceive the issue of fairness based on their input-reward calculations while undertaking part-time studies. The use of these two theories provided a robust foundation for connecting broad institutional inequities to their lived impact on students, thereby framing the research problem not merely as a descriptive phenomenon but as a matter of structural and perceptual injustice.

Chapter 4 focuses on the research methodology, outlining the strategic plan that guided how the study's questions were answered. It puts into practice the dual theoretical lens in Chapter 3 by specifying the research design, the setting and participants, the data collection methods, and the procedures for data analysis. This chapter serves as a crucial bridge between the theoretical propositions of Chapter 3 and the empirical findings that will follow in Chapter 5. It demonstrates how the abstract concepts of systemic barrier and perceived inequity were explored within the specific context of Lesotho's higher education landscape.

4.2 Research design and methodology

A research design is a clear outline that shows the planned study path to be followed when carrying out a study that necessitates the collection and analysis of data. A research design helps to lay out the steps to be followed when conducting a

study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The research design determines the steps to be followed in a study; these include how the data is collected, analysed, and interpreted in connection to the research questions. The research design, therefore, encompasses the systematic forms of data collection that are purposefully used by researchers in their studies, which require careful planning to guarantee that the gathered data directly addresses the research problem and sub-problems. The following are the aspects that were used to shape the research design and methodology for this study.

4.2.1 Research paradigm

The research paradigm is a fundamental worldview that influences how various researchers should conduct their studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). A research paradigm provides a roadmap of how a researcher will address the topic under investigation. Chong (2022) highlights that a research paradigm includes a researcher's philosophy, which determines the setting of their goals, the selection of research methods, and how data are interpreted. Different research paradigms are connected to different beliefs about reality, the nature of knowledge, and how research should be carried out (Khatri, 2020). According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), there are three main research paradigms being positivism, interpretivism and critical theory. This leads many researchers to approach research studies with several interconnecting and often opposing philosophical assumptions and standpoints. As noted by Buriro et al. (2021), a research paradigm starts with a researcher’s philosophical assumptions about reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), and the methods of inquiry (methodology) to be used in a study. The way in which researchers write and conduct their studies is informed by their world views, paradigms, or sets of beliefs relating to their study. As such, this study was located within the interpretivism paradigm.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), the interpretive paradigm is a perspective that focuses on exploring the variation of human behaviour and different contexts that influence how people think and behave. Additionally, the interpretive paradigm is centred on people giving meaning to their social world, therefore

helping researchers understand how individuals perceive and make sense of the world around them (Dube, 2023). The interpretive paradigm is thus befitting for this study as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of the experiences, struggles, and contextual factors that shape part-time students' ethical challenges in higher education institutions in Lesotho. Unlike the positivist paradigm, which would have reduced the ethical challenges to quantifiable data, hence ignoring the individual personal influences of part-time students' behaviour, the interpretive paradigm was used because it allowed the researcher to have thorough interactions with participants, thus revealing more insights into their experiences (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The critical theory, on the other hand, was also not appropriate for this study as it would have focused more on power dynamics and ignored diving deeper into how part-time students' behaviours are influenced by the challenges they come across (Turin et al., 2024). Since this study aimed to explore rather than measure or critique, the interpretive paradigm was therefore the suitable as it provided a participant-centred approach needed to understand the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in Lesotho's higher education institutions.

4.2.2 Ontological assumptions

The concept of research paradigms in educational research has been used by researchers to refer to sets of general philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world (ontology) and how we can understand it (epistemology) (Niure & Sapkota, 2025). This study was grounded in an interpretivist ontology, which holds that reality is not a single, objective, and external phenomenon but is instead socially constructed and very subjective in nature.

Ontological assumptions pertain to the nature of reality and existence, guiding researchers to clarify their perspective on how things truly are and how they fundamentally operate (Pretorius, 2024). Different paradigms inherently contain various ontological views and therefore have differing assumptions of reality, which underpin their particular research approach (Sim et al., 2024). Ontology is therefore concerned with the nature of reality and what a researcher can know about it.

For this study, the ethical challenges experienced by part-time students are not pre-existing, tangible objects waiting to be discovered or measured. Rather, they are constructed through the unique interactions of part-time students with their institutional environment, lecturers, employers, coordinators, and families. Their reality is shaped by personal circumstances, such as employment and parenthood, and by the meanings they attach to their experiences within the context of Lesotho's higher education institutions. Therefore, this study assumed that there are multiple, valid realities of the ethical landscape in Lesotho's higher education institutions, and the aim was to explore the complexity of these socially constructed realities as perceived by the part-time students themselves.

4.2.3 Epistemological assumptions

Epistemological assumptions define how researchers believe knowledge can be acquired and what constitutes valid knowledge, ranging from objectives detached approaches in positivist paradigms to subjective, socially constructed knowledge in interpretivist frameworks (Alborough & Hansen, 2023). These assumptions directly influence methodology choices and determine the researcher's relationship to research participants and data.

Epistemology is central to any research that is being undertaken as it addresses the nature of knowledge and how things can best be known. This study assumed that knowledge regarding ethical challenges is not something that can be uncovered through observation it however can be generated through the interaction between the researcher and the participants. The most valid way to understand the part-time students' experiences is to engage with them directly, listening to their stories and interpret the language, meanings, and context they use to describe their experiences. The findings of this research will be a co-construction between the researcher and the part-time students, acknowledging that the researcher's own interpretation plays a role in shaping the final understanding because the goal is to gain deep, contextual insights into the participants' perspectives, rather than to produce generalised statements.

4.2.4 Research approach

A research approach is a philosophical assumption that a researcher brings to their study (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). The researchers go on to note that such an assumption outlines procedures to be used in the study and specific research methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. The selection of an appropriate research approach is based mainly on the study being undertaken, a researcher's personal experience on the topic of interest, and the population of the study (Johnson et al., 2020).

There are about three main research approaches that can be used in research: being qualitative research approach which is the one which generates words as data to be analysed, a quantitative research approach which is the one which generates numerals from the collected data, and the mixed-method approach, which is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Nassaji, 2020). This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

A qualitative research approach is an approach that generates some type of non-numerical data to help answer research questions in a study (Mulisa, 2022). These non-numerical data are made up of data such as the statements made by respondents while being interviewed, written records, pictures, clothing, or any form of observed behaviour from participants. Given the complexity of the current study, a qualitative research approach was used to maintain flexibility throughout the research process. Flexibility is promoted by the research approach's adaptive nature, which allows for adjustments as new insights emerge during the study, promoting a deeper and more meaningful exploration of the research topic. Lim (2025) states that a qualitative research approach allows researchers to adapt to the conditions in which participants are situated, and it also enables the use of open-ended questions during interviews. This flexibility allowed for an in-depth and contextualised exploration of the research question.

A qualitative research approach was employed to collect data in the participants' setting, thereby providing the researchers with the opportunity to explore and understand how

participants responded to the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). In contrast, a quantitative research approach focuses on testing relationships among variables to come up with numerical data that can then be analysed statistically (Ali et al., 2024). In addition, the mixed-method approach was not chosen because of challenges that can arise in trying to interpret conflicting results from qualitative and quantitative data (Ali et al., 2024). By making use of the qualitative approach, the researcher was able to interact with the participants and ask questions that assisted to fully comprehend the phenomenon being studied. This approach is underscored by Thanh and Thanh (2015), who attest that when using the qualitative approach, researchers take an interactive role in the research. This helped the researcher to understand the participants and their educational environment. Researchers also asked broad questions, which were intended to explore, interpret, and understand the situation being studied. The qualitative research approach enabled the researcher to ask participants broad questions, which led the researcher to better understand the situation being studied.

The qualitative research approach was therefore the best approach for the intent of the present research to explore ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. This approach is particularly used in this study because it aligns perfectly with the interpretivist paradigm's goal of understanding the subjective meanings and complexities that human beings experience. Ethical challenges are not merely a list of problems that part-time students encounter, but they are deep personal, contextualised challenges that are interpreted and felt differently by each part-time student. The use of a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to obtain rich, narrative data, thus allowing the research to explore these challenges in-depth.

4.2.5 Research design

A research strategy is a plan to be used to conduct a research study and it guides a researcher in planning, executing, and monitoring the study (Mosha & Ngulube, 2025). This study, therefore, used a case study research design to help the researcher focus on one instance of a phenomenon that is being studied. By focusing on a particular instance

that is being studied, the researcher was provided with a rich, in-depth description and insight into the problem being studied.

A case study is more suitable for this study than a survey or a laboratory experiment. This is because surveys can produce broad results but shallow views of the problem being studied, while a case study can provide more details of the subject matter being studied (Kardam et al., 2023). As for a laboratory experiment, it reduces complexities and sometimes eliminates components that can hamper the experimental results (Kardam et al., 2023). In contrast, for a case study to succeed, there is a need to dwell on complex issues that arise during the study, for the reason that a case study focuses on relationships and other factors that are in the real world (Poth & Searle, 2021). Case studies can be used for various purposes, including exploring, describing, and explaining (Takona, 2024). Considering the complexity of the current study, an exploratory case study was deemed the best research strategy to utilise since it not only offers a description but also tries to identify cause-and-effect relationships pertaining to why certain events occur.

In exploring the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho, the researcher used a qualitative case study research strategy to get an in-depth and context-rich insight into the problem that is being studied. A Qualitative research strategy was opted for because it offered unique insights into human experiences and phenomena, unlike a quantitative strategy, which aims to generate hypotheses and generalise results. The exploration of ethical challenges was achieved through the collection of extensive data from part-time students on whom the study mainly focused.

4.3 Data collection

Data collection is not only the process of gathering the required data from the selected participants in a research study, but it is also the precise, systematic gathering of information related to the research problem through methods such as interviews, participant observations, and focus group discussions. According to Zarrillo et al. (2024), the data collection procedures include setting the boundaries for the study

through sampling and recruitment, gaining permissions, developing protocols for the collection of data, and collecting information through multiple forms of data collection, such as observation, interviews, documents, and visual and social media. The choice of methods and instructions to use when collecting data depends on several key issues, such as the type of investigation, the objective of the study, financial resources, availability of time, and the degree of accuracy the study aims. The current study utilised one approach to data collection which was qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research issue being studied.

4.3.1 Focus groups

The study employed focus groups, which is another form of data collection that can be used to collect data for a particular study by involving around six people who come to discuss a particular topic under investigation. The use of focus groups was advantageous as it allowed participants who were reluctant to initiate discussion to contribute after observing the contributions of their peers in the group. Most importantly, this method also helped generate a immense data within a shorter time than other methods, such as interviews and questionnaires.

Focus group discussions were particularly advantageous for exploring ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in Lesotho's higher education institutions. When in supportive group settings, participants are more inclined to share sensitive experiences (Urry et al., 2024). The focus group setting encourages inactive members to express their thoughts and experiences by reducing pressure on them to answer in ways they think the researcher expects, while allowing everyone to participate based on their own perspectives.

Focus group discussions are particularly valuable when researching ethical issues, as they create safe spaces that help participants feel more inclined to share sensitive experiences. The methodology has been successfully implemented with part-time students in African higher education contexts, with focus groups conducted during students' residential periods or normal meeting times to accommodate their unique flexible scheduling constraints (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023).

To capture different perspectives on ethical challenges, effective focus group implementation for part-time student research should consider participant diversity. Studies have shown the importance of selecting participants based on their field of study, intersecting factors such as race, gender, and academic year of study. Focus groups can be effectively combined with other data collection methods as part of a triangulated approach. Researchers have successfully used focus groups alongside semi-structured interviews to exchange ideas on overcoming challenges, with group-generated solutions becoming part of the primary data presented through thematic analysis (Ning et al., 2024). The interactive nature of focus groups allows researchers to observe collective views, attitudes, and mannerisms while providing rich and in-depth data that individual interviews do not have the ability to capture.

Focus groups are very useful where researchers want data that comes from interaction among participants and not just from individual answers. In studies where only focus group interviews are used, participants are able to build on and develop each other's understandings, expand beyond the interviewer's questions and also drive the discussions towards new or unexpected directions (Hamka et al., 2022; Ramalepa et al., 2022). This therefore shows that the use of focus group interviews as the only data collection method can reveal knowledge, content and reasons that are not easy to get from one-on-one interviews.

Moreover, focus groups can produce rich data when used alone as participants do not only state their views but they also comment on, test, explain and challenge each other's views. This interaction results in refined data that is drawn from critical examination of the topic under study, thereby helping the researcher gain a broader and sometimes more detailed picture of the phenomenon under study than when separate interviews are used. Many scholars describe this as a collaborative and co-construction of data generation, where meanings are produced in the exchange of ideas among participants instead of simply collecting data from individual participants (Aladsani, 2022; Rajoo et al., 2020).

Lincoln (2021) defines focus groups as small groups of approximately eight to 10 people who are interviewed together. To enhance qualitative interviews, focus group discussions

were conducted to capture collective viewpoints and interactive dynamics among participants. These discussions included six focus groups consisting of six part-time student participants per group from three different institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. Therefore, there were two focus groups made up of six participants per group in each higher institution of learning, since there were three institutions of higher learning that brought the total of participants to 36 who took part in the focus groups to promote diversity of perspectives while also maintaining manageable data that will be collected. The focus groups from the first institution were named FG1, while the focus groups from the second institution were named FG2 and the focus groups from the third institution were named FG3.

This was done in line with Rutledge et al. (2023), who state that a general focus group consists of about six to 10 participants, which promotes a balanced interaction without anyone overwhelming the discussion. Welink et al. (2021) also show that smaller groups can foster deeper conversations, while larger groups may generate a broader range of opinions, which might dilute contributions during discussions. A moderator guided the conversation using a structured protocol, while the researcher took notes on non-verbal cues and group interactions. This method helped explore shared experiences, divergent opinions, and socially constructed meanings from the participant. As Gundumogula (2020) states focus groups, can provide initial ideas about what responses participants give to a certain type of question, as such groups may stimulate participants' thinking, therefore encouraging them to give more in-depth information.

4.3.2 Population and sampling

The population of any qualitative study is a collection of people from which the sample is drawn. All essential members in the population should have some similar characteristics to be classified as a single group of interest, such characteristics include age distribution, gender proportion, ethnic makeup, or socio-economic factors (Davis et al., 2023). A research population is, therefore, a large collection of individuals who are the main focus of a study. All individuals who have been selected to form part of the population should always have a common, binding characteristic or trait so that they help the

researcher answer their research questions. The population for this study was part-time students.

Population refers to all individuals who are of interest to a particular study (Kniess & Penrose, 2021; Marx, 2023). The selection of participants in a study must be the result of a bias-free procedure and must also result in fair selection outcomes (Johnson et al., 2020). Johnson et al. (2020) further shows that the justness of participant selection not only relates to them as individuals but also relates to them as members of a society, their race, their sexual orientation, and their ethnicity. Researchers cannot study the whole population of interest; therefore, it is vital that they study a subset of the population, which is called a sample (Subedi, 2021).

Subedi (2021) highlights that the sample should not be based on the researcher's personal interests but should be representative of the whole population for which it was selected in the study. Therefore, equitable sampling is essential since studying an entire population is often impractical, and researchers must select a representative sample from which to collect data. Most importantly, the sample must reflect the diversity of the broader population and not be based on the researcher's own biases or convenience.

Study results depend heavily on the number of participants. Very few participants can hide important patterns, while too many participants have the potential to exaggerate minor details; in both cases, the findings may not accurately represent the true reality (Serdar et al., 2021). Managing and interpreting large datasets can be challenging and increases the risk of data entry errors. By selecting the appropriate sample, the researcher ensured that results accurately reflect the phenomenon being studied. Geletu and Adige (2023) highlight that sampling techniques are critical components of qualitative research, as they include selecting a group of participants who can provide valuable insight into the research questions. Additionally, to provide an in-depth understanding of a particular problem that is being studied, Walker et al. (2024) emphasise the need to use a smaller sample in qualitative research. In this study, purposive sampling was used to select the participants (36 part-time students) who were knowledgeable about the issue in question, because of their involvement in their situation and experience of the

situation being studied. The participants were selected because they hold distinct, critical, and information-rich perspectives directly relevant to challenges faced by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

Part-time students were selected as primary participants because they are the ones who directly experience the phenomenon under investigation. The inclusion criteria used required that participants be currently enrolled as part-time students in an institution of higher learning in Lesotho and have finished at least one full academic year. This ensured that they had sufficient exposure to the institutional environment to encounter and reflect upon ethical challenges.

Walker et al. (2024) explain purposeful sampling as the selection of information-rich participants to gain in-depth insights and understanding about the purpose of the study being undertaken. This sample was selected because it provides the most relevant data relating to ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. This was done in line with Creswell and Creswell (2023), who note that in qualitative data, the intent is to collect data from a small, purposeful sample. For the current study, three institutions of higher learning were used. Their selection was based on the part-time studies offered by these institutions (Lefoka, 2023; Lekhetho, 2021; Nketekete & Mojalefa, 2021). This was done following Andrade (2020), who states that the determination of the correct sample size is important for a particular study for the promotion of its validity, reliability, and ethical considerations.

Table 4.1: Demographic and enrolment characteristics of part-time students.

Characteristic	**Description**
Enrolment status	Enrolled in a part-time programme in one of the three selected institutions of higher learning.
Employment status	The majority were employed both full-time or part-time.

Employment sectors	Varied, including the education sector, public service and finance.
Travel requirement	Some travelled long distances to attend physical classes.
Sample method	Purposive sampling.
Selection criterion 1	Had to be enrolled in at least one of the three institutions.
Selection criterion 2	Had to have been enrolled for a minimum of one academic year.

Table 4.1 outlines the demographic and methodological profile of participants who took part in this study. The participants were deliberately selected based on their enrolment statuses. The demographic status of participants was also considered to obtain in-depth knowledge to address the aim of this study.

4.4 Data analysis

Data analysis in qualitative studies involves segmenting and breaking down the collected data and then rearranging it into a cohesive whole (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Qualitative data analysis is viewed as a process that involves sequential steps, starting from the general and progressing through multiple levels of analysis to arrive at the specifics targeted in research (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This process is inherently vital when analysing qualitative data as it aims to identify patterns, themes, and deeper meanings. Through steps such as coding and thematic development, the analysis systematically transforms raw data into specific, insightful findings that help answer the research questions.

To analyse the collected qualitative data from focus groups interviews, thematic data analysis was used. According to Salmona and Kaczynski (2024), thematic data analysis is an approach to data analysis that combines a varying range of epistemological, theoretical, and disciplinary views in response to the research question. In

addition, Maggino (2023) describes thematic data analysis as a qualitative research method that focuses on the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns noticed within collected data. Thematic data analysis is advantageous as it provides detailed insights into participants' experiences, enhancing a researcher's understanding within various research contexts (Dawadi, 2020). This structured yet flexible approach allows for the systematic identification of patterns, making it a widely applicable method across many fields of study, including the education field.

The thematic data analysis was used in this study to identify, analyse, and report themes identified in the collected data. This approach is seen as being highly suitable for the current study as it is flexible in accommodating several viewpoints and for its ability to help researchers come up with rich and detailed interpretations of the collected data. Janis (2022) emphasises that thematic data analysis provides a researcher with a structured method that enhances the quality of qualitative research by helping in systematically coding and categorising data.

The thematic data analysis advocates for several main steps to be followed to promote a comprehensive understanding of the collected data. The data analysis steps as outlined by Braun et al. (2022) and Naeem et al. (2023) were used in this study. :

1. The researcher familiarised himself with the data by diving deep into the data and listening to the recording to understand what the data entails.
2. The researcher generated codes then the researcher identified the recurring patterns in the data that relate to the question.
3. The researcher searched for themes and identified patterns.
4. The researcher reviewed themes and merged related themes.
5. The researcher defined and named themes.
6. The researcher wrote a report.

By following these steps, the researcher was able to familiarise himself with the collected data and then understand the overall ideas by identifying recurring points. Xu and Zammit (2020) note that the steps in thematic data analysis serve as a roadmap to clearly process

qualitative data, and such steps enhance the rigor of the research process and depth of the research findings.

Figure 4.1 below shows a conceptual framework that outlines a roadmap of the entire research journey from the beginning to the finished product. This framework, as proposed by Saunders et al. (2019), is referred to as the 'research onion' (Abdelhakim, 2021). The blue circles highlight the researcher's journey in this study.

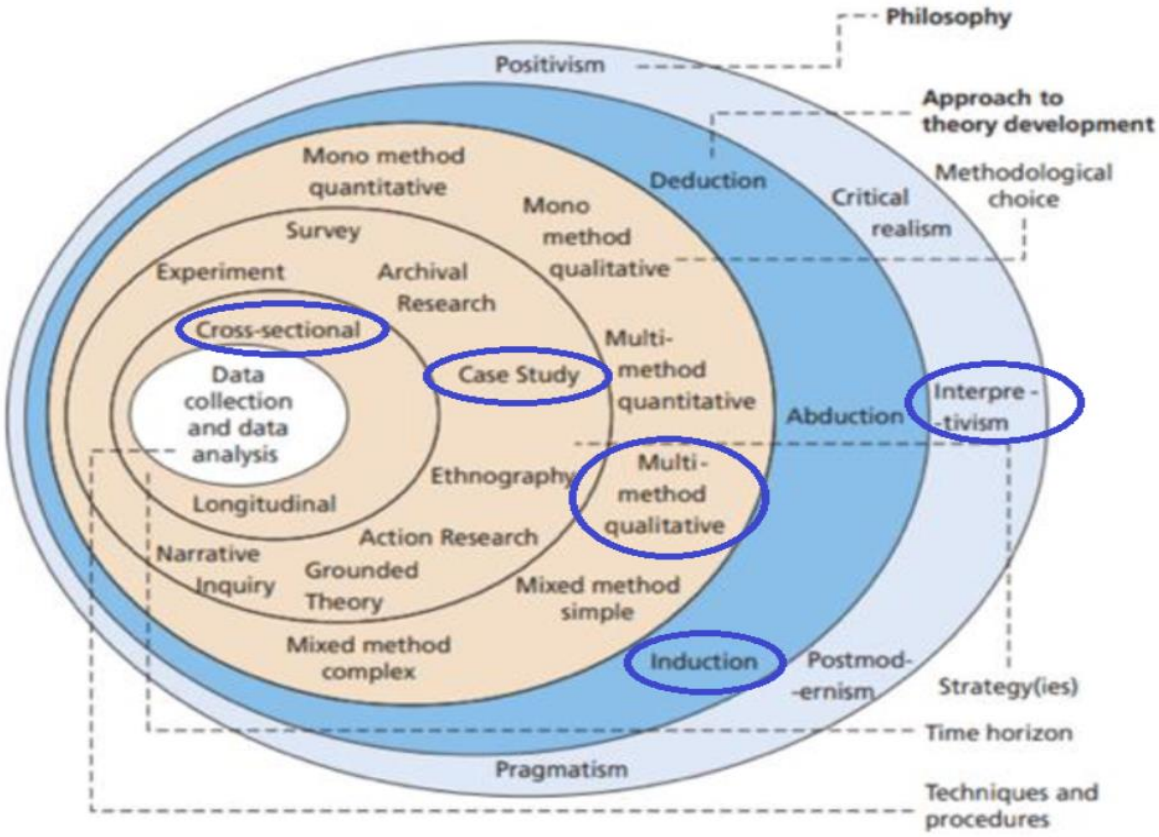


Figure 4.1: The research onion

The research onion model illustrates the decisions that the researcher made, moving from the outermost layer to the innermost layer. The researcher's study is explicitly positioned within the interpretivism paradigm, which helped him understand meanings, experiences, and social context, hence why the researcher

rejected positivism, which seeks objective facts, and critical theory, which focuses on power transformation in the study. The interpretivist paradigm logically led to the qualitative approach. This approach helped the researcher with flexibility to obtain in-depth knowledge while exploring the complicated ethical challenges encountered by part-time students.

The use of a qualitative exploratory case-study strategy enabled the researcher to obtain a rich, contextualised understanding of the phenomenon being studied within the Lesotho context. This led to the use of a qualitative design where one data collection technique was used. This data collection technique was the focus group interviews, and it was selected to help the researcher explore the study from different angles as exposed by participants to enhance data richness and to promote trustworthiness. Lastly, in the study, data were gathered over a period to explore ethical challenges encountered by part-time students rather than following participants over an extended period.

4.5 Trustworthiness

Measures of trustworthiness in qualitative research refer to strategies a researcher uses to ensure the credibility, validity, and holistic quality of their research findings (Ritter et al., 2023). For qualitative research, trustworthiness is guided by the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) who outline four key criteria in the approach to trustworthiness. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). The researcher, therefore, paid close attention to these four criteria to ensure trustworthiness in the study.

4.5.1 Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to how well the findings of the research align with reality, because qualitative research may be subjective as it relies heavily on a researcher's judgments (Norman, 2020). To enhance credibility, researchers often use triangulation, which involves multiple sources, using different methods, using theories, and identifying patterns (Chakravorti et al., 2024; Timonen et al., 2024). In this study, the researcher enhanced credibility by member checking, whereby participants reviewed and verified the accuracy of the collected data and its interpretation, and peer

debriefing was used, whereby a researcher discussed interpretation with colleagues to further minimise biases (Chakravorti et al., 2024). Furthermore, the researcher ensured credibility by focusing on relevant factors emanating from the data to avoid premature conclusions, by using member checking where themes from the data were taken back to participants for them to confirm their accuracy and by using peer debriefing where peers engaged to check for any form of bias by the researcher.

4.5.2 Transferability

The researcher also guaranteed the transferability of this study. By transferability (Drisko, 2025) notes that it refers to the extent to which the findings of a research can be applied to various contexts, settings, and respondents. Moreover, transferability needs detailed context descriptions to assist those who are reading the study to evaluate the applicability of the findings to similar situations (Stalmeijer et al., 2024). To promote transferability of the current study, the researcher provided details of discussions that took place during data collection, and the researcher also highlighted key patterns in the findings and provided real-world examples from participants.

4.5.3 Dependability

Another key criterion is dependability. Dependability is an important aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research, which refers to the consistency and stability of the inquiry process used in research (Janis, 2022). To achieve dependability, a researcher must rigorously interact with documentation (Ahmed, 2024). Dependability promotes reproducibility by ensuring that research is conducted in a systematic and well-documented way (Talkad Sukumar et al., 2020). In this study, the researcher ensured dependability by providing a detailed discussion of methodology, provided information on data collection processes, and all the data analysis steps that were used.

4.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is defined as the extent to which the findings of a study can be corroborated by other scholars (Kakar et al., 2023). Confirmability tries to ensure that the researcher's biases are reduced in the study by trying to establish that the research results are based on participants and their contexts (Ahmed, 2024). To promote confirmability, peer review

and external audits are used to ensure that the research findings are based on the collected data and not influenced by the researcher's prejudice (Kakar et al., 2023). To establish confirmability in this study, the researcher kept all the interview notes and recordings organised such that they could easily be referenced. Also, the researcher sought external validation by asking another researcher to review the findings to ensure that there were no biases. Lastly, the researcher openly addressed any limitations by acknowledging any limitations and potential biases in the study. The member checking process, described in Section 4.5.1, also contributed to confirmability by providing participants with the opportunity to review and verify the accuracy of the findings. Even though not all participants were consulted, representatives were conducted. The participants confirmed the accuracy of the interpretations made by the researcher and had nothing to include or exclude. This ensured that the findings were based on participants' actual experiences rather than the researcher's assumptions or biases.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are a set of key principles and behaviours that are to be followed when researching because they play an essential role (Chasokela, 2024). Due to the nature of interaction with participants and their contextualised understandings of their individual experiences, ethical considerations in qualitative research are highly important (Subedi, 2021). It is therefore crucial that researchers prioritise informed consent, ensuring that participants are aware of the purpose of the study and the rights they have (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Creswell and Creswell (2023) add by showing that confidentiality and anonymity are essential for the protection of participants' identities and the sensitive information they provide; hence, they should be included in the consent form.

For this study, to ensure ethical considerations, ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and minimising harm to participants were strictly adhered to as stipulated by Nii Laryeafio and Ogbewe (2023). Before taking part in the study, all participants were provided with detailed explanations of the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of taking part in the study. A written consent

form was issued and obtained from participants prior to taking part in the study, hence ensuring that participants participated voluntarily.

To also safeguard participants' privacy, all collected data was anonymised by removing personal identifiers such as names, surnames, and addresses. Confidential information on the researcher's laptop was securely stored and only accessible through a password known to the researcher and the information will be kept for three years before being permanently deleted from the researcher's laptop. Lastly, the researcher requested ethical clearance from the UNISA College of Education and permission from the three universities before commencing with the study. By adhering to these ethical guidelines, this study aimed to contribute valuable knowledge while also safeguarding the rights and welfare of all participants.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the methodology employed to explore the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in Lesotho's institutions of higher learning. This chapter serves as a link between the theoretical framework in Chapter 3 and the forthcoming empirical findings in Chapter 5, and it has outlined a clear strategic plan for inquiry. The chapter showed that the current research was firmly anchored within the interpretivist paradigm, which focused on subjective experiences, meanings, and lived realities of the participants. This chapter also highlighted that a qualitative research approach was adopted in the study, making use of an exploratory case study design. This selection helped the researcher to obtain in-depth, contextual, and detailed insight into the multifaceted phenomenon under study. To ensure a comprehensive and triangulated understanding, qualitative data was collected from multiple participants, through focus group discussions with part-time students from three institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. The selection of participants through purposive sampling was also highlighted, which was done to ensure the engagement of information-rich individuals whose experiences were central to the research questions.

The thematic data analysis that was employed for the study followed a structured, stepwise process, which was identified as the appropriate

tool to follow patterns, identify themes, and meanings from the collected verbatim data. This systematic approach ensured that the analysis remained rigorous and mainly rooted in the participants' own words, leading to authentic findings. Finally, the chapter emphasised the foundational pillars of trustworthiness and ethical rigour, which were followed to ensure the research was conducted with integrity and respect for all participants who took part. The findings that follow in Chapter 5 will, therefore, be the product of a carefully considered process designed to voice the experiences of part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho authentically and to examine the institutional ethical landscape under which part-time students undertake their studies. Importantly, the methodological approach described in this chapter ensures that the theoretical concepts from the social justice theory and equity theory were not merely abstract frameworks but were operationalised through carefully designed focus group questions.

CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the methodology used to explore the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in Lesotho's institutions of higher learning. The research was based on the interpretivist approach to help the study understand the individual experiences and daily realities of part-time students. It was also highlighted in the previous chapter that the current study adopted a qualitative research approach, hence the use of an exploratory case study design. Finally, the chapter emphasised the foundational pillars of trustworthiness and ethical rigour, which were followed to ensure the research was conducted with integrity and respect for all participants who took part.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of a study exploring the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. Data were collected through focus group interviews. Part-time students from three institutions of higher learning were asked to express their views and opinions on the topic under study.

Using Atlas.ti for data analysis, the findings revealed key themes that were in line with the research questions. The researcher started by exploring the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. Following the thematic data analysis approach as outlined by Braun et al. (2022) and Naeem et al. (2023), this chapter organised the collected qualitative data from focus group discussions conducted across three institutions of higher learning in Lesotho (Schools A, B, and C) into seven main themes. The chapter also includes systematic data presentation, interpretive analysis, and theoretical integration, together with direct quotations to preserve the authentic voices of participants.

The themes that emerged from the data aligned with research questions are presented in the Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Emerging themes from the data aligned with research questions

RQ1: What are the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho?	
Financial challenges and economic vulnerability	Sub-themes: - Financial impact on academic continuation. - No financial support. - Penalty fees and arbitrary deadlines. - Unexpected fee increases. - Volunteer teachers and low-income.
Academic compromise	Sub-themes: - Academic dishonesty from desperation. - AI dependence due to resource denial. - Cultural factors enabling compromise. - Group work false participation.
RQ2: Why do part-time students face ethical challenges in higher education institutions in Lesotho?	
Institutionalised marginalisation and resource deprivation	Sub-themes: - Denial of essential academic facilities. - Denial of student identity and representation. - Exclusion from support services. - Physical exclusion from learning spaces.
Structural disorganisation and communication breakdown	Sub-themes: - Calendar and timetable chaos. - Lack of responsive mechanisms. - Last-minute and absent communication. - Lecturer-related issues.
Work-life balance	Sub-themes: - Having less time with family. - Marriage under strain from study commitments. - No preparation time between work and school. - Work and class time conflict.

RQ3: Which strategies can be used by higher education institutions to reduce ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho?	
Establish legitimate communication channels and integration into the school governance structure.	Sub-themes: - Face-to-face communication - Inclusion in decision-making processes - Student governance representation - Timely communication
Ensure financial affordability and predictability.	Sub-themes: - Cost saving through online classes. - Foreseeable and transparent fee structure. - Having access to affordable academic resources. - Reduction of fees.

Table 5.1 outlines the structure of the analysis of the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho's higher education institutions. The table helps to link the findings of the study to the three research questions. The ethical challenges that answer RQ1, then RQ2, show that the ethical challenges are not isolated circumstances but result from systemic failures in institutions of higher learning and RQ3, which points towards the necessary steps that institutions should take to remedy the ethical challenges faced by part-time students.

5.2 Description of the case and participants

Data were collected from six focus groups to help participants feel free to express themselves and be able to build on what others have said. The focus groups were spread evenly across three institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. The study focused on adult students who were enrolled in a part-time programme in the education field in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. Moreover, the study focused on those part-time students who had to balance academic pursuits with work and family responsibilities within the landscape of Lesotho.

The three institutions of higher learning were purposefully selected because they represented the unique provision of a part-time teaching programme. This distinctive feature enables this study to capture a broad spectrum of ethical challenges faced by part-time students across the selected institutions of higher learning in the education field.

This study was relevant given the underexplored nature of ethical issues affecting part-time students in Lesotho. A total of 36 part-time students were purposefully selected to participate in the study, and they were divided into six focus groups with two focus groups per institution of higher learning. This selection was chosen to ensure equal representation of all three institutions of higher learning. Each focus group comprised six participants, which is a recommended size for focus groups to promote group interaction and allow in-depth reflection of participants' experiences (Sentance, 2019).

Data saturation was reached after the fifth focus group was interviewed, as no new information about ethical challenges was emerging. However, the sixth focus group was interviewed not only to confirm saturation but also to confirm that all three institutions of higher learning's perspectives were holistically represented. During the focus group interviews, participants were eager to express their experiences within their respective institutions. However, the researcher encountered a challenge of having most participants prefer to code-switch between Sesotho and English rather than expressing themselves fully in English. Before the start of the focus group interviews, participants were made aware that they could leave at any time during the interview, which brought another challenge of participants leaving before the focus group interviews were over however, this did not affect the data quality, as those participants who left were not contributing a lot during the focus-group discussions. Lastly, most male participants were reluctant to participate, and those who took part gave short answers to questions; this left the focus group interviews to be heavily dominated by female part-time student participants.

5.3 Linking findings to the study's research objectives

As stated, this study intended to achieve three primary objectives as discussed below.

1. **To identify the specific ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.**

The findings of this study addressed this objective by revealing two themes being financial challenges and economic vulnerability and academic compromise. Under financial challenges and economic vulnerability, the findings revealed that there were unexpected fee increases, punitive penalty fees for late registration and part-time students were not

given government sponsorships for their studies. These challenges together with the findings reveal that some part-time teachers were volunteer teachers and some work in private schools where they are underpaid, created ethical challenges for part-time students. Furthermore, the findings revealed that part-time students engage in unethical academic behaviours not because they are lazy but as a calculated desperate survival strategy driven by the ethical challenges they face.

2. To explore reasons why part-time students face ethical challenges in higher learning education institutions in Lesotho.

The findings revealed three themes that were connected to reasons why part-time students faced ethical challenges in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho being: institutional marginalisation and resource deprivation, structural disorganisation and communication breakdown and work-life balance. The data showed that part-time students face ethical challenges because they are systemically excluded from accessing institutional facilities such as libraries and computer laboratories. Part-time students are also not represented in the SRC, moreover the institutions' academic calendars do not cater for part-time students, which does not give them enough time to prepare themselves for classes. The data also revealed that part-time students face extreme marital strain due to their compressed academic calendar. The findings of this study directly show that the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho are connected to higher education institutions' failures to come up with policies, class schedules and support services that acknowledge the unique requirements of part-time students.

3. To examine strategies which higher education institutions can use to reduce the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho.

To address the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students, the findings revealed two themes: 'Establish legitimate communication channels' and 'Integration into the school governance structure and ensure financial affordability and predictability'. The findings revealed that part-time students recommended that there should be face-to-face communication to reduce the reliance on communication through social media. Part-time

students also recommended that they must have a representative in the SRC, that there should be online lessons to reduce educational costs and that fee structures should be transparent and foreseeable.

The data in this study revealed that part-time students in institutions of higher learning face immensely unfair treatment, but it is closely related to being systemically pushed to the margins of the institutions in which they are enrolled. Using the social justice theory, seemingly, part-time students are not just struggling, but they are also being excluded by the institutions they are a part of. They are made to feel less worthy than full-time students; sometimes, they are even physically removed from lecture halls by security officers and fined for simply trying to access some of the shared learning spaces in institutions of higher learning. They have no voice in student governance and are not included in instances where important decisions are taken.

The second lens is the equity theory, whose focal point is how fairness breaks down when effort and cost do not match outcomes. Part-time students constantly compare themselves to full-time students and find that the balance is highly disproportionate, tilted in favour of full-time students. Annually, tuition fee increases unexpectedly, with no communication in advance, which pushes many towards dropping out. Part-time students pay the same amount as full-time students and, in some instances, even pay more but receive less from the institutions of higher learning, as they are not given full access. Part-time students have difficulty accessing computer labs due to overcrowding or them being off-limits, while full-time students may walk to school, part-time students have to rent rooms for days at a time during their residential classes, which leads them to bear hidden costs that are often ignored by the higher institutions they are a part of.

5.4 Data coding

Following the methodology recommendations outlined by Braun et al. (2022) and Naeem et al. (2023), this section of the study provides details of the systematic coding process, which was followed to transform the raw data from the focus group interviews into manageable and understandable information. The following coding procedure helped to ensure transparency, rigour, and trustworthiness during the interpretation of part-time

students' experiences in relation to ethical challenges they face in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

The current study followed an inductive coding approach which helped to allow codes and subsequent themes to emerge, derived explicitly out of the raw data instead of being imposed by pre-existing theoretical frameworks. The researcher deemed this approach appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research and the need to capture the context-specific experiences of part-time students without coming up with categories in advance. When investigating under-researched phenomena, inductive coding is particularly valuable within educational contexts.

The interactive six-phased procedure proposed by Braun et al. (2022) and Naeem et al. (2023) was followed by the researcher in this study as follows: **Phase 1** was 'data familiarisation' wherein the researcher began by immersing himself in the data by listening to the audio recordings while concurrently transcribing them verbatim. In **Phase 2,** the 'initial code generation', the researcher conducted line-by-line coding of all six transcripts with the use of Atlas.ti. During **Phase 3,** known as 'searching for themes', the researcher used Atlas.ti's code manager to group related codes into potential themes. In **Phase 4**, 'reviewing themes', the researcher reviewed all the themes in relation to all the codes extracted from the whole dataset. During **Phase 5**, 'definition and naming themes', the researcher defined each final theme to reflect its main meaning clearly. Finally, in **Phase 6**, 'writing the report', the researcher wrote the thematic narratives, selected illustrative quotes directly from the transcripts, and connected all the findings to the research questions. The final coding process generated a coding structure comprising 29 initial codes, organised into seven thematic categories, each assigned to its respective research question.

5.5 What are the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho?

As indicated in the introduction, the presentation of the findings was guided by the research questions. For research question 1, two themes emerged. Below are presentations and discussions on the second theme, which is and they are financial

challenges and economic vulnerability and academic compromise. These themes are presented and discussed below.

5.5.1 Financial challenges and economic vulnerability

The participants in this study revealed that economic hardship is the most prevalent ethical challenge that part-time students in higher institutions of learning in Lesotho face. Unlike full-time students in Lesotho who are frequently supported by the government sponsorship scheme controlled by the National Manpower Development Secretariat (NMDS), part-time students holistically pay the full costs for their studies from their personal earnings without assistance from the government. This unique characteristic of part-time students renders them vulnerable to economic distress when they face institutional financial practices that are perceived as normal, such as an increase of fees. Five noticeable and interconnected sub-themes emerged from the data: financial impact on academic continuation, no financial support, penalty fees and arbitrary deadlines, unexpected fee increase and volunteer teachers and low income.

5.5.1.1 Financial impact on academic continuation

The most immediate challenge, which was expressed by the focus groups, was the financial vulnerability among part-time students. This financial vulnerability directly had an influence in the ability of part-time students to remain enrolled in higher education institutions. Participants made a direct recollection that some of their classmates were withdrawing from school, not because of academic failure, but because of their inability to keep up with the cost of their education.

FG 2B stated: *"We have seen some of our classmates or from other groups and previous years, people come for a year or two, and they drop out because of the fee."*

The same sentiment was stated by **FG 1B** stated: *"So when there is just an increment in the middle of the program, there will be so many dropouts. We are encountering that problem now, and I am telling you that there are going to be so many dropouts because people are not going to be able to afford it, that money is too much."*

The prospect of withdrawal was noted even in the minds of those part-time students who were still managing to pay their fees, as another **FG 3A** confessed: *"Because of the*

money, a lot of us wanted to quit; we still want to. So they said if we quit, we should know that we are still going to owe the university."

The issue of finance adds to educational pressure on part-time students, transforming the educational path into a source of chronic anxiety. The findings of this study corroborate Sentance's (2019) findings which show that in the UK, the absence of targeted financial support for part-time students in higher learning can result to a dramatic decline in part-time retention and enrolment in higher education. Moreover, Baja (2024) and Paintsil et al. (2020) add that part-time students frequently experience reduced class attendance, missed lectures, and difficulties with cumulative assessments.

This study also revealed that part-time students often withdraw from school not because of academic failure, but because of their inability to keep up with the cost of their education. This corroborates Baja's (2024) assertion that part-time students who work over 20 hours per week demonstrate lower school performance as compared to those working fewer hours.

The findings of this study that financial vulnerability causes dropout of part-time students is corroborated by the literature. However, what the current study reveals that differs from some scholarship is the severity of the impact of finances on academic continuation of part-time students in Lesotho. While international literature acknowledges financial challenges, these studies often highlight financial pressures as a manageable constraint which part-time students are able to overcome, rather than seeing it as the primary course of withdrawal of part-time students (Ates Ozdemir et al., 2024; McKinney et al., 2022).

5.5.1.2 No financial support

The financial burden on part-time students is exacerbated by the absence of any external financial support, such as from the government. During the focus group interviews, participants reported that they do not receive any form of financial assistance such as bursaries, scholarships, employer scholarships, or even government scholarships. The absence of financial support mechanisms for part-time students in Lesotho's higher education system leaves students with no option but to self-fund their studies. Findings show that the government sponsorship through the National Manpower Development

Secretariat (NMDS) is mainly directed at full-time students. This action by NMDS leaves part-time students to shoulder the financial demands of higher education on their own. The exclusion of part-time students from public funding shows a structured inequity that is found within Lesotho's national policy.

FG 2B revealed that: *"We are on our own... We depend on ourselves, and we earn so little."*

The lack of support for part-time students is not just limited to fees, but it extends to accommodation, learning materials, and travel costs. As **FG 3B** emphasised: "*We are paying for ourselves. We are not getting manpower (government sponsorship). We are not sponsored."*

This shows that any unforeseeable expenses could make a part-time student to be out of budget hence affect their academic progress. Clearly, institutions of higher learning in Lesotho treat part-time students as self-funding consumers of education and do not seek to alleviate their financial burdens.

The findings of this study show a common trend across the African higher education landscape, where part-time students are often excluded from student financial support. Research indicates that inequitable access to government financial resources is a major political challenge for part-time students, leading to financial strain and difficulty balancing work and study (Shaari et al., 2025).The exclusion of part-time students from government financial support in Africa is a significant issue that should be addressed, particularly among part-time postgraduate government employees.

The findings of this study further reveal that part-time students receive no external financial support, with government sponsorship mainly directed at full-time students, which aligns with Ardissone et al.'s (2021) findings that many policies in institutions of higher learning often require full-time enrolment to qualify for financial assistance in higher education. The literature discusses ways of assisting part-time students and notes that there is a need for institutions of higher learning to provide financial help programmes, grants, and scholarships made specifically for part-time students to make education more accessible in higher education institutions (Morena et al., 2024). This recommendation

implicitly acknowledges that such financial support does not currently exist thereby validating the findings of this study that part-time students in Lesotho are fully self-funded.

Welsh (2024) highlights that the financial pressures faced by part-time students are heightened by the fact that in most institutions of higher learning, part-time students are generally ineligible for financial assistance, as it is typically assumed that they are earning an income. This international observation matches the findings of this study, where part-time students reported that the government sponsorship through NMDS was mainly directed at helping full-time students, ignoring the reality that even though some part-time students earn money, their responsibilities outweigh the money they get paid.

While the literature confirms the existence of financial exclusion for part-time students, there is a disagreement regarding its intentionality. The current study's stance that the exclusion of part-time students shows a structured inequity that is found within Lesotho's national policy suggests intentional discrimination. Some international literature, however, frames this exclusion as oversight rather than deliberate policy. Virtue et al. (2023) speak to this by noting that institutional policies and structures are primarily focused on full-time, residential students. This suggests that the literature views the exclusion of part-time students as an effect of historical institutional design rather than active discrimination.

5.5.1.3 Penalty fees and arbitrary deadlines

The findings reveal that part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho face an ethical challenge with institutional financial policies. The financial policies that contribute to ethical challenges that part-time students face are related to late payment penalties and rigid fee deadlines. Part-time students described being charged penalty fees in addition to their expected tuition fee, thereby turning their fee, which may have been manageable, into an insurmountable debt. Moreover, deadlines for payments for registration were communicated to part-time students poorly or changed without warning, and a fine was added, compounding the existing hardship.

FG 2B made reference to this by saying: *“We find ourselves behind with registration, and we have to pay extra money because they say that you are behind time for registration.”* What was outstanding was that the registration penalty came as a surprise to part-time

students, as **FG 2B** verified *"Penalty fees … came as a surprise. We never told that we were supposed to register with the full-time students one time… it came as a surprise."*

A recount of a similar experience came from **FG 3A**: *"The system closed without us being informed and after that we are told that we failed to register… therefore those who are going to be allowed to register after that are going to have to pay the penalties."*

The data shows that deadlines for fee payments were often not seen by part-time students as an administrative necessity but as a thought-out revenue-raising tactic by institutions of higher learning. The deadlines were set without considering the income cycles of part-time students who are often working adults who receive their monthly salaries at the end of the month. What is ethically challenging about penalty fees imposed on part-time students is that they disproportionately punish the group of students who are already financially vulnerable. The researcher's view is shaped by the observation that higher education institutions' financial policies are mainly focused on administrative convenience rather than student welfare.

The findings of this study reveal that penalty fees and arbitrary deadlines contribute to ethical challenges that part-time students face. This aligns with Virtue et al. (2023) who state that in institutions of higher learning bureaucratic, hierarchical frameworks shaped by structural functionalism focus on efficiency and order but often neglect the complexities of part-time students' lives. The discovery that part-time students were charged penalty fees on top of their expected tuition fee shows this institutional prioritisation of administrative convenience over student welfare.

The findings that part-time students paid penalty fees show punitive practices by institutions of higher learning that were designed without considering part-time students' circumstances. In exploring part-time students' challenges, Vokic et al. (2021) discusses what they call time-based conflict which is where part-time students' working hours, their study commitments and family responsibilities compete for their limited time. Institutions of higher learning fail to acknowledge that part-time students have income cycles and once they receive their income, they have family responsibilities to take care of.

A growing number of studies refute the findings of this study showing that some institutions of higher learning are shifting towards allowing part-time students who are behind with their studies' payments an opportunity to register and attend classes (Alshamy & Barry, 2024). This move is a positive shift away from using fines as the main tool to block part-time students' progress, but a move to separate academic participation from administrative compliance.

5.5.1.4 Unexpected fee increases

Data shows that part-time students in institutions of higher learning encounter an ethical challenge of fee hikes, which are imposed on them mid-programme without consultation or prior warning. Part-time students reported that their fees were raised between the period when they registered for the start of their academic journey and graduation or from one academic year to the next, and this was done without timely communication to allow them an opportunity to plan their finances in advance.

As **FG 3A** reported an increase: *"The percentage that has been used to increase the tuition fee. The fee is too much, from M17, 900 to M26, 500."* **FG 3A** continue by adding*: "That is because when there are changes. They are just brought. They implemented them during the academic year without us knowing."*

In **FG 1B,** the frustration about fee increments was obvious: *"To add on what she's saying, we are not sure but there's been this thing that the fee has been increased and we do not know why and when. We do not know. There were no any discussions with us and we are already in the programme. We cannot drop out. We are forced to do it to continue with the programme. So, it's one of the big challenges."* The unexpected nature of fee increments led part-time students not to trust institutions of higher learning, as they turn around and increase fees at any time.

The ethical challenge of unexpected fee increase extends beyond the financial burden on part-time students to include issues of transparency, good faith and institutional accountability. Part-time students enrol in institutions of higher learning based on their understanding of the costs involved. However, when those costs change without meaningful prior notice, the institutions have arguably breached an unspoken

understanding with part-time students. The researcher noticed that tuition fees pricing practices that do not have transparency cause an ethical challenge as unclear pricing misleads part-time students about the true costs of their higher education undermining both equity and trust.

The current study revealed that unexpected fee increases constitute an ethical challenge for part-time students aligns with Aria et al. (2020) who state that many students struggle to manage the increasing costs of education and living expenses. Additionally, Welsh (2024) adds that the financial burdens faced by part-time students is exacerbated by the students ineligibility for financial assistance. While part-time students are not eligible for financial assistance the unexpected fee increases in institutions of higher learning puts them in situations where they are face with ethical challenges.

The literature also shows that higher education institutions have ethical responsibility to ensure that all students have equitable access and support despite their enrolment statues (Dawar, 2025; Huong, 2024). Part-time students' frustration with fee increases implemented during the academic year without their knowledge represents a failure of institutions' ethical responsibility, as fee increases were implemented without transparency or consultation with part-time students.

The primary disagreement in this study concerns the transparency of fee-setting processes in institutions of higher learning. The literature discusses how financial considerations act as constraints for community college students (McKinney et al., 2022), but does not address how institutions communicate fee changes. The Lesotho findings in this study reveal a complete lack of transparency that goes beyond what the literature typically describes.

5.5.1.5 Volunteer teachers and low-income

The findings revealed a distinctive feature of part-time students in Lesotho, which was a vulnerable subgroup of part-time students who were working as volunteer teachers receiving no salaries, and those who were employed in low-paying private schools while pursuing higher education qualifications in Lesotho.

FG 2A highlighted: "*To add more on that. Some of us are volunteer teachers where we are working and we are not earning anything. So if the fee is increased really it becomes a problem on our side."*

These students face a double-sided impasse, that their professional circumstances provide low or in some cases irregular income that is insufficient to cover the costs of furthering their studies, yet obtaining further qualifications is often considered as the only way to improve employment conditions and remuneration.

The data also reveals that even though some part-time students have some income, the salaries so low that paying fees means sacrificing family necessities. **FG 2B** explained: "*We depend on ourselves and we earn so little. And the little that we are getting, and most of us in that classroom I learned that we are not employed. For example, myself, I am not yet employed by the government. We are still in private schools and we earn little. The little that we get we have to share.*" This combination of professional dedication and economic vulnerability created an ethical conundrum where the people that the country of Lesotho need to be qualified teachers were being priced out of the very education that would help them get the educational credentials they needed. The findings reveal a cycle in which part-time students work to pay for their education that might lead to better employment opportunities; however, the cost of education drained their only resource, thus creating a trap, as opposed to a ladder of opportunity for a better life.

The findings also reveal a structural injustice where the labour market and the higher education system meet. The Lesotho government benefits from the services provided by volunteer and low-income teachers, yet the country, through its funding policies and higher education practices, comes up with barriers that prevent part-time students from advancing their qualifications. This inconsistency brings into question the coherence and fairness of the Lesotho government's human capital development strategies.

The findings illuminate that volunteer teachers and low-income private school teachers constitute a vulnerable subgroup of part-time students aligns with Kaufman (2025) who discusses how part-time students come from diverse backgrounds, including those who are low-income individuals, single parents, and youth. The volunteer teachers described

in the findings of this study represent an extreme manifestation of the vulnerability of part-time students as they work for free or receive low incomes.

The literature shows family responsibilities mainly lead to the pursuit of higher education on a part-time basis (Novak et al., 2025); moreover, the literature shows that family obligations can sometimes limit the time available for studying (Andrade et al., 2024). Findings show that part-time students in Lesotho earn insufficient income which they must share with family, thus reflecting how low-income compounds family responsibilities, creating a cycle of economic vulnerability for part-time students.

The clearest disagreement between the current study's findings and the literature concerns the attention the literature gives to volunteer or low-income teachers specifically. While the literature discusses low-income individuals generally (Kaufman, 2025), it does not specifically address the phenomenon of unpaid teaching as a distinct challenge. The findings in this study reveal that volunteer teachers represent a subgroup of part-time students who face an impasse, as their professional situations provide low or in some cases no income that is not enough to cover the costs of furthering their studies, yet obtaining further qualifications is often seen as the only way to improve employment conditions and remuneration opportunities in Lesotho.

The financial challenges revealed in this study show an alignment with three dimensions of the social justice theory: redistributive justice, recognitive justice, and representational justice. Redistributive justice addresses the unequal allocation of resources in society, such as limited access to financial assistance and access to library services. The findings substantiate this dimension of the social justice theory. The findings of this study show that part-time students fully paid for their education from their earnings without the assistance of NMDS as it mainly assisted full-time students. Rawls's (1971) theory outlines that social and economic inequalities should be addressed to assist the least advantaged within a social setting. However, this study revealed the opposite; despite being working adults, part-time students are economically vulnerable because some are volunteer teachers while others are private teachers paid low salaries. Yet, they are denied access to public funding, while full-time students have full access to public funding.

Recognitive justice was noted where there is a lack of cultural responsibility for part-time students, as higher institutions' policies and curricula are designed focusing on full-time students. The findings of this study show that deadlines for payments for registration are often communicated late and changed without warning to part-time students, which results in a penalty if they are unpaid. Higher education institutions set this policy mainly considering full-time students but ignoring the income cycles of part-time students who receive their salaries at the end of the month.

The findings also reveal that part-time students' fees also increased in the middle of their programme without any consultation, which represents a failure to apply recognitive justice. Recognitive justice requires all institutions of higher learning to recognise part-time students as full, legitimate part of institutions whose presence requires consideration. However, the findings reveal the opposite whereby part-time students are treated as revenue sources and not legitimate members of institutions whose financial planning needs warranted respect.

Representational justice emerged from the findings when it came to unexpected fee increments. Part-time students are not consulted when fees were increased, thereby denying them a voice in the decisions that directly affect their academic journey. The exclusion of part-time students during decision-making is not a communication failure but a structural exclusion of part-time students from institutional governance, which the social justice theory views as a systemic barrier to part-time students' learning.

Nonetheless, this study rejects the limitation of the social justice theory, which is the victimhood paradigm, which could display part-time students as victims. The findings of this study show that part-time students continue studying despite experiencing financial pressure. They also persist despite the thoughts of withdrawal; as noted in those managing to pay the costly fees.

5.5.2 Academic compromise

Findings reveal that academic compromise among part-time students in Lesotho's higher education institutions is another ethical challenge. The issue of academic compromise among part-time students in Lesotho is not primarily a matter of individual moral failure

but rather is used as a rational response to systemic marginalisation in institutions of higher learning. The findings further reveal that since institutions of higher learning fail to provide basic resources, reasonable timeframes, and equitable treatment, students resort to ethical compromises as survival strategies. The data analysis reveals four clearly defined and mutually connected sub-themes: academic dishonesty from desperation, AI dependence due to resource denial, cultural factors enabling compromise, and group work false participation.

5.5.2.1 Academic dishonesty from desperation

The data from the six focus groups reveals that part-time students engage in various forms of academic dishonesty, which is not conducted out of laziness or moral deficiency, but as a desperate response to some institutional failures. The most frequently articulated form of dishonesty was the submission of work previously completed by other students, often from part-time students who studied in earlier years. The action of submitting work previously completed by other part-time students showed a calculated risk assessment rather than impulsive, intentional cheating. Part-time students are fully aware that their lecturers may recognise resubmitted assessments; yet they proceed to submit such work because the consequences of non-submission are even greater.

As was exposed by **FG 1A**: *"Yes, most of the time you find that we know that we be given some work to do as part-time students and also be given deadlines, but we find that we take other people's work and then present it, knowing that the consequences of taking someone's work. You might find that you are going to be the bad books of that lecturer. For instance, we found that that lecture also taught those who came before you. They might be aware that you have marked this work before, but you take the risk of presenting the very same work that was presented by those who came before us."*

The use of the phrase "*we take the risk*" provides strong evidence that part-time students have normalised this practice as a legitimate strategy within their constrained circumstances. The desperate actions taken by part-time students were further elaborated by **FG 2A**, which exposed the frustration and helplessness that come up when endless demands hinder the possibility for original thought. **FG 2A** detailed how the clash of endless responsibilities leads to an impassable roadblock: *"We face challenges. Those*

people there who are our leaders. Hey, they would complain that. Hi. Now you are busy with your school work. You have to do one, two, three. Trying to push up too much stress. Too much work at our own jobs. And also this one of our studies."

The findings reveal the overwhelming nature of the circumstances surrounding part-time students. When work supervisors and principals demand productivity, families require attention, and institutions impose deadlines without consideration of these competing demands, part-time students experience what might be termed as ethical exhaustion, which is the depletion of capacity to make morally optimal decisions.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher is of the view that academic dishonesty among part-time students in Lesotho is not the result of individual laziness or moral failings, but rather a calculated, normalised coping strategy which comes from systemic institutional neglect and overwhelming life pressures. When faced with rigid deadlines, competing demands from employers and families, and a lack of structural support, part-time students make morally compromised decisions. Their deliberate risk-taking, such as resubmitting past students' work, reflects a desperate rational response to institutional failures rather than impulsive cheating.

These findings are similar to Grigoreva et al.'s (2025) study, which confirms that extreme time constraints and fatigue, which form part of part-time students' schedules, can increase the risk of academic misconduct, including plagiarism. The concept of ethical exhaustion described in the findings align with Zhao's (2023) study which found that part-time students experience excessive cognitive load from the constant demands of work, study, and personal life, making it difficult to engage in deeper, meaningful learning.

Moreover, the finding that submission of previously completed work by part-time students reflects a calculated risk is consistent with research by Rahimi et al. (2024), who found that students facing potential failure may choose to cheat because the cost of repeating a course or module far exceeds the relatively small cost and low risk of using others' work as their own. Also, the current study's emphasis on competing demands from employers and families on part-time students is supported by Vokic et al. (2021), who found that work-school conflict occurs when addressing work-related demands drains part-time student workers' resources and constrains their ability to fulfil their school responsibilities.

On the other hand, the literature tends to view part-time students' academic dishonesty as a moral failing to be addressed through punitive measures (Ferková & Zacharová, 2024; Peculea et al., 2020). However, the findings of this study argue for the need to understand part-time students' academic dishonesty as a rational response to overwhelming life pressures and institutional neglect.

5.5.2.2 AI dependence due to resource denial

The second subtheme that emerged from the data showed a huge dependence on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools and similar platforms. These AI tools were used as substitutes for authorised academic resources that institutions had not made available to part-time students. Unlike other students who use AI for convenience or to avoid investing intellectual effort in their work, the data showed that part-time students described their AI dependence as a necessity born from resource exclusion.

The dependency on AI was directly linked to lack of library access by **FG 1A** by clearly stating: *"We struggle to go to the library because when you go to the library, they're going to require a student card. So those are challenges that we encounter. I cannot personally just pass and go into the library. No. That's why we will use AI because we don't have access to the library and to, look at the books. Yes. And you were told that they don't even think a student cards will be there, meaning our money is just gone."*

Clearly, part-time students do not choose to use AI, but AI becomes the only option for them to do their work, as they do not have easy access to the library. After paying for student ID cards, which are a unique form of identification in institutions of higher learning, part-time students never receive those cards. As a result, they find themselves unable to access certain physical resources from their institutions. AI, therefore, becomes the alternative digital library that part-time students can have access to without the need for institutional permission.

FG 1A also added: *"I think also the issues with the lecturers is that most of them, not all of them. They will be telling you not to use AI, but they will not tell you how to maybe use AI ethically. You know, you tell, you know, if you use AI, I'm going to detect it and I'm going to give you zero. But AI is there. So what is it that we have to use? We can't go to*

the library. Like my colleagues have said, we can't go to the library due to the unavailability of the student cards. So AI is the only option that we have that we can use. But we find that most lecturers just disregard that use of AI. They don't like it."

Evidently, there is an ethical gap on the use of AI in institutions of higher learning. Lecturers prohibit the use of AI without providing part-time students with alternative or providing them with guidance on how AI can be used ethically. This leaves part-time students with no proper guidance on how they should conduct their academic assignments as they do not have access to the library and they are forbidden from using AI.

FG 3A confirmed this pattern of behaviour across institutions of higher learning by noting: *"Another problem is that the school library is, not accessible to us like now. It was not opened. So, we are forced to rely on AI when we do our school assignments. That leads to most of our work being plagiarism."*

For part-time students, the use of AI is not a choice but a coercion. The findings reveal that part-time students are aware that submitting AI-generated content results in their work being classified as plagiarised. However, part-time students view their unethical use of AI not as a moral lapse but as the outcome of higher institutional failures.

Part-time students are not assigned institutional emails which stops them from assessing other learning management systems provided by their institutions. In the absence of official institutional emails, part-time students are unable to access digital resources which are provided by other higher education institutions such as e-journals, e-books and other online learning resources. The absence of these systems has pushed part-time students to rely on unregulated digital environments where they access free AI tools to use. This was further shown by **FG 3A** by revealing: "*I think the other problem is we are not treated like other students in terms of we don't really get access to things that are supposed to help us. Example, we don't have school email so that we can access some things like educational learning platforms. So it's a bit challenging."*

Part-time students' heavy reliance on artificial intelligence (AI) is not a voluntary choice but a coerced necessity resulting from systemic institutional failures, including denial of

library access, lack of institutional email addresses, and exclusion from digital learning platforms. Prohibited from using AI by lecturers who offer no ethical guidance or alternative resources, part-time students are trapped between academic integrity rules and the inability to access sanctioned learning materials, leading to inevitable plagiarism and highlighting a critical ethical gap where institutions blame students for problems they created.

The finding from this study that part-time students in Lesotho depend on the use of AI as a substitute for authorised academic resources is strongly supported by Harris et al. (2020). Findings from Harris et al.'s (2020) study found that part-time students from poor financial backgrounds lack access to appropriate computing devices and are forced to share devices with family members, which creates scheduling conflicts. Also, the finding from the current study that part-time students in Lesotho lack institutional email addresses, which prevents them from accessing digital resources, aligns with research by Darsih et al. (2025), who found that part-time students have different technology abilities and face barriers in accessing digital learning platforms.

Additionally, the findings from the current study that lecturers prohibit part-time students from using AI without providing alternatives or ethical guidance highlighted what the study terms an ethical gap. This finding is consistent with Staddon (2023) who found that part-time students need scaffolding and training on the use of digital learning platforms to overcome technological barriers. The literature also confirms that resource exclusion pushes part-time students to use unregulated digital tools (Morena et al., 2024; Van Der Wouden & Youn, 2023).

The literature on AI dependence mainly focuses on its use for intentional cheating rather than seeing the use of AI as a coerced necessity that results from institutions' resource exclusion. Desmond and Dierickx (2021) examine academic integrity in terms of prohibiting AI use in higher education rather than understanding why students may be forced to use it. The finding that AI becomes the only option that part-time students can use because they do not have access to libraries due to missing student cards offers a more important, contextualised understanding of AI dependence among part-time students that is largely missing from the literature.

5.5.2.3 Cultural factors enabling compromise

Cultural values and social norms were identified as the third subtheme that promoted ethical compromise among part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho. The first two subthemes mainly focused on how structural inaccessibility and educational resources lead part-time students to behave unethically, the current theme reveals how cultural values and social norms centre around the desired for social harmony, avoidance of confrontations and collective responsibilities influence part-time students' academic integrity.

There was a link made by **FG 2B** to cultural upbringing and how it influences the tendency of part-time students to cover up for some group members who did not contribute to group work. **FG 2B** stated: *"It is the way we are raised, in our culture we are made to accept to compromise in every situation. Now we are bound to and we empathise so much. When you think about somebody who pays such an amount then at the back of your mind you are like, you cannot let one fall or kick them while they are already down. You play your part and it is for him to play their part."*

Part-time students suggested that their cultural upbringing is connected to their abilities to prioritise compromising or confrontation. Part-time students' act of compromising is not just a passive action but a self-determined moral choice which is driven by compassion for other students who are struggling as well. Everyone in the part-time group is seen as sacrificing, as a result, there is no one who wants to be responsible for another's failure as there is recognition of a shared financial struggle.

To elaborate on how cultural values shape part-time students' academic practices, **FG 2B** added that: *"And then yesterday I nearly, maybe my paper would still be with me because it was already deadline for submission and I had to wait and ask my partner if they are done and he said that he was just at the beginning and a person has to wait because we are group members, you cannot abandon one another. That is how we are."*

Cultural values are further perceived as explanations for part-time students' behaviour that violates acceptable academic behaviour such as submission of incomplete group work and inclusion of names of those who did not partake in group work activities. This

action taken by part-time students is not seen as an act of self-righteousness, however it is seen as an unavoidable but accepted aspect of part-time students' being where their deep connections cannot simply be set aside to adhere to academic requirements.

Within the social context of part-time students, there is a fear of retaliation should a peer report another. **FG 2B** expressed: *"Sometimes some members do not participate and you are forced… you cannot say that someone was absent. You just have to write their name when submitting, pretend that everything is OK because snitches get stitches you know we still need to maintain peace. Sometimes it gets tough, the relationship becomes strained, yeah!"*

The colloquialism *"Snitches get stitches"* suggests that there is fear of retaliation among part-time students should a peer turn against another student. Therefore, there is a culture of social harmony that has been adopted to override academic standards of individual accountability and honest reporting and to move to a situation where those who do not take part in academic work are included to promote peace.

The data discovered a hierarchical side of culture which involved the unconditional respect for authority figures in **FG 1A** where fear of victimisation for complaining about lecturer misconduct was exposed: *"I think the other one. I hope it's a challenge. Is this one of our lecturers delaying to give us feedback and also delaying to give us coursework before writing examinations. And you find out that when we try to complain our class reps will be like, please don't complain you might even make them angry. But I think it's our right to get our feedback and coursework on time so that we prepare for the exam. And you find that we get it very late, and we are even scared to complain because there might be consequences if I talk too much and complain. You see, I think that."*

There is a cultural norm of hierarchical respect among part-time students which constrains whistleblowing and bold assertive claims of rights. Part-time students have genuine grievances about their delayed feedback, missing course outlines and unfair treatments, but choose to remain quiet because by speaking up they would have violated the expected compliance to authority.

The current study revealed that cultural values and social norms promote ethical compromise, which is supported by Ajjawi et al. (2025) and Khanal (2022) who confirm that part-time students experience marginalisation and diminished sense of belonging. This impacts on their identity and behaviour within institutions of high learning. Furthermore, the findings of this study that part-time students prioritise social harmony among themselves over academic standards aligns with research by Quan et al. (2021), who found that part-time students often find their needs and contributions ignored, leading them to adopt coping strategies that may violate academic norms.

In addition this study found that cultural upbringing influenced tendencies in part-time students to cover for non-contributing group members is consistent with studies on part-time students' need for community and peer support (Hayman et al., 2022; Wilbraham et al., 2024). Also, the findings that fear of retaliation as stated in the colloquial statement, "*Snitches get stitches"* constrains whistleblowing among part-time students is supported by Jones (2025), who found that institutional barriers and systemic oppressions prevented students from disclosing problematic experiences they faced.

While the literature in this study acknowledges that part-time students face isolation and marginalisation (Canty et al., 2020; Sikhwari et al., 2020), it does not clearly explore how cultural factors specifically enable ethical compromise among part-time students. Most studies focus on structural or institutional factors rather than examining how cultural values around social harmony, avoiding confrontation, and collective responsibility shape academic integrity practices among part-time students.

5.5.2.4 Group work false participation

The fourth subtheme revolves around the widespread practice of false participation in group work, where part-time students include non-contributing members' names on submitted scripts. The absent students are covered for during class presentations, and where there is no authentic collaboration among part-time students. This subtheme emerged predominantly from **FG 2B**, although other focus groups strongly confirmed this pattern of behaviour.

The response from **FG 2B** directly expresses the issue of including those students who did not participate or contribute to group work: *"OK I think one of the challenges that we face is when we are faced with the group work. Sometimes some members do not participate and you are forced… you cannot say that someone was absent. You just have to write their name when submitting, pretend that everything is OK because snitches get stitches you know we still need to maintain peace. Sometimes it gets tough, the relationship becomes strained, yeah!"*

Findings reveal that sometimes part-time students view the inclusion of those peers who did not take part in given work as coercion rather than as a voluntary action. This shows that some part-time students prefer authentic contribution but feel that they are unable to put it into action. Further, there are consequences connected to honest reporting if those that do not take part in group work are exposed.

The logistical challenge connected to coordinating group work across different geographical distances also emerged as **FG 2B** stated: *"My concern is still on our academic work as students. I think what could be changed is this grouping of people from various places and letting us communicate through the phones. Some people are inaccessible and if at least we're from different districts it is true some lecturers allowed that but some they do not. We are from different places meeting is a challenge. Online meeting we are Basotho so it doesn't work for us. Otherwise we will keep on covering for them."*

There was a distinctive mismatch identified between higher institutions' expectation that part-time students should complete group work remotely and the reality that part-time students faced of unreliable phones, unreliable internet and that online meetings were seen as culturally unworkable. The cultural identity embedded in the statement "*We are Basotho so it doesn't work for us"* suggests that online collaborations lack the relational and physical qualities that make working in groups meaningful or even accountable in the Basotho culture. This leads part-time students to include peers who do not take part in online given group work.

Even in the absence of threats, the sole burden of managing non-participating group members creates significant stress on those part-time students who are committed to

their academic work, as also described in **FG 2B**: *“Some people have different personalities. Some people are way too difficult to work with in groups. Some have different commitments for example when we're talking about the groups you find that I am in a group with someone who is not a teacher.”*

When group work is assigned to part-time students, there is the assumption of homogeneity of circumstances which does not exist. Part-time students comprise people from diverse occupational backgrounds. This is because some part-time students are not teachers; as a result, they may have different work schedules, different skills set and different levels of investment in the degree of commitment on their academic work. This unique circumstance forces those committed part-time students to include names of those who fail to participate in group work due to various reasons.

FG 1A identified how the fear of consequences for complaining about non-participation extends to interactions with their lecturers: “*You find out that when we try to complain our class reps will be like, please don't complain you might even make them angry. But I think it's our right to get our feedback and coursework on time... we are even scared to complain because there might be consequences if I talk too much and complain.”*

This disclosure from **FG 1A** suggests that there is a hierarchical culture where students fear retaliation for any complaint they may make, whether about non-participating group members or about lecturer misconduct. Their class representatives, who are viewed as people who might be expected to advocate for part-time students, instead, choose silence to avoid conflict. This exposes an institutional culture of fear which amplifies all other challenges, therefore making it impossible for part-time students to ask for help or report problems without risking a backlash of victimisation.

Part-time students frequently engage in false participation during group work due to a combination of logistical, cultural, and institutional pressures. Key drivers include geographical dispersion and unreliable technology, which make genuine remote collaboration difficult, alongside a cultural preference for face-to-face interaction that online meetings cannot satisfy.

This study's findings that part-time students engage in false participation during group work is supported by studies conducted by Bravo (2022) and Gorni et al. (2024), which confirmed that geographically dispersed part-time students have limited opportunities for in-person interactions, hindering meaningful collaboration. Further, the finding that part-time students in Lesotho find online meetings culturally unworkable for them as Basotho students aligns with Morena et al. (2024), who found that geographical constraints, including limited access to reliable internet, hinder part-time students' participation in academic activities.

Moreover this study found that part-time students included non-contributing members' names to maintain peace and avoid conflict when they are assigned assessments is consistent with research on power dynamics and advocacy conducted by Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) and Quan et al. (2021). These studies found that part-time students are systemically marginalised and may avoid confrontation due to fear of retaliation. In addition the finding of this study that class representatives of part-time students advocate for silence rather than advocacy supports research by Jones (2025), who found that institutional cultures of fear prevent students from reporting problems that they come across during their studies.

Nevertheless, the data from this study revealed that part-time students in Lesotho's institutions of higher learning come from diverse occupational backgrounds and not all of them are teachers. This leads them to have different levels of investment and commitment which adds a dimension of heterogeneity that existing literature overlooks. Most studies treat part-time students as a relatively homogeneous group, whereas the data in this study revealed that internal diversity of part-time students in Lesotho created tensions that exacerbate ethical challenges that they faced.

The redistributive justice dimension of the social justice theory was seen where part-time students took a risk by submitting previously completed work. To close resource and opportunity gaps created by society, redistributive justice focuses on fixing the systemic structures that create inequality. The findings of this study indicate that part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho do not have equitable access to institutional resources, reasonable deadlines, or the ability to manage workloads, unlike full-time

students. The ethical challenges faced by part-time students are mainly not individual deficits but are caused by institutional structural inequity. Therefore, part-time students are forced into situations where ethical compliance becomes impossible, leading to dishonesty.

The findings also reveal the dimension of recognitive justice; this dimension of the social justice theory was noted where higher education institutions' policies and curricula were mainly structured around full-time students. The data in this study revealed a lack of recognition and lack of cultural awareness in relation to part-time students. The data confirmed this lack of recognition by revealing that institutions impose deadlines without considering that part-time students are working adults with family responsibilities, thus leading part-time students to make ethically inappropriate decisions.

The academic dishonesty revealed in this study is connected to the equity theory. The equity theory states that people always assess fairness by comparing their inputs to their outcomes with those of other people. In this study, part-time students' inputs are time, money and energy while simultaneously managing work and family responsibilities. Their expected outcomes are institutional support, resource availability and understanding, which were not enough as compared to full-time students. The equity theory notes that when people notice that their input to outcomes are unequal, they experience frustration, resentment and demotivation. The data from this study confirms this theory by noting that part-time students' original thoughts are hindered by endless demands from institutions of higher education, which results in submissions of previously completed work as a restorative mechanism to adjust their input to restore equity between their inputs and inadequate outputs by institutions.

The equity theory complemented the social justice theory in this study; this is because the social justice theory focused on systemic barriers that part-time students face and did not fully focus on explaining how part-time students experience and respond to the ethical challenges they faced. The finding that part-time students experienced ethical exhaustion leading to depletion of their capacity to make moral decisions needed the equity theory's understanding of how perceived inequity leads to emotional stress that shaped part-time students' behaviour.

5.6 Why do part-time students face ethical challenges in higher education institutions in Lesotho?

As indicated in the introduction, the presentation of the findings was guided by the research questions. For research question 2, three themes emerged: institutionalised marginalisation and resource deprivation, structural disorganisation and communication breakdown and work-life balance. These themes are presented and discussed below.

5.6.1 Institutionalised marginalisation and resource deprivation

The findings show that systemic exclusion of part-time students from the basic rights, resources, and recognition that are given to their full-time counterparts in institutions of higher learning is a major cause of ethical challenges for part-time students. The findings reveal a pattern of cases where part-time students across the three higher education institutions commonly described situations where they were made to feel unvalued and unwanted as members of the higher education academic community. Four linked subthemes emerged from the data: denial of essential academic facilities, denial of student identity and representation, exclusion from support services and physical exclusion from learning spaces.

5.6.1.1 Denial of essential academic facilities

Part-time students recounted several situations where they were restricted from having basic access to academic resources. The most cited deprivation was that part-time students described being unable to access the library due to lack of student cards, as was stated by **FG 1B**: *"We never feel welcome there. We struggle to go to the library because when you go to the library, they're going to require a student card. So those are challenges that we encounter. I cannot personally just pass and go into the library. No. That's why we will use AI because we don't have access to the library and to, look at the books."*

FG 2A added by showing that: *"The other one also is during our time of preparations or the discussions or the revision week, we are not able to use the library. It is closed. There's nowhere we can go to read the books that can help us to prepare for the exams."*

The denial of resources goes beyond access to the library to include inability to access computer laboratories, projectors, internet connectivity, and even basic classroom furniture.

As **FG 3B** indicated: "*For example, we have no access to the computer lab. We are many, so we don't have access because the computers are few. We should access the facilities that help us in learning."*

FG 2B also added: "*Limited resources, there are no resources here. We missed the point that even when we were supposed to present there are no projectors nothing we're on our own, no teaching materials and all the stuff."*

The rational for not providing part-time students with access to some facilities was revealed by **FG 2A**: *"No, we don't have the access for it because we come to school during the holidays, as we say when our schools, the teachers at the schools have closed, we come to study here at our university. So, at that time the library is closed. Those people also have that time to enjoy their holidays. So, it's another problem because we are not well prepared for the exams."*

Higher education institution's schedules are predominantly structured for staff convenience while ignoring the needs of part-time students. This oversite directly creates educational inequity for part-time students. This denial of access to the library results in part-time students shifting towards unethical alternatives such as the use of AI as previously stated.

Part-time students also insinuated difficulties in accessing technology. As **FG 3A** highlighted: *"In addition to that, we have no Wi-Fi. We are not even sure that it is here or not. You can tell it is there but we cannot access it. What I have realised is that only those lecture rooms that are used by students who are studying for honours and masters there it works efficiently. Other than that, it is a mountain to climb to access it."*

This reveals a practice where institutions of higher learning give priorities to postgraduate (honours and masters) students by providing them with access to WI-FI while leaving part-time students to struggle with finding connection or even ending up using their own data for connection.

This study found that part-time students in Lesotho's higher education institutions are denied access to libraries, computer laboratories, and other crucial academic resources which aligns with existing literature. Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) found that part-time students lack equal access to library facilities in Lesotho as compared to full-time students, corroborating the current study's finding that students cannot access library facilities without student cards.

Savall Ceres (2024) documented that part-time students in Spain face challenges such as limited flexibility and financial constraints that hinder their access to and participation adequately in higher education. The current study extends these findings by demonstrating how the denial of access to physical resources forces part-time students towards unethical alternatives, such as the use of AI. Morena et al. (2024) highlighted that institutions of higher learning in Lesotho are overwhelmed with high student populations, leading to insufficient infrastructure including classrooms, libraries, and technology. The findings of this study that part-time students could not access computer laboratories and projectors directly supports this.

Most importantly, the findings of this study that libraries in institutions of higher learning closured during holidays which were when part-time students attend physical classes showed a unique contribution to the literature. Previous Lesotho studies by Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) and Morena et al. (2024) did not specifically document how holiday schedules create systemic exclusion, making this study a significant extension.

5.6.1.2 Denial of student identity and representation

A common practice that was seen as normal was seen throughout the data, where part-time students were systemically excluded from the Students Representative Council (SRC). **FG 1A** stated explicitly: *"We're not represented in the SRC. And you found out that when we need to give out our consents, we just pass through the class reps. Class reps we pass to our coordinator. We don't we are not even sure if the message is conveyed in the way that we want, because there are just so many channels, but we know we have no representatives. In short, in the SRC."*

The same pattern was confirmed by **FG 2B**: *“There is no connection between us and the SRC of the school. There is no connection, we only meet when they want us to buy data, this is the only time that we see that they know that we exist. There is nothing that they do for us.”*

An explicit rejection and exclusion of part-time students by SRC leadership was recorded from **FG 3A**: *“No. When we talked to the SRC regarding Data one time they said they only help full-time students, we are not part of them. We are there, they are there, there is no collaboration between us and them.”*

The absence of representation in the SRC means that part-time students are excluded from decisions that directly affect their academic experiences such as fee structures, academic calendars and resource allocation. The structured exclusion from formal structures that represent students in institutions of higher learning constitutes what Fraser (2009) names as misrecognition. Misrecognition is a form of societal injustice that involves a certain group being denied full participation rights within a society.

The data also showed that part-time students are deprived of physical identifiers in the form of student cards. **FG 1A** noted: *“We feel we are not valued. You know, we paid for the student cards, but we don't even have them. We are always asked questions by the security guards when we enter the gate. We are never. We never feel welcome there. We struggle to go to the library because when you go to the library, they're going to require a student card. So those are challenges that we encounter. I cannot personally just pass and go into the library. No. That's why we will use AI because we don't have access to the library and to, look at the books. Yes. And you were told that they don't even think a student cards will be there, meaning our money is just gone.”*

Participants also reported being denied physical identifiers of student identity, such as student cards. **FG 1A** noted: *"We paid for the student cards, but we don't even have them. We are always asked questions by the security guards when we enter the gate."* The administration's withholding of students' identification cards carries symbolic weight. Student cards confer individual institutional legitimacy and identification; in their absence the identity and status of part-time students is invalidated, thereby making them feel as if they are not part of the institutions in which they have enrolled.

Part-time students experience systemic misrecognition and exclusion, as they are denied representation in the Student Representative Council (SRC) and deprived of physical identifiers like student cards. This dual exclusion from formal decision-making structures and from tangible symbols of institutional belonging leaves part-time students feeling invalidated, unwelcome, and unable to access basic resources such as the library, ultimately reinforcing their marginalisation within the higher education institution.

The finding from this study showed that part-time students in Lesotho's higher education institutions were excluded from the Students Representative Council (SRC) and they were denied physical identifiers such as student cards, which aligns with Ajjawi et al. (2025) , who found that students' identities, particularly their status as part-time students, directly affect their sense of belonging in institutions of higher learning. Moreover, Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) documented that part-time students in Lesotho felt disrespected, discriminated against, and marginalised, which led to feelings of disconnection and lack of belonging. The current study's finding that students did not feel valued by their institutions and that SRC leadership only help full-time students in certain aspect directly supports this.

Fraser's (2009) concept of misrecognition is supported by Jones (2025) , who documented systemic oppressions in higher education institutions that marginalise certain student groups. The exclusion of part-time students from formal decision-making structures represents a clear case of institutional misrecognition.

Quan et al. (2021) thus remarked that part-time students' lack of representation might be due to perceived transient nature of their engagement in institutions of higher learning; however, the current study revealed active rejection of part-time students, as evidenced by the SRC explicitly stating that they only assisted full-time students to obtain data. This represents a more severe form of exclusion than previously documented in literature.

5.6.1.3 Exclusion from support services

The findings of this study reveal several systemic exclusions where part-time students were excluded from essential institutional support services such as access to health clinics, cafeteria services, printing facilities, and administrative offices.

FG 3A reported: "*Even the health facilities, when full time students close they (health facilities) are even close. Like everything is closed when we are here. So almost everything is closed when we are here. Whenever one of us encounters a health problem here it says it's going to be a serious issue. Everything is on us, but we pay. Even the cafeteria, the shops, everything. When they (full-time students) close, everything closes. So now we are left."*

FG 2A added: *"The academic offices are now closed for us to go and get our services. Sometimes, like I myself, I, registered late, so I need to go there and get the services. The problem is that the offices are now closed for us to go and be helped. So nothing we can do. This means that we are denied."*

The same pattern is followed by catering and retail services who close when full-time students go on holiday. As was noted by **FG 3A**: *"Even the cafeteria, the shops, everything. When they (full-time students) close, everything closes. So now we are left."*

Another critical support service from which part-time students are excluded is accommodation. **FG 3A** went on to expose: *"The accommodation is only for full-time students, we do not have access to dormitories, we are on our own. We have to see ourselves that we have accommodation, we have everything."*

FG 2B shared the same feelings and added: *"They already have dormitories, they can allow us maybe to live there for free while we are here. Now I came here for four days but where I am staying I have already promised the owner that I will pay for his full month rent in order for him to let me have a roof on my head when I am here."*

Part-time students face systemic exclusion from essential institution support services such as health clinics, cafeterias, printing facilities, administrative offices, and accommodation. This happens because these services operate only in connection with full-time students' schedules and needs. As a result, part-time students do not have access to health care, late registration assistance, on-campus dining, or dormitories, despite paying fees, which forces them to bear significant personal and financial burdens.

These findings align with Yifei et al. (2025) , who noted that support services are mostly designed and structured with full-time students in mind, leading to operational hours

inaccessible to part-time students. Moreover Fynn and Mashile (2022) found that structural barriers that part-time students face, raise profound ethical questions about the moral defensibility of institutional practices, where institutions expect students to perform academically without providing them with the necessary conditions for success. The findings of the current study that administrative offices in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho closed when part-time students need them directly supports this.

Sikhwari et al. (2020) found that part-time students face additional challenges such as limited access to support services because institutional structures were designed around full-time students. The current study's finding that health facilities, cafeterias, and shops close when full-time students close in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho directly matches with this.

In contrast, Masuku et al. (2025) and Zungu (2022) documented financial stress among South African part-time students related to transportation and living expenses. However, the current study reveals a more extreme situation where part-time students had to secure accommodation for themselves despite institutions having dormitories available, representing a policy choice to exclude rather than a case of resource shortage.

5.6.1.4 Physical exclusion from learning spaces

A subtheme of physical exclusion from areas meant for learning emerged from the data. The data shows that part-time students reported being physically moved between classrooms, being denied access to some lecture halls and even subjected to fines for using some learning spaces that were reserved for certain students.

FG 3A described: *"We do not have classes where we discuss like it has been said but the honours students literally expel us with the help of security officers from some lecture rooms. And we are told that these classes are reserved for honours and masters students only you are found there, it is written that you will pay M200 fine fee."*

FG 1A reported: *"And the use of classrooms. It's a hassle. There are some classrooms that we are like restricted or prohibited to use and time examination time we need to discuss. You go to this room, you're not allowed to use that one. You go to this one, you're not allowed to use that one. And you may find that we need to plug our, our devices and*

the room that we like to end up using. There's no like electrical sockets in there." **FG 2A** added: *"The other point is the, I don't know if we can say it's a lack of resources because we share our classrooms with the full-time students. So sometimes when we it's our own time to study in the same class, the full times will be occupying the classrooms. There's no place for us to have the discussions or for preparations for the group works or presentations. So sometimes it's it becomes very difficult for us to work in such an environment."*

Classroom access delays were also discovered as a process that wastes precious instructional time for part-time students. **FG 3A** noted: *"Even the lecture rooms. Every morning when we are supposed to attend the lectures, you find that most of the lecture rooms are still locked. We have to wait for something close to 30 minutes before they can be opened. So it says it consumes a lot of time."*

Part-time students face physical exclusion from learning spaces as they are removed from lecture rooms which are reserved for honours and masters students, and they are threatened with fines if they enter such learning spaces. This aligns with Cardellino and Deed (2024) , who noted that ethical considerations are significant to ensure equitable educational experiences for part-time students, but part-time students frequently encounter challenges from educational systems designed to favour full-time students. Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) found that part-time students faced unfair treatment from both full-time students and non-academic staff during their campus visits. The current study extends these findings by documenting explicit policies where honours and masters students expelled part-time students from learning spaces with the help of security officers.

Canty et al. (2020) and Hayman et al. (2022) documented that part-time students struggled to develop meaningful connections with their peers due to limited opportunities for interaction. Findings from this study suggest that physical exclusion directly contributes to social isolation. Further, the explicit threat of financial penalties on part-time students for using some learning spaces represents a level of institutional hostility not documented in previous literature. This suggests that exclusion is not merely passive

neglect but active enforcement of discriminatory policies by institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

The findings in this study that part-time students lack access to the library, do not receive their student cards and lack access to technology, points to a violation of the equity theory. According to Adams (1963), people assess fairness by comparing their input-output ratios against those of others at the same level. An input outcome imbalance in this study was revealed where inputs from part-time students were payments of fees, time investment and travel costs, while preserved outcomes from institutions include no library access, no WIFI access, no student cards and no access to the computer laboratory.

Part-time students in this study experienced negative inequity, which is defined by Adams (1963) as a situation where people feel under-rewarded based on their contributions. The findings that part-time students resorted to using AI because they did not have access to the library represents a behavioural restoration mechanism where part-time students resort to unethical behaviour to submit their assessments.

Principles of the social justice theory were revealed, where part-time students were denied essential academic facilities. The distributive injustice dimension of the social justice theory was noted where the participants revealed that in institutions of higher learning, study resources were allocated based on enrolment status and not on the need of such resources. Institutions' scheduling of library access in such a way that privileges staff and not part-time students demonstrate distributive injustice.

The dimension of recognitive injustice appeared where **FG 1B** stated: "*We never feel welcome there."* The social justice theory pays attention not only to equal distribution but also to the recognition of all members within a society. The prioritisation of postgraduate students in institutions of higher learning represents what Rentzi (2024) identified as educational inequity, which was a situation where some students were systemically disadvantaged based on their status with different institutions. The progression from structural injustice to ethical compromise provides a crucial link between theory and empirical data. The social justice theory establishes the institutional frameworks such as spatial marginalisation and service withdrawal; these frameworks generate perceived inequity under Equity Theory. Consequently, these subjective experiences of unfairness

motivate corrective actions by part-time students. These actions manifest as the ethical challenges that this thesis investigates.

5.6.2 Structural disorganisation and communication breakdown

The participants revealed several operational failures across institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. These breakdowns resulted in a chaotic learning environment overshadowed by unreliable schedules, poor communication, unaddressed grievances and staff-related disruptions. The structural disorganisation and communication breakdown create an environment where part-time students are compelled to constantly make ethically questionable decisions simply to survive their academic journey. The structural failures in institutions of higher learning represent distributive injustices and inequitable treatment that violate fundamental principles of fair access to higher education on the part of part-time students.

5.6.2.1 Calendar and timetable chaos

One of the most prominent causes of ethical challenges that emerged from the data revolved around the disorganisation of academic calendars and timetables in relation to part-time students. Unlike full-time students, who have a clear and well organised academic calendar, part-time students consistently reported having an unplanned calendar. As **FG 1A** stated: *"There is a calendar. Part-time students like these. It says nothing about us. We don't even know whether we are part of the institution or not, because every. Everything that are being said in there, like there's nothing that really, you know, talks about the part-time student."*

The removal of part-time students from official institutional documentation is not a minor oversight but an ethical violation that leads to part-time students being unable to plan their lives, families, and workplaces around their studies.

The results of calendar exclusion are severe as **FG 1A** continued: *"Another thing is that we don't really know when are we opening for another semester this goes back to the school almanac or school calendar. We normally open in April, but this time around we opened way before April. Early March, early March. Was it? Yes. In February. Yes. End*

of February. We were not prepared to go to school. We had plans before that, knowing that we would open during the Easter holidays."

The unpredictable calendar forces part-time students to always be ready to be called to school anytime which is a state of readiness that full-time students are not required to maintain. The ethical challenge emerges when the unique stature of part-time students is paid attention to, these students are simultaneously managing professional responsibilities as teachers and familial obligations. The failures of institutions of higher learning in Lesotho to provide stable, predictable scheduling indirectly forces students to choose between professional reliability and academic commitment, a choice that full-time students are never compelled to make.

FG 2B described the compressed nature of part-time students' academic schedule: *"And on that point the institution does not cater for us because we just expect to be at school immediately after the school closed they don't even give us week to prepare ourselves to go at home. Others are living in towns or at rural areas at their work places and they have to travel to other places to meet their family members. But we're not given that chance once we close today we are given only one day then we are expected to come to school yeah! I think that divorce can happen because of this because we always telling the partner that I am not coming I am going to the school. Then they say what is this school for, always going to school even during Easter, even during Christmas always we're going to school, during winter we're not even given certain time in between our workplace and coming here."*

In addition, **FG 3A** described the intensity of their academic schedule: *"This issue of coming here for only four days finishes our money, the one that we still want, we don't have money sir. Coming here for four days and another four days during September time…This one of coming here for a few days should be looked into."*

Higher education institutions' neglect of part-time students' scheduling needs results in an ethical failure. The disorganisation failure not only generates financial strains, relational stress, and even rising marital breakdown, but also compels part-time students to make difficult choices that full-time students do not have to make.

The literature supports the findings of this study that calendar disorganisation in institutions of higher learning creates significant challenges for part-time students. Tlali et al. (2019) documented that insufficient infrastructure and organisation in Lesotho's higher education institutions directly affects the quality of services available to part-time students. Also, the findings of this current study are in line with Caldwell et al. (2025) and Turner's (2023) characterisation of part-time students as invisible students, which is a reflection of systemic failure of institutional systems to recognize and address part-time students' needs.

Savall Ceres (2024) found that part-time students in Spain face challenges including limited flexibility and balancing studies with work or family commitments, which corroborates the findings of the current study that unpredictable calendars force part-time students to maintain a state of readiness not required of full-time students as they can be called to perform academic related activities at any time.

Most importantly, the findings of this study that calendar disorganisation can contribute to marital breakdown and divorce for part-time students in Lesotho represents a significant contribution not widely documented in existing literature.

5.6.2.2 Lack of responsive mechanisms

One of the most common findings throughout the three institutions of higher learning in Lesotho was the lack of responsive mechanisms within the institutions. Even in situations where part-time students found ways to raise their concerns, their efforts were met with dismissals and silence from those in authority. As stated by **FG 1A**: *"We also raised this point and we were advised to write a letter that we are still awaiting for its response? Yeah. Because nobody ever got back to us."*

The same concern was raised by **FG 3A**: *"In addition to that our coordinator is the one that requested that we write about all the challenges that we encountered but after writing that letter we never received even a single piece of information concerning our challenges, whether they are going to addressed or we just wrote them for fun."*

The data shows that despite having followed some procedures to lodge their complaints, part-time students received no official responses or any updates. This shows that

institutions of higher learning in Lesotho do not have clear channels for part-time students to express their challenges and subsequently have those challenges addressed. This highlights the critical importance of not merely having complaint channels, but ensuring they are accompanied by transparent, responsive, and accountable follow-up processes otherwise, such channels risk becoming symbolic exercises that discourage future reporting and undermine organisational credibility to part-time students.

The findings from the current study about lack of responsive mechanisms in institutions of higher learning strongly aligns with existing literature. Quan et al. (2021) found that part-time students often find their needs and contributions ignored in institutional governance and decision-making processes. The study attributed this oversight to factors including the perceived transient nature of part-time students' engagement and a lack of dedicated channels for part-time students to provide feedback to institutional management.

Jones (2025) in Canada highlighted that despite increased awareness and available support, many part-time students do not disclose their experiences due to institutional barriers and systemic oppressions, which connects to the current findings that part-time students' efforts to raise concerns are met with dismissals and silence. The literature also supports the findings that institutions often fail to create trusting and inclusive climates where all students feel heard.

Fynn and Mashile (2022) in South Africa revealed that structural barriers faced by part-time students raise profound ethical questions about the moral defensibility of institutional practices. This supports the findings of the current study that institutions of higher learning have complaint channels that lack transparent, responsive follow-up processes. While the literature documents that part-time students face barriers in having their concerns addressed, there is limited research on the specific cases where institutions request students to document their ethical challenges and then never responded. The literature tends to focus more on the existence or non-existence of support mechanisms for students rather than the ethical implications of responsive channels that exist but are deliberately ignored.

5.6.2.3 Last-minute and absent communication

Findings reveal that part-time students receive critical information untimely, leaving part-time students with insufficient time to respond appropriately. As **FG 1A** explained: *"The line of communication is not really clear. Yes there is no communication. Remember last year we were told that we're going to offer residential classes in a place in town and after the college had that, people have started planning on where they're going to stay for that time. Like it just changed instantly. And we were told the following day that you're not. You're no longer going to classes in town. You're going to the main campus out of town. Yes. And by that time, people had already paid, and it was hard for them to get their refunds. Okay."*

Additionally, **FG 1A** explained how delayed communication impacted on the part-time students' ability to balance their work with their studies: *"The other one is that of a delay in communication. They haven't said anything about our Easter residentials now, but I'm telling you, they might say it next week. And for me to tell my employer saying Monday I won't be in. If they tell me on Friday, and me telling my employer that on Monday I won't be in and the employer will be like, really? How long have you known about this? So Monday, I want you in and you tell me you won't be in. So it really causes us inconvenience. We wish they could communicate prior."*

Last-minute communication forces part-time students to choose between their professional duties and their academic responsibilities, which sometimes damages their workplace relationships and credibility.

Correspondingly, **FG 2B** described how registration deadlines were communicated with insufficient notice: *"It comes on the coordinator and then it is disseminated to our class reps. sometimes within the short period of time, three days, five days maximum and then we are expected to have done our part. We understand it is our responsibility but if it is well communicated, it becomes easier for us."*

The timeframe given to part-time students is inadequate, as they work while studying and some also have family responsibilities. The action of providing part-time students with insufficient time to prepare directly affects their ability to secure finances, arrange

transport for those who live far and request for leave from their employers, which often impacts them negatively.

The data also showed that some communication from institutions of higher learning often came through informal channels that lack credibility, which becomes problematic when part-time students must justify their absenteeism at their workplaces. **FG 1A** highlighted this issue: *"True even the schedules or timetables. They don't really show where they are from. It's as if I made it myself. If it was possible to communicate it in a way like a school logo, like a stamp to show the date, you know, so that when we pass such information to our directors or principal, they're authentic. Sometimes it's just a screenshot being shared to us. This is a timetable. This is your examination timetable. I remember one time my boss asked me, what is this?"*

Higher education institutions' inability to provide part-time students with official and verifiable communication places part-time students in a position where they cannot prove the credibility of the academic communication to their employers, leading to suspicion and strained professional relationships with employers.

FG 2B reinforced this concern noting: *"And I also think that the way the information is passed to us from the college to us as students is not a good way because you may find that sometimes you just see things on the... Is it on the social media platform, And you may see that those news affect us and we just see them. And maybe we'll even discuss that. Maybe this is not true. Let us wait for the official something for us to know about them. But we would wait until we may find ourselves that this is going to be true."*

The informal communication used by institutions of higher learning leave part-time students uncertain of the legitimacy and trustworthiness of the information, which leaves them feeling anxious and unable to plan well. For those part-time students who stay or work far from the institutions and must organise accommodation, this poses financial consequences.

This study's findings about last-minute communication align with research by Letseka-Manka et al. (2023), who found that part-time students in Lesotho experienced communication breakdown with faculty and were excluded from key educational

experiences. The literature supports the findings of this study that part-time students face significant challenges when institutions fail to provide timely and official communication. Furthermore, Virtue et al. (2023) documented how support systems such as advising, financial aid, and success programmes may be less accessible to part-time students in institutions of higher learning, which aligns with the findings of the current study that communication to part-time students in Lesotho often comes through informal channels that lack credibility. Informal communication becomes problematic when part-time students must justify their absenteeism from their workplaces. Likewise, Harahap and Siregar's (2023) study found that the need to take time off work for exams or project work can create friction with supervisors and part-time students. This poses a dilemma for students as they are conflicted between trusting unofficial institutional media communications and waiting for official communication, and previous research does not address this issue.

5.6.2.4 Lecture-related issues

Among the most recurring ethical challenges were those related to lecturers' pedagogical behaviour. Part-time students detailed patterns of the institution's late dissemination of essential learning materials, sometimes sent out towards the end of the semester as exams will be approaching. Consequently, this causes overwhelming barriers to part-time students' academic journey.

FG 1A stated: *"The other one is of the course outline. They provide us with the course at around the last minute when we approach the exam. They don't give us the course outline before we start our lecture or what it is before we start our classes. They don't do that, but later, when we approach the exams, they will now give us the course outline. Some they don't even give that until we write exams. They keep on saying, remind me. I'm still preparing it. I'm still preparing it to the extent that you find that it is time for the examinations, while we continue asking about the course outline."*

The withholding of important documents that provide a clear roadmap for part-time students while studying is ethically problematic. It restricts part-time students from planning their study time in advance, while also forcing part-time students to rely on

incomplete information especially when deciding on the topics to prioritise while studying. This further causes unnecessary worrying and uncertainly.

The seen pattern goes beyond course outlines to lecture notes. As **FG 1A** continued to show: "*It's hard because they're not even providing us with what they would want us to… We're not saying give us word by word. Okay. But at least remember, hey! at least share what they have because we know they've compiled something. They don't do that some you find that the worst thing is that they promise after-class. I'm going to share after class. I'm going to share until the date. We are from the examination, the recent examination now we went there without the notes that somebody has always promised us."*

The constant failure of lecturers to share notes and course outlines results in part-time students no longer trusting their lecturers. As a result, students struggle with relying on the lecturers' communication because of the repeated failure to deliver their promises. This correlates with Fynn and Mashile's (2022) study which found that part-time students face congestion of assessment deadlines and expectations to perform without sufficient time to complete schoolwork. The literature also supports that institutional practices create environments where part-time students cannot adequately prepare for their studies.

Grigoreva et al. (2025) found that extreme time constraints and fatigue which are part of part-time students' schedules, can elevate the risk of academic misconduct, which connects to the current study's findings that withholding course outlines forces part-time students to make decisions based on incomplete information. Additionally, Dawar (2025) and Gauci and Carabott (2025) assert that the failure to provide learning material timeously creates the pressure to succeed, thus leading part-time students to make ethically questionable behaviour.

Although the literature on part-time students addresses academic integrity pressures and support deficits, it does not extensively examine how lecturers' pedagogical behaviour specifically that of withholding course outlines and lecture notes, lead to an ethical behaviour by part-time students. Findings from this study thus reveal violations of the social justice theory (Rawls, 1971) across redistributive, recognitive, and representational justice dimensions. The redistributive justice, which focuses on addressing unequal resource allocation in a society, is reflected through part-time students' exclusion from

official schedules. This denies them the predictable time resource which is essential for them to balance their studies with work and family, while compressed scheduling and withheld lecture notes and course outlines create material inequity that full-time students did not face.

The higher education institutions' failure to provide calendars and schedules that takes cognisance of part-time students, represents recognitive justice, which is concerned with misrecognition and lack of cultural respect. Informal communication via unverified screenshots degrades part-time students' status as legitimate members of institutions of higher learning, and institutional silence in response to formal complaints reinforces status hierarchies. Representational justice violations appear where part-time students are excluded from making decisions related to sudden venue changes made without student input. Thus, this contradicts the need for consultative and participative processes.

The data strongly supports the equity theory (Adams, 1963) by revealing that part-time students perceive immense input-output imbalances across financial, professional, and relational domains in institutions of higher learning. The input-output imbalances include depleting limited funds for a compressed residential period or risking marital stability, which part-time students compare as unfavourable against the assumed standard of full-time students, leading to frustration, resentment, demotivation, and anxiety. In response to this perceived inequity, part-time students attempt physical restoration behaviours such as writing complaint letters, but institutional non-responsiveness blocks this pathway and fosters anticipated restoration failure and withdrawal.

5.6.3 Work-life balance

As part of addressing reasons why part-time students face ethical challenges in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho, the participants revealed that work-life balance was another factor. The data showed that work-life balance was not just a matter of poor time management but was composed of deep ethical challenges that forced part-time students to continuously navigate competing responsibilities ranging from academic responsibilities, professional responsibilities and family commitments. The analysis of work-life balance is organised around four subthemes: having less time with family,

marriage under strain from study commitments, no preparation time between work and school and work and class time conflict

5.6.3.1 Having less time with family

A pattern of reduced family time emerged from the data where part-time students reported a gradual withdrawal from family life when the demands of their academic life increased. Time which was previously used by part-time students to focus on domestic responsibilities and familial relationships was diverted towards academic life.

As **FG 1B** alluded to family time deprivation: *"We no longer have enough time to spend with families or do any to run errands. When you're from work, you have to prepare for an online class."*

This shows that part-time students' daily schedule is constricted; they must switch from professional life to domestic life and to student life. This switching of roles leaves part-time students with no extra time to interact with their families.

FG 1B went on to reveal: *"We do not have life. We are only focussing on that routine. We no longer see our family members. We no longer attend funerals or any other thing because we are always packed."*

The statement above shows how academic life and academic responsibilities have taken over part-time students' lives. The academic responsibilities bear cultural impact, thus leading to part-time students' failure to attend culturally significant ceremonies such as funerals. This represents not just a personal loss, but a violation of community expectations, potentially leading to societal isolation.

The escalating severity of the demand for part-time students' time was articulated by **FG 3A**: *"We do not have family time, one, we don't have time for the kids, the husband is always complaining you are here now and at 5 o'clock, you are going to wake him up with the lecture in the morning."*

The loss of family time is seen by part-time students as the first and most obvious consequence of studying part-time. Moreover, parental responsibilities are difficult for

part-time students to fulfil while working and studying as **FG 2B** emphasised: *"To kids we do not have much time to be with them."*

FG 1A also highlighted: *"There are challenges because we have kids. There are young kids who would be demanding time when I'm attending my online class. My son would just come in. Mommy, this this this, this. I want the balloon in there. Can you please give me that balloon? I'm like, can you please say your sister should give you."*

The participants' remarks highlight how the demarcation between academic and family life becomes non-existent when part-time students learn from home. The child's interruption is seen not as misbehaviour but as natural childhood behaviour because the child does not comprehend that their parent simultaneously a student. The findings that part-time students experience reduced family time while studying aligns with existing literature. The literature identifies that part-time students face family responsibilities where they have caregiving roles for their children, which can conflict with academic obligations (Maynard, li & Slate, 2021). This directly supports the finding of this study that part-time students experience a gradual withdrawal from family life when the demands of their academic life increase.

Andrade et al. (2024) found that part-time students often need to adapt their schedules and share household and childcare duties to manage their commitments to their studies effectively. This aligns with the finding that time previously used for domestic responsibilities and family relationships was diverted towards academic life after enrolment in higher education institutions. Maluleka et al.'s (2023) study on student mothers in Africa revealed that part-time students struggle to balance their dual roles as students and as mothers, which directly supports the current study's finding that parental responsibilities are difficult to fulfil while working and studying part-time.

The specific finding from the data that part-time students no longer attend funerals or any other social events because they are always busy with their academic work aligns with the literature on cultural and community obligations. The literature notes that part-time students have social and emotional roles that require them to maintain good relationships with their partners, family members, and peers; yet they fail due to academic overload

and the inability to fulfil these roles represents a significant ethical challenge for part-time students (Nirmalasari & Minai, 2023).

The findings from this study that part-time students cannot attend culturally significant ceremonies such as funerals represents a cultural dimension of ethical challenge that is not extensively addressed in the literature. Most studies focus on the practical and psychological aspects of reduced family time rather than the cultural consequences of being unable to fulfil community expectations. The inability to attend funerals represents not just a personal loss but a violation of community expectations, which may lead to societal isolation and adds a culturally specific dimension that is largely absent from international literature.

5.6.3.2 Marriage under strain from study commitments

Marital relationship strain emerged as one of the subthemes under work-life balance. The findings reveal that part-time students had tensions ranging from partners complaining about their intensive focus on their studies, leading to threats of relationship dissolutions due to their focus on academic life.

The most explicit articulation of this subtheme was provided by **FG 2B** who stated: *"I think that divorce can happen because of this because we always telling the partner that I am not coming I am going to the school. Then they say what is this school for, always going to school even during Easter, even during Christmas always we're going to school, during winter we're not even given certain time in between our workplace and coming here."* This shows that part-time students' academic commitments straddle over holiday time such as Easter holidays and Christmas holidays, which are times traditionally reserved for family time and rest. Part-time students' lack of availability to be with their families has adverse consequences on their marriages.

To illustrate marital strains, a vivid picture was portrayed by **FG 2B**: *"Like now my husband come on Thursday when he arrived home that is when I arrived here at school. He is leaving on Monday, and that is when I will be leaving here. It is not easy."* There is a pattern of crossed paths between part-time students and their spouses resulting in them

not being present at the same time in their homes. Part-time students' academic schedule disrupts the basic coordination of marital life leading to significant relational distress.

Marital tensions were also described by **FG 3A**: *"Our husbands are going to leave us. We do not have family time, one, we don't have time for the kids, the husband is always complaining you are here now and at 5 o'clock, you are going to wake him up with the lecture in the morning."* There is clear indication that part-time students' spouses complain about the scheduling of classes early in the morning, when people are still asleep. Lectures also happen during times when spouses are trying to rest, which creates direct competition between academic commitments and spouse's need for attention.

FG 1A also provided a clear detailed account of marital strain due to academic commitments: *"The other one maybe is that of our spouses. We have spouses. You find out that one lecturer takes more than his or her or her time. After that, I have to do the group work. My spouse is waiting there. As adults, I just sleep when I get to bed and some such things, they cause tension in our families that you're always tired. You're always busy with this school."* The used of *"some such things"* appears in short reference to intimate relation difficulties which could not be said explicitly because of the focus group setting. The is also an indication that part-time students are consistently exhausted and unavailable leading to spouses feeling ignored and isolated.

A dimension of gender roles was revealed by **FG 1B**: *"One of the challenges that I had to face was having to be a mom, a wife and being a part-time student. Online classes, oh, it's a bit messy. It's not easy, honestly."* Part-time students struggle to fulfil all the gender roles assigned to them simultaneously because of the academic load that they have.

Unlike full-time students who may often be young and unmarried, part-time students, as revealed by findings in this study, must simultaneously deal with academic demands and the demands of marital relationships. The data suggests that part-time students view their study commitments as a barrier that withdraws them from their family presence. The data suggests that female part-time students bear a burden of managing both their academic responsibilities and domestic expectations.

Part-time students' marital relationships are strained from study commitments as revealed by this study, which aligns with literature that notes that part-time students must maintain good relationships with their partners, family members, and peers, while dealing with feelings of isolation due to their unique schooling situation (Nirmalasari & Minai, 2023). Also, the finding that part-time students' partners complain about their focus on studies aligns with research showing that part-time students may sacrifice their time to fulfil these extra-role behaviours, leading to increased work and family conflict (Johansson & Hart, 2023).

These findings on relationship strains are similar to findings from a study conducted by Morena et al. (2024). The findings revealed that in Lesotho, part-time students often struggle to balance their professional responsibilities, personal obligations, and academic pursuits simultaneously, leading to time constraints, fatigue, and stress. The specific finding on limited availability for family time during holidays and rest aligns with the Johansson and Hart's (2023) findings on a study conducted to identify work-leisure conflict. The findings revealed that part-time students experience conflict between academic demands and time for rest and family (Johansson and Hart, 2023).

There is a gap in the literature regarding the specific impact of part-time studies on marital relationships. Most studies focus on work-family conflict in general terms without specifically examining how part-time study strain marital relationships. These marital and familial dynamics as revealed by the findings from this current study represent a specific marital dynamic not directly documented in existing research.

5.6.3.3 No preparation time between work and school

This subtheme focuses on the time constraints experienced by part-time students between work duties and academic requirements. Part-time students noted the lack of a transitional period before attending physical classes and online classes, which would enable them to mentally, financially, and logistically switch from their role as teachers to that of being students.

FG 3A provided a clear description of part-time students not having time between work and school: *"We will come here only when we write exams. I mean almost everybody*

does. But us we do online classes, we go to work every day, there is a class every day 5pm to 7pm, Monday to Saturday or Sunday. there is our work, I teach so many pupils I don't know what should be done. Should we come here, it's like we are daily students because I thought online we learn from home then we come to school when we write exams. So we are here, when we leave here we are not going to rest, on Monday when schools open online classes will be on again. We do not have any time to rest."

The data not only reveals a lack of transitional time between work and study but also highlights the absence of recovery time while studying part-time. Part-time students move from their work, which is highly demanding, to more academic work, which is also highly demanding, without any pause in between.

The logistical impossibility of preparation was outlined by **FG 2B**: *"is a challenging one because if I'm leaving school at 4:00 pm sometimes due to the office duties in extends to 6:00 pm so the class begins at six sometimes I'm driving I'm on my way home."* The data shows that sometimes when online classes begin some part-time students are literally traveling home. This puts them in a situation where they are unable to fully participate in their class discussions as driving requires their full attention.

In terms of learner outcome and productivity **FG 3B** stated: *"At my workplace, I don't think I am productive enough. Because I have a lot to do when it comes to my schoolwork. The learners do suffer because I do not give them enough time to teach them."* The findings revealed that the inability of part-time students to plan between their work and school also affects their work performance which in turn affects the learners they teach.

Another perspective on preparation time was provided by **FG 1A**: *"When it comes to a timetable. The one that we were just saying, like, we don't even understand it. And nobody's even responsible to make us understand the timetable."* The lack of a clear timetable worsens the preparation problem faced by part-time students, as they are unable to prepare for what they cannot predict.

Unlike full-time students who may have dedicated academic time, part-time students are forced to automatically shift from professional life to academic life most of the time while in transit from their workplaces. The lack of preparation time contributes to exhaustion,

reduced learning outcomes, and workplace tensions as documented throughout the transcripts. This finding on the shift from demanding work to academics, which are demanding, align with findings from a study conducted by Pacheco et al. (2021) on strain-based conflict. The study found that in strain-based contexts, stressful situations in one domain result in negative emotions and physical strain such as tension, anxiety, depression, or energy depletion (Pacheco et al., 2021).

The specific finding that part-time teachers feel they are not productive enough at work reveals that insufficient time is dedicated to teaching and supporting learners, which impacts on their academic performance. This shows that balancing academic and work responsibilities can lead to lower overall professionalism scores and reduced academic performance of part-time students (Alameddine et al., 2022).

Additionally, the findings that part-time students sometimes attend online classes while driving or on their way home align with findings from a study conducted by Morena at al. (2024). The study revealed that part-time students face geographical constraints and limited access to reliable internet and transportation which can hinder part-time students' participation in classes and their academic activities (Morena et al., 2024).

The literature does not extensively address the concept of preparation time as an ethical challenge. While the literature addresses time-based conflict generally, the specific finding that the lack of a transitional period between roles creates unique ethical challenges for part-time students represents a more widely understood situation which can be found in existing research.

5.6.3.4 Work and class time conflict

The data from the study also revealed work and class time conflict as another subtheme, which showed the mismatch between part-time students' teaching obligations and their study time schedule. Unlike preparation time, which is connected to transitions between work and class time, work and class conflict refers to situations where part-time students must choose between attending work and attending classes because both may be scheduled at the same time.

Early in the study, **FG 1A** provided an example: *"It was when we were supposed to join the classes, right. And then most of our, classmates, like the time clashed because as we all know that we teach in different schools, some teach in private schools, some teach in government schools. So they had some, what was it like the celebrations that they were? Was it. Yes. So we were supposed to have a class at that time. And then we asked one of our class reps to relay the message to the lecturers to tell them that we are really I mean, we won't be able to attend classes or even teach. We were supposed to take a test, right? Yes. And it raised some mixed emotions because we know that we have to. Right. But at the same time, there are people who are saying we can't. We are not even home at I mean, during this time that you guys want us to write the test."* A description of a situation where school-scheduled celebrations conflicted with institutional class attendance was given. This clash in the timetables leads part-time students to have to choose between attending work-related activities and academic classes.

A clear cause of ethical problems for part-time students was given by **FG 3B**: *"I work in a private... In a private what? School. So you may find that sometimes when I have to come to the campus, the schools are not yet closed. So that is a big challenge. I cannot drop my work and come to school. So you may find that sometimes I will be late to come for classes. I will be late to begin the classes."* A clear cause of ethical challenges for part-time students is that missing work is not optional and the economic consequences of not going to work outweigh those of missing their academic classes. As a result, they end up missing some of their classes to go to work.

FG 3B described another outcome of work and class time conflict: *"I lose some of the concepts that are being delivered on the days that I won't be at school."* Part-time students' ethical challenges are caused by learning deficits that accumulate over time as they miss classes. There is a learning gap in their understanding that may affect forthcoming learning and their overall academic performance.

An introduction of power dynamics with principals was introduced by **FG 1A**: *"Even at our work, sometimes they the university calendar does not really allow does not match exactly with our school calendar. So it causes clash among our ourselves and the principals at our school because they sometimes do not allow us to go to the classes during our work*

classes." There is misalignment between the part-time students' work calendar and the school calendar. As a result, part-time students cannot simply choose to miss work and attend their classes, as they must obtain permission from their employers, who are often unsympathetic.

Work and class time conflict causes part-time students' ethical challenges. The participants revealed that part-time students mainly resolve this cause of ethical challenge by choosing work over their studies. They choose work over studies, not because they value work more but because the consequences of not going to work are more severe than those of not going to school.

The findings of this study that part-time students experience direct conflicts between work obligations and school attendance is strongly supported by Vokic et al. (2021) who identified that work-school conflict was a specific form of work-life conflict defined as a situation that occurs when addressing work-related demands which drain student workers' resources and constrains their ability to fulfil school responsibilities.

Additionally, the findings that a conflicting schedule between work and classes align with research showing that the most common conflicts occur between work and scholastic responsibilities that part-time students have. As a result, part-time students struggle to balance employment demands with school requirements (Grozev & Easterbrook, 2022).

Also, the findings that there is misalignment between the part-time students' work calendar and the institutional calendars represents a specific structural failure that is acknowledged in the literature (Letseka-Manka et al., 2023; Morena et al., 2024) but not extensively analysed in terms of its ethical implications. The literature tends to treat this situation as a logistical problem rather than an ethical one that forces students into impossible choices.

The findings show a strong connection to the social justice theory by Rawls (1971), revealing that the ethical challenges faced by part-time students arise from institutional structures that fail to accommodate part-time students. The data also shows a failure in recognitive justice where policies of institutions of higher learning are designed with full-time students in mind, who most of the time are young, unmarried and without work or

family responsibilities. The narratives around family time deprivations and marital strains connected to part-time students, which were discovered in this study, highlight this misrecognition.

The emotional distress shown in the data shows a connection to the equity theory by Adams (1963). The data in the study revealed that part-time students were constantly comparing their inputs and outcomes, leading to a perception of negative inequity. The inputs from part-time students included not just tuition, their time and intellectual effort, but also the sacrifice of part-time students' emotional well-being, family relationships, and cultural obligations. Part-time students perceive the outcomes from institutions as a source of loss and not as a reward.

The work-life balance data does not just show personal challenges for part-time students. Through the dual lens of the social justice theory and the equity theory, it is seen as evidence of institutional injustice that leads part-time students to act unethically as a survival mechanism.

5.7 Which strategies can be used by higher education institutions to reduce ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho?

As indicated in the introduction, the presentation of the findings was guided by the research questions. For research question 3, two themes emerged: 'Establish legitimate communication channels and integration into the school governance structure'; and 'Ensure financial affordability and predictability'. These themes are presented and discussed in the subsequent sections.

5.7.1 Establish legitimate communication channels and integration into the school governance structure

To address the third research question, which aims to identify strategies that can be used by higher education institutions to reduce ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho, the theme of establishing legitimate communication channels and integration into the school governance structure emerged. The approaches that emerged from the data aim to create an inclusive, transparent institutional environments that aim to reduce ethical challenges for part-time students. This part of the study will be centred around the

following subthemes: ‘Face-to-face communication’; ‘Inclusion in decision-making processes’; ‘Student governance representative’; and ‘Timely communication’.

5.7.1.1 Face-to-face communication

The data from this study revealed a pattern where higher education institutions rely heavily on mediated communication in the form of social media posts, screenshots, coordinators and class representative messages. As such, part-time students desired to have direct physical communication with institutional decision-makers. Face-to-face communication emerged as a critical need across all focus groups.

FG 1A explicitly state: *“Since we are not even a large group, once in a while, they can even come to address us physically. We should feel that importance.”* The physical presence of institutional authorities to address them is seen as important as it will validate their existence as members of the academic communities.

The same group revealed that orientation occurred *“Only once when we were first years”* with the explicit request that such orientation happen “at least once every year.” This annual expectation suggests that part-time students recognise the evolving nature of their challenges and desire recurring opportunities for direct engagement with the institution’s authority rather than seeing them once.

FG 1B reinforced these findings of the study by stating: *“I think they should call meetings where we can be able to raise out our opinions. They should not just make decisions without hearing our side of the point.”* The data shows that part-time students prefer face-to-face communication as a strategy to promote procedural justice, where part-time students want to have a say before decisions that concern them are made.

FG 2A expressed the desire for direct communication: *“I think another thing is that the coordinator should discuss things with us as we are adults. We have to, After every semester, we can just sit together and discuss what is your problem? How can we find a solution for that? By doing that, they will be helping themselves as institution to improve.”* Part-time students are mature students who deserve direct engagement rather than mediated communication. Thus, they proposed regular face-to-face communication as a routine practice rather than an exceptional event that happens once.

Even though **FG 2B** did not directly mention face-to-face communication, there was a complaint about intermediated channels of communication. *"It comes on the coordinator and then it is disseminated to our class reps. sometimes within the short period of time, three days, five days maximum and then we are expected to have done our part. We understand it is our responsibility but if it is well communicated it becomes easier for us."* Part-time students' concerns about how communication reaches them demonstrate how current communication channels delay and distort information. The distortion of information could be eliminated by using face-to-face communication.

FG 3B showed the same sentiments by stating: *"And I also think that the way the information is passed to us from the college to us as students is not a good way because you may find that sometimes you just see things on the... Is it on the social media platform, And you may see that those news affect us and we just see them. And maybe we'll even discuss that. Maybe this is not true. Let us wait for the official something for us to know about them. But we would wait until we may find ourselves that this is going to be true."* The data shows that part-time students desire legitimate and authoritative channels of communication, which are currently non-existent. The experience of part-time students getting information through social media lacks the authority and reliability that face-to-face communication would provide.

Across all focus groups, part-time students expressed a strong need to have face-to-face communication with authorities in institutions of higher learning to overcome the over-reliance on mediated channels of communication. These steps are seen as vital to overcome the ethical challenge of poor communication.

The current study also found that part-time students desire face-to-face communication with higher institutional authorities. This aligns with Gorni et al. (2024) who emphasised the importance of offering both in-person and part-time courses, along with professional development, for faculty and students who are geographically dispersed. This approach is important for part-time students as it helps them build a sense of community despite their physical distance. The literature therefore supports the findings of this study that face-to-face communication helps part-time students overcome the reliance on mediated

channels of communication and recognises part-time students' existence as members of higher education communities.

Furthermore, research by Staddon (2023) highlights that part-time students need scaffolding and training on how to use digital learning platforms, but this should not replace the value of direct physical communication. The literature acknowledges that part-time students have different levels of digital literacy, and face-to-face communication can bridge gaps that mediated communication cannot address.

The literature also highlights the geographical constraints faced by part-time students in Lesotho. Morena et al. (2024) note that in Lesotho, studying part-time often involves geographical constraints such as limited access to reliable internet and transportation, which can hinder students' participation in classes and academic activities. The literature therefore suggests that face-to-face communication, while desirable, may not be a solution for all part-time students due to their dispersed locations.

5.7.1.2 Inclusion in decision-making processes

The inclusion of part-time students in decision-making processes emerged as a recurring desire among part-time students. They consistently revealed being excluded from discussions that affected their academic lives while enrolled in institutions of higher learning. The data also revealed that the exclusion occurs not as an occasional oversight but as systemic institutional practices.

FG 1A revealed the depth of the exclusion of part-time students when discussing academic calendars: "*There is a calendar. Part-time students like us. It says nothing about us. We don't even know whether we are part of the institution or not, because every. Everything that are being said in there, like there's nothing that really, you know, talks about the part-time student."* The statement produces an ontological uncertainty among part-time students about their existence as members of their institutions.

"The fee has been increased and we do not know why and when. We do not know. There were no any discussions with us and we are already in the programme. We cannot drop out. We are forced to do it to continue with the programme." **FG 1A** revealed that decisions that concern part-time students are imposed on them. Unlike full-time students

who have the SRC as their representatives when decisions are made, part-time students do not have a body to ensure that their inputs are considered during decision making. The inclusion of part-time students during decision making could reduce the ethical challenges that they face.

To promote ownership **FG 2A** articulated: *"They should make us part of the conclusions that are taken in this institution so that we feel. Whatever, no matter whether it will be a problem or anything. But we shall feel ownership of whatever. We come to ownership of the conclusions that we are coming across."* The data shows that when part-time students take part in decision-making processes, they develop psychological investment in those decisions and commit to them. Likewise, imposed decisions lead to resistance, resentment and passive non-compliance.

FG 3A provided evidence of decision-making exclusion connected to fee increment*:" The increment of the tuition fee. It's very, very high. And we are still wondering about that tuition. The percentage that has been used to increase the tuition fee. The fee is too much, from M17,900 to M26,500. That is because when there are Changes. They are just brought. They implemented them during the academic year without us knowing. Without communication."* The fee increments implemented mid-academic year without part-time students being consulted represent a form of exclusion from decision making. Part-time students' ethical challenges could be reduced if they were made part of discussions about fees during the proposal stage to prevent communication of the fee increments when final conclusions are made.

Part-time students experience a systemic, institutionalised exclusion from decision-making processes that directly affect their academic lives. This leads to ontological uncertainty about their belonging, resentment toward imposed changes, such as unexplained mid-year fee hikes, and a lack of psychological ownership. The inclusion of part-time students in discussions, primarily through representative structures they currently lack, has the potential to reduce the ethical challenges they face and promote commitment.

The finding on part-time students' exclusion from decision-making processes aligns with Quan et al. (2021) who found that unlike full-time students, part-time students often find

that their needs and contributions are ignored in institutional governance and decision-making processes. Cardellino and Deed (2024) also support the findings of this study by noting that part-time students frequently encounter unique challenges that raise significant ethical challenges within higher institutions of learning, often stemming from the fundamental design of educational systems historically structured to favour the needs of full-time students. This aligns with the finding that exclusion occurs not as an occasional oversight but as normal institutional practices.

Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) specifically found that in Lesotho, part-time students were excluded from key educational experiences, including communication breakdowns with faculty, and faced unfair treatment from both full-time students and non-academic staff. This literature reflects the current study's findings that decisions about fee increments are imposed on part-time students without consultation.

The current study found that there should be inclusion of part-time students to promote ownership and commitment in institutions of higher learning. This aligns with Strohschen's (2020) critique of institution-centric design, which overlooks the perspectives of various stakeholders, including part-time students. The literature supports that when stakeholders are included in decision-making, they invest and commit to outcomes.

Although the literature does not necessarily disagree with the findings of the current study, rather, it suggests that the exclusion of part-time students may be more complex than simple institutional neglect. Some scholars argue that part-time students' physical absence from campus and their multiple commitments make it logistically challenging for institutions to include them in decision-making processes. Crawford and Emery (2021) suggest that institutional systems privilege certain types of students over others; part-time students' limited presence on campus creates barriers to their participation in governance structures effectively.

5.7.1.3 Student governance representative

The absence of part-time students within the structure of the Student Representative Councils (SRCs) appeared to be a common finding among the six focus groups. Throughout all the groups, there was no mention of part-time students being represented

in their institution's SRC. Many of the ethical challenges that part-time students face result from exclusion from the SRC.

FG 1A revealed: *"We're not represented in the SRC. And you found out that when we need to give out our consents, we just pass through the class reps. Class reps we pass to our coordinator. We don't we are not even sure if the message is conveyed in the way that we want, because there are just so many channels, but we know we have no representatives."* The participants revealed a long chain of protocol to follow when they have grievances, which leaves them unsure if their message is passed as they wanted. To overcome this ethical challenge, part-time students suggested having representation in the SRC. As stated by **FG 1A**: *"We should be included in the SRC."*

FG 1B recalled: *"For a procedure in which you take your concerns to the administration of the school. Are you not represented in the SRC? No, we are not. What is the explanation for that? We were told that it is something that will be considered but it has not yet been done. Yet, we are already here."* The findings revealed that representation in the SRC is always promised to be done in the future while present part-time students stay unrepresented. To overcome this ethical challenge **FG 1B** also advocated for SRC representation*: "I also think we should have our representatives in one of the SRCs so that our views and our concerns could be heard."*

FG 2A made a connection between lack of representation and lack of their rights awareness: "*Are you represented in SRC to talk about your right? No, we are not. You are not, why? We don't know. We don't know why. As I as I've said, I think we don't know our rights. Because if we know, we should have asked who is our representative in this SRC? What is his responsibilities? Maybe so that we can just discuss with him or her about everything that is a challenge to us."* The exclusion of part-time students from representation produces ignorance of their rights which in turn reduces their drive to demand representation. To surpass this ethical challenge, part-time students suggest having representation in the SRC.

FG 2B revealed the most negative engagement with the SRC: *"There is no connection between us and the SRC of the school. There is no connection, we only meet when they want us to buy data, this is the only time that we see that they know that we exist. There*

is nothing that they do for us." Part-time students are only consulted by SRC when they need something from part-time students such as buying data or soliciting votes. The same focus group revealed: *"And for the elections they sometimes come to talk to us to vote for them while we do not even know them."* To overcome this ethical challenge there is a proposal for part-time students to have a representative in the SRC as stated by **FG 2B***: "I do not know if it is the institution through the coordinator, maybe if we had a connection with the SRC matters could be better."*

The same negative experience with SRC was shared by **FG 3A**: *"Do you have a representative in the SRC? No. When we talked to the SRC regarding Data one time they said they only help full-time students, we are not part of them. We are there, they are there, there is no collaboration between us and them."* The data shows that there is institutional discrimination where the SRC opts to help one group of students while ignoring the existence of another. **FG 3A** also pointed out: *"They don't know us in other words. The SRC president said it that we should talk to the coordinator. She is the only one who can help us. Otherwise, if we encounter problems here we do not talk to them."* The data shows that there is a 'part-time students cycle' between authorities where part-time students are referred to their coordinator by the SRC then the coordinator refers them back to the SRC and so on. To improve the welfare of part-time students there is a need for them to be part of the SRC.

FG 3B reported: *"I don't know the SRC, we don't know them. So if you have concerns, how do you pass your concerns from you to the head of the institution? We just discuss them amongst ourselves. If the rep is brave enough to take them, he will."* The data showed that the absence of their representative in the SRC leads part-time students to form informal advocates to voice their concerns.

A common finding across all focus groups was that part-time students were excluded from Student Representative Councils (SRCs). This absence created ethical challenges for part-time students, which could be overcome by putting structures that ensure that part-time students have an SRC representative in the SRC to speak on their behalf and protect their interests.

This study's finding that the exclusion of part-time students in the SRC creates ethical challenges aligns with a study conducted by Jones (2025) on the discussion on power dynamics in higher education institutions. This study highlighted that despite increased awareness, many part-time students do not have their voices heard due to institutional barriers and systemic oppressions (Jones, 2025). This literature strongly validates the finding that part-time students in Lesotho are only consulted by the SRC when they want to benefit from them through buying data from a service provider of the SRC's choice or soliciting votes.

The literature on power dynamics and advocacy (Quan et al., 2021) directly supports the findings of the current study that part-time students' needs are ignored in institutional governance. The finding that the absence of representation leads part-time students to form informal advocates to voice their concerns aligns with research showing that marginalised groups develop alternative strategies when formal representation structures exclude them. Morena et al. (2024) found that part-time students in Lesotho face challenges beyond social discrimination, including practical and structural barriers that institutions often fail to address. This study's findings that part-time students are referred back and forth between SRC and coordinators without resolution aligns with this literature.

The literature does not present significant disagreement with the finding that part-time students lack SRC representation. However, some scholars suggest that the absence of representation may partly result from part-time students' limited engagement with campus life rather than solely institutional exclusion. Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) note that part-time students' limited campus presence may contribute to their invisibility in governance structures.

5.7.1.4 Timely communication

In this study, timely communication emerged as a sub-theme during the focus group interviews. There were reports of receiving delayed critical information from institutions of higher learning, resulting in students' inability to respond or effectively act timeously. Focus groups reported receiving information about registration deadlines, scheduling of class changes, residential class session dates and examination results late. The data also

showed that the delayed communication is not random but rather systemic, which results in negative consequences for part-time students.

Regarding residential classes, **FG 1A** showed getting communication late: *"Another thing is that we don't really know when are we opening for another semester this goes back to the school almanac or school calendar. We normally open in April, but this time around we opened way before April. We were not prepared to go to school. We had plans before that, knowing that we would open during the Easter holidays."* The data shows that part-time students' life organisation is disrupted by the institution's calendar unpredictability. Last minute communication with part-time students makes coordinating child care, management of finances and talking to their employers challenging. To overcome this ethical challenge **FG 1A** noted*: "If everything is just rushed like that and right now we have assignments which are due, we are writing reports, we are preparing for conferences, it's a lot. We are going to go nuts. So, you need information provided on time? Yes! So that we can also plan ahead."* Part-time students need information that concerns them timeously so that they can prepare in time.

The psychological impact of delayed communication was emphasised by **FG 1B**: *"We are now in a second session but we don't know how we have performed in the first session. So, this has put us into a pressure. We are not free because we have not yet know how we have performed."* The data shows that delayed communication about results produces anxiety for part-time students. To help part-time students plan for outcomes such as repeating courses and registration, such important information should be disseminated on time.

FG 2A reported: *"Our results as part time students delays to come out. We don't know why. And now we were. We have written our exams in January or in February. Was it in February or January? Now we're still waiting for results. But we are in second semester."* The data shows that the delay in communication about part-time students' academic results makes planning difficult.

Registration timing failure was discovered from **FG 2B**: *"We were never told that we were supposed to register with the full-time students one time but the previous years we often registered when we came during December for the physical classes. But now it came as*

a surprise to us that we have to register together with the full-times students. And it was not even welcome communicated with us." The findings revealed that communication with part-time students was insufficient for them to prepare for the change in registration timing. There is a need to communicate with part-time students on time to reduce the ethical challenge they face of delayed communication in institutions of higher learning.

FG 3A reported: *"When it comes to the registration process, you may find that you are given maybe 15 days and before the due date the system will be closed and after that they are going to claim that we failed to register within the stipulated time and those who will register after that will have to pay the penalties."* The data shows that part-time students are given a deadline, but the system closes before that date, making timely registration challenging. Institutional timing failures lead to financial constraints for part-time students. Timely communication can help part-time students prepare themselves financially and register in time to avoid penalties.

The same focus group revealed the results of untimely lecturer communication*: "You will get a lecturer then you spend some months without that course being taught... You will be told that there is no lecturer yet the university is still looking for a lecturer... after some time it will be like somebody is coming and later it's like that person who promised to come is no longer coming."* The data shows that prolonged time without instruction is followed by sudden demands when lecturers finally appear. This situation creates impossible learning conditions for part-time students as they must suddenly create time for classes they expected to have completed.

Part-time students face delayed communication from institutions of higher learning, which disrupts their ability to make needed preparations. The untimely communication generates anxiety, complicates academic planning and financial planning for part-time students. As a result, timely information is an ethical necessity to reduce ethical challenges that part-time students face and to avoid any negative consequences.

This study found that part-time students in Lesotho considered timely communication as an ethical necessity to reduce the ethical challenges they faced. This coincides with Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) who found that part-time students faced challenges in paying tuition fees, especially when registration deadlines were communicated late or

inconsistently, leading to additional costs such as penalties for delayed registration. These findings by Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) directly support the finding of the current study that delayed communication leads to financial punishment for part-time students.

The literature on the needs of part-time students emphasises that they require flexible academic support. This aligns with studies conducted by Al-Qudah (2024) and Chong (2025) who found that students who had access to self-paced courses, recorded lectures, and asynchronous learning modules reported lower stress levels and improved academic performance. While these studies focus on flexible learning, they support the broader principle that timely access to information reduces stress on part-time students in institutions of higher learning.

The current study's finding that untimely lecturer communication creates impossible learning conditions is supported by research on cognitive load as noted by Zhao (2023) that the constant demands of work, study, and personal life contribute to excessive extraneous cognitive load, making it difficult to process new information and retain knowledge. When part-time students must suddenly create time for classes they expected to have completed, this exacerbates cognitive strain leading to ethical challenges they face.

The literature does not present significant disagreement with the findings of the current study that timely communication is essential for part-time students. However, some scholars suggest that institutions may face practical challenges in providing timely communication to part-time students due to their scattered nature. Morena et al. (2024) highlighted infrastructural challenges in Lesotho, such as limited access to reliable internet, which can hinder part-time students' participation in classes and academic activities. This suggests that while timely communication is desirable, achieving it may be constrained by broader infrastructural issues which are beyond higher institutional control.

The social justice theory by Rawls (1971) operates through three core dimensions: redistribution justice, recognition justice and representational justice. The dimension of representational justice was linked to the frequent exclusion of part-time students from student governance and curriculum design committees, as a result, denying them a voice in decisions that directly affect their academic journey. The representational justice states

that denial of representation produces systemic marginalisation, which was confirmed by the data in this study through the experience revealed in the study, where part-time students were referred back and forth between authorities due to no effective advocacy. Lack of representation of part-time students exacerbates the ethical challenges that part-time students face.

The recognitive justice helped to identify misrecognition and a lack of cultural respect for part-time students, where institutional policies and curricula were mainly focused on full-time students, thereby ignoring part-time students. The data provides empirical evidence in connection with what the theory terms misrecognition. The ontological uncertainty expressed by part-time students of not knowing if they are part of the institutions is the consequence of institutional non-recognition that the social justice theory predicts. The institutional failure to recognise part-time students as legitimate members produces their experience of invisibility and marginalisation, adding to the ethical challenges that they face.

The equity theory focuses on individuals' perceptions of fairness through comparing their input-to-output ratios with those in the same situation. The findings revealed clear patterns of perceived inequity that align with the theory's predictions. The participants revealed that part-time students receive limited access to essential educational resources while simultaneously paying what they perceive as exorbitant tuition fees that did not reflect the quality of treatment and services they received. The equity theory states that perceived input-output imbalance produces psychological distress. The data confirms this by showing that part-time students pay equal or higher fees but receive fewer services, thus leading to frustration and resentment towards the institutions.

5.7.2 Ensure financial affordability and predictability

Addressing the third research question which aims to identify strategies that can be used by higher education institutions to reduce ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho, the theme ‘Ensure financial affordability and predictability’ emerged. The findings from the participants revealed that financial instability and unpredictability are not just administrative inconveniences but are also ethical stressors that promote the vulnerability of part-time students. The findings revealed that part-time students found the

financial practices of institutions of higher learning to be punitive, as a result, forcing them into ethical challenges with continuing their education, meeting their family needs and their professional obligations. The data also revealed that financial predictability and affordability are needed to reduce ethical challenges that part-time students face. This part of the study will be centred around the following subthemes: cost saving through online classes, foreseeable and transparent fee structure, having access to affordable academic resources and reduction of fees.

5.7.2.1 Cost saving through online classes

The need to restructure the teaching mode in institutions of higher learning to save on direct and indirect costs was stated as a strategy that could be used to reduce ethical challenges encountered by part-time students. A clear preference was stated by **FG 3A**: *"Us coming here, cancel coming here, do everything online and only come here for exams."*

Similarly, **FG 1B** suggested: *"Online learning. I think online learning should be introduced so that some students will feel like they can study online fully and they have a choice to opt for."*

The switch to online learning or a reduced residency model potentially reduces expenses that part-time students incur for transport, accommodation and meal costs which currently drain financial resources that could be used for tuition or family matters. Although part-time students prefer to save costs through online lessons, they also report that current online lessons are poorly implemented. **FG 1A** outlined the clash between online classes and workplace assessments: *"Others were asking for classes to, to stop so that they can continue with their assessment at, at their school, at their workplace, so that they are saying it's, it's more challenging to, to have classes, online classes, while also we are assessing learners does not have we don't have adequate time to, to focus on both our schoolwork and our work."*

FG 3A also added by showing: *"But us we do online classes, we go to work every day, there is a class every day 5pm to 7pm, Monday to Saturday or Sunday. There is our work, I teach so many pupils I don't know what should be done… We do not have any time to*

rest." The data suggests that online classes, as they are currently structured, are not cost-effective for part-time students because they are not flexible. As a result, part-time students do not have enough time for their studies, leading to unethical shortcuts such as the use of AI and submission of copied work.

While part-time students prefer online classes as a money-saving measure to cut costs on transport, accommodation and meals, the current structure of online classes is counterproductive. This is because there are rigid schedules of daily evening classes that conflict with workplace demands. As a result, part-time students lack time to rest, which reduces flexibility and increases ethical violations such as AI use and plagiarism. Thus, the potential cost-benefit is undermined by poor structural design, meaning online learning only reduces ethical challenges if it is genuinely flexible, not just digitally delivered.

Van Der Wouden and Youn (2023) thus confirm that advancements in online learning have made part-time study more accessible, allowing individuals to engage in education without the need for physical proximity to institutions of higher learning. Thaanyane and Jita (2024) add that in Lesotho, the introduction of mobile learning allowed part-time students to learn at their own pace and convenience.

Additionally, the current study's findings on the poor implementation of current online classes for part-time students aligns with a study conducted by Mazur et al. (2021). The study found that many students simultaneously experience academic performance challenges and high employment expectations, preventing them from continuing with education if courses maintain rigid, synchronous schedules. The finding on rigid online class schedule is supported by Zhao (2023), who found that part-time students, mainly handling multiple responsibilities, are particularly susceptible to impacts on learning quality and cognitive overload, which impacts on their learning quality. Grigoreva et al. (2025) adds by confirming that extreme time constraints and fatigue inherent in part-time schedules can elevate the risk of academic misconduct, including plagiarism or content cheating. This proves the need for cost saving through online classes for part-time students.

The literature also supports the current study's finding that flexibility for part-time students is required. Childs et al. (2024) found that asynchronous learning models enable part-time students to learn at their own pace by providing deadlines that are flexible so that part-time students can study while working. Al-Qudah (2024) and Chong (2025) also added that students who had access to self-paced courses, recorded lectures, and asynchronous learning modules reported lower stress levels and improved academic performance. Hence, the need for online learning for part-time students.

There is some disagreement regarding the extent to which online learning is beneficial for part-time students. While the current study's findings suggest that online classes are counterproductive due to rigid scheduling, Rahman and Mehnaz (2024) argue that the provision of adaptable course delivery frameworks is a prerequisite for supporting part-time students. In the absence of such flexibility, part-time students face significant barriers. This suggests that the issue is not online learning itself but how it is implemented.

Additionally, while the current study focuses on the cost-saving potential of online classes, Morena et al. (2024) highlighted that in Lesotho, studying part-time often involves geographical constraints such as limited access to reliable internet, which can hinder students' participation in online classes and academic activities. This suggests that online classes may not be universally cost-effective for all part-time students in Lesotho.

5.7.2.2 Foreseeable and transparent fee structure

The data across all focus groups reveal complaints about sudden unexplained tuition increments and unpredictable financial deadlines. **FG 1A** recounted: *"Our previous coordinator told us that we can be able to pay till up to December and start registering for another year around that time. But things changed along the way. We were told that we have to register in August. Was it August? Some time. And we never planned to register at that time. And we had so many financial constraints. The penalties, all those. And it was very challenging for us. Even. We thought of withdrawing. Oh, there was so many misunderstanding."*

FG 1B also stated: *"To add on what she's saying, we are not sure but there's been this thing that the fee has been increased and we do not know why and when. We do not*

know. There were no any discussions with us and we are already in the programme. We cannot drop out. We are forced to do it to continue with the programme."

Additionally, **FG 2A** stated: *"The fee structure can increase any time, without telling the students that in the second year or in the second semester, there is an increment of the your fees. And that will be the most challenging because if you come to school, you have to budget for three years."*

The lack of transparency about fees forces part-time students to face increased ethical challenges, and they find themselves having to choose between continuing to pay unaffordable fees by taking money from their family budgets, incurring debt, or withdrawing from school and losing their educational investment. To overcome these ethical challenges, part-time students suggest that there should be foreseeable and transparent fee structures to help them plan their educational finances accordingly.

As stated by **FG 2A**: *"I will change the fee structure. I will not, I will not say the part-time students should pay a lot of money."* **FG 1A** added: "*The institution must stop the increment of fees in the middle of the program. We should know that for the duration of the program, your fees will be 10, 000 annually. Not when I am in the second year, they just increase to 26, 000. We did not prepare for that. When we come to school, we budget, we plan. So when there is just an increment in the middle of the program, there will be so many dropouts."*

Part-time students face ethical and financial challenges due to unpredictable fee increases and unforeseen changes to payment deadlines, which are implemented by institutions of higher education without consultation and transparency. The lack of foreseeable fee structures force part-time students to make difficult choices about incurring debt, using family designated funds or withdrawing from school. Therefore, there is a need for institutions of higher learning to clearly and openly communicate fees for the entire duration of the part-time studies to enable effective financial planning.

The finding on unpredictable fee structures aligns with findings from a study conducted by Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) who found that part-time students in Lesotho faced challenges in paying tuition fees. This is especially when registration deadlines were

communicated late or inconsistently, leading to additional costs such as penalties for delayed registration and added financial strain.

The literature supports the findings of the current study that lack of transparency forces part-time students into difficult ethical decisions. Masuku et al. (2025) found that many part-time students end up prioritising immediate financial needs, such as supporting their families or covering living expenses, over academic requirements, leading to misallocation of funds aimed at educational purposes. Ramli et al. (2025) similarly found that financial pressure significantly impacts on part-time students as they often juggle work and study, leading to competing demands on their time and resources.

Research by AlKharouf et al. (2024) supports the current study's findings that flexible fee structures and amendments in higher education institutions' policies are essential to make higher education more financially viable for part-time students. McKinney et al. (2022) also found that financial aid significantly influences students' decisions to enrol full-time or part-time, suggesting that predictable financial structures are crucial for student planning.

The finding that part-time students in Lesotho face ethical challenges due to financial unpredictability aligns with a study conducted by Aria et al. (2020). The study found that many students struggle to manage the rising costs of education and living expenses, which creates additional financial responsibility that significantly influences their decision-making processes. Hence, there is need for foreseeable and transparent fee structures in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

Although there is limited literature that refutes the finding of this study that predictable fee structures are needed, however, the literature presents a broader perspective on financial challenges. While the current study focuses primarily on institutional transparency, Taylor and Rouillard (2021) found that institutions that provide robust advising and financial literacy programmes can positively influence students' decisions regarding their study modes. This suggests that financial challenges may also be addressed through improved financial education for part-time students rather than mainly through institutional policy changes.

5.7.2.3 Having access to affordable academic resources

The findings reveal that part-time students lack access to basic academic resources to which full-time students have easy access, which forces them into unethical academic practices. As revealed by **FG 1A**: *"We struggle to go to the library because when you go to the library, they're going to require a student card. So those are challenges that we encounter. I cannot personally just pass and go into the library. No. That's why we will use AI because we don't have access to the library and to, look at the books. Yes. And you were told that they don't even think a student cards will be there, meaning our money is just gone."*

FG 3A confirmed: *"The school library is, not accessible to us like now. It was not opened. So we are forced to rely on AI when we do our school assignments. That leads to most of our work being plagiarism."*

The lack of access to educational resources was also revealed by **FG 2A**: *"The library is closed. Those people also have that time to enjoy their holidays."* During part-time students' residential classes, libraries are closed as those responsible for the library also go on holiday.

The lack of affordable, legitimate resources pushes part-time students towards academic dishonesty, as **FG 1A** admitted: *"We find that we take other people's work and then present it, knowing that the consequences of taking someone's work. You might find that you are going to be the bad books of that lecturer."*

In **FG 1A** the use of AI was mentioned: *"We can't go to the library. Like my colleagues have said, we can't go to the library due to the unavailability of the student cards. So AI is the only option that we have that we can use."* This is a classic ethical challenge where part-time students know that plagiarism and unauthorised AI use are wrong, but when the institutions deny them legal means of accessing information, they choose the wrong path out of necessity. In **FG 2B**, the ethical compromise of part-time students extended to their group work: *"Sometimes some members do not participate and you are forced… you cannot say that someone was absent. You just have to write their name when submitting, pretend that everything is OK."*

To overcome these ethical challenges, part-time students revealed that they need access to learning resources. **FG 3B** remarked: "*The other thing, they should provide resources that help us in learning. For example, we have no access to the computer lab. We are many, so we don't have access because the computers are few."*

FG 1B added: *"The desktops which we were dealing with in computer labs were very old and nor functioning. So it prohibited our learning. Yes, so we should have more learning LMS, the learning management system should be improved.*"

The same need for learning materials was revealed by **FG 2A**: "*I would change the infrastructure whereby I could give this part-time learners the materials of their own where they will feel free, and they will be supported and learn in a conducive environment. Everything being there, accessible, the materials accessible, including the library where they can read."*

Part-time students are denied access to basic academic resources such as libraries, working computers and student cards. These instructional barriers force part-time students to resort to unethical academic practices such as using AI, plagiarism and falsifying group work. The findings highlight that when legitimate pathways to academic information are closed, part-time students feel compelled to use dishonesty, and they explicitly call for improved, affordable access to learning management systems, library hours, and dedicated materials to reduce the ethical challenges that they face.

Lack of access to academic resources is strongly supported by findings from a study conducted by Letseka-Manka et al. (2023). The study found that part-time students in Lesotho lack equal access to library facilities and face unfair treatment from both full-time students and non-academic staff during their campus visits. The study also revealed that part-time students are excluded from key educational experiences, including inadequate contact sessions, communication breakdowns with faculty, and limited access to guest lectures by field experts.

The finding that part-time students resort to AI and plagiarism due to lack of access aligns with research by Dawar (2025) and Gauci and Carabott (2025). They found that the pressure to succeed can lead to ethically questionable choices by part-time students.

Grigoreva et al. (2025) confirmed that the temptation to resort to academic dishonesty is intensified by a lack of time to engage deeply with the material or to produce original work, leading to a compromise of scholarly honesty. Therefore, the data shows that part-time students must have access to affordable academic resources to reduce the ethical challenges that they face.

There is limited direct disagreement with the finding of this study that lack of access to academic resources leads to unethical practices by part-time students. However, the literature suggests that the issue may be more complex than the current findings suggest. While the current study suggests that students use AI because they lack library access, Darsih et al. (2025) found that part-time students have different levels of digital literacy, with some struggling to understand and use basic technological tools. This suggests that AI use may also stem from digital literacy gaps rather than solely from resource access issues.

5.7.2.4 Reduction of fees

The data shows that most part-time students believed that they paid too much to study in institutions of higher learning. As a result, part-time students proposed the reduction of their fees as a strategy that can be used to reduce the ethical challenges they face.

FG 1B stated: *"If I would change, I would change the prices for school fees. I feel like we are paying too much. So it looks like we are hindered the opportunity to learn. So if the university could feel for us, it would reduce the prices."*

Additionally, **FG 2A** noted*: "I will change the fee structure. I will not, I will not say the part-time students should pay a lot of money. As we know that because of Covid 19, we're still struggling. So if they pay a lot of money, this means some of them they are not going to finish the school, they are going to drop out."*

The same feeling about fees was echoed by **FG 3B**: *"We pay too expensive. The school fees is too expensive for us. I think we are adults. Then we have to cater for our families. And also we must pay school fees. So that is too much for us."* In **FG 2A** the impact of high fees was highlighted: *"To add more on that. Some of us are volunteer teachers where*

we are working and we are not earning anything. So if the fee is increased really it becomes a problem on our side?"

Participants did not argue for free education, but they advocated for proportionate fees that are equivalent to the reduced services that they receive from institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. This is because the current high fees create ethical challenges by hindering access to learning, exacerbating financial struggles and conflicting with adult responsibilities such as family care and unpaid work such as for volunteer teaching.

The current study revealed that part-time students paid too much for their education and needed fees to be reduced is supported by Letseka-Manka et al. (2023) who found that part-time students perceived they were treated differently by the university, as they paid high fees but did not receive equivalent access to facilities and services. Moreover, Morena et al. (2024) specifically recommended that institutions of higher learning should provide financial aid programs, grants, and scholarships specifically for part-time students to make higher education more accessible.

Additionally, the findings that high fees create ethical challenges by hindering access to learning align with research by Ardissone et al. (2021), who found that many policies often require full-time enrolment to qualify for financial assistance in higher education, creating barriers for part-time students. Savall Ceres (2024) also found that part-time students often face challenges such as limited flexibility, financial constraints, and balancing studies with work or family commitments, which hinder their access to and participation in higher education.

There is limited literature that refutes that tuition for part-time studies should be reduced. However, the literature presents a more complex view of the relationship between fees and ethical challenges. While the current study suggests that high fees create ethical challenges, Rahimi et al. (2024) found that the financial burden creates a cost-benefit calculation that includes the cost of repeating a unit versus the cost of purchasing assignments, which can motivate academic misconduct. This suggests that ethical challenges are not solely about fee amounts but also about the consequences of academic failure.

5.8 Theoretical framework contributions

The findings of this study connect to the three core dimensions of the social justice theory: redistributive justice, recognitive justice and representational justice. In relation to recognitive justice, the participants revealed that part-time students desired online classes to reduce travel and accommodation costs which showed that the current strict class schedule failed to recognise that part-time students had many roles to play that directly affected how they learned. The policy was designed with full-time students in mind, therefore there is a need to change it to reduce ethical challenges that part-time students face.

The data also showed that fees increased suddenly mid-programme which is connected to the representational justice dimension. Fees are increased without the consultation of part-time students thereby denying them the chance to voice their opinions, which demonstrates a systemic exclusion of part-time students in institutional governance. Changing this policy could help part-time students voice their concerns and help elevate the ethical challenges they face. Finally, the redistributive justice fails in instances where libraries are closed during part-time students' residential classes, where students' cards are not given and where computers are not accessible. These are resources which are easily accessible to full-time students; as such, this creates material inequity for part-time students. Collectively, these violations show that part-time students in Lesotho face systemic marginalisation which leads to a lot of ethical challenges. Addressing these shortcomings can help reduce the ethical challenges that part-time students face.

The findings from this study validate the equity theory's main principle that people compare their input to outcomes in relation to people in the same situation; in this study, part-time students compared themselves to full-time students. The theory also shows that when there is an imbalance between the input outcome ratio, people often experience psychological distress and take action to balance the inequity. In this study, part-time students invest inputs in the form of daily late classes, working without resting, financial investment and family sacrifices but they receive poor outcomes in the form of low flexibility, sudden fee increases, lack of library access and lack of computer lab access. When part-time students compare themselves with full-time students, there is clear

discrimination leading to negative inequity leading to demotivation and thoughts of withdrawal. To reduce these ethical challenges that part-time students face, there is a need to reduce fees and have clear fee structures.

The combination of the social justice theory and the equity theory was essential as using the social justice theory only would explain why institutional systems produce ethical challenges and miss explaining part-time students' behaviour. Without the equity theory the researcher would have focused on structural barriers and missed the psychological mechanism that turned part-time students' frustrations into unethical behaviour. This combination revealed that ethical challenges are a result of inequitable systems in institutions of higher education, mediated by part-time students' attempts to restore fairness under unfair conditions.

5.9 Conclusion

The current chapter presented and analysed data from focus group interviews from part-time students across three institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. The chapter described the case and participants of the study. Thereafter Braun et al.'s (2022) six phased framework and Atlas.ti software were used to analyse data. This chapter presented and discussed the findings for research question number one which was about the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho. The findings for research question number 2, which was the reasons part-time students face challenges was also presented and discussed in this chapter. The findings of third research question which dealt with strategies can be used by higher education institutions to reduce ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho were also presented and discussed in this chapter. This chapter concluded by unpacking the theoretical contribution in this study. The following chapter focuses on explaining what the findings from this study mean in relation to the research objectives.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter analysed data that were collected from part-time students who were enrolled in three institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. Focus groups were used to collect data from 36 participants, which helped to generate qualitative data that were coded using Braun et al.'s (2022) six-phased thematic analysis framework and Atlas.ti. The findings revealed seven main themes which helped to answer the three research questions that guided this study.

This chapter is the concluding chapter of this study. Firstly, the chapter provides the researcher's reflection on the research journey. Second, the chapter provides a summary of the findings of this study based on the research questions that guided this study. Third, the chapter presents an interpretation of the findings of this study, detailing what they mean in the context of part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho and in similar situations. Fourth, it gives actionable recommendations for multiple interested parties. Fifth, it identifies areas for future research that could help extend understanding of ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in Lesotho. Sixth, it focuses on the study's unique contribution to the body of knowledge through the creation of a conceptual framework. Seventh, it acknowledges and discusses the limitations of the study and finally, the chapter provides a conclusion which details the synthesis of the study's contribution and importance.

6.2 Reflections on the research journey

Conducting this study has been a transformative experience that has made the researcher get out of his comfort zone. From the beginning to the end of this study, the researcher came across both anticipated challenges and unexpected ones, which have not only shaped the findings of the study but also shaped the researcher's understanding of ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher education in Lesotho.

Looking back, the researcher had previously planned to collect data from part-time students, coordinators and lecturers. This would have provided the researcher with

sufficient data that would have taken longer to analyse. Focusing on part-time students was worth it as it provided first-hand experience of ethical challenges. Even though the use of focus groups was logistically challenging and costly, it was worth it based on the richness of the data that the researcher obtained.

The research journey was however not without its challenges. During the focus group interviews, most participants selected to code-switch between Sesotho and English rather than expressing themselves fully in English which therefore required the researcher to carefully translate and interpret their information to make sure that the participants' voices were preserved while maintaining academic rigour. Another challenge that the researcher noticed was the reluctance of male participants to fully engage in focus group discourse. However, those male participants that participated gave short responses thereby resulting in the focus groups being heavily dominated by female participants. Another challenge was that participants would randomly leave the focus group interviews before the conclusion of the interviews. On a positive note, this provided insight into the time pressures that part-time students face in institutions of higher learning.

The withdrawal of participants during interviews was a practical example of the constraints of time that part-time students described during the focus group interviews, hence showing how part-time students are constantly struggling to balance competing demands for their time. Those participants that remained were highly engaged and spoke with visible emotions and revealed their experiences as part-time students. The emotions shown and passion which the participants showed when talking about their challenges reaffirmed the importance of conducting this study and reinforced the researcher's commitment to finishing the study to ensure that their voices were properly represented.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of this research journey was the process of data analysis using Atlas.ti software which was a first experience for the researcher. While the systematic coding process of using Atlas.ti was time-consuming, it however helped reveal connections between themes that might have been missed if the researcher was analysing data manually.

Equally important was the experience the researcher had when using the two theories that applied in this study. The use of both the social justice theory (Rawls, 1971) and the

equity theory (Adams, 1963) emerged from the literature that was read. Through their use it became clear to the researcher that the ethical challenges that are faced by part-time students could not have been adequately explored had the researcher used one theoretical lens. The social justice theory helped the researcher identify institutional barriers that excluded part-time students from equal participation in higher education while the equity theory helped the researcher explain the psychological strategies through which part-time students respond to the inequities they faced.

6.3 Summary of findings

This section provides a summary of the findings based on the three research questions that guided the study. The findings of this study reveal that there is systemic marginalisation and institutional neglect of part-time students in institutions of higher learning. It was also revealed that the adaptive responses by part-time students led to ethical challenges that part-time students faced in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.

6.3.1 RQ1: What are the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho?

To address the first research question that aims to find the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho, the findings revealed two themes. The first theme, ‘Financial challenges and economic vulnerability’, showed that part-time students faced financial hardships while studying because they were excluded from government sponsorship (NMDS); as a result, they had to fully fund themselves while studying. This theme was informed by five sub-themes: ‘Financial impact on academic continuation’, ‘No financial support’, ‘Penalty fees and arbitrary deadlines’, ‘Unexpected fee increases’ and ‘Volunteer teachers and low income’. The second theme, ‘Academic compromise’, revealed that academic dishonesty among part-time students came not from moral failures but came from systemic marginalisation they experienced. This theme was informed by four sub-themes: ‘Academic dishonesty from desperation’, ‘AI dependence due to resource denial’, ‘Cultural factors enabling compromise’ and ‘Group work false participation’.

6.3.2 RQ2: Why do part-time students face ethical challenges in higher education institutions in Lesotho?

To answer research question two, which aimed to identify reasons why part-time students face ethical challenges in higher education institutions in Lesotho, the findings revealed three themes. The first theme, 'Institutional marginalisation and resource deprivation', revealed the exclusion of part-time students from basic student rights. This theme was informed by four subthemes: 'Denial of essential academic facilities'; 'Denial of student identity and representation'; 'Exclusion from support services'; and 'Physical exclusion from learning'. The second theme was 'Structural disorganisation and communication breakdown'. This theme revealed that the calendar and timetable are chaotic, there is a lack of responsive mechanisms, last-minute and absent communication and lecture related issues. The third theme was 'The work-life balance'. This theme revealed that being a part-time student results in less time with family, marital strain due to study commitments, lack of sufficient preparation time between work and school, and work and class conflict.

6.3.3 RQ3: Which strategies can be used by higher education institutions to reduce ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho?

To answer the third research question, which aimed at identifying strategies that can be used by institutions of higher learning to reduce the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho, two themes emerged. The first theme, 'Establish legitimate communication channels and integration into the school governance structure', suggested the creation of inclusive educational environments through having regular face-to-face meetings with institutional management and granting part-time students membership in the SCR. This theme was guided by four sub-themes: 'Face-to-face communication'; 'Inclusion in decision-making processes'; 'Student governance representation'; and 'Timely communication'. The second theme: 'Ensure financial affordability and predictability', advocated for the reduction of financial instability by having online classes and transparent fee structures. This theme was informed by four sub-themes: 'Cost saving through online classes', 'Foreseeable and transparent fee structure'; 'Having access to affordable academic resources'; and 'Reduction of fees'. While these strategies emerged from the data as participants' proposed solutions, it is

important to note that the literature review (section 2.8) identified several mitigation strategies, including flexible learning pathways, extended support hours, and advocacy for fair workloads or employer support.

6.4 Interpretation of findings

The findings of this study revealed complex realities that part-time students face while studying in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. The ethical challenges that were revealed in this study were not individual failures but were response mechanisms adopted by part-time students in response to systemic inequalities that existed within institutional policies and practices. This section of the study interprets the findings of the study based on the theories that guided this study and the literature on part-time higher education.

6.4.1 Systemic marginalisation of part-time students

The study revealed that ethical challenges faced by part-time students in institutions of higher education are connected to systemic marginalisation that existed within institutions of higher learning. The findings revealed that institutions of higher education operate in such a way that favoured full-time students. Institutional policies, resources allocations and practices favour full-time students while excluding part-time students. This means that part-time students' needs and experiences are not fully considered during institutional planning.

The marginalisation of part-time students manifests itself institutionally, operationally and relationally. Institutionally, part-time students are marginalised by being denied a chance to be part of formal governance structures such as the SRC, they are also not given access to institutional resources such as libraries and computer laboratories, and essential services such as healthcare (clinics) and cafeteria services. Operationally, part-time students are not included when academic calendars are set, thus leading to chaotic and unpredictable schedules. Communication with part-time students is often inconsistent and unreliable and institutional responsive mechanisms are not there. Relationally, part-time students are made to feel as if they are unwelcome, unwanted and illegitimate members of institutions of higher learning as they are not given student identification cards.

The social justice theory (Rawls, 1971) provides a clear picture for understanding systemic marginalisation of part-time students. The findings of this study show violations of all three dimensions of the social justice theory. Distributive injustice is also noted in the unfair allocation of institutional resources whereby full-time students have full access to libraries, computer laboratories and even have student cards while part-time students must study without accessing these basic resources. Recognitive injustice is noted where part-time students' needs and lifestyles are ignored when institutions' policies were set, which mainly favours full-time students. Representational injustice is noted where part-time students are not included in decision-making processes and they were excluded from the SRC which denied them the opportunity provide input in decisions that directly affect their academic lives while studying.

The equity theory (Adam, 1963) helped the researcher understand and explain how part-time students perceive and respond to the systemic injustices they face. The findings revealed inequity where part-time students invest in fees, time, effort and family sacrifices, yet the outcomes do not match the inputs; yet full-time students clearly receive more services while paying less. The negative inequality that was experienced by part-time students leads to psychological distress, frustration, resentment and demotivation that leads to unethical behaviour by part-time students as a coping mechanism.

6.4.2 The harmful nature of institutional exclusion

The focus group interviews revealed the harmful nature of institutional exclusion of part-time students. The data shows that part-time students are not simply overlooked or neglected, but they are directly excluded through institutional policies and practices. The SRC clearly stated that they only assist full-time students with some services, while security officers physically remove part-time students from learning spaces and threaten them with fines. Additionally, administrative offices were closed during holidays when part-time students had their residential classes. These exclusions are not accidental but are deliberate practices that marginalise part-time students in institutions of higher learning.

The harmful nature of institutional exclusion is noted where part-time students are excluded from the SRC, which results in them not having a say in institutional decisions

that concern them. In the absence of representation, part-time students' needs are not considered while policies are made. The lack of policies that consider part-time students' needs, results in barriers that stops the students from accessing resources and services fully. Consequently, part-time students are forced into unethical academic practices, which further solidify stereotypes about part-time students, justifying more exclusion.

Most importantly, the psychological impact of institutional exclusion on part-time students cannot be ignored as part-time students revealed that they feel unwelcome, unwanted and illegitimate members of their institutions. This leads to ontological uncertainty about their inclusion in institutions, which reflects the damage done by systemic marginalisation.

6.4.3 Adaptive responses to systemic failures

Based on this study, the misconduct identified as academic dishonesty, AI dependence and false participation in group work, was not because of individual moral failures but rather as adaptive responses to systemic institutional failures. This thought is based on the data that revealed that part-time students behave unethically not because they are lazy, but because they are placed in situations where ethical compliance is perceived as impossible.

During part-time students' residential classes, without student identification cards and with libraries closed, the use of AI becomes the only logical survival mechanism and not an immoral choice. When part-time students are given group work with unrealistic submission deadlines, and without considering the geographical separation of part-time students, the inclusion of non-contributing group members becomes a solution instead of academic dishonesty. Most importantly, when course outlines and lecture notes are provided late, submission of previously completed work becomes a calculated risk to take instead of deliberate cheating.

The researcher's interpretation is in line with the social justice theory's stance that systemic structures create conditions for people's behaviours. The theory points out that when institutions fail to promote equitable access to resources and opportunities, students are forced to choose between ethical compliance and academic survival. The

study's findings show that ethical compromise among part-time students is promoted when institutions choose administrative conveniences over part-time students' welfare.

The researcher's interpretation is also supported by the equity theory which shows how perceived inequity is connected to behavioural responses of people. When part-time students view their inputs in the form of time, money and effort and not being equal to the outcomes being lack of resources, support and recognition as compared to full-time students, they strive to restore equity. The restoration of equity is done by behaviours that adjust their inputs such as the use of AI to reduce effort when doing their schoolwork, submitting other students' previously completed work to save time and including non-contributing peers to avoid conflict. These behaviours by part-time students are not driven by the desire to cheat but by the need to restore fairness in what is seen as an unfair system.

6.4.4 The ethical contradiction of part-time education

The current study uncovered an ethical contradiction that was connected to part-time education in institutions of higher education. On the one hand, part-time education is viewed as a way of professional development and improving the quality of their lives. On the other hand, the institutions in which part-time students enrol as a way of obtaining higher education come up with barriers that make studying in higher education extraordinarily challenging.

The contradiction can be seen in situations where volunteer teachers and low-income private school teachers pursue higher education with the hope of improving their qualifications to be more employable. Yet, the financial costs of higher education use up all the money they need for survival, leading to higher education becoming a financial trap. Although the government of Lesotho benefits from the services provided by such teachers, it also implements policies that prevent such teachers from accessing funding during their studies.

The contradiction even applies to financial practices implemented by institutions of higher education. Part-time students pay fees that are equal to, or sometimes higher than those of full-time students, yet they receive less services and resources. Part-time students are

charged penalty fees when they do not register in time despite payment deadlines being communicated poorly, with fees increasing in the middle of their programme without any consultations. These practices reveal that higher institutions view part-time students as income revenue sources and not legitimate members within their academic communities. The ethical implications of these contradictions are that when institutions of higher learning are the providers of educational opportunities while also creating situations that make ethical behaviours by part-time students impossible betray their main goal of providing education to all.

6.4.5 The gender side of ethical challenges

The findings of this study revealed that there is a gender dimension to ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho. The hesitance of male part-time students from sharing their thoughts during focus group discussions, led to the focus group interviews being dominated by female part-time students. This suggests that the experiences of male and female part-time students may be different. Most importantly, the data shows that female part-time students carry the heavy burden of managing both their academic responsibilities and domestic expectations. Female part-time students expressed that they struggle to simultaneously manage their multiple roles as mothers, wives and as students. They remarked that their children disturb online classes, while their husbands complain about their absence and exhaustions. This leads to relationship strains for female part-time students.

The gender aspect of this study finding aligns with literature on the feminisation of part-time studying. In most instances, female part-time students are more likely to have caregiving responsibilities than full-time students. The findings of this study suggest that institutions of higher learning in Lesotho fail to accommodate the gender responsibilities of female students hence increasing the ethical challenges they encounter as compared to those that maybe faced by male part-time students.

6.4.6 The cultural side of ethical challenges

The findings of this study revealed a cultural aspect of ethical challenges that part-time students face. Part-time students' academic practices are linked to cultural values that

include social harmony, avoidance of confrontation and collective responsibility. These cultural values are important in the context of Lesotho. In Lesotho's context, maintaining social relationships and avoiding confrontations is important, as a result, the reporting of part-time students that do not take part in given group work and those that are dishonest carries social consequences that outweigh the academic benefits of reporting them. Consequently, part-time students have to choose between violating academic integrity standards and violating deeply held cultural values about loyalty and harmony.

The cultural side of ethical challenges extended to online learning where part-time students revealed that online meetings did not work for them. This implies that online meetings lack the relational and physical qualities that make working in groups meaningful in the Basotho culture. The negative attitude towards online collaborations reinforces the geographical challenges of group work whereby part-time students will be at home, which ultimately leads to the inclusion of non-contributing group members as a solution.

The cultural side of ethical challenges also revealed cultural norms of hierarchical respect which are valued in the Basotho culture. Part-time students disclosed fears of victimisation if they complain about their lecturers' misconduct. To avoid conflict, part-time students' class representatives advocate for silence instead of reporting the lecturers. This culture of fear increased the ethical challenges that part-time students face, thus making it impossible for them to seek help.

6.4.7 Theoretical integration

The use of both the social justice theory and the equity theory helped the researcher obtain a holistic understanding of ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho. The two theories provided different sides of analysis; the social justice theory addressed the systemic and structural issues while the equity theory addressed how individual part-time students responded to ethical challenges they encountered.

The social justice theory helped the researcher explain why part-time students in institutions of higher learning experience ethical challenges. The findings revealed that higher education institutions in Lesotho violate the three dimensions of the social justice

theory. The distributive injustice was seen in the unequal allocation of resources in institutions of higher education, the recognitive injustice was seen in the lack of cultural recognition and respect of part-time students and the representational injustice was seen in the exclusion of part-time students in decision-making processes. These systemic injustices create conditions in higher education institutions for ethical challenges to happen.

On the other hand, the equity theory helped the researcher explain how part-time students respond to the systemic injustices they face. The findings of this study revealed that part-time students perceive a negative inequity between their inputs and outcomes as they compare themselves to full-time students. The inequity causes psychological stress, frustration, resentment and demotivation and drives part-time students to behave in unethical ways. The equity theory helped to reveal that the ethical challenges faced by part-time students are not just the results of systemic injustices but are also behavioural responses to perceived unfairness in institutions of higher education.

The use of the two theories was essential in enabling the researcher to fully understand the extent of ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning. If used alone, the social justice theory would have explained reasons why institutional systems cause ethical challenges but would have missed the psychological mechanisms through which part-time students respond to those challenges. Although the equity theory explained part-time students' behavioural responses to ethical challenges it also missed the systemic conditions that led to those responses. Together, the two theories revealed that the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher education result from inequitable systems moderated by part-time students trying to restore fairness. While the social justice and equity theories are powerful at explaining structural and psychological dimensions of the ethical challenges, they are culturally neutral frameworks. They do not account for cultural values such as social harmony, avoidance of confrontation, collective responsibility, and hierarchical respect that shape how Basotho part-time students perceive, experience, and respond to injustice in institutions of higher education.

6.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study thus proposes recommendations to a variety of stakeholders such as higher education institutions, the government of Lesotho and part-time students themselves. The recommendations aim to address the systemic injustices identified in this study and reduce the ethical challenges faced by part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho.

6.5.1 Recommendations for higher education institutions

6.5.1.1 Establish and maintain access to essential academic facilities

Higher education institutions are recommended to guarantee equitable access to essential academic facilities for part-time students. This can be done by keeping libraries open during their residential classes when full-time students have closed and providing part-time students with dedicated study areas during their residential classes. Higher education institutions should provide part-time students with student identification cards and provide reliable access to computer laboratories with working internet. Moreover, institutions should ensure that learning management systems are accessible to students by providing them with student emails and teaching materials such as projectors should be easily accessible.

6.5.1.2 Integrate part-time students into institutional government structures

To ensure that views from part-time students are formally addressed, they should be included in institutional governance, most importantly through reserved positions on the Student Representative Council (SRC). These representatives should always be present during decision-making processes that affect part-time students, such as fee structure setting and academic calendar making to resource allocation.

6.5.1.3 Ensure financial affordability and predictability

To reduce the financial pressure on part-time students, institutions should maintain transparency and predictability of fees throughout the duration of part-time students' programme. Mid-programme fee increments without proper consultation should be

avoided and notice and punitive penalty fees should be removed. Flexible registration deadlines and cost saving through flexible online study options should be implemented.

6.5.1.4 Provide timely and transparent communication

Institutions of higher education are encouraged to improve their communication with part-time students to reduce uncertainty and ethical challenges. Official communication channels should be used for publishing academic calendars and critical information such as registration and fee structures in advance. This will help part-time students to use such communication to formally seek leave or time off from their employers. Regular face-to-face meetings should be held to discuss part-time students' challenges, while course outlines and lecture compiled notes should be shared at the start of each semester.

6.5.1.5 Provide access to learning resources

To reduce breaches such as academic dishonesty, institutions of higher learning should provide part-time students with learning resources and ensure that libraries are open during part-time students' residential classes. This includes providing part-time students with free access to digital resources together with ethical guidance on using AI. Institutions should also provide part-time students with training on academic writing and research skills to prevent academic dishonesty.

6.5.1.6 Improve scheduling

Institutions of higher education are recommended to improve their scheduling to allow part-time students to have enough time to prepare themselves between work and academic responsibilities. This can be done by avoiding compressed schedules that often force part-time students to choose between fulfilling their professional obligations or academic responsibilities.

6.5.1.7 Provide support services

Institutions of higher education should acknowledge that part-time students are adults who manage multiple roles; thus, they should provide them with support services that promote work-life balance. For example, institutions can offer counselling that directly addresses challenges of juggling work, family and studying at the same time. Support

should also be provided to part-time students who are encountering marital problems and other personal challenges caused by their academic commitments.

6.5.2 Recommendations for the government of Lesotho

6.5.2.1 Provide financial support to part-time students

The government of Lesotho, through the National Manpower Development Secretariat (NMDS), should extend the provision of financial assistance to include part-time students. This can be done through scholarships or partial funding for part-time students pursuing crucial qualifications, especially in the field of special education. The government can also create a funding scheme for part-time students, especially for those studying while volunteering and those teaching in private schools but earn low income.

6.5.2.2 Address the volunteer teacher situation

The government of Lesotho should address the situation of volunteer teachers who work without being paid while still pursuing their studies. This can be done by developing policies that ensure that all teachers receive appropriate remuneration while working. The government should take note that the current situation of volunteer teachers creates a trap where those teachers need qualifications to escape unemployment but face hurdles in accessing the education they need.

6.5.2.3 Regulate higher education financial practices

To protect from financial exploitation, the government of Lesotho should regulate the financial practices of higher education institutions. This can be achieved by requiring transparent and predictable fee structures for the duration of programmes. The government can also restrict mid-programme fee increases without consultation and require institutions to clearly and publicly justify the fee differences between full-time students and part-time students.

6.5.2.4 Support gender responsive policies

The government of Lesotho should develop and implement policies that recognise the challenges faced by female part-time students, as they have overwhelming caregiving

responsibilities. This can be achieved by developing policies that encourage flexible learning options that accommodate caregiving responsibilities.

6.5.2.5 Promote institutional accountability

The government should toughen accountability strategies in higher education to ensure that institutions meet their obligations to part-time students. This can be done by requiring institutions to report on how they promote access, equity and support for part-time students. Most importantly, the government should ensure that institutions of higher learning adhere to existing policies and regulations.

6.5.3 Recommendations for part-time students

6.5.3.1 Promote collective advocacy

Part-time students should organise themselves to advocate for their rights and interests. This can be done by forming groups where they discuss common concerns and advocate for representation in institutional governance structures. It is also important for them to use current established channels to raise their concerns and actively support those student leaders who are willing to advocate for part-time students.

6.5.3.2 Financial planning and management

Given the absence of external financial support for part-time students, they are encouraged to engage in careful financial planning. This can be done by understanding the total cost of their programme before enrolment to create a detailed budget that caters for all expenses, including tuition fees, cost of study materials, travel costs and accommodation costs. Part-time students can also ask for employer support where possible and, come up with contingency plans to cover unexpected expenses.

6.5.3.3 Work-life balance strategies

To manage all the demands on their time, part-time students are encouraged to develop effective work-life balance strategies. This can be achieved by communicating openly and honestly with their principals, family members and partners concerning their academic commitments and deadlines. This will help part-time students to negotiate flexible working

schedules where possible. They should also seek help from their family members and their community networks to get the needed support.

6.5.3.4 Ethical decision-making

Despite the ethical challenges that they face, part-time students should make principled ethical decisions. They need to have a clear understanding of the severity and consequences of academic dishonesty for their future careers. They should also strive for legitimate alternatives for the ethical challenges they face, such as asking for flexible use of library resources. Most importantly, part-time students should support each other in making ethical choices and report to institutional authorities without fear of any systemic failures that may lead them towards making unethical decisions.

6.6 Future research

6.6.1 Use of quantitative study

To correlate the qualitative insights of this study, future research could use quantitative methods to measure the intensity of widespread ethical challenges for part-time students. This can be achieved by conducting large-scale surveys across many institutions of higher learning and by analysing statistical correlations between institutional practices and academic outcomes, which could inform policy reforms.

6.6.2 Conduct studies on specific sub-populations

Given the diverse nature of part-time students that was revealed by this study, targeted research on vulnerable sub-groups is needed. Future research could pay attention to volunteer and low-income private school teachers or investigate gender-specific barriers experienced by part-time students or even explore the challenges faced by part-time students with caregiving responsibilities. Also, a study on how geographical distances promoted ethical challenges encountered by part-time students could help with the design of location-sensitive support strategies.

6.6.3 The use of action research

There is a need for action research that can test practical solutions to the identified ethical challenges. This could be designing and evaluating intervention strategies to ethical

challenges such as improved access to resources, flexible learning models and promotion of part-time student representation in institutional governance. Research could also investigate the effectiveness of better communication strategies could be in reducing misunderstandings in the academic environment.

6.6.4 Institutional perspectives

The current study mainly focused on part-time students' voices; future research could include institutional viewpoints to understand the main causes of exclusion practices. To understand why support systems in institutions of higher learning are not effective, studies on administrative decision are making and resource limitations could be conducted.

6.6.5 Using different theoretical lenses

To build on the dual theoretical framework of the social justice theory and the equity theory that were used in this study, future research could test or try to refine this integrated model by using other theories.

6.7 Own unique contribution (model/framework)

The researcher's unique contribution from this study is the Mohale Ethical Compromise Framework (MEC). This framework proposes that ethical challenges faced by part-time students in Lesotho's higher education institutions are not intentional ethical oversights but can be predictable outcomes of injustices in institutions of higher education. This framework suggests that when institutions of higher learning systematically exclude part-time students across various dimensions those students will be forced to engage in ethical compromised behaviours as survival mechanisms.

The Mohale Ethical Compromise Framework (MEC) has been crafted by incorporating the social justice theory (Rawls, 1971) and the equity theory (Adams, 1963) to come up with a strategy to follow to understand ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher education in Lesotho. The MEC framework proposes a three-stage framework when studying part-time students' ethical challenge:

Stage 1 involves understanding of systemic injustices that are prevailing in institutions of higher learning. **Stage 2** involves identification of inequalities as perceived by part-time

students and **Stage 3** involves understanding of behavioural patterns by part-time students that respond to systemic injustices

Stage 1: Systemic Injustice → Stage 2: Perceived Injustice → Stage 3: Ethical Compromised Behaviour

Figure 6.1 outlines the Mohale Ethical Compromise Framework (MEC). The framework outlines how part-time students face systemic injustices in institutions of higher learning, then it progresses to perceived inequities and finally, resolutions to ethical challenges. The framework emphasises that part-time students' unethical behaviour are predictable outcomes of perceived inequity against part-time students. The framework also proposes solutions to ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning.

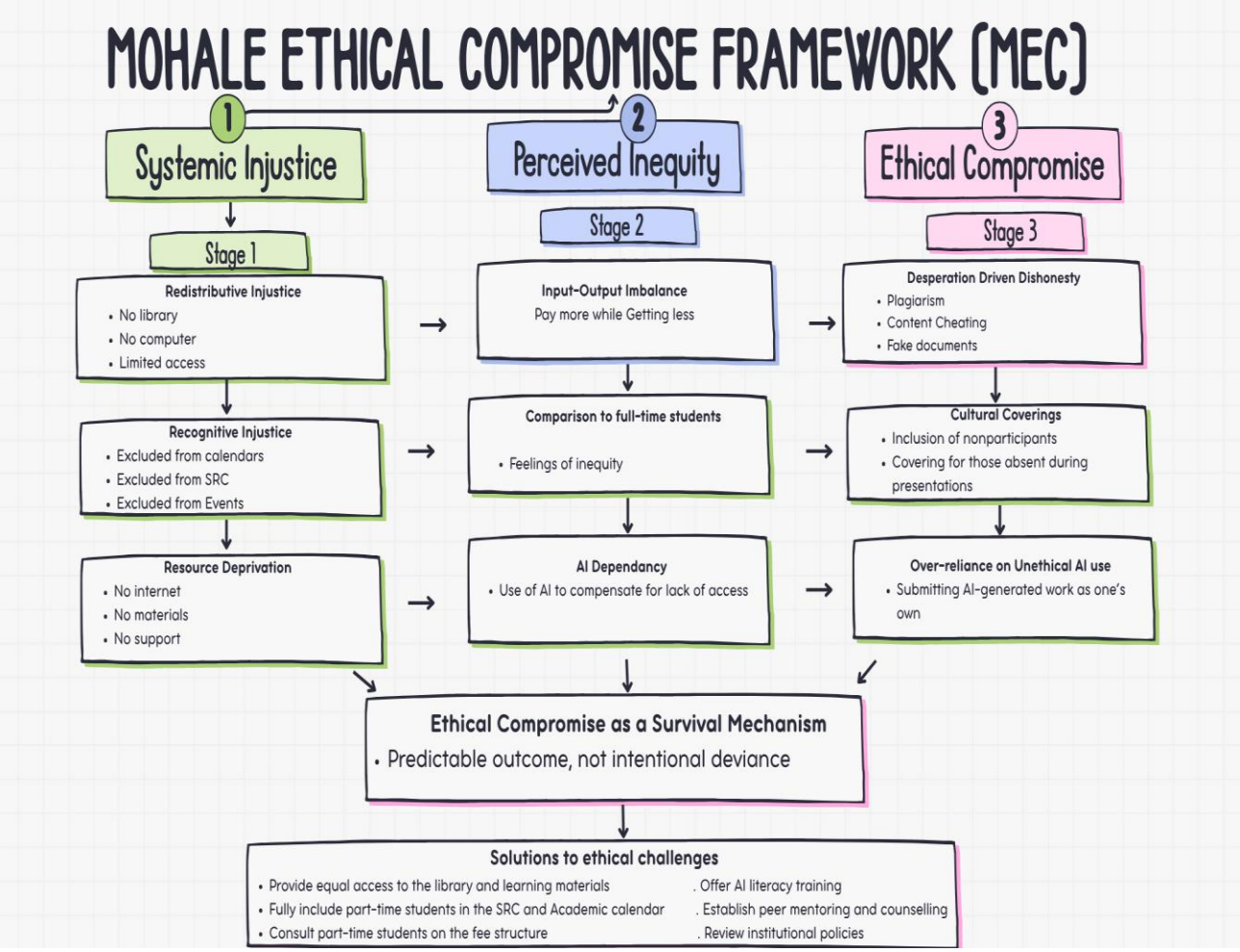


Figure 6.1: Mohale ethical compromise framework

6.8 Limitations

Even though this study provided rich qualitative insights, it however has some limitations which need to be acknowledged. Firstly, this study relied mainly on qualitative data from focus group interviews; this may have limited the generalisation of the findings. In the absence of quantitative data, the broader impact of the revealed ethical challenges cannot be applied to all part-time student population in Lesotho. Secondly, the study purposefully focused on only three institutions of higher education which may not fully capture the experiences of part-time students in other institutions of higher education mainly those with perhaps different management structures or those in different geographical locations.

Thirdly, the data-collection process faced some challenges, which included the reluctance of male part-time students to express their thoughts which resulted in focus group interviews being dominated by female part-time students. As a result, the data may not fully represent equal gender dimensions of the ethical challenges found in this study. Additionally, the study encountered limitations with part-time students leaving mid-interviews and some preferred to code-switch between Sesotho and English rather than using English fully leading to the researcher having to translate their Sesotho to English; as such, this may have affected the depth of the data that was collected. Finally, the reliance on only part-time students' self-reported perspectives may have promoted bias and does not capture institutions' side that may have provided a more comprehensive insight into the systemic aspects.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a holistic picture of the research journey that the researcher took when exploring the ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. In conclusion, this study has challenged prevailing assumptions that unethical behaviours by part-time students come from their individual moral failures. Instead, the findings revealed that the unethical behaviour of part-time students included calculated survival strategies used in response to failures in institutions' systems. Using the dual lens of the social justice theory and the equity theory,

this study exposed systemic marginalisation and perceived inequities between part-time students and full-time students, which led to ethical compromises by part-time students as coping strategies.

As a unique contribution, this study developed the Mohale Ethical Compromise Framework (MEC), which provides a structured approach that can be used to understand how systemic injustices in institutions of higher learning led to perceived inequities and ultimate ethical compromises. Recommendations emerging from this study were directed towards Lesotho's higher education institutions, the government of Lesotho and part-time students, with emphasis on promoting equity, access and inclusion in institutions of higher learning. Recognition of the study's limitations and future research directions were also proposed. Ultimately, the study asserts that ensuring ethical conduct in institutions of higher learning demands institutional justice rather than relying on individual integrity, and that the way forward is to change systems to support all students, regardless of their enrolment status.

REFERENCES

Abalos, C. P. G., Lagcao, Y. G. D., Peñaflor, L. L., Perocho, S. N. S., & Besa, A. S. (2022). Enter Her Novice World: A Narrative Study on The Life of a Teenage Student–Mother. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Research and Technology*, *3*(2), 141–146. https://doi.org/10.17509/ijert.v3i2.50078

Abdelhakim, A. S. (2021). Adopted research designs by tourism and hospitality postgraduates in the light of research onion. *International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management*, *4*(2), 98–124.

Adams, J. S. (1963). Towards an understanding of inequity. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, *67*(5), 422–436. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0040968

Agyekum, B. (2023). Adult unmet educational needs: Higher education options amongst adults in rural and small towns in Ghana. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, *29*(1), 195–214. https://doi.org/10.1177/14779714221096499

Ahmadpour-Samani, P., Arman, H., Foukerdi, A., Hadi-Vencheh, A., & Mavi, R. K. (2022). The equity theory: A quantitative perspective using data envelopment analysis. *RAIRO - Operations Research*, *56*(5), 3711–3732. https://doi.org/10.1051/ro/2022178

Ahmed, S. K. (2024). The pillars of trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, *2*, 100051. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2024.100051

Ajjawi, R., Gravett, K., & O'Shea, S. (2025). The politics of student belonging: Identity and purpose. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *30*(4), 791–804. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2023.2280261

Akgun, S., & Greenhow, C. (2022). Artificial intelligence in education: Addressing ethical challenges in K-12 settings. *AI and Ethics*, *2*(3), 431–440. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-021-00096-7

Akhter, F., & Iqbal, S. (2021). Student's performance and academic stress: A study of higher education institution of pakistan. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *60*(1), 63–79. https://doi.org/10.46568/jssh.v60i1.483

Aladsani, H. K. (2022). The perceptions of female breadwinner parents regarding their children's distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Education and Information Technologies*, *27*(4), 4817–4839. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10812-9

Alameddine, M., Bou-Karroum, K., & Hijazi, M. A. (2022). A national study on the resilience of community pharmacists in Lebanon: A cross-sectional survey. *Journal of Pharmaceutical Policy and Practice*, *15*(1), 8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40545-022-00406-2

Alborough, L., & Hansen, R. K. (2023). Reframing fundraising research: The challenges and opportunities of interpretivist research practices and practitioner researchers in fundraising studies. *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing*, *28*(1), e1775.

Alharahsheh, H. H., & Pius, A. (2020). *A Review of key paradigms: Positivism VS interpretivism*. *2*.

Ali, A., C Varma, U., & Pandya, S. (2024). Qualitative vs Quantitative: The Difference in the Key Sections of Doctoral Dissertations – A Comparative Analysis and a Summary of Findings. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *19*, 007. https://doi.org/10.28945/5330

AlKharouf, R., Shehadeh, A., Alrefaee, A., & Alshboul, O. (2024). Integrative strategies for social inclusion and equity: Enhancing refugee access to higher education in Jordan. *Heliyon*, *10*(11), e31762. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e31762

Al-Qudah, E. M. (2024). The Effectiveness of Recorded Lectures on University Students' Achievement. *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development*, *12*(1), e2537. https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v12i1.2537

Alshamy, A., & Barry, A. (2024). Experiences of Graduate Students of the First Cohort on Cost-Sharing Policies in Saudi Public Universities: Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Policy and Practice. *Sage Open*, *14*(2), 21582440241256807. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241256807

Amzalag, M., Shapira, N., & Dolev, N. (2022). Two Sides of the Coin: Lack of Academic Integrity in Exams During the Corona Pandemic, Students' and Lecturers' Perceptions. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, *20*(2), 243–263. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-021-09413-5

Andrade, C. (2020). The Limitations of Online Surveys. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, *42*(6), 575–576. https://doi.org/10.1177/0253717620957496

Andrade, C., Fernandes, J. L., & Almeida, L. S. (2024). Mature Working Student Parents Navigating Multiple Roles: A Qualitative Analysis. *Education Sciences*, *14*(7), 786. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14070786

Ardissone, A. N., Galindo, S., Wysocki, A. F., Triplett, E. W., & Drew, J. C. (2021). The Need for Equitable Scholarship Criteria for Part-Time Students. *Innovative Higher Education*, *46*(4), 461–479. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-021-09549-7

Ari, A. E., & Korkmaz, B. C. (2024). A Qualitative Study on the Challenges in Doctoral Education Encountered by Full-time Working PhD Students. *Erzincan Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, *26*(4), 507–516. https://doi.org/10.17556/erziefd.1427260

Aria, A., Jafari, P., & Behifar, M. (2020). The Impediments to Student Engagement: A hybrid Method Based on Fuzzy Delphi and Fuzzy DEMATEL. *World Journal of Education*, *10*(5), 45. https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v10n5p45

Ates Ozdemir, E., Kisabacak Basgurboga, G., & Duhan Musaoglu, M. (2024). Phenomenology of Student Wellbeing in Higher Education: Challenges and Strategies. *Phenomenology of Student Wellbeing in Higher Education: Challenges and Strategies*. https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i4.1843

Atteberry-Ash, B., Holloway, B. T., & Walls, N. E. (2023). Endorsement of Critical Social Justice and Privilege: Heterosexual and Cisgender Privilege Awareness Among Social Work Students in the US. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, *43*(4), 449–474. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2023.2246155

Ayanwale, M. A., Mosia, P. A., Molefi, R. R., & Shata, L. (2022). Reliability Components of Online Teaching and Learning Tools in Lesotho Higher Education Institutions: A Systematic Review. *Pertanika Journal of Science and Technology*, *31*(1), 595–614. https://doi.org/10.47836/pjst.31.1.34

Ayenew Kassie Tesema & Tamrin Fathoni. (2023). Global Trends in Higher Education: A Comparative Analysis of Enrollment and Quality Assurance Mechanisms. *Assoeltan: Indonesian Journal of Community Research and Engagement*, *1*(1), 29–37. https://doi.org/10.70610/edujavare.v1i1.27

Baja, R. A. C. (2024). Tears of hope: The plight of working students under tvl-late afternoon program. *European Journal of Education Studies*, *11*(5). https://doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v11i5.5291

Barua, L., & Lockee, B. B. (2024). A review of strategies to incorporate flexibility in higher education course designs. *Discover Education*, *3*(1). https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-024-00213-8

Beckwith, N. (2023). *Barriers for Non-Traditional Students in Higher Education*.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Hayfield, N. (2022). ‘A starting point for your journey, not a map’: Nikki Hayfield in conversation with Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke about thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *19*(2), 424–445. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2019.1670765

Bravo, M. F. B. (2022). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Undergraduate University Students with Part-Time Jobs*.

Brown, S. (2023). Where are the part-time women teachers in senior school leadership: Inequalities, tensions and timescapes? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 17411432231219679. https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432231219679

Buriro, A., Ednut, N., & Khatoon, Z. (2021). Philosophical underpinning and phenomenology approach in social science research. *Asia-Pacific - Annual Research Journal of Far East & South East Asia*, *38*, 237–254. https://doi.org/10.47781/asia-pacific.vol38.Iss0.2526

Caldwell, H., Whewell, E., & Richardson, T. (2025). A trio-autoethnographic analysis of the experiences and wellbeing of part-time doctoral students with full-time academic roles. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *62*(3), 1032–1046. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2024.2385005

Calikoglu, B. S. (2019). Challenge-Oriented Behavior Types: A New Explanation. *Lnternational Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, *12*(2), 197–204. https://doi.org/10.26822/iejee.2019257667

Callender, C., & Thompson, J. (2018). *The lost part-timers: The decline of part-time undergraduate higher education in England*. The Sutton Trust.

Canty, A. J., Chase, J., Hingston, M., Greenwood, M., Mainsbridge, C. P., & Skalicky, J. (2020). Addressing student attrition within higher education online programs through a collaborative community of practice. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*, *3*(Special Issue). https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2020.3.s1.3

Cardellino, P., & Deed, C. (2024). Interactions between Design Innovation and Educational Change in Non-Western Schools. *Buildings*, *14*(3), 716. https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings14030716

Carvalho, C., Mónico, L., Pinto, A., Oliveira, S., & Leite, E. (2024). Effects of Work–Family Conflict and Facilitation Profiles on Work Engagement. *Societies*, *14*(7), 110. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc14070110

Casey, C., Taylor, J., Knight, F., & Trenoweth, S. (2023). Understanding the Mental Health of Doctoral Students. *Encyclopedia*, *3*(4), 1523–1536. https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia3040109

Chakravorti, T., Koneru, S. D., & Rajtmajer, S. (2024). *Reproducibility, Replicability, and Transparency in Research: What 430 Professors Think in Universities across the USA and India* (Version 1). arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2402.08796

Charli, M. S., Eshete, S. K., & Debela, K. L. (2022). Learning How Research Design Methods Work: A Review of Creswell's Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches. *The Qualitative Report*. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5901

Chasokela, D. (2024). Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Educational Research: In D. Elomari (Ed.), *Advances in Educational Technologies and Instructional Design* (pp. 51–76). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-6021-7.ch003

Chen, Y., Zhang, Z., Zhou, J., Liu, C., Zhang, X., & Yu, T. (2023). A cognitive evaluation and equity-based perspective of pay for performance on job performance: A meta-analysis and path model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 1039375. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1039375

Chepkiyach, T. S., & Thomas, D. M. (2025). © *SAGE GLOBAL PUBLISHERS*. 563–577.

Childs, E., Mohammad, F., Stevens, L., Burbelo, H., Awoke, A., Rewkowski, N., & Manocha, D. (2024). An Overview of Enhancing Distance Learning Through Emerging Augmented and Virtual Reality Technologies. *IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics*, *30*(8), 4480–4496. https://doi.org/10.1109/TVCG.2023.3264577

Chong, C. M. (2025). The Impact of Online Learning Formats on Emotional Responses and Academic Performance in EFL Courses: A Comparative Study of Real-time vs. Pre-recorded Classes. *The Korean Association of General Education*, *19*(1), 109–127. https://doi.org/10.46392/kjge.2025.19.1.109

Chong, S. L. (2022). Interviewing in Qualitative Research. *The Malaysian Journal of Qualitative Research*, *8*(Issue 1), 110. https://doi.org/10.61211/mjqr080110

Clinton-Lisell, V., & Gwozdz, L. (2023). Understanding Student Experiences of Renewable and Traditional Assignments. *College Teaching*, *71*(2), 125–134. https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2023.2179591

Conway, K. M., Wladis, C., & Hachey, A. C. (2021). Time Poverty and Parenthood: Who Has Time for College? *AERA Open*, *7*. https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211011608

Crawford, N., & Emery, S. (2021). "Shining a Light" on Mature-Aged Students In, and From, Regional and Remote Australia. *Student Success*, *12*(2), 18–27. https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.1919

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*.

Dabis, A., & Csaki, C. (2024). AI and ethics: Investigating the first policy responses of higher education institutions to the challenge of generative AI. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *11*(1), 1006. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03526-z

Daramola, O. (2021). Lessons from Postgraduate Supervision in Two African Universities: An Autoethnographic Account. *Education Sciences*, *11*(7), 345. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11070345

Darsih, E., Agustiana, V., Hanggara, A., & Palmer, R. (2025). Insights on TPACK Implementation by Preservice English Teachers: Challenges and Solutions. *Script Journal: Journal of Linguistics and English Teaching*, *10*(1), 68–93. https://doi.org/10.24903/sj.v10i1.2000

Davis, A. C., Voelkel, J. L., Remmers, C. L., Adams, J. L., & McGlynn, E. A. (2023). Comparing Kaiser Permanente Members to the General Population: Implications for Generalizability of Research. *The Permanente Journal*, *27*(2), 87–98. https://doi.org/10.7812/TPP/22.172

Davitadze, M. (2023). Labour and Employment Policy: Opportunities and Challenges for Undergraduate Students. *European Scientific Journal, ESJ*, *19*(35), 99. https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2023.v19n35p99

Dawadi, S. (2020). Thematic Analysis Approach: A Step by Step Guide for ELT Research Practitioners. *Journal of NELTA*, *25*(1–2), 62–71. https://doi.org/10.3126/nelta.v25i1-2.49731

Dawar, M. (2025). The Role of Part-Time Work on College Students' Time Management, Academic Performance, and Well-Being. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*, *7*(3), 44245. https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i03.44245

Desjardins, R., & Florentin, V. (2024). Social justice and translator training and education in a time of (non-)equitable tech. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series – Themes in Translation Studies*, *23*. https://doi.org/10.52034/lans-tts.v23i.786

Desmond, H., & Dierickx, K. (2021). Research integrity codes of conduct in Europe: Understanding the divergences. *Bioethics*, *35*(5), 414–428. https://doi.org/10.1111/bioe.12851

Dewaele, J.-M., & Li, C. (2021). Teacher enthusiasm and students' social-behavioral learning engagement: The mediating role of student enjoyment and boredom in Chinese EFL classes. *Language Teaching Research*, *25*(6), 922–945. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211014538

Doherty-Restrepo, J. L., Perez, K., Creeden, M., Cram, B., & Charite, M. (2023). Closing the Gap Between Students' Career Readiness and Employers' Expectations: An Innovative Competency-Based Approach. *International Journal of Innovative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, *4*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.4018/IJITLHE.327348

Dost, G., & Mazzoli Smith, L. (2023). Understanding higher education students' sense of belonging: A qualitative meta-ethnographic analysis. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *47*(6), 822–849. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2023.2191176

Drisko, J. W. (2025). Transferability and Generalization in Qualitative Research. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *35*(1), 102–110. https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315241256560

Dube, M. (2023). The epistemic views of rural history teachers on school history as specialised subject knowledge. *Yesterday and Today*, *30*(1), 136–152. https://doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2023/n30a7

Dulalas, T. M. B., Deguiñon, J. P., Famor, K. V. C., Osma, H. J. C., Puda, L. J. Y., & Batiancila, M. J. Q. (2025). A Comparative Study of Emotional Intelligence in Full-Time and Part-Time Students of Filipino College Students. *American Journal of Human Psychology*, *3*(1), 7–13. https://doi.org/10.54536/ajhp.v3i1.4178

Dungey, C. E., & Ansell, N. (2020). 'I go to school to survive': Facing physical, moral and economic uncertainties in rural Lesotho. *Children's Geographies*, *18*(6), 614–628. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2020.1822514

Duvnjak, I. (2020). WELL-BEING AND LIFE SATISFACTION OF STUDENTS. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, *8*(9), 1173–1178. https://doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/11772

Fahs, I., Nasser, S., Bou Malhab, S., Younes, S., Safwan, J., Bouraad, E., Abdel Fattah, S., Chamsine, N., Rahal, M., & Hammoudi Halat, D. (2023). Assessment of professionalism among pharmacy students: A pilot study exploring professionalism tenets and associated factors. *Pharmacy Education*, *23*(1), 283–295. https://doi.org/10.46542/pe.2023.231.283295

Fang, R., & White, R. (2025). Distance Learning Students' Perspectives of Academic Procrastination: A Qualitative Investigation. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, *73*(1), 31–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2024.2317614

Fenton, J. (2022). Enlighten me: Teaching social justice in further and higher education by reclaiming philosophically liberal values – a social work education case study.

Journal of Further and Higher Education, *46*(8), 1066–1077. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2022.2047619

Fiorini, L. A., Borg, A., & Debono, M. (2022). Part-time adult students' satisfaction with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, *28*(2), 354–377. https://doi.org/10.1177/14779714221082691

Fraser, N. (2009). *Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world* (Vol. 31). Columbia university press.

Fynn, A., & Mashile, E. O. (2022). Continuous Online Assessment at a South African Open Distance and e-Learning Institution. *Frontiers in Education*, *7*, 791271. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.791271

Gardner, A. C., Maietta, H. N., Gardner, P. D., & Perkins, N. (2022). Online Postsecondary Adult Learners: An Analysis of Adult Learner Characteristics and Online Course Taking Preferences. *American Journal of Distance Education*, *36*(3), 176–192. https://doi.org/10.1080/08923647.2021.1928434

Gauci, S. A., & Carabott, J. (2025). Understanding the Employment Needs of Full-time Vocational Students at ICS: Exploring the Impact of Employment on Student Performance at the College and Beyond. *MCAST Journal of Applied Research & Practice*, *8*(4), 4–22. https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0055.0452

Geletu, G. M., & Adige, A. Y. (2023). Effectiveness of teaching-learning, research and innovative actions in Hawassa University, Ethiopia. *Cogent Education*, *10*(1), 2214222. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2214222

Ghassan El Ali, R., & Kandil, K. (2024). Juggling Work and Studies: A Lebanon-Focused Study on Work-Life Balance and Well-being of Part-Time Student Workers. *Advances in Social Science and Culture*, *6*(3), p92. https://doi.org/10.22158/assc.v6n3p92

Gorni, R. L., Nurdin, D., & Komariah, A. (2024). Leveraging Technology for Remote Supervision: Overcoming Challenges in Supervising Geographically Dispersed Student Teachers. *R. L.*, *3*(1).

Grigoreva, M. N., Grigorev, A. L., Borovkova, M. G., Akimova, V. P., & Alexandrova, N. V. (2025). Problems of Maintaining Academic Integrity in Online Learning for University Students. *International Conference on Finance, Economics, Management and IT Business (FEMIB 2024)*, 132–136. https://doi.org/10.63550/ICEIP.2025.84.98.001

Grozev, V. H., & Easterbrook, M. J. (2022). The relationships of employed students to non-employed students and non-student work colleagues: Identity implications.

Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy, *22*(2), 712–734. https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.12315

Gundumogula, M. (2020). Importance of Focus Groups in Qualitative Research. *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies*, *8*(11). https://doi.org/10.24940/theijhss/2020/v8/i11/HS2011-082

Gyourko, Jennifer Silver, & Johanna K. P. Greeson. (2025). Financial and psychosocial challenges reported by social work students: Findings from a cross-sectional online survey. *Transformative Social Work*, *2*(2). https://doi.org/10.55016/ojs/tsw.v2i2.79851

Haltia, N., Isopahkala-Bouret, U., & Jauhiainen, A. (2022). The vocational route to higher education in Finland: Students' backgrounds, choices and study experiences. *European Educational Research Journal*, *21*(3), 541–558. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904121996265

Hamka, ., Koesponco, E., Anita, ., Cahyaningrum, S., & Yusuf, M. (2022). Stakeholder Collaboration in Developing Sustainable Ecotourism in Badung. *KnE Social Sciences*. https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v7i9.11020

Harahap, Y. F., & Siregar, P. A. (2023). Persepsi Mahasiswa Terhadap Begadang Malam Di Fakultas Kesehatan Masyarakat Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara. *IJOH : Indonesian Journal of Public Health*, *1*(3), 239–246. https://doi.org/10.61214/ijoh.v1i3.161

Hari Rajan, M., Herbert, C., & Polly, P. (2024). Disrupted student engagement and motivation: Observations from online and face-to-face university learning environments. *Frontiers in Education*, *8*, 1320822. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1320822

Haririan, H., Hassankhani, H., & Porter, J. E. (2024). The Lived Experience of Nursing Students from Student Work in Clinical Environments: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study. *Journal of Caring Sciences*, *13*(2), 138–145. https://doi.org/10.34172/jcs.33241

Harris, B. N., McCarthy, P. C., Wright, A. M., Schutz, H., Boersma, K. S., Shepherd, S. L., Manning, L. A., Malisch, J. L., & Ellington, R. M. (2020). From panic to pedagogy: Using online active learning to promote inclusive instruction in ecology and evolutionary biology courses and beyond. *Ecology and Evolution*, *10*(22), 12581–12612. https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.6915

Hayman, R., Wood, M., Wharton, K., & Shotton, L. (2022). Supporting the integration of first-year undergraduate widening participation sport students into university: The

role of online programme induction. *SN Social Sciences*, *2*(12), 268. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-022-00574-7

Hill, L. H., Rogers-Shaw, C. A., & Carr-Chellman, D. J. (2023). But, *is* it Adult Education? Disciplinary Boundaries of Adult Education and Higher Education. *Adult Learning*, *34*(2), 59–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/10451595231159430

Horan, K. A., & Su, S. (2025). Time-based conflict and trade-offs: Work-family-school conflict and health behaviors. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, *17*(4), e70041. https://doi.org/10.1111/aphw.70041

Horsley, F. (2022). Studying for a part-time PhD. *Forensic Update*, *1*(142), 26–27. https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsfu.2022.1.142.26

Hoshaw, J., Isaacson, E. M., Grabau, A., Wilkinson, R., Di Genova, L., Schramm-Possinger, M., Santilli, N. R., Daugherty, K. K., & Ben-Avie, M. (2021). Integrated Planning: The “Difference that Makes a Difference” in Institutional Effectiveness Over Time. *Intersection: A Journal at the Intersection of Assessment and Learning*, *2*(3). https://doi.org/10.61669/001c.24571

Hug, S., Jurow, S., & Thiry, H. (2022). HSI Students’ Experiences of “Servingness” during COVID-19. *Dialogues in Social Justice: An Adult Education Journal*, *6*(2), A1147. https://doi.org/10.55370/dsj.v6i2.1147

Hunter-Johnson, Y. (2021). A Leap of Academic Faith and Resilience: Nontraditional International Students Pursuing Higher Education in the United States of America. *Journal of International Students*, *12*(2). https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v12i2.1986

Huong, P. T. (2024). The Dynamics of Part-time Employment among University Students: Balancing Work, Education, and Personal Growth. *World Journal of Educational Research*, *11*(2), p60. https://doi.org/10.22158/wjer.v11n2p60

Issafi, H., & Ouladhadda, A. (2024). AI-Assisted Writing Tools and the Perceptions of Fairness in University Writing Courses and Assessments: An Analysis through Equity Theory. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, *9*(3), 311. https://doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v9i3.1441

Izawa, S. (2024). Cultivating classroom democracy: Educational philosophy and classroom management for social justice. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *56*(2), 135–144. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2022.2094244

Jackman, P. C., Slater, M. J., Carter, E. E., Sisson, K., & Bird, M. D. (2023). Social support, social identification, mental wellbeing, and psychological distress in

doctoral students: A person-centred analysis. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *47*(1), 45–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2022.2088272

Janis, I. (2022). Strategies for Establishing Dependability between Two Qualitative Intrinsic Case Studies: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis. *Field Methods*, *34*(3), 240–255. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X211069636

Johansson, E., & Hart, R. (2023). The Outcomes of Organizational Citizenship Behaviors in Part-Time and Temporary Working University Students. *Behavioral Sciences*, *13*(8), 697. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13080697

Johnson, J. L., Adkins, D., & Chauvin, S. (2020). A Review of the Quality Indicators of Rigor in Qualitative Research. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, *84*(1), 7120. https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7120

Jones, J. (2025). Power and possibility: An intersectional perspective of campus sexual violence disclosure. *BMC Global and Public Health*, *3*(1), 41. https://doi.org/10.1186/s44263-025-00163-9

Juhnke, P., & Haley, T. L. (2024). Indigenizing Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition: A Review of the Literature. *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *15*(3). https://doi.org/10.5206/cjsotlrcacea.2024.3.16682

Jung, J., Lai, M., & Li, X. (2025). Part-time master's students' attitudes towards study and work. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *47*(1), 33–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037x.2023.2254244

Jung, J., Li, X., & Lai, M. (2024). Concept of research among master's students in Hong Kong. *Higher Education*, *87*(1), 17–33. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00989-4

Kabanova, E.E., & Vetrova, E.A. (2022). Quality of Educational Services in the Distance Format: Assessment of Moscow Higher Education Institutions' Students. *European Journal of Contemporary Education*, *11*(4). https://doi.org/10.13187/ejced.2022.4.1113

Kakar, Z. U. H., Rasheed, R., Rashid, A., & Akhter, S. (2023). Criteria For Assessing And Ensuring The Trustworthiness In Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Business Reflections*, *4*(2), 150–173. https://doi.org/10.56249/ijbr.03.01.44

Kardam, N., Misra, S., & Wilson, D. (2023). Is Natural Language Processing Effective in Education Research? A case study in student perceptions of TA support. *2023 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition Proceedings*, 43887. https://doi.org/10.18260/1-2--43887

Kaufman, D. (2025). *Meeting the Challenge: The Relationship Between Students' Educational Gains and Teacher Full-Time Versus Part-Time Status*.

Kawasaki, J., & Chang, S. (2024). Exploring the Goals of Social Justice Teaching Through the Eyes of Early Career Science Teachers. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, *35*(4), 423–442. https://doi.org/10.1080/1046560X.2023.2288719

Khanal, B. (2022). A Study of Part-Time Worker Students at the Postgraduate Level. *Bouddhik Abhiyan (बौद्धिक अभियान)*, 16–23. https://doi.org/10.3126/bdkan.v7i1.47528

Khatri, K. K. (2020). Research Paradigm: A Philosophy of Educational Research. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, *5*(5), 1435–1440. https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.55.15

Kibuuka, E. (2024). Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy in Higher Education Institutions in Uganda: Policy, Legal and Ethical Tensions. *International Journal of Higher Education*, *13*(4), 23. https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v13n4p23

Kniess, D., & Penrose, C. (2021). Using Focus Groups to Listen, Learn, and Lead in Higher Education: Danner, M. J. E., Pickering, J. W., & Paredes, T. M. (2018). *Using focus groups to listen, learn, and lead in higher education* . Sterling, VA: Stylus. 192 pp. ISBN: 978-1-62036-597-7 ($32.50, paperback). *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, *58*(4), 474–476. https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2020.1723606

Knowles, M. S. (1980). The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy (2nd ed.). Cambridge Books.

Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., III, & Swanson, R. A. (2012). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (7th ed.). Routledge.

Koichu, B., Cooper, J., & Widder, M. (2022). Implementation of Problem Solving in School: From Intended to Experienced. *Implementation and Replication Studies in Mathematics Education*, *2*(1), 76–106. https://doi.org/10.1163/26670127-bja10004

Kong, K. G. (2024). Prevailing Moral Standards in Higher Education Institutions. *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion*, *6*(2), 32–42. https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v6i2.4

Kont, K.-R., Rannula, K., & Puura, K. (2021). Professional Ethical Aspects in the Study and Internship Environment: Research in Tallinn Health Care College. *Acta*

Paedagogica Vilnensia, *46*, 148–167. https://doi.org/10.15388/ActPaed.46.2021.10

Krieger, J. T. (2022). Employer tuition assistance: Current approaches and the application of the implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing. *Nw. UL Rev.*, *117*, 1661.

Lafaye, C. G. (2020). *Recognition and Redistribution: Discussion of two Paradigms*.

Lefoka, P. (2023). Perspective Chapter: Lessons from Implementing a Higher Education Program in Lesotho. In L. Waller & S. Kay Waller (Eds.), *Education and Human Development* (Vol. 4). IntechOpen. https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.109291

Lekhetho, M. (2021). Postgraduate Students' Perceptions of Support Services Rendered by a Distance Learning Institution. *International Journal of Higher Education*, *11*(7), 24. https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v11n7p24

Lessky, F., & Unger, M. (2023). Working long hours while studying: A higher risk for First-in-Family students and students of particular fields of study? *European Journal of Higher Education*, *13*(3), 347–366. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2047084

Letseka-Manka, M., Morena, M. C., & Khumalo, M. A. (2023). Exploring Higher Education Part-time Students' Sense of Belonging: The Case of an Institution in Lesotho. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, *4*(5), 7–14. https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2023.4.5.735

Li, X. (2024). Study on One-Stop Student Community Education Management and Services in Higher Education Institutions. *Modern Management Science & Engineering*, *6*(1), p106. https://doi.org/10.22158/mmse.v6n1p106

Libago, Mangadang, A., Hidayah D. Molok, Gabriel, A. B., Noble, G., & Jimbo Fuentes. (2024). *The Association Between Being Working Students to Academic Performance, and Time Management A RESEARCH*. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.13797.61921

Lim, W. M. (2025). What Is Qualitative Research? An Overview and Guidelines. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, *33*(2), 199–229. https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619

Lincoln, T. (2021). *Qualitative Research: A Field Manual for Ministry Students*. Atla Open Press. https://doi.org/10.31046/atlaopenpress.24

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.*

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2016). *The Constructivist Credo*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315418810

Liu, T., & Taresh, S. (2024). Balancing Athletic and Academic Excellence: A Quantitative Study of Student-Athletes' Time Management Strategies. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, *3*(7), 4004–4022. https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i7.4520

Lourens, A., Connelly, R., Plaatjes, R., & Mapaling, C. (2022). Impact of Emergency Online Learning and Teaching on Mature Part-Time Students. *European Conference on E-Learning*, *21*(1), 230–239. https://doi.org/10.34190/ecel.21.1.897

Nashich, T., & Palupi, L. (2020). The Relationship between Social Support and The Psychological Well-being of Students Who Work Part-time. *E3S Web of Conferences*, *202*, 12024. https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202020212024

Maggino, F. (Ed.). (2023). *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17299-1

Mahande, R. D., Setialaksana, W., Abdal, N. M., & Lamada, M. (2024). Exploring HyFlex learning modality through adaption-innovation theory for student learning equity. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, *14*(1), e202410. https://doi.org/10.30935/ojcmt/14170

Makhata, M., Naidoo, D., & Gurayah, T. (2021). Occupational choices of school-going adolescents: A study in the Pitseng Area, Leribe District, Lesotho. *Rural and Remote Health*. https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH6274

Makoelle, T. M., & Burmistrova, V. (2020). Funding inclusive education for equity and social justice in South African schools. *South African Journal of Education*, *40*(4), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v40n4a2037

Maluleka, U., Senekal, J., Munnik, E., & Somhlaba, N. (2023). Balancing dual roles as mothers and students like a walk on a tight rope? Reflections and experiences of student mothers at a South African higher education institution. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *37*(3). https://doi.org/10.20853/37-3-5448

Manyeneng, L. G., Pilusa, M. L., & Mogotlane, M. S. (2021). Health and safety risks affecting part-time nursing students. *Health SA Gesondheid*, *26*. https://doi.org/10.4102/hsag.v26i0.1404

Mapetla, N. (2022). *State of Higher Education Report*. Council on Higher Education, Lesotho.

Maphosa, T. T., & Makama, R. (2025). From colonial time to decolonial temporalities. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *64*(2), e12817. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12817

Mapuya, M. P. (2023). Exploring Social Justice Issues That Inform the 21st-Century Curriculum in Higher Education: Lecturers' Voices and Experiences. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, *5*(3), 108–127. https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2023.26

Mariana, S., & Veronika, M. (2023, June 23). Analysis Of University Students' Needs For Inclusive Education. *Education and New Developments*. International Conference on Education and New Developments. https://doi.org/10.36315/2023v2end075

Marotta, J. A. (2024). Transformative Learning and Professional Advancement During an EdD Program. *Impacting Education: Journal on Transforming Professional Practice*, *9*(1), 3–11. https://doi.org/10.5195/ie.2024.402

Marx, S. (2023). Mapping as critical qualitative research methodology. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *46*(3), 285–299. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2022.2110231

Mashao, T. (2024). *An Assessment Of The Impact Of Macroeconomic Indicators On Unemployment Rate In Africa: A Case Study Of Southern African Economies*. *9*(3).

Masuku, M. M., Mlambo, V. H., & Ndebele, N. C. (2025). Utilisation of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme's Learning Material Allowance for Higher Education Students: A Perspective of a South African University. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *79*(3), e70042. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.70042

Matee, G. L., Motlohi, N., & Nkiwane, P. (2023). Emerging perspectives and challenges for virtual collaborative learning in an institution of higher education: A case of Lesotho. *Interactive Technology and Smart Education*, *20*(1), 73–88. https://doi.org/10.1108/ITSE-06-2021-0110

Maunganidze, F., & Ruggunan, S. (2021). Improvising Ethics? A Collaborative Autoethnographic Account of the Challenges Faced when doing Fieldwork in Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies*, *3*(2021a), 38–50. https://doi.org/10.51415/ajims.v3i1.969

Maynard II, J. P., & Slate, J. R. (2021). Differences in Male and Female Texas Community College First-time-in-College Part-Time Students Over Time: A Multiyear, Statewide Analysis. *International Journal of Modern Education Studies*, *5*(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.51383/ijonmes.2021.61

Mazur, C., Creech, C., Just, J., Rolle, C., Cotner, S., & Hewlett, J. (2021). Teaching during COVID-19 Times: A Community College Perspective. *Journal of Microbiology & Biology Education*, *22*(1), ev22i1.2459. https://doi.org/10.1128/jmbe.v22i1.2459

McKinney, L., Burridge, A. B., Lee, M. M., Bourdeau, G. V., & Miller-Waters, M. (2022). Incentivizing Full-Time Enrollment at Community Colleges: What Influences Students' Decision to Take More Courses? *Community College Review*, *50*(2), 144–170. https://doi.org/10.1177/00915521211061416

Mercan Kucukakin, P., & Gokmenoglu, T. (2025). Fraser's social justice theory revisited: Experiences of Turkish immigrant children in Northern Cyprus from the parental perspective. *Education 3-13*, *53*(3), 340–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2023.2186186

Meredith, M., & Zhang, Y. L. (2024). Impact of Part-Time Faculty on Community College Student Success: An Analysis of Literature Using Foucault's Three Modes of Objectification. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2024*(208), 71–79. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20654

Mofokeng, J. T., & Tlou, K. N. (2022). Towards Development of Security and Safety Education Support Sustainability regime to tackle gender-based violence and femicide on campuses. *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development*, *15*(01), 23–38.

Morena, M. C., Mokhetsengoane, S. J., & Letseka-Manka, M. (2024). Experiences of Part-time Primary School Teachers Studying in One University in Lesotho. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, *5*(2), 93–98. https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2024.5.2.794

Mosha, N. F. V., & Ngulube, P. (2025). Strategies for implementing research data management (RDM) services in Tanzania's higher education institutions (HEIs). *Collection and Curation*, *44*(2), 54–72. https://doi.org/10.1108/CC-05-2024-0027

Mosia, P. A., & Phasha, T. N. (2020). Student Experience and Quality of Tertiary Education for Students with Disabilities in Lesotho. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, *8*(1). https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v8i1.4179

Motsomotso, M. (2025). The Workplace Stress Factors among Part-Time Lecturers in Lesotho. *Formosa Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, *4*(4), 1793–1810. https://doi.org/10.55927/fjmr.v4i4.148

Mujallid, A. T. (2024). Digital Active Learning Strategies in Blended Environments to Develop Students' Social and Emotional Learning Skills and Engagement in

Higher Education. *European Journal of Education*, *59*(4). https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12748

Mulisa, F. (2022). When Does a Researcher Choose a Quantitative, Qualitative, or Mixed Research Approach? *Interchange*, *53*(1), 113–131. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10780-021-09447-z

Munro, D., Willis, J., Gibson, A., & Laundon, M. (2023). Higher education decision making of Australian women with caring responsibilities. *Frontiers in Education*, *8*. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.927792

Musara, E., Grant, C., & Vorster, J.-A. (2021). Inclusion as Social Justice: Nancy Fraser's Theory in the South African Context. In C. A. Mullen (Ed.), *Handbook of Social Justice Interventions in Education* (pp. 1–20). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-29553-0_107-1

Mutanana, N., & Pedzisai, C. (2020). An Analysis of Challenges Faced by Part-time Postgraduate Block Release Students at Institutions of Higher Learning. *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies*, *8*(7). https://doi.org/10.24940/theijhss/2020/v8/i7/HS1801-012

Muthanga, B. N., Maku, P. G., & Ogalo, J. O. (2024). Promoting Digital Literacy: The Uptake of OER by Members of Faculty in Teaching and Research for a Technological Transition in Institutions of Higher Learning. *Journal of Information and Knowledge*, 53–62. https://doi.org/10.17821/srels/2024/v61i1/171260

N Ramalepa, T., S Ramukumba, T., & Elizabeth Masala-Chokwe, M. (2022). Learner pregnancies: Views of parents in Madibeng Municipality, North West Province, South Africa. *African Health Sciences*, *22*(2), 459–467. https://doi.org/10.4314/ahs.v22i2.53

Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *22*, 16094069231205789. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789

Nassaji, H. (2020). Good qualitative research. *Language Teaching Research*, *24*(4), 427–431. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820941288

Nedelsky, J., & Malleson, T. (2023). *Part-time for all: A care manifesto* (1 online resource (368 pages).). Oxford University Press. WorldCat. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190642754.001.0001

Nii Laryeafio, M., & Ogbewe, O. C. (2023). Ethical consideration dilemma: Systematic review of ethics in qualitative data collection through interviews. *Journal of Ethics*

in Entrepreneurship and Technology, *3*(2), 94–110. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEET-09-2022-0014

Ning, X., Liu, Y., Miao, J. L., & Li, W. L. (2024). Enhancing the Potentials of the Focus Group Discussion – Engaging Frequently Neglected but Essential Situational Factors for Analyzing Data. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *23*, 16094069241306332. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069241306332

Nirmalasari & Minai. (2023). Burnout Effect On The Academic And Work Performance Of Part-Time Students In Indonesia. *Journal of Namibian Studies : History Politics Culture*, *33*. https://doi.org/10.59670/jns.v33i.763

Niure, D. P., & Sapkota, M. (2025). Philosophical Assumptions Across Paradigms: Implications for Educational Research. *ILAM इलम*, *21*(1), 36–46. https://doi.org/10.3126/ilam.v21i1.75654

Nketekete, M., & Mojalefa, M. L. (2021). Exploring Open and Distance Learning Reform at the National University of Lesotho: A Managerial Perspective. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *22*(4), 41–52. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v22i4.6283

Nkisi, M. (2021). Higher Education Financing in Lesotho: Regulation to Realize Its Sustainability and Increase Inclusiveness. *Journal of African Law*, *65*(1), 25–45. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021855320000327

Norman, Ph.D., Z. (2020). Understanding the Effect of Distance Learning vs. Face-to-Face Learning Experiences on Students' Engagement in Higher Education. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3734764

Novak, L., Escobar, C., Amanullah, N., Toyoda, M., & O'Donoghue, R. (2025). *Defining the Part-Time Student and Identifying Promising Practices: A Scan of Literature, Approaches, and Initiatives*.

Ntelo, M. (2024). *The social challenges that contribute towards non-completion within institutions of higher learning in Lesotho [Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State]*.

Pacheco, A., & Franco, M. (2023). The Role of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in Academic Spin-off Creation: A Cooperation Perspective. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, *15*(2), 7523–7541. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-023-01390-x

Pacheco, T., Coulombe, S., & Meunier, S. (2021). When Work Conflicts With Personal Projects: The Association of Work-Life Conflict With Worker Wellbeing and the

Mediating Role of Mindfulness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 539582. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.539582

Paintsil, E., Atakpa, S., & Osei, I. F. (2020). Assessment of Conflict Between Work and Studies of Students' Workers at the Hospitality Management Department of Takoradi Technical University. *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Sports*. https://doi.org/10.7176/JTHS/49-05

Perera, J. T., & Sutha, J. (2021). Application of Equity Theory on Adult Learning: In I. R. Management Association (Ed.), *Research Anthology on Adult Education and the Development of Lifelong Learners* (pp. 591–610). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-8598-6.ch029

Perumal, N., Pillay, R., Zimba, Z. F., Sithole, M., Van Der Westhuizen, M., Khosa, P., Nomngcoyiya, T., Mokone, M., & September, U. (2021). Autoethnographic View Of South African Social Work Educators During The Covid-19 Pandemic: Highlighting Social (In)Justice. *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, *57*(4), 393–409. https://doi.org/10.15270/57-4-964

Porkodi, S., AlBalushi, Y., Saranya, R., & Pandurengan, V. (2023). The Role of Higher Education Institutions in Promoting Innovativeness and Passion towards Entrepreneurship among Students – A Meta-Analytic Review. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, *20*(5). https://doi.org/10.53761/1.20.5.12

Poth, C. N., & Searle, M. (2021). *Media Review: 30 Essential Skills for the Qualitative Researcher* (2nd ed.). *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *15*(4), 592–594. https://doi.org/10.1177/15586898211028107

Pretorius, L. (2024). Demystifying Research Paradigms: Navigating Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology in Research. *The Qualitative Report*. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2024.7632

Pretorius, M., & Blaauw, D. (2020). Financial Challenges and the Subjective Well-being of First-year Students at a Comprehensive South African University. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, *8*(1). https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v8i1.4181

Quan, G. M., Corbo, J. C., Wise, S., & Ngai, C. (2021). Unpacking challenges in student-faculty partnerships on Departmental Action Teams. *2021 Physics Education Research Conference Proceedings*, 353–358. https://doi.org/10.1119/perc.2021.pr.Quan

Radovan, M. (2024). Workplace Flexibility and Participation in Adult Learning. *Sustainability*, *16*(14), 5950. https://doi.org/10.3390/su16145950

Rahima, E. T., & Tumin, T. (2025). Analysis Of the Experiences of Muslim Students Who Work Part-Time in Balancing Academic, Work, and Spiritual Aspects at Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta. *Kamaya: Jurnal Ilmu Agama*, *8*(2), 49–61. https://doi.org/10.37329/kamaya.v8i2.4129

Rahimi, R., Jones, J., & Bailey, C. (2024). Exploring contract cheating in further education: Student engagement and academic integrity challenges. *Ethics and Education*, *19*(1), 38–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2023.2299193

Rahman, P., & Mehnaz, S. (2024). International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR). *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5054029

Rahman, N. A., Muhamad, N. S., Mokhtar, H., Ismail, M. I., & Yaccob, A. A. (2024). Challenges of Online Teaching for Full-Time Lecturers in UiTM while Studying Part-Time. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, *13*(1), Pages 1952-1964. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i1/20978

Rainford, J., & Guccione, K. (2024). *Thriving in Part-Time Doctoral Study: Integrating Work, Life and Research* (1st ed., Vol. 1). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003223931

Rajoo, Y., Wong, J., Raj, I. S., & Kennedy, G. A. (2020). Perceived barriers and enablers to physical activity participation in people with Alopecia Areata: A constructivist grounded theory study. *BMC Psychology*, *8*(1), 132. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-020-00502-5

Ramli, A. F., Jamil, S. M., Zulkifli, N. R., Abdul Hadi, F. S., Ismail, N. S., & Mohamad, I. (2025). Determinant Factors Influencing Part-time Students Withdrawal in SPACE, UTM. *Business Management and Strategy*, *16*(2), 29. https://doi.org/10.5296/bms.v16i2.22560

Rasethuntsa, B. C. (2022). The Tourism Industry and Economic Growth Nexus in Lesotho. *ATHENS JOURNAL OF TOURISM*, *9*(1), 19–32. https://doi.org/10.30958/ajt.9-1-2

Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice* (Rev. ed., 5.-6. printing). Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press.

Rentzi, A. (2024). Social Justice in Education: Creating an Inclusive Culture at Schools Through Critical Multicultural Theory. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, *5*(1), 94–97. https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2024.5.1.802

Ringsten, M., Färnqvist, K., Bruschettini, M., & Johansson, M. (2025). Inclusion, characteristics and methodological limitations of systematic reviews in doctoral

theses: A cross-sectional study of all universities in Sweden. *Cochrane Evidence Synthesis and Methods*, *3*(1), e70015. https://doi.org/10.1002/cesm.70015

Ritter, C., Koralesky, K. E., Saraceni, J., Roche, S., Vaarst, M., & Kelton, D. (2023). Invited review: Qualitative research in dairy science—A narrative review. *Journal of Dairy Science*, *106*(9), 5880–5895. https://doi.org/10.3168/jds.2022-23125

Roy, R. N., Dayne, N., Kim, A., & Bradecich, A. (2022). College Student-Parents: The Significant Role of Support Systems and How Institutions Can Provide Support. *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, *114*(2), 33–41. https://doi.org/10.14307/jfcs114.2.31

Rutledge, S. A., Gilliam, E., & Closson-Pitts, B. (2023). 'I'm being heard right now': Amplifying individual voice through scaffolded focus groups. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *26*(1), 67–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2021.1973272

Salmona, M., & Kaczynski, D. (2024). Qualitative data analysis strategies. In D. Kaczynski, M. Salmona, & T. Smith (Eds.), *How to Conduct Qualitative Research in Finance* (pp. 80–96). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803927008.00012

Saputro, G. G., Elisabeth, G., & Khansa, G. (2025). The Impact of Academic Load, Time Management, and Work-Study-Life Balance on Graduate Students' Anxiety Levels. *Dinasti International Journal of Economics, Finance & Accounting*, *6*(3), 2208–2218. https://doi.org/10.38035/dijefa.v6i3.4654

Sari, C. M. A. (2020). Rawls's Theory of Justice and its Relevance in Analyzing Injustice on Ethnic Phenomenon. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 210–219. https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/497

Saunders, N. K., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2019). Research Methods for Business Students, 8th Edn. London: Pearson Education.

Savall Ceres, J. (2024). Integration of short-cycles on university campuses. The case of pre-primary education in Spain. *Cogent Education*, *11*(1), 2296450. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2296450

Schofield, G., Dittborn, M., Selman, L. E., & Huxtable, R. (2021). Defining ethical challenge(s) in healthcare research: A rapid review. *BMC Medical Ethics*, *22*(1), 135. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-021-00700-9

Senanayake, A. C., Samarakkody, A., Malalgoda, C., Amaratunga, D., Haigh, R., Liyanage, C., Hamza, M., Kaklauskas, A., & Shaw, R. (2023). Towards an Inclusive Disaster Education: The State of Online Disaster Education from the

Learner's Perspective. *Sustainability*, *15*(14), 11042. https://doi.org/10.3390/su151411042

Sentance, C. (2019). Paying the Price? An Investigation Into the Continued Decline of Part-time Higher Education in England. *Fields: Journal of Huddersfield Student Research*, *5*(1). https://doi.org/10.5920/fields.584

Serdar, C. C., Cihan, M., Yücel, D., & Serdar, M. A. (2021). Sample size, power and effect size revisited: Simplified and practical approaches in pre-clinical, clinical and laboratory studies. *Biochemia Medica*, *31*(1), 27–53. https://doi.org/10.11613/BM.2021.010502

Shaari, S., Jalal, M. F. A. A., Mohamed, R., Noh, M. N., Samad, N. E., & Fakhruddin, F. M. (2025). Navigating the Nexus: Challenges Faced by Part-Time Postgraduate Government Employees in Malaysia. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, *9*(10), 1555–1567. https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.910000132

Shabalala, N. P. (2025). Global citizenship education as a strategy for social, justice and identity: Achieving balance for meaningful social impact. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2025.2537371

Sikhwari, T. D., Dama, N. G., Gadisi, A. M., & Matodzi, T. C. (2020). A Comparative Study of the Academic Performance of Resident and Non-resident Students at a Rural South African University. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, *8*(1). https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v8i1.3468

Sim, C. L., Wong, T. A., Sin, K. Y., & Sivakumaran, V. M. (2024). Pragmatism as a paradigm for quality management research in bridging academic-practitioner gaps. *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, *16*(2), 330–342. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJQSS-07-2024-192

Smith, J., Fisher, J., & Ramprogus, V. (2022). Adding University to work and life: The work–life balance and well-being experiences of women who combine employment, HE learning and care of the family. *Community, Work & Family*, *25*(5), 583–602. https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2020.1779662

Staddon, R. V. (2023). Exploring Higher Education Students' Perspectives on Factors Affecting Use, Attitudes and Confidence with Learning Technologies. *International Journal of Instruction*, *16*(2), 31–52. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2023.1623a

Stalmeijer, R. E., Brown, M. E. L., & O'Brien, B. C. (2024). How to discuss transferability of qualitative research in health professions education. *The Clinical Teacher*, *21*(6), e13762. https://doi.org/10.1111/tct.13762

Steven, & Fuyane, N. (2020). Making Sense of Service Recovery in Higher Education Institutions: Exploring the Relationship between Perceived Justice and Recovery Satisfaction. *EUROPEAN RESEARCH STUDIES JOURNAL*, *XXIII*(Issue 1), 62–74. https://doi.org/10.35808/ersj/1536

Stoddart, F. A. (2024). The Role of Flexible Work Arrangements in Mitigating Teacher Burnout Caused by Heavy Workloads in Urban Schools. *Research and Advances in Education*, *3*(12), 27–35. https://doi.org/10.56397/RAE.2024.12.05

Strohschen, G. (2020). By Means of Critical Theory: Informed Emancipatory Education – An Essay on Realities and Possibilities. In V. Wang (Ed.), *Advances in Higher Education and Professional Development* (pp. 1–13). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-4141-8.ch016

Subedi, K. R. (2021). Determining the Sample in Qualitative Research. *Scholars' Journal*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.3126/scholars.v4i1.42457

Taff, S. D., & Clifton, M. (2022). Inclusion and Belonging in Higher Education: A Scoping Study of Contexts, Barriers, and Facilitators. *Higher Education Studies*, *12*(3), 122. https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v12n3p122

Takona, J. P. (2024). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches / sixth edition. *Quality & Quantity*, *58*(1), 1011–1013. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-023-01798-2

Talkad Sukumar, P., Avellino, I., Remy, C., DeVito, M. A., Dillahunt, T. R., McGrenere, J., & Wilson, M. L. (2020). Transparency in Qualitative Research: Increasing Fairness in the CHI Review Process. *Extended Abstracts of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1145/3334480.3381066

Tatel, C. E., Lyndgaard, S. F., Kanfer, R., & Melkers, J. E. (2022). Learning While Working: Course Enrollment Behaviour as a Macro-Level Indicator of Learning Management Among Adult Learners. *Journal of Learning Analytics*, *9*(3), 104–124. https://doi.org/10.18608/jla.2022.7625

Taylor, J. K., & Rouillard, J. (2021). Roots and progress: A review of civic learning and democratic engagement on college campuses. *New Directions for Higher Education*, *2021*(195–196), 107–113. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20414

Taylor, L., Chandler, C., & Jong, S. (2023). Equity and employability: A study into the challenges faced by healthcare learners with a disability and/or learners pursuing part-time work. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, *14*(2), 54–69. https://doi.org/10.21153/jtlge2023vol14no2art1791

Teng, G., & Chan, P. (2022). The Relationship between College Students' Part-time Job Engagement and Their Professional Learning. *Journal of Management World*, *2022*(2), 166–174. https://doi.org/10.53935/jomw.v2022i2.191

Thaanyane, M., & Jita, T. (2024). The use of mobile technology in higher education: Implications for students and instructors. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, *8*(4), 1236–1243. https://doi.org/10.55214/25768484.v8i4.1498

Thanh, N. C., & Thanh, T. T. M. (2015). *The Interconnection Between Interpretivist Paradigm and Qualitative Methods in Education*. https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:39607585

Timonen, V., Foley, G., & Conlon, C. (2024). *Quality in qualitative research: A relational process*.

Tlali, N., Mukurunge, T., Bhila, T., & Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, Maseru, Lesotho. (2019). Examining the Implications of Massification of Education on Quality Assurance and Assessment in Higher Institutions in Lesotho. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, *Volume-3*(Issue-3), 1561–1568. https://doi.org/10.31142/ijtsrd23493

Tortola, R. L. (2024). *Ethical Decision- Making in the Context of Education: A Systematic Literature Review*. *8*(4).

Turin, T. C., Raihan, M., & Chowdhury, N. (2024). Paradigms of approaches to research. *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Journal*, *17*(2), e73973. https://doi.org/10.3329/bsmmuj.v17i2.73973

Turner, H. (2023). Exploring motivation and satisfaction in part-time PhD students. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, *14*(2), 171–185. https://doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-12-2021-0088

Urry, K., Chur-Hansen, A., & Scholz, B. (2024). From member checking to collaborative reflection: A novel way to use a familiar method for engaging participants in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *21*(3), 357–374. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2024.2355972

Van Der Wouden, F., & Youn, H. (2023). The impact of geographical distance on learning through collaboration. *Research Policy*, *52*(2), 104698. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2022.104698

Virtue, E., Lytle Lett, E., Cheshire, G., Brown, D., & Gregory, W. (2023). Supporting Students on the (Academic) Margins: An Equity-Driven Framework. *Journal of College Academic Support Programs*, *5*(2). https://doi.org/10.58997/5.2ee2

Vokic, N. P., Bilusic, M. R., & Peric, I. (2021). Work-Study-Life Balance – the Concept, its Dyads, Socio-Demographic Predictors and Emotional Consequences. *Zagreb International Review of Economics and Business*, *24*(s1), 77–94. https://doi.org/10.2478/zireb-2021-0021

Walker, T., Burbidge, E., Arden-Close, E., & Panourgia, C. (2024). Knowing me, knowing you: How school educators cope with the challenges of inclusion in deprived and non-deprived areas. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2024.2309870

Watkins, A., & Smead, R. (2020). The Origins of Unfairness: Social Categories and Cultural Evolution, Cailin O'Connor. Oxford University Press, 2019, 256 pages. *Economics and Philosophy*, *36*(2), 324–330. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026626712000005X

Welink, L., De Groot, E., Damoiseaux, R., & Bartelink, M.-L. (2021). Educational strategies to enhance EBM teaching and learning in the workplace: A focus group study. *BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine*, *26*(5), 247–252. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjebm-2020-111383

Welsh, S. (2024). Gender equity for student parents in higher education at an English further education college. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, *29*(4), 581–601. https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2024.2403820

Wilbraham, S. J., Jones, E., Brewster, L., Priestley, M., Broglia, E., Hughes, G., & Spanner, L. (2024). Inclusion or Isolation? Differential Student Experiences of Independent Learning and Wellbeing in Higher Education. *Education Sciences*, *14*(3), 285. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14030285

Xu, J., Lv, F., Zhang, J., Luo, C., Yang, Z., & Wu, J. (2025). 'Conducting Research Amidst Hustle and Bustle': A Qualitative Study of the Research Challenges Faced by Part-Time Nursing Postgraduates. *Nursing Open*, *12*(6), e70254. https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.70254

Xu, W., & Zammit, K. (2020). Applying Thematic Analysis to Education: A Hybrid Approach to Interpreting Data in Practitioner Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *19*, 1609406920918810. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920918810

Yamanaka, A., & Hassell-Goodman, S. (2025). Deconstructions of Colonialism in Global Leadership Education. *Global Leadership for Equity and Inclusion in Education: Geopolitical Issues, Diverse Perspectives, and Critical Praxis*.

Yifei, W., Dou, L., Ying, L., & Kai, L. (2025). Ethical Tensions and Collaborative Governance in Inclusive Education: A Dynamic Equilibrium Model from

China's Greater Bay Area. *International Journal of Education, Culture and Society*, *10*(2), 112–119. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijecs.20251002.16

Yusof, R., Mohamed Harith, N. H., Lokman, A., Abdul Batau, M. F., Mohd Zain, Z., & Rahmat, N. H. (2023). A Study of Perception on Students' Motivation, Burnout and Reasons for Dropout. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *13*(7), Pages 403-432. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i7/17187

Zarrillo, D., Kelly, M., Yan, E., & Ni, C. (2024). Web archives for data collection: An ethics case study. *Accountability in Research*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/08989621.2024.2396940

Zhang, S., Carroll, M., Li, C., & Lin, E. (2021). Supporting part-time students in doctoral programs: A technology-based situated learning model. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, *12*(2), 190–205. Education Research Index; ProQuest One Academic; Social Science Premium Collection (2716892459). https://doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-11-2019-0082

Zhao, Y. (2023). The Impact of Cognitive Load Theory on Online Learning Outcomes for Adolescent Students. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, *18*, 50–55. https://doi.org/10.54097/ehss.v18i.10946

Zungu, S. (2022). *Student Support Services: Opening TVET Education in South Africa through the Provision of Student Support*. African Minds. https://doi.org/10.47622/9781928502425_P07

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNISA university of south africa

College of Education _ERC Educational Foundations

NHREC Registration # : (if applicable)
Ref #: 10413
Name: Mr Moliko Mohale
Student #: 24666378
Staff #:

Date: 17/02/2026

Dear: Mr Moliko Mohale

Decision: Ethics Conditionally Approved

Researcher: Mr Moliko Mohale

14 United Nations Road, Maseru 100, Kingdom of Lesotho

Maseru

+26658728121 24666378@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Supervisor: Professor Mbusiseni C Dube dubemc@unisa.ac.za

Co-Supervisor: Professor Christo Doniwen Pietersen epietecd@unisa.ac.za

Co-Researcher(s):

Email address:

An Exploration of Ethical Challenges Encountered by Part-time Students in Institutions of Higher Learning in Lesotho

Qualification: PhD in Educational Philosophy

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Education _ERC Educational Foundations for the above mentioned research.

The application was reviewed by College of Education _ERC Educational Foundations on

The application is conditionally approved pending stipulated conditions.

Please receive the comments from the committee. You may address these comments by amending the application and resubmit.

Title	Comment
Please provide an abstract of the research study by answering selected questions. The abstract should be written in everyday language. Each section needs to be approximately 250 words.	The problem statement is not clear. Please try to link your problem statement to the title of the study.
Please provide an abstract of the research study by answering selected questions. The abstract should be written in everyday language. Each section needs to be approximately 250 words.	The study could benefit from a clearer explanation of how the multi-method approach will be used to collect data. For example, how will the interviews and focus groups be used to collect data, and how will the data be integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem? - The study could benefit from a clearer explanation of how the thematic data analysis will be used to analyze the data.
Please provide an abstract of the research study by answering selected questions. The abstract should be written in everyday language. Each section needs to be approximately 250 words.	While the qualitative approach is well-suited for this study, it may be helpful to provide more detail on the specific qualitative methods that will be used (e.g., interviews, focus groups, observations). - The case study research design may benefit from a clearer explanation of how the case(s) will be selected and how the data will be collected and analyzed. - It may be helpful to provide more detail on how the study will ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, such as through the use of triangulation, member checking, or peer debriefing.
Please provide an abstract of the research study by answering selected questions. The abstract should be written in everyday language. Each section needs to be approximately 250 words.	The aim could benefit from a clearer explanation of what is meant by "ethical challenges" and how these challenges will be defined and operationalized in the study. - The first objective, "To identify prevalent ethical challenges faced by part-time students in higher education institutions in Lesotho," could be more specific.
Please provide an abstract of the research study by answering selected questions. The abstract should be written in everyday language. Each section needs to be approximately 250 words.	The statement could benefit from a clearer explanation of what is meant by "ethical challenges" and how these challenges will be defined and operationalized in the study. - While the statement mentions poverty, limited infrastructure, and pronounced gender roles as contributing factors to ethical dilemmas, it could be helpful to provide more specific examples of how these factors affect part-time students in Lesotho.
Provide an explanation and indicate your planned efforts in obtaining the permission.	Indicate how do those letters will reach the respective gatekeepers and outline your initial communication with them. Are you going to call them? Visit them in their offices? etc
Explain step by step how you will select participants in each group (sampling method, predicted sample size and justification for the sample size). E.g Group 1 , Group 2 , Group 3.	This sampled is too big for a qualitative study

Data collection activities, as indicated in the application documents, may not commence until final approval has been granted by the College of Education _ERC Educational Foundations

It is your responsibility to ensure that the proposed research adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Research Ethics Policy.

Please note: If your re-submission does not adhere to the procedure set out above, it will not be tabled for ethics review and will be returned to you within 48 hours.

Kind regards,



Prof Justin Oswin August
Chair of College of Education _ERC
E-mail: augusjo@unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION LETTER FROM UNIVERSITY

Registrar
Institution A
Maseru, Lesotho

30 March 2026

Dear

Sir/Madam

Request for Permission to Conduct Research at Institution A

I, Moliko Mohale, a postgraduate researcher under the supervision of Professor Dube Mbusiseni Celimpilo and Professor Pietersen Christo at the University of South Africa (UNISA), hereby formally request your permission to conduct research at your institution.

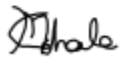
The primary aim of this study is to explore and understand the unique ethical challenges that part-time students face while pursuing their studies in higher education institutions within Lesotho. These challenges may include academic integrity, institutional policies, access to resources, fairness in assessment, conflicts among work, family, and study obligations, and other ethical dilemmas that arise in part-time higher education.

To ensure the research remains focused, data collection will be exclusively directed at part-time students currently enrolled at your institution. My methods will include focus group interviews that are designed to be minimally disruptive to academic schedules and institutional operations. Participation will be entirely voluntary and confidential.

I am available to discuss any questions, provide a full research proposal, or adjust the data collection plan to suit your institutional protocols.

Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to your positive response and the opportunity to contribute to improving the higher education experience for part-time learners in Lesotho.

Yours sincerely,



Moliko Mohale

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

Consent Form

I _____ (Participant Name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications, and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified. I agree to the audio recording of the interview. I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant's Name & Surname (please print) _____

Participant's Signature & Date _____

Researcher's Signature & Date _____

APPENDIX D: TRANSCRIBED SAMPLE INTERVIEWS

School A Group A

Mohale: So good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am Moliko Mohale a student with the University of South Africa. I'm conducting research on ethical challenges that you encounter at your institution as part-time students. I'm sure you come across a lot of challenges, and I would like us to share. But before we do that, I would like us to look at the rules that are going to govern us. While I ask you some questions, please note that there are no right or wrong answers. I would prefer that you be as open as possible to give me all the information that you can. Let's speek one at a time so that we get to capture everyone's Thought and feel free to differ from what others might say. And also, please take note that if you feel uncomfortable, you can withdraw from the interview at any time. Just let me know and then you can leave. Okay. Any questions for me before I ask you the first question? I think everything is set. I have five questions that I'm going to ask you. I hope it's not going to take too much of your time. So my research is. My research title is Ethical Challenges encountered by part-time students in Institutions of Higher learning in Lesotho. So I'm just focusing on the challenges that part-time students come across, ethical challenges that part time students come across. Do you know what ethical challenges are? What do we mean by the term ethical challenges?

Participant: Unprofessional challenges.

Mohale: Unprofessional challenge. Someone says, unprofessional in what way?

Participant: Unprofessional or professional? Ethical or unethical or ethical?

Participant: Ethical.

Mohale: Now we are talking about ethical challenges.

Participant: Challenges, professional.

Participant: Professional challenges that happen.

Participant: Challenges that are related to behavior.

Mohale: Challenges that are related to behavior.

Participant: Behaviour of learners at school.

Mohale: Behaviour of learners in school. Right now, we are not talking about the students that we teach. We are talking about you as part-time students.

Participant: So, it could be the challenges we face.

Participant: Ethical challenges that we face while we are at school. Yes. And how.

Mohale: But the component of ethical. Let's focus on ethical challenge. The component ethical. So that challenge, that challenge, which leads you in a situation whereby you have to pick between what is right and what is wrong. Ethical challenge. Remember, a challenge is just that difficulty that you need to overcome. But with an ethical challenge, you need to overcome something. But there is that choice of doing something that is wrong or right. And it might lead to damaging your reputation. It might your decision, your choice. When you encounter this ethical challenge. It might lead to Preaching trust. Someone might not end up trusting you after the decision that you make. You might even violate your professional behavior based on the decision that you decide to take. So such challenges you do come across, I hope, at school whereby you find yourself that I need to make a decision. But this decision, it has those two consequences, good or bad? Yes.

Participant: True.

Mohale: Okay. Thank you. What are the ethical challenges that you face as part time students in your institution?

Participant: One challenge that we recently encountered was it last week. It was when we were supposed to we were supposed to join the classes, right. And then most of our, classmates, like the time clashed because as we all know that we teach in different schools, some teach in private schools, some teach in government schools. So they had some, what was it like the celebrations that they were? Was it. Yes. So we were supposed to have a class at that time. And then we asked one of our class reps to relay the message to the lecturers to tell them that we are really I mean, we won't be able to attend classes or even teach. We were supposed to take a test, right? Yes. And it raised some mixed emotions because we know that we have to. Right. But at the same time, there are people who are saying we can't. We are not even home at I mean, during this time that you guys want us to to write the test. I hope it makes sense.

Participant: It does. Yeah. Was it a was it a weekend? Was it during the week?

Mohale: It was during the week. It was during the week. Okay.

Participant: It was during the week.

Participant: A another challenge is that others were asking for classes to, to stop so that they can continue with their assessment at, at their school, at their workplace, so that they are saying it's, it's more challenging to, to have classes, online classes, while also we are assessing learners does not have we don't have adequate time to, to focus on both our schoolwork and our work. Please work, work.

Mohale: Work, please work was that people who work in the private sector or government sector.

Participant: The concern was raised by those who you in the in the private sector? Yeah.

Participant: No public.

Participant: Public schools.

Participant: I mean, mostly public schools. Because if you remember, we were mostly quiet in there because some of the things that they raised, like they do not concern us at all because even our calendar is not the same.

Participant: There is a private school and there's an international school, an international school. Ours are private schools. Some work at English medium school. So we assess earlier while the government schools to assess towards the the end.

Participant: Oh.

Mohale: So the concern was raised by those who work in private.

Participant: Private and public. The same. Remember when I complained to him? He's making.

Mohale: Okay. Any other ethical challenge?

Participant: Yes, most of the time my time to find that we know that we be given some work to do as part-time students and also be given deadlines, but we find that we take other people's

work and then present it, knowing that the consequences of taking someone's work. You might find that you are going to be the bad books of that lecturer. For instance, we found that that lecture also taught those who came before you. They might be aware that you have made this work before, but you take the risk of presenting the very same work that was presented by those who came before us.

Mohale: Okay.

Participant: That is, I think that is a challenge that we present.

Participant: I think the other one. I hope it's a challenge. Is this one of our lecturers delaying to give us feedback and also delaying to give us coursework before writing examinations. And you find out that when we try to complain our class reps will be like, please don't complain you might even make them angry. But I think it's our right to get our feedback and coursework on time so that we prepare for the exam. And you find that we get it very late, and we are even scared to complain because there might be consequences if I talk too much and complain. You see, I think that.

Mohale: You fear that if you complain, you might be victimised.

Participant: Yeah, yeah.

Mohale: Any other. What about finances?

Participant: Speaking about finances, we had a very horrible experience about the registration and the deadline of registration. Last was it last semester or last academic year? Our previous coordinator told us that we can be able to pay three up to December and start registering for another year around that time. But things changed along the way. We were told that we have to register in August. Was it August? Some some time. And we never planned to register at that time. And we had so many financial constraints. The penalties, all those. And it was very challenging for us. Even. We thought of withdrawing. Oh, there was so many misunderstanding.

Participant: We also we raised this point and we were advised to write a letter that we are still awaiting for it's response? Yeah. Because nobody ever got back to us. And. Yes.

Mohale: So the coordinator was changed.

Participant: Yes.

Mohale: Yes. So you have a new coordinator.

Participant: Yeah.

Participant: And then the new coordinator new rules.

Mohale: Any other?

Participant: I think the other one is the communication between us as students and the coordinator. Our coordinator hardly communicates or even if she does you find out that, she imposes.

Mohale: No names, right?

Participant: She poses most of the things on us. They never come to us to discuss certain matters regarding our maybe our fees or anything, our well-being in general.

Mohale: Are you represented in the SRC?

Participant: No.

Participant: That's another challenge. We're not represented in the SRC. And you found out that when we need to give out our consents, we just pass through the class reps. Class reps we pass to our coordinator. We don't we are not even sure if the message is conveyed in the way that we want, because there are just so many channels, but we know we have no representatives. In short, in the SRC.

Participant: And to add on to that, there is a calendar. Part-time students like these. It says nothing about us. We don't even know whether we are part of the institution or not, because every. Everything that are being said in there, like there's nothing that really, you know, talks about the part-time student. Yes.

Participant: We are not really included in the school calendar, and we don't have a clear calendar as a part-time student.

Participant: When it comes to a timetable. The one that we were just saying, like, we don't even understand it.

Participant: And nobody's even responsible to make us understand the timetable. The other challenge is that of us not being treated like real students.

Mohale: By real students. You mean.

Participant: Full-time students. We feel we are not valued. You know, we paid for the student cards, but we don't even have them. We are always asked questions by the security guards when we enter the gate. We are never. We never feel welcome there. We struggle to go to the library because when you go to the library, they're going to require a student card. So those are challenges that we encounter. I cannot personally just pass and go into the library. No. That's why we will use AI because we don't have access to the library and to, look at the books. Yes. And you were told that they don't even think a student cards will be there, meaning our money is just gone.

Participant: And the use of classrooms. It's a hassle. There are some classrooms that we are like restricted or prohibited to use and time examination time we need to discuss. You go to this room, you're not allowed to use that one. You go to this one, you're not allowed to use that one. And you may find that we need to plug our, our devices and the room that we like to end up using. There's no like electrical sockets in there.

Participant: The other thing is hygiene. Those who work there, the support staff who are suppose to clean. They don't do that work very well. While it's only part-time students day because you find out that for two days, maybe the toilets are not cleaned because they are not there. They only be there when the full-time students are around. You find out that when it's only part-time students, you find them maybe once a week and we don't use clean toilets. Our classrooms are also not very clean, so the hygiene is not very well for us when we are there. The full-time students are not around and our coordinator has not even bothered about it.

Participant: Another thing is that we don't really know when are we opening for another semester this goes back to the school almanac or school calendar. We normally open in April, but this time around we opened way before April.

Participant: Early March, early March.

Participant: Was it? Yes. In February. Yes. End of February. We were not prepared to go to school. We had plans before that, knowing that we would open during the Easter holidays. Also, we don't know where our classes are going to be going to be held. Yes. For the Next residential. Next residential classes, we don't know where the classes are going to be held. So that it's it's a challenge because we need to prepare for transport. If you are going to travel, others need to prepare for rooms. So that makes it difficult for us to prepare in time.

Participant: The line of communication is not really clear..

Participant: Yes there is no communication. Remember last year we were told that we're going to offer residential classes in a place in town and after the college had that, people have started planning on where they're going to stay for that time. Like it just changed instantly. And we were told the following day that you're not. You're no longer going to classes in town. You're going to the main campus out of town. Yes. And by that time, people had already paid, and it was hard for them to get their refunds. Okay.

Mohale: What about? Your work at home? Your families at home. Do they have an impact? Do they cause you any challenges insofar as your studies are concerned or is everything smooth?

Participant: No. There are challenges because we have kids. There are young kids who would be demanding time when I'm attending my online class. My son would just come in. Mommy, this this this, this. I want the balloon in there. Can you please give me that balloon? I'm like, can you please say your sister should give you. And know you'll be wanting mommy to do it. So yeah, there are such challenges. The other one maybe is that of our spouses. We have spouses. You find out that one lecturer takes more than his or her or her time. After that, I have to do the group work. My spouse is waiting there. As adults, I just sleep when I get to bed and some such things, they cause tension in our in our families that you're always tired. You're always busy with this school. Yeah. Okay.

Participant: Even at our work, sometimes they the the university calendar does not really allow does not match exactly with the our school our school calendar. So it causes clash among our ourselves and the principals at our school because they sometimes do not allow us to, go to the classes during our work classes. Sometimes the university will just call you there to go and register for something during our work classes. Go and collect the results during our work classes. So that causes tension between the principals and us.

Participant: And when you get to the system, it is down.

Participant: Or we will be told by the coordinator to hurry up and come to the institution for help after lunch, or else at 4.30 pm I will not be there.

Participant: It is high time that we do not waste transport to go there for the results. We do not need the hard copy transcripts; we just don't. I just need a soft copy to download and print if I need a hard copy.

Participant: It's unfair for people to travel from far districts just to come and collect result slips and then travel back to the far district. It is costly.

Mohale: If that is all, thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, for being vulnerable and being honest and sharing what you encounter in your institution.

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Focus Group Interview Guide

Research Topic: Ethical Challenges Encountered by Part-Time Students in Institutions of Higher Learning in Lesotho.

Participant Group: Part-Time Students

Researcher: Moliko Mohale

Date: December 2025

Location: Maseru

Researcher: Good morning/afternoon. My name is Moliko Mohale, and I would like to thank you all sincerely for taking the time to participate in this discussion. Your input is incredibly valuable.

Purpose: We are here to talk about your experiences as part-time students in Lesotho. Specifically, I would like to understand the ethical challenges you may face while studying part-time.

Confidentiality: What is shared in this room stays here. I ask that everyone respects each other's privacy and does not repeat personal stories outside of this group. The findings will be reported in a way that no individual can be identified.

Setting Ground Rules:

- There are no right or wrong answers, we need honest experiences and opinions.
- Please speak one at a time so we can hear everyone clearly.
- Please feel free to share, even if your view is different. We want to hear all perspectives.
- The session will be audio-recorded to ensure that I do not miss any of your important points. The recording will be stored securely and deleted after the research is complete.

Introductory Question (To make participants relaxed)

Let's start by going around the room. Please tell us your name (or just your first name), what you are studying, and one word that describes your experience as a part-time student so far.

Main Discussion Questions

1. Do you understand what ethical challenges are?
2. What are the ethical challenges that you face as a part-time student in your institution?

3. What are the causes of the ethical challenges that you face as a part-time student in your institution?
4. What do you think can be done by your institution to reduce the ethical challenges that you face as a part-time student in your institution?

Closing and Thanks

Thank you for your openness, honesty, and for sharing your experiences today. Your stories are crucial for this research and can help improve the situation for future part-time students in Lesotho.

APPENDIX F: LANGUAGE EDITOR CERTIFICATE

Editing Certificate

This hereby serves to confirm that I, Dr Pamela Makati, language edited the PhD thesis titled "Ethical challenges encountered by part-time students in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho" by Moliko Mohale. I declare that I have ensured clarity, coherence and cohesion in the presentation of ideas, corrected grammar, spellings and language use, and ensured consistency in spellings and language use.



Dr Pamela Makati (D Lit. and Phil. in English, MA in English, BA Hons in English)
Academic Editor (member of PEG, SATI & EASA)
Date: 14 July 2026

pmmakati@gmail.com | +27632739957

APPENDIX G: TURNITIN

Similarity Report

PAPER NAME	AUTHOR
Mohales final thesis.docx	MOLIKO MOHALE

WORD COUNT	CHARACTER COUNT
73789 Words	437632 Characters

PAGE COUNT	FILE SIZE
242 Pages	2.1MB

SUBMISSION DATE	REPORT DATE
Jul 6, 2026 9:21 AM GMT+2	Jul 6, 2026 9:24 AM GMT+2

21% Overall Similarity

The combined total of all matches, including overlapping sources, for each database.

- 10% Internet database
- 17% Publications database
- Crossref database
- Crossref Posted Content database
- 13% Submitted Works database

Excluded from Similarity Report

- Manually excluded sources

Summary