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UNISA | 
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**LEARNER SUPPORT IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING AT UNISA, KWAZULU-NATAL:
ACCESSING EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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UKZN INSPIRING GREATNESS

Overview

- Introduction
- ODL
- Characteristics and principles of ODL
- Learner support
- Primary functions of learner support
- Learner support and adult learning
- Learner support and blended learning approach
- PA, PG and Developmental State perspectives
- ODL and NDP, 2030
- Methodology
- Sampling
- Findings and discussions
- Recommendations and Conclusion

Introduction

- Change in higher education landscape since 1994
- Distance education affected
- ODL approach
- Poor rate - second language learners
- Under-prepared for world of learning
- Are learner support initiatives and services provided to learners sufficient and effective in improving throughput rates?

ODL

- Features of ODL
- ODL policy of Unisa
- Self-determination and self-sufficiency in learning processes of learners
- Empowerment
- Approach rather than system or technique
- Based on needs of individual learners and not on interests of lecturers or institutions

Cont

- Learner-centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility and learning and removing barriers obstructing learners' accessibility
- Learning programmes constructed with expectation to succeed
- Away from study material
- Learner as customer
- “Openness” - choices to students linked to learning processes

Learner Support (LS)

- LS creation and delivery supporting learners (Simpson)
- 2 areas: academic and administrative or non-academic
- Academic - cognitive, intellectual and knowledge components of courses, learning skills and literacy
- Non-academic - strengthens facilitation of communication between students, academic staff and the administrative needs of students – registration and orientation

LS and Adult learning

- Where is the starting point when learner support is considered?
- What kind or type of learner support services should be provided?
- How should these services be provided?
- Important components:
 - Characteristics of the learner
 - Technological infrastructure
 - Geographical environment
 - Program demands and management requirements

Cont

- ❑ Cognitive – through courseware.
- ❑ LS embodied in development and design of content
- ❑ Affective – environment to support students
- ❑ Systemic – establishing administrative processes and information management systems
- Interdependent of each other and LS so learning takes place

Framework

- Constitution of the Republic of SA, 1996
- White paper on Education and Training
- Higher Education Act, National Plan for Higher Education
- White paper for post school Education and Training of 2013
- National Development Plan (NDP) 2030
 - ❑ Reconstructing the Higher Education landscape in SA;
 - ❑ Addressing the imbalances of the past;
 - ❑ Access to education;
 - ❑ Open Distance learning; and
 - ❑ Learner Support

Cont

- Restructuring higher education system
- Unisa – only distance education institution in SA
- Unisa regulatory framework informed by:
 - ❑ Strategic Plan 2015 (new Strategic Plan of 2016-2030)
 - ❑ Institutional Operational Plan
 - ❑ Open Distance Learning Policy
 - ❑ Open Distance and eLearning Business Model

LS and BL

- BL - mixture of classroom and online learning
- Without complete loss of face-to-face contact
- BL dedicated to performance of learner
 - ❑ Promotes connections and conversations
 - ❑ Guides, directs and tracks learning

Cont

- ❑ Informed decisions by learners
- ❑ Utilise technologies
- ❑ Fosters independent habits for learning and reference
- ❑ Encourages learning at work
- ❑ Improves performance and control costs
- Factors such as conditions, availability of resources (time, money), characteristics of the learner and characteristics of content (different learning objectives) should be considered

PA, PG and Developmental State perspectives

- ***System of structures and processes***
- ***Operates within a particular society as environment***
- ***Facilitate formulation of appropriate, legal and legitimate governmental policies***
- Higher Education Act of SA guided Unisa in ODL

ODL and NDP, 2030

- Post-school system - quality-learning opportunities
- Raising education and training levels to produce highly skilled professionals
- Crucial to long-term growth in SA
- Eradicate poverty and reduce inequality
- NDP is based on government intervention - higher education (Thornhill and Van Dijk 2014)
- Learner support within developmental state.
- Developmental state – cohort of qualified and skilled public servants - addressing talent management (Subban & Vyas-Doorgapersad (2014)
- LS vital role in ODL to develop knowledge and skills in society

Methodology

- Research design: Pragmatism world view
- Mixed methods
- Staff involved in LS interviewed in region
- Open-ended questions informed interviews
- Students who attended tutorial classes in Durban, Newcastle, Pietermaritzburg, Richards Bay and Wild Coast areas
- Durban - Hub of region
- Other offices regional agencies of Unisa in KZN
- Observational data collection

Sampling

- Population – distance education students of Unisa in KZN
- Sample size - tutorial classes
- Currently only high risk modules
- Students selected randomly to participate
- Staff randomly selected and interviewed
- Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure and Bartlett's test examined appropriateness of factor analysis and measure of students' attitudes towards the ODL policy
- 2nd phase, interviews with staff involved in LS and tutors - qualitative phase

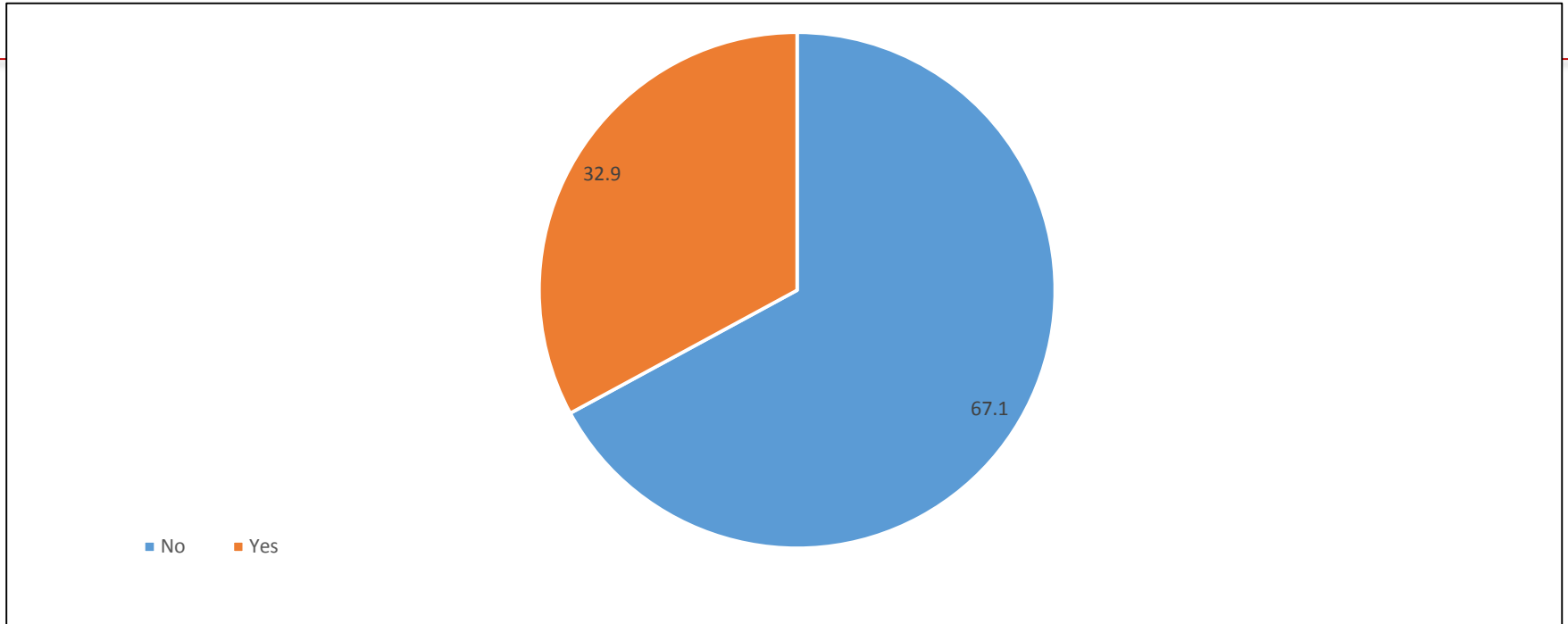
Data Analysis

- Questionnaire in first phase
- Various regional offices in KZN during 2nd semester in 2014
- 369 questionnaires dispatched and 313 returned with 84.8% response rate
- Through SPSS, inferential techniques included correlations and Chi-Square Test values; interpreted using p-values
- Revealed phenomenon under investigation and established significant relationships between and amongst key variables

Findings and discussion

- Biographical data – age, gender, geography, income, racial identity, employment and unemployment, housing, access to communication technology - findings revealed ratio of females to males is approximately 3:7 (27.8% : 72.2%)
- ODL - financial and low literacy levels
- Ages 18 to 20 years = 14.1% = 44 students
- Age categories of 21 to 25 years reveals 33.9% = 106 students
- Total number of students between 18 to 25 years = 150 students

Cont



- Number of unemployed students = 67.1%.
- Reasons - high number of young students between age groups of 18-25.
- Students with more work experience more successful (Erdogan, Bayaram and Deniz, 2008), and could be attributed to why dropout rates are higher amongst first years

Cont

Table 1 Accommodation during studies

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	168	57.3
No	96	32.8
Sometimes	29	9.9
Total	293	100.0

- More than half of respondents (57.3%) indicated they had accommodation
- 32.8 % of students don't have accommodation whilst studying at Unisa
- 9.9% were able to find accommodation
- Could impact on throughput and success rates

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Table 2 Expectations of students

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree
Attend classes every day	47.1	5.3	47.6
More face-to-face tutorial classes	17.0	4.9	78.0
Lecturer is at the regional centre	23.0	14.9	62.2
Only online learning	63.5	12.8	23.6
None of the above	60.2	23.9	15.9

- Face-to-face contact - important expectation of students

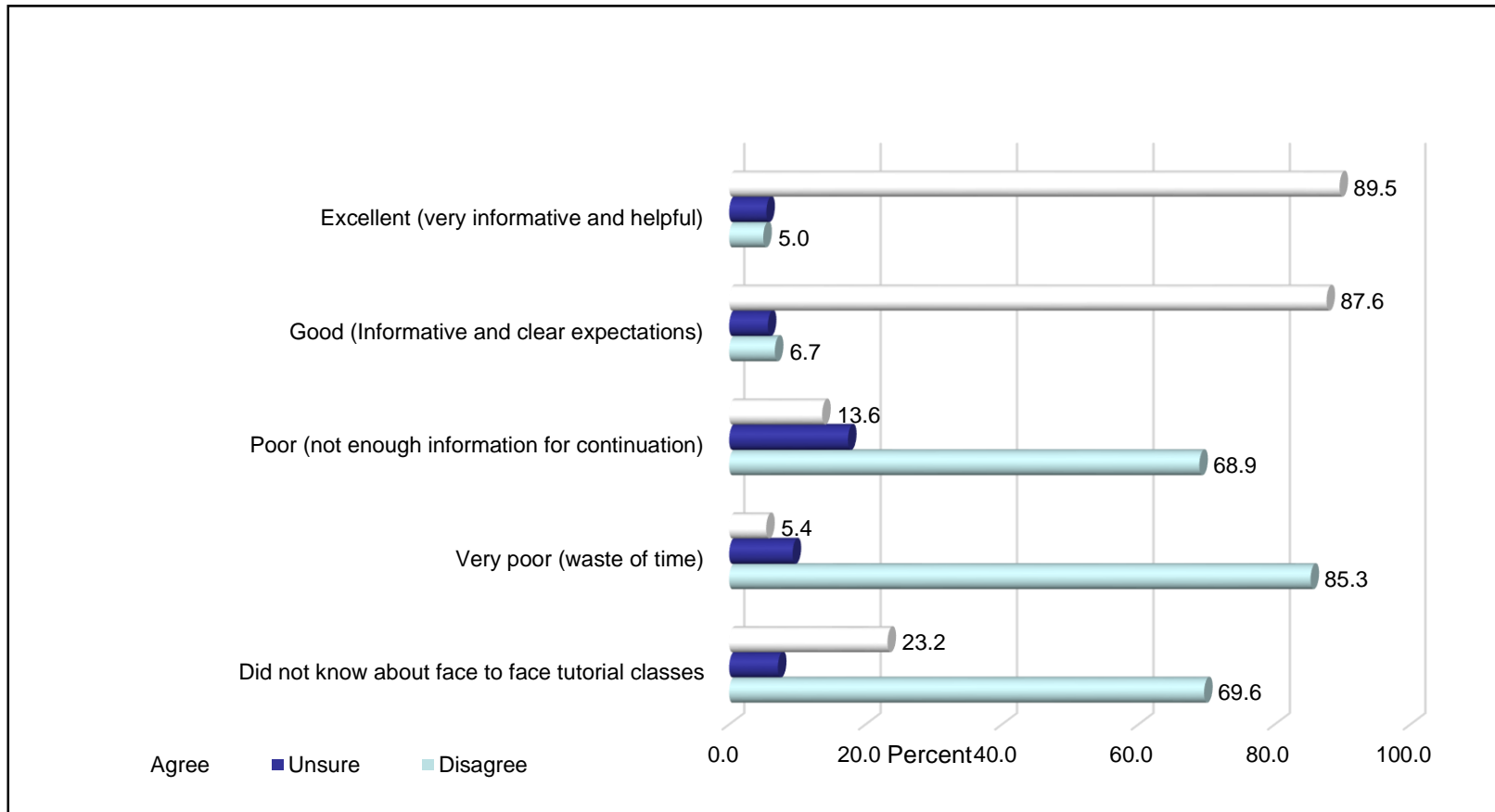
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Table 3 Usage of Learner Support Services

	Count	Percent
Tutorial classes (face-to-face by tutor in the region)	254	80.9
MyUnisa (online services)	236	75.2
Library services	151	48.1
Discussion classes (classes by the lecturer)	150	47.8
MyLife (own student e-mail address)	137	43.6
Registration support while registering	94	29.9
Computer Laboratories	92	29.3
E-tutoring (online tutoring)	89	28.3
Student Counselling services	76	24.2
Teaching assistant support (TA support)	70	22.3
Financial support	63	20.1
Video conferencing	52	16.6
None of the above	13	4.1

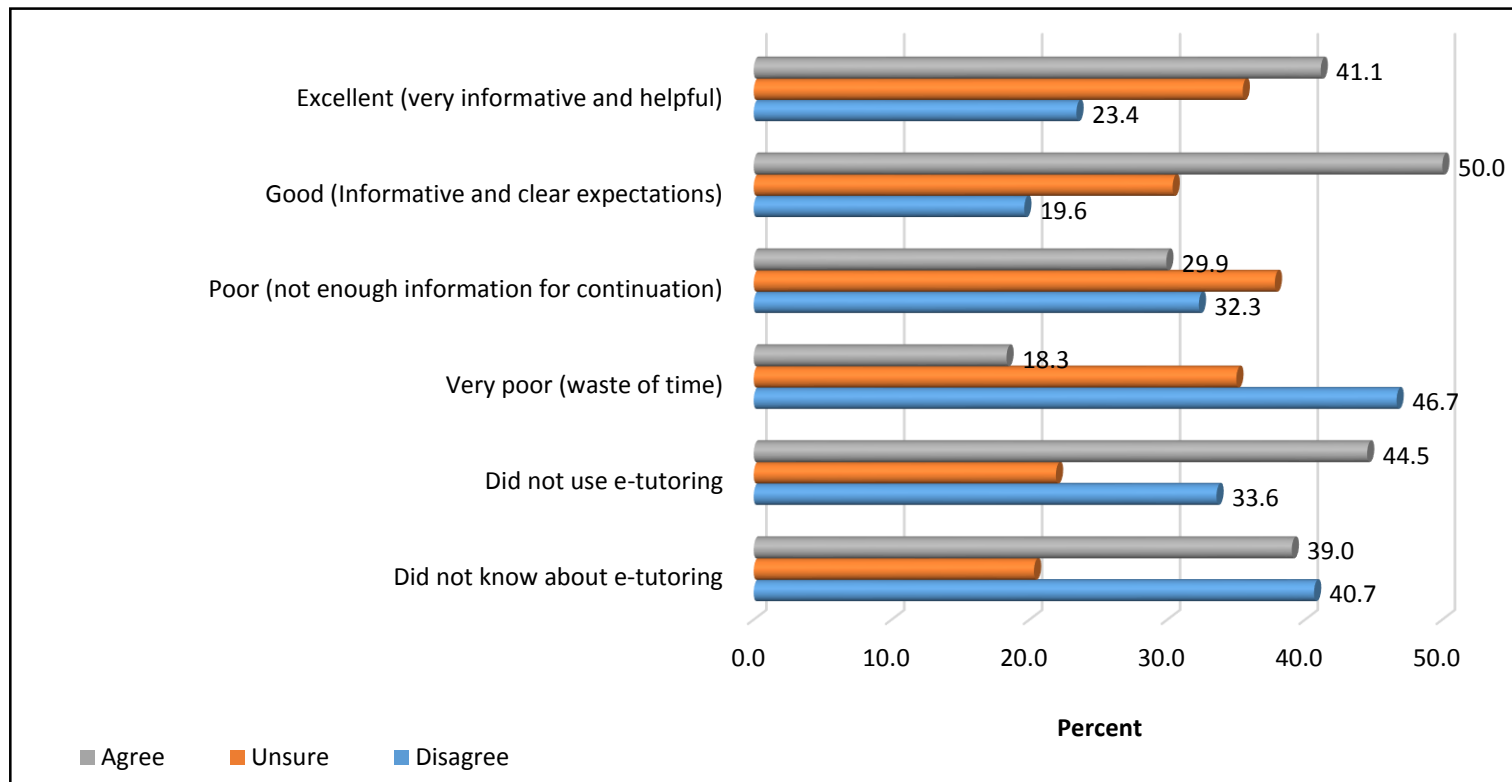
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Face-to-face tutorial experience by students



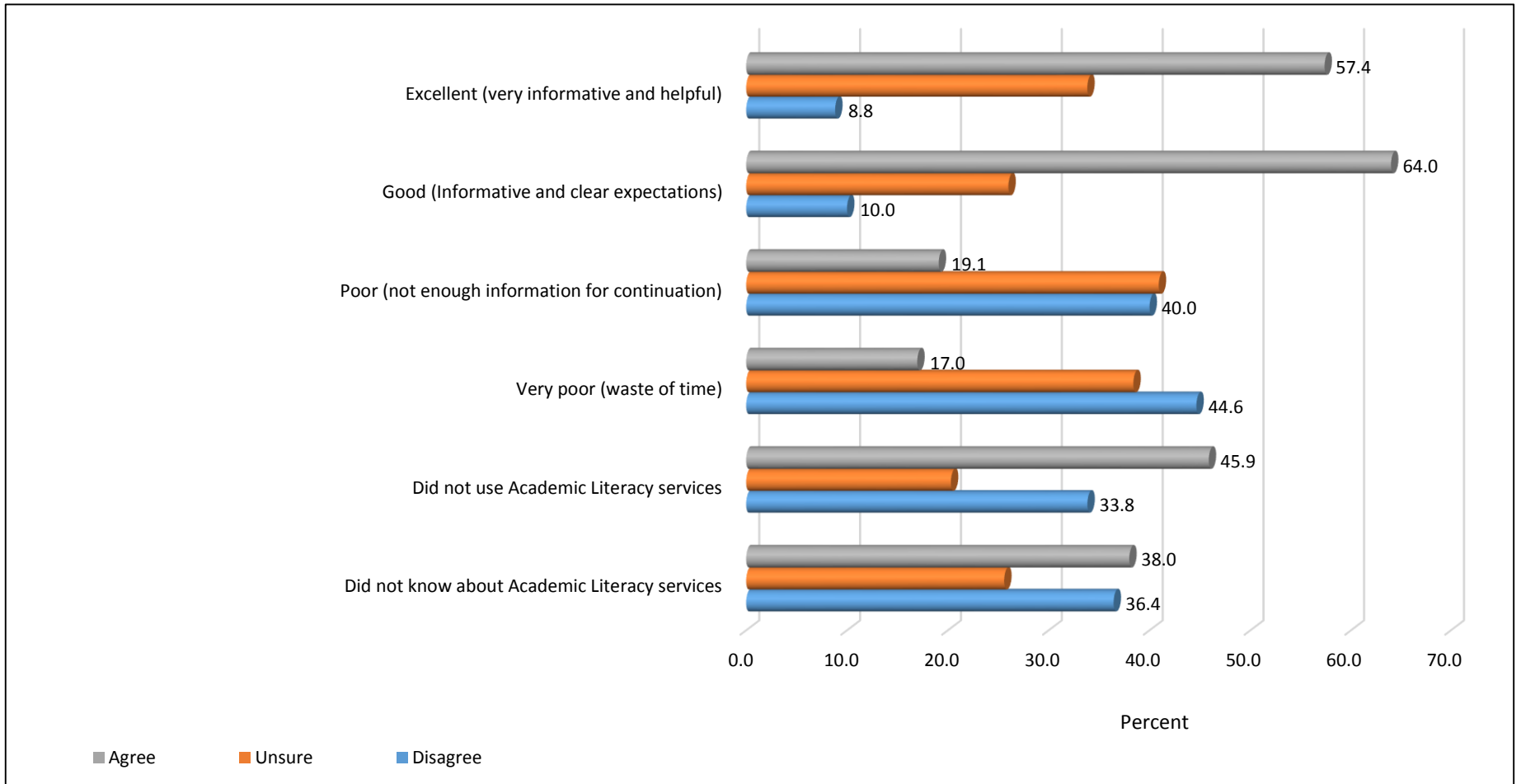
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Experience of E-tutoring by students



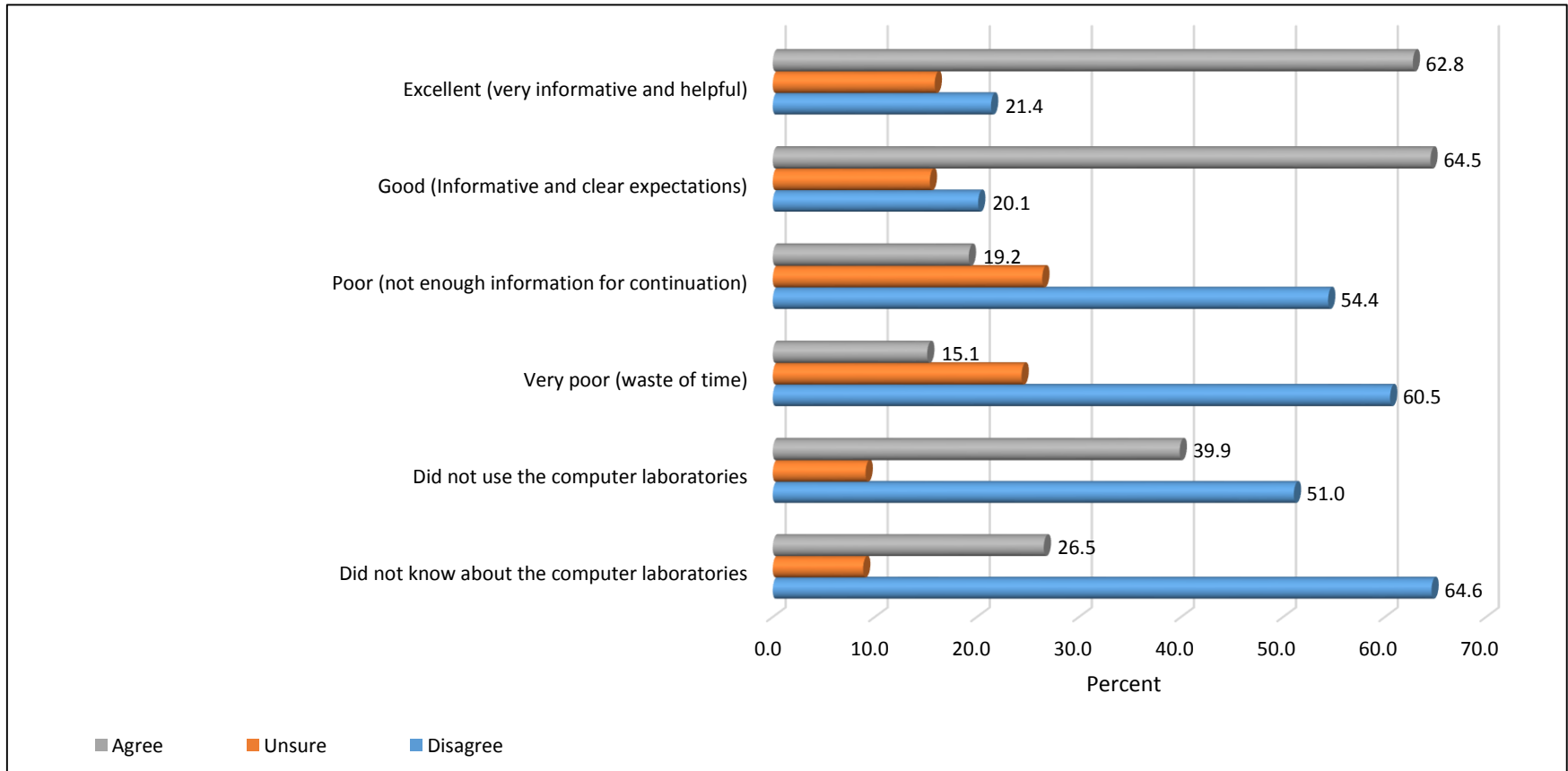
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Experience of Academic Literacy services



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Services at the computer laboratories at Unisa KZN



LS and staff perspectives

- Simpson (2002) – quality of services
- Important part of ODL system
- Aspects highlighted during interviews with staff and tutors: resources are in a poor condition; access to system are difficult; staff uninformed on e-learning; availability of lecturers; necessity for course development to stimulate learning; BRP are challenging
- LS services and students' learning experiences via ODL integral
- Cognitive, affective and systemic functions

Conclusion

- ODL university - LS compulsory
- Cost-effective mode of education delivery
- Profile and calibre of students dictates learning
- Staff in region doing utmost best with available resources
- Urgent need to address gaps
- LS = “*Batho Pele Principle – People First / Students First.*”
- Oosthuizen, Loedolff and Hamman (2010) - students’ perceptions showed low levels of satisfaction: discussion classes, tutorial classes, administrative support and helpfulness after registration
- Revealed insignificant level of change for students
- Increase attention to teaching and learning needs

Thank You