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**An investigation of the relationship between students'
perceptions of workload and their approaches to learning
at a regional polytechnic**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates students' perceptions about their workload and their approaches to learning, employing a regional polytechnic as a case study. Data was collected using a mixed methods approach. The convenience sample consisted of 269 full-time undergraduate students who completed a questionnaire indicating whether they perceived the workload to be heavy or unmanageable at times, and those who did specified the reasons for their perceptions. All respondents also completed a modified ASSIST instrument to indicate the approach to learning they adopted. Analysis of the questionnaire data indicated that the majority of students perceived their workload to be heavy or unmanageable at times with the main reason given as too many assessments due around the same time. The issues raised from the data confirmed the results of other studies and pointed to a range of issues both internal and external to the institution. Thirty follow-up interviews were conducted to further investigate the issues raised in the questionnaire. A complex picture emerged from the interview data of a number of inter-related aspects in the teaching-learning environment that impacted on perceived workload and approach to learning, including assessment and overloaded curricula, motivation, time management problems resulting from part-time jobs or family commitments, and lecturer support. Trends or patterns signalled by the data provided an important first step to assist in planning changes in the teaching-learning environment at the regional polytechnic. The main recommendations were centred on a long term, collaborative action-research project to be set up within a programme, to review curricula, create a more stimulating and responsive teaching-learning environment, foster learning communities, and ensure a consistent approach to developing generic skills. The aim of the recommendations was to ensure students are motivated to learn, engaged, and have the skills and information needed to be effective learners, which in turn has the potential to change perception of workload and impact on approach to learning.

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