

Be in My Corner:

The Students' Voice on University Support Services' Accommodation of Their Needs

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Abstract

With increasing diversity in the tertiary student population, comes a growing necessity to ensure *all* students enrolled in university study are enabled to fulfil their potential. For those experiencing difficulties in their ability to participate and perform within the universities' structures, which may occur when students experience disability, illness or difficult personal circumstances, it is essential that the support services available can effectively accommodate their needs. There are suggestions that whilst many are benefiting from this support, others are having less positive experiences. Research in Australia is highlighting the need for a more student-centred approach in the provision of university support. As such, this study sought to explore and understand students' ($n = 60$) beliefs regarding the extent to which university support services accommodate their needs. An exploratory qualitative research design was adopted to unearth the insider's perspective, gaining insight into what students believe is effective, ineffective, and the ways in which the support they receive could be improved. Through Senge's (1990) theory of leverage, students' insights were examined to determine how services may enhance their ability to cater for students' diverse needs, and which aspects of these services may be most beneficial to focus upon. The findings reveal that effective support goes beyond the tangible to the affective. Students highlighted the importance of personalised support which cared about, and catered to, their particular needs and was timely and accessible. Furthermore, students noted that effective support could facilitate student agency and empowerment. Support was deemed ineffective when these positive aspects were lacking or absent. These aspects can, with minimal effort, be improved. When students with diverse needs feel they must work "twice as hard" as their peers (Moriña, 2017a, p. 220), at the very least they should feel their support services are in their corner, willing and able to assist them.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis¹ entitled “*Be in My Corner: The Students’ Voice on University Support Services’ Accommodation of Their Needs*” is my own original work. It has not previously been submitted for a higher degree in any university or institution other than this current submission to Macquarie University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself. All sources and literature drawn upon have been appropriately cited.

The research presented in this thesis was approved (reference number: 5201700097) by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee.

[Signed]

Elizabeth Hitches

29th January, 2021

¹ This thesis adheres to the Macquarie University guidelines for theses in the Master of Research. This thesis references in APA 7th style.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Chapter

With the growing diversity of the university student population, there is greater necessity to ensure *all* students enrolled in higher education are enabled to fulfil their academic potential (see Moriña, 2017b; Pavone et al., 2019). University study is challenging for many students (Munro, 2011), however, those experiencing impairment, illness or difficult personal circumstances, may encounter further challenges in participating and performing to their full potential within the timeframes and structures set by their university (Grimes et al., 2019a; Hughes et al., 2016). Therefore, it is essential that the student support services² available can effectively accommodate students' strengths and needs, thus addressing barriers to learning and achievement in the higher education environment (Yssel et al., 2016).

This study sought to explore students' beliefs regarding the extent to which student support services³ have accommodated their needs, what contributed to effective or ineffective accommodation, and what students believe could improve or further strengthen the support they receive. Grounded in the students' voices, this study identified aspects of the support services which can be leveraged to enhance their ability to cater to students' diverse needs.

This Chapter provides an overview of students with diverse needs in higher educational environments, and considers the remit of universities in accommodating diversity in light of national and international policy. The aims, approach, and significance of the study are then discussed and the researcher's position outlined. The Chapter concludes with an overview of the organisation of the thesis.

² Student support services are services internal to a university which provide support to students enrolled at that university.

³ This study sought to examine services typically used by students with diverse needs, such as accessibility or wellbeing support which provide academic accommodations or counselling, respectively. At the site of this study, at the time data were collected, accessibility and wellbeing support were provided within the same premisses, with shared contact details, under the one banner as one student support service. Other support services specifically for language, academic study skills, indigenous students, or financial and career support, were beyond the scope of this study.

1.2 Background to the Study

1.2.1 Student Diversity and Higher Education

Under the influence of international and national advocacy for inclusion in educational environments, such as *Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006) and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Australian Department of Education, Skills, and Employment (DESE), 2005), higher education has been working to improve its ability to provide equitable access to, and participation in, learning experiences and learning environments for *all* students (Moriña, 2017b). As a result of this, and with an increase in the number of students with disabilities successfully completing secondary education, the diversity of the university student population has continued to increase, and so too has the need for universities to be effectively responsive to the diversity of their learners (see Moriña, 2017b; Naylor et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, research suggests there may be “a long way to go” (Moriña, 2017b, p.4), with certain equity groups such as students with disabilities underrepresented at Australian universities and reported to have lower rates of retention than their peers (Naylor et al., 2013). Furthermore, studies have shown that students experiencing a chronic health condition, impairment, or learning difficulty may still be “struggling” (Murray et al., 2014, p.40) and those with a childhood-onset chronic health condition may be half as likely as their peers to graduate (Maslow et al., 2011). As completing a university degree provides improved opportunities for employment (see Birrell & Edwards, 2009; Ma et al., 2016), and many social and economic benefits for their broader community (Chan, 2016), it is important that all students who enrol at university are enabled to fulfil their academic potential.

1.2.2 Defining Diverse Needs

Students experiencing impairment, a chronic health condition or learning difficulty are often conflated under the label of students experiencing ‘*disability*’ (see Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019). However, this thesis will use a more neutral term ‘*diverse needs*’ for the

following reasons. Various definitions of disability exist intra- and internationally (Grönvik, 2009; Haegele & Hodge, 2016; Petasis, 2019), and the meaning associated with the term disability depends substantially on which of the many models of disability impairment is viewed through (Haegele & Hodge, 2016; World Health Organisation (WHO), 2013). For example, through a medical-model lens, impairment is seen as the cause of disability, and not as a point of difference but of *deficit*, often impeding inclusive practices and underpinning stigmatisation and discrimination (Cologon & Thomas, 2014; WHO, 2013). As a result of this view of disability, understandably many students with an impairment do not identify with being ‘disabled’, actively avoid the term, and can even avoid support seeking at university (Grimes et al., 2017; Magnus & Tøssebro, 2014). In contrast, the social-relational model does not align with a deficit view of impairment, and instead considers the interplay between the biological and social effects of impairment on an individual’s functioning in society, and the lived experience of *socially constructed* barriers to an individual’s full and valued participation (Thomas, 1999; 2010). In light of these definitional challenges, in this thesis ‘*students with diverse needs*’ will be used as an umbrella term for students whose needs make them eligible for accessibility support or academic accommodations from their university.

1.2.3 Estimating Population Size

Estimates of the population of individuals with diverse needs vary greatly, due in part to the abovementioned differences in the way experiences such as ‘disability’ are defined and subsequently measured (Grönvik, 2009; WHO, 2013). In university populations specifically, estimates are further complicated by the fact that many students do not disclose their needs to their institution and so form a hidden population (see Fichten et al., 2018; Grimes et al., 2017; Osborne, 2019). This non-disclosure can result from avoidance of disability labels (Osborne, 2019), “passing as ‘normal’” (Magnus & Tøssebro, 2014, p. 328) due to concerns over stigma and the impact on their identity should they disclose (Grimes et al., 2019b), feeling they must find their own solutions to difficulties experienced, and not recognising their needs are

eligible for university support (Grimes et al., 2019a). In 2017, Grimes and colleagues conducted a study at an Australian university to examine this challenge. Taking together both students who have and have not disclosed at university, they estimated that 35% of the undergraduate population has diverse needs which may be eligible for university support, in comparison to only 7% of the student population who *had* disclosed to the university. Adding further weight to the size of this population are studies such as that of Hussain and colleagues (2013), who found that 80% of students at another Australian university reported experiencing health challenges within the last six months, some frequently, and in addition, 25% reported experiencing anxiety and 20%, coping difficulties. Therefore, the number of students who may be eligible for, or at some time require, support from university support services is substantial, whether or not students formally disclose and seek this support.

In addition to the challenges many university students face, such as managing work or family responsibilities whilst studying (Munro, 2011), those with diverse needs may experience further difficulties participating, learning, and achieving, at the level they are capable of (Grimes et al., 2019a; Hong, 2015). When these difficulties occur, students are recommended to self-disclose their needs and seek support from university support services (Murray et al., 2014).

1.2.4 The University's Remit in Catering to Diverse Needs

In Australia, universities are legally required to provide reasonable adjustments or academic accommodation for students with diverse needs (Naylor et al., 2013). In New South Wales, for example, this involves implementing the principles of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (DESE, 2005), *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and *Disability Services Act 1993*: to enable students with diverse needs to have fair and equitable opportunities for access and participation in higher education, and support their capabilities for success and degree completion (Naylor et al., 2013). To meet this requirement, universities have developed student support services designed specifically to enhance accessibility and student

wellbeing (Moriña, 2017b; Naylor et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2018). These services typically offer students problem-focused support such as academic accommodation, resources, advice or counselling (see Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Julal, 2013).

Whilst some have questioned the remit of these services in catering to students' diverse needs and whether the resources required produce results, others have argued that the services are crucial and form part of the university's duty of care (see Fichten et al., 2014; Laws & Fiedler, 2013). Furthermore, university support services are considered the main source whereby students access support, regarded as experts in understanding diverse needs within a university context, and therefore, in a better position to support students during their studies than external services (Martin, 2010).

Inclusion in higher education requires more than simply enrolling students into university courses; it is catering to the full diversity of learners, providing all students fair and equitable opportunities to reach their academic potential, and addressing barriers which impede this (see Moriña, 2017b). Student support services for accessibility and wellbeing are seen to be benefiting a number of students (Drury & Charles, 2016; Oliver et al., 2016), and are considered important for reducing attrition when students experience difficulties during their studies (Naylor et al., 2013). However, there are suggestions these services may not be meeting the needs of all students who require them (Hussain et al., 2013; Pech, 2017), and that support may not be adequately targeted to accommodate them (Couzens et al., 2015; Hughes et al., 2016; Serry et al., 2018). Listening to students' perspectives on what best accommodates their specific needs may strengthen and improve the available support, and lead to a more student-centred approach which is considered to be currently lacking (Heagney & Benson, 2017; Roberts & Dunworth, 2012; Roberts et al., 2015; 2018; Serry et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2019). Therefore, this study focuses upon the voices of students who have sought assistance from student support services and attempts to leverage their insights.

1.3 Aims and Approach of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to explore and understand students' beliefs regarding the extent to which university support services accommodate their particular needs. The overarching research question is:

To what extent do students with diverse needs experiencing difficulties at university believe university support services accommodate their needs?

To answer this, the following sub-questions are explored:

- 1) In what ways do students believe that the support they receive(d) was effective in accommodating their needs, and what aspects of the support service contributed to this?
- 2) In what ways do students believe that the support they receive(d) was ineffective in accommodating their needs, and what aspects of the support service contributed to this?
- 3) What do students consider would improve the extent to which university support services accommodate their needs?

An exploratory qualitative research design has been employed with a grounded theory approach adopted to unearth the insider's perspective: the voices of students who have *directly* received support from the accessibility and wellbeing service at one Australian university⁴. Sixty students anonymously completed a questionnaire which provided insight into their beliefs about the ways in which the support they receive(d) is effective or ineffective, which aspects of the support service contributed to this, and how the support could be improved or further strengthened. Applying Senge's (1990) theory of leverage, this

⁴At this university at the time data were collected, accessibility and wellbeing services were provided within the same premisses, under the one banner, and with shared contact details, and so are together termed a 'service' and discussed as one in this study.

study suggests ways in which the service can enhance its ability to cater to students' diverse needs, and which aspects may be most beneficial to focus upon.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Our understanding of Australian university students with diverse needs is said to be poor (Grimes et al., 2017; 2019a). Furthermore, research regarding their experiences with formal support at university is limited: very few Australian studies closely and specifically examine accessibility and wellbeing support services, as instead many studies discuss student support more generally and within a broad scope of additional variables (see Section 2.4). Research calls for a student-centred approach to student support service delivery (Roberts et al., 2018; Serry et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2019) and suggests that listening to the students' perspective on how best they can be accommodated is the starting point to further strengthening the quality and effectiveness of these services for *all* who require them (Heagney & Benson, 2017). This study adds to this limited body of literature, and with consideration of the challenges support services may face with limited resources (Stallman, 2012), it applies Senge's (1990) principles of leverage to identify where small actions may produce substantial positive change. The researcher believes this to be the first time this theoretical framework has been applied to student support services despite its use within other educational contexts internationally. This study has implications for student support services through its suggested points of action; many of these require minimal resourcing to implement and would enhance the extent to which all students' needs may be accommodated. Implications for students and future research are also discussed.

1.5 Situating the Self: Researcher's Position

For the transparency and trustworthiness of qualitative studies, it is imperative to understand the background and views of those conducting the research (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). The researcher's background includes teaching secondary school students

with a range of strengths and needs, and current teaching of inclusive education at university⁵. The researcher holds a view of diverse needs most closely aligned to the social-relational model of disability (see Thomas, 1999; 2010) and so considers the influence of not only the lived experience of impairment on an individual's educational experiences, but the impact of enablers and barriers in the learning environment on the individual's ability to participate and achieve their full potential. As suggested by Johnson and Christensen (2017), throughout this study the researcher has engaged reflexively to be aware of potential bias which could be influential on the study and its findings.

1.6 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is presented in five chapters. Chapter One has provided an overview of students with diverse needs and universities' responses to cater to this diversity, to orient and introduce the study. Chapter Two explores the experiences of students with diverse needs, and systematically reviews the literature on students' access to, use, and experiences of, student support services at Australian universities. The research priorities are identified and the theoretical framework for this study is then discussed. Chapter Three presents and justifies the study's methodology and design. The key findings of data analysis are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five discusses these findings in light of relevant literature and concludes with implications for student support services, students and future research. Appendices to this thesis follow.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This Chapter provided an overview of students with diverse needs and the remit of university support services in accommodating students experiencing difficulties during their studies. It has established the focus of the research. The following Chapter explores the literature in depth.

⁵ The collection of data was finalised prior to the researcher commencing teaching at the university.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Overview of the Chapter

In the previous Chapter, an overview was provided of students with diverse needs in higher education and the role of university support services. This Chapter examines the literature on the experiences of students with diverse needs, followed by a systematic review of studies examining their access to, use of, and experiences with, Australian university support services. The theoretical framework of this study is then discussed.

2.2 Students with Diverse Needs

Whilst university study can be challenging for many students, those with diverse needs may encounter additional difficulties in their participation, learning, and/or academic performance (Grimes et al., 2019a; Osborne, 2019). Studies such as Hughes and colleagues (2016) have suggested that because many students do not register as experiencing ‘disability’ upon enrolment but do so later in their studies, this may convey that some experiences of diverse needs become more challenging when situated within the structures and timeframes of the higher education environment. Whilst the findings vary regarding the academic outcomes of students with diverse needs, many are considered to experience poor adjustment to university (Murray et al., 2014) and are at increased risk of dropping out of their studies (Fichten et al., 2014; Maslow et al., 2011). This can have significant implications with long-term effects on students’ employment prospects and standard of living (Chan, 2016; Ma et al., 2016).

Students with diverse needs may face a number of challenges in the ease and accessibility of learning and achieving in higher education. For students experiencing difficulties with excessive fatigue, impaired concentration, or challenges retaining information, meaningful participation and learning in classes can be compromised (Hong, 2015; Martin, 2010; Osborne, 2019). Furthermore, experiences such as illness, exhaustion or pain can make meeting attendance requirements challenging, and absences may lead to

barriers in meeting learning outcomes and course requirements (Hong, 2015; Hughes et al., 2016; Martin, 2010). Some have reported only achieving the deep learning they desired by “sacrificing other aspects of their lives” (Couzens et al., 2015, p. 38). Furthermore, managing difficult personal circumstances, or the symptoms of a chronic health condition or its treatment, can leave less time for students to complete academic tasks (Hong, 2015). Students may experience challenges meeting assessment deadlines (Hughes et al., 2016; Martin, 2010) and feel concern regarding their performance (Hong, 2015), such as when submitting work which does not reflect their capabilities (Martin, 2010). Students with diverse needs have also expressed feeling that they needed to prove themselves capable to staff and peers (Hong, 2015). When difficulties have resulted in students having to expend substantial amounts of effort and energy in order to achieve their goals, some have felt “they had to work twice as hard to achieve half the results” of other students (Moriña, 2017a, p.220).

The challenges students with diverse needs may encounter in higher education can also impact on their wellbeing, with each of the above experiences a potential stressor (Hong, 2015). Research suggests students with diverse needs may have significantly higher stress than their peers (Ardell et al., 2016), which can impact their physical and mental health, learning, and performance (see Beiter et al., 2015; Pascoe et al., 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2018). Additionally, when students’ diverse needs or the experience of stress have affects upon sleep, students’ capacity to cope with their studies and the broader demands in their life may be negatively impacted (Martin, 2010), and students may require additional time to manage these stressors (Grimes et al., 2019a).

When difficulties arise which impede students’ participation, performance, or wellbeing at university, students are recommended to self-disclose their diagnosis or specific needs to the relevant university support services and request support (Murray et al., 2014).

2.3 Seeking University Support

In response to policy and legislation, many universities, both in Australia and internationally, have developed services dedicated to enhancing their university's ability to provide more fair and equitable educational opportunities for their increasingly diverse student populations (Moriña, 2017b; Roberts et al., 2018). However, for students to receive support from these services they need to meet eligibility criteria and not all who feel they require support are deemed eligible (Martin, 2010).

For students with diverse needs, accessibility and wellbeing support may be provided (Osborne, 2019), such as academic accommodation and/or counselling (see Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Julal, 2013). Some diverse needs require simple accommodations, such as examination provisions or notetaking, which are occasional and simple to enact, whilst other needs may be more complex and require more frequent or ongoing support (Anderson et al., 2018). To accommodate students, these services need to be both individualised and effective (Yssel et al., 2016).

The processes involved in seeking and obtaining support are often complex and can be challenging (Fossey et al., 2017). When students lack awareness of the types of support available, it makes it difficult for them to request specific accommodations (Hong, 2015). Services may be in high-demand (Pech, 2017), especially during peak times such as exam or assessment periods (Cathcart, 2016). Furthermore, limited resources may mean a high ratio of students to staff members, as well as few consultations available to each student (Stallman, 2012). This impedes the efforts of the service and widens the gap between students' needs and the availability of support, and is suggested to potentially impact attrition (Stallman, 2012). Some students receive insufficient accommodation of their needs which leads to higher stress (Magnus & Tøssebro, 2014; Osborne, 2019).

Furthermore, the act of seeking support can result in emotional challenges. The processes can be stressful (Reed & Kennett, 2017) and students may feel guilt, or even a sense

of failure, requesting assistance (Martin, 2010). Seeking waivers to attendance requirements, or gaining assessment extensions, can create a sense of the student being an “other”, and this can become a challenging affective experience or “a breaking point” (Hughes et al., 2016, p. 494). Students’ beliefs they should manage their educational journey independently can outweigh their motivation to receive support (Hong, 2015).

In seeking to understand students’ experiences of university support services in an Australian context, a preliminary review of the literature was conducted yet returned limited studies. As such, a systematic literature review was undertaken and is discussed below.

2.4 Australian University Support Services: A Systematic Literature Review

To gain a thorough understanding of research related to students’ access to, use of, or experiences of student support services at Australian universities over the last decade, a systematic review of the literature was conducted. This review focused upon accessibility and wellbeing services. The review aim and search methodology are presented according to the PRISMA preferred reporting items for systematic reviews (see Moher et al., 2009), and as a PRISMA flow diagram (Figure A) in Appendix A. Of the 2153 articles screened, 28 were deemed eligible for review⁶, the findings of which are synthesised below.

This review revealed that relatively few Australian studies have focused primarily upon accessibility and wellbeing services, and instead the majority have considered student support in a broad sense amongst other factors relevant to students’ experiences at university (see Table 1). Often consideration of university support services was a small aspect of larger studies and not the primary focus.

⁶ See Appendix A, Table A, for a detailed summary of each study, as appropriate for systematic literature reviews (see Moher et al., 2009).

Table 1*Support Services Across Reviewed Studies*

Support service type primarily focused upon	<i>n</i> articles
Accessibility	4
Wellbeing	4
Combination of Accessibility & Wellbeing	3
General consideration of student support services	17
<i>Total</i>	28

Furthermore, of the twenty-eight studies that met the systematic search criteria, only eight included samples specifically relevant to this study (see Table 2).

Table 2*Characteristics of Study Samples Across Reviewed Studies*

Main characteristic of students in study sample	<i>n</i> articles
Chronic health condition and/or impairment	5
Learning difficulties	2
‘Significant challenges’	1
Other (e.g., international students, low SES, mature-aged, general undergraduate student sample)	20 ^a
<i>Total</i>	28

Note. ^a Whilst meeting the systematic search criteria, the samples of these studies were not considered aligned with this study.

The findings of these studies have been synthesised into five themes: the *barriers to access and use of support services*, students’ *needs and expectations prior to service use*, *positive experiences of service use*, reports of *a need for improvement*, and considering *future directions: a student-centred approach*.

2.4.1 Barriers to Access and Use of Support Services

There are a range of barriers identified in the literature in relation to students’ access and use of support services. A number of students with diverse needs had limited or no use of

support services (Briguglio & Smith, 2012; Earnest et al., 2010; Heagney & Benson, 2017). The barriers were reported to include a lack of awareness or understanding of the services available, and how or when to access them (Beccaria et al., 2016; Earnest et al., 2010; Perre et al., 2016; Roberts & Dunworth, 2012; White, 2014). Additionally, Couzens and colleagues (2015) found that students avoided support services when believing they were for those experiencing 'disability' or more severe difficulties.

For students who were aware and understood the role of the support services, it was reported many still made limited use of them, even when experiencing substantial difficulties (Anderson et al., 2018; Karimshah et al., 2013). Students found that uncertainty, reluctance (Beccaria et al., 2016) or a lack of confidence (Perre et al., 2016) formed a barrier to them accessing the support they needed. So too did concerns they would be viewed as less able to cope or be stigmatised if they reached out for support (Hussain et al., 2013). Others feared their need for support would not be understood, or that it may impact their opportunities in higher education or future employment (Martin, 2010). Many students only approached support services when they experienced severe distress (Kambouropoulos, 2014; Vivekananda et al., 2011). However, it is reported that the services were not always easy to access (Karimshah et al., 2013; Spencer et al., 2018) or available when needed (Roberts et al., 2015).

Additionally, Martin (2010) states that an important barrier can be that although university support services are free, obtaining requisite evidence of a diagnosis from external services in order to qualify for university support, may not be. For example, accessing medical specialists can incur financial costs, causing hardship for some students. This is accentuated for those already facing financial strain from the cost of medical treatment, or impacts on their ability to work (Karimshah et al., 2013).

2.4.2 Needs and Expectations Prior to Service Use

A single study by Moore and colleagues (2016) asked 641 university students to report on their needs or expectations from a wellbeing service, prior to receiving support, as part of an internal quality assurance survey. Students reported needing connection, being understood, being heard, advice and guidance, psychosocial skill development, resilience building, stress management to manage the impacts on their academic achievement, and accessible, qualified, empathetic and non-judgemental staff. As such, services seen as supporting wellbeing were believed to play a more complex and broader role in supporting students during their studies.

2.4.3 Positive Experiences of Service Use

Various positive student experiences of support service use were reported in the literature. Support services helped students to succeed when experiencing challenges (Drury & Charles, 2016), to progress with their studies (Oliver et al., 2016) and to support their wellbeing (Couzens et al., 2015). For example, students who were provided with accessibility and/or wellbeing support had higher achievement than those who did not access support from the services (Stone et al., 2016). Furthermore, university support services were recognised as places to access assistance during times of significant challenge (Martin, 2010; Wright et al., 2013). Whilst it has been suggested that accessing support may have limited impact on retention (Karimshah et al., 2013), when coupled with students' own determination, positive impacts have been seen (Wright et al., 2013). Overall, the literature suggests that a number of Australian university students are benefitting from the support available when they experience difficulties during their studies.

Positive relationships with service staff were also reported (Beccaria et al., 2016; Supple & Agbenyega, 2015). According to Hughes and colleagues (2016) students generally felt comfortable approaching staff for assistance. For international students, the perceived helpfulness of staff impacted how useful support services appeared (Roberts et al., 2018). Additionally, students with mental health challenges appreciated when staff were supportive,

and as Martin (2010) notes, with the appropriate support, students' disclosure of their needs led to empowerment.

2.4.4 A Need for Improvement

The literature strongly suggests that whilst some students are receiving sufficient support to cater to their needs, other students are not. When 290 students were asked how universities can support students' resilience when facing challenges, 20% suggested improving support services, and gave little positive feedback on the current services (Pech, 2017). Similar numbers were reported in a study of 355 students, with 23% suggesting "a number of issues" in receiving support, including concerns for their privacy and feeling guilt or embarrassment (Hussain et al., 2013, p.7). Studies report students' particular needs were only partially understood by the services (Earnest, 2010; Serry et al., 2018), or that sufficiently targeted support was inconsistent (Hughes et al., 2016) or lacking (Couzens et al., 2015; Karimshah et al., 2013; Serry et al., 2018; Spencer et al., 2018). Furthermore, others have noted a gap in service delivery between short-term wellbeing supports, such as counselling, and the ongoing nature of accessibility support, such as academic accommodation (Courtney, 2019). Thompson and colleagues (2019) argue that what is needed is individualised support, where service staff understand the nuances of each student in their care from a strengths-based approach.

2.4.5 Future Directions: A Student-Centred Approach

Several Australian studies have advocated for a more student-centred approach to supporting students with diverse needs (see Heagney & Benson, 2017; Roberts & Dunworth, 2012; Roberts et al., 2015; 2018; Serry et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2019), with both service staff and students considering such an approach to be lacking (Roberts & Dunworth, 2012). Roberts and colleagues (2018) noted that as the locus of student support has moved from academic staff to specific services, support is now more generic and a provider-consumer

relationship exists. This less personalised assistance may not reflect students' needs (Roberts et al., 2015).

As Heagney and Benson (2017, p. 231) state, "asking students what they believe would assist them to succeed is an important first step in the process of moving to an effective student-centred model of support". Others agree, arguing that universities can benefit from listening to the students' perspective on what best accommodates their strengths and needs, as this will inform ways to further strengthen the quality and effectiveness of current support services (Anderson et al., 2018; Serry et al., 2018).

2.5 Conclusion to the Review

Whilst a number of students are experiencing the benefits of the support they receive from support services at Australian universities, other students are having less than positive experiences. However, research is limited as very few studies closely and specifically examine accessibility and wellbeing services, as instead student support services are predominantly examined within a broad scope of other variables. To gain valuable insight into how these services can enhance their capability to cater for the needs of *all* students requiring their assistance, the literature reviewed recommends a student-centred approach and that students are asked about what they need from support services. As such, it is important to gain an understanding of students' own beliefs regarding the effectiveness of the support they receive, what contributes to this, and how the support could be improved to best cater for their needs. One lens through which to view student support is Senge's (1990) theory of the learning organisation and leveraging points of action for positive change.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 Senge and Leverage for Positive Change

According to Senge (1990), in order for an organisation to reach their potential and enhance their ability to achieve desired outcomes, they must be an effective learner or *learning* organisation. As dynamic, living systems, organisations learn from success and

failure in order to maintain essential elements for effective functioning, and to continually adapt and evolve (Kools et al., 2020; Rowley, 1998; Senge et al., 2011). Effective learning means moving beyond preconceptions to make sense of what is at play and why, not only understanding the parts and wholes of organisational structures, processes, and outcomes, but deeply considering how they interrelate (Senge et al., 2011). To harness this learning to then make “significant, enduring improvements”, Senge (1990, p. 65) argues organisations must look to the principle of leverage.

Senge’s (1990) principle of leverage informs that organisations need to identify points of action for improvement, and situate their efforts on those “small, well-focused actions” (p.65) for which substantial positive change can occur. Senge identifies two types of leverage for action: high leverage and low leverage. The *high leverage points of action* are those requiring minimal effort to produce significant results. In contrast, *low leverage points of action* are those requiring great effort to produce only minimal results. To explain this concept, Woodcock and Woolfson (2019) use the analogy of attempting to move a car. Whilst a stationary car could be pushed manually, it would require substantial effort with little relative achievement (low leverage). However, turning the car on and instead pushing the accelerator down would require minimal effort, yet yield substantial results (high leverage). For systemic improvement, Senge (1990) believes it is beneficial for high leverage points of action to be focused upon.

2.6.2 Senge and Educational Environments

Beyond its applicability to business corporations, the concept of the learning organisation and leverage popularised by Senge, has become a lens through which to see ways educational institutions can adapt to rapidly changing times (Kools et al., 2020). It is a way of learning with the intention to continuously make improvements, without looking to lay blame (Pensieri, 2019; Senge, 1990). In schools, for example, applying Senge’s theory has illustrated that in response to the growing diversity of students, successful enactment of

inclusion relies upon high leverage actions such as systemic support from school leadership teams, which can be more influential than lower leverage actions such as policy documents and formal professional development alone (Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019). Additionally, in universities, Senge's theory has assisted with identifying that the collective learning of teaching staff is important for educational institutions to now evolve into learning organisations, with collective learning seen as a high leverage point of action which is in need of greater attention (Asokan, 2016). A recent review conducted by Pensieri (2019) identified 33 studies within school and/or higher educational contexts which applied Senge's theory, and Pensieri subsequently advocated for the framework to be a model to rethink the Italian school system. Such studies highlight the usefulness of Senge's theory in the field of education.

2.6.3 Senge and University Support Services

Despite its acceptance within educational contexts, at this time it does not appear that Senge's theory has been applied to student support services at university. Senge's theory was not utilised in any of the Australian studies of student support systematically reviewed by the researcher (see Section 2.4), nor were university support services a focus in the studies reviewed by Pensieri (2019).

As Senge's concept of the principle of leverage for positive change is intended to assist organisations to achieve the outcomes they desire, it is considered beneficial to apply this to university support services as it may illuminate the aspects of the service which can be leveraged to best meet their intention of effectively accommodating students' needs. Furthermore, in a context where resources such as time and staff may be limited (Stallman, 2012), this framework is particularly appropriate as it draws attention to the points of action for which minimal effort or output can produce the most substantial results.

2.6.4 Senge and the Insider's Perspective

The deep level of learning required to identify and effectively leverage points of action is best achieved when organisations are learning directly from experience, however, Senge (1990) argues this is difficult to accomplish when the decision makers of the organisation are not *directly* experiencing the consequences of the decisions made or actions taken. A university support service can be considered an organisation in which those deciding and implementing the policies and practices of the service are not the direct recipients of the support this service offers. Therefore, learning from direct experience is made challenging. To overcome this in this study, there is a need for listening to the insider's perspective: the voice of students who *have* directly experienced support from the service. When centring on the insider's values, beliefs and attitudes, greater opportunities for identifying high leverage points of action are found (Many & Sparks-Many, 2014; Senge, 1990). As such, in listening to the students' voices about the support they receive, this study can identify those points of action for improvement for which substantial results may occur for minimal effort and resourcing.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This Chapter has explored the experiences of students with diverse needs at university and systematically reviewed their access to, use of, and experiences of university support services in Australia. Senge's (1990) theory, particularly the principle of leverage, was outlined as an appropriate framework for this study. Taken together, the literature review and theoretical framework demonstrate a need to listen to students' voices regarding what best accommodates their needs, and leverage this as a means to enhance current services' ability to cater to the growing student diversity. As Heagney and Benson (2017) state, listening to students' voices is a first step in moving towards a more student-centred approach to accommodating diverse needs. Furthermore, for students with diverse needs, sharing their

experiences can be empowering (Yssel et al., 2016). The following Chapter presents the methodology and research design of this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Overview of the Chapter

In the preceding Chapter, relevant literature was reviewed and the research priorities identified. Founded upon this, this Chapter presents the aims and objectives of this study, followed by an explanation and justification of the research methodology and design. This includes the approach to the study, participants, procedure, and the data collection and analysis methods. Ethical considerations and the trustworthiness of the research are then discussed.

3.2 Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this study was to explore and understand in what ways students with diverse needs experiencing difficulties at university believe the support they receive from university support services is effective or ineffective in accommodating their needs, and how this support might be improved. As such, the overarching research question was:

To what extent do students with diverse needs experiencing difficulties at university believe university support services accommodate their needs?

To answer this, the following sub-questions were explored:

- 1) In what ways do students believe that the support they receive(d) was effective in accommodating their needs, and what aspects of the support service contributed to this?
- 2) In what ways do students believe that the support they receive(d) was ineffective in accommodating their needs, and what aspects of the support service contributed to this?
- 3) What do students consider would improve the extent to which university support services accommodate their needs?

3.3 Approach to the Study

3.3.1 Qualitative Research Paradigm

In order to explore and understand students' beliefs regarding the extent to which university support services accommodate their needs, this study employed an exploratory qualitative research design in which participants completed an anonymous, self-administered, pencil-paper questionnaire.

A qualitative research design was appropriate as, unlike quantitative research paradigms, it captures and values the individual's voice, enabling an understanding of the individual's personal experiences and beliefs, and thereby, the *insider's* perspective (Lapan et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2005). In answering the aims of the study, it was essential that the research design facilitated this unearthing of the insider's perspective, privileging the voice and beliefs of those who have directly experienced university support. As this design supported the theoretical lens of the insider, it complements Senge's (1990) theoretical concern that decision makers are often not those who experience the consequences of their decisions; in this case, that university support service staff and policy makers who decide upon and deliver the support, do not directly experience receiving this support or its outcomes, whereas students do. Furthermore, the exploratory nature of this research design (see Merriam, 2009) was well suited to this study as it is considered appropriate for the investigation of topics for which there is currently little understood (Johnson & Christensen, 2017), enabling new and unanticipated insights to emerge (Maxwell, 2005).

3.3.2 Grounded Theory

A grounded theory approach does not test predeveloped theory, but aims to generate insights from the data to explain the phenomenon being examined (see Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). It is "primarily a particular *way of thinking* about data" (Morse et al., 2016 p. 14), in that the explanations or theory developed through grounded theory methods are inductively driven from the data and the patterns within it that

the researcher sees emerge (Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Morse et al., 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This approach is appropriate in this study as the understanding and insights which have developed have emerged as intended from the voices of the participants.

3.3.3 Method

This study used an anonymous, self-administered questionnaire as this was deemed the most appropriate method of balancing a need for rich data which privileged the participants' voices, with the characteristics and potential needs of the target population. As Dryer and colleagues (2016) state, some students with diverse needs may not feel they have the capability to expend the necessary energy or time to participate in research. Whilst interviews are providers of rich information (see Johnson & Christensen, 2017), the potential demands of this method of data collection on participants rendered this unfeasible.

Additionally, studies have suggested that students with diverse needs may not be willing to disclose their experiences, such as those relating to disability, to their universities or researchers (see Magnus & Tøssebro, 2014; Osborne, 2019). For example, Osborne (2019, p. 241) found that many students with diverse needs who participated in their study mentioned "they did not wish their institution to be aware of their situation". Thus, it was essential that prospective participants in this study could feel comfortable participating and reporting their *authentic* experiences, positive or negative, without fear of being identified, or experiencing negative repercussions such as stigmatisation. Maintaining participant anonymity was paramount and data from students needed to be collected in such a way as to enable anonymous participation.

Therefore, a paper-based questionnaire was used as it was considered responsive to the needs and characteristics of prospective participants, whilst effective in obtaining the qualitative data required. Collecting data via questionnaire ensured students could answer questions in a comfortable environment, in their own time and at their own pace, and with the security of being able to answer anonymously.

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Participants

3.4.1.1 The Sample

Participants ($n = 60$) were university students who had directly experienced support from university support services to accommodate their diverse needs. This sample was drawn from undergraduate Teacher Education students at one metropolitan university in Sydney, Australia.

The sample was intended to capture the diversity of students' experiences with university support services. As such, participants in the study did not have to be in current receipt of support, as it was recognised that support may have been provided to students temporarily, or that students may have withdrawn from a support service if they deemed the support ineffective, or no longer necessary for their particular needs. This is considered a strength of this study, as research involving students with diverse needs predominantly recruits students from their university support services, which would appear to favour the voices of some, being those currently supported, and exclude others (see Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019; Osborne, 2019). Those students not in current receipt of support have been suggested to have very different experiences and needs to their peers who are in current receipt of support (see Grimes et al., 2019a). This made it vital that all of their voices were heard. Therefore, the sampling criteria used (aided by diversifying from typical recruitment pathways, as explained below), enabled the study aims to be met in a more comprehensive and nuanced way than would be otherwise possible.

In characterising the diverse needs experienced by this sample, it was recognised that the term disability has varying definitions inter- and intra-nationally, at times aligning with medical model or deficit views of disability and diverse needs (see Grönvik, 2009; WHO, 2013). As such, whilst some students may proudly identify themselves as 'disabled' (Cologon & Thomas, 2014), others may avoid the term for fear of stigmatisation, and wanting to be

seen as “normal” (see Magnus & Tøssebro, 2014, p. 328). Additionally, students may not align their own needs and experiences with what they perceive the term ‘disability’ to imply. For example, numerous studies consider chronic illness as falling under the label of disability (see the systematic review: Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019), however, many students with chronic illness do not consider themselves as ‘disabled’ (Royster & Marshall, 2008). Furthermore, it was also recognised by the researcher that requiring students to list their specific diagnosis to overcome these discrepancies could potentially undermined the anonymous nature of their participation. Therefore, in order to characterise the diverse needs of the sample, in light of the above, participants were asked to select any of the following broad categories they perceived applied to their particular experience: impairment or disability, learning difficulty, illness, chronic illness, and/or difficult circumstances.

3.4.1.2 Sampling Strategy

The sampling method employed was selected to be responsive to the characteristics of the target population. It was considered impractical to recruit participants directly from university support services using convenience sampling (see Johnson & Christensen, 2017), although this is a typical recruitment pathway for this population of students (see Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019). Based upon suggestions by Osborne (2019), the researcher deemed this method of sampling as excluding a subset of the target population for this study: those who had received support previously but were not receiving support at the time of this study. Therefore, purposive sampling was used (see Johnson & Christensen, 2017) by inviting any undergraduate university student who had experienced difficulties during their studies and sought support from university support services, to voluntarily and anonymous participate in the study by completing and returning a questionnaire. As the researcher was enabled access to participants in Teacher Education, undergraduate students were invited from this discipline.

3.4.1.3 Context of the Research Site

At the Sydney metropolitan university from which the sample was drawn, government data from 2009 to 2018 illustrate that the number of enrolled students reporting to the university that they experience “disability, impairment or an ongoing health condition”, has tended to increase each year; a trend occurring across many universities in the Sydney metropolitan, and across New South Wales universities overall (DESE, 2019).

The university under study has a designated service which offers students both accessibility and wellbeing support, providing they meet eligibility criteria. Participant students had disclosed their needs and obtained assistance from this support service. As gleaned from this university’s website and policy documents, the procedures and processes which these students have engaged with are as follows.

For a student with diverse needs relating to disability or an ongoing health condition to register for accessibility support, they must provide supporting documentation from a health practitioner, communicating their diagnosis and the impacts of the condition on their studies. This is a legal requirement for the service to abide by government reporting requirements. This documentation, along with a completed registration form, are submitted to the support service for review, and if accepted, a disability assessment appointment occurs in which an individual educational access plan is created for the student. This plan considers the reasonable adjustments which would enable equitable access in regard to the learning content and assessments throughout the student’s studies. In the case of implementing reasonable adjustments, the service considers the student’s requirements, as well as the costs and benefits of implementing the adjustment, and the interests of staff and other students at the university.

Wellbeing support is also provided to students who require it in the form of psychological support and intervention. Where a student requires greater than three appointments, a similar process to that described above occurs, whereby the student must

provide documentation from a health practitioner prior to receiving further appointments with the service.

Nevertheless, students undergo an *alternative* process of accessing support when an acute onset of their condition, or sudden intensification of their needs, leads to serious and unavoidable disruption, such as affecting students' attendance, performance or ability to complete assessments on time. This process of special consideration is separate to students' registration and receipt of support from the university support service described above, and is instead a process available to all students at the university who encounter short-term difficulties. Evidence is provided by the student, such as a report by a health practitioner, and if assessed by the university to be eligible, students are provided with an additional or alternative assessment, extension, averaged assessment mark, or advised to withdraw from the class without academic penalty, as deemed appropriate to each student's circumstances. This is important to note, as some students in this study had engaged with, and discussed, both the support service and the special consideration process⁷.

3.4.2 Data Collection Methods

Data collected for analysis in this study were collected via a paper-pencil questionnaire which was self-administered by participants. The questionnaire utilised closed-ended questions relating to participant demographics, and open-ended questions to obtain the qualitative data. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher under the expert supervision and peer debriefing discussions of Associate Professor Stuart Woodcock.

⁷ Please note that at the time of writing this thesis, the university has adjusted processes in response to the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated effects on the wellbeing, daily lives and financial circumstances of many university students. For example, enabling greater flexibility in the provision of evidence in the process of special consideration, in recognition that obtaining evidence such as health practitioner reports may be more challenging at this time. However, data used in this study were collected prior to the impact of COVID-19 in Australia, and as such, students' beliefs regarding the support that they receive have not been influenced by, and do not relate to, the current university COVID-related procedural changes for student support.

3.4.2.1 Contextual Information

To provide context and background to the study, as is suggested by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), a literature review, as well as a close examination of documents from the research site relating to student support seeking (i.e., university policy documents and information provided to students on the university website), were undertaken. This preceded data collection and did not form a part of the questionnaire or data collected for analysis. It was used to provide context to participants' responses.

3.4.2.2 Demographic Information

The questionnaire used closed-ended questions to understand the general composition of the sample (see Johnson & Christensen, 2017). This included demographical questions including participants' gender, their broad age category, as well as their current year of study in their degree.

Additionally, participants were asked to indicate via a closed-ended question, the broad nature of their diverse needs. Participants selected one or more of the categories they perceived applied to their particular experience: impairment or disability, learning difficulty, illness, chronic illness, and/or difficult personal circumstances. Whilst the categories in this question are typically conflated under the umbrella term of 'disability' (see Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019), the use of the term disability as an overarching category was considered problematic, and delineating subcategories for students to select, deemed more appropriate, as outlined in Section 3.4.1.1.

3.4.2.3 Perceptual Information

To provide the perceptual qualitative data from participants to answer the research questions, the questionnaire included five open-ended questions which asked students to: a) explain how effective the support service was in accommodating their needs; identify b) the positive, and c) the negative, aspects of the support service; to d) explain if there was any support that was not offered, that would have been beneficial to them; and e) to explain what

could improve the extent to which the support service accommodated their needs. The questions were worded in such a way as to avoid leading participants' responses, and were aligned with the research objectives, as this is suggested to be best practice (see Johnson & Christensen, 2017).

3.4.3 Procedure

Approval was obtained from the relevant human research ethics committee at the university. Following this, university course convenors⁸ for Teacher Education studies at the university were informed of the study and asked whether students in their classes may be invited by the researcher to participate. Where program directors were willing, the researcher attended the classes to inform students of the nature of the study and distribute the questionnaire to all students who were in attendance.

Students were informed that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw participation at any time without negative repercussions, and that they were not required to answer any question they felt uncomfortable answering. To encourage participating students to provide their authentic beliefs about the support they had received and in what ways it could improve, the researcher informed students that the study was seeking to hear students' beliefs, whether positive, negative, or neutral. Furthermore, students were informed that their participation was anonymous, with no identifying information being collected, including details regarding their personal circumstances, nor specific diagnoses.

The questionnaire was completed by participating students in their own time, outside of the classroom. To ensure the identities of students who had and had not participated in the study remained anonymous, all students returned both completed and blank questionnaires to a locked post-box in the classroom in the following lesson one week later. These were then collected by the researcher.

⁸ Also termed unit or subject convenors.

The responses to the paper-based survey were entered into an excel spreadsheet by the researcher to ensure only the researcher and supervisors had access to the data, as approved by the university's human research ethics committee. Each anonymous participant's response to the questionnaire was allocated a unique two-digit identifier, ranging from 01 to 60, for the purposes of data management, transparency, and the accurate reporting of results. For example, all responses from Participant 1 could be identified by the code P.01. The data were extracted into the qualitative data analysis computer software, NVivo 12.

3.4.4 Data Analysis

This study draws upon the analysis of data from five open-ended questions. To answer research sub-question 1, 'in what ways do students believe that the support they receive(d) was effective in accommodating their needs, and what aspects of the support service contributed to this?', students' responses to the following questions were analysed:

- a) "Please explain how effective the support was in accommodating your needs"; and,
- b) "What were the positives of the support service for you?".

To answer research sub-question 2, 'in what ways do students believe that the support they receive(d) was ineffective in accommodating their needs, and what aspects of the support service contributed to this?', students' responses to the following questions were analysed:

- a) "Please explain how effective the support was in accommodating your needs"; and,
- c) "What were the negatives of the support service for you?".

To answer research sub-question 3, 'what do students consider would improve the extent to which university support services accommodate their needs?', students' responses to the following questions were analysed:

- d) "Do you feel that there was any support that was not offered, that would have been beneficial to you?"; and,

e) “Were there any areas of the support service that could be improved upon?”.

Codes were developed across the qualitative data as explained below.

3.4.4.1 Overview of Analysis Stages

The qualitative analysis was undertaken in two stages. The first stage focused upon the insider’s perspective, hearing and understanding the authentic voices of the participants. As such, a grounded theory approach was taken with a constant comparative method of analysis adopted (see Glaser, 1965; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The second stage explored how the themes which emerged in the initial stage of analysis could indicate aspects of student support most beneficial for support services to focus upon and potentially improve. As such, an a priori approach was taken, categorising the themes identified in Stage 1 of the analysis according to Senge’s (1990) types of leverage in learning organisations. That is, each theme or aspect of support was categorised according to the effort to be expended, and the significance of the impact which may be seen, if that particular aspect of support were to be improved. This did not detract from the insider’s perspective, but enabled a final level of analysis from which to make suggestions for practice.

Considered supportive to all stages of the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 1997), the researcher engaged in memoing throughout. These memos ranged from notes of key words and concepts that emerged from the data, to records of the researcher’s thoughts and decisions during coding, and reflections through which the researcher could be aware of their own potential bias, supporting the trustworthiness of the study (see Janesick, 1994; Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). These memos also assisted the researcher to organise their thoughts in such a way as to remain close to the data, supporting the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

3.4.4.2 Stage 1: Hearing Participants' Voices: A Grounded Theory Approach

To enable the researcher to become familiar with the data, participants' responses to the five open-ended survey questions were read and reread in their entirety. Once the researcher felt a deep familiarity with the data, open-coding (see Johnson & Christensen, 2017) was undertaken which identified key codes or "small categories of information" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 184). These initial codes were descriptive and low inference (Elliot, 2018), ensuring that the understanding and themes which were emerging were grounded in the participants' own views, *inductively* driven, rather than generated through the lens of predetermined categories and assumptions (see Janesick, 1994; Johnson & Christensen, 2017). A constant comparative analytical approach was undertaken (Strauss & Corbin, 1997), and as such an iterative process of coding and recoding was engaged in, whereby codes were compared with all associated data and with each other. Thus, the codes were being defined and redefined until they comprehensively and clearly represented the nuance and meaning across participants' responses in a consistent manner (see Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Elliot, 2018). Memoing was particularly useful here in enabling the researcher to be aware of, build from, and record the thought processes involved in coding decisions, and as Glaser (1965) states, provided a means of recording and accessing the researcher's freshest theoretical contemplations as grounded firmly in the data.

Axial coding was then undertaken, exploring the relationships between codes, and classifying codes into broader distinct themes and subthemes (see Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Elliot, 2018). For example, the initial codes of '*regular personal communication*', '*feeling of care*', and '*understanding of/responsive to student's particular needs*', were all seen to speak to students' feeling of the effectiveness of support which was personalised or student-centred. This led to the broader theme of '*personalised and student-centred*' support under which these initial codes sat as subthemes. Constant comparison

between codes and themes (see Strauss & Corbin, 1997), and engaging in memoing throughout (Glaser, 1965), aided this axial coding process.

This culminated in the identification of two overarching themes, which through selective coding, all identified themes and subthemes sat within. That is, each of the themes identified could be classified as relating to the '*tangible*', the practical and material aspects of support, or relating to the '*affective*', those intangible aspects conveying students' feelings or emotions in relation to the support. These overarching themes were more inferential and abstract than the initial codes, yet as grounded theory and analysis by constant comparison enables, still grounded and inductively drawn from the insider's perspective or participants' voices.

Once the themes were established, a deeper, nuanced understanding evolved from further observing patterns in themes across participants. This deep analysis provided greater insight into which themes may be more significant to particular subsets of the sample; providing what Glaser (1965) stated as a means of accounting for differences in the data. Additionally, through the use of NVivo 12, word frequency analysis and text searches enabled participants' language particular to key themes in the data to be explored. At this point, theoretical saturation was reached (see Johnson & Christensen, 2017) with no further themes emerging, and with the data validating the theory which had been developed.

3.4.4.3 Stage 2: Applying Senge's Concept of Leverage: An A Priori Approach

The second stage of data analysis utilised Senge's (1990) types of leverage points of action in learning organisations as a priori codes: codes developed prior to engaging in the analysis of Stage 2 (see Johnson & Christensen, 2017). These codes were a means through which to view each of the subthemes developed in the first stage of analysis (for example, '*feeling of care*'), in such a way as to identify which aspects of the support may be most beneficial for support services to focus upon in catering to students' diverse needs. The a priori codes developed in this study included the following:

- i) high leverage points of action: those areas for improvement which, with minimal effort applied, may produce significant results; and,
- ii) low leverage points of action: those areas for improvement which, with great effort applied, may produce minimal results (Senge, 1990).

A process of coding each of the subthemes established in Stage 1 according to these a priori codes was undertaken. On the rare occasion a subtheme (i.e., '*timely access*') sat outside of these codes, meaning that an area for improvement could, with great effort applied, produce significant results, it was termed and discussed as a theoretical outlier.

Each of the subthemes from Stage 1 was coded according to the abovementioned codes. For example, the subtheme of '*feeling of care*' was reported by students as contributing to effective support, and for those students who reported ineffective support through a lack of this feeling of care, the support service could, with minimal effort, significantly improve this. Therefore, a '*feeling of care*' can be considered a high leverage point of action; a point where small actions on the part of the support service, may have substantial benefits for students.

Literature informed the classification of points of action (see Chapters 1 and 2). For example, studies within the education sector suggest policy documents and staff training alone can be lower leverage points of action (see Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019), and academic accommodations such exam provisions and notetaking as 'simple' to enact (see Anderson et al., 2018), which suggests these can be higher leverage points of action.

3.4.5 Ethical Considerations

The study focuses on topics that had the potential to cause discomfort or distress for some students. To minimise this potential for discomfort, students were informed of the aims and nature of the research and that their participation was voluntary and anonymous, and could be ended by them at any time, for any reason, without consequence. Additionally, students were informed that they were not required to answer any question which they felt

uncomfortable answering. These are considered appropriate measures (Lapan et al., 2011; NHMRC, 2018).

Furthermore, as the questionnaire was self-administered by students in their own time, outside of supervision, it was essential that students were made aware of what they should do if they experienced discomfort or distress. This was outlined on the information and consent form provided to students, and included the contact details of the researcher, university support services and the external support service, *Lifeline* (a free, confidential, 24-hour crisis support service operating across Australia; see Lifeline, 2020).

3.4.6 Trustworthiness

Throughout this study strategies to support trustworthiness or credibility have been used. Trustworthiness is supported through transparency (see Rubin & Rubin, 2005), which is provided through the accurate and detailed reporting of all processes involved in designing and implementing the study. Furthermore, as it considered that qualitative research designs are not free of personal values or bias, it was essential the researcher could make themselves and others aware of that which may be influential on the study and its findings (Janesick, 1994). To address this, the researcher engaged in reflexivity (see Johnson & Christensen, 2017) by reflecting through memoing throughout the study, and presenting the researcher's position (Section 1.5).

Furthermore, steps to support the trustworthiness of the study were also incorporated into the analysis of data and reporting of findings. The constant comparative method of analysis used provided a means of systematically analysing the data, and when combined with its required use of memoing, is considered by Glaser (1965) to improve the probability that the theory developed is clear, complex and *closely* aligned with the data. This is the result of the constant comparisons between the data and emerging themes made throughout the analysis process; it is in essence a means of checking and rechecking the alignment between the data and the theory emerging from it. It also enables the researcher to maintain

consistency in coding across the dataset, supporting intra-coder reliability (see Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Additionally, during and after the data analysis, the researcher engaged in peer (i.e., supervisor) review, or the discussion, debriefing, and examination of the data and themes which the researcher identified. This was considered necessary by the researcher in strengthening the trustworthiness of the study findings, as options such as member-checking were not feasible due to the anonymous nature of participation. Finally, in the reporting of the findings of this study, raw participant data are provided as evidence for the themes and theory developed, and explained using low inference descriptors (see Glaser, 1965; Johnson & Christensen, 2017).

3.5 Chapter Summary

This Chapter has presented the aims and objectives of the study, and explained and justified the approach and research design. The following Chapter reports on the findings of this study in relation to answering the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Overview of the Chapter

The previous Chapter outlined the aims and objectives of the study and explained the methodology employed in achieving these. Based on an exploratory qualitative research design, students who had directly experienced support from university support services completed an anonymous paper-pencil questionnaire about the extent to which they believed the support service accommodated their needs. Students communicated whether the support received was effective (RQ1) or ineffective (RQ2) in accommodating their needs, and identified contributory aspects of the support service. Furthermore, they considered what could improve the extent to which their needs were accommodated (RQ3). This Chapter presents the key findings of the data analysis.

The results are presented in three parts, the first of which, Section 4.2, provides the characteristics of the sample.

Section 4.3 reports on the findings of Stage 1 and 2 of the analysis. Insights from the voices of students who received support from university support services emerged through a grounded theory approach. Three themes were pertinent across students' responses: 1) '*personalised and student-centred*' support, 2) the '*accessibility*' of support, and 3) support which facilitated '*student agency and empowerment*'. Within Section 4.3, these themes and their subthemes are presented in relation to each research question. Integrated throughout are the findings of Stage 2 of the analysis, where the insights from Stage 1 were viewed through the lens of Senge's (1990) theoretical framework of leverage. This approach assisted in identifying how services may enhance their ability to cater for students' diverse needs and which aspects of these services may be most beneficial to focus upon. Two overarching themes are then discussed: the '*tangible*' and '*affective*' aspects of support.

Section 4.4 provides a summary of the key findings of this study.

4.2 Sample Characteristics

The sample was predominantly comprised of female Teacher Education students (see Table 3), reflecting a gender ratio similar to that observed for in-service teachers in New South Wales, Australia (NSW DoE, 2020). Further demographic characteristics of the sample can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Sample Demographics

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	9	15.0
Female	50	83.3
Of another gender	1	1.7
Age		
< 20	6	10.0
20 to 29	47	78.3
30 to 39	3	5.0
40 to 49	3	5.0
≥ 50	1	1.7
Year of Study		
First	13	21.7
Second	5	8.3
Third	17	28.3
Fourth	14	23.3
Other	11	18.3

The self-identified diverse needs of the sample are presented in Table 4. Participants were able to select any number of categories which were applicable, and over half of the sample ($n = 34$, 56.7%) reported experiencing two or more of the available categories (see Table 4).

Table 4*Characterising the Diverse Needs of the Sample*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Category of Experience		
Disability or Impairment	12	20.0
Learning Difficulty	10	16.7
Illness	22	36.7
Chronic Illness	17	28.3
Difficult Circumstances	46	76.7
Number of Categories Selected		
One	26	43.3
Two	21	35.0
Three	13	21.7

Note. Percentages related to each ‘category of experience’ collectively total >100% of the sample, as students were able to select more than one category.

4.3 Hearing and Leveraging Students’ Voices

Stage 1 of the analysis enabled the development of a comprehensive understanding of students’ personal beliefs about what contributed to the effectiveness (RQ1) or ineffectiveness (RQ2) of the support they receive(d), and what would improve the extent to which their needs were accommodated by the support service (RQ3).

Of the sixty students, nineteen reported solely on the effective accommodation of their needs and four suggested improvements to further strengthen this. These students considered the support “*very effective*” (P.43) and the service a “*great support structure*” (P.19). Additionally, eight students reported solely on ineffective accommodation of their needs, considering the support “*unhelpful*” (P.03) or perceiving it “*didn’t work*” (P.04). However, over half the students, thirty-three, reported a mixture of both effective and ineffective ways in which their needs were accommodated, qualifying the support “*effective, but...*” (P.59).

Across students’ responses, three themes emerged as pertinent to all three research questions: ‘*personalised and student-centred*’ support, the ‘*accessibility*’ of support, and

support which facilitated '*student agency and empowerment*'. The presence of these themes within each student's response, and the spread of themes across the sample and research questions, are presented in Appendix B, Table B.1.

The theme of '*personalised and student-centred*' support captured students' sense of whether their particular and unique needs were understood by the service, responded to in an individualised, rather than generalised, way, and whether students felt personally cared for. This theme also captured whether students suggested these aspects for improving the accommodation of their needs.

The theme of '*accessibility*' captured students' judgements about the accessibility of the support, and whether the service was perceived as approachable and willing to help. This theme also addressed whether students suggested improving the accessibility of support.

The theme of '*student agency and empowerment*' also emerged, capturing students' sense of whether or not the support facilitated their ability to make informed decisions or take action, or whether it empowered them through stress reduction and improved self-belief. This theme also addressed whether these aspects were suggested for improvement to accommodate students' needs.

These themes have several associated subthemes which tended to align and complement each other across the research questions (see Appendix B, Table B.2). These are discussed below in relation to each research question.

In Stage 2 of the analysis, the subthemes which emerged from Stage 1 were classified according to Senge's (1990) framework as either a high leverage point of action (an area for improvement which, with minimal effort applied, may produce significant results), or a low leverage point of action (an area for improvement which, with great effort applied, may produce minimal results). The findings are integrated into the reporting of each Stage 1 subtheme.

4.3.1 Effective Accommodation of Students' Needs (RQ1)

Students reported that '*personalised and student-centred*' support, the '*accessibility*' of support, and support facilitating '*student agency and empowerment*', contributed to the effective accommodation of their needs. As students' reports of effective accommodations theoretically have had greater than a minimal impact, no low leverage points of action (high effort/low impact; see Senge, 1990) were identified.

4.3.1.1 Effective: Personalised and Student-Centred Support

Over half of the students ($n = 36$) conveyed the effectiveness of '*personalised and student-centred*' support, perceiving their needs were understood and responded to in an individualised way. Four subthemes were identified: that the support service staff were '*understanding of/responsive to students' needs*'; that students experienced a '*feeling of care*'; received '*personal communication/follow-up*'; and specific '*accommodations*' which effectively responded to their needs.

Eight students reported staff being '*understanding of/responsive to students' needs*'. The word "*understood*" and its conjugates were salient in five students' responses, for example, in "*feeling understood and being accommodated for*" (P.28). For two students, their explanation of staff's understanding conveyed a sense of validation: an "*acknowledgement of difficulties and how they impact [their] ability to perform well*" (P.38), or "*feeling that [their] issues were recognised*" (P.60). P.60 linked this with "*being fairly treated*", suggesting an awareness of the right to equitable participation in higher education, and a reminder of the important advocacy of support services. Staff appear to play a significant role in students' perception that their needs were understood, and support was considered effective when appearing personalised or centred around specific needs. This appears to require low effort, yet have a significant impact for students, suggesting a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Five students reported a '*feeling of care*' as important. A lexical grouping around care including "*care*", "*compassion*", "*empathy*", and their conjugates, was paramount to this subtheme, with students reporting staff "*showed that they cared*" (P.05), were "*empathetic*" (P.23), and "*compassionate to [their] situation*" (P.54). Effective support went beyond the tangible, with staff crucial to students' positive affective experiences.

This feeling of care was echoed in four students' reports of receiving the tangible support of '*personal communication/follow-up*'. For example, P.43 emphatically noted support was "*very effective!*", receiving "*regular check ins to see how [they are] travelling*". The idiom conveys the student's perception that staff were following up on their progress. The regularity of this "*personal contact and care*" (P.14) from staff was emphasised. Generating a feeling of care, and potentially doing so through staffs' communication with students, indicate high leverage points of action (see Senge, 1990) as these require minimal effort and resourcing.

Twenty-seven students mentioned specific academic '*accommodations*' responsive to their needs. Overall, assessment provisions were a key concern with "*exam*", "*assignment*", and their synonyms, being mentioned 52 times across students' responses; the highest frequency of a lexical grouping across the dataset. Thirteen students noted the service organised exam "*provisions*", including "*the option to sit final exams in quiet rooms with fewer people.*" (P.60) ($n = 5$), "*extra time*" (P.52) ($n = 5$), computer "*software*" (P.46) ($n = 2$), or a "*reader-writer*" (P.52) ($n = 1$). These were considered "*very effective*" (P.52; P.43) and "*very helpful*" (P.30; P.46). Considered low effort to enact (Anderson et al., 2018), these accommodations constitute a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Additionally, fourteen students noted receiving "*extensions*" to assessment deadlines, effective in providing "*time to complete work*" (P.34) and "*recover*" (P.45), however, the service's role in this was omitted. Similarly, whilst three students noted the effectiveness of withdrawing from a class "*without academic or financial penalties*" (P.44) when

circumstances required it, only one noted “[a service staff member] supported [their] withdrawal” (P.23). Beyond providing exam provisions, the service was not central in students’ commentary on specific effective accommodations, yet these accommodations appear a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Effective support was perceived as personalised and student-centred, however, it also needed to be easily and readily accessible.

4.3.1.2 Effective: Accessibility

Twenty-two students conveyed that the ‘*accessibility*’ of support contributed to effective accommodation. Five subthemes were identified: the perceived ‘*approachability*’ of the staff and their ‘*willingness to help*’; ‘*timely access*’; the service’s ‘*communication with teaching staff*’ to aid support delivery; and, that the support was ‘*free*’.

Twelve students reported the affective domain of accessibility as effective: the ‘*approachability*’ of staff. Staff were described as “*friendly*” and “*nice*” by six students, and a lexical grouping around their ‘*willingness to help*’ was conveyed with the terms “*willing*”, “*wanted to help*”, “*supportive*”, and “*there for me*”, across nine students’ responses. For example, P.07 explained “*I felt like [the staff member] was there for me and wanted to help*”. When students experience challenges and seek support, it appears beneficial for them to feel staff are approachable and willing to assist. Requiring minimal effort, this appears a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Regarding tangible aspects of accessibility, seven students reported the effectiveness of ‘*timely access*’, being “*seen rapidly*” (P.08), and there being a “*promptness to attend*” (P.53) to students’ needs. This was particularly appreciated by P.27, expressed as “*a great help...when [they] desperately needed assistance*”. When experiencing challenges, timely support is beneficial, however, as section 4.3.2.2 will illustrate, during periods of high demand this effective point of action may in fact be difficult to enact consistently without

additional resourcing, and so may be considered leverage with high impact, yet requiring high effort to achieve, potentially constituting a theoretical outlier to Senge's (1990) framework.

Staff actions enhanced accessibility and aided support delivery for two students through the '*communication with teaching staff*'. P.13 recounts a support service staff member "*contacted unit coordinators for [them]*". This appeared to alleviate a burden for this student with the service seen to be organising the delivery of support on the student's behalf. Ensuring students are aware of this communication may be a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Additionally, one student provided a reminder of the importance of university support services as *free*, credible, support providers for students: it is a "*free service (very unlikely I would/could have used it otherwise) with educated practitioners*" (P.25).

In addition to its accessibility, students noted the effectiveness of the support in facilitating student agency and empowerment.

4.3.1.3 Effective: Student Agency and Empowerment

Twenty-six students conveyed that support which facilitated '*student agency and empowerment*' was beneficial. Five subthemes were identified: that the support facilitated '*informed decision making/action taking*'; provided an '*outsider's perspective*'; '*strategies/a plan*' to manage difficulties; and supported '*stress reduction*' and '*self-efficacy growth*'.

For eight students, the information and guidance provided by the support service enabled '*informed decision making and action taking*'. For example, students mentioned the support service "*gave [them] some informed opinion/perspective*" (P.01) and provided "*helpful contacts and advice for short-term action.*" (P.27). The provision of information requires minimal effort and may suggest a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Informed decision making and action taking were at times aided by having an '*outsider perspective*'. This was important to four students experiencing difficult

circumstances who noted the effectiveness of having a “*neutral third party*” (P.24), or “*outsider*” (P.22), who could offer “*a different perspective*” (P.42). This too appears a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990), requiring low effort.

Seven students reported the effectiveness of the ‘*strategies/a plan*’ they had developed with the service. For two students the service “*gave [them] a go to for issues. Had a plan*” (P.40); for others it was having been provided “*strategies to deal with*” (P.14) difficulties. This facilitated student agency and empowerment as, when challenges arose, students had a clear course of action already established which they could follow. The effects of this, one student remarked, were not short lived: the service provided “*strategies [the student] can work on for the rest of [their] life*” (P.25). Providing students with a plan and strategies may require minimal effort, yet provide substantial benefits, suggesting a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

The affective domain was also key with nine students experiencing ‘*stress reduction*’. The support aided students to “*manage stress*” (P.07; P.57), or “*took a lot of stress off which allowed [them] to focus on [their] studies more*” (P.31). For three students, exam provisions organised by the service achieved this. For two other students, it was the university’s process of special consideration: extensions to assessment deadlines were effective in “*alleviating the pressure*” (P.45) in simultaneously managing the challenges they were experiencing and “*completing numerous pieces of work*” (P.50). For both students, this enabled them to “*recover*” from the challenge, and for P.45, to “*still do well in the subject*”. Considering the mechanism of stress reduction was receiving effective academic accommodations, which are said to be simple to provide (see Anderson et al., 2018), this suggests a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Additionally, the service supported three students’ ‘*self-efficacy*’, or their belief in their ability to continue their studies and pursue their goals. It “*helped [them] to believe in [themselves]*” (P.07), and “*encouraged [them] not to give up on [their] degree and goals in*

life” (P.32). The ability of staff to bolster students’ self-belief may be a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Whilst some students experienced personalised and student-centred support which was readily accessible, and may even have facilitated student agency and empowerment, this experience was limited, or absent, for others.

4.3.2 Ineffective Accommodation of Students’ Needs (RQ2)

Students reported that a lack of *‘personalised and student-centred’* support, impediments to the *‘accessibility’* of assistance, and limited facilitation of *‘student agency and empowerment’*, contributed to the ineffective accommodation of their needs.

4.3.2.1 Ineffective: Insufficiently Personalised and Student-Centred Support

Fifteen students perceived a lack of *‘personalised and student-centred’* support ineffectively accommodated their needs. Five subthemes were identified: that support felt *‘generalised’*; that students needed to *‘fit into predefined boxes’* to access support; were not receiving *‘accommodations’* responsive to their particular needs; were *‘lacking a feeling of care’*; and some *‘met with scepticism’*.

Four students perceived their support to be *‘generalised’*, not responsive to their needs in an individualised way. For example, one student explained, *“the university did offer support, however some of which was quite generalised...didn't actually suit what I was struggling with”* (P.38). Their inclusion of *“quite”* and *“actually”* to lower the modality of their statements politely conveys the support was perceived as not accommodating their specific needs. In contrast, with higher modality and a sense of frustration, another reported *“there wasn't accommodation for different strategies. There was an assumption that all illness of one type is the same”* (P.58). These students perceived a lack of personalised assistance; the negative complement of high leverage personalised and student-centred support (see Section 4.3.1.1).

Related to generalised accommodation were three students' beliefs that the service required them to '*fit into predefined boxes*', rather than understanding and catering to them particularly. As P.37 explains:

"There was a category which I didn't meet of being able to get lecture or tutorial notes because the condition I had didn't involve not being able to write. This was not fair because even though I can write my condition meant I couldn't even get out of bed in order to make the notes I needed".

This student believed that their condition did not meet the eligibility criteria for accessing notetaking support. Although the researcher's conversation with the service informed that there is no 'tick a box' procedure which allows students some accommodations and rules out others, this notion of eligibility was echoed by two other students reporting they "*don't meet some of the requirements*" (P.33) and suggesting the service asks "*basically do you fit our boxes*" (P.59). These three students self-reported experiencing chronic illness. It warrants further investigation into why some students with chronic illness appear to 'fit' the available support and others do not. As specific diagnoses or impairment effects were not reported by students in this study, this was beyond the scope of the current analysis.

Furthermore, in considering specific '*accommodations*', three students experiencing chronic illness noted that beyond exam provisions, accommodations responsive to their particular needs were lacking. For one student, the service "*did not help [them] during the semester*" when they "*often need to take a day off from tutorials...no support in helping get any missed notes or information needed*" (P.37). Another student received provisions for exams, "*but once [they] tried getting support for being sick in an exam - it wasn't effective...[They] just dealt with the consequences in lower marks*" (P.59). Additionally, one student reported they were "*meant to have morning classes but this was out of [the service's] control*" (P.13). These students had registered with the service to manage the impact of their chronic health conditions on their studies, but reported that these needs were only partially

accommodated. Beyond exam provisions which are considered a high leverage point of action (see Section 4.3.1.1), support was perceived as ineffective in its responsiveness to their specific needs.

Additionally, four students felt they were '*lacking a feeling of care*' from the service. For example, one reported that their interaction with the service was "*all very impersonal*" (P.39), whilst another noted the staff member "*was very clinical and offered no sympathy in a difficult situation. [They] came off quite cold*" (P.01). Adjectives such "*impersonal*", "*clinical*", and "*cold*", convey a negative affective experience which contrasts starkly with the feeling of personal care other students reported receiving (see Section 4.3.1.1). For another, it was the perception staff "*hurry the discussions to their own ends and controlling talk*" (P.42), with the emphasis on staff's "*own ends*" indicating the student's perception their individual needs were not given the significance desired, and personal care was undermined. Affective aspects of support delivery, not simply the tangible support itself, can impact students' perceptions regarding the accommodation of their needs. Perceptions of a lack of personal care negatively complement the high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990) of feeling cared for by the staff (see Section 4.3.1.1).

Two students also reported their needs misunderstood and '*met with scepticism*'. As one student explained, "*it felt as if the person was sceptical about [their] situation...treated as if [they were] lying*" (P.28). Similarly, another stated they were "*dismissed as exaggerating...met with placations*" (P.47). Verb choices such as "*lying*" and "*exaggerating*" convey the negative emotions aroused when disclosing sensitive information to others and feeling you are not being believed. This negatively complements the high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990) of support which is understanding of, and responsive to, students' needs (see Section 4.3.1.1).

In addition to lacking personalised and student-centred support, a number of students faced difficulties in accessing support.

4.3.2.2 Ineffective: Challenges for Accessibility

For nearly half of the students ($n = 29$), impediments to the ‘*accessibility*’ of support contributed to the ways in which their needs were ineffectively accommodated. Five subthemes were identified: the ‘*waiting time*’; ‘*difficult processes*’ in accessing support; the service’s perceived ‘*limited communication with teaching/other staff*’; a sense of ‘*no ongoing support*’; and a support service that appeared ‘*intimidating/unapproachable*’.

The ‘*waiting time*’ for responses from, or appointments with, the service was a significant contributor to eleven students’ perception of ineffective accommodation. Three students considered the delays to be the result of a support service which was already extremely busy attending to other students and had little available time for their needs also. For example, P.05 reported “*they showed that they cared, but responded so late that it was hardly useful...they were clearly really busy and didn't have a lot of time to help*”. Words such as “*time*”, “*delay*”, “*length*”, “*busy*”, and their conjugates, featured 32 times in these students’ responses, highlighting temporal aspects as a key issue for these students. For five students, the waiting time was particularly related to receiving appointments with the service. Whilst some students reported a “*long waiting time (2 plus weeks)*” (P.25) and “*a lot of emailing and delays*” (P.23), two students reported never receiving a response from the service during a time of need: one stated “*my emails weren't returned when I needed the support*” (P.15), and another, “*I didn't receive any responses from [staff]*” (P.22). After disclosing details of personal circumstances and explaining or justifying a need for support, P.22 explained, it felt “*extremely disappointing*” not to have this acknowledged. As this point of action would likely require additional staff and resources to rectify, it sits as a theoretical outlier to Senge’s levers (Senge, 1990), being high impact, but also high effort.

In addition, eleven students reported that there were ‘*difficult processes*’ involved in accessing support. For three students this related to paperwork when initially accessing the service. However, for eight students, it was the challenge of completing special consideration

processes outside the remit of the service (see Section 3.4.1.3). The frustration that registering with the support service did not ease the difficulty of obtaining support, such as extensions, at crucial times, is clearly expressed by students frequently experiencing unavoidable disruption to their studies. This involved “*having to provide constant medical certificates for the same condition when [they] needed extensions for assignments.*” (P.40), and “*constantly having to fill out forms*” (P.42).

For two students, completing the special consideration process, which requires them to “*provide multiple pieces of certified documentation in a very limited time*” P.50, whilst synchronously managing the cause of the disruption, was reported as a significant difficulty. For example, P.18 was “*in hospital for 11 days*” and argued “*if you submit [evidence] late...you can't [get support] even though you can get extensions for weeks*” (P.18).

Throughout this process, as there is “*a lot of paperwork required*” (P.45) and it is “*difficult to lodge documents*” (P.39), some students noted their disappointment that they were unsupported by the service in managing this process. They stated the service “*did not help with locating/filling out documentation*” (P.26), nor helped them “*contact the services to get extensions.*” (P.05).

Perhaps recognising this challenge, the teaching staff of four students reportedly avoided approval from the service and the special consideration process altogether, providing students “*a low-key arrangement with tutors [which] worked well*” (P.34), directly accommodating them with extensions and waivers to attendance requirements. Teaching staff were perceived as “*more than happy to accommodate*” (P.06) students in this way. Streamlining the special consideration processes for those registered with the service, or enabling teaching staff to directly provide extensions to those with needs already validated by the service, may be high leverage points of action (see Senge, 1990) to explore.

Additionally, two students perceived the service had *'limited communication with teaching/university staff'*. P.47 explained, requesting support *"feels like a waste of time and energy because there is no communication to convenors or tutors"*. Students expected that disclosing their circumstances once to the service would reduce the number of times they needed to disclose to others, such as teaching staff. This negatively complemented the high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990) where the service was seen to effectively communicate students' needs to teaching staff (see Section 4.3.1.2).

Furthermore, four students perceived support was accessible in the short term, but believed there was *'no ongoing support'*. For example, P.03 stated their support: *"concluded and had no follow up or intent of ongoing support"*. This contrasts with others feeling that they had a plan and strategies to support them ongoingly (see Section 4.3.1.3); a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Finally, in the affective domain of accessibility, three students felt the service was *intimidating/unapproachable*. For one, it was feeling *"a bit intimidated"* (P.27) booking appointments, and for two others, it was feeling *"uncomfortable, sometimes"* (P.41), or feeling *"judgement"* (P.42). This contrasts with the high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990) of the service being approachable, with friendly staff (see Section 4.3.1.2).

In addition to challenges with the accessibility of support, some students noted it was ineffective when support failed to facilitate student agency and empowerment.

4.3.2.3 Ineffective: Challenges for Student Agency and Empowerment

Six students were ineffectively accommodated when the support did not facilitate *'student agency and empowerment'*. A single subtheme was identified: receiving *'limited information/guidance'*, which impeded students' ability to make informed decisions or take necessary actions. For one student, the service appeared to have *"no extensive knowledge of how to fix [the student's] problems at uni. They seemed as in the dark as [the student]"*

(P.13). Similarly, others reported the need for “*more guidance on what best to do in [the student’s] situation*” (P.36). As P.01 stated, “*support was there but I was still left confused as to what to do*”. These students were expecting more extensive guidance from the support service to inform their actions, potentially seeing the service as an expert in diverse needs at university. This negatively complements other students’ experiences of being provided information which supported their decision making and action taking, which is potentially a high leverage point of action (see Section 4.3.1.3).

Students’ needs were ineffectively accommodated when they perceived a lack of personalised and student-centred support, impediments to the accessibility of support, and a failure to facilitate student agency and empowerment. Therefore, these were naturally suggested by students as points of action for improvement.

4.3.3 Suggested Improvements to Accommodate Students’ Needs (RQ3)

In considering what would improve the extent to which the support services can accommodate their needs, students’ suggestions related to ‘*personalised and student-centred*’ support, improving the ‘*accessibility*’ of support, and improving the support’s facilitation of ‘*student agency and empowerment*’.

4.3.3.1 Suggestion: Provide Personalised and Student-Centred Support

Nearly a third of students ($n = 19$) suggested the service improve the provision of ‘*personalised and student-centred*’ support. Four subthemes were identified: that the service staff or support provided be more ‘*understanding of/responsive to students’ needs*’; that the service ‘*examine eligibility criteria*’ for accessing specific accommodations; that students receive ‘*personal communication/follow-up*’; and ‘*accommodations*’ responsive to their particular needs.

Seven students suggested increasing the extent to which the service staff are ‘*understanding of, and responsiveness to students’ needs*’. Both affective ($n = 3$) and tangible

($n = 4$) aspects of support were crucial to this. Affective aspects related to feeling cared for and understood by service staff. For example, one suggested “*more understanding from first contact (reception people) as...because I am sick, I am already stressed*” (P.33), or suggesting staff “*treat clients with less cynicalness*” (P.28). These responses suggest that when students are disclosing their needs and seeking support, they believe a positive affective experience in their interaction with the service, such as feeling their needs are understood, will contribute to the extent to which their needs are accommodated. This may be a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990), requiring minimal effort.

Additionally, four students suggested “*more personalised*” (P.58) tangible support to improve the responsiveness of the service to their needs, and closely related were suggestions from two other students that the service ‘*examine eligibility criteria*’ for specific accommodations. For example, P.37 who believed they were unable to access notetaking support due to their health condition not meeting eligibility criteria, suggested the service “*look into the categories people fall in more closely (not at superficial level...), have meeting with students to make sure their needs are being catered for*”. It suggests a deeper understanding of students’ needs may be achieved by engaging in discussion and follow-up with students to “*make sure*” appropriate accommodations are available and meeting the outcomes intended by the service. This appears a low effort yet high impact strategy; a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Similarly, six other students suggested a need for ‘*personal communication/follow-up*’. For two it was to engage in a process of evaluation and refinement of their accommodations, for example, “*a follow-up of people who access the service, to check on their progress and to provide additional support if needed*” (P.36). For four others, it was “*someone [to] catch up with [them] later on to make sure [they were] ok*” (P.27) after they had disclosed experiencing challenging circumstances. The request for follow-up indicates a

desire to feel cared for by the service. Providing this may require minimal effort, suggesting a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Of concern, two students requested improved personal communication or follow-up between service staff and those contemplating harm to themselves or others. One student requested that students considering suicide have their calls to the service returned, particularly after missing an appointment: *“a call back especially for peeps who might be suicidal and don't turn up to a session”* (P.08). Another suggested increased communication with the service *“for those who had severe issues and might be on the verge of harm to themselves or others after sitting and hashing out their issues”* (P.09). With words such as *“might”* and *“on the verge”* demonstrating future possibilities, the service is positioned by these students as a force which could positively intervene at crucial times. Interestingly, these two students focused their suggestions on *‘others’*, potentially understanding from experience the necessity of effective personal communication from the support service when mental health challenges are more severe, and the negative effect there might be for students like themselves when this is lacking. Communication with students may require low effort, presenting a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Regarding improvements to the responsiveness of specific *‘accommodations’* to students’ needs, four students considered it was pertinent that the service provided support for times when they are unable to attend their classes. For P.59, this would assist them to avoid the negative outcomes of missed learning and not meeting attendance requirements when experiencing an exacerbation of symptoms of their chronic illness: *“Need to be able to do make up work or access notes...an option for flexibility on tutorial attendance. One time I fainted before class and lay on the floor all class just so I didn't fail”*. This support around attendance and notetaking was requested by three others to aid them in managing their studies whilst experiencing illness or chronic illness. However, unlike other students, P.04 believed *“that is the lecturer's responsibility”*. For teaching staff to provide students registered with the

service with waivers to attendance requirements, and access to tutorial notes and lecture recordings as required, may require low effort (see Section 4.3.2.2); a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

In addition to improving how personalised and student-centred the support is, students also suggested that support becomes more readily accessible.

4.3.3.2 Suggestion: Improve Accessibility

Twenty-two students suggested that improvements to ‘*accessibility*’ would aid in the effectiveness of the support service in accommodating their needs. Five subthemes were identified: ‘*timely access*’; ‘*improved processes*’ involved in accessing support; improvements to the service’s ‘*communication with teaching/university staff*’; ‘*ongoing support*’; and ‘*approachability*’.

Despite eleven students reporting a lack of timely access as ineffective, only four students suggested this for improvement. Whilst improving the “*speed of the process*” (P.48) and providing more “*time to help*” (P.23) were requested, one student appeared to state the crux of the issue suggesting “*more staff*” (P.42) were needed. Perhaps what this student is perceiving, as others did in Section 4.3.2.2, is that many students are using the service and this high demand is impacting the timeliness of the support. Increasing staff and resourcing would require high effort, yet potentially improve the timely accommodation of students’ needs, presenting a theoretical outlier to Senge’s (1990) levers.

Eleven students reported the need to ‘*improve processes*’ involved in accessing support. This was not related to accessing the support service itself, but related to the need for students already registered with the service to undergo a separate process of special consideration when a significant disruption to their studies was experienced. For those encountering this process frequently, they suggest a reduction to the number of times they are required to provide proof of their need for accommodation. For example, “*extensions offered*

without getting a medical certificate every time would have been helpful as this process was very time consuming for me” (P.43), and that its “*sometimes easier to just hand in something incomplete than to go through the system*” (P.45). It should be noted that these students have provided adequate evidence to receive ongoing support from the service, but must provide proof of their need repeatedly to another sector of the university each time an assessment deadline or attendance requirement is impacted. When this evidence is required “*for the same condition*” (P.40) for which they registered with the support service, students are calling for a more streamlined process. A process which reduced the number of times students must be assessed for academic accommodations may lower the effort required by both the student and the university in this process, suggesting this is a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Improving the service’s ‘*communication with teaching/university staff*’ was suggested by six students. This was explained as “*communication*” (P.38; P.47), “*coordination*” (P.05), “*links*” (P.26), or “*connections*” (P.32; P.41), and appeared to be suggested primarily for the purpose of reducing the number of times students felt they needed to disclose their circumstances to others beyond the service. As students explained, “*communication within the university so you don't have to explain yourself every other day.*” (P.47), such as to teaching staff. Ensuring students are aware of the timing and detail of communication between the service and teaching staff, may be a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Additionally, only one student suggested ‘*ongoing support*’, or “*long term assistance*” (P.14), although the need was reported by four others (see Section 4.3.2.2). As this student stated they had a chronic illness, it appears natural this student would wish to perceive there was ongoing support for their ongoing needs. This appears to complement the high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990) of the service developing a plan with students (see Section 4.3.1.3).

Only one student suggested improvements to the ‘*approachability*’ of the service, noting the effect of the office environment: “*there's something quite professional/sterile about the offices that make it intimidating to go into to ask questions/ make appointments*” (P.27). As the service provides other means of contact, providing information to ensure all university students are aware of alternative methods to contact the service may be a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

In addition to increased accessibility, improvements to the service’s ability to facilitate student agency and empowerment emerged as important.

4.3.3.3 Suggestion: Support Student Agency and Empowerment

Facilitating ‘*student agency and empowerment*’ was identified as a point of action for improvement by students ($n = 2$), related to the subtheme of improving the ‘*information provided*’. As one student remarked with apparent frustration, “*it would have been beneficial to have been told the correct information from the outset*”, with the word choice of “*correct*” suggesting they had been misinformed at some point. Providing clear information may require minimal effort, and can be considered a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Furthermore, there was an ‘*implied need to facilitate student agency/empowerment*’ in the responses of eight students who were “*unsure*” what to suggest to improve the extent to which their needs were accommodated. This is best explained by P.42, who when responding to the question ‘is there any support you did not receive which would have been beneficial to you?’, stated “*yes. A lot. But can't think of specific.... It just simply is not offered...for someone who doesn't know...it's not explained*” (P.42). It is perhaps a paradox that whilst the question was designed to provide the opportunity for students to advocate for their needs, for some students this advocacy is stating their present inability to do so. In lacking awareness of the support available and what it might entail, students were unable to suggest improvements. Surprisingly, seven of these eight students were in their final year of their degree, a point in their educational journey where the researcher presumed the students would have the most

understanding of the service and improvements needed. Providing students with information regarding what accommodations are available, how they might be applied, and for what outcomes, may be a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

Whilst ‘*personalised and student-centred support*’, ‘*accessibility*’, and ‘*student agency and empowerment*’, were key to all three research questions, two overarching themes emerged across these.

4.3.4 Overarching Themes: The Tangible and the Affective

Two overarching themes were identified: that some aspects of the support were ‘*tangible*’, concerning material or practical components, such as academic ‘*accommodations*’; whilst others were ‘*affective*’, concerning the intangible and affective experience, such as a ‘*feeling of care*’. Each subtheme in Appendix B, Table B.2, was classified as being ‘*tangible*’ or ‘*affective*’⁹. This was with the exception of ‘*generalised*’ support and the suggestion for support to be ‘*understanding of/responsive to students’ needs*’, which consisted of responses blending both tangible and affective components.

The presence of tangible and affective aspects of support within each student’s responses, and the spread of these overarching themes across the sample and research questions, can be viewed in Appendix B, Table B.3. What Table B.3 demonstrates is that whilst discussion of the tangible dominated many students’ responses, the effective accommodation of students’ needs often went beyond the tangible to the affective, and this to a lesser extent was found in features of ineffective accommodation and suggestions for improvement.

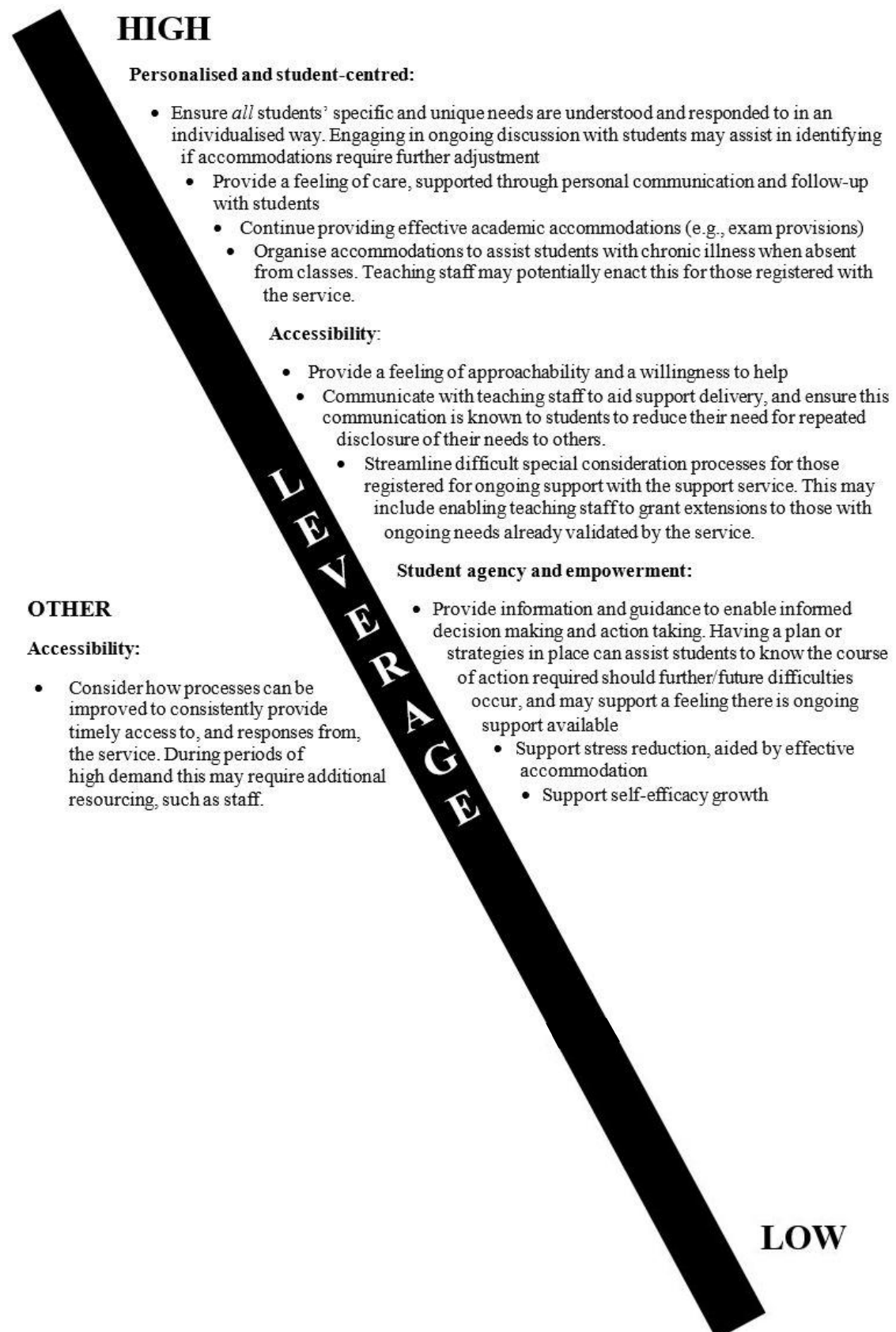
⁹ In Table B.2 (see Appendix B), subthemes which fall under tangible support are indicated by a superscripted ‘T’, and subthemes which fall under affective support are indicated by a superscripted ‘A’.

4.4 Summarising Key Findings

The tangible and practical components of support, as well as the affective experience for students, were both important to students' reports of effective and ineffective accommodation. Contributing to the effective accommodation of students' needs were aspects of support which were personalised and student-centred, accessible, and supported student agency and empowerment. The lack of these contributed to the ineffective accommodation of students' needs. Overall, the majority of these aspects of support could be classified as high leverage: actions requiring low effort and which may have a substantial positive impact (see Senge, 1990). Figure 1 presents a summary of these findings categorised according to Senge's (1990) framework of leverage.

Figure 1

Leveraging the Insider's Perspective to Enhance the Extent to Which Students' Needs are Accommodated



Note. This figure presents the findings of this study categorised according to Senge's (1990) concept of high (low effort/high impact) and low (high effort/low impact) leverage points of action. Marked 'Other', improving timely access was considered to require high effort, yet have a high impact on the accommodation of students' needs, presenting a theoretical outlier to Senge's types of leverage.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This Chapter has presented the results of Stage 1 and 2 of the data analysis of this study, and demonstrated that students consider personalised, student-centred, accessible, support beneficial, and appreciate when it facilitates student agency and empowerment. Where improvement was suggested, for many aspects of the support service, minimal effort could improve and positively impact how effectively students' needs are accommodated. The following Chapter will discuss these results in light of relevant literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Overview of the Chapter

In previous Chapters, the literature demonstrated that students with diverse needs may encounter additional challenges in their learning and performance at university (Grimes et al., 2019a; Osborne, 2019), and in response to this and the legal obligation to provide fair and equitable opportunities for *all*, universities have developed support services designed to accommodate the increasing diversity of their learners (see Moriña, 2017b; Naylor et al., 2013). Whilst in Australia these services are assisting a number of students, studies indicate that the available support may not be adequately targeted to meet their particular needs (Hughes et al., 2016; Serry et al., 2018). Therefore, for some it falls short of the services' intention to remove barriers to learning and participation in higher education, and to support students' capabilities for achievement and degree completion (see Naylor et al., 2013). Students with diverse needs continue to be underrepresented and have lower retention rates than their peers (Naylor et al., 2013), which may have subsequent negative implications such as for students' future employment opportunities and living standards (Birrell & Edwards, 2009; Ma et al., 2016). Nevertheless, in Australia the understanding of these students is considered poor (Grimes et al., 2017; 2019a), and a systematic review revealed limited research examining the formal support they receive (see Section 2.4).

This study has responded to calls from the literature to listen to students' perspectives on what accommodates their particular needs, with the intention of providing insight which may further strengthen the available support, and lead to a more student-centred approach which has been deemed by Australian studies to be lacking (see Heagney & Benson, 2017; Roberts et al., 2018; Serry et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2019). Grounded in the students' voice, and thus complementing Senge's (1990) theoretical concern that organisations must learn from those directly experiencing the impact of an organisation's decisions, this study explored what students considered contributed to the effective and ineffective accommodation

of their needs, and their suggestions for how this may be improved. A particular strength of this study was its diversification from the typical recruitment pathways for samples such as these (see Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019; Osborne, 2019), enabling the voices of not only those who are *currently* registered with support services, but those who have *previously* been supported and have either withdrawn from the service or no longer require assistance, to also be heard.

Through the lens of Senge's (1990) theoretical framework of leverage, actions by the service which may, with minimal effort and resourcing, produce positive results, were identified. This is believed to be the first application of this framework to student support services in higher education, despite its broad use within educational contexts internationally (see Pensieri, 2019). However, it is considered an appropriate lens in a climate where universities and support services may face limited resources, including staff and time (Stallman, 2012). The previous Chapter presented the findings of this study. This Chapter will now discuss these in relation to the literature.

5.2 Discussion

5.2.1 Introduction

Of the sixty students in this study, close to a third reported that their needs were purely effectively accommodated, and some of these students suggested ways in which this support could be further strengthened. However, over half of the sample had experienced a mixture of both effective and ineffective support, and around a sixth reported only ineffective accommodation of their needs. This aligns with previous studies which have suggested that whilst many students are benefitting from the available accessibility and wellbeing services (Drury & Charles, 2016; Oliver et al., 2016), others may be insufficiently accommodated (Pech, 2017; Serry et al., 2018). Overall, students appeared to thoughtfully engage in this study, providing well considered responses which demonstrated awareness of not only their

own needs from the service, but what they felt was possible of the service and the university when support was perceived as in high demand.

Throughout students' responses, three themes dominated the discourse. It was observed that effective support was considered *personalised and student-centred*, had an ease of *accessibility*, and facilitated *student agency and empowerment*. Where these three positive attributes were reported to be lacking, or even absent, accommodations were considered by students as partially, or ineffectively, catering to their needs. Students' suggestions for improving the assistance they received also centred around the personalisation or individualisation of support, and on improvements to accessibility, and aiding student agency and empowerment. Overall, it was seen that not only were the practical or *tangible* aspects of support contributory to how effectively students' needs were accommodated, but also those aspects relating to the *affective* experience of seeking and receiving assistance from the support service. With consideration of relevant literature, the insights gained from listening to the students' perspective, and how this may be leveraged to strengthen the available support, will now be discussed.

5.2.2 The Importance of Personalised and Student-Centred Support

When students perceived that their particular needs were understood by service staff, and responded to in a personalised or individualised way, this reportedly contributed to the effective accommodation of their needs. This effective accommodation has been argued for by Thompson and colleagues (2019) who have stressed the need for individualised support where staff understand the nuances of students' strengths and needs. Furthermore, students reported the positive contribution of feeling the staff cared for them personally, and that they responded to them in times of difficulty with empathy. This positive affective experience was aided by receiving personal communication and believing staff were following-up on their progress. The effective attributes of being understood, and interacting with empathetic staff, appear to align with those needed and expected by students in Moore and colleagues' (2016)

study who approached a support service for assistance for the first time. The actions by service staff in this study to achieve this may be considered of relatively low effort and resourcing, yet have provided students substantial benefits, constituting points of high leverage (see Senge, 1990). Furthermore, students imply that effective support is more than simply tangible accommodations, and highlight the importance of the *affective* when experiencing difficulties and seeking support.

Regarding specific tangible accommodations, exams and assignments were a primary focus for students and formed the highest frequency of a lexical grouping across the dataset. The exam provisions organised by the support service were considered by students as “*very effective*” in accommodating their particular needs. Examples included additional time, computer software, a reader-writer, and being able to sit exams in a room with fewer students. Such provisions are occasional and simple to enact (Anderson et al., 2018), constituting a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990). In addition, extensions to assessment deadlines were effective in enabling students the necessary time to complete their work and recover during periods of difficulty, however, this form of accommodation currently lies outside the remit of the service.

The high leverage actions of personalised and student-centred support were not experienced by all. A number of students reported receiving assistance which appeared generalised and did not suit their particular needs, supporting concerns in the literature that adequately targeted support is inconsistent (Hughes et al., 2016) or lacking (Serry et al., 2018; Spencer et al., 2018). Furthermore, it complements suggestions that as the locus of student support shifted from academic staff to support services, the accommodations have become more generic and less personalised (Roberts et al., 2015). With frustration, one student believed that accommodations seemed geared to diagnostic labels and not the nuances of their difficulties – a frustration perhaps accentuated by their study of inclusive education as part of their teacher education studies.

Further concerns were raised by a subset of students experiencing chronic illness, who despite registering with the service to manage the ongoing impact of their health condition at university, found the accommodations received outside of exam periods limited. This echoes literature which suggests frequent and ongoing needs are more complex and challenging to accommodate (Anderson et al., 2018), and that students with chronic health conditions may not be adequately supported by current university processes (Spencer et al., 2017). Insufficient accommodation was experienced by students particularly during times when they were unwell and physically unable to attend classes on campus. Students reported not receiving the accommodations they believed they required, such as notetaking, as they did not fit the criteria which would make them eligible for this. However, the service assured the researcher that a ‘tick-a-box’ procedure to enabling particular accommodations does not occur.

Students across this study recommended that personal communication and follow-up would assist to evaluate and refine their accommodations, and ensure they were meeting the outcomes the service intended. This appears to advocate a more student-centred approach, which both service staff and students across the literature have argued is required (Roberts et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2019). This form of communication with students may be seen as a point of high leverage (see Senge, 1990) which may provide these students the feeling of individualised support already reported by their effectively accommodated peers. Additionally, a Universal Design for Learning approach, or the provision of class notes or lecture recordings by teaching staff to those registered with the support service who experience absences from class, may be a point of high leverage to explore (see Senge, 1990), requiring relatively low effort and resourcing, yet greatly assisting students to manage their studies during periods of difficulty.

Furthermore, students also reported perceiving a lack of a feeling of care from the service and having interactions with staff that were impersonal, clinical, and even cold, which

impacted the effectiveness of the support. Research suggests many only approach support services when in severe distress (Vivekananda et al., 2011), and that seeking support can already be emotionally challenging (Martin, 2010; Reed & Kennett, 2017), potentially explaining students' desires to feel personally cared for when reaching out for assistance. Students suggested greater understanding from staff from the point of initial contact with the service would improve this. Furthermore, those experiencing difficult personal circumstances suggested follow-up from the service to check that they are "OK" after their initial disclosure of challenges; an experience reported to occur for other student participants. The importance of personal communication was emphasised by two students who reported not receiving this when they contemplated harm to themselves and/or others. A feeling of care, bolstered by receiving personal communication and follow-up, may require minimal effort relative to its positive impact, constituting a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990). Furthermore, this suggestion may speak to students' needs for personal connection and to be heard (Moore et al., 2016).

5.2.3 Ensuring Support is Accessible

Accessibility, in its tangible sense, related to timely access to the service and was particularly appreciated by students who felt they were seen rapidly when they had desperately needed assistance. This contributed to the effective accommodation of their needs. However, this timely access was not experienced by all. Some students experienced delays in gaining responses from the service, or failed to receive a response when they requested support, and reported limited available appointments. Some stated this rendered the assistance "*hardly useful*" by the time it arrived. Many of these students perceived the service to be in high demand, busy attending to other students' needs, and therefore, with little additional time available to support them. Across the sample, the inconsistency of students obtaining timely access may be explained by changing levels of demand throughout the year, with peak times during exam or assessment periods (see Cathcart, 2016). Furthermore, services may face a

high ratio of students to staff, impeding services' efforts and thus widening the gap between available support and students' needs (Stallman, 2012). As such, whilst students suggested improving the delays they experienced, they also recognised this may require additional staff to accomplish. The additional resourcing required places this as a high effort, yet high impact, point of action; a theoretical outlier to Senge's (1990) framework, which in a climate of scarce resources (see Stallman, 2012) appears unfeasible.

Perceived to aid the accessibility and effectiveness of accommodations were support staff's communications with teaching staff to organise and assist their delivery. This appeared to be seen as the service acting on behalf of the student, alleviating a burden for them. However, other students reported they felt there was little or no communication between the service and teaching staff, leading them to believe registering with the service had been a "*waste of time and energy*". They felt they had to disclose their needs and circumstances repeatedly to staff across the university, such as teaching staff; an experience some may find emotionally challenging (see Hughes et al., 2016). Ensuring the timing and detail of communication between the service and teaching staff is known to students may assist with this; a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

A number of students reported challenges accessing accommodations such as extensions at crucial times, which are delivered not by the support service, but through a special consideration process open to all students at the university (see Section 3.4.1.3). Students reported frustration that despite having provided enough evidence of their need for ongoing support from the service, they were required to provide additional evidence to a separate faction of the university each time an unavoidable disruption to their studies occurred. For those requiring extensions frequently, the repeated requirement for evidence, the submission of paperwork, and simultaneous management of their difficulties and studies, was a substantial challenge. Potentially recognising the difficulty of special consideration processes for students, some teaching staff directly accommodated students with extensions

and waivers to attendance requirements, avoiding the formal processes required. This was reported by students to be “*low-key*” and effective. Streamlining processes to reduce the number of times those registered with the service must provide further evidence for extensions, or enabling teaching staff to directly provide extensions to those whose needs have been validated by the service, may provide a process involving lower effort; one of higher leverage (see Senge, 1990). As medical evidence can at times be costly to obtain, this may also alleviate a potential financial burden for some students (see Karimshah et al., 2013; Martin, 2010).

Students also acknowledged the accessibility of support in relation to its affective components. Feeling the staff were approachable, friendly, and willing to help, was reported as beneficial when students were experiencing challenges and reaching out for support. Furthermore, perceiving staff are supportive can mean students’ disclosure of challenges can lead to empowerment (Martin, 2010). However, other students in this study felt uncomfortable and a sense of judgement, contributing to their ineffective accommodation. Roberts and colleagues (2018) note that the perceived helpfulness of staff can impact students’ beliefs regarding the usefulness of the service. These findings point to the importance of the affective experience, not only the practical accommodations students receive. This form of accessibility requires minimal effort to provide, suggesting a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990).

5.2.4 Facilitating Student Agency and Empowerment

The ability of the service to facilitate student agency and empowerment was also seen as contributing to the effective accommodation of students’ needs. Students appreciated the provision of information and advice from which they could make informed decisions and take action. For students whose needs stemmed from experiencing difficult personal circumstances, having a neutral third party who could provide an outsider’s perspective on their situation was beneficial. Related to this guidance were students’ reports of having

developed a plan with the service or being given strategies to assist them to manage difficulties. This enabled students to know the course of action required should further difficulties arise. For one student, the strategies organised were perceived to be ones they would employ “*for the rest of their life*”. However, where information and advice were lacking, students reported feeling confused and unsure as to appropriate actions to take. Perhaps considering the service experts in diverse needs at university, and in prime position to provide such support, these students appeared disappointed. Advice from the service may be both needed and expected by students (Moore et al., 2016), and the provision of information may be considered a high leverage point of action (see Senge, 1990), requiring relatively low effort and resourcing.

Student agency and empowerment also linked with a reduction in stress. This resulted from effective accommodations which enabled students to focus on their studies and achieve, or manage stress with the service’s assistance. Extensions to assessment deadlines, provided by processes outside the remit of the service, also alleviated the pressure faced when simultaneously managing study and the difficulties students were experiencing, allowing students time to recover and still achieve academically. Stress itself can impact students’ physical and mental health, and negatively affect their learning and achievement (Pascoe et al., 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2018). As those with diverse needs may experience higher stress than their peers (Ardell et al., 2016), reducing this stress may be an important affective outcome of receiving support. Where this results from accommodations which require low effort to provide (see Anderson et al., 2018), this suggests a high leverage action (see Senge, 1990).

Furthermore, staff’s ability to bolster students’ self-efficacy, encouraging students and improving their self-belief in their ability to continue with their studies and achieve their goals, contributed to the effective accommodation of students’ needs. As students may have to expend great amounts of energy and effort in order to achieve (Moriña, 2017a), and are at higher risk of dropping out of their degree than their peers (Fichten et al., 2014), perhaps the

impact of both affective and tangible aspects of support on students' self-efficacy levels warrants further investigation.

5.3 Implications and Recommendations

5.3.1 Implications and Recommendations for the Support Service and Students

Disclosing needs or diagnoses to others, and engaging in the processes of support seeking at university, can be complex and emotionally challenging (Martin, 2010; Reed & Kennett, 2017). Nevertheless, for many students in this study, undertaking these processes had a substantial benefit, resulting in the effective accommodation of their needs. These students received support which understood and catered to their particular needs, was accessible, and enabled them agency and empowerment in managing their difficulties during their studies.

However, half of the students in this sample experienced support which only partially accommodated them, and unfortunately, a few reported receiving only ineffective assistance. As effective accommodations have been seen to aid students in meeting their academic potential (Drury & Charles, 2016), partial or ineffective accommodation may have negative implications for these students' achievement. Furthermore, ineffective accommodation can result in stress (Osborne, 2019), which may negatively impact not only students' learning capacity and achievement, but their mental and physical health (Pascoe et al., 2020). Students in this study have suggested a number of ways to improve or strengthen the support they receive. These suggestions closely align with those aspects of the support reported by others to be already contributing to their effective accommodation. This alignment demonstrates the overall importance of personalised and student-centred, accessible support, and the facilitation of student-agency and empowerment for students. These aspects of the support may be most beneficial for the support service to focus upon when considering the effectiveness of accommodations for students and their experiences with the service. Figure 1 illustrates these

high leverage recommendations, many of which can be put in place immediately and with minimal effort relative to their outcomes.

Furthermore, this study has demonstrated the importance of the *affective* to students' perceptions of effective accommodation. Many of the positive affective experiences which aided students during times of difficulty arose from the service staff going above simply the provision of tangible accommodations to provide a feeling of care, support, and even individual significance to students they encountered. As students' reports highlighted, this was greatly appreciated and had a significant impact on them. The importance of the affective experience when seeking and receiving tangible accommodations, and the actions of staff to provide this, should not be underestimated. That this was evidenced from the students' own voices conveys the value of research in this area listening to the students' perspective.

For students, this study illustrates the importance of seeking support at their earliest convenience, and subsequently emphasises the need for universities to provide students with clear guidance which aids students' awareness and understanding of the support available, and how to access it. With limitations to staffing and resources across support services (see Stallman, 2012), and many students waiting until experiencing substantial distress or need (Kambouropoulos, 2014) before starting the complex and challenging process of obtaining support (Fossey et al., 2017), students should be provided with appropriate information regarding support services and their processes, and be encouraged to reach out for assistance when difficulties first arise. Additionally, whilst potentially requiring high effort, ways in which universities can improve or streamline support seeking processes to consistently provide students with timely access to, and responses from, the service, should also be explored.

5.3.2 Future Research

In addition to that mentioned above, further investigation is necessary to understand why some students with chronic illness appear to be accommodated effectively by the

available support, and others do not experience this same ‘fit’ between the assistance offered and their particular needs. Examining differences in the specific diagnoses or impairment effects experienced by these students may shed further light on this.

Replication with samples outside of Teacher Education studies, and across other university sites, would aid in understanding the applicability of the insights from this investigation to a broader context. In addition to students’ voices, future studies may wish to explore the perspectives of other stakeholders involved in university student support.

5.4 Limitations

The sample was drawn from Teacher Education students at one metropolitan university, and therefore, generalising beyond this limited sample is cautioned. As females comprised the majority of the sample, the insights gained may not adequately reflect the diversity of experiences of students utilising this service. Furthermore, as Teacher Education students will likely have an understanding of inclusive education and equity in educational opportunities, these students may reflect a perspective of effective and ineffective accommodation which may differ to students in other fields of study.

5.5 Conclusion

Students with diverse needs conveyed the importance and effectiveness of support which was personalised and student-centred, readily and easily accessible, and had the ability to facilitate their own agency and empowerment. These positive attributes were experienced by a number of students, contributing to the effectiveness of the accommodation they received. However, for others, these attributes were lacking, or at times, even absent. Whilst providing students with timely access to the service staff appears to require substantial resourcing to improve, and may not be feasible in the current climate, the other points of action for improvement suggested by students may require minimal effort and resources to produce positive change. In fact, many of the points of leverage identified for improvement by some students, were already being effectively enacted by the service for others. Students

with diverse needs often feel they must expend substantial effort to achieve their goals, working “twice as hard” as other students (Moriña, 2017a, p.200). What this study has demonstrated, however, is the importance of not only tangible accommodations in meeting the needs of these students, but the importance of the affective experience when students are seeking and receiving support. The positive impact of students’ feeling that the support service cares and is willing to help, that the staff are in their corner, should not be underestimated.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY SUPPORT SERVICES: THE AIM, SEARCH METHODOLOGY, AND SUMMARY TABLE OF THE SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW.....	90
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Appendix A: Australian University Support Services: The Aim, Search Methodology, and Summary Table of the Systematic Literature Review

This Appendix presents the aim and search methodology of the systematic literature review, whose findings are reported on in Section 2.4. A summary of each of the articles systematically reviewed is presented in Table A within this Appendix.

A.1 Systematic Review Aim and Guiding Questions

A systematic review was conducted to gain a thorough understanding of recent research examining students' use of, access to, and experiences of student support services at Australian universities. The search focused upon the findings of the recent decade in relation to accessibility and wellbeing services. Support services specifically for language, academic study skills, indigenous students, or financial and career support, were beyond the scope of this review and this study, and therefore, were not included.

The questions guiding this systematic literature review included:

- 1) In what ways do undergraduate students access/use student support services at Australian universities and what are their experiences of the support received?
- 2) What further investigation is needed into students' access/use/experiences of support from these services?

This systematic review is presented according to the PRISMA preferred reporting items for systematic reviews (Moher et al., 2009). The search methodology is first presented, followed by a summary table (Appendix A, Table A) of the articles reviewed.

A.2 Systematic Search Methodology

A systematic search of the literature was conducted during February of 2020 and the following databases were searched electronically: *Academic Search Primer* (via EBSCOhost), *Education Research Complete* (via EBSCOhost), *A+ Education* (via informit), and the

Humanities & Social Sciences Collection (via *informit*). The key terms utilised included ‘support service’ or ‘student support’, and ‘university’, ‘college’, or ‘undergraduate’. The databases were searched using truncations of these terms, along with Boolean operators: ("support service*" OR "student support*") AND (university OR college OR undergraduate). The term ‘disability service’ was not utilised as a preliminary search of *Academic Search Primer* and *Education Research Complete* using (“disability service”) AND (university OR college OR undergraduate) using the method outlined below, did not return relevant articles; for example, the results predominantly centred around the Australian National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The search was limited to literature published in the English language within the period of 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2019. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies were deemed eligible for review. Searches of *Academic Search Primer* and *Education Research Complete* were limited to peer reviewed articles with a geographic location of Australia, with ‘equivalent subjects’ of the search terms applied. Such limits and expanders were not able to be placed on the searches of *A+ Education* or the *Humanities & Social Sciences Collection*, however, the broader database, *informit*, from which these were accessed is known to provide peer reviewed, predominantly Australian content.

The review method is presented as a PRISMA flow diagram (see Moher et al., 2009) as appropriate for systematic reviews, and can be seen in Figure A, Appendix A.

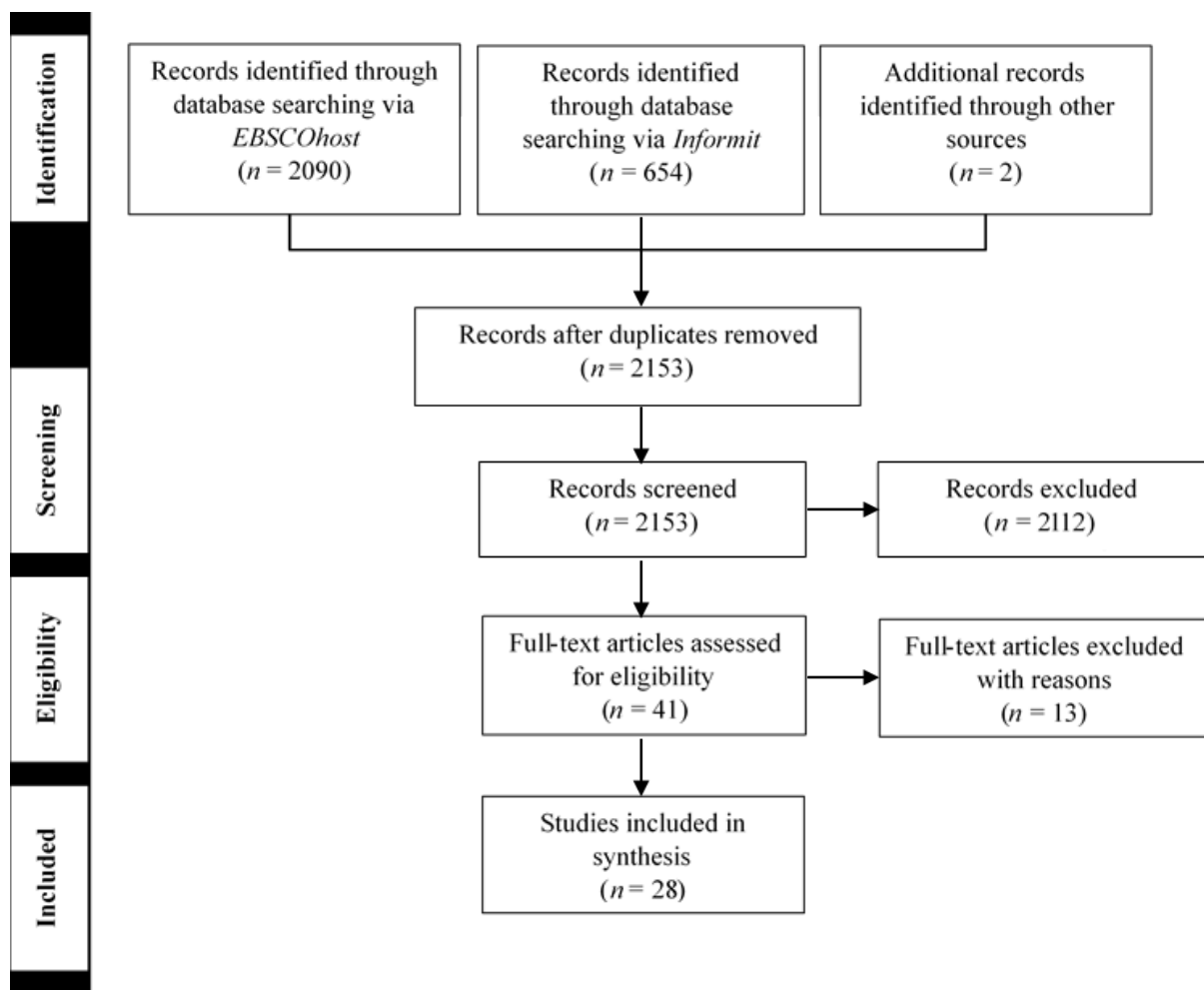
The title and abstract of potentially relevant articles were screened, the full text version was obtained, and the articles assessed for inclusion in the review. Twenty-eight articles satisfied the following eligibility criteria:

- Focused upon students’ access to, use of, or experiences of, support from student support services
- Focused upon undergraduate students as the sample, or subset of the sample

- Focused upon Australian universities
- Empirical research
- Published within 2010-2019, inclusive
- Published in English
- Full text article accessible via the current journal subscriptions of the researcher's university library

Figure A

Systematic Literature Review Method



Note: The systematic literature review method for Section 2.4. is presented here using a PRISMA flow diagram, as appropriate for this form of review (see Moher et al., 2009).

Full text articles which were excluded from the review either did not include undergraduate students in their sample, did not include the student support services required in this review, focused upon a university campus located outside of Australia, or examined support students receive in settings outside of the university, such as clinical placements.

The findings of the twenty-eight articles are synthesised in Section 2.4. Summaries of individual articles are presented in Appendix A, Table A.

A.3 Summary Table for Articles Systematically Reviewed

This Appendix contains a summary table (Table A) of the articles reviewed in Section 2.4. This table reports on the focus, sample, approach, data collection, and key relevant findings of the articles, as is appropriate for the reporting of systematic literature reviews (see Moher et al., 2009).

Table A

Australian University Support Services: Summary Table for Articles Systematically Reviewed

Study	Relevant research focus	Support services	Sample	Approach and data collection method	Relevant key findings
Anderson et al. (2018)	The support offered to students and their level of satisfaction.	Accessibility	Students ($n = 48$) with ASD registered with accessibility services.	Qualitative and quantitative questionnaire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic accommodations such as exam provisions were considered helpful. • Reports of support not available or lacking, leading to withdrawal from a unit of study. • Delays between asking for and receiving support caused stress and stopped some students accessing support. • Some students noted lacking the self-advocacy skills to request the support they required. • Causes of delayed access to services: lack of awareness of the services, wishing to proceed with their studies without formal support, or believing that they did not need support but later realising they did.
Beccaria et al. (2016)	Students' beliefs regarding the university's role in supporting students' health.	General consideration of support services, including wellbeing	Distance education students ($n = 7$) at a regional university.	Qualitative exploratory approach. Semi-structured interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges to accessing support: awareness of services, reluctance or uncertainty, believing services were for prevention and not crisis support. • Building a good relationship with counsellors was important, and receiving personal phone calls and emails beneficial.
Briguglio & Smith (2012)	Understanding the strategies used by students to deal with education issues, socio-cultural and personal factors.	General consideration of support services	International Chinese students ($n = 20$) undertaking accounting majors.	Qualitative ethnographic approach. Longitudinal study. Semi-structured interviews, writing tasks and students' grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early in the semester, students did not consider seeking support from university support services. Later in the semester, students turned to peer support.

Continued

Study	Relevant research focus	Support services	Sample	Approach and data collection method	Relevant key findings
Courtney (2019)	Describing the methods, outcomes and challenge of a case-management approach employed.	Accessibility and wellbeing	Students ($n = 23$) utilising a university service called UNify	Survey and university enrolment and achievement records.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a gap between short-term counselling and the student accessibility service, which UNify filled. • With UNify, student attrition lowered, and for many, GPA increased, and students gave positive feedback.
Couzens et al. (2015)	Students' use of the accessibility service.	Accessibility	Students ($n = 7$) with learning difficulties and university staff ($n = 8$).	Qualitative approach. Interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility services necessary for some students' wellbeing and academic success. • Caring teaching staff were effective supports. • Students did not access the service thinking it was only for those with severe disability • Frustration due to a lack of targeted and timely support • Some considered the service only for students with more severe disability.
Drury & Charles (2016)	Understand factors which helped students experiencing challenges, succeed in their studies.	Accessibility and wellbeing	Students ($n = 308$) utilising a university learning centre	Online survey, focus groups and interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The services were considered factors which supported students experiencing challenges to succeed.
Earnest et al. (2010)	Examining use of support systems, among other aspects of student experiences.	General consideration of support services	African and Middle Eastern students from refugee backgrounds ($n = 14$)	Qualitative approach. Interviews and focus groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many students did not use support services • Students often not aware support was available • Students believe service staff required greater awareness of their particular needs and experiences
Heagney & Benson (2017)	Understand the role of institutional support in the success of mature-aged student	General consideration of support services	Mature-aged undergraduate students undertaking a social work degree ($n = 11$).	Qualitative, longitudinal case-study approach. Interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students had limited use of the support services • Services need to be student centred and consider students' perceived needs

Continued

Study	Relevant research focus	Support services	Sample	Approach and data collection method	Relevant key findings
Hughes et al. (2016)	The support provided by academic and non-academic staff, and the support students required.	Accessibility	Students ($n = 83$) experiencing chronic illness or disability.	Qualitative and quantitative questionnaire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students needed flexibility, and assistance with stress and university processes. Seeking exceptions and waivers generated a negative affective experience. Many students only accessed support after, not at, enrolment, suggesting university environments can cause challenges for students with a health condition. Sufficient provisions are inconsistent.
Hussain et al. (2013)	Examine students' physical and mental health challenges and their perception of access to available health and support services.	General consideration of support services; including wellbeing	First-year undergraduate students ($n = 355$) at a rural university	Cross-sectional study. Qualitative and quantitative questionnaire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 23% experienced difficulties with student counselling services Students prevented from accessing support by their concerns of stigma, and feelings of mistrust, guilt and embarrassment.
Kambouroglou et al. (2014)	Examine the issues for which students sought counselling services within their first 12 months on campus, and their experience of the service.	Wellbeing	International students ($n = 90$), and counsellors ($n = 12$).	Qualitative approach. Questionnaire and interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students only accessed support when in extreme psychological pain.
Karimshah et al. (2013)	Examine the stressors and retention processes of student with and without low SES background.	General consideration of support services, including wellbeing and accessibility	Domestic undergraduate students, ($n = 1002$) including those of low SES background	Qualitative and quantitative questionnaire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 82% were aware of the support services available, yet there were low rates of accessing support. For some the services were impersonal, hard to access, or did not cater for their needs. Support services minimally affected students' decisions to continue with their studies.

Continued

Study	Relevant research focus	Support services	Sample	Approach and data collection method	Relevant key findings
Martin (2010).	Considering what was most helpful to students who experienced mental health challenges.	General consideration of support services, including accessibility and wellbeing	Students (<i>n</i> = 54) who experience mental health challenges.	Qualitative exploratory approach. Questionnaire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main source for accessing support is seen to be university support services, and students prefer contacting one source. Disclosure leading to empowerment or disempowerment depending on support students receive and whether they internalise stigma. Supportive and informative service staff appreciated Support predominantly related to assessment extensions. Medical evidence for special consideration often incurred financial cost.
Moore et al. (2016)	Examine the needs of students utilising a counselling service for the first time.	Wellbeing	University students accessing counselling services (<i>n</i> = 641)	Qualitative. Quality assurance survey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students needed the service to provide a feeling of connectedness, understanding and being heard, and support psychological skill development, resilience, recovery from challenges, and guidance. The support service was considered important in supporting students' academic achievement. Students needed support from staff who understood both their needs and the university system/processes.
Oliver et al. (2015)	Understanding what supports and impedes indigenous students at university.	General consideration of support services, including accessibility and wellbeing	Indigenous students (<i>n</i> = 57)	Qualitative. Questionnaire and interview.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The support services aided students' progress in their university studies.
Pech (2017)	Understanding how students support their own resilience and how universities can aid their resilience	General consideration of support services	Students (<i>n</i> = 290)	Qualitative. Questionnaire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20% of students suggested improving support services could support their resilience. More timely access to high-demand services Little positive feedback on the services provided

Continued

Study	Relevant research focus	Support services	Sample	Approach and data collection method	Relevant key findings
Perre et al. (2016)	Examining social perceptions of mental illness.	Wellbeing	University students ($n = 10$)	Qualitative. Interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some students lacked the confidence to access support from the service. One student was unaware support was available.
Roberts & Dunworth (2012)	Examining students' and staff beliefs about students' awareness, access to and use of support services.	General student support, including wellbeing	International students ($n = 19$) and service staff ($n = 6$).	Qualitative. exploratory approach. Staff interviews. Student focus groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some students lacked awareness of the support available, and services were not always available when they were needed Service staff believe students are aware of the support available, but may not know specifically what the services provide, or how to access them and when. Students and service staff believe the delivery of support needs to be more student-centred.
Roberts et al. (2015)	Examining awareness, access to, and use of student services.	General, consideration of support services, including accessibility and wellbeing	International students ($n = 333$)	Case-study approach. Qualitative and quantitative questionnaire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 40% used counselling services, and 15% needed and were aware of the service but did not use it. 30 % used disability services, and 2% needed and were aware of the service but did not use it. Not using the service was related to lacking awareness of how to access support and information about the service. Students suggested promotion of the service and improved access to the services.
Roberts et al. (2018)	Examining awareness, access to, and use of student services	General, consideration of support services, including accessibility and wellbeing	International students ($n = 19$), students from a student guild ($n = 5$), staff from support services ($n = 6$), and a larger survey of international students ($n = 333$).	Case study approach. University documents, staff interviews, student focus groups, and qualitative and quantitative questionnaire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some students did not access support as they lacked awareness or information about the services, felt uncomfortable accessing them, or felt they did not require support. Students expressed concern regarding the time it takes to access services which require appointments.

Continued

Study	Relevant research focus	Support services	Sample	Approach and data collection method	Relevant key findings
Serry et al. (2018)	The types of support offered by the university.	Accessibility	Students ($n = 33$) with specific learning disability.	Qualitative and quantitative questionnaire, and interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately half the students felt their needs were only partially understood Students wanted more types accommodations than they had received. Universities would benefit from listening to what students recommend would accommodate their needs. Students felt they must always prove their chronic illness to obtain support, however, it was easier and preferred to conceal it than seek support. Benefits of support were validation of their condition and accommodations. Universities need to provide greater flexibility and accommodation to support the changing intensity and needs resulting from students' health conditions; this support was lacking as a result of current university processes.
Spencer et al. (2017)	Students' experience of health, illness and university, and use of resources and support.	General consideration of support services	Undergraduate and postgraduate students ($n = 16$) identifying as having a chronic condition	Qualitative. In-depth semi-structured interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students felt they must always prove their chronic illness to obtain support, however, it was easier and preferred to conceal it than seek support. Benefits of support were validation of their condition and accommodations. Universities need to provide greater flexibility and accommodation to support the changing intensity and needs resulting from students' health conditions; this support was lacking as a result of current university processes.
Stone et al. (2016)	How support initiatives impacted students' success for those of low SES backgrounds.	Accessibility and wellbeing	Undergraduate students of low SES background ($n = 22$) and an unspecified large number of students on university database	Qualitative and quantitative. University database and student interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8.5% used accessibility services; these students had higher achievement than those who did not access the services, and reported benefits of support. 10.4% used wellbeing services such as counselling; these students' academic performance increased apart from those of low SES background whose performance decreased, potentially the result of psychological distress. Students reported benefits of counselling.
Supple & Agbenyega (2015)	Level of academic support, perceptions of any cultural differences in support	General consideration of support services	International students ($n = 2$)	Qualitative case-study approach. Interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive interactions with staff from support services

Continued

Study	Relevant research focus	Support services	Sample	Approach and data collection method	Relevant key findings
Thomas et al., (2019)	Impacts on the success of students with ASD.	General consideration of support services	Students ($n = 23$) with ASD, and disability support workers, parents or mentors of students with ASD.	Q-methodology. Online Q-sort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students benefitted from individualised support and an individualised support plan Students benefitted from having a support service staff member aid them in accessing supports and discuss academic challenges. Individualised support is required to cater to students' diverse strengths and needs for students with ASD.
Vivekananda et al. (2011)	Identifying at-risk student cohorts accessing the service.	Wellbeing	Students ($n = 3682$) accessing wellbeing support between 2005 and 2010.	Quantitative. Questionnaire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students accessed wellbeing support not only to assist with mental health challenges, but also difficult circumstances, and academic concerns such as Special Consideration, study-related stress, motivation and concentration, and their academic progress. Students with a disability, or who are international or from a language background other than English, have lower likelihood of accessing support until experiencing great distress. Students with psychiatric disability not only accessed wellbeing support, but made up the largest portion of students registered for accessibility support.
White (2014)	Theoretical model to develop support services responsive to students' needs.	General consideration of support services	Mature aged low-SES students ($n = 17$) and staff ($n = 3$) at a regional university.	Qualitative. Semi-structured interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited awareness and understanding of the services available. More likely to access the service if encouraged to by a person they trust. Universities need referral pathways.
Wright et al. (2013)	Understanding what supported students continuation of their studies during significant challenges.	General consideration of support services	Students ($n = 28$) who had experienced significant challenges	Qualitative. Interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessing student support services was considered to aid retention, particularly when coupled with students' own determination. Students suggested other students should access support to aid in managing challenging circumstances.

Appendix B: Detailed Findings from Stage 1 of Analysis: Results Tables

This Appendix contains three Tables which report on the findings of Stage 1 of the analysis (see Section 4.3). The first, Table B.1, illustrates the presence of the identified themes within each participant's response, and the spread of themes across the sample and research questions. The second, Table B.2, presents the frequency of the themes with their subthemes across participant responses, and demonstrates that subthemes align and complement each other across the research questions. The third, Table B.3, illustrates the presence of the overarching themes of tangible and affective aspects of support within each participant's response, and the spread of these overarching themes across the sample and research questions.

Table B.1*Themes Across Research Questions and Participants' Responses*

Participant ID	Themes Present in Participants' Responses								
	RQ1: Effective			RQ2: Ineffective			RQ3: Improvements		
	P	A	S	P	A	S	P	A	S
P.01			*	*		*	*		*
P.02	*	*							
P.03				*	*				
P.04				*			*		
P.05	*				*			*	
P.06	*	*	*					*	
P.07		*	*		*				
P.08	*	*			*		*		
P.09		*	*		*		*		
P.10	*								
P.11	*								
P.12	*		*		*	*	*	*	
P.13	*	*		*		*		*	*
P.14	*		*		*			*	
P.15	*		*		*				
P.16	*								
P.17	*		*						
P.18					*		*	*	
P.19		*						*	
P.20	*	*			*				*
P.21	*		*						
P.22			*		*		*		
P.23	*				*			*	
P.24			*						
P.25		*	*		*		*		
P.26	*	*			*	*		*	
P.27		*	*		*		*	*	
P.28	*			*			*		
P.29									
P.30	*	*							
P.31		*	*						
P.32	*	*	*		*			*	
P.33		*		*	*		*		
P.34	*								
P.35				*			*		
P.36			*			*	*		
P.37	*			*			*	*	*

Continued

Participant ID	Themes Present in Participants' Responses								
	RQ1: Effective			RQ2: Ineffective			RQ3: Improvements		
	P	A	S	P	A	S	P	A	S
P.38	*	*		*	*		*	*	
P.39				*	*			*	
P.40	*		*		*			*	
P.41					*			*	*
P.42		*	*	*	*	*		*	*
P.43	*		*					*	*
P.44	*				*		*		
P.45	*		*		*			*	*
P.46	*	*			*				
P.47	*			*	*			*	*
P.48	*		*		*			*	
P.49		*	*						
P.50	*		*		*				
P.51	*						*		
P.52	*								
P.53	*	*	*						
P.54	*	*							
P.55		*							
P.56					*			*	
P.57			*						
P.58				*			*		
P.59	*			*			*		
P.60	*		*	*					
<i>Total</i>	36	22	26	15	29	6	19	22	9

Note. P, A, and S represent the themes 'personalised and student-centred', 'accessibility', and 'student agency and empowerment', respectively.

The symbol '*' conveys that the theme was present in the participant's response.

Research Question (RQ) 1 asked "In what ways do students believe that the support they receive(d) was effective in accommodating their needs, and what aspects of the support service contributed to this?". RQ2 asked "In what ways do students believe that the support they receive(d) was ineffective in accommodating their needs, and what aspects of the support service contributed to this?". RQ3 asked "What do students consider would improve the extent to which university support services accommodate their needs?".

Table B.2*Theme and Subtheme Frequency and Alignment Across the Research Questions*

Theme	Subtheme Alignment Across Research Questions		
	RQ1: Effective	RQ2: Ineffective	RQ3: Improvements
Personalised & student centred			
Students	36	15	19
Subthemes (<i>n</i> responses)			
	Understanding of/ responsive to students' needs (<i>n</i> = 8) ^A	Generalised (<i>n</i> = 4) ^{T/A}	Understanding of/ responsive to students' needs (<i>n</i> = 7) ^{T/A}
		Fit into predefined boxes (<i>n</i> = 3) ^T	Examine eligibility criteria (<i>n</i> = 2) ^T
		Met with scepticism (<i>n</i> = 2) ^A	
	Feeling of Care (<i>n</i> = 5) ^A	Lacking a feeling of care (<i>n</i> = 4) ^A	
	Personal communication/ follow-up (<i>n</i> = 4) ^T		Personal communication/ follow-up (<i>n</i> = 6) ^T
	Accommodations (<i>n</i> = 27) ^T	Accommodations (<i>n</i> = 3) ^T	Accommodations (<i>n</i> = 4) ^T

Continued

Theme	Subtheme Alignment Across Research Questions		
	RQ1: Effective	RQ2: Ineffective	RQ3: Improvements
Accessibility			
Students	22	29	22
Subthemes (<i>n</i> responses)			
	Timely access (<i>n</i> = 7) ^T	Waiting time (<i>n</i> = 11) ^T	Timely access (<i>n</i> = 4) ^T
		Difficult processes (<i>n</i> = 11) ^T	Improved processes (<i>n</i> = 11) ^T
	Approachability (<i>n</i> = 12) ^A	Intimidating/ unapproachable (<i>n</i> = 3) ^A	Approachability (<i>n</i> = 1) ^A
	Communication with teaching staff (<i>n</i> = 3) ^T	Limited communication with teaching/other staff (<i>n</i> = 2) ^T	Communication with teaching/other staff (<i>n</i> = 6) ^T
	Free (<i>n</i> = 1) ^T		
		No ongoing support (<i>n</i> = 4) ^T	Ongoing support (<i>n</i> = 1) ^T
Student agency & empowerment			
Students	26	6	9
Subthemes (<i>n</i> responses)			
	Informed decision making/action taking (<i>n</i> = 8) ^T	Limited information/ guidance (<i>n</i> = 6) ^T	Information provided (<i>n</i> = 2) ^T
	Outsider's perspective (<i>n</i> = 4) ^T		
	Strategies/a plan (<i>n</i> = 7) ^T		

Continued

Theme	Subtheme Alignment Across Research Questions		
	RQ1: Effective	RQ2: Ineffective	RQ3: Improvements
	Stress reduction (<i>n</i> = 9) ^A		
	Self-efficacy growth (<i>n</i> = 3) ^A		
			Implied need to facilitate student agency/ empowerment (<i>n</i> = 8) ^A

Note. Research Question (RQ) 1 asked “In what ways do students believe that the support they receive(d) was effective in accommodating their needs, and what aspects of the support service contributed to this?”. RQ2 asked “In what ways do students believe that the support they receive(d) was ineffective in accommodating their needs, and what aspects of the support service contributed to this?”. RQ3 asked “What do students consider would improve the extent to which university support services accommodate their needs?”.

^T denotes that students’ responses in this subtheme relate to a tangible aspect of support.

^A denotes that students’ responses in this subtheme relate to an affective, intangible, aspect of support.

Table B.3*Overarching Themes Across the Research Questions and Participants' Responses*

Participant ID	Overarching Themes Present in Participants' Responses					
	RQ1: Effective		RQ2: Ineffective		RQ3: Improvements	
	A	T	A	T	A	T
P.01		*	*	*		*
P.02	*	*				
P.03				*		
P.04				*	*	*
P.05	*			*		*
P.06	*	*			*	*
P.07	*			*		
P.08		*		*		*
P.09		*		*		*
P.10	*	*				
P.11		*				
P.12		*	*	*		*
P.13	*	*		*	*	*
P.14	*	*		*		*
P.15	*	*		*		
P.16		*				
P.17		*				
P.18				*		*
P.19		*				*
P.20		*		*	*	
P.21	*	*				
P.22		*	*	*		*
P.23	*	*		*		*
P.24		*				
P.25		*		*		*
P.26		*		*		*
P.27		*	*	*	*	*
P.28	*	*	*		*	*
P.29						
P.30	*	*				
P.31	*					
P.32	*	*		*		*
P.33	*		*	*	*	
P.34		*				
P.35				*		*
P.36		*		*		*
P.37		*		*	*	*
P.38	*			*		*
P.39			*	*		*

Continued

Participant ID	Overarching Themes Present in Participants' Responses					
	RQ1: Effective		RQ2: Ineffective		RQ3: Improvements	
	A	T	A	T	A	T
P.40	*	*		*		*
P.41			*		*	*
P.42	*	*	*	*	*	*
P.43	*	*			*	*
P.44		*		*	*	
P.45	*	*		*	*	*
P.46	*	*		*		
P.47		*	*	*		*
P.48	*	*		*		*
P.49	*	*				
P.50	*	*		*		
P.51		*				*
P.52		*				
P.53	*	*				
P.54	*					
P.55	*					
P.56				*		*
P.57	*					
P.58				*		*
P.59		*	*	*		*
P. 60	*	*		*		
<i>Total</i>	29	43	11	37	13	34

Note. ‘A’ denotes that students’ responses relate to an affective, intangible, aspect of support.

‘T’ denotes that students’ responses relate to a tangible aspect of support.

The symbol ‘*’ conveys that the theme was present in the participant’s response.

Research Question (RQ) 1 asked “In what ways do students believe that the support they receive(d) was effective in accommodating their needs, and what aspects of the support service contributed to this?”. RQ2 asked “In what ways do students believe that the support they receive(d) was ineffective in accommodating their needs, and what aspects of the support service contributed to this?”. RQ3 asked “What do students consider would improve the extent to which university support services accommodate their needs?”.

Appendix C of this thesis has been removed as it may contain sensitive/confidential content

Appendix D: Participant Information and Consent Form



Information Sheet

You are invited to participate in a voluntary research study conducted by Dr Stuart Woodcock and Miss Elizabeth Hitches, from Macquarie University.

CONTENT: This research survey is designed to investigate the experiences of university students during their tertiary and secondary education. The study is seeking to examine whether students have experienced any difficulties during their time at university and/or high school, and if applicable, the effects of these upon their educational experiences. The study is examining whether or not students have requested support, and if so, how successful the support was in accommodating their needs. The survey contains multiple choice closed questions, as well as open-ended questions.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated, and should you choose to participate, the survey will be seeking your thoughts and beliefs in relation to your experiences during high school and university.

TIME: It is estimated that about 10-20 minutes will be required to complete the following questionnaire. However, please feel free to answer them in as timely a fashion as you feel appropriate.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All responses to this survey are confidential. Your identity will remain anonymous and no identifying information will be recorded.

YOUR RIGHTS: Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You may end your participation at any time. Should you decide to not participate or end your participation, you may do so without penalty and this will in no way affect your relationship with the university.

If at any time this survey causes any emotional discomfort, please do not hesitate to inform the researchers listed below, staff at Campus Wellbeing, or Lifeline.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics & Integrity (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any further questions about this research survey, you may contact the researchers via the contact details below. The contact details of Campus Wellbeing and Lifeline are also provided.

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Afterword

During 2020 and to date, a time in which individuals across the world have and continue to experience numerous unanticipated challenges – natural disasters, a pandemic, and financial difficulties - we have seen the ability of our communities, both local and global, to respond. With the sudden emergence of COVID-19, everyday procedures and the way we typically live our lives have and continue to quickly adjust to the needs of our time. During the pandemic when in ‘lockdown’, phone calls, videoconferencing, and media, have reminded us we are all going through this together, even when apart; we are not alone in our challenges or our triumphs.

Once these experiences and their lessons become simply memories, may we still with the same dedication, drive, and courage, together seek to address the barriers which continue to impact individuals in our society, so that regardless of our strengths, needs, labels, experiences, and other forms of diversity, each of us may have equitable opportunities to reach our full potential.

Elizabeth Hitches

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