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Knowledge production and access

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Journal of Student Affairs in Africa

The *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* (*JSAA*) is an independent, peer-reviewed, multi-disciplinary, open-access academic journal that publishes scholarly research and reflective discussions about the theory and practice of student affairs in Africa.

Vision and mission
The *JSAA* aims to contribute to the professionalisation of student affairs in African higher education by publishing high-quality scholarly articles, research and reflective discussions by academics, professionals, researchers and students about student affairs and services in African higher education.

The *JSAA* strives to be the foremost academic journal dealing with the theory and practice of the student affairs domain in universities on the African continent, and an indispensable resource for national policy makers, the executive leadership of universities and colleges dealing with student affairs, deans of students and other senior student affairs professionals, as well as institutional researchers and academics and students focused on the field of higher education studies and student affairs.

Focus and scope
The *JSAA* considers theoretical, practice-relevant and reflective contributions from across the scholarly field of student affairs and professional domains of student development/student affairs, taking due cognisance that the scope is broad, fluid and context-dependent.

The scope of *JSAA* is indicated by keywords such as: student affairs, student career development, student counselling, student development theory and research, student discipline, student engagement, student experience, student finances and financial aid, student housing, disability/disabled students, student leadership and governance, student life cycle, student living and learning, student movement, student organisations, student orientation, student policy, student politics and activism, student sport, student support, academic development (and its intersection with the student affairs co-curriculum), graduate attributes, and teaching and learning support. This list of keywords is not exhaustive. Our key focus area is the core functions of student affairs and services in Africa.

Submissions are encouraged from scholars and reflective practitioners from across the globe. Submissions must be original and relevant to the mission, scope and focus of the journal. Especially encouraged are submissions from African scholars and professionals working in higher education on the African continent. Submissions dealing with student affairs issues from other contexts (e.g. the African diaspora; other emerging economies; developed countries) that are transferable to the African context are also considered for publication. Submissions must be made on the JSAA online submission website. Please register, log in and submit your manuscript at: https://upjournals.up.ac.za/index.php/jsaa. For any queries and to contact the editors please email Ms Bronwin Sebonka at bronwin.sebonka@up.ac.za.

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Editorial team

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Editorial

Lived Barriers to African Knowledge Production: Beyond – *and Before* – Accessibility

Birgit Schreiber,* Thierry M. Luescher** & Teboho Moja***

This issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* bears testimony to the advances that research into African student affairs and services has made over the last decade. The 11 research articles published in this issue span the diversity of the research interests and knowledge needs in the field. It includes research into the experiences of African international students, student leadership development in the residence sector, the experiences of students with disabilities, student activism, protest behaviour and university transformation, student psychology and thinking styles, access to online counselling services and student satisfaction with campus facilities and infrastructure. As in every issue, author collaborations are the welcome norm. Authors collaborate across countries and institutions, between practitioners and academics, early career and seasoned researchers, and from different disciplinary backgrounds. It is also encouraging to see almost equal numbers of female and male authors contributing to the production of knowledge on student affairs in Africa in this issue. The substantive research presented in these articles is accompanied by two that reflect on research into student affairs in Africa. Reflecting on the same is also our purpose in this editorial.

On 10 June 2022, the *JSAA* Editorial Executive made a presentation at the conference of the Association for African Studies in Germany hosted by the Africa Centre for Transregional Research of the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg. The presentation entitled "Lived barriers to African knowledge production: beyond – and before – accessibility" was essentially our reflection on the challenges of publishing an open access,

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accredited, high quality, peer-reviewed, scholarly and professional journal in the African knowledge production context. We argued that the development of African knowledge bases by Africans, for and about African higher education is an undisputed necessity and of great significance. Africa is the continent of the future – and this future is omnipresent in the challenges and opportunities that are present all around us. African knowledge production, as shown in a range of recent scientometric studies, is expanding rapidly and widely. Yet, creating equitable and sustainable knowledge-sharing processes is fraught with barriers to overcome.

Our paper presented our experience as the Editorial Executive of an African journal wedged uncomfortably into the intersection of the desire to enable fee-free publishing of African authors' work (no article processing fees/APCs) and to enable fee-free access to the published work of African scholars (no subscription or access fee to the individual) and yet finding ourselves hamstrung by costs that inevitably accrue in the process of journal administration and publishing. As much as our own work and that of all colleagues on the Editorial Board, the International Advisory Editorial Board and all peer reviewers is *pro bono* and thus entirely unpaid, the professional copy editing, proofing, and typesetting, as well as the hosting and administration of the journal are not. Having quality-assured, professionally produced articles with DOIs, indexed and without errors, is time-consuming and costly. Altogether, knowledge production does not pay for itself. Or should it?

This volume might be the last of *JSAA* which we are able to keep truly open access for both authors and readers. The struggles to overcome the barriers to African knowledge production are weighing on us heavily and we might need to charge publishing fees to fund the publishing process. Over the last ten years, the costs of production have been carried by the Editorial Executive by means of project funding available from research projects funded by international funders such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; by the African Minds Trust as part of its journal development commitment; by budget allocations from the journal's host institutions, the University of the Western Cape, Stellenbosch University and more recently the University of Pretoria; and by the contributions of guest editors to the production of their issues. While some scholarly journals receive funding from scholarly societies, others have long gone the route of charging subscription fees, APCs, or both. If we choose to retain independent editorial rights, then we may need to charge APCs in the future to cover the costs of publishing. We are currently in the process of exploring a variety of models that enable sustainability, that include fair access for authors and readers, and that maintain editorial independence.

Lastly, with the Journal's move to the University of Pretoria in 2021 we changed our article submission process to run exclusively via the journal website and away from the former email system. Our hope is that the renewal and expansion of the Editorial Board at the end of 2021 and eventually with a new financial model we will be able to streamline our overall processes to cut the time from submission through to the editorial decision and publication. Moreover, the *JSAA* team hopes to collaborate with professional SAS associations in developing a much "thicker" model of research support and authorship development by creating a Community of Practice on Student Affairs Research. These

considerations are all alive and under debate among the editors and we are happy to receive comments from our readership.

And finally a comment on our choice to have the peace flag on our cover. We are deeply concerned about the welfare and safety of students and the success of higher education across the war-torn parts of the world. We are concerned about the continuing humanitarian crisis in other parts of the world, terrorist threats and the threats of hunger and impact of the environmental crisis. These are some of the factors that derail all efforts to bolster education.

Disengaging from students, terminating study permits, withdrawing from dual degrees and severing research projects – while gratifying our frustrations with war-mongers – contribute to deepening the divide between aggressors and victims.

Our pledge is to commit to continued support and engagement with regions and countries suffering the brutalities of war. It is in the engagement with both sides – the aggressors and victims – that we can contribute to deepening understanding. Severing relations should not be an option for higher education and student affairs across the globe.

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Research article

Mapping African Student Affairs Research during the Past Interlude (2008-2019) through Bronfenbrenner's Lens

Sophia Maria Holtzhausen* & W.P. Wahl**

Abstract

The research question we pursued was: What are the variations in the themes of research in the African higher education context that will enable researchers to promote student development? This contribution addresses three aspects of student affairs research in the African higher education context. First, it commences with tracing the African position with a document analysis of 121 student affairs research articles published in 34 peer-reviewed journals over the 2008-2019 interval. Second, it uses the thematic categorization of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2019) to determine international publication trends as derived from this document analysis. Third, it applies Bronfenbrenner's person-process-context-time (PPCT) model as an appropriate umbrella research design and guiding framework to review the mapping of African student affairs research. A comparison of the international CAS categorization and the African categorization led to the conclusion that the CAS mapping was largely confirmed by the African analysis, with nine main themes as the foci. Additionally, it found that four first-hand African themes are not represented in the CAS categorization, and that significantly limited research has been conducted into postgraduate programmes and services (hereafter referred to as PGP&S), despite the demands for increased enrolments. The findings suggest that more accurate and continuous mapping of the field can assist policymakers, managers and student affairs practitioners in making more informed choices in their efforts to support growth and development in African higher education, with special emphasis on postgraduate students.

Keywords

African student affairs, Bronfenbrenner's person-process-context-time (PPCT) model, Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), postgraduate research and studies, African higher education research

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Introduction

Global trends have demonstrated an increase in and emphasis on African student affairs research (Pansiri & Sinkamba, 2017; MacMaster, 2014; Moja et al., 2014) within a transforming higher education (HE) context (Tumubweinee & Luescher, 2019). Although there exists a holistic approach to produce well-rounded students, limited research has been conducted on African student affairs regardless of demands for increased postgraduate enrolments (McCarthy, 2019; Le Roux et al., 2019; Cloete et al., 2015). Thus, the current body of knowledge on African student affairs research remains relatively inadequate. In view of that, this article elucidates the process of locating and interrogating studies on student affairs within an African HE context, reported between 2008 and 2019 (referred to as Bronfenbrenner's chrono system).

We proceed by discussing the method of the stipulated student affairs research in Africa that was applied in this qualitative case study. This is followed by a brief explanation of the conceptual framework, Bronfenbrenner's person-process-context-time (PPCT) model, and how the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education's (CAS, 2019) mapping of student affairs research in Africa was applied for the analysis. Thereafter, the findings of this CAS thematic research are presented and discussed, and we conclude that the 47 foundational functional areas were largely confirmed by the African student affairs research. Additionally, in the article nine major African student affairs research focus areas, identified during the analysis, are elucidated, and four new, local themes are highlighted. We also recommend postgraduate programmes and services as areas for further research.

Methods: A Case Study on Student Affairs Research in African Higher Education

This qualitative, multi-focus case study used the 47 functional areas of the CAS's (2019) professional standards as premise for the document analysis to determine international publication trends. These international trends were established in student affairs research in the African HE context through searches in the following operating databases: Academic Search Ultimate, Africa-Wide Information, Education Source, ERIC, and Humanities Source Ultimate. We then analysed the 121 articles in 34 selected academic journals for the chrono system period 2008-2019. We chose CAS (2019) as the grounding for our analysis as it represents a 40-year history of research, which served as a sound professional basis (41 US members and Canadian associations, and 115 000 practitioners), culminating in the research findings of the decade under study. In addition, Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model was applied as an appropriate research design and guiding framework to map African student affairs research.

Theorising CAS Mapping of Student Affairs Research in Africa through the Lens of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Model

Bronfenbrenner is a prominent psychologist whose work hinges on the premise that a person's development is holistically influenced by his or her immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). He conceives of the environment as comprising five

different levels: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The process of interaction between the person (with unique characteristics) and these different layers of the context over a time period collectively combine to form the bioecological systems theory.

The bioecological systems theory (i.e. theory of human development) articulates the process of human socialization – which is key to understanding education. In the context of this article, Bronfenbrenner's work was imperative in understanding a systematic approach to human and social development within the higher education context. Therefore, this theory offers an appropriate, practical theory for higher education and student affairs practitioners to gain clearer understanding of students' learning environments, to build fundamental relationships and to establish quality learning environments.

This bioecological theory inspired Bronfenbrenner as a developmental psychologist to introduce a theory of development with **four components**, namely the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This model was a relevant guiding framework for this study, as we wished to establish "how and why" CAS's student affairs foundational functional areas "occur as they do" in an African context (Evans et al., 2010, p. 161; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This implies a particular interest in the processes underpinning these foundational functional areas of CAS within a given context, and not necessarily in the outcomes they produced.

As already stipulated, Bronfenbrenner's original research themes continue to provide a sound basis for such an analysis. Bronfenbrenner's original research themes continue to provide a sound basis for such an analysis Therefore the social and historical *context*, the active student affairs practitioner/student, and the impossibility of considering individual developmental *processes* in isolation are themes that provide helpful theoretical lenses to analyse the body of literature focusing on student affairs in Africa.

The student affairs practitioner is nested within and among these principal components of the PPCT model (Evans et al., 2010; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), which are primarily responsible for development. In the nucleus of the model, multiple personal and interpersonal interactions and engagement *processes* (fundamental to Bronfenbrenner's bioecology theory and constantly changing) between the student affairs practitioner and other stakeholders are transforming the African HE *context*.

In light of these interpersonal student affairs engagements in African HE, the CAS foundational functional area categorization (mostly identified in the American *context*), proved to be most appropriate to establishing these research mappings, as CAS concurs with UNESCO's student affairs/service functions in HE (UNESCO, 2002), and with the Association of American Colleges and Universities' (AAC&U) Inquiry and Analysis VALUE Rubrics (Rhodes, 2009). Moreover, this historic *time* was best represented by CAS's (2019) 40-year research and professional base (associations and practitioners) as a sound basis, as was largely confirmed by this study.

Findings of this CAS thematic study on the chronosystem *time* 2008-2019 indicated that the 47 functional areas were largely confirmed by the African student affairs research. However, the following nine main African student affairs research focus areas were

identified: learning-assistance programmes; master's level and student affairs professional preparation programmes; academic advising programmes; leadership education and development; postgraduate and professional student programmes and services; housing and residential life programmes; college unions/*governance*; international student programmes and services, and internship programmes and assessment services. This finding is meaningful because it not only confirmed that these functional areas, that had been established internationally, are relevant in African student affairs, but stressed their prominence in African HE. An elaboration on the importance of these nine themes in African HE follows.

Principal Themes in African Student Affairs Research

Learning-assistance programmes

Most of the 121 articles from CAS confirmed that African student affairs practitioners are primarily involved in learning-assistance programmes. This task is indispensable to student success (De Klerk et al., 2017; Scott, 2018; Strydom et al., 2017) and retention (Mkonto, 2018), especially in terms of first-year student engagement (Faroa, 2017; Mkonto, 2018; Schreiber & Yu, 2016). In addition, learning-assistance programmes also place emphasis on mathematics (Jacobs & Pretorius, 2016), generic skills in the medical curriculum (Jama, 2016), and at-risk students (Mayet, 2016). Learning-assistance programmes also provide rewarding interactions and individualized instruction within a digital, multilingual mentoring and tutoring space (Arend et al., 2017; Du Buisson, 2017; Faroa, 2017; McKay et al., 2018; Seeto, 2016; Spark et al., 2017). Student learning requires co-curricular involvement (Naik et al., 2017), inclusive education (Moswela, 2011), high impact practices, and peer leadership (Keup, 2016).

Peer-assisted learning is applicable in high-risk subjects such as mechanical engineering (Makola, 2017), but also is an appropriate teaching and learning method in higher education in general (Bugaj et al., 2019; Makola, 2017). Adult learning (see Hutchings, 2014) should be included to create comprehensive learning-assistance programmes that support students from their first academic year up to postgraduate/professional studies. This aspect is not widely addressed in the African HE context, but needs urgent attention with the current demand for increased postgraduate outputs. Research verified supplemental instruction, mobile technology, and a humanising philosophy (respecting individual identity) as crucial for diverse student populations and large classes to make learning accessible to students, when they are implemented more effectively in learning-assistance programmes (Boughey, 2015; Erasmus, 2017; Madambi & Mangena, 2016; Robbins et al., 2019; Schreiber & Aartun, 2011; Sedibe & Sedibe, 2009). Additionally, academic partnerships with key campus and community partners resulted in steering resources and policies (Berger et al., 2019).

Master's level and student affairs professional preparation programmes

In fourteen articles student affairs preparation programmes were addressed (although the master's level was indicated in the title of this functional area, no recognized articles were found, despite the current demands for postgraduate outputs). This is supported by Dunn

and Dunkel's (2013) viewpoint that in African HE professional competency development is executed via associations rather than institutions offering formal qualifications. Selznick (2013) asserts that continued professionalization of African student affairs is essential for conceptualization and expansion of the knowledge base (for promotion and self-advancement purposes), including the integration of library referencing and instruction (Love, 2009). This profession, with evolving focus on innovation (Boaykye-Yiadom, 2015), research and scholarship (Carpenter & Haber-Curran, 2013), social justice (Schreiber, 2013), democratic engagement (Johnson, 2019), social identity and professional role transitions (Robbins et al., 2019), and collaboration between student and academic affairs (O'Halloran, 2019), requires theory-driven practices with high-quality assessment outcomes (Pope et al., 2019). Additionally, the growth in diverse student bodies prompted areas such as student learning and development theory, programme development and cultural competency. These professional programmes (accommodating online and social media, but also newer delivery modes) are necessary to render well-prepared student affairs educators for the world of work. Dialogues on advocating for standards in Student Affairs Departments in African institutions (Pansiri & Sinkamba, 2017) and inter-association, which are crucial to stipulate "anchors guiding with a strong foundation", whilst adjusting to developing areas in the field (CAS, 2019, p.1354) are required. Finally, student affairs leadership appears to be multidimensional and complex. New student affairs professional programmes should include areas such as transactional peer leadership (Keup, 2016), new university leadership models (Walters, 2018) and an ecological framework (Taylor, 2019).

Academic advising programmes

Academic advice and guidance are not only fundamental to the success of first-year students (Jama, 2016; De Klerk et al., 2017), but also in large classes (Boughey, 2015). Equally important is tracking the impact of student affairs professionals on student performance (Masehela & Mabika, 2017) through student engagement (Strydom & Mentz, 2010; Strydom, et al., 2017). Academic advisors work with students to enable them to construct knowledge (Schreiber, 2013), be innovative (Boakye-Yiadam, 2015), and to enhance their academic development (Shange, 2015). Academic advisors must be ready to meet challenges (Yakaboski & Birnbaum, 2013), and to pursue a collaborative partnership with academic affairs (Berger et al., 2019; O'Halloran, 2019) to support the complexity and diversity of current students.

Leadership education and development

Leadership learning is pivotal in African student affairs and HE fields, not only in offering comprehensive development programmes, but also to enrich and integrate student learning opportunities. Lately, student affairs leadership educators critically reflect on existing leadership models, theories and practices to reconstruct more inclusive, equitable and just approaches. Examples, such as peer leadership (Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017) and high-impact practice (Keup, 2016), as well as women leadership (Person et al., 2014) are present in the

African HE context. The Ecological Framework (Taylor, 2019) helps student affairs leaders understand their roles, as well as challenges they may face in their roles (Murage et al., 2019; Nel, 2016; Yakaboski & Birnbaum, 2013). This is essential for student affairs practitioners to steer the multiple ways in which students learn effectively in a transforming HE context (Lumadi & Mampuru, 2010). It is also imperative for student affairs divisions to prepare students for citizenship (Kgosithebe & Luescher, 2015), democratic engagement (Johnson, 2019; Robiadek et al., 2019), and mentorship (Paterson & Hutchinson, 2019).

Postgraduate and professional student programmes and services

The rising cognisance of the distinctive needs of postgraduate and professional student affairs students led to advocacy for support services, tailored to the more diverse and complex African student profile (McCarthy, 2019). Mentorship outcomes (Paterson & Hutchinson, 2019) and peer mentoring assessment, evaluation and research competencies (Baumgartner et al., 2019) are important in the professional preparation of student affairs practitioners (Ardoin et al., 2019). Knowledge communities drive student performance (Masehela & Mabika, 2017) and mentorship programmes. However, specific challenges impact the development of outcomes assessment standards (Finney & Horst, 2019), and guidelines for graduate and professional programmes and services, namely

- variety of types of degrees and reporting structures,
- diverse student populations served,
- establishing sound collaboration with other institutional units providing student and academic support services,
- demands for online programmes and virtual support (Cain, 2015), and
- lack/shortage of professional administrators and/or services for graduate and professional students (CAS, 2019, pp.1039-1040).

Addressing these challenges is essential for student affairs to foster theory-based practices and outcomes-based assessments (Pope et al., 2019).

Housing and residential life programmes

Operational involvement in housing and residential life has been transformed; not only the in loco parentis role of student affairs, but also the legal and education practice, which led to the historical progression of residence-life training programmes (McCluskey-Titus et al., 2019) and competency development of housing staff (Dunn & Dunkel, 2013). With the recognition of diversity (Smorenburg & Dunn, 2014), equity, disability (Vaccaro & Kimball, 2019), and politics (Mugume & Luescher, 2015), the inclusion of the residential environment became a tool not only to complement the formal classroom context, but also to assist learning outside the classroom for personal and social well-being, civic participation, cross-cultural responsiveness and academic identity (Alcock, 2017). This is in line with the student-centred approach found in African HE. Additionally, Dunn-Coetzee and Fourie-Malherbe (2017) provided an example where social changes within a senior

housing programme were addressed by incorporating increased levels of interaction among students that led to reduced stereotyping and diminished bias.

College unions/*governance*

In the African HE context, the term "governance" is used to refer to a university's operations. In African higher education research, democratic engagement in student affairs is emphasised (Johnson, 2019). This occurs through the representation of student organisations on committees at higher education institutions (Macharia, 2015; Robiadek et al., 2019), where students are involved in voting, decision-making, and leadership (Hester, 2019; Oni & Adetoro, 2015) to address challenges (Murage et al., 2019), past and present (Moja et al., 2014).

International student programmes and services and internship programmes

International students enjoy benefits such as service learning and social change (Gaines-Hanks & Grayman, 2009), student engagement (McFarlane, 2015) and co-curricular involvement (Naik et al., 2017), and share in high-quality and diverse academic opportunities, while the host university gains the benefit of cultural modification and diverse perspectives. Within a diverse socio-demographic context, studying is stressful in terms of structural, linguistic, and internal and external dimensions, and sometimes, political and social instability in the home country. Therefore, mastering coping styles is important for international students, but the student affairs practitioners should also adapt their roles to provide culturally relevant postgraduate and peer-led services for student success (Akhtar & Kröner-Hewig, 2015; Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017; Martinez & Colaner, 2017; McFarlane, 2015; Onyenekwe et al., 2017; Rasmussen, 2015). Although the CAS categorization makes provision for internships, this was not evident in the African HE context.

Assessment services

Student assessment is the foundation for student learning, development, and success. Assessment services are driven internally for evidence to improve service, and externally for accountability purposes, despite the constant changes in technology and student demographics. For example, supplemental instruction for large-class first-year students (Erasmus, 2017) has been found to improve student understanding. The professionalization of student affairs through assessment (Gansemer-Topf, 2013) is essential, but also requires mapping standards for outcomes assessment practice (Finney & Horst, 2019), and fostering theory-driven practice (Pope et al., 2019), as well as the utilization of institutional administrative and student affairs assessment resources (Groover et al., 2019).

In brief, these nine CAS functional areas appear to be prominent in the African HE student affairs context. The similarities in the CAS framework and the body of literature about student affairs in Africa are important, because they underline those functional areas perceived to be essential for the contextualisation of student affairs praxis in an African context. In general, scholars study different student affairs functional areas in Africa, making

it surprising that these research outputs emerged within definite clusters during the past decade. Furthermore, four new themes, not presently listed among the CAS functional areas, emerged unexpectedly from this study.

Newly Identified Student Affairs Research Themes

Four new themes, not listed in the CAS categorization, emerged through this research based on African higher education journals, namely:

(i) *Professionalization associations* result from voluntary student affairs leadership. In the African HE context, professionalization organisations, such as the International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS) (Ludeman, 2014), support the professional development (Li & Fang, 2017) and identity (Clarke, 2016) of student affairs practitioners to address challenges towards a more effective administrative pathway. The dedication, collaborative efforts, and collective expertise support student affairs staff as reflective practitioners to keep up with current African HE trends and the needs of students in preparation (Ardoin et al., 2019; McCarthy, 2019) for the world of work.

(ii) *Legal responsibilities and ethical considerations* remain essential when interpersonal and process engagements are present. Holistically, this limits risks and liabilities for the institution. In the African HE environment, the *legal aspects* include human rights or norms, with emphasis on improving accountability and the quality of the provision of nutrition and health relief (Ali & Kabau, 2014). Student affairs staff can only perform duties within the scope of their position, training, expertise and competence (e.g. refer to proper administration if a matter is beyond one's own scope). Student affairs staff members comply with governmental laws, institutional policies and procedures, as well as standards for good professional practice. Finally, the main focus remains the well-being of students dealing with demands of political, social and economic development (OECD, 2019).

(iii) *Students and government* refer to nurturing cooperative relationships with local and regional governance structures, civic engagement, and the inclusion of multiple sources of expertise. Although strong leadership and government involvement or laws are not new to HE (CAS, 2019), it is extraordinary that they are not incorporated in the CAS functional areas. The history of student governance (May, 2010) in African higher education, as well as the love-hate relationship with governments (Makunike, 2015) has been stressed as relevant in African student affairs research.

(iv) Parallel with the ongoing demand for publications, *citation styles* are more noticeable in African student affairs research. Although a number of diverse citation styles exist and each journal has its own requirements, Nwadike (2018) proposed a scientific model, the Nsukka Multidisciplinary Citation Style (p.147). The value of this African scientific citation style lies in it being decolonised, as most other international citation styles are Western.

These four innovative student affairs research themes, and the proposed trends towards these themes serve well as potential, distinctly functional areas within a transforming African HE context. However, the inadequacies of the current body of literature on these promising functional areas need to be researched in-depth, and the consistency of these practices across multiple HE institutions needs to be assessed. In addition, it must be

determined whether professionals supporting these four new functional areas and related professional associations still need to be identified. This accentuates the complex role of student affairs professionals and practitioners in student development within African higher education. Their strategic positions assist with student engagement towards seamless in-class and out-of-class learning experiences, but also in the development of comprehensive graduates (MacMaster, 2014). This is crucial to develop a diverse and shared foundation for the student affairs profession from which multiple perspectives and theories may expand and evolve.

Conclusion

This study entailed a research journey through two fields, student affairs and HE on the African continent. Through Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, the learning curve towards holistic student development is found to not be linear, but rather a spiralling circle. During this chrono system interval (2008-2019), the majority of the 47 functional areas of CAS were apposite to African student affairs. Among them, learning-assistance programmes; master's level and student affairs professional preparation programmes; academic advising programmes; leadership, education and development; graduate and professional student programmes and services; housing and residential life programmes; college unions/ *governance;* international student programmes and services, and internship programmes and assessment services were the nine functional areas that were found to be prominent trends in African student affairs research. From the analysis we deducted that mentoring, research and assessment competencies and demands drive the knowledge community to professional preparation of student affairs practitioners. For student success, both academic and student affairs complexities should be seamlessly integrated through democratic engagement, professional development, and leader-mentorship.

Four local themes, not found in CAS's functional areas, but present in African student affairs research, are professionalization associations, legal responsibilities and ethical considerations, students and government, and citation styles, which reflect African HE's diverse and complex demands for professional development, legal and government solutions, and publication. In the analysis of African student affairs research, CAS overlooked these four themes that are based on diverse cultural contexts, and their discovery also indicates limitations in the current body of literature about how the different functional areas in student affairs have been conceptualized to date. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model provided critical insights into how and why student affairs manifest in African higher education – with special reference to the person and process within the African student affairs context in the period of 2008-2019. Finally, postgraduate programmes and services are a noteworthy issue requiring future exploration to extend and promote student affairs as a field of research and studies in the African context.

Ethics Statement

This research has obtained ethical clearance from the ethics committee of the University of the Free State's Faculty of Education.

Conflict of Interest

Since this research consists of document analysis, there is no conflict of interest involved in terms of content nor authorship.

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Research article

Design-Based Research (DBR) as an Effective Tool to Create Context-Sensitive and Data-Informed Student Success Initiatives

Ilse Karsten* & André van Zyl**

Abstract

Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest higher education (HE) participation rate of any region in the world at under 10%. Large numbers of students are entering the various systems, often from non-traditional backgrounds, which contributes to making an already difficult transition even more difficult. In many instances, well-intended interventions and initiatives are imported from elsewhere or based on "common sense", but they are often not very effective. This raises a crucial question: How can institutions best devise context-sensitive and effective student assistance programmes? Design-based research (DBR) uses an iterative and longitudinal process that involves theory, participant inputs, peer inputs and stakeholder inputs to cyclically develop theoretically informed, contextually sensitive and appropriate interventions. Most practitioners could benefit from a better understanding of this process when designing interventions. This article elucidates DBR as a phased intervention-development process aimed at assisting students to integrate into HE and focuses primarily on the methodological approach on which it elaborates using examples from a PhD study.

Keywords

contextual intervention, design-based research, student integration, first-year students

Introduction

There is an interrelated web of issues relating to student academic success and social mobility. In the South African context, Maluleke (2018) has, for example, pointed out that a strong relationship exists between a person's level of education, and their social mobility and prosperity. Lower levels of socio-economic status are often linked in "contours" with other negative implications such as poor access to the health services availability, and quality (Van Zyl, 2016, p.1). Universities are key to addressing these issues and have been called the "engine rooms" for developing the human resources required to support and grow the South African economy (USAf, 2018a, p. 12).

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Not only does Maluleke (2018) point out that students emanating from poorer households have much lower levels of HE participation than those from the higher socio-economic strata, they also often leave school under-prepared for HE (StatsSA, 2019). In sub-Saharan Africa, the participation rate of 17-to-24-year-olds is still below 10% (Ilie & Rose, 2016) and in South Africa it varies between 17 and 18 % (DHET, 2013). Student success and graduation rates across South African HE have shown some meaningful improvements over time. However, massive human and financial losses are still being incurred because of poor levels of student success (DHET, 2020).

The challenge of developing effective and data-informed interventions

The South African HE sector has spent huge amounts of money and massive effort aimed at improving student success. These efforts have borne some fruit but have not always been effective. Crisp et al. (2009) identify some of the reasons for lower-than-expected impact, linking it to unrealistic student expectations, unfriendly institutional cultures, and unwarranted assumptions made by institutions when planning interventions. Coates and Radloff (2017) exhort institutions of higher learning to transcend their preconceptions, as these tend to limit their thinking in ways that are detrimental to student success. When institutions and their representatives make invalid assumptions about their students and their needs, they often provide well-intended, but largely ineffectual interventions. Waage et al. (2015, p. 252) emphasise that developmental decisions should not be taken by the "unaccountable few"; but suggest that decisions related to interventions should be characterized by "deliberation, participation, and transparency of decision making".

Interventions aimed at improving student success should therefore be designed using a collaborative and data-informed process. Fennie et al. (2020) emphasise the need for "evidence-informed" programs, especially for entry-level students. USAf (2018b) argues that understanding the attributes and experiences of South African students is key to improving their success. Improved student success must be the result of design and cannot be left to chance. Therefore, interventions should equally and strongly be based on a rigorous methodology and sound evidence. Design-based research (DBR) provides a productive framework that allows a move towards more data-informed and holistic interventions.

DBR as data-informed intervention creation methodology

DBR is often called an interventionist approach, since it aims to implement a strategy or bring about some change to address an identified problem (Ford et al., 2017). DBR is also known for its collaborative nature (Scott et al., 2020), which is why, when interventions are planned, a complex web of stakeholders are involved in the content creation and roll out of interventions. It therefore provides a comprehensive, collaborative, respectful and longitudinal developmental method which can be productively used to develop appropriate interventions that are data informed and contextually sensitive (Ford et al., 2017).

DBR is often used in educational contexts due to its focus on solving practical, real-world problems in everyday life (Ford et al., 2017). In the case study used to illustrate the methodology in this article, the DBR process was used to develop and implement an intervention to facilitate first-year student integration at a South African university for a selected group of students. These students were carefully selected to receive student bursaries by adhering to the criteria of coming from a previously disadvantaged background, belonging to a low socio-economic status, showing interest in accounting as career choice, and exhibiting the potential to succeed in the academic qualification. The intervention was implemented to three cohorts of 50 students each, in 2015, 2016 and 2017. The rest of this article comprises a detailed explanation of the DBR methodology and the authors reflect on its use and effectiveness.

Design-Based Research

DBR is a relatively new methodology (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Plomp, 2013) and has been identified as a good option to use in educational contexts due to its focus on solving practical everyday problems through a comprehensively designed intervention (Fransman, 2014; McKenney & Reeves, 2012; Plomp, 2007; Van den Akker et al., 2006). DBR typically follows an iterative process (Armstrong et al., 2020), where an initial, well-researched solution to the identified problem (called a prototype) is implemented. Feedback from the participants is then used to improve the solution (next prototype) and it is implemented again. This process is repeated until new feedback from participants is minimal, and the final prototype is then presented as the proposed intervention (Nieveen & Folmer, 2013). Recent examples of where DBR has been used include developing a framework for designing mobile virtual reality learning environments (Cochrane et al., 2017); developing clinical reasoning when working with virtual patients (Hege et al., 2017); improving infection control and prevention processes (Meyers et al., 2018); and making the connection between theory and practice explicit (Wolcott et al., 2019). The comprehensive nature of DBR and the time it takes to implement the process have been found to discourage some researchers and practitioners from using it. We argue, however, that alternative short-term research often results in an overly pragmatic approach that is not sufficiently context-sensitive or comprehensively designed.

Methodology – design-based research

DBR is typically characterized by recurrent versions of proposed designs in real-world situations where the researcher often fulfils multiple roles, whilst being mindful not to influence variables and outcomes. According to Barab and Squire (2004, p. 2), the *design* in design-based research refers to "a series of approaches, with the intent of producing new theories, artefacts, and practices that account for and potentially impact learning and teaching in naturalistic settings".

Characteristics of design-based research

The five most prominent characteristics of the DBR methodology are described below. They foster and enable the context-sensitive and comprehensive nature of DBR-developed interventions.

a. DBR pursues practical solutions to complex problems

DBR aims, within a given context, to produce *knowledge* with *practical* relevance (Flick, 2007, p. 6; Plomp, 2007, p. 9; Plomp, 2013, p. 20;Van den Akker et al., 2006, p. 4). Outcomes are intended to be user-friendly for similar future situations, where minor adjustments can be made to satisfy relevant contextual needs. Therefore, DBR is not only data-informed, but it also creates theory and/or artefact. It has a potential multiplying effect in that it allows others to build on what has already been done instead of starting from scratch. In this study a solution was sought to support the HE integration process of students from a low socio-economic status.

b. DBR makes use of a research team

Most authors and experienced DBR researchers recommend the employment of a research team instead of an individual researcher (Cobb et al., 2003; Plomp, 2013; Reeves et al., 2005). As the African proverb goes: "If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together". Student success and the pursuit of equity in the South African context is to "go far". The research team often consists of a variety of participants from the different stakeholder groups and levels, giving everyone a voice in finding a solution as well as critiquing the proposed solutions. In the instance of this study, the PhD student was the lead researcher and met with the assistant researcher on a weekly basis. Meetings with the tutors and mentors, as part of the support team, took place after all 12 intervention activities with each cohort. These and all contact sessions with and feedback provided by the students were documented.

c. DBR is implemented in phases

To provide the research team with structure, the processes and procedures of DBR typically consist of three phases (Bakker & Van Eerde, 2015; Mor, 2010; Plomp, 2013), which are applied sequentially. However, Mor (2010, p. 48) warns that: "In reality, the boundaries between the three phases are often blurred", informing a character of overlap and mutual complement. The research reported on here happened over three consecutive years and involved three phases per cohort. Each year's phase evolved as new suggestions for improvements were collected from the participants and research team, often overlapping with feedback from students who were both participants in the previous cohort and then mentors in the next. Overlapping also occurred due to the many activities per intervention where feedback on specific sections (like lecturing style) was repeated.

Preliminary Research Phase. The preliminary phase is sometimes called the analysis and exploration phase (McKenney & Reeves, 2012), or the framing phase (Fransman, 2014; Mor, 2010). It includes a comprehensive investigation into the identified problem

(McKenney & Reeves, 2012; Van den Akker, 2010), which Nieveen and Folmer (2013, p. 154) call "the gap between the current and desired situation". It starts with a thorough literature review (Herrington et al., 2007; McKenney & Reeves, 2012; Nieveen & Folmer, 2013; Plomp, 2013; Reeves et al., 2005) using previous research outcomes, observations, interviews, discussions, etc., to inform the problem statement. In fact, almost any methodology can be incorporated into this design process, as the researchers need a rich understanding of the problem from various perspectives. This multi-method approach is encouraged during all the phases since solutions are often made up of a combination of ideas and interventions. Therefore, DBR is often associated with *mixed methods* research and *pragmatism* as research paradigm.

The preliminary phase concludes with the design of a tentative solution (intervention), as a first attempt to solve the research problem. It is mainly based on the researchers' knowledge and the literature review. The first prototype provides the framework for further data collection and discussions that will follow in the next phases. In the study reported on here, the researcher had a developed intervention in place for over eight years. The developed intervention was based on educational psychology and extended programme involvement. The first prototype version was tightened through a literature review and peer-review process involving facilitators from other universities and other support programmes. The initial prototype consisted of 14 themes with accompanying activities.

Prototyping Phase. The prototyping phase consists of several iterations or cycles of implementation and thus are *phases within a phase*. As the first cycle within the prototyping phase, Prototype 1 is implemented. Nieveen and Folmer (2013, pp. 156-157) define the term *prototype* as "a tentative version of the whole (or part of an) intervention before full commitment is made to implement it". As part of the refining process, the prototyping phase continues with consecutive, improved versions of the intervention until the final version with its activities is arrived at. Van den Akker, (2010) calls this the design experiment phase with its repeated process of consecutive estimates.

To refine the content and enhance the quality of the prototype, continuous participant and researcher feedback, and reflections by the research team are fundamental ingredients of the prototyping phase. The feedback is gathered via a variety of possible means and is provided as *formative evaluations.* Any productive method can be utilized to get feedback, with surveys, questionnaires, interviews and observations being the most common. Van den Akker (2013) emphasises that the function of formative evaluation feedback is "more" than simply detecting limitations of the evaluated prototype, in that it accentuates the importance of detailed recommendations for improvement. The development described here for example, went through two prototyping cycles with feedback and input from the participants and the research team. In the third cycle, significantly fewer changes were recommended for implementation, indicating that the final prototype was crystalising.

The prototyping phase proceeds through an iterative progression with continuous cycles of design, evaluation and revision, as seen in Figure 1.

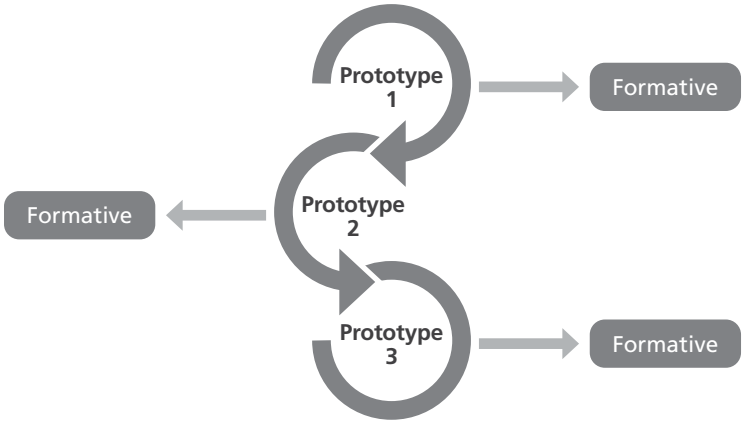

Figure 1: Prototypes informed by formative evaluations (Karsten, 2018, p. 88)

Nieveen and Folmer (2013, p. 157) call this process *evolutionary* prototyping. The final version is presented as a single, comprehensive intervention (proposed prototype) and is recommended for full implementation. Another function of formative evaluations is to inform the development of the design principles, as a secondary outcome of all DBR endeavours.

Karsten (2018), however, showed that the iterative process, informed by the process of continuous evaluation, reflection and feedback, actually consisted of adjusting not only the whole design from one prototype to the next, but also adjusting individual activities within and across prototypes. For example, feedback on *lecturing style* in Prototype 1, Activity 1, could already be adapted for Activity 2 in Prototype 1 and was not only relevant for the same activity in Prototype 2. An illustration of this design process is given in Figure 2.

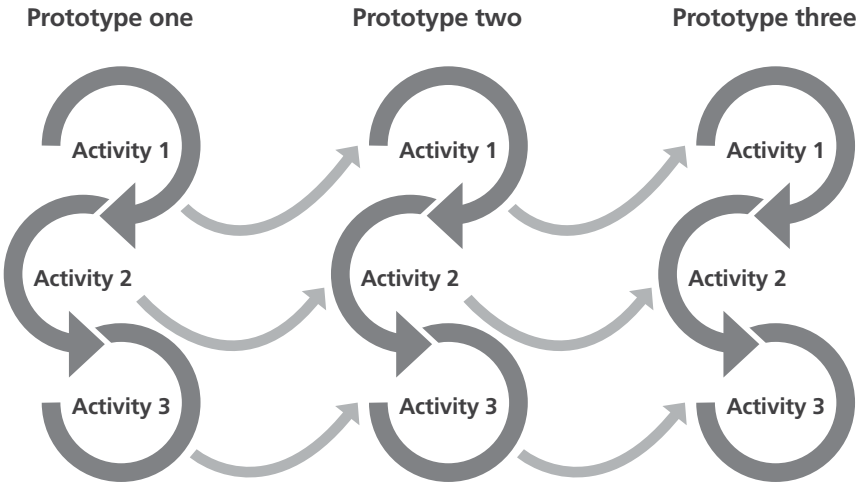

Figure 2: Design adaptation process (Karsten, 2018, p. 92)

Evaluation and reflection phase. As a final assessment of the complete DBR process, the evaluation and reflection phase is implemented. According to DBR guidelines (Nieveen & Folmer, 2013; Plomp, 2013), this phase is used to summatively evaluate the recommended solution (the proposed final prototype) in appropriate ways. Crucially, this includes the participants' ability and willingness to implement learnings from the experienced prototype, within and to their contexts.

Figure 3 shows a framework as guideline for the possible implementation of the DBR phases with accompanying processes and procedures (adapted from the framework applied in the PhD study reported on in this article).

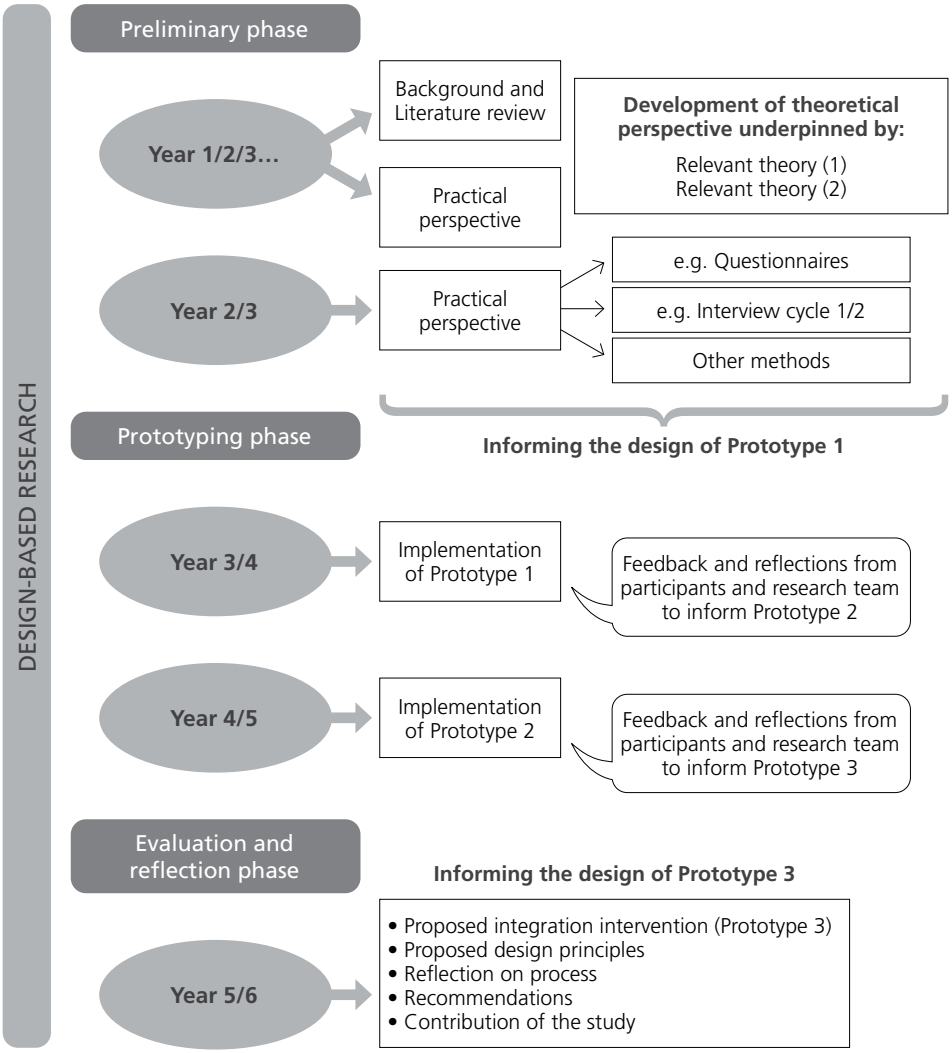

Figure 3: A proposed framework for the implementation of the DBR phases
(Adapted from Karsten, 2018, p. 170)

Nieveen and Folmer (2013) indicate that the evaluation of the final prototype should investigate both its practicality and its effectiveness. They recommend that these two attributes should be evaluated by comparing the expected and actual outcomes.

The *expected* practicality and effectiveness of an intervention are evaluated against what is recorded in existing literature, as well as through the data and their analyses as part of the DBR process. In measuring *effectiveness*, McKenney and Reeves (2012, pp. 142, 170) recommend that researchers ask the question: "How effectively does the intervention solve the problem?" They suggest two types of evidence when assessing *practicality*, namely (1) *Perceived evidence of practicality*, which assesses the design of the intervention, and (2) *Objective evidence of practicality*, which assesses the constructed prototypes (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, p. 178). McKenney and Reeves (2012) warn that a practical feel and ease of implementation do not automatically imply increased effectiveness or sustainability. During the DBR process it should be recognized that such an evaluation is open to subjective interpretation.

If both the expected *effectiveness* and *practicality* of the proposed intervention are found to be viable, a decision should be made regarding possible further implementation of the prototype. The concluding prototype is also called the final deliverable (Nieveen & Folmer, 2013) and is put forward as the proposed solution to the research problem Evident in the evaluation of the final version of the intervention developed, were a saturation of suggestions from the participants and research team, approval from the support staff from other universities, and an indication that student academic results improved.

d. DBR follows an iterative process

One of the main strengths of DBR is that it allows the researchers to practically and patiently "test drive" the possible solution (Prototype 1), making adjustments according to valid feedback, and "test drive" it again (Prototype 2), and again (Prototype 3), until a level of saturation and satisfaction is reached. These repetitive design cycles (Cobb et al., 2003; McKenney & Reeves, 2012; Nieveen, 1999; Plomp, 2013; Van den Akker, 1999) ensure that the final iteration is context-sensitive and comprehensive, with all stakeholders having provided their inputs. The final iteration in this study points to an intervention tailored to students in a South African university, entering HE from a low socio-economic background, displaying high academic potential towards a career in accounting.

e. DBR has a set of dual outcomes

The phases as proposed by Plomp (2013) formed the basis of the methodology, with the dual outcome of a contextualised "final" or proposed prototype, as well as a list of design principles representing guidelines for the implementation of support interventions in similar contexts. A summary of the final proposed version follows.

Table 1: A summary of the final intervention

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Step 1: Selection of and communication to participants (Time frame: October to January)</th></tr>
<tr><th>Institutional action</th><th>Key factors and focus points</th></tr>
<tr><td>Selection
Admission
Communication</td><td>Adhere to the criteria of:
– Institution
– Bursary funders
– HE policies

Suggested measures:
– Students to motivate for their choice of career</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Integration of psychological needs:
Autonomy
– Observe students' abilities to provide motivation(s) for their career choices.
– Observe and assess students' knowledge of the compatibility of their career choice with their own abilities and interests.

Competence
– Demonstrate competence in personal organisational and communication skills.
– Observe students' academic competence (evident in NSC and NBT results).

Relatedness
– Observe students' communication during the selection process (including their written communication on the application forms, emails, and telephone conversations).
– Foster a professional relationship by sharing accurate information timeously.
– Foster a trusting relationship with students.</td></tr>
<tr><th>Institutional action</th><th>Key factors and focus points</th></tr>
<tr><td>Institutional communication

To share information about institutional requirements, accommodation, bursaries, orientation, and other administrative matters</td><td>Intervention manager to:
– be warm and inviting,
– be reasonably available to address student queries,
– communicate timeously,
– share accurate information,
– refer to various service providers where needed, and
– encourage two-way communication.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Integration of psychological needs:
Autonomy
– Assess and guide students' decision-making skills regarding careers, finances, accommodation, contracts, and other related matters.

Competence
– Assess students' responses to intervention manager's questions and communication.
– Emphasise competent communication skills (like professional greetings, clear language use, including their contact and reference numbers in their communications).

Relatedness
– Interacting with prospective participants (via phone calls, emails, messages).
– Foster a professional relationship by sharing accurate information timeously.
– Foster a trusting relationship with students.</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Step 2: Orientation of participants through the facilitation of selected intervention activities (Time frame: January when students arrive at the institution; 2-week orientation)</th></tr>
<tr><th>Institutional action</th><th>Intervention content, including key factors and focus points</th></tr>
<tr><td>Welcome students</td><td>Intervention manger to:
– meet the students and their families,
– cooperate with residence management and student leaders to welcome the students,
– answer questions of students and family members. and
– refer students to institutional services where needed (e.g. health services and financial aid departments).

Keep in mind:
– General orientation of the residence will commence.
– Students arrive with different expectations.
– The involvement of other role-players like bursary funders, sport societies, religious organisations, and more.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Integration of psychological needs:
Autonomy
– Observe and guide students' steps towards their independence (by encouraging autonomous decision-making, identifying strengths, and challenging their thinking about their career decisions and goals).

Competence
– Encourage students' confidence in their academic and other abilities.
– Refer to senior students who have "made it" so far.
– Communicate in such a way as to stimulate curiosity in the students.
– Encourage students' drive to discover their new environment and its' elements, with the cognisance of making autonomous and responsible decisions.

Relatedness
– Observe students saying goodbye to their families.
– Provide some structure to meeting peers, senior students, mentors/tutors, residence leaders, bursary staff, and the intervention manager.
– Creating an atmosphere of acceptance, involvement, belonging, and social connection.</td></tr>
<tr><th>Institutional action</th><th>Facilitation of activities towards integration:</th></tr>
<tr><td>Orientation

FYE programme, academic orientation, residence orientation, environmental orientation, initiation of intervention activities

Process of integrating into new cultural habitus

Intervention manager to clarify her role as support-provider / psychologist / facilitator</td><td>IA* 1: Self-knowledge
To include:
– Personality profile
– Conflict management style
– Assertiveness style
– Multiple intelligence
– Stress management
– Personal values
Facilitation guidelines:
– Intervention manager to share about self to build trust,
– allow for small-group discussions to encourage interaction,
– and discourage unhealthy comparisons between and among students.

IA 2: Personal well-being
To include:
– Personal health
– HIV/Aids
– Diet/rest/exercise</td></tr>
</table>

	Facilitation guidelines: – Ensure confidentiality and encourage trust within the group; – provide practical suggestions to students; – allow sufficient time for discussions and questions; – consider a guest speaker who is an expert, or living with HIV/Aids; – and make students aware of available health and counselling services within the institution. **IA 3: Entrepreneurial activity** *To include:* – Relation building / social activity – Problem solving skills – Organizational skills – Communication skills *Facilitation guidelines:* – Conduct activity close to the beginning of the academic year to allow for senior student participation; – provide structure to the activity to encourage cooperation and optimal interaction opportunities; – and incorporate content on stress-management.

*IA: Intervention activity

Integration of psychological needs:

Autonomy
– Assisting participants in making decisions regarding their personal management.
– Create awareness of the *self* and the role of their perceptions and values in autonomous decision-making.
– Guiding students in becoming increasingly aware of their uniqueness to develop a healthy self-image and self-esteem.
– Encouraging students to provide motivation(s) for their decisions.
– Encouraging students to ask for help when needed.

Competence
– Guiding students to develop a realistic perspective of their competencies in relation to their strengths and experienced challenges.
– Encouraging academic progress (passing).
– Providing knowledge and opportunities to students to develop competencies in the various skills related to the facilitated activities.
– Assisting students to develop confidence in themselves.
– Guiding students to set realistic goals (holistically, thus academic goals, health-related goals, relationship goals, and more).
– Allowing students to take responsibility for choices and to face the consequences thereof.
– Stimulating the feeling of efficacy and mastery.
– Creating a safe space where students can strive towards achievement.
– Encouraging internal motivation.

Relatedness
– Creating a warm atmosphere of belonging, acceptance, care, trust and connectedness.
– Creating opportunities and providing structure for social activities where students can connect with peers, senior students, mentors/tutors, academic staff, bursary and other support staff.
– Encouraging students to build meaningful relationships with others.
– Providing opportunities where students can be actively involved in and experience contributing to others.
– Making students aware of the available support structures.

DBR's practical contribution is to provide a well-researched solution to an identified problem. In addition, its scientific contributions are (1) making a theoretical input (relevant to validation studies) and (2) offering *design principles* (relevant to development studies) (Plomp, 2013, pp. 19-23). Like findings in case studies, the outcomes of DBR cannot be generalized directly to other contexts (Plomp, 2013). However, *design principles* as secondary outcomes of DBR offer a situation that provides informed advice that approaches a level of generalizability. Within the context of DBR, McKenney and Reeves (2012, p. 20) define generalizability as "being able to transfer theoretical insights and/or practical interventions to other settings".

Although the implementation of design principles in a different context "cannot guarantee success", the principles are **pointers** towards contextualising problems via heuristic statements that "are meant to support designers in their tasks" (Plomp, 2013, p. 24). Plomp (2013, p. 24) differentiates between two types of design principles. First, *substantive design principles*, where the focus is on the features of the *design* itself. Table 2 provides an example of a Substantive design principle from the study on which this article is based.

Table 2: Example of a substantive design principle (Karsten, 2018, p. 292)

Substantive Design Principle 4	**Appoint and train senior students as mentors as part of the intervention team**
Suggestions relevant to Substantive Principle 4	**Select mentors with specific competencies and characteristics:** – Willing to invest time to support peers – Good interpersonal skills – Good time management skills to cope with additional responsibilities – Trustworthy and reliable (treating participants' information confidentially)

Second, Plomp (2013, p. 24) describes *procedural design principles* as the features of the design *approach*. These principles therefore include knowledge about the suggested process to be followed with accompanying *design activities* that are most likely to impact the intervention successfully.

Table 3: Example of a procedural design principle (Karsten, 2018, p. 304)

Procedural Principle 1	The process of DBR is time and labour intensive and requires the careful selection of a research team relevant to the intervention

Trustworthiness and codes of ethics

DBR, like all other research, necessitates ethical conduct to ensure the trustworthiness of findings and results. These include measures to ensure *validity* and *reliability* (Creswell, 2012, p. 627; McKenney & Reeves, 2012, p. 101). McKenney and Reeves (2012, p. 205) advocate that credibility "has parallels with internal validity, relating to the "truth" of the findings".

In DBR it is often possible to report on the process as it unfolds, ensuring rich descriptions from observations and reflections. *Credibility,* in DBR with its "prolonged and persistent engagement" (Mertens, 2010, p. 260) requires commitment from and consistency within the research team, due to the scaffolding nature of the data.

Because researchers engage in extended and communication dense research-relationships with participants, high ethical standards in the process of DBR are essential. Participants need to know that their time and input is valued and respected. This time-consuming nature of DBR also requires patience and flexibility from the researchers and can at times be highly frustrating. Nevertheless, all efforts need to be made to adhere to the principles related to ethical conduct (Lichtman, 2010), including the principles to *do no harm* (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 47), respecting participants' rights to *privacy and anonymity* (Creswell, 2012, p. 23; Grove et al., 2012), adhering to *confidentiality* (Creswell, 2014, p. 100; Grove et al., 2012), assuring *informed consent* (Creswell, 2012, p. 398; Flick, 2014, p. 50), managing any possible *intrusiveness* (Creswell, 2014, p. 94), and *inappropriate behaviour (*Lichtman, 2010, p. 54-58; Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 112). The way that data are interpreted and presented should also be done honestly and with all intent to avoid deception (Creswell, 2014, p. 94; Flick, 2014, p. 50). The study in this paper adhered to the ethical guidelines of the institution's research policy by keeping all data confidential. Student feedback was coded before it was discussed among members of the research team and all personal identifying information was securely stored.

Contribution of DBR

DBR processes and procedures are typically known for their contributions on practical, methodological, theoretical and personal levels. The *practical* contribution is that of the "solution", also called the intervention, relevant to the context of the study. In this instance it resulted in a final version of the integration intervention that is now being profitably implemented at the university under investigation.

Methodologically, DBR offers a sound and comprehensive vehicle for research reporting of the problem and its background (in the prototyping phase), as well as a well-tested solution to that problem (in the prototyping phase) that has been evaluated as viable and implementable (in the evaluation and reflection phase). This intentional methodology contributes to a process that is context-sensitive, and one where every relevant stakeholder within that context has a voice (Karsten et al., 2020). The iterative nature of DBR allows for repeated verification of data and leaves an open-ended conclusion to all research, since continued and continuous development, growth and change are actual ingredients of the DBR process.

The design principles, as secondary outcomes of DBR, can contribute on *theoretical* levels within a study's context and field, and enhance the conceptual theoretical frameworks thereof, potentially affecting practices and policies. In this instance, the DBR process resulted in an amalgamation of two theoretical frameworks, namely the *theory of self-determination* (Ryan & Deci, 2002, 2008, 2017) and Tinto's *theory on integration* (Tinto,

2003, 2014). Lastly, a researcher is unlikely to walk away from a DBR project without experiencing personal development and learning. In fact, in our experience, most members of the research team reported personal value and growth from the research process. After the reported PhD study, one member of the research team registered for her own PhD and several others assumed student leadership and tutorial roles to further increase their impact.

Possible limitations of DBR

There is no doubt that DBR is a lengthy process, but this is both a limitation and a strength. It is a limitation due to its time-consuming nature, and progress often feels slow. Also, with time, participants can either "drop out" of the research or decline further involvement. However, this lengthy process allows for systematic and thorough data, ensuring high levels of trustworthiness. Researcher bias can be another limitation, where the researcher is often deeply involved in the lives of the participants. The use of a research team can bring balance to this limitation, where individual interpretations and observations can be tested against the members of the team.

Conclusion

The importance of strong methodological approaches that are data-informed and comprehensive is continually increasing. Equity and other developmental initiatives are needed to close the gap between what HE support providers think students need, and what students actually need. DBR provides a robust and comprehensive framework for researchers and practitioners to create interventions and programmes that feature high levels of "deliberation, participation, and transparency of decision making" as proposed by Waage et al. (2015, p. e252). In so doing, they create a "safe and just space for humanity" (Hajer et al., 2015, p. 1654). DBR clearly provides one of the few effective vehicles that enable pursuit of effective, context-sensitive and data-informed equity-enabling initiatives. The researchers confidently recommend DBR as a development methodology to those who are seriously pursuing a rigorous and academically sound approach to developing practically implementable interventions. Future research could include aspects such as the intersection between institutional culture and DBR as a viable methodology and the intersection of DBR and the appreciative inquiry model.

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Research article

Understanding the Experiences of Mauritian Students at Institutions of Higher Education Overseas

Ravichandran Ammigan*

Abstract

Each year, a significant number of students from the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius seek higher education opportunities abroad. Yet, limited research exists on these students' expectations, preferences, and experiences in their academic and non-academic university settings overseas. This quantitative study investigates the experiences of Mauritian degree-seeking students at universities in Australia and the United Kingdom, which have been two of the most preferred destination countries for these students over the years. Precisely, this research examines associations between overall university satisfaction and various aspects of the student experience in the arrival, learning, living, and support services environment. Analyses reveal that a number of satisfaction variables were important to students, namely the opportunity to make friends on campus, the availability of social activities and facilities, internet access and IT support, and chaplaincy or multi-faith provision. Implications for international educators, university administrators, and guidance counsellors are discussed.

Keywords

international students, Mauritius, student experience, student satisfaction

Introduction

Mauritius, a small island state located off the southeast coast of Africa, is home to about 1.3 million inhabitants (World Bank, n.d.). As one of the continent's success stories in terms of political stability, cultural diversity, and economic development, Mauritius has over the years remained closely associated and engaged with the global community, partly due to its remoteness, limited natural resources, and the size of its economy (Auty, 2017; Ramtohul, 2016). Having invested heavily in the education and well-being of its population, the island is considered to be Africa's most developed country and is now positioned at the top of the Human Development Index for the region (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Mauritius is classified as an upper middle-income economy, holds one of the highest GDP per capita incomes on the continent, and has a literacy rate of 91.3% (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020). Most Mauritians are multilingual and are fluent in English, French, and Creole, which is the majority language and lingua franca of the country (T. Ammigan, 1989; Jugnauth, 2021).

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In the late 1990s, the Mauritian government identified internationalization of higher education as a key strategic initiative in order to keep its nation aligned with global educational trends and increase access to tertiary education (Motala-Timol & Kinser, 2017). As such, there has been an intentional increase in cross-border education and international collaborations with institutions overseas, as well as a surge in international programme and provider mobility as the education sector opened up and invited foreign institutions to set up academic hubs and satellite campuses on the island (Knight & Motala-Timol, 2020).

From an outbound mobility standpoint, thousands of Mauritian students choose to study abroad each year. While enrolment reports show a declining trend in Mauritian international students over the past four years, 34% of all Mauritian nationals still opted to start their university education overseas in 2019 (Higher Education Commission, 2019). In that context, it is important for institutions to gain better insights into the educational expectations, preferences, and experiences of these internationally mobile students, from both a recruitment and support services standpoint. This study sheds some light on this topic by investigating the satisfaction levels of Mauritian undergraduate students with their institutions of higher education in Australia and the UK, which have been two of the most preferred destination countries for Mauritian students over the years. It specifically examines associations between overall university satisfaction and various aspects of the student experience in their *arrival*, *learning*, *living*, and *support services* environment, before discussing implications for host university educators and administrators, as well as for those who actively prepare students to engage in studies abroad.

Literature Review

International students

The number of international students enrolled at institutions of higher education around the world has increased dramatically over the past two decades. In 2017, 5.3 million internationally mobile students were engaged in tertiary education worldwide, representing a growth of 165% in enrolment since 1998 (OECD, 2019). International students, defined as students who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are enrolled outside their country of origin (UNESCO, n.d.), make invaluable intellectual, cultural, and economic contributions to their host institution and country, and so serve key roles in advancing internationalization, inclusivity, and diversity efforts on campus (Smith, 2020; Urban & Palmer, 2014).

According to the Higher Education Commission (2019), a total of 8 079 Mauritian students studied overseas in 2019, compared to 15 677 students who decided to remain on the island and enrol in public or private post-secondary educational institutions locally. This is a significant statistic, considering that over a third of all Mauritian students decided to pursue their tertiary education abroad. While France emerged as the most preferred destination for Mauritian international students, Australia and the United Kingdom have consistently featured among top host countries for higher education since 2008. The

most popular fields of study for Mauritians studying abroad were Medicine, Engineering, Administration and Management, Business, Commerce, and Marketing, and Law.

The international student experience

The student experience, which is usually measured by satisfaction ratings, is comprised of three key elements, namely academic and intellectual (teaching and learning), social and emotional activities and networking (extra-curricular opportunities and facilities), and welfare and support services (access to campus resources and services) (Tribal Group, n.d.). There is an extensive body of literature that explores the experiences of international students across the world, and many of these studies have stressed the need for a strong support system, in both the curricular and co-curricular settings, to ensure the success of these students (Akanwa, 2015; Choudaha, 2016).

The transition to university life can be an intimidating process for all students as they seek to familiarise themselves with their new campus. In response, host institutions must organise orientation and transition programs to help them feel welcome and secure a sense of belonging, which can lead to long-term academic and personal success (Nadler et al., 1998). A number of factors can affect the experiences of international students with various aspects of their university environment. Intercultural perspectives and local friendships can be highly rewarding experiences in and outside of the classroom (Arkoudis et al., 2013; Walsworth et al., 2021). The expertise of faculty and personal support from academic staff are considered key determinants of international student satisfaction (Hellsten & Prescott, 2004; Yu et al., 2016). Classroom size and facilities, and library services can be crucial in the learning dimension of one's learning experience (Asare-Nuamah, 2017; Butt & Rehman, 2010). And a recent study by Ammigan and Jones (2018) found that campus eating options, visa services provided by the international office, and assistance from the finance department all influenced students' experiences with their university.

Few studies exist on the experiences of Mauritian students overseas. In a qualitative study by Khawaja and Stallman (2011), Mauritian students at an Australian institution were found to experience culture shock and difficulty interacting with local students due to different types of beliefs, styles, and value systems. A different study from the UK by Schweisfurth and Gu (2009) indicated that one of their respondents from Mauritius had a particularly bad experience sharing accommodation with local roommates, which seriously disturbed her study habits. The same student, however, spoke very positively about the support services provided by her university, such as welcome activities, orientation programs, opening bank accounts, and opportunities to make friends with students from different backgrounds.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this study was drawn from Arambewela and Hall's (2009) model of international student satisfaction, in which they indicate the importance of service quality factors that are related to both the educational and non-educational aspects

of the student experience. The model identifies seven constructs as significant predictors of student satisfaction, namely education, social, technology, economic, accommodation, safety, and prestige and image. The authors found that the expectations and perceptions of international students in relation to key service quality variables, such as teaching quality, access to lecturers, social activities, friends/relationships, job opportunities, transportation, and accommodation, varied among nationality groups and had a differential impact on student satisfaction (Arambewela & Hall, 2009). Therefore, because of the diversity of cultures, language and values, and expectations among international students, it is important that host institutions develop a diversified and adaptable service model that addresses the differential needs of students across nationalities and cultural contexts. This conceptual framework is in line with the *arrival*, *learning*, *living*, and *support services* constructs of the International Student Barometer, which is the instrument used in the present study. It also supports the main goal of this paper, which examines the experiences of international students from a specific sending country and discusses implications for university administrators and support staff on how to effectively serve foreign nationals from Mauritius.

Method

This quantitative study investigates associations between overall university satisfaction and various aspects of the student experience across four institutional settings (arrival, learning, living, and support services) for Mauritian international students at institutions in Australia and the UK. It uses anonymized, pre-existing data from the International Student Barometer (ISB) and was declared exempt from the requirements of human subject protection by the Institutional Review Board.

Participants

The participants of this study were 207 degree-seeking, undergraduate students from Mauritius, enrolled at 43 different institutions in Australia and the UK. At the time the survey was taken, there were 2 016 Mauritian students studying in Australia, and 1 458 studying in the UK (Tertiary Education Commission, 2016). The sample in this study is representative of 5.6% of all Mauritians studying in Australia that year, and 6.5% of all Mauritian students at UK institutions. The average age of respondents, across both destination countries, was 21.7 years, and 39.6% were female compared to 45.4% who were male. Business and Administrative Studies (21.3%), and Engineering (14%) were the top two study areas. A majority of students (43.5%) were enrolled in a year other than their first or last (in terms of study stage). All student participants completed the online ISB questionnaire through a hyperlink sent via email from September to December 2016. Table 1 details the demographic characteristics of respondents in this study.

Table 1: Mauritian student demographics (*N* = 207)

Variable	Description	*n*	%
Age	18-22	137	66.2%
	23-27	32	15.5%
	28 and older	11	5.3%
Gender	Male	94	45.4%
	Female	82	39.6%
	Did not respond	31	15.0%
Top study area	Business/Admin. studies	44	21.3%
	Engineering	29	14.0%
	Biological Sciences	22	10.6%
	Law	22	10.6%
	Medicine (and related fields)	19	9.2%
Study stage	First year	80	38.6%
	Last year	37	17.9%
	Other	90	43.5%
Student totals	In Australia	112	54.1%
	In UK	95	45.9%
Host institutions	In Australia	21	54.1%
	In UK	22	45.9%

Instrument

The International Student Barometer (ISB) was the instrument used in this study to measure the satisfaction ratings of international students. The ISB tracks and compares the decision-making, expectations, and satisfaction of international students from application to graduation, and has gathered feedback from more than 3 million students in over 1 400 institutions across 33 countries since its inception in 2005 (i-graduate, 2021). Satisfaction items are organised in four main dimensions of experience: (1) *arrival* – students' first impressions and experiences upon arrival to campus (18 variables); (2) *learning* – students' academic environment and the aspects of teaching, studies, and facilities (33 variables); (3) *living* – student accommodation, social, and day-to-day life experiences (39 variables); and (4) *support services* – resources and services provided by the university's academic and non-academic units (22 variables). The online questionnaire, which has been periodically tested for validity and reliability through 18 cycles (Brett, 2013), uses a 4-point Likert scale to measure satisfaction, where 1=*very dissatisfied*, 2=*dissatisfied*, 3=*satisfied*, and 4=*very satisfied*.

Data analysis

All analyses were conducted on the unidentified responses using IBM's SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, in the form of percentages, means, and standard deviations, were employed to summarize and display demographics and students' level of satisfaction within each university environment. Paired-sample t-tests were used to compare overall satisfaction means between Australia and UK and determine whether the mean difference between the paired observations was statistically significant. Bivariate correlation analyses were performed to determine whether overall university satisfaction was associated with any of the satisfaction variables in the arrival, learning, living, and support service dimensions of the university experience.

Results

Associations between overall satisfaction and the dimensions of experience

To determine whether Mauritian students' overall university satisfaction was associated with their experiences in the *arrival*, *learning*, *living*, and *support services* dimensions of the institution setting, Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed. Results in Table 2 show significant positive correlations between overall satisfaction and each of the dimensions of experience, indicating the importance of the relationship among these five variables of the student experience. Overall university satisfaction had the strongest positive association with learning ($r = .401$, $p < .01$), followed by living ($r = .315$, $p < .01$), support services ($r = .245$, $p < .01$), and arrival ($r = .237$, $p < .05$).

Table 2: Correlations between overall satisfaction and dimensions of experience ($N = 207$)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Overall university experience	–				
2. Arrival experience	.237*	–			
3. Learning experience	.401**	.433**	–		
4. Living experience	.315**	.334**	.342**	–	
5. Support services	.245**	.252*	.265**	.312**	–
M	3.12	3.24	3.13	3.14	3.01
SD	.615	.544	.586	.668	.555
Range	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4
Note: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$					

Student satisfaction in Australia versus UK

Mauritian students were generally satisfied with their university experience at institutions in Australia and the UK. As indicated in Table 3, students reported a slightly higher satisfaction level with their overall university experience in the UK than in Australia [$t(206) = -1.71$, $p < .005$]. Although the paired-sample t-tests revealed a statistically significant difference in *arrival*, *learning*, and *living* satisfaction mean scores between Australia and UK institutions, the differences were minimal. In other words, the experiences of Mauritian international students did not vary much by host or destination country.

Table 3: International student satisfaction in Australia versus UK (N = 207)

Satisfaction variables	Australia Mean (n = 112)	UK Mean (n = 95)	Mean Difference	Sig.
Overall university experience	3.05	3.20	-0.15	.021**
Arrival experience	3.23	3.26	-0.04	.063*
Learning experience	3.13	3.13	-0.01	.073*
Living experience	3.10	3.17	-0.07	.056*
Support services	3.00	3.01	-0.01	.737
Note: ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$				

Correlates of overall satisfaction

A separate correlational analysis was performed to assess the relationship between Overall university experience and the satisfaction variables within each of the four dimensions of institutional experience, in both Australia and the UK combined. Table 4 summarizes the results of the analysis, indicating that several aspects of the institutional experience were positively associated with students' overall university satisfaction. In the *arrival* category, opportunities to make friends with others upon arrival to campus ($r = .311$, $p < .05$) was a key factor for Mauritian students. A number of variables in the learning environment were also important, including the expertise of lecturers ($r = .330$, $p < .01$), personal support from academic staff ($r = .325$, $p < .01$), and the academic staff's command of the English language ($r = .323$, $p < .05$). Making friends locally ($r = .415$, $p < .01$), social facilities ($r = .373$, $p < .01$), and internet access ($r = .359$, $p < .01$) were essential determinants of the overall university experience in the *living* setting. Of the four dimensions of experience, variables within *support services* were found to be the highest correlates of overall satisfaction. Chaplaincy or multi-faith provision ($r = .736$, $p < .01$), Disability support services ($r = .667$, $p < .01$), and Accounts/finance department ($r = .532$, $p < .01$) were variables with the most significant associations with Mauritian students' overall university satisfaction coefficient.

Table 4: Correlates of overall satisfaction (Australia and UK combined)

Variables	*M*	*SD*	*r*
Arrival			
Making friends upon arrival	2.97	.803	.311*
Learning			
Expertise of lecturers	3.34	.579	.330**
Personal support from academic staff	3.14	.648	.325**
Academic staff grasp of English	3.19	.709	.323**
Courses that lead to a good job	3.05	.683	.304**
Online library facilities	3.30	.615	.303**
Living			
Making friends from this country	2.98	.796	.415**
Social facilities	3.01	.723	.373**
Internet access at my residence	3.04	.702	.359**
Social activities (organised events)	3.00	.722	.353**
Feeling safe and secure	3.28	.606	.341**
Cost of living	2.68	.657	.324**
Transportation on campus	3.17	.657	.324**
Eco-friendly attitude of institution	3.28	.598	.315**
Support services			
Chaplaincy or multi-faith provision	3.15	.745	.736**
Disability support services	3.20	.422	.667*
Accounts/finance department	3.05	.539	.532**
IT and systems support	3.20	.717	.508**
Personal tutors	3.38	.672	.448**
Career services	3.23	.633	.438**
Students' union/governance	3.18	.718	.416**
Immigration/visa advising	2.97	.718	.410**
Student advisory services	3.23	.538	.409**

Note: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Table shows .3 correlation coefficients and above.

Discussion

The findings in this study show that Mauritian students at Australian and UK institutions were generally satisfied with various aspects of their university experience. There were no major differences is respondents' overall satisfaction between the two host countries, although students in the UK reported slightly higher satisfaction ratings that those in Australia. The *arrival* experience had the highest satisfaction mean score in both destination

countries, which is an indication that adequate resources and support were being provided to students upon arrival at their respective campuses.

Satisfaction with each of the four dimensions of institutional experience was found to be positively associated with Mauritian students' overall university experience. This aligns well with previous research by Ammigan and Jones (2018) and supports the understanding that a conducive arrival, learning, living, and support services environment is critical in ensuring students' overall satisfaction with the university. Another significant factor for consideration is that the learning environment exhibited the strongest correlation coefficient with overall university satisfaction, which highlights the importance for host institutions to prioritise a quality and well-supported academic environment for their international students. Additionally, the relationship between *support services* and the other dimensions of satisfaction draws key implications for administrators in the sense that universities must allocate sufficient resources and establish a robust support infrastructure in both the curricular and co-curricular setting to enhance the experience and success of their international students.

This study also found several satisfaction variables (within each of the four dimensions of experience) to be positively correlated with students' overall university experience. In other words, overall satisfaction with the institution was dependent on students' satisfaction with a number of variables within the *arrival*, *learning*, *living*, and *support services* settings. Results from this study, which echo some of the findings and recommendations from our conceptual framework, are discussed below along with implications for university staff and administration, as well as student advisors and guidance counsellors who advise and assist students on their study abroad plans.

Arrival

Upon arrival to campus, it was important for Mauritian students to find opportunities for making friends and developing personal networks within the local community. This is not surprising as several studies, noted in the literature review, have pointed to the positive impact that initial friendships and a local support system can have on international students' well-being and academic success at their university (Arkoudis et al., 2013; Walsworth et al., 2021). Host institutions must therefore be intentional and strategic at establishing initiatives that can assist new international students with acculturation, integration, and engagement in their new campus environment. Offering networking opportunities and organising social and cultural events during their first few days on campus and at orientation can make students feel welcome and forge a sense of belonging. Buddy and mentorship programmes that engage current student leaders with incoming students prior to their arrival to the university can initiate conversations early on and facilitate their transition to their new campus. Arrangements for airport pick up, transportation to campus, dormitories, and shopping centres, and welcome events in the initial days can spark opportunities for new students to connect with local members of the campus community. It is also key that international students are prepared for what to expect and how to access resources before they reach their institution so they can settle in quickly.

Learning

A number of satisfaction variables in the learning environment were positively associated with Mauritian students' overall university experience. Significant factors, such as the expertise of lecturers and personal support from academic staff, indicate that the teaching aspects of the classroom environment must remain central to students' university experience as they are key determinants of international student satisfaction. This corresponds with the research of Butt and Rehman (2010) and Arthur (2017). The relationship between student employability and university satisfaction was somewhat predictable as many international students seek internship and post-graduation work opportunities to complement their academic credentials (Gribble et al., 2017). This stresses the importance of resources and guidance on career readiness and development offered by the university's Career Services Center and academic programme. Online library facilities was also found to be a vital aspect of the university experience as supported by the research of Asare-Nuamah (2017). In addition to the existing facilities, institutions must make sure that their international students know how to access and utilize their online academic resources through available tutorials and training materials. These findings also lead to important practical implications for international student recruitment professionals. As Ammigan (2019) found, the overall learning experience does not only influence university satisfaction but is the most significant predictor of international students' willingness to recommend their institution to prospective applicants.

Living

Students in this study conveyed the importance of being able to make friends locally within their living environment, as they did when they first arrived at their university. To address this need for socialization on campus, institutions must continue to provide opportunities for meaningful engagement and involvement among students – and between international and domestic students. Social and cultural initiatives, such as residential and campus life events, coffee hours, student leadership groups, and language and conversation programmes, can help students make new acquaintances, engage in cross-cultural dialogues, increase their awareness and understanding of different worldviews, and develop global competence. These co-curricular initiatives must be carefully designed and intentionally linked to the formal global learning curriculum in order to produce high quality experiences and enhance cultural diversity, inclusion, and engagement for all students (Leask & Carroll, 2011). Dedicated physical space and facilities must also be assigned for these inclusive programmes and events to foster a sense of belonging and build tradition and community. The other correlates of overall university satisfaction for the respondents in this study was internet access in their housing, safety and security on campus, the cost of living, transportation services, and the eco-friendly attitude of their institution.

Support services

A total of nine variables in the *support services* category were associated with overall university satisfaction, including six that held the strongest correlation coefficients of all variables across the four dimensions of institutional experience. This is indicative of the importance of these factors to Mauritian students overseas, as well as the significance of support services to international students from a holistic standpoint. In this context, it behoves host institutions to continue assessing the needs of their international student community and strengthen campus support services through a strategic and collaborative approach across student affairs, academic departments, and local community resources (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017). For instance, the provision of chaplaincy or multi-faith services is dependent on a strong partnership with a wide variety of religious, cultural, and spiritual entities and support groups both on and off campus. Access to and effective usage of campus resources such as disability support services, the finance department, IT and systems support, student governance, and immigration and visa services requires a strong partnership between the International Student Office and various university support units to promote and customize services to the international community. Personal tutors, career services, and student advisory services hinge on close collaborations between academic departments and student affairs. The International Student Office in particular has direct access to the international community and can play a vital role in developing services for international students and getting the word out about key resources on campus (Ammigan & Laws, 2018). Foremost, the delivery of support services must remain student-centred and must be adaptable across nationalities and cultural contexts to maximize their impact, effectiveness, and satisfaction ratings, and address the differential needs of students (Arambewela & Hall, 2009; Roberts et al., 2015).

Conclusion

To the author's knowledge, this study is the first of its kind to investigate the experiences of Mauritian students at institutions of higher education in Australia and the UK using data from the International Student Barometer. In exploring the associations between students' overall university satisfaction and their experiences with various aspects of the university environment, this research demonstrated that a number of satisfaction variables were significant in the arrival, learning, living, and support services contexts. Making friends upon arrival, organised social activities and facilities, internet access and IT support, and chaplaincy or multi-faith provision were some of the distinct correlates of Mauritian students' overall university experience. Although the results from this study are not meant to be generalizable, they merit consideration and serve as a point of reference for university educators and administrators, and for those preparing Mauritian students to engage in study abroad. One of the limitations of this research is that the ISB is a self-reporting instrument, and it is subject to social desirability and response bias. Future research should consider a larger sample of Mauritian international students, explore the experiences of

graduate students from a comparative perspective, and expand the scope to include more participating institutions and destination countries.

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Research article

Expectations versus Realities: Insights into the Transition Experiences of International Students at Two Universities in Nigeria

Olaide Agbaje* & Chika Sehoole**

Abstract

Attracting, recruiting and retaining international students should be balanced with the need to provide support for the smooth transition of these students into their host countries and institutions. One way to achieve this transition is by bridging the gap between international students' expectations and actual realities. Hence, this article examines the impact that the expectations and the realities of studying abroad have on the overall transition experiences of international students in Nigeria. The study adopted a mixed method and employed Schlossberg's theory of transition to further understand the phenomenon of transition with regard to international students. Paper questionnaires were collected from 64 international students at two universities in Nigeria, while a subset of 20 (10 from each university) was further interviewed. The findings indicate that unmet expectations contributed largely to difficult transition experiences for the international students in Nigeria.

Keywords

international students' experiences, higher education, university, transition, expectations, realities

Introduction

The increasing demand for international education has brought about intensified efforts by higher education institutions to attract students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds around the world. However, attracting, recruiting and retaining international students should be balanced with the need to provide support for their smooth transition into their host countries and institutions. One way to achieve this is by bridging the gap between international students' expectations and their actual realities. It is natural for international students to check and cross-check their higher education experience by appraising the ways in which their institutions meet their expectations. As Adediran and Coetzee (2019, p. 3) argue, if they cannot be surpassed, international students' expectations should at least be met.

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Several studies (Agbeniga, 2016; Kritz, 2015; Sehoole & Lee, 2015; Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2015) have examined students' reasons for choosing certain international study destinations. These include funding/scholarship opportunities, quality of education, living conditions and job prospects in the host country. From the viewpoint of developed countries, researchers have reported on the challenges faced by international students in their new study environments (Ashton-Hay, 2016; Bamford, 2008; Calikoglu, 2018, p. 440; Leong, 2015; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Yin, 2013; Zhang, 2016). However, studies that report on the experiences of international students in Africa are limited (Agbeniga, 2017).

The university education system of Nigeria is one of the largest and oldest in Africa. From one university in 1948 to five universities in 1962 and 171 universities (44 federal, 48 state and 79 private universities) in 2020 (Varrella, 2020), the Nigerian university sector has witnessed a rapid expansion in response to the growing population. The rapid expansion began in the 1990s when the Nigerian government approved the establishment of private universities; before then, the university sector was dominated by public universities. Private universities (two thirds of which have religious affiliations) grew from three in 1999 to 68 in 2017, and account for 45% of the total number of universities in the country (*World Education News & Reviews*, 2017). The Nigerian university system is often confronted by long-standing problems such as underfunding, corruption, poor planning and implementation, diminishing research culture, industrial actions, poor teaching and learning outcomes (Iruonagbe et al. 2015). In spite of the growing number of universities in Nigeria, the number of international students in the country is meagre, compared to some African countries such as South Africa and Egypt (Agbeniga, 2017). There is a paucity of data on inbound international students and their experiences, even though some studies have explored the outbound movement of Nigerians undertaking studies in other countries (Madichie & Madichie, 2013; Robert-Okah, 2015). To the best of our knowledge no studies have investigated the transition experiences of inbound international students in Nigeria. This lack of literature posed a major limitation to this study. A gap which this study hopes to fill.

The two Nigerian universities chosen for this study were the University of Ibadan (UI) (public) and Covenant University (CU) (private), both located in South-West Nigeria. These two institutions were carefully chosen based on their institutional ranking. The University of Ibadan (UI) is the premiere university in Nigeria, fondly referred to as the "first and the best". It is currently the best public university in Nigeria and the 18th best university in Africa, according to Webometrics ranking of 2020. Covenant University (CU), a faith-based university, is the best private university in Nigeria and the 22nd best university in Africa according to Webometrics 2020 (World University Rankings, 2020).

This article investigates the impact that prior expectations have on the transition experiences of international students studying at two Nigerian universities. The following sections discuss evidence from the literature on international students in Africa, as well as Schlossberg's theory of transition, which was adopted as a lens to examine the transition experiences of international students in Nigeria.

International Students in Africa

Recruiting international students has been at the forefront of educational discourse in some African countries and institutions. South Africa and Egypt attract the highest number of inbound international students in Africa (Sehoole & Lee, in press). South Africa remains the most popular African destination for internationally mobile students across the globe (Lee & Sehoole, 2015; Majee & Ress, 2020). In North Africa, Egypt accounts for the highest number of international students, particularly from the North African region and the Middle East (Marei, 2018). In West Africa, countries like Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal account for a considerable number of international students from the region. In East Africa, international students find Uganda and Kenya to be viable study destinations (Kiiza, 2019).

In spite of the significant efforts of some African countries in recruiting international students, very few studies have explored the experiences of inbound international students. A study conducted by Adediran and Coetzee (2019, p. 1) investigated the service expectations and the real service experienced by 325 international students at a university of technology in South Africa. Findings revealed that the overall quality of service delivery offered to international students at the university was poor; students' expectations were not met in the areas of academic support, accommodation, quality of education and infrastructure for leisure activities. Consequently, institutions must ensure that the gap between expectation and reality is largely bridged, as the effect of a mismatch between expectations and reality could be devastating. Similarly, positive experiences will emanate from met or surpassed expectations.

Transition Theory

Schlossberg's theory of transition was adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. First propounded by Nancy Schlossberg in 1981 to analyse how humans adapt to transition, particularly in the context of psychology, the theory has since undergone some developments to analyse transition to other contexts, such as higher education. Transition refers to any event or non-event that results in changed roles, relationships, routines and assumptions (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33). According to Schlossberg (2011), the first step in dealing with change is to understand the different types of transition, namely anticipated, unanticipated and non-event transitions. Anticipated transitions are expected life events, such as getting married, unanticipated transitions are disruptive events that happen unexpectedly, such as a life-threatening illness, while non-event transitions are the life events that are expected but fail to occur, such as not getting married.

Transition theory (Schlossberg, 1989) can be used to understand the experiences of higher education students and to accommodate these through a variety of responses in their transition processes. International students experience various changes when studying in an unfamiliar context. In the context of this study, these transition experiences hinge largely on whether the transition was anticipated, unanticipated or a non-event. Nonetheless, Schlossberg (2011) argues that it is not the transition itself or the type of transition experienced that matters most, rather it is the way one responds to it. How

international students cope with transition is influenced by four aspects of transition otherwise known as the four S's – Situation, Self, Support and Strategies (Schlossberg, 2011). The first 'S', Situation, has to the do with the variables that trigger transition, such as undertaking international study and the duration of the transition, which can be temporary, permanent, or uncertain. The second 'S', Self, refers to a person's personal, psychological and demographic characteristics, including gender, age, country of origin and socio-economic status, while psychological characteristics include spirituality, ego and self-esteem. The third 'S', Support, refers to the level of help an individual receives from family, friends, the community, or even relationships in the transition process, which influences an individual's ability to respond to transition appropriately. The fourth 'S', Strategy, is the specific method adopted by an individual to cope with transition; while some individuals modify the situation, some control the meaning of the problem, and others devise ways to manage stress (Evans et al., 2010).

Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) argue that students' perceptions largely determine the negativity or positivity of their transition experiences. Similarly, we argue that international students' transition experiences are a function of their met or unmet expectations. Schlossberg's theory of transition is useful in understanding how prior expectations and actual realities influence the transition of the international students in Nigeria. Moreover, the four aspects of transition shed light on the complexities involved in the way transition experiences differ from one individual to another.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed method research approach to address the following research question: To what extent do the expectations and the realities of studying in Nigeria impact on the transition experiences of international students? Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in order to obtain comprehensive responses or data. Four criteria guided the selection of the participants/respondents: (1) they had to be registered as international students, (2) enrolled in a full undergraduate or postgraduate course, (3) able to communicate in English, and (4) have completed at least one semester.

The total number of international students at UI at the time of this research was estimated by the Office of International Programmes as around 400, with reportedly 30 international students at CU. Quantitatively, a total population sample was used so that all international students at both universities would potentially complete the questionnaire, given that the total population of international students in both universities is fairly small. A structured and tested paper questionnaire was administered to 110 international students at the two universities (80 questionnaires at UI and 30 at CU). Of these, a total of 64 questionnaires were completed and retrieved from both universities (42 from UI and 22 from CU). Qualitatively, a subset of 20 international students (10 from each university) was interviewed for qualitative analysis through semi-structured, one-on-one interaction. Each interview lasted an average of 45 minutes and was recorded with the consent of the participants, who were purposefully selected using snowball sampling. In addition, relevant institutional documents were consulted to substantiate the data. The questionnaire was

useful in gathering biographical data from the respondents, as well as basic responses on their prior expectations and the reality of studying in Nigeria, while the interview provided more detailed responses on how prior expectations and actual realities influenced the participants' transition experiences.

Qualitative data were manually transcribed and emailed to all the participants for member checking, after which they were analysed using thematic analysis. The quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 24.

Background data on the questionnaire respondents

This subsection gives an overview of the background characteristics of the 64 international students who completed the questionnaire at the two universities. These characteristics include region of origin, gender and the first languages of the respondents.

Table 1: Frequency showing the gender, type of degree, first language, region of origin and residence of the respondents at the private and the public university

			University		Total
			Private university	Public university	
Gender	Female	Count	7	14	21
		Expected count	7.2	13.8	21.0
		% within university	31.8%	33.3%	32.8%
		Standardised residual	-.1	.1	
	Male	Count	15	28	43
		Expected count	14.8	28.2	43.0
		% within university	68.2%	66.7%	67.2%
		Standardised residual	.1	.0	
Total		Count	22	42	64
		Expected count	22.0	42.0	64.0
		% within university	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

			University		Total
			Private university	Public university	
First language	English	Count	16	8	24
		Expected count	8.3	15.8	24.0
		% within university	72.7%	19.0%	37.5%
		Standardised residual	2.7	-2.0	
	French	Count	2	23	25
		Expected count	8.6	16.4	25.0
		% within university	9.1%	54.8%	39.1%
		Standardised residual	-2.2	1.6	
	Other	Count	4	11	15
		Expected count	5.1	9.8	14.9
		% within university	18.2%	26.2%	23.4%
		Standardised residual	-.6	.4	
Total		Count	22	42	64
		Expected count	22.0	42.0	64.0
		% within university	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Region	West Africa	Count	10	32	42
		Expected count	14.4	27.6	42.0
		% within university	45.5%	76.2%	65.6%
		Standardised residual	-1.2	.8	
	East Africa	Count	2	9	11
		Expected count	3.8	7.2	11.0
		% within university	9.1%	21.4%	17.2%
		Standardised residual	-.9	.7	
	Southern Africa	Count	5	1	6
		Expected count	2.1	3.9	6.0
		% within university	22.7%	2.4%	9.4%
		Standardised residual	2.0	-1.5	
	Other	Count	5	0	5
		Expected count	1.7	3.3	5.0
		% within university	22.7%	0.0%	7.8%
		Standardised residual	3.5	-2.5	
Total		Count	22	42	64
		Expected count	22.0	42.0	64.0
		% within university	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Of the international student population that completed the questionnaire, 67.2% were male (n = 43) which was twice the percentage of female students, at 32.8% (n = 21). A further breakdown of the total population reveals seven females and 15 males at the private university compared to 14 females and 28 males at the public university. The gender composition of the international students at both universities was not reported to have had any impact on their transition experiences. At both universities, 39.1% (n = 25) of the respondents spoke French, closely followed by 37.5% (n = 24) who spoke English, while the remaining 23.4% (n = 15) reportedly spoke eleven other first languages. At the private university, more respondents than were expected had English as a first language (observed 16, expected 8.3), while fewer were French speaking (observed 2, expected 8.6). At the public university, fewer respondents than expected had English as a first language (observed eight, expected 15.8), while more had French (observed 23, expected 16.4). Due to the heterogenic nature of the respondents' countries of origin (23 countries were reported), the countries were grouped into regions (see Table 1). Table 1 indicates 42 international students from West Africa (suggesting a phenomenon of regionalisation), 11 from East Africa and six from Southern Africa, while the remaining five were from outside Africa (two from Europe and three from the USA). Table 2 below shows how international students' expectations matched their actual realities across the two universities.

Table 2: A cross tabulation showing if international students' expectations matched their realities of studying in Nigeria

			University		Total
			Private university	Public university	
Did your expectation of Nigeria prior to studying here match the actual reality?	Yes	Count	11	15	26
		Expected count	8.9	17.1	26.0
		% within university	50.0%	35.7%	40.6%
		Standardised residual	.7	-.5	
	No	Count	11	27	38
		Expected count	13.1	24.9	38.0
		% within university	50.0%	64.3%	59.4%
		Standardised residual	-.6	.4	
Total		Count	22	42	64
		Expected count	22.0	42.0	64.0
		% within university	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Of the 64 respondents who completed the questionnaire at both universities, 40.6% (n = 26) reported that their expectations were met by the reality, as opposed to 59.4% (n = 38) who reported a mismatch. Concerning the findings per university, 50% of the international students at the private university had their expectations met while the expectations of the remaining 50% were not. At the public university, only 35.7% of the international students

had their expectations met, while 64.3% did not. Accordingly, the number of those who experienced a mismatch between their expectations and reality exceeded those whose expectations were matched by reality. However, Fisher's exact test showed no significant difference between the two universities (p-value = 0.296).

Interview Results

The interview participants originated from 12 anglophone and francophone African countries namely, Mali, Zambia, Kenya, Benin Republic, Cameroon, Ghana, Western Sahara, Niger Republic, South Africa, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, and Zimbabwe (see Table 3 below). The participants comprised 15 males and five females and had spent between one and four years in Nigeria. While all the interview participants from UI were postgraduate students studying on scholarships, all those from CU were undergraduate students on either a scholarship or self-funded. Regarding the gender make up of questionnaire respondents, having more male participants than females was purely random: the first 20 participants who showed willingness and availability were interviewed.

Table 3: Total number of interviewees and their countries of origin

Country of origin	Number of interviewees
Mali	3
Zambia	3
Kenya	2
Benin Republic	2
Cameroon (Anglophone)	2
Ghana	2
Western Sahara	1
Niger Republic	1
South Africa	1
Cote d'Ivoire	1
Togo	1
Zimbabwe	1
Total	20

The participants will be referred to as S1 to S20 to maintain the ethical protocol of anonymity. Five of the participants alluded to their expectations meeting the actual realities of studying in Nigeria while 15 reported a mismatch between their expectations and realities. Hence, three themes – met expectations, unmet expectations and recommendations from the international students – emanated from this study, as subsequently discussed.

Met expectations

Twenty-five per cent of the participants at the two universities indicated that their expectations prior to studying in Nigeria matched the actual realities. These students appraised their decision to study in Nigeria as satisfactory. One of the most prevalent expectations was an improvement in their English language skills. However, this expectation was peculiar to the French-speaking international students at UI, who in addition to obtaining a degree in Nigeria hoped to acquire English language proficiency. For example, Participant S3 from Cote d'Ivoire, a French-speaking country, relayed his expectation as follows: "I was expecting that on getting to Nigeria, I should get my PhD and also be able to speak fluently in English." At the time of conducting this interview, he was happy that his expectation had generally been met, indicating that, "… even though my English is not perfect but I can at least communicate". This expectation regarding language was corroborated by Participant S4 from Benin Republic, another French-speaking country, who said, "I am in Nigeria because I want to improve my English. Before coming, I could not speak English at all, I learnt it here in Nigeria". When asked if her expectation was met she responded, "I am experiencing what I expected". In addition, the students in this study were happy with the higher standard of education in Nigeria than in their home countries. For example, Participant S10 from Western Sahara stated:

> In terms of academics, research and ranking, the University of Ibadan is better than all the universities in my country. So, I was happy before even coming here and I saw what I was expecting in terms of the level of education, lecturers and the environment.

Similarly, Participant S7 from Mali mentioned that he did not have adequate knowledge of the academics at UI prior to studying in Nigeria, but that he expected a good standard of education at least. He was subsequently impressed by the quality of education and research offered at UI:

> When I came, one of the things I discovered was that Nigeria was far ahead of Mali and other West African countries in terms of academics, research, scientific research and other things.

The participants at CU also attested to the quality of education offered by the university. For instance, Participant S20, prior to arriving in Nigeria, knew that he would be attending a university that places a premium on spirituality, and so he was expecting to benefit spiritually from his affiliation to CU and at the same time excel academically. Comparing the standard of education in his home country to that at CU, he admitted that CU was of a higher standard than universities in Togo.

> We don't have this kind of standard university in Togo, even the private universities there cannot match up with Covenant University.

Unmet expectations

Seventy-five per cent of the interview participants at the two universities indicated that their expectations prior to studying in Nigeria did not match the actual reality.

One area of unmet expectations that stands out from the responses of participants at both universities was the lack of teaching and learning resources, infrastructure and technology. According to the participants at UI, they had expected the university, with its claim to be "the first and the best", to be better equipped with the resources and technology needed for their respective courses. Similarly, the international students at CU were disappointed that the university was not aware of advances in certain resources and technology, in spite of its 'Vision 10:2022' to become one of the top ten universities in the world by the year 2022. This unmet expectation is articulated thus by Participant S3:

> One thing I do not like about UI is the lack of resources for my course. As a geographer, I need to use some software like GIS and laboratory equipment but there is nothing in the lab even though I paid for it.

Participant S4 from Zambia expressed the same sentiment:

> I expected high standards of learning in terms of good infrastructure, learning, technology and a conducive environment for me to learn in.

Another aspect of unmet expectations was the academic demands in Nigeria. The participants at CU in particular complained of a heavy academic workload which hampered other aspects of their student life. A review of the CU student handbook (pp. 6-8) indicates that the university places a premium on the "The Total Man Concept" which takes students through various rigorous programmes (academically, spiritually, entrepreneurially etc.). This disappointment was exemplified by Participant S12 from Cameroon, who was not expecting the heavy academic workload she had to deal with:

> I got to meet a system that is purely academic, something I will refer to as a high school in my home country. I felt like I was taking a step back in time, going back to what I did in high school … the academic pressure is really much.

To get a clear sense of the academic workload in Nigeria, Participant S16 from South Africa explained that university students in her country usually do eight modules or courses per semester, attending only four in each semester. Participant S14 reiterated how stressful the academic workload in Nigeria could be by explaining that his friend from his home country, Zambia, who was studying the same programme in China, only had to do five courses in a semester while he (Participant S14) did 14. These students also mentioned that they had too many classes to attend in a day, which prevented them from having free time to spend on other activities.

Apart from being disappointed with the large amount of academic work they had to deal with, the international students were also not happy with the universities' integration efforts. When asked whether her expectations matched reality, Participant S16 from South

Africa stated: "I had thought that I would feel more welcomed and I didn't. I still don't". She explained that she had had a difficult transition which made her very unhappy, and she was longing to go home. Her feelings were echoed by Participant S13, who said:

> Once the university knows that an international student is coming in, an orientation should be organised for that student. I never had such orientation.

The international students at UI, on the other hand, felt more welcomed than their CU counterparts. However, a few of them also mentioned they did not receive proper orientation to aid their integration and found it difficult settling into their host institution. For example, when asked whether his expectations were met with regard to feeling welcomed and well-integrated, Participant S1 replied:

> No, I am a man, and I won't lie to you. The integration will be easy if someone can help you. They [university staff and local students] are not helpful.

The responses elicited from the international students at UI indicated that those from francophone countries had a more difficult transition. They were disappointed with the absence of well-structured English classes to help French-speaking students adjust. The admission policy of the two universities states that "a credit pass in English language is compulsory for all courses" (The University of Ibadan Calendar, 2018, p. 2; Covenant University student handbook, 2019-2022, p. 54), but it is not clear whether international students are exempt from this requirement.

Recommendations from the International Students

The international students made salient recommendations on how their universities could bridge the gap between their expectations before studying in Nigeria and the realities they encountered. They believe that these recommendations could assist international students to transition smoothly into the host country and the host institution. Several recommendations were made but we elaborate only on the two most commonly mentioned. First, the participants at the two universities longed for an appreciable level of assistance from the universities, which they believed would go a long way in assisting their transition. Participant S10 from Western Sahara succinctly stated:

> An international student expects some level of assistance to be well integrated into the university system and might be frustrated if there is no assistance. Such student will be eager to return to their country.

If international students lack the right support from the university it can lead to a difficult transition. As Participant S19 said:

> The university should be more interested in international students, which is something that is really lacking when we were transitioning … They did not really show interest in us. If the university showed us care, our transition would be quite easier.

When asked about the specifics of assistance the international students expected from the university, accommodation topped the list for participants at both universities. The students expected their accommodation to be a priority for university authorities, in view of the amount they paid in fees compared to local students. Another area of assistance was with the registration process; the participants relayed how daunting the largely manual registration process was. They also believed that orientation and follow-up from the university would add to their experience. The international students at CU also expected to receive some level of assistance from the university with regard to visa processes.

Second, the participants recommended that the universities provide adequate online information to provide prospective international students with a better sense of what to expect in the host country and at the institution. Having an idea of the rules and regulations in the host institution and the challenges they might face would have enabled them to come prepared and alleviated their shock upon arrival. For example, one of the rules in the CU student handbook (p. 67) states: "No student is allowed to possess or use mobile phones or any other gadgets or devices that are capable of placing and receiving calls on campus within or outside the Halls of Residence. MDA/PDA devices with sims are not allowed for use in the University".

The handbook also stipulates that students could make use of the university telephone services located within and outside the halls of residence. However, the students claimed that such vital information was missing from the university's website and was not communicated to them by the Office of International Linkages (OIP) prior to leaving their home countries, thus leading to international students being caught unawares upon arrival. Expressing her disappointment while also making recommendations, Participant S12 from Cameroon explicitly stated:

> I would like that administrators see to it that the online information about the university is authentic and detailed. Before students leave their countries to come here, they should have a good idea of what they will need and what they will see, so that we are able to adjust well. The International Office and Linkages should be available to communicate with international students while they are still home, so that they can come here ready … Particularly in Covenant University, it should be clearly stated on the online platform, for example, that students are not allowed to communicate with a phone when they get here.

Similarly, the international students at UI pointed out the importance of information for their transition experience. For example, they would not have been so shocked by the erratic power supply in Nigeria if they had been informed about the issue before arriving. Participant S8 from Mali mentioned:

> The first thing [recommendation] is light, we don't have light. If someone had told me before coming that there is no constant power supply in Nigeria, I would have doubted it.

The international students at UI did not take the issue of electricity lightly, especially because they were postgraduate students engaged in research that was time-sensitive and they needed to work on their computers. Moreover, considering that the UI participants

were on scholarships, they viewed the intermittent power supply as an impediment to completing their studies within the time stipulated by their scholarship conditions. Participant S7 therefore recommended that "they [the university] can provide generator in a special hostel for international students and include it in the bill".

Other recommendations made by the international students included an avenue for international students to be recognized at the university such as the establishment of an "international students' day". They also recommended a well-structured English language programme for students whose first language is not English.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight that international students have a number of expectations of their study experience prior to leaving their home countries. Positive or negative transition experiences of international students depend on their met or unmet expectations, which Schlossberg (2011) refers to as an anticipated transition. Schulmann and Choudaha (2014) argue that a relationship exists between students' expectations of their host institutions and the realities they experience, which consequently determine their transition process. In line with O'Neil and Palmer (2004), international students regard studying abroad as an investment and thus compare their expectations with actual reality to determine the success of this venture.

Based on the findings of this study, academic experience is one of the most important factors in the overall experiences of international students. Marei (2018) and Wadhwa (2016) note that acquiring quality higher education and exposure to high standards of teaching and learning infrastructure are some expectations that serve as motivations for international study. As the participants mentioned, the quality of education in Nigeria is of a high standard. Indeed, UI and CU have taken the lead among Nigerian universities in the global rankings. International students at these two universities therefore expected a high academic standard, which they largely experienced in reality. That notwithstanding, the findings reveal that both universities are underequipped in terms of teaching and learning resources and infrastructure. Funding in the Nigerian higher education sector has been a major problem over the years and is felt not only felt by students in the lack of teaching and learning resources and deteriorating facilities, but also by academic and non-academic staff who often embark on strike action to protest poor renumeration and poor working conditions. Private universities like CU generate their own funds but international students still expected better quality resources and infrastructure. Many of the students at CU also decried the hectic academic workload with which they were saddled. Although it is explicitly stated in the students' handbook that CU is rigorous academically and otherwise, international students were not aware of this until they began their studies.

Common responses gathered from the interview participants at both universities clearly indicate the lack of integration and assistance offered to international students by the universities. These issues were prevalent in participants' experiences and in their recommendations. Many of them did not get the kind of support they had expected to allow them to transition seamlessly. Loneliness and isolation ranked as the two most

common integration issues, like the experiences of African undergraduate students at an American university reported in Constantine et al. (2004). Similarly, international students in popular destination countries such as the UK (Taylor & Ali, 2017), the US (Zhang, 2016), Australia (Ashton-Hay, 2016), Canada (Guo & Guo, 2017) and South Africa (Ratshilaya, 2017) reportedly experience some level of integration difficulty. The importance of support for international students has been substantially indicated in several studies on international students' experiences. For example, Lee et al. (2018) recommended visa assistance for the international students in their South African study. Adediran (2017) argues that accommodation assistance and various socio-cultural integration programmes should be included in the support system a host institution renders to its international students. It is important that universities the world over pay attention to the integration of international students and offer them the necessary support to alleviate their stress (Sengupta, 2015). Moreover, universities must guard against international students feeling short-changed by receiving far less assistance than is commensurate with the high tuition fees they pay.

The importance of a reliable information system cannot be overemphasised in bridging the gap between international students' expectations and their actual realities. According to Yee (2014), providing international students with adequate information is one of the ways of managing the transition challenges. As Martinez and Colaner (2017) argue, the availability of information prepares students and guards against negative experiences. Much of the frustration experienced by international students could be avoided if they received adequate information prior to departure from their home countries. This is the responsibility of universities' international offices which should ensure that every international student is well informed about the host country and the host institution. International students also rely on information on universities' websites; hence these websites should provide specific information for international students in addition to general information for all students. For example, to combat the socio-cultural issues faced by students, the University of Queensland in Australia includes certain practical information in their orientation sessions, such as how to open a bank account (Barron et al., 2009). Universities should not only provide information pre-departure (Guo & Guo, 2017) but should also provide orientation for all international students on arrival to ensure their smooth transition and then continue to provide follow-up support as they progress through their studies (Barron et al., 2009).

At the time of writing this article, the COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a "new-normal" of virtual learning in higher education, following the closure of most campuses around the world. Since the outbreak of the global pandemic, concerns over the sustainability of inbound and outbound academic student mobility have been widely expressed (Rumbley, 2020; UNESCO, 2020; Wang, 2020). Nevertheless, international academic mobility and studies like our own will remain relevant as students who seek international education will prefer to physically cross borders than engage in online education. Such students will continue to have expectations and host institutions need to ensure that they prepare adequately to meet their needs. It is clear that the internationalization of higher education entails more than merely recruiting international

students to a higher institution of learning; it encompasses meeting their expectations, as much as possible, and ensuring their overall positive experience.

Statement about Research Ethics and Potential Conflict of Interest

We, the authors, confirm the originality of this article as it has not been published elsewhere, nor is it being considered for publication in another journal. We also disclose that there is no conflict of interest of any sort. Where the work of others has been used, sources have been identified and duly acknowledged by means of in-text citations and complete references.

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Research article

Relational Student Engagement in Co-curricular Spaces: Evidence from a South African University

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Abstract

Student engagement is a widely researched and utilized concept to enhance student experiences and outcomes. Most research on student engagement, however, focuses on curricular engagement with relatively little emphasis placed on the co-curriculum. This study utilizes Case's theory of relational engagement to analyse findings from three focus groups conducted at a university in South Africa to better understand how relational engagement is instantiated in the co-curriculum and how the co-curriculum differs from the standard academic curriculum in terms of engagement. In particular, we show relational engagement is just as important in the co-curriculum, highlighting student relations to broader university life, to fellow students, and to communities beyond the campus.

Keywords

student engagement, relational engagement, student affairs, co-curricular, sense of belonging, focus group

Introduction

Over the last decade, universities in South Africa have focused greater attention on student engagement and co-curricular learning to increase retention rates and encourage learning beyond the classroom. Generally, much of this focus remains on academic student engagement using the South Africa Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE) (Schreiber & Yu, 2016; Strydom et al. 2017; Strydom & Mentz, 2010), with a growing body of work exploring the experiences and perceptions of students and co-curricular learning in South Africa (Garton & Wawrzynski, 2021; Naik & Wawrzynski, 2018; Wawrzynski et al., 2012; Wawrzynski & Naik, 2021).

The differing social, economic, and educational contexts in which South African students are embedded necessitate new ways of theorizing about engagement and

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co-curricular learning, grounded in prior South African research. Using a theoretical approach to engagement that explicitly foregrounds relational contexts (Case, 2007, 2008), we conducted focus group interviews at a comprehensive South African university (SAU, a pseudonym) in the Eastern Cape province to examine how students perceive and benefit from student engagement in co-curricular experiences. Along with validating aspects of Case's (2007) theory of relational engagement, we identified new types of relations students hold pertinent to their sense of belonging from co-curricular experiences.

Literature Review

In one of the most widely used definitions of student engagement, Kuh (2003) described engagement as both the individual effort students put in toward their education and the organisational structures facilitating student experiences. Considered holistically, these educational activities and efforts can involve classroom as well as out-of-classroom experiences. Although aspects of student engagement can certainly transcend geographical boundaries, Kuh's student engagement concepts were primarily developed based on traditional-aged students in United States higher education.

Others, however, have sought to develop more culturally relevant student engagement frameworks. More specifically, Case (2007) discussed student engagement in the South African context as a form of relationship students develop with different aspects of their university and broader ecological context. Whereas Kuh's (2003) definition focused on inputs from individual students and the university, Case (2007) emphasised the connections between students as well as between students and their educational contexts. That said, inputs are still an important factor for Case (2007), especially in the form of students' motivations and efficacies.

Student engagement is a key component of the social justice mission of student affairs in South Africa because it combines academic and relational contexts, reducing the barriers to knowledge. Integrating academic and relational contexts broadens epistemological access by creating spaces for co-constructed knowledge and personal capacity building (Schreiber, 2014), which influences sense of belonging. Moreover, connecting engagement and sense of belonging has great educational value in the South African context, particularly for non-traditional students (Wisker & Masika, 2017), who can be defined as "mostly black students from disadvantaged family and school backgrounds" (Jama et al., 2008, p. 998). A strong sense of belonging to the university community generates opportunities for personal sharing and growth that may be repressed if individuals do not feel welcome or safe (Wisker & Masika, 2017). Furthermore, achieving social and academic integration, which is connected to sense of belonging for many students, tends to be more challenging for non-traditional students than for their traditional counterparts because of limitations in resources, such as finances, commuting, and coming from families without educational backgrounds (Jama et al., 2008).

Engagement is structured by student motivations, university characteristics, and socio-political histories and economies (Agherdien & Petersen, 2016; Case, 2007; Ivala & Kioko, 2013). Indeed, cultural, and hegemonic conditions shape organisational practices and

environments, such as poor residence hall conditions or inequitable divisions of labour (Agherdien & Petersen, 2016). Within these structures, specific influential figures, like teachers, can have an impact on the form of engagement (Bezuidenhout et al., 2011). Authentic engagement also presupposes students' own self-awareness, so supportive external factors are still dependent to some degree upon the capacity of the individual student (Agherdien & Petersen, 2016).

Sense of belonging

Given the importance of interpersonal relations for student engagement in South Africa (Case, 2007; Wisker & Masika, 2017), sense of belonging to the university is a key component of collegiate experiences, which may be framed by historical legacies and artefacts of colleges and universities (Sartorius & Sartorius, 2013). For example, one study found when racial histories interacted with symbols associated with Afrikaans heritage in the built environment, on-campus black students reported a reduced sense of belonging (Wawrzynski et al., 2012). Yet, once such artefacts were removed from parts of campus, black students reported a higher sense of belonging overall than their white counterparts (Naik & Wawrzynski, 2018). Gaps and convergences between students' expectations and actual experiences also determine sense of belonging, with large gaps decreasing sense of belonging and convergences increasing sense of belonging (Pather & Dorasamy, 2018). For example, if new university students expect certain outcomes or experiences from their new student orientation, orientations that meet those expectations will enhance sense of belonging, while orientations that differ from expectations will decrease sense of belonging.

The antithesis of sense of belonging is alienation, or "a disconnection in the context of a desired or expected relationship" (Case, 2007, p. 120). Again, Case (2007) focused on relationships as the building blocks of the collegiate experience which was supported and expanded by Bezuidenhout et al. (2011) to include distances between expectations and realities as a source of alienation. University support for either meeting student expectations or providing strategies for dealing with new environments is essential for reducing feelings of alienation and increasing sense of belonging (Bezuidenhout et al., 2011), but institutionalised power dynamics tend to perpetuate alienation rather than challenge it (Agherdien & Petersen, 2016).

Co-curricular involvement

Student engagement in South Africa is therefore relational and dependent upon university support. One of the strategies universities utilize to foster engagement is to create spaces for peer-led experiences, such as co-curricular involvement through student societies (Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017). These societies serve as social learning spaces that institutionalise opportunities for relational interactions and experiences (Agherdien & Petersen, 2016). Other programmatic elements of the co-curriculum also centre social learning spaces. Peer tutoring, community service or outreach, and residential events are examples of particularly

high-impact practices built on social learning spaces (Agherdien & Petersen, 2016; Faroa, 2017; Harrop-Allin, 2017).

Co-curricular involvement is related to desirable learning outcomes (Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017; Naik & Wawrzynski, 2018; Naik et al., 2017). Specifically, increases in academic achievement and academic skills like studying and time management are associated with co-curricular involvement (Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017; Makala, 2017; Wawrzynski et al., 2012). Beyond academia, career skills and employability (Frade & Tiroyabone, 2017; Koen & Ebrahim, 2013) and a commitment to social change (Harrop-Allin, 2017) are learning outcomes also related to co-curricular involvement. The relationship between the co-curriculum and learning is possibly due to out-of-classroom experiences disrupting students' implicit assumptions and changing their mental models of society (Koen & Ebrahim, 2013) all while providing peer relational support (Case, 2007).

Facilitating student engagement is not as easy as creating opportunities for involvement, however. Numerous barriers exist that bar students from participating in out-of-classroom experiences. Financial obstacles stratify participation along class lines, providing potentially transformational experiences only to students who can afford to devote the requisite time and energy (Naik & Wawrzynski, 2018; Naik et al., 2017). Scheduling conflicts, information asymmetries, and language also pose barriers that prevent students from participating in co-curricular activities (Schreiber, 2014; Wawrzynski et al., 2012).

Conceptual Framework

Many studies exploring student engagement, including some in South Africa, have relied on Kuh's (2009) functionalist approach (Naik & Wawrzynski, 2018; Pather & Dorasamy, 2018; Wawrzynski et al., 2012), which suggests a connection between desired outcomes for college and the effort students devote to educational activities employed through an institution's processes, policies, and practices. However, other scholars (Harper & Quaye, 2015; Jama et al., 2008) note this concept is more applicable to traditional students and less so for underserved populations. Because of the non-traditional nature of many students in South Africa (Garton & Wawrzynski, 2021; Jama et al., 2008), a more culturally relevant framework warrants exploration.

Many cultural and organisational institutions in South Africa embrace the philosophy of *ubuntu*, translated as *humanity*, which values collectivism and mutual dependence rather than individual needs as core components of human existence (Ncube, 2010). Certainly, in the South African context, student engagement is relational because of the personal connections students develop with different aspects of their university, educational structures and activities, and broader ecology (Case, 2007). Relational engagement is the opposite of alienation from the norms and mores of higher education organisations, instantiated across the university experience for students (Case, 2008). Similarly, engagement is connected to sense of belonging, which generates opportunities for sharing and growth (Wisker & Masika, 2017), but may be repressed if students do not feel welcome or safe – which often is the case for those historically excluded from higher education.

Case (2007) identified six forms of relations that can be spaces of either engagement or alienation, contributing to learning and feelings of validation or isolation and exclusion: "to one's studies; to the broader university life; to home; to the career; to one's classmates; and to the lecturer" (p. 123). Although Case's (2007) empirical work focused largely on engagement in the classroom, our study advances the theory and applies it to co-curricular involvement. Much of what Case argued for, namely positive and validating relationships to other students and different aspects of the university, are evident in the co-curriculum. Indeed, co-curricular involvement is associated with students' sense of belonging in the South African university context (Wawrzynski et al., 2012; Naik & Wawrzynski, 2018).

Methods

This study took a qualitative approach grounded in focus group interviews with students at SAU to better understand their attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of co-curricular engagement. Focus groups are a popular means of data collection in higher education because of their ability to bring together students with varying characteristics, relationships, and experiences, ultimately strengthening the reliability of the gathered information (Cohen et al., 2011). Moreover, given the centrality of relationships and collectivism in much of South African cultural values, focus groups engage participants in discussions about issues relevant to their own experiences (Romm et al., 2013). Focus group data sourced from personal, group, and relational contexts also aligned with our conceptual framework by seeking to understand all spaces of student engagement. As a result, focus groups provided a more comprehensive and culturally competent approach to understanding students' perspectives of co-curricular engagement.

Setting and source of data collection

The qualitative data for this study were collected as part of a larger research project focused on student co-curricular engagement at SAU. Located in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, the six campuses of SAU are a product of a merger of two universities and a Technikon during the post-apartheid restructuring of South African higher education. SAU is a predominantly black, comprehensive university where students pursue study in a range of graduate and undergraduate fields including Business, Engineering and Technology, Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, Law, and Natural Sciences. Just over half of the SAU student body are self-funded, while the rest are recipients of some form of state appropriations or financial aid to assist with university tuition and living expenses. A majority of students live off-campus and commute to and from campus. SAU is unique in that the co-curriculum is heavily emphasised as a space for learning, formalized in a co-curricular record.

Administrators at SAU invited students from a co-curricular leadership and diversity course to attend one of three focus groups to share their insights regarding their co-curricular involvement at SAU. In May 2017, 18 SAU students agreed to participate in the focus groups at convenient locations on three of the six SAU campuses. On average,

six students attended each focus group session facilitated in English by two of the study's authors, who identify as non-black and are from the United States. All participants were black Africans from various provinces in South Africa or a neighbouring country. A majority of participants identified as female and were undergraduates in their second or third year of university study. Participants represented different faculties including Business, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences. The students cited a wide range of involvement on campus including community service organisations, intramural athletics, and residence life. Semi-structured focus groups lasting 40-60 minutes prompted students to reflect and engage in dialogue about their overall engagement, co-curricular experiences, motivations for involvement, learning outcomes, and barriers to involvement. The focus groups were digitally recorded with voluntary consent from participants and transcribed verbatim. In an effort to establish trustworthiness, transcripts were sent to participants to review, expand upon, and address any concerns.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using the constant comparative method and categorized into patterns or themes emerging from the interview transcripts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Three of the researchers independently open-coded the transcripts looking for patterns, then came together to group preliminary codes and refine them into broader categories. Next, three themes were developed from the categories that resonated meaningfully with the relevant literature and the purpose of the study. Finally, an inquiry auditor offered feedback on our themes and the coding analysis to verify their consistency with the generated data. Pseudonyms are used throughout to maintain confidentiality of participants.

Findings

From the data analysis, we constructed three themes of relational engagement: (a) a strengthened sense of belonging on campus, (b) intercultural competence gained through student involvement, and (c) community engagement and stewardship from involvement.

Sense of belonging

Students across all focus groups discussed how co-curricular involvement and engagement writ large enhanced their sense of belonging in SAU. Specifically, participants described co-curricular structures that facilitated finding new friends and expanding social networks, as well as an overall openness to meeting and learning about others, emphasising the relational aspect of engagement. Rethabile used the language of family to describe her connections at SAU, referring to the "sisters" she found. Karabo echoed the use of family terms in describing how custodial staff cared for students. Particular environments within SAU, such as residence halls or student societies, fostered a sense of community within the larger campus community. As stated by Bokamoso, "Being part of a residence when you have to do stuff with people you live with, whether it's your flatmate or … other res students, you learn sense of care about the person who lives next door." Amogelang spoke

to the value of student societies, saying, "I think the opportunities they offer to students … make you feel welcome because you have places where … obviously you don't know anyone. People are strangers to you, but the things like societies and events they organise actually make you feel welcome, that's where you meet friends".

Students reported building a sense of belonging through co-curricular activities. Previous literature emphasised how sense of belonging or alienation were results of differences between expectations and experiences (Bezuidenhout et al., 2011; Pather & Dorasamy, 2018). Rather than discussing expectations, however, students focused solely on their experiences, particularly relational experiences. Moreover, co-curricular spaces seemed to structure the relations and facilitate student engagement.

Inter-cultural competence

Along with sense of belonging, participants reported learning related to inter-cultural competency. Several students reflected on the transition from relatively homogenous provinces outside of the Eastern Cape to SAU where students from across South Africa and the world interacted on a daily basis. According to the students, SAU created an open and welcoming environment for these types of interactions through events such as Diversity Week where students showcased their home cultures. Dolinde felt the residence halls and orientation also facilitated inter-cultural interactions and created spaces for students to feel welcome: "One of the pulling factors for my coming to SAU is how they are accepting of different cultures and people from outside … Even in our student res, how they try to integrate and make sure, even during orientation, they try to accommodate everyone, with the games and the interactions." From these interactions, students learned about their own cultures in addition to others. As stated by Kungawo, "When I came to SAU, Xhosa people are about their culture and they believe about where they come from. They make you realise it's important to know who you are."

Community engagement

Regarding the final theme, community engagement and stewardship, students expressed a desire to work with communities for positive change as a motivation for involvement in co-curricular societies. Amogelang spoke about community engagement as a motivation for her decision to join a student society, saying, "… to me it was helping and giving back to the community because I come from a disadvantaged background, so I know the struggles from the township …" Even for students who joined societies to boost their CV, giving back became an added benefit. Participants emphasised a passion to continue doing volunteer work and engaging with their various communities beyond graduation. For example, Siyabonga said, "Involvement in [a non-credit bearing leadership class] taught us to do community work … They actually gave me a passion to continue." This stewardship extended to environmental care as well as social justice, often articulating the connections between social justice and the environment. As stated by Minenhle, "You want to be a good person through helping other people, through caring for the environment." Students'

experiences and involvement thus extended beyond the campus to the larger environment in which SAU is embedded.

Participants discussed community engagement and stewardship both as a motivation to become involved and as a learning outcome of involvement. Moreover, they cited societal problems, such as the racial segregation and poverty in townships and environmental degradation, as motivations for becoming involved in community engagement. Furthermore, this finding linked to motivations supports previous literature that explored the value of co-curricular involvement in developing a commitment to social change (Harrop-Allin, 2017; Garton & Wawrzynski, 2021).

Interestingly, despite literature arguing that co-curricular experiences disrupt assumptions and mental models (Koen & Ebrahim, 2013), the non-traditional students in our study did not generally discuss how their assumptions changed. Perhaps due to the nature of our participants (i.e. being from disadvantaged backgrounds), they are already familiar with the historical inequities of the differential development and racist policies of apartheid (Sartorius & Sartorius, 2013). If this indeed were the case, then many non-traditional students probably have already faced these experiences and do not engage in co-curricular experiences to learn about inequities. Instead, involvement is an avenue for students to learn how to navigate these inequitable systems by taking action and learning strategies for effective change.

Relational student engagement

Although several different forms of relationships were cited within Case's (2007) relational framework, given our study's emphasis on co-curricular involvement, we note those generated from our focus groups, the most resonant being participants' relationship with broader university life. SAU structured these relationships through formal and informal co-curricular involvement. For example, Kungawo recounted experiences prior to becoming involved, saying "I only went to school and came home and slept. That was my life". SAU-sponsored programmes provided a way for Kungawo to form a relationship to SAU beyond the classroom. Positive relationships formed through unstructured paths as well, as evidenced by the connections between students and custodial staff. Referring to "cleaners and gardening staff," Karabo said, "… they treat us as their children and they mother us", a sentiment echoed in informal conversations by students and staff members outside of the focus groups. These cases support Wisker and Masika's (2017) claim that relationships built from community engagement help students feel safe and supported by developing a greater sense of belonging to the university.

Though Case (2007) focused on relationships formed between students specifically within classrooms, we found the framework can also extend to inter-student relations in co-curricular spaces. These spaces open opportunities for forming new relationships that contribute to learning and engagement. Amogelang spoke to this, saying "… getting involved helps you have a different mind. I know when I first came I had my own attitudes against some people … but when I decided to get involved … you find something different

about the person than the thing you came with. Getting involved helps a lot in changing your perspective about people." As demonstrated here, interpersonal interactions are valuable for students to combat alienation by learning across differences, thus connecting them to a broader support system (Case, 2007).

In our analysis, a new theme of relational student engagement extending beyond Case's (2007) framework became evident, namely students' relationships to communities beyond the SAU campus. These relationships took two main forms: volunteerism and living in a larger community. First, participants volunteered to "give back to" their communities. As noted above, Amogelang gave back to the community because she came from a "disadvantaged background," whereas Iminathi, who volunteered at a hospice in the city witnessed poverty and "learned to appreciate more of what I have." Bokamoso and Karabo also volunteered at different organisations to see more of the city, with Karabo adding, "… it becomes part of your university life," indicating volunteerism was integrated into their studies. Second, participants discussed the experience of living in the city where SAU is located. Some participants noted the diversity in the city. Bokamoso particularly noted how the Eastern Cape as a whole seemed "more open in diversity" than her home province and how this facilitated classroom spaces in which students "learn … about us, our differences as students in the class." Bokamoso further explained, in terms of care for the environment, "it's about more than being a student and getting through your studies and being an A student. It's about being part of a community and knowing you are accountable." These types of experiences reinforced a sense of belonging for non-traditional students who feel more empowered as a result of their engagement in campus-related environments that promote an appreciation for diversity (Wisker & Masika, 2017).

Relational engagement was the most salient finding and overarching theme across all the focus groups. Whereas Case (2007) focused on relational engagement in curricular settings, we show evidence relational engagement is equally as prevalent in co-curricular spaces. Akin to Case's (2007) findings in which students had relations to their studies, university life, home, career, classmates, and lecturers, our participants also identified two of these relations in the co-curriculum. The focus groups discussed three forms of relational engagement within co-curricular involvement, two of which are also curricular relations. For the first two forms, students described their relationships with broader university life and other students in co-curricular spaces. These relations are shared with curricular relational engagement as argued by Case (2007). For the third form, students also described in detail their relations with the city and communities beyond the campus, extending Case's relational framework to larger settings. Relational engagement in the co-curriculum therefore encompasses the university as well as broader communities.

Implications

There are several implications for practice and research as a result of this study. First, student affairs staff should recognize the relational characteristics of engagement in co-curricular involvement, namely the relationship to the university and to their community, such that they are then able to identify the benefits of becoming involved (e.g. sense of belonging for

students), which then is more likely to translate into success for students. Second, student affairs staff can assist students in making meaning of their involvement in co-curricular activities by reflecting on the relational nature of engagement and connecting this to aspirational goals. In doing so, students may be better positioned to understand how these outcomes may help shape their future careers.

In terms of research, our study provides further support for the importance of using culturally relevant frameworks to understand student engagement in different national contexts. Further exploration of other components of Case's (2007) culturally relevant framework should be considered in other aspects of South African university spaces. Future research should include a more racially diverse group to better understand relational engagement dynamics, since our study only included black African participants from South Africa and neighbouring countries.

Conclusion

Studies of student engagement generally emphasise high-impact practices and strategies to engage individual students in these types of activities (Harper & Quaye, 2015; Kerr & Luescher, 2018). This paper provides evidence supporting Case's (2007) framework that student engagement in the South African context is also relational, encompassing interactions and strong connections between other students, faculty, and staff. These relationships often cultivate a sense of belonging for students both within and beyond a campus community. Analysis relying solely on US-based theories applied to other contexts may miss, overwrite, or erase experiences unique to different social, cultural, and political frameworks. By incorporating theories of engagement developed explicitly for South African students, analysis is more accurate and less ethnocentric. The relational characteristics of engagement as described by the study participants highlights a valuable component of engagement not only in South Africa but perhaps in the United States or elsewhere. Future studies on co-curricular activities in South Africa and perhaps the rest of the world should consider the importance of relational aspects, acknowledging the importance of close relationships and sense of belonging.

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Research article

A Morphogenesis Account of Student Leaders' Development of their Agency in their Undergraduate Residences at Stellenbosch University

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Abstract

This article offers an account of the development of student leaders' agency within the institutional culture of their residences at Stellenbosch University (SU). Residences at formerly white universities such as SU are struggling to align their welcoming practices and cultures to the requirements for immersion of the diverse students who now live in them. This article focuses on student experiences of alienation in SU residences with a particular interest in how they develop adaptative responses to establish a place for themselves in them. It is based on focus group discussions with student leaders which provided insights into their perceptions of their residence cultures and how they established their agency in this environment. The analysis presented in the article is based on Archer's theoretical approach to morphogenesis. The first data section of the article discusses the interaction between the students' immersion in the institutional culture of their residences, on the one hand, and the acquisition of their initial identifications in response to the environmental cues of their residences, on the other. The second data section discusses the students' active acquisition of their social identities, which allowed them to establish their aspirant pathways at the residence and the university. Overall, the article offers an account of morphogenesis at work at the institutional level of SU's residences with a specific focus on the adaptive behaviour of student leadership in this university context.

Keywords

student leadership, residences, morphogenetic approach, university transformation, institutional culture, student identity, student agency

Introduction

This article presents a discussion of the development of the agency of student leaders in the context of their living experiences in Stellenbosch University's (SU) undergraduate residences. It examines how these students develop and employ their agency in pursuit of their educational goals. The focus is on a demographically diverse group of student leaders. These students come to the university with their particular histories and identities, which

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position them in a particular way. Over time they establish their agency and identity with respect to their institutional behaviour.

Archer's morphogenesis theory (1982) is used in this article to describe the interactions between structure, culture and agency in informing and shaping the student leaders' behaviour. The contention is that the student leaders develop their agency by "counter-positioning" themselves in their interactions with the institutional culture of residences. They speak back to the institutional culture by establishing their agency within the structural and cultural context of the residences. They do this by constantly evaluating the environmental cues in the residences; they reflect on their default positioning in relation to these cues and then adjust their behavioural responses in pursuit of their academic, social and leadership goals.

This article is based on a larger qualitative study investigating the student leaders' immersion and behavioural adaptation in their residences at SU. The analysis presented in this article is based on research done with 15 student leaders in seven selected residences at SU. The study employed qualitative methods to understand the experiences of these student leaders in the residences. Based on inductive analysis, the two key themes that emerged from the data to form the basis of this article were: (1) environmental cues at work in the residences, and (2) the emergence of the student leaders' social identity. These themes are utilized to provide a narrative account of the students' agency-based development practices within their residences.

Theoretical Framework

We proceed from the view that universities and their residences are social systems constituted at the intersection between structure and agency (Archer, 1982). Drawing on Archer (1982), this article uses morphogenesis as a theoretical approach to analyse how structural and cultural dimensions interact and shape social practices. Morphogenesis is a process that describes the changes in social systems due to the interaction between structure and agent (Archer, 1982). This approach is cyclical and consists of three overlapping phases: (i) structural conditioning, (ii) social interaction, and (iii) structural elaboration (Archer, 1982). *Structural conditioning* refers to the initial distribution of material goods and cultural qualities and provides the context in which action is conditioned. A particular space can thus constrain or enable the exercise of human agency. *Social interaction* refers to the actions taken by agents within a context not of their own making. If these actions are effective and transformative, *structural elaboration* occurs, yielding new social possibilities and signalling a new cycle, introducing new conditional influences for future action (and future agency) (Archer, 1982). This approach emphasises the bi-directional force that agents and structures exert on one another in producing change. Research on student learning in higher education is generally concerned with the morphogenesis of student agency (Case, 2015). Universities hope, for example, that students "leave higher education with different knowledge and capacity for action than that with which they entered" (Case, 2015, p. 843). We consider the possibility of transformation and institutional change at the residence level.

Agential morphogenesis is dependent on the agent's experience of, and responses to, an institution's structural and cultural qualities, which are encountered as students experience the university's lived institutional culture. Institutional culture has a subjective dimension, which comprises of shared assumptions, meanings, understandings and values, as well as an objective dimension, including physical artefacts, organisational stories, and rituals and ceremonies. The prevailing institutional culture of a university cannot be seen as isolated from the outside world nor detached from its past (Agbedahin & Agbedahin, 2019). Even though South Africa is a democratic nation, the legacy of apartheid still lingers within educational institutions (see Hunter, 2019). Similarly, South Africa's colonial heritage continues to influence the discourses and behaviour in these tertiary establishments (Fomunyam, 2015). Although these historical roots cannot account for the entirety of the present institutional culture of any university and residence, they do play a significant role due to their structural and emergent properties. Research done on institutional culture in South African universities refers to people's experiences, especially those of black South Africans, as marked by racial undercurrents (Higgins, 2007; Matthews, 2015; Vice, 2015). According to Vice (2015) and Higgins (2007), this has led to the cultural contexts of higher education institutions being characterized by "whiteness" as normative. However, what these practices of "whiteness" entail has been vague. In addition to critiquing this vagueness, Vice also rejects such race-only accounts and calls for exploring the influence of race by also taking into account the impact of the "gender, class, religion and able-bodiedness (and their intersections)" on institutional culture (2015, p. 47). It is in this light that the present article examines how students from various social positionings experience the institutional culture at SU residences.

The theoretical framework presented above helps us analyse the dynamic relations and formative interactions between the cultural and structural elements of the university's residences and the students' developing agency. The institutional culture of SU, which is not of the students' own making, provides the background and basis for the development of differently positioned students' agency. As they encounter the institution, their social interactions take place in specific settings and relationships. The nature of these social interactions determines the degree to which they can fulfil their educational aspirations. Based on this conceptual framework, this article sets out to analyse student leaders' agential development at their SU residences.

Methodology

This article is part of a larger study that focuses on student leaders' behavioural identities and agency in university residences at SU. SU accommodates students from diverse backgrounds, with 43% of students being from black, coloured and Indian racial backgrounds in 2020, which represents an increase from 36.6% in 2014 (Stellenbosch University, 2021). Even though access to students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds has increased, the institution still struggles with institutional cultural transformation, characterized by students' negative experiences at the university (Fataar, 2018).

To understand some of these students' subjective experiences within their university residences, we employed a qualitative methodology that aligns with the interpretivist paradigm (Scotland, 2012). In the context of this study, it was important to select participants who had had the opportunity to develop their agency in a concerted manner over a period of time in the residence. To this end, purposive sampling was employed, as this allowed for the intentional selection of the individuals and sites, in this case, student leaders in residences (Creswell, 2012). The participants selected were in the fourth or fifth year of their university studies and had previously served on their residence house committees (HC), which positioned them uniquely at SU because of the nature of this elected leadership position. HC members fulfil essential duties within their residences, such as serving on disciplinary structures, involvement in safety measures, and educational and social programming. Their primary role focuses on building relations and a sense of community among the residence students, cultivating feelings of belonging and growth. The 15 participants who met the sampling criteria were identified and selected. We chose a diverse group of participants from a range of undergraduate residences. Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of the participants:

Table 1: Demographic distribution of participants

Gender	*N*	**Class**	*N*
Female	6	Lower-middle class	4
Male	5	Middle class	7
Queer	4	Upper class	1
		Working class	3
Race/Ethnicity	*N*	**Home Language***	*N*
Black	5	Afrikaans	7
Coloured	6	English	7
White	4	isiXhosa	1
Nationality	*N*	**University Residence Type**	*N*
Namibian	1	Single-sex female	7
Nigerian	1	Single-sex male	4
South African	12	Mixed	4
Zimbabwean	1		

The social positioning of students as reflected in the demographic data presented above and their intersectional identities serve as a microcosm of the demographic diversity present at SU. This article is based on focus group (FG) discussions with the participants, which allowed us to ascertain individual and shared thoughts, feelings and meanings related to the research questions. Each of the four FGs consisted of 4-5 participants. The FGs featured discussions of semi-structured, open-ended questions related to their understandings and

experiences of belonging, attachment and agency, along with issues of power, privilege and prestige in their residences.

Music-elicitation techniques were utilized to access participants' thoughts, ideas, feelings and emotions regarding their ways of being in their residences and the university (Allett, 2010). The intention was to understand these participants' actions, intentions and beliefs. Before the FGs, students were asked to select a piece of music that illustrated their sense of their journey in residence. They provided a written narrative before the discussion which they shared verbally with the group. The group listened to each song and shared points of resonance with their fellow participants' experience. These discussions provided rich and nuanced data on various environmental affordances and constraints experienced by the students in their respective residences. The participants' written narratives and the transcription of the discussions are the article's primary data sources.

When addressing issues of trustworthiness and authenticity as they relate to challenges that may arise because of the researcher's positionality, it is suggested that researchers need to clarify their biases (Buzzanell, 2017). We acknowledge that the selection of questions, choosing whose voices to amplify, and deciding which data to report on would be informed by our (the authors') own history and culture, as well as experience. This is the case for Davids, lead author of the article and master's student, who previously held the position of HC member, and Fataar, who was the supervisor of the study and an academic at the university. To manage and account for potential bias, we adopted a reflexive orientation which involved joint reflection during the data collection and analysis phases, respectively. Member checking was also done to ensure that participants had an opportunity to express any concerns about the results. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from Stellenbosch University.

We used an inductive approach to guide the data analysis. We first read through the data to obtain a general sense of the material. After that, each text segment was coded with reference to the research question and the emerging themes. During coding, we identified topics related to setting and context, perspectives held by participants, their way of thinking about people and objects, processes, activities, strategies and relationships (Creswell, 2012). This process was iterative, as each additional set of collected data produced new themes that were useful for understanding the phenomenon. These codes were used to build up themes and descriptions (Creswell, 2012). The themes that emerged from this process and the data presented below are based on the environmental cues that act upon students and the emergence of their social identities in the process of exercising their agency in response to these cues.

Environmental Cues at Work in the Residences

This section describes the institutional culture at SU's residences which manifests as environmental cues in two domains: (i) structural and (ii) cultural. Institutional culture refers to values, attitudes, practices and shared meanings which become embedded in an institution, even though they may not be explicitly articulated in policy or procedures (Matthews, 2015). The deeply entrenched nature of the institutional culture often makes it

difficult to pinpoint, yet it conveys strong signals to which those who interact within the institution are attuned. From the data, we describe environmental cues that stem from the way that the participants engaged with questions around institutional culture, power and privilege. Environmental cues are cues that are in place in the spaces around an individual and notify them of what is happening and how to respond to that occurrence. These cues send signals which are interpreted differently and result in different behavioural responses.

(i) Structural cues

Structural cues refer to physical characteristics that can be perceived through the senses. For participants, the names of specific rooms, pictures and words adorning walls in the residences generated specific meanings. The participating student leaders noted that the names of rooms, areas and sections in the residences were predominantly written and verbally referred to in Afrikaans. These names were often on plaques on the doors or at the entrances to these spaces. Similarly, some students reported that posters and notices put on walls by fellow residents were also mainly in Afrikaans. For participants who do not speak Afrikaans, these sets of cues convey meanings of not belonging in the space. Such an experience was captured by Khumalo,[1] who said: "As soon as you walk into the space, you're like, [...], as a person of colour (POC), as a non-Afrikaans person you go in there and you're like, ah, the space is actually not for me".

When it came to photos, participants often described the meanings which they attached to these visual artefacts in terms of the absences that they noticed. For example, when referring to portraits of earlier head students, known at SU as a *Primarius* or *Primaria* as well as house photos, which include all the residents of a specific year and are often hung up in the archive rooms of residences, participants commented on the lack of racial representation in these photos. Referring to these photos, Andrea, for instance, said that "[when] you don't see people of colour, you're like, Oh, we only came later". For the participants, the images of head students do not accurately depict the residents' current demographic diversity. These images communicated a particular perspective on what leadership looked like in the residences. Similarly, Andrea noted with disappointment that photos of earlier social gatherings included white males but no residents of colour, which sent a signal to her about "who has fun here".

The structural cues discussed above interact directly with the students' *primary agency* upon their entry into the residences. Such interaction resulted in students questioning their belonging. This did not happen for all students. The students who questioned their belonging did not speak Afrikaans as a first language, and they fell into the racial categories of black and coloured. Of those who did, both male and female students experienced this questioning of their sense of belonging. The structural cues of the residences thus acted upon these students. The meanings they developed depended on their individual dispositions. These structural cues produced perceived meanings more or less immediately upon participants' entry into the residences. This contrasts with the cultural cues discussed

1 Pseudonyms have been used for all participants to preserve their anonymity.

below, which had a more protracted impact on students' cumulative meanings attached to their stay in the residences.

(ii) Cultural cues

Cultural cues refer to the "atmosphere" of the residences and include embodied values, implicit understandings and expected behaviours. For the participants, these cues were more difficult to pinpoint and discussions about them were accompanied by a degree of uncertainty, as they sometimes struggled to articulate what they were feeling or how these cues presented themselves. The cultural cues also affected student behaviour more directly.

When asking participants to describe the dominant culture of SU, Sharine responded with "White and Afrikaans". Sharine further stated: "I felt inferior in the space in the beginning, especially, you know, because of the way I speak Afrikaans, like [...] is it like proper or not". This statement refers to more than the language. On further probing, Sharine explained that she was referring to her perceptions about how her dialect, accent and even vocabulary positioned her in the residence.

Mbali, a black female student, explained that:

> if you are a person of colour, or you do not speak Afrikaans, or you're not comfortable speaking Afrikaans, [...] you automatically feel like you're on the back foot within the community.

The experiences depicted above demonstrate that students experience discomfort based on the prevailing language usage at the residences. Mbali's phrasing "being on the back foot" illustrates how language positions students within the university community. Mbali notes that her residence's HC attempts to conscientize students in their residence and uses English during activities to ensure that no one feels excluded. But when they had a *skakel* (the colloquial term for a social interaction with another residence) with a male residence, the language would revert to an "Afrikaans narrative" (Mbali). This leaves people feeling excluded as "dominant cliques" would form, which creates clear divisions among students based on language, which is often coterminous with race.

Mbali's vignette highlights an essential aspect of structural conditioning: the tension between the specificity of residential environments as they induce integrative and differentiating processes within the broader environment of the university. The interaction between the parts and the whole is an important feature of the morphogenetic cycle, as the nature of the tension that exists within the parts themselves, "produces the state of the whole" (Archer, 1982, p. 476). The structural conditioning of language (and any other property) can thus have different effects on the positioning of students, depending on how such conditioning manifests in the different residences.

These tensions were also evident as students experienced gendered cultural cues which stem from what both male and female participants labelled as a "patriarchal culture" that exists at SU. In their experience, this manifested in the form of toxic masculinity, which refers to non-productive and even destructive behaviour of especially cis-gendered,

heterosexual men. Commenting on the interactions during the anti-gender-based violence (GBV) protests in 2019 and around gender issues on campus, Lance, a male student at a single-sex men's residence, noted that men in his residence showed a general "annoyance" when conversations of gender (and race) came up. Similarly, Carl, a black male student from a single-sex men's residence, remarked that:

> the issue that people had [referring to the residents, especially white male residents] with the protest was how it [...], I don't want to, like call anyone out. But like, it wasn't valid, we sort of focused on how respectful the people who came to protest were to us, rather than focusing on the issue that was at hand. And I think that's been a problem in male communities and male spaces.

Carl's comment highlights a reluctance to "call people out," which could be due to his racial positioning in the residence. Even though he enjoys male privilege, being black positions him at a disadvantage compared to his white male counterparts. While Mbali's earlier vignette highlights group tensions between different residences because of language and race, Carl's perspective helps us foreground intergroup tensions within one residence, which seem to be due to racial differences. However, the tensions play out concerning the subject of different beliefs around gender.

Participants who lived in mixed residences seemed to have greater fluidity in their attitudes to the way that gender is understood, expressed and accepted. Lionel, a white, queer, male student, reflects on an unexpected encounter with a fellow student who made him feel welcome in the residence even though Lionel, on occasion, wore heels and make-up. The acceptance of Lionel's expression of his gender identity by students in his residence came as a surprise to him, because even though many other students expressed their queer identity openly in the residence, there were also "very stereotypical white Afrikaans males who were judgmental and apprehensive towards the idea [of expressing a different gender identity than cis-gendered males]" (Lionel). Lionel's intersectional identity and privilege associated with being a "white man" are contested due to his expression of his gender identity. Similarly, Anthony, who also identifies as queer, shared that he could authentically express his gender identity in the residence and felt accepted despite being different. As a black male himself, he also had experiences with other black males who expressed disdain for the way he portrayed himself.

The male participants' engagement with gender cues was determined by their race and gender identification. For the queer participants, gendered cues signalled something about how they go about expressing their personal identity, whether through the choice of clothing or sharing of beliefs. The cis-gendered, heterosexual men encountered resistance in conversation with similarly positioned men due to clashing beliefs about the treatment of women. For the female participants, the gendered cues manifested in a lack of representation of women in positions of power and decision-making more generally at the institution. Rufaro commented, for instance, on the lack of female lecturers in the Engineering Department, while Andrea mentioned the lack of female "role models" at the institution. For them, the anti-GBV movement was a collective "calling out" of men's

toxic masculinity at SU in response to these gendered cues. Mbali went as far as to say that participating in the anti-GBV protests "was the first time that I felt it [belonging]" in the larger SU community. Even though these cues were more prominent for the female participants in the university, exploring them is still significant as such cues influence the potentiality of students' agency within the micro contexts of the residences. The institution's history informed the gendered cultural cues along with the behaviours of others. Participants responded to these cues by adopting specific behaviours.

Examples of these behavioural responses were most evident in the cultural cues which participants derived from their class positioning. Class differences manifested in the way in which access to money positioned the students and impacted on their behaviour. Participants stated that the cost of entertainment or recreational events would be a deciding factor in whether they or other residents would attend or not. Rufaro said that "I'm very aware that the price of an event affects the type of people that can attend, obviously, because there are some people that have more dispensable income". For example, one activity that came up frequently when discussing class differences was the annual house dances of residences. This formal event usually takes place on a wine farm or at the City Hall in the town of Stellenbosch (SU's location). The dress code for students is formal attire and a three-course meal is one of the night's highlights. These events cost upwards of ZAR 600 per person. Participants noted that these dances were not generally attended by students who could not afford to pay for the event, mainly students from previously disadvantaged groups.

Participants also said that students were expected to spend money during informal interactions. Examples of such informal interactions included hosting social bonding gatherings that involve those who live on specific floors of their residences and contributing to floor funds that pay for decorations to render spaces more "homey". Even when residences offered some money to attend house dances or offered free tickets for activities in the residences, many students who could not afford to contribute out-of-pocket for these activities opted not to take up the opportunities. Depending on how students interpreted these class-based cues, they would decide whether or not to attend these activities.

The cultural cues discussed in this section derive from language, race, gender and class and the intersections between them. Unlike the structural cues discussed in the previous section, which generated immediately perceived meanings, the meanings associated with the cultural cues developed more slowly over a longer period. The environmental cues do not have a homogenising effect on all residence students. Consequently, the cues and resultant behavioural responses signify intragroup and intergroup tensions in the micro contexts of the university. These cues condition but do not determine the potential for agency for the differently positioned students, which means that students are able to mediate between the cues, their behaviour and the outcomes of their specific responses. Participants generally selected a course of action aligned with their aspirations and the perceived outcomes of these actions. As Archer (2003) explains, these perceptions need not

be accurate; however, students' perceptions of these outcomes have a conditioning effect on their behaviours and agency.

Understanding how environmental cues may condition student behaviour is essential. This allows us to familiarise ourselves with the challenges students face as well as their opportunities as they develop their agency. The section below will outline how students move through critical moments as they develop their emerging social identities in the residence.

The Emergence of the Social Identities of the Residence Student Leaders

This section describes the adaptation process students undergo as they engage with the environmental cues. It discusses how the participating students' social identities emerged during their time living in residence. According to Archer (2004), an individual gradually acquires a social identity through three developmental processes: primary agency, corporate agency, and becoming social actors. We will discuss each of these processes, starting with their entry into SU and ending with their experiences as HC members. Students' social demographics, life histories and motivations for study and pursuing leadership positions in the residences are central to this account.

(i) The move from primary agency to corporate agency

Per Archer, all of the participants entered SU as *primary agents.* She uses this concept to refer to a person's identity or agency as a result, for example, of being born into certain conditions, such as being female or middle-class and having inherited certain forms of cultural capital from parents, that allow these agents to occupy a place of privilege or disadvantage involuntarily (Archer, 2004). The participants in this study occupied a variety of positions that have been imposed upon them by society. Understanding how students reflect on the positions they were born into is important in accounting for morphogenesis (Archer, 2004). To illustrate how the students reflected on their primary agency in the residences, we turn to Shaun, a coloured, queer student who lived in a mixed-sex residence. Reflecting on his initial sense of belonging, he said: "You know, for someone like me as a POC. I obviously didn't feel that [belonging] once I got there [into the residence] immediately". Similarly to Shaun, students used socio-demographic descriptors of race, language, gender and class as validation of their experiences. Participants thus showed consciousness of their primary identity and hyper-awareness that their experience may be different from those who are positioned in another way.

Even though the environmental cues could constrain the development of their agency, all of the participants in this study moved from primary agency to *corporate agency*. The latter term refers to how students were able to formulate goals and actively organise to achieve these goals. Archer explains aptly:

> Only those who are aware of what they want can articulate it to themselves and others, and have organised in order to obtain it, can engage in concerted action to reshape or retain the structural and/or cultural features in question. These are termed corporate agents. (2004, p. 265)

Shaun and Anthony's accounts of their educational pursuits demonstrates such concerted action. They were born into families who could not afford to pay for tertiary education, yet they defied the odds and overcame great struggles to pursue tertiary studies. Shaun "always had this dream of coming to Stellenbosch University". He grew up in Kuilsriver and attended a no-fee high school in the area. In his final year of high school a teacher helped Shaun to apply to a different university in the province. After realising that this teacher had not, in fact, completed the application, Shaun and his mother went to this university, where an administrator shattered his dreams by telling him that he would "never be accepted to any university with those marks". Shaun opted to take an unplanned gap year, during which he applied to SU and got accepted. His father's boss gifted him his registration fee of ZAR 10 000 and he later secured a scholarship for his undergraduate studies. Shaun realised his dream through perseverance and support from family and his community. Perseverance and resilience became key to his university journey.

Anthony is of the view that "I honestly think that Stellenbosch University chose me". Anthony grew up in a township in Strand and lived with his mother, a domestic worker. He comes from a large family of 12 siblings. Anthony attended a Muslim high school college in the area, which exposed him to cultural diversity. After matriculating, he worked at a supermarket to assist his mother with household expenses and support his sister's schooling. He decided to attend SU in pursuit of studies that would give him economic independence later in life. He managed to interact with his peers and lecturers, and the university's support infrastructure gave him confidence and a single-minded focus during his university studies.

These two short biographies illustrate how students transformed their primary agency into corporate agency in the course of seeing through their decision to pursue tertiary education. Through the interaction with family, friends and mentors, they have become transformed. However, participants' corporate agency was not limited to their achieving academic goals but also towards their becoming in other spheres of university life. Helen, who grew up in Paarl and identifies as queer, shared that her *Primaria* inspired her approach to university. During orientation, the *Primaria* shared that "university is about getting more than a degree". Helen thus aspired to grow in many aspects of her life during her time at SU, while always wanting to remain true to herself. Mbali entered SU with many fears, especially related to being away from home for long periods. After entering SU, she felt those fears diminish as a result of her residence community. Her welcoming experience translated into her motivation for pursuing student leadership, as she wanted other students of colour to also experience the same kind of acceptance and inclusion. Helen and Mbali's experiences are examples of how the interaction with others helps with transforming primary agents into corporate agents.

Each participant had at least one story where they reflected on the influence of senior residence students, staff members, mentors or HC members who inspired them to become involved in residence activities or supported them in doing so. These parties are corporate agents who, in serving the House through their various positional and non-positional roles, became catalysts in the participants' moving from primary agency towards corporate agency. Thus, group elaboration was achieved, yielding increased corporate agency (Archer, 2004).

The result was that participants opted to participate in residence sports teams, cultural activities such as SU choral acapella group, and joined organising committees. Immersion in these activities was in direct contrast to the messaging that these cues conveyed. All the POC students became involved in managerial and leadership activities, even though they saw little racial representation in leadership. By merely representing people of colour, or queer bodies on student leadership structures, these participants redefined who could aspire to such positions.

Similarly, they went against the residence cues' representations of "who has fun here" (Andrea). They opted to attend events and participate in activities where they could contribute to the residence and have fun with others. Their ability to actively pursue their aspirations with assistance from others may be why they were able to resist and "speak back" to these environmental cues. This then demonstrates "double morphogenesis", which refers to how these residence-based students become corporate agents who pursued self-directed goals, which in turn impacted on and transformed their residence culture.

The article now looks at these HC roles in order to describe how participants moved from corporate agency to become social actors.

(ii) Becoming social actors

A social actor is someone who can personify a social role in which one's personal identity can be fully expressed (Case, 2015). The social role in question here is that of an HC member in a residence, who holds a position of responsibility and influence, with the power to constrain or enable. Becoming a social actor requires mediation between the personal and social identities of the individual (Archer, 2004). The first move towards becoming a social actor takes place when the personal identity continues to hold sway over the social identity (Archer, 2004). Here students use their previous experiences from their life histories and experience as spectators in the residence to make their initial role choices. All of the students in this study chose to avail themselves of the social role of HC member, an elected leadership position in the residence, which shows that they made the first move towards becoming a social actor.

When they were elected, they had the choice to experiment in order to make the role their own, which is referred to as "personification" (Archer, 2004). During this experimentation, the emerging social identity impacts on the emerging personal identity (Archer, 2004); students experiment and then reflexively evaluate this experience. For the participants in this study, this seemed to be the most challenging stage of becoming a social actor. This experimentation was met with resistance from peers in the residences. Anthony explains that:

> I regard myself as a futurist, as an agent for change, as a voice to those who don't have a voice. I don't want anyone to experience what I had in my first year. So, my role is to sort of be the torch there at the end of the tunnel. But that is sort of met with a lot of resistance.

Anthony's initially hesitant persona in his HC role translated into developing an emerging social identity as an "agent of change". His description of his role as a torch bearer shows a level of personification that comes up against resistance from those who want to maintain

the status quo in the residences. Similarly, Andrea recalls a painful incident during her leadership term as *Primaria*:

> there was a lot of negative things [said] about me as a Prim. How I'm not representing Moonlight[2] residence, how dare I make this decision on behalf of Moonlight residence? The House wanted this, why did you decide this for the house? And just that animosity, as like I should have jumped in with this tradition. I shouldn't speak on behalf of Moonlight because I can't represent the voices when some of us don't agree. Yeah, I felt very alone in that moment. But I knew I did the right thing.

Andrea's experience highlights the nature of the resistance that students faced while occupying and experimenting with the HC roles, and the tension between her wanting to make the role her own and her house members' expectations about what she is allowed to do in the role. For Andrea, knowing that "I did the right thing" was important. This shows that she reflected on her actions, how others perceived them, and what she ultimately took from this experience. Such a perspective aligns with Archer's view that experimentation in the making of the HC role impacts on participants' identities as they learn more about themselves and their capabilities, and adapt in response to this learning (Archer, 2004). All of the students in this study embarked on transforming at least one practice, tradition or view in their residences as they occupied their HC role and were met with resistance. This made the move onto the third stage of becoming a social actor more difficult for students, but they persevered regardless.

When students overcome the challenges that emerge during experimentation, they move to the third moment which entails synthesis of the personal and social identities (Archer, 2004); students have to decide how much they will put into the role. Lionel describes his student leadership journey as a "bittersweet duality". He explains that:

> student leadership, although it gave me a very good time in my life, it gave me a purpose. It gave me the kind of satisfaction and fulfilment and it gave me drive to work with people, to resonate with people to be a representation for, you know, the first year coming in not knowing anyone, and being scared of being queer, being openly queer […] at the same time also having this situation be extremely taxing on myself, on my mental health.

Lionel's honesty and vulnerability prompted other students in his focus group also to share their struggles of finding a healthy balance of mind and body in meeting the demands of student leadership. In students' pursuit of realising the potential of the HC role and achieving a synthesis between personal and social identities, their experiences demonstrated sacrifice. Anthony explains that:

> Well, I haven't graduated yet because of the many sacrifices but I don't regret any of that. I did doubt myself as to why I made certain decisions. But in hindsight, when I look back at where the community is, at what we managed to achieve for people of colour in this space […], I am proud that I was part of a narrative, of a vision, of a group that that was steering for, for actual and tangible transformation.

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2 Pseudonyms have been used in reference to residence names to further preserve participant anonymity.

For these students, the sacrifices made in the name of student leadership paid off, yet at some cost to other aspects of their lives. This is archetypal of social actors who have been able to make decisions about their concerns and how they prioritise sometimes competing concerns, such as academic achievement versus leadership success. These students thus have emerged as social actors over the time spent in their residences. They achieved this by mediating between their aspirations, dispositions and goals, and the expectations of their HC role. Through experimentation and reflection, they succeeded in making the HC roles their own. They did this despite experiencing some environmental cues as constraining and in the face of resistance from peers.

Conclusion

This article offers a situated account of morphogenesis at work at the institutional level of SU's residences. It offers a perspective that residences are important contexts in which student's adaptive behaviour and leadership response sets are displayed. This article contributes to elaborations on how structure, culture and agency influence the students' being and becoming within university residences (Barnett, 2009). The study employed the theoretical lenses of morphogenesis to offer an account of student leaders' experiences. The institutional culture of the residences condition students' perceptions of, and behavioural responses towards, environmental cues, which are structural and cultural. The environmental cues at higher education institutions in South Africa have been characterized by "whiteness" (Vice, 2015; Higgins, 2007). The accounts from the participants showed that these cues were constraining, as they intersected with race, language, class and gender. Regardless, participants developed defiant behavioural responses and spoke back to the institution in the ways in which they developed their agency-orientated practices.

In terms of students' agency, they could transform from their primary agency at the start of their university journey into social actors. By the end of their leadership term, they had enacted practices that brought about change with respect to greater inclusiveness at their residences. The student leaders thus became change agents in their residences and the broader university. Becoming change agents within the residences was not an easy task, as students faced both personal and environmental challenges along this journey. The environmental challenges came in the form of cues that signalled the conditioning of students' behaviours and senses of belonging. These cues interacted with students' identity and positioning, and students developed behavioural responses to these cues by counter-positioning themselves, that is, intentionally going against the messaging of the environmental cues. They did this by becoming involved in residence activities. Through this initial involvement, they began becoming effective social actors through experimenting with various roles that aligned with their goals. The success of these endeavours propelled them into pursuing positional student leadership, which gave them the space for further exploration that in turn allowed them to integrate their emerging personal and social identities.

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Research article

Experiences of Students Living with Physical Disabilities at a University of Technology in KwaZulu-Natal

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Abstract

Society's inadequate response to disability impacts people's physical health, social relationships and lives in general which can be perceived in the realms of family, friends, neighbours, psychological state and level of independence. The consequences of a disability can have an impact on multiple levels, the personal, interpersonal, family and social (Catherin & Shanbhang, 2015). These impacts are mirrored – and in some ways exaggerated – in the lives of students living with disabilities. Students living with physical disabilities at universities of technology may experience challenges that negatively affect their studies. The purpose of the study reported in this article was to explore the experiences of students who are living with physical disabilities at a selected university of technology in KwaZulu-Natal. The study adopted a qualitative design. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were employed to collect data from the 10 participants. And participation of students living with physical disabilities was secured through the snowball sampling technique. The findings of the research revealed a variety of challenges that students with physical disabilities encounter at the selected university of technology.

Keywords

higher education, challenges, students, physical disabilities, university of technology

Introduction

Physical disability is the long-term loss or impairment of part of or a person's entire body function, resulting in a limitation of physical functioning, mobility, dexterity or stamina (Smeltzer et al., 2017). Similarly, for Narayanan (2018), disability is part of a human condition that renders a person temporarily or permanently physically impaired. Monroe County Community College (n.d.) defines physical disability as a condition that highly limits a person from physical activities, for example, walking, climbing stairs, reaching, carrying and lifting. Therefore, such limitations can hinder the person from accomplishing tasks of daily living.

Higher education has proven itself critical to (potentially improving) quality of life for especially the systemically marginalized today. However, it is evident that people living

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with disabilities have generally limited access to education in many parts of the world, especially in Africa and Asia (Opoku et al., 2015). Growth in the wider acknowledgement of this deficit and movements for social justice have influenced widespread developments in institutional recognition of social responsibility, leading institutions of higher learning in many countries to increase enrolment numbers of students living with disabilities. But trying to ensure full inclusion for the historically disadvantaged members of our communities, such as people living with physical disabilities, has different implications rooted in the needs of different groups. Thus, Dalton et al. (2019) suggest that universities must consider matters of physical and programmatic access in order to achieve the goal of inclusive education for people living with disabilities. This is in line with Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities (Schulze, 2010, p. 75).

Engelbrecht and De Beer (2014) emphasise that higher education institutions still need to do more research on improving accessibility and living conditions for students living with disabilities. Murray et al. (2013) suggest that future studies analyse and amplify the importance of specific sources of support needed for students with disabilities. People with acquired physical disabilities experience many stressful situations in life because of various personal and environmental barriers (Byra & Cwirynkalo, 2018).

According to Opoku et al. (2015), the physical accessibility of school buildings is an important requirement to make education accessible to students with disabilities. Nonetheless, this is often ignored as most educational facilities are constructed without considering the concerns and needs of persons with disabilities. Barriers in academic institutions that obstruct access to education for people who are physically impaired include narrow doors, inappropriate seating arrangements, rugged terrains, inaccessible toilet facilities and lack of ramps.

According to the data produced by the South African Board for People Practice (2017, p. 2), the national disability prevalence rate in South Africa is 7.5%. Disability is more prevalent among females compared to males (8.3% and 6.5% respectively). More than half (53.2%) of persons aged 85 and older reported having a disability. The prevalence of a specific type of disability shows that 11% of persons aged five years and older have visual difficulties, 4.2% have cognitive difficulties (remembering/concentrating), 3.6% have hearing difficulties, and about 2% have communication, self-care and walking difficulties. Moreover, persons with severe disabilities have trouble in accessing education and employment opportunities.

Theoretical Framework

The ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1992) guided this study. According to this theory, human development is influenced by various forms of environmental systems, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. The topic under study necessitated focus on microsystems and exosystems. According to Ettekal and Mahoney (2017), microsystems are the settings in which individuals directly interact with the immediate environment. Friends, classmates, family, neighbours and other people who have direct interaction with one in one's microsystem form part of this environment which

can positively or negatively shape the development a person. Attitudes projected towards a person by the environment may predict how the world is perceived by a person living with physical disabilities.

In microsystems, students who are living with physical disabilities should feel connected and thus should be able to forge healthy relationships with others. Students living with physical disabilities should not in any way feel left out of the system because of their conditions. The university plays a critical role in ensuring that the needs of the students living with physical disabilities are met accordingly. Sincero (2012) defines the exosystem as the setting in which there is a link between the context where the person does not have an active role and the context in which the person is actively participating. Assistance must be offered to families so that they are motivated in their exosystem relations. Some students who are living with physical disabilities have no active roles within the university. They do not participate in any decision-making or student leadership.

Literature Review

Challenges experienced by students living with physical disabilities

Soltani et al. (2011) state that it has been accepted that people living with disabilities have fewer opportunities and have a lower quality of life than the non-disabled. However, not giving people with disabilities opportunities to achieve and having low to no expectations of them is a form of discrimination (University of Canberra, 2014). Thus, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities Article 8 (a) explicitly states that awareness should be raised throughout society including at the family level, regarding persons with disabilities, and to foster respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.

People with physical disabilities encounter numerous other problems with their families and society. They often are unable to utilize their talents due to structural barriers in our wider society and the families of some tend to fail in caring for them in the absence of special rehabilitation and care centres, thus being deprived access to basic human rights such as the rights to health and education. People living with disabilities should be encouraged to live independently and participate in all aspects of life.

Their capacity to realise this independence is often further hindered by the difficulties physically disabled face when it comes to accessing various facilities, despite the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) containing the Bill of Rights which seek to ensure that no person is discriminated against. Chapter 2, Section 9(3) prohibits discrimination of all sorts including discrimination based on disability. This also includes access to the physical environment, transportation and information and communications technology systems (United Nations, n.d.). Lack of access to the aforementioned resources may therefore be regarded as an infringement of peoples' right to have their dignity respected and protected.

Yet the free movement of people living with disabilities continues to be restricted due to most buildings usually not being built in a manner that is accommodative of their bodies. Furthermore, even where some of the buildings have provisions for wheelchairs, depending on ability, some wheelchair users may need additional assistance to manoeuvre

in these spaces (Masarira, 2017). Yarfi et al. (2017) stress that public places and spaces should be accessible to everyone, whatever bodily ability. This calls for the integration of the wheelchair user into society, thereby granting them the capacity of participating in activities of daily living and ensuring equality in daily life.

Bascom (2017) reminds us, moreover, that transportation accessibility is very important for finding employment, education, healthcare and social interaction. People who face challenges in obtaining access to transportation are considered "transportation disadvantaged", which include those of lower socio-economic status, aging individuals and persons with disabilities. Accessing public transportation is a key drawback for people with disabilities, both young and old (Asia-Pacific, 2013). Additionally, they are likely to face more challenges and difficulties while they are traveling in and using public transport, as the needs of the disabled are rarely catered for.

Such deficiencies in access to buildings, public space and transportation in South Africa are arguably reflective of lacking regulation, and thus inadequate governmental enforcement. Therefore, the government must take all necessary measures in ensuring that rights of people with disabilities are protected, and thus allowing them access, on an equal basis with others, to facilities and services open or provided to the public, in both urban and rural areas. This includes institutions of higher learning. As a means of addressing some of these systemic inadequacies in the context of higher education, a framework for disability inclusion was recognized and established in 2018 (Dalton et al., 2019, p. 2).

Currently, there are gaps in universities' meeting the needs of students living with physical disabilities. This might be ascribed to the lack of awareness of how some of the experiences affect these students. Students living with physical disabilities face many challenges that can often, and quickly, progress beyond the physical if not addressed. The physical environments of universities, including the availability of sensor doors, ramps, fully functional elevators, to name a few, impact on the experiences of students with physical disabilities (Healey et al., 2011). Healey et al. (2011) contend that the lack of appropriate and adequate provisions of spaces and resources for students living with disabilities at the institutions of higher learning in South Africa adversely affect their education.

Challenges faced by students with disabilities are further compounded by the fact that they often isolate themselves from others because of rejection, fear of rejection and misunderstanding of their conditions and abilities. Their experiences of simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility leave them feeling misunderstood by their non-disabled peers and lecturers (Nel et al., 2015). According to Maotoana (2014), students living with disabilities are often discriminated against in their personal and social lives, experiences which tend to be mirrored in their academic involvements. Non-disabled students are found to be stigmatising and discriminating towards the students with disabilities. Negative attitudes of peers have a tremendous impact on the life of an individual with a handicap. The person's self-concept, cognitive and social development, academic performance and general psychological health may be largely affected (Idrees & Ilyas, 2012). This calls for universities to play a vital role in making sure that students who are living with physical disabilities are treated equitably and are by no means discriminated against.

Discrimination can be limited if the non-disabled recognize how they respond to students who are living with disabilities. Not allowing a student to go to campus because of a disability is considered as discriminatory and restricts the student's learning opportunities. This can be as limiting as the disability itself. In the context of education, it is unlawful for an education provider to discriminate directly or even indirectly against students because of their disability. Moreover, an education provider is expected to take positive steps in ensuring that people with disabilities have equal access to education and the provision of services (Child Law Advice, 2018).

Tough et al. (2017) indicate that people with disabilities or body impairments often are disadvantaged due to limited opportunities to participate in social life. Hence, there is evidence that favourable exchanges with ones' proximate social environment, for example, family, friends and work life, exert beneficial effects on health and well-being. Furthermore, the ability to share one's life and connect emotionally through friendship is habitually reported as a critical factor in the development and maintenance of life satisfaction.

The role of environmental barriers and discrimination in contributing to poverty and exclusion of people with physical disabilities is now well understood. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities *(*Article 3) outlines the measures needed to remove barriers and promote participation. Moreover, there is a need to develop appropriate opportunities for people with disabilities throughout their life course (Business & Disability Organization, 2018). The work of scholars like Tough et al. (2017) reflect the observations of the World Health Organization (2011), that response to disabilities has undergone a radical change in recent decades.

In line with these changes and scholarship reflective thereof, the study on which this article is based sought to explore the experiences of students living with physical disabilities at a university of technology in KwaZulu-Natal. This included exploring the challenges that the students experience relating to the infrastructural setting and the effects that the structural hindrances have on students' academic development. By centralising the experiences of students living with physical disabilities, the research study hopes to contribute to the discovery and improved understanding of the factors that impact this student community and offer recommendations on how these factors may be addressed. The authors also hope to have helped the participant students feel empowered by the process of voicing their main concerns regarding their lived experiences.

Research Methodology

An exploratory, qualitative design was employed to conduct the study. According to Elkatawneh (2016), qualitative research aims to explore the meanings people attribute to their experiences, their culture and how they view a particular issue or case. Swedberg (2018) indicates that exploratory research is used to investigate a problem that is not clearly defined. Exploration can produce results that are valid and insightful if conducted in a manner that is transparent and self-reflexive (Reiter, 2017). This approach was appropriate for this study as it was used to better understand the experiences of students living with physical disabilities.

Park et al. (2020) identify a paradigm as a guide to scientific discoveries through their assumptions and principles, which helps illuminate the quality of findings that support scientific studies and identify gaps in generating sound evidence. Polit and Beck (2012) suggest that the constructivist paradigm is mostly aligned to qualitative research and assumes that reality is not a fixed entity but rather a construction of the individual participating in the research, and that many constructions are possible. For this study, a constructivist paradigm was adopted as participants shared their experiences and their realities were interpreted to discover the underlying meaning of events and activities. The study was conducted at a university of technology (UoT).

Kumar (2014) suggests that a study population can be a group of individuals from whom the information is required or can be obtained to find answers to the research questions. The researcher must decide who constitutes the study population to select the appropriate participants. The study was open to all students from first-year level to the fourth-year level of study, registered in all faculties. The total number of registered students living with physical disability was 17. For this study, the targeted number of prospective participants was 15 students (male and female). Only 10 gave consent to participate in the study.

Kumar (2014) states that a sample can be selected based on being easily accessible or based on the researcher's judgement that the person has extensive knowledge about an occurrence. This helps the researcher to obtain knowledge about their situation and experiences. The sampling strategy is the plan that the researcher sets forth to ensure that the sample used in a research study represents the population from which the sample is drawn (Landreneau, n.d.). The first participant was approached through the university's Disability Unit. Thereafter, the study employed a snowball sampling technique. According to Naderifar et al. (2017), snowball sample is defined as a non-probability sampling technique in which the samples have traits that are rare to find. Moreover, Naderifar et al. (2017) suggest that snowball sampling is used when the samples relevant to characteristics of the research are not easily accessible. Furthermore, De Vos et al. (2011) highlight that the chain can easily be broken, therefore the researcher should preferably ask each participant to identify other members instead of only one.

The researchers collected data to the point where no new information was coming forth, thus sample size was determined by data saturation. From the 15 possible participants, only 10 participants consented to participate in the research study. Participants were informed through the letter of information that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw their participation should they feel the need to do so.

Demographic data

Nesterova and Jackson (2018) state that the gender gap in universities has tilted in favour of women because of increased access and inclusion of women in higher education, contrary to this study. Invitations to participate in the study were open to all students living with disabilities at the university of technology. However, overwhelmningly more male students took up the opportunity. Students who participated in this research study were aged

between 19 and 39 years. While this represents a good age spread, the aim of the study was not to gauge the maturity of participants and the effect it has on how they deal with challenging experiences.

Furthermore, of the participants, two were registered for information accounting, three for financial accounting one was registered for interior design, one was registered for taxation, one was registered for human resources, one was registered for business administration and one was registered for civil engineering. Three participants were in their first year, while five participants were in their third year and two participants were in their second year. The availability and willingness of the students to participate in the study is commendable as participation was purely voluntary. It is noted, however, that the programmes above are not a true representation of all the programmes offered at the UoT. The table below outlines the demographic information of participants.

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

Participant no.	Gender	Age	Course registered for	Year of study
Participant 1	Male	19	Information Technology	1st
Participant 2	Male	29	Financial Accounting	3rd
Participant 3	Male	23	Interior Design	3rd
Participant 4	Male	20	Taxation	2nd
Participant 5	Male	19	Accounting	1st
Participant 6	Male	22	Human Resources	3rd
Participant 7	Female	22	Information Technology	3rd
Participant 8	Male	23	Financial Accounting	3rd
Participant 9	Male	39	Business Admin	1st
Participant 10	Male	26	Civil Engineering	2nd

Participation was voluntary and participants were given the option to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. Ethical clearance from the UoT was obtained. A limitation is that the study was conducted among students with physical disabilities at one UoT and therefore the results cannot be generalized to the entire population of students with disabilities in KZN.

A semi-structured interview schedule was designed. The areas of focus within the interview schedule were (a) challenges facing students living with physical disability; (b) how conducive the infrastructure is to the students' conditions; (c) the effects of the infrastructural hindrances on students' academic development; (d) determining if they can build social relations with other people and whether they feel a sense of belonging within the university environment; and (e) assess what positive interventions may be offered by the university to students with physical disabilities. Data were collected using face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim before data analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data. The themes that emerged from the data are presented next.

Findings

Challenges faced by students living with physical disabilities

The interview data looked into challenges experienced by students in terms of the formation and maintenance of relationships in four spheres. These spheres were relationships with fellow students; relationships with lecturers; relationships with other stakeholders and the infrastructural setting for students living with physical disabilities.

Relationships with fellow students

In response to the question about their relationships with fellow students, Participant 5 pointed out "some students think that they are better than us and also think that we are a burden to them". These sentiments were echoed by Participant 7 who added, "other female students look down at me because of my condition. I think it is because they think I will depend on them and use my disability as an excuse". Participant 1 felt that it was not easy for him to fit in as he said "it was hard uh ... it was not easy to fit in because I am disabled, the environment, it was difficult because I am used to being surrounded by people who are disabled". However, most participants felt that they coped because they are assertive and can freely express themselves when feeling left out or excluded and that they naturally connect with other people.

Relationships with lecturers

Participants felt that their relationships with the lecturers could be improved. Participant 6 felt that sometimes lecturers are not accommodative and added "let's say I have a problem with my wheelchair on my way to lectures, I must fix it, and when I get into the class it becomes a big issue, the lecturer thinks that I am undermining him/her. This causes a poor relationship between me and the lecturer". Participant 1 felt that he always has to make lecturers aware of the hindrances that he encounters concerning the "accessibility of lecture venues". He confirmed that it can be frustrating when he "negotiates for the change of venues "as it makes him the "centre of attention".

Relationship with other stakeholders

Many students felt the relationship with other stakeholders needed improvement. Participant 3 felt strongly about the dean of students not being considerate of students with disabilities as he contended, "at some point, we went to see the dean of students to table some of our concerns. The dean of students didn't even want to listen to us and just said – out you go! - out you go! - you don't have to come here; I only deal with your representatives". The same goes for the Student Representative Council – "when running for elections they canvas and only remembers that there is the disabled community at the end of their canvassing" (Participant 1).

The infrastructural setting for students living with physical disabilities

Wheelchair-bound students found that getting to campus and their lecture venues take a long time. Participant 1 confirms by stating "I attend lectures at Campus A - other students can easily cross the road - but for me, I have to go around the entire campus because I can't use the gate across the street because of the staircases. I have to go around and use the main gate (where there are no cars), that is used by the cars every day, which is time-consuming … and also dangerous since the road is busy with inconsiderate taxi drivers every day." Participant 5 concurs, saying "it takes a long way to have access to lecture rooms. Yah, it is a long way, like if I am attending at Campus C, I step outside of campus and 'walk' down the street". Participant 7 echoed the same sentiments: "there is no other route therefore I find myself on the road avoiding cars".

All participants felt that getting to the lecture venue itself is a big challenge for students living with disabilities. That operational lifts and a better system to ensure that they are serviced well and promptly are needed is clear from the experience recounted by Participant 1:

> uh – lecture venues – were a problem to me to the point where I ended up not attending and I missed out, like in the first semester there was a class that I did not go to – that was for the first-year experience and again, this semester also there was a class which is supposed to be in Campus C, D Block. The problem is that sometimes elevators are non-functional so I couldn't go.

Participant 6 was even more explicit in this regard: "we have a problem with lifts, they are always out of order. Especially at Campus C, the student lift always has a problem. If it wasn't for the staff lift, I would not attend some of the classes". Participant 8 gave voice to the problem of access: "I also wish that the school can have transport for students with the disability because the students on wheelchair – when it rains it becomes a problem for them to move from the residences to attend lectures. I am saying this on behalf of those who are using motorized wheelchairs who operate on batteries. If those batteries get exposed to water can be damaged". Participant 9 added "the lifts are the major problem, we once asked [university maintenance staff] to fix tiles as it is dangerous – tiles are slippery but we have not seen any difference".

Improvement of living conditions for students living with physical disabilities

According to Participant 8, "[university management] told us that they care about people who are living with disabilities, but they are doing things that do not match their words. I would need the university to take our needs/challenges seriously. It shouldn't get to the point where students throw in the towel and give up because her needs are not attended to. As we exhaust all the avenues where we are supposed to [get] help but to no avail – that becomes a problem".

Participants suggested that lifts to the lecture venues are needed, as using stairs is very difficult. Participant 2 shared the view that "the UoT should have ramps for wheelchair-

bound students and have sensor doors for the students that are on wheelchairs to move freely as they enter the doors". Participant 3 felt that leadership should engage and listen to their concerns, urging that "the UoT management must put themselves in the shoes of the disabled in order for them to know exactly what the disabled are going through." Participant 10 added "how I wish there could be a disabled person in a leadership position to influence decision-making."

In light of the apparent lack of accommodation shown to students living with disabilities, awareness campaigns to educate people about disabilities were viewed as important by all participants. Participant 5 took the view that "awareness campaigns should be facilitated to sensitize people and educate them about disabilities that can help to reduce the stigma that is attached to disability". Participant 6 concurred by stating "most importantly, may the university work more on doing campaigns and awareness programmes around campus for us students who are living with disability so that students will know about us."

Discussion

The framework of the following discussion is based on the two lenses provided by the ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner, namely the microsystem and exosystem.

Microsystem

While some of the participants expressed having no challenges building and maintaining relationships with peers, perhaps due to the advantageous effects of high self-esteem and a good sense of humour; others feel rejected, discriminated against, and at times treated as if they do not exist. This is noted in the literature which confirms that non-disabled members of the faculty and student body often lack knowledge about and experience with students with disabilities, an ignorance that can directly impact the success and campus engagement of students (Evans et al., 2017). One may expect lecturers to be understanding and accommodative and when that is proven otherwise, students suffer a double blow. This statement resonates with the idea that there is a lack of either awareness on the side of educators or inadequate support available within the university (Melero et al., 2018; Mol et al., 2019). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities Article 4(i) emphasises the training of professionals and staff working with persons with disabilities to better provide the assistance and services required.

Exosystem

There are numerous challenges associated with the way buildings are designed which affect the accessibility of lecture venues and other service buildings. Further, due to the lack of structural accommodations, moving from the place of residence to campus poses a threat to wheelchair-using students, as they have to contend with taxis and their often-inconsiderate drivers. Thus, there should be a way to assist students to move safely from residences to campus.

The scarcity of lifts and preponderance of non-operational lifts pose further hurdles for students living with physical disabilities, forcing them to forego lectures when the challenge of getting to class on time proves insurmountable. When the lifts are not working, stairs are not an option for a wheelchair-bound person. While ramps can make for better alternatives to lifts, as noted, there are none. And although sensor doors may appear luxurious accessories to the ignorant eye, their function is a critical need to wheelchair-user and people reliant on crutches, as opening doors requires them to assume positions impossible or uncomfortable for them, which may otherwise be effortless for non-disabled persons. These findings align with the view of Evans et al. (2017). The UoT should monitor and service lifts regularly to ensure that they are in working order. Another option can be that lectures take place only on ground floor venues. In lecture venues, desks and chairs are bolted to the floor, making movement a challenge for a student with artificial legs, as flexible movement is limited. This then forces the student to sit rigidly and uncomfortably throughout the lecture period. There should be designated spaces reserved for students with special needs.

The challenges mentioned above are apparent even at the residences where resources allocated do not meet the needs of students living with physical disabilities. The kitchen is situated on the first floor and this creates an access challenge for students living with physical disabilities. Students using crutches find it a great strain, as they have to carry pots and other necessities up and down the stairs, which they do nonetheless because they have to eat. The university has provided platforms for students to table their grievances. While the existence of this forum is a net positive, the expectations of students are not always met. Ntombela (2013, p. 493) contends "even getting to those platforms such as student counselling, Disability unit or the clinic is met with challenges as they are inappropriately located thus are not accessible using a wheelchair".

Limitations of the Study

While the study realised its goal of exploring the experiences of students living with physical disabilities at a university of technology in KwaZulu-Natal, it came up short in terms of generalizability of its findings due to issues of representation. There were more male than female students who participated in the research study. The courses to which participants of this study are registered do not provide an accurate representation of all the courses offered by the university of technology. In terms of racial demographics, the study consisted of only black students, as students from other racial groups did not consent to participate. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be extended to any other institution of higher learning and cannot be generalized as the main focus of this study was only on this university of technology in KwaZulu-Natal.

Recommendations for Practitioners

According to Ferguson et al. (2019), institutions of higher education across the world have recognized that they have a role to play in achieving full societal inclusion for people with differing needs and/or disabilities. Critical to the realization of this effort is the preparedness of institutions in ensuring that students with special needs and disabilities are

not made to feel overlooked or have their conditions unaccommodated. The following are recommendations to practitioners that can be used to address challenges facing students living with physical disabilities.

Primarily, meaningful acceptance of this role entails that such institutions accept accountability for their successes and failures at providing a welcoming environment and appropriate services for students with physical disabilities. Key to this is knowledge, thus, non-disabled practitioners need to develop their skills through education on issues related to disability. Having to deal with professionals underdeveloped in dealing with students living with physical disabilities creates unnecessary problems and hinders expected care and service for students. Professional development has a positive impact and could have far-reaching long-term benefits for students with disabilities (Park et al., 2012).

Students living with physical disabilities are a vulnerable group and therefore may need extra support to voice their concerns and ensure they are heard. Wessel et al. (2015) recommended that practitioners dealing with servicing students living with disabilities should teach students how to advocate for themselves, yet without abdicating practitioner responsibility in advocating for such students. Moreover, practitioners should work with other officials responsible for maintenance-related issues, for example, monitoring and servicing lifts regularly to ensure that they are in working order; and/or proposing that lectures take place only in ground floor venues.

Lastly, there is a need for the development and implementation of disability-awareness programmes. Educating members of the wider student body and staff about disability could foster a more welcoming environment and sense of belonging for students with disabilities.

Further Research

This research study focused on the experiences of majority male students living with physical disabilities at a university of technology in KwaZulu-Natal. The researchers learned that there are many challenges affecting students with physical disabilities, including the attitudes of their peers towards them. Thus, further research is needed to investigate the knowledge and attitudes of non-disabled students about issues related to disability. This will give an indication to practitioners working with students living with physical disabilities on what role to play and what policies should be implemented to close the knowledge and experiential gap between students living with disabilities and the non-disabled. Moreover, researcher focus on the experiences of students living with physical disabilities in other institutions of higher learning may reveal general issues experienced across this sector. Furthermore, studies exploring female experiences may reveal issues and experiences unique to female students.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore experiences of students living with physical disabilities at a university of technology. The study revealed that these students are faced with many challenges. They are also concerned about the stigma attached to their conditions, which sometimes leads to their marginalization. Moreover, the attitude of both students and staff

members towards students living with physical disabilities is a major problem due to lack of understanding and thus failure to empathize. This leaves participant students alienated, as the experiences of lack of understanding and constant fear of rejection due to their physical condition disables them from creating effective and healthy relationships with others.

Students living with disabilities feel excluded during group work because fellow group members see them as incapable. Furthermore, not having access to operational elevators, ramps, installed handrails, sensor doors (or adjustment of the force needed to open the doors), accessible lecture venues and auditoriums, non-slippery bathroom-floor tiles, easily accessible kitchens in-residence and transport are major problems with which students living with physical disabilities have to contend.

It must be noted, however, that there were participants who indicated that they had not experienced any challenges as they have been able to build effective relationships with their peers, and this they attribute to their high self-esteem and good sense of humour. That said, there remains a need for creating a safe space for students living with physical disabilities which will enable them to develop effective relationships and their needs be identified and addressed appropriately while during their time in higher learning.

The study revealed that even though systems and platforms may be put in place to afford students living with disabilities opportunities to table their grievances, it is not enough as training and monitoring of stakeholders should consistently take place. This would ensure that stakeholder attitudes and behaviours towards students living with disabilities align with the policy of the university and the universal design - which entails environmental design conducive to access for all, including students living with disabilities. Discrimination of any sort towards people living with disability should be dealt with seriously. This is the major contribution of this paper.

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Research article

Psychological Stamina and Thinking Style Preferences among First-Year University Students

Henry Mason,* Ané Craven** & Megan Fredericks***

Abstract

This study investigated the association between psychological stamina (grit, mindset and hardiness) and thinking style preferences among South African university students. Data were collected from 369 first-year university students using measures of grit, mindset, hardiness and thinking style preferences. The results indicated that different thinking style preferences were related to grit, mindset and hardiness. We argue that thinking styles should be considered as an important variable when supporting first-year students. Additionally, the role of grit and hardiness in student success should be considered in conjunction with the thinking style preferences of students. Avenues for further research are considered.

Keywords

grit, hardiness, mindset, Neethling Brain Profile Instrument (NBI), thinking style preferences

Introduction

Student development and support (SDS) services promote holistic well-being among students in academic and personal areas (Mason, 2019; Sinclair, 2019). Well-being refers to two broad and interrelated aspects: satisfaction with life, and experiencing more positive than negative affect (Diener, 2013). Holistic well-being, or flourishing, points to a state of optimal functioning and encompasses emotional well-being (experiencing more positive than negative emotions), social well-being (positive relationships) and psychological well-being (purpose, meaning and personal growth) (Keyes, 2016).

Research has indicated that higher levels of well-being can help students approach their learning in more focused states that could culminate in upward cycles of engagement, and ultimately promote greater academic commitment, learning and student success (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Mason, 2019; Van Zyl & Rothmann, 2012). Student success is a multidimensional concept that encompasses positive adjustment to the university context, academic performance and a sense of well-being (Cilliers, 2014; Sinclair, 2019).

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Well-being is conceptualized in one of two traditions: hedonic well-being (HWB) or eudaimonic well-being (EWB) (Diener, 2013). HWB refers to the pursuit of pleasure and the minimisation of pain, whereas EWB is more closely aligned to flourishing (Diener, 2013; Waterman et al., 2010). A central feature of well-being also entails the capacity to remain psychologically resilient in the face of stressors (Southwick et al., 2014). Resilience points to the capacity to deal with stressors in ways that promote positive adaptation and growth (Southwick et al., 2014). Numerous psychological variables, such as grit, mindset and hardiness, are closely related to resilience.

Grit, mindset and hardiness

Grit, which entails the capacity to pursue goals with passion and vigour, has been linked to enhanced academic performance and perseverance (Duckworth et al., 2007). Researchers have noted that mindset is closely related to grit (Dweck, 2016). According to Yeager and Walton (2011), mindset refers to the assumptions or implicit theories that people use as decision filters to attribute meaning to intelligence, personality and performance in various domains, one of which is university studies. These implicit theories shape people's perceptions of their capacities to change and engage in learning (Yeager & Walton, 2011). Dweck (2006) points to two sets of mindset: fixed mindset and growth mindset.

A fixed mindset describes the implicit theory that people have a predetermined range of skills, talents and abilities. In contrast, the growth mindset suggests that people can incrementally develop the skills required for academic success through purposeful effort (Blackwell et al., 2007). Students who hold fixed mindsets would interpret learning opportunities as stressful encounters that threaten their sense of psychological well-being. Conversely, growth mindset-orientated students would likely regard the learning process as a challenge that promotes flourishing (Yeager et al., 2013). Accordingly, students who exhibit a growth mindset are more likely to present higher grit levels (Duckworth, 2016; Dweck, 2016). Similarly, gritty students with growth mindsets are prone to present with hardiness (Maddi et al., 2012).

Hardiness, which describes a pattern of skills associated with the capacity to remain resilient in response to stressors (Maddi et al., 2009), comprises three interdependent factors, namely challenge (interpreting challenges as opportunities for growth), control (internal locus of control), and commitment (engagement in pursuing important life goals) (Maddi et al., 2012). Research has indicated that hardiness can be developed through hardiness training (Jameson, 2014; Maddi et al., 2009). Hardiness training adopts a cognitive-behavioural approach and focuses on assisting students in examining appraisals of stressors, thereby promoting adaptive coping and enhanced stress-management skills (Maddi et al., 2009; Sahranavard et al., 2019). As a result, autonomous functioning and adaptive coping strategies can be developed through hardiness training, thus positively affecting student success (Maddi et al., 2009).

Collectively, grit, mindset and hardiness refer to the optimistic interpretation of challenges as avenues towards flourishing and the accompanying tenacity required for goal

achievement despite functioning in a stressful environment (Dweck, 2012; Duckworth, 2016; Maddi et al., 2009). Thus, students who rate highly on measures of grit, mindset and hardiness are likely to present with the psychological stamina required to persist diligently during stressful periods (Achor, 2011; Anderson, 2016). In this paper, the umbrella term "psychological stamina" is used in reference to grit, mindset, and hardiness.

Theory on the constructs included in psychological stamina presupposes a linear and self-disciplined approach from students to pursuing and achieving academic success (Broghammer, 2017). In other words, research suggests that gritty students who adopt a growth mindset and present with higher levels of hardiness tend to be more academically successful (Duckworth, 2016; Dweck, 2012; Maddi et al., 2009). Consequently, it could be assumed that specific non-cognitive factors should be promoted and developed to promote student success (Anderson, 2016). Non-cognitive factors refer to the behaviours, skills, attitudes, and strategies that contribute, inter alia, to student success but are not traditionally assessed in the academic context (Nagaoka et al., 2013). Theorists on thinking style preferences argue that students can approach challenges from various perspectives (De Boer et al., 2013; Neethling, 2005). Therefore, a student's unique thinking preference may predispose them to report different levels of psychological stamina (Hermann & Hermann-Nehdi, 2015; Nagaoka et al., 2013). Accordingly, thinking style preference may fall within the ambit of non-cognitive factors and be related to psychological stamina. To date, limited research has investigated the relationship between psychological stamina and thinking style preferences.

Thinking style preferences

It would be simplistic to expect that, given the complexity of human nature, mediating factors might not play a role in either negating or supporting the practices associated with psychological stamina (De Boer et al., 2013). Thinking styles, which refer to preferred ways or patterns in which a person makes sense of the world, may offer a window into understanding individual differences related to psychological stamina (Hermann & Hermann-Nehdi, 2015).

Neethling (2005) identified four thinking styles, described as quadrants metaphorically linked to localised areas in the brain. The four metaphorical thinking style quadrants are graphically represented in Figure 1.

As illustrated in Figure 1, Quadrant 1 is also referred to as L1 and represents a logical, quantitatively orientated, critical, objective, analytical and fact-based thinking style (De Boer et al., 2013). Quadrant 2 (L2) represents a planning-based orientation and encompasses specific thinking processes that are sequential, controlled, structured, detailed, and procedural. Quadrant 3 (R1) is associated with long-term, strategic, explorative, and conceptual thinking preferences. The person who shows a strong inclination for R1 thinking would also be less risk-averse and may be likely to challenge the status quo. Finally, the R2 thinking style, indicated in Quadrant 4, is associated with a strong relational focus, and encompasses a preference for interpersonal cooperation and empathy (De Boer et al., 2013).

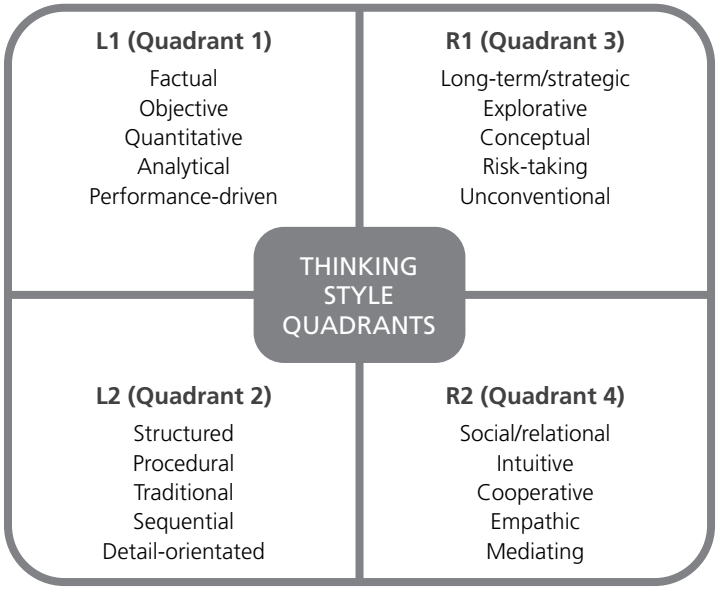

Figure 1: Thinking style quadrants (adapted from Neethling, 2005)

According to Neethling (2005), thinking style preferences influence decision-making, thus affecting how students understand academic challenges and engage with the world. Hence, students would be likely to approach their educational goals in ways commensurate with their thinking style preferences (De Boer et al., 2013; Herbst & Maree, 2008; Neethling, 2005). Additionally, we hypothesise that students' well-being profiles, including the elements described as psychological stamina, would be expressed uniquely based on students' preferred thinking styles.

Although some studies have explored thinking style preferences among students (De Boer et al., 2013; Herbst & Maree, 2008), limited research has investigated the relationship between thinking style preferences and well-being constructs such as psychological stamina. This is an important area to explore, especially among persons working in SDS roles. In addition, developing a better understanding of how psychological stamina manifests as a result of different thinking styles could offer the empirical grounding needed to deliver student-centred services (De Boer et al., 2013).

Student development and support

The massification of higher education in South Africa led to an influx of students into the university system (Scott, 2018). However, the widening of access to university did not result in the anticipated increase in student success (Cilliers, 2014; Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). On the contrary, South African higher education is described as a high attrition and low success system (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). The need to augment physical access with student success has been well documented since (Scott, 2018; Wilson-Strydom, 2015).

SDS services have essential roles to play in promoting student success (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014; Mason, 2019). One approach to delivering SDS services is using psychological assessments to pinpoint potential risk factors that could negatively affect student success (Dockrat, 2016; Foxcroft & Roodt, 2013). The purpose of psychological risk assessments is to identify areas where students that have gained access to higher education may require support (Seidman, 2005). Hence, based on the psychological assessment results, students could be referred to relevant SDS service areas such as career counselling, study skills intervention programmes, mentorship, or language support services (Dockrat, 2016; Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014).

Previous studies pointed to the importance of considering students' well-being and thinking style preferences in promoting student success (De Boer et al., 2013; Van Zyl & Rothmann, 2012). However, it is vital for staff responsible for conducting psychological assessments within SDS contexts to understand the relationship between well-being and thinking style preferences. Such an understanding could enhance the quality of data interpretation and promote accurate referrals to intervention services, which may ultimately augment physical access to university with student success (Dockrat, 2016; Scott, 2018).

The goal of the study

This study was aimed at investigating the relationship between thinking style preference and psychological stamina among a sample of first-year university students. The following research question guided the study: What is the empirical relationship between first-year students' thinking style preferences and psychological stamina?

Method

Research approach and strategy

A cross-sectional, descriptive, and correlational research design was used to investigate the relationship between thinking style preference and psychological stamina. The three constructs (grit, mindset, and hardiness) included under the umbrella term "psychological stamina" served as the dependent variables, and thinking styles served as the independent variable.

Participants and setting

A purposive sample of 369 first-year university students participated in the study. All the participants completed a psychological risk assessment when they enrolled for their academic studies. The risk assessment focused on assessing the students' well-being and thinking style profiles. Following the risk assessment, the students attended a developmental feedback workshop. Subsequently, based on the students' results, they were referred to specialist SDS services, for example, study skills intervention or language support programmes. Only limited biographical data, such as student numbers (identification number at the university), were collected from the students. Thus, no information is available on students' sex, age, or other biographical details.

Data collection and procedure

Data were collected pre-COVID-19 from February to March during the 2020 academic year. All participants were enrolled for academic studies at a South African university. The students completed measures of psychological stamina and thinking styles in a face-to-face format and received feedback on their results. All data were stored in an online archive and duly anonymised and de-identified. The Research Ethics Committee of the university where the sample was drawn granted permission to conduct the study (Ref#: REC2020/08/002), and all participants provided informed consent. The data collection instruments are described next.

Instruments

Psychological stamina was assessed using three instruments: the Dweck Mindset Instrument (DMI), the Grit Scale, and the Hardiness Scale. Thinking styles preferences were assessed using the Neethling Brain Profile Instrument (NBI).

The DMI is a 16-item measure that assesses how students view their intelligence (Dweck, 2016). Students rank their levels of agreement on a scale ranging from 1-6 (1 = strongly agree; 6 = strongly disagree). Examples of items include: "You have a certain amount of intelligence, and you can't really do much about it" and "No matter who you are, you can significantly change your level of talent." Scores are summed and averaged. The DMI serves as a valid and reliable measure of mindset (Dweck, 2008), and the internal reliability in this study was assessed as 0.71.

Consisting of 8 items, the Grit Scale features a 5-point scale (1 = not like me at all; 5 = very much like me) (Duckworth et al., 2007). Two examples of items are: "Setbacks don't discourage me" and "I finish whatever I begin." The literature reports excellent internal consistencies ranging from 0.77 to 0.90 (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The Cronbach's alpha of this study was calculated as 0.79.

The Hardiness Scale comprises 15 items and reports four scores: total hardiness, commitment, challenge, and control (Bartone, 2007). Students are instructed to respond to a series of statements using a 4-point Likert scale (0 = not at all like me; 3 = completely agree). Examples of items include: "By working hard you can nearly achieve all your goals" and "Life in general is boring for me." The Hardiness Scale presents with good internal consistency levels (Bartone, 2007) and the Cronbach's alpha of this study was calculated as 0.77.

The NBI is a self-report questionnaire that identifies an individual's thinking style preferences (Neethling, 2005). The NBI can be described as a conceptual model that offers a description of thinking styles. However, an implicit assumption of the NBI is that the richness of brain functioning cannot be assessed accurately nor depicted using a one-dimensional survey questionnaire. Consequently, the thinking style preferences are described using metaphorical vernacular referring to the four quadrants of the brain, namely two in the left hemisphere and two in the right hemisphere. The NBI brain profile indicates how an individual communicates, acts towards other people, and makes

decisions. Higher scores indicate a preference to engage in a particular thinking style (Neethling, 2005).

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the variables (Field, 2013). The strength and direction of the relationships were assessed using the Pearson product-moment correlations (Pearson's *r*), and linear regression analyses were used to investigate whether thinking styles predicted psychological stamina (Cohen, 1992; Field, 2013).

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive and correlational statistics of the variables investigated in this study.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics, alpha coefficients and correlations

Variables/Statistical values	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Grit	3.42	0.62									
Mindset	2.88	0.42	0.03								
Hardiness (Total)	30.67	4.52	0.35**	-0.05							
Hardiness (Challenge)	7.04	2.70	0.05	0.06	0.60**						
Hardiness (Control)	12.91	1.95	0.21**	-0.08	0.52**	-0.04					
Hardiness (Commitment)	10.72	2.71	0.39**	-0.08	0.70**	0.03	-0.04				
NBI-L1	82.12	7.40	0.24**	0.07	0.08	-0.04	0.10	0.10			
NBI-L2	80.75	8.14	0.17**	-0.19**	0.03	-0.15**	0.06	0.15**	.13**		
NBI-R1	63.90	7.82	-0.15**	0.08	0.00	0.15**	0.04	-0.17**	-0.32**	-0.55**	
NBI-R2	72.32	9.51	-0.21**	0.05	-0.09	0.04	-0.16**	-0.07	-0.62**	-50**	0.10

*Note: NBI-L1 = Neethling Brain Instrument Left 1/Quadrant 1; NBI-L2 = Neethling Brain Instrument Left 2/ Quadrant 2; NBI-R1 = Neethling Brain Instrument Right 1/Quadrant 3; NBI-R2 = Neethling Brain Instrument Right 2/Quadrant 4; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$*

The mean scores indicated in Table 1 for the Grit Scale (mean = 3.42, SD = 0.62), Hardiness Total (mean = 30.67, SD = 4.52), and the respective hardiness subscales are consistent with data reported elsewhere (Bartone, 2007; Duckworth, 2016). The mean score on the DMI of 2.88 (SD = 0.42) indicates that most students' reported scores are characteristic of a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2008). In other words, most of the participants may have held the belief that learning opportunities are stressful and psychologically threatening. Such an interpretation is consistent with earlier research that indicates first-year students experience disproportionate levels of stress compared to the general population (Bewick et al., 2010; Grøtan et al., 2019) and that this can negatively affect their academic performance (Mason,

2019; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010). The belief that one's skills, talents, and abilities cannot be developed could also enhance a sense of alienation, negatively affect epistemic access, and ultimately perpetuate low student success (Habib, 2016; Long, 2021).

Grit presented with significant ($p < 0.01$) positive correlations with the total score on the Hardiness Scale ($r = 0.35$), hardiness (control) ($r = 0.21$), and hardiness (commitment) ($r = 0.39$). Similarly, students' reported grit scores were significantly associated ($p < 0.01$) with the L1 ($r = 0.24$) and L2 ($r = 0.17$) thinking style preferences. However, the Grit Scale presented significant ($p < 0.01$) inverse associations with the R1 ($r = -0.15$) and R2 ($r = -0.21$) thinking style quadrants on the NBI. These results indicate that students who reported greater linear (L1) and planning-orientated (L2) thinking preferences were more likely to report higher scores on the self-reported Grit Scale. Thus, it could be deduced that students who adopt linear and planning-orientated thinking styles may report higher grit levels and are likely to approach their academic studies from a disciplined perspective comprising consistent engagement.

In contrast, students who noted a preference for long-term and strategic thinking (R1) and a stronger relational focus (R2) were more likely to report scores associated with lower grit levels. Hence, students who adopt R1 and R2 thinking styles may appear less disciplined in their academic studies but could benefit from greater relational support. However, there is limited to no evidence suggesting significant differences in academic success levels between students based on their unique thinking style preferences (Ghanbari et al., 2020). Instead, it has been hypothesised that students who report R1-related thinking may be more prone to boredom and this lack of interest could present as lower levels of discipline (De Boer et al., 2013; Neethling, 2005). Accordingly, SDS staff should be wary of over-promoting a dichotomous approach concerning academic success. Instead, students' thinking style preferences could offer valuable information on an appropriate way to articulate how they approach their academic studies.

The data indicated that the L2 thinking style preference was positively correlated with hardiness (commitment) ($r = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$) and negatively related with mindset ($r = -0.19$) and hardiness (challenge) ($r = -0.15$, $p < 0.01$). In other words, students who presented with a thinking style preference associated with sequential processing, control, and logical arrangement appeared to report a greater commitment to important life goals (hardiness (commitment)) while also being more likely to endorse a fixed mindset and a lower preference for change and challenging activities (hardiness (challenge)). The inverse relationship with mindset is interesting and could suggest that the planning and cautious nature of the L2 thinking style may predispose students to avoiding the uncertainties associated with challenges, thereby preferring familiar and tried-and-tested methods linked to a fixed mindset (Anderson, 2016; Dweck, 2012; Neethling, 2005).

Students who reported an R1 thinking preference scored higher on the hardiness (challenge) subscale ($r = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, it appears that students who exhibit a thinking style preference associated with strategic, exploratory and conceptual thinking are more likely to endorse stressors within the educational context as opportunities for growth and development (De Boer et al., 2013; Neethling, 2005). In contrast, participants with an

R2 preference were less likely to endorse a high score on the Hardiness (Control) Scale (r = -0.16, p < 0.01).

Predicting psychological stamina from thinking styles

Table 2 presents the results from the regression analyses. Only the regression analyses presented with significant relationships are included below.

Table 2: Summary of standard multiple regression analyses

Model 1. DV: Grit IV: L1	**Sum of squares**	***df***	**Mean square**	***F***	***p***	***R²***	**Adjusted *R²***
Regression	8.43	1.0	8.43	23.03	0.01**	0.06	0.06
Residual	134.29	367.00	0.37				
Total	142.71	368.00	-				
Model 2. DV: Grit IV: L2	**Sum of squares**	***df***	**Mean square**	***F***	***p***	***R²***	**Adjusted *R²***
Regression	4.09	1.0	4.09	10.83	0.01**	0.03	0.03
Residual	138.62	367.00	0.38				
Total	142.71	368.00	-				
Model 3. DV: Mindset IV: L2	**Sum of squares**	***df***	**Mean square**	***F***	***p***	***R²***	**Adjusted *R²***
Regression	2.49	1.0	2.49	14.31	0.01**	0.04	0.03
Residual	63.90	367.00	0.17				
Total	66.39	368.00	-				
Model 4. DV: Grit IV: R1	**Sum of squares**	***df***	**Mean square**	***F***	***p***	***R²***	**Adjusted *R²***
Regression	3.06	1.0	3.06	8.05	0.01**	0.02	0.02
Residual	139.65	367	0.38				
Total	142.71	368	-				
Model 5. DV: Hardiness (Challenge) IV: L2	**Sum of squares**	***df***	**Mean square**	***F***	***p***	***R²***	**Adjusted *R²***
Regression	57.55	1.0	57.55	8.03	0.01**	0.02	0.02
Residual	2630.42	367	7.17				
Total	2687.97	368	-				
Model 6. DV: Hardiness (Commitment) IV: L2	**Sum of squares**	***df***	**Mean square**	***F***	***p***	***R²***	**Adjusted *R²***
Regression	62.24	1.0	62.24	8.67	0.01**	0.02	0.02
Residual	2635.45	367	7.18				
Total	2697.69	368	-				

Model 7. DV: Hardiness (Challenge) IV: R1	**Sum of squares**	***df***	**Mean square**	***F***	***p***	R^2	**Adjusted R^2**
Regression	59.31	1.0	59.31	8.28	0.01**	0.02	0.02
Residual	2628.66	367	7.16				
Total	2687.97	368	-				
Model 8. DV: Hardiness (Commitment) IV: R1	**Sum of squares**	***df***	**Mean square**	***F***	***p***	R^2	**Adjusted R^2**
Regression	82.71	1.0	82.17	11.53	0.01**	0.03	0.03
Residual	2615.52	367	7.13				
Total	2697.69	368	-				
Model 9. DV: Hardiness (Control) IV: R2	**Sum of squares**	***df***	**Mean square**	***F***	***p***	R^2	**Adjusted R^2**
Regression	35.03	1.0	35.03	9.43	0.01**	0.03	0.02
Residual	1363.02	367	3.71				
Total	1398.05	368	-				

*Note: AHS – Adult Hope Scale; FS – Flourishing Scale; SDHS – Short Depression Happiness Scale; AA – Academic achievement; *$p < 0.05$ – Statistically significant; **$p < 0.01$ – Statistically significant*

Consistent with the correlations reported in Table 1, the data in Table 2 indicate that the L1 thinking style preference is predictive of higher grit scores ($F(1,367) = 23.03, p < 0.01$). However, the L1 thinking preference accounted for only 6% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.06$) in students' reported grit scores. Hence, with specific reference to the L1 thinking style, thinking style preference is one of various factors that account for students' reported scores on the Grit Scale.

Noteworthy regression equations were also found in predicting grit ($F(1,367) = 10.83$, $p < 0.01$) and mindset ($F(1,367 = 14.31, p < 0.01$) from the L2 thinking style. Furthermore, the L2 thinking preferences predicted 2% ($R^2 = 0.02$ of the variance in grit, and 2% ($R^2 = 0.02$) of the variance in mindset.

Regarding the predictions in hardiness, the L2 thinking style served as a significant predictor of hardiness (commitment) ($R^2 = 0.02, F(1,367) = 8.67, p < 0.01$), and hardiness (challenge) ($R^2 = 0.02, F(1,367) = 8.03, p < 0.01$). However, it should be noted that the L2 and hardiness (challenge) constructs are inversely related ($r = -0.15$) that suggests higher reported L2 thinking style preferences would indicate lower hardiness (challenge) scores. The R1 thinking style preference served as a significant predictor variable for lower grit scores ($R^2 = 0.02, F(1,367) = 8.05, p < 0.01$) and higher hardiness (challenge) scores ($R^2 = 0.02, F(1,67) = 8.28, p < 0.01$).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The results from this study have theoretical and practical implications. Regarding theoretical implications, the results indicate that grit and commitment are strongly associated with linear thinking preferences. Students who exhibited linear thinking styles (L1 and L2) appeared to be more likely to report higher scores on the Grit Scale and

the Hardiness (Commitment) Scale. In contrast, students who were more inclined to exploratory and relational thinking styles (R1 and R2) tended to report lower grit and commitment scores but scored higher on the Hardiness (Challenge) Scale. In light of these results, we hypothesise that students who prefer linear thinking styles may report greater perseverance concerning their academic studies while avoiding challenges and being more inclined to a fixed mindset orientation. Conversely, students who are inclined towards R1 and R2 thinking styles may be more willing to endorse lower grit and commitment scores, and they may tend to be more prone to embracing challenges.

The modern-day educational and work environments require greater agility concerning thinking style preferences (Schwab, 2016). In other words, people are challenged to pursue meaningful goals with passion, purpose and commitment while also remaining flexible regarding the challenges posed by change (Schwab, 2016). Thus, a dynamic balance in terms of thinking style preferences appears to be essential to assist students in developing the requisite psychological stamina to address educational and other challenges. In theory, students ought to become comfortable with straddling the tension between L1 and L2 and R1 and R2 thinking style preferences as they encounter ever greater levels of complexity in the world (Dweck, 2012; Neethling, 2005; Schwab, 2016).

Regarding practical implications, the results offer food for thought for persons working in SDS environments. Whereas a substantial body of literature points to the importance of grittiness and mindset as enablers of student success (Duckworth, 2016; Dweck, 2008), this study suggests that SDS practitioners should consider students' thinking style preferences as critical to interpreting the relevance and importance of specific non-cognitive factors regarding student success.

Furthermore, the results indicate that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be adequate regarding grit, mindset and hardiness as these constructs are related to students' thinking style preferences that may not necessarily be malleable and changeable. However, the results could serve as valuable feedback to SDS practitioners in developing the necessary psychological stamina associated with student success. For example, SDS practitioners could focus on helping students with L1 and L2 thinking style preferences develop their capacity to embrace challenges and remain mindful that the learning process can promote flourishing and personal growth (Maddi et al., 2012; Yeager et al., 2013). Similarly, students who show a propensity for R1 and R2 thinking style preferences could be assisted in developing the commitment, passion and perseverance for goal pursuit (Dweck, 2012; Maddi et al., 2009).

Finally, it is strongly suggested that SDS practitioners should augment the assessment of these and other psychological constructs with personalised feedback and attempt to provide individualized self-development opportunities for students based on their unique psychological stamina and thinking styles preferences (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2013; Mason, 2019). For example, students could be assisted in developing greater self-awareness of their respective psychological stamina and thinking style profiles through psychosocial support programmes, such as hardiness training and individual or group-based coaching (Cilliers, 2014; Mason, 2019). Such approaches can assist students in identifying their unique

strengths and enhancing development areas, and ultimately enhance student success (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014; Maddi et al., 2009).

Conclusion

This study investigated the empirical linkages between thinking style preference and psychological stamina. The results showed significant positive relationships between linear and planning-orientated thinking preferences (L1 and L2) and grittiness and hardiness (commitment). In contrast, the R1 and R2 quadrants were negatively associated with grit and hardiness (commitment) but positively related to hardiness (challenge). The findings suggest that thinking styles may influence how students express the constructs associated with psychological stamina within the higher education context. In light of these findings, we suggest that SDS practitioners should consider thinking style preferences when exploring the expression and value of psychological stamina regarding student well-being.

That said, this study was limited in the following ways: first, the study adopted a cross-sectional research design that does not account for dynamic changes across time. Hence, the data provided a snapshot of students' experiences at a particular point in time. Students' experiences could have changed over time due to external experiences, such as a changing landscape amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the data were collected from students at a single South African university. Therefore, the findings may not necessarily be generalizable to other contexts. Third, data were only collected on three constructs associated with psychological stamina: grit, mindset and hardiness. The inclusion of additional constructs could have provided greater insight into the dynamic interaction between thinking style preferences and psychological stamina.

We propose that future research should focus on collecting data from students using longitudinal designs. Adopting longitudinal strategies would enable researchers to gain a better understanding of students' experiences as they progress through an academic year and throughout their academic studies. Additionally, researchers should consider exploring the importance of psychological stamina using qualitative approaches, which could shed light on students' lived experiences and the relevance of psychological stamina in terms of student success. Finally, the development and evaluation of support programmes that integrate a focus on well-being and thinking style preferences should be pursued.

The study contributes to the existing body of literature by drawing attention to the influence of thinking styles on the expression of psychological stamina among first-year students. Furthermore, the study foregrounds the necessity of considering constructs related to well-being alongside thinking style preferences if the goal is to promote student success holistically. Finally, the data reported here could assist SDS practitioners in promoting holistic student success by helping students embrace and develop psychological stamina capacity that may not necessarily be associated with their respective thinking styles.

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Research article

A Case Study of Student Hooligan Behaviour during Protest Action at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

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Abstract

This article focuses on the behaviour of students during protest action at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The objectives of the study on which the article is based were to assess factors that contribute to student hooliganism and to evaluate the effects of violent student protests on the university community. The data were collected using interviews with 25 purposefully sampled participants including 20 students and five risk management personnel. The data were analysed using descriptive writing and identifying actively generated themes from the participants' responses. The study found that a private security service and the South African police service actively instigated violence on campus as a means to disperse the crowd, and that the crowd retaliated with violence. It was also found that the university management's ignorance of students' grievances caused students to be violent and exhibit hooligan behaviour to attract management's attention. Victims of violence experienced physical injury and destruction of their property, which inevitably affected them psychologically, academically and behaviourally. It is recommended that security personnel are trained to control crowds without using violence, and that university management resolve student grievances promptly before they lead to violent protesting.

Keywords

crowd control, hooliganism, protest, riot policing, security services, student activism, students, university leadership, university management, violence

Introduction

This article focuses on violence and hooligan behaviour by UKZN students during protest actions. The study underpinning this article intended to understand what prompted the supposed future leaders to act in such a hooligan manner. The study is important because violence during student protest action has been increasing steadily, with universities, such as the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), the University of Cape Town (UCT), and UKZN, seeing exceedingly terrible student protests and hooligan behaviour, especially in

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the period of 2015 to 2017 (Stuurman, 2018). The years 2018 and 2019 continued to be a period of violent student protest actions at UKZN; property and cars were set alight, and students clashed with the police. In 2020 students protested the university's demand that students with historical debt pay a portion of their debt before they could register for the new academic year.

According to the vice-chancellor (VC) and principal of UKZN, Professor Nana Poku:

> The recourse to violence which has shaped the political landscape and scarred the lived experience of the majority of South Africans is a national issue and not just specific to UKZN, though I concede that we suffer from it more than most. (2020, para. 4)

Poku's argument was in response to UKZN's experience of massive destruction to property over the years, particularly at the start of the 2020 academic year. UKZN, just like many other South African universities, has been experiencing student rioting that is violent in nature, often resulting in the destruction of property. This problem provokes a few questions: What prompts these violent behaviours? Who instigates violent behaviour? Is this hooliganism justified? What are the effects of student violence on the student body, the university community and the academic programme?

These are some of the fundamental questions we had in mind in initiating this study. The study was carried out at UKZN as a baseline. UKZN has seen a considerable amount of frequent hooligan behaviour recently which has sometimes resulted in casualties. According to Bitso (2015), the calamity of violence during student protests lies in the fact that these incidents occur regularly in previously disadvantaged communities that require the very assets that often are destroyed in the violence to free them from destitution and other social risks. Students rioted in every significant city during the #FeesMustFall student protests and hit the core of many downtown areas township protests typically do not reach (Ndlozi, 2015). UKZN property has been vandalised and set on fire on multiple occasions of protest. Kujeke (2016) and Mavunga (2019) indicate that students were violent during the #FeesMustFall campaign.

Robins (2014, p. 93) identifies changes in protest strategies in the digital era: "the post-apartheid age has witnessed the materialisation of a proliferation of media technologies as well as new forms of media-based political mobilisation". Protesting strategies have changed. Today, there is also digital protesting (Treré, 2012); and, as previously stated, protests on university campuses appear to have become more (and more frequently) violent than they used to be under apartheid. The current generation was not part of the struggle during the era of apartheid, however; yet it exhibits a *modus operandi* similar to that of those years. According to Oxlund (2010), university students presently encounter numerous difficulties like those encountered during the apartheid era (Koen et al., 2006). Can we then say the culture of violent protest action is one passed down from generation to generation? And why is it still as violent as it used to be under apartheid? This needs to be investigated further by other scholars.

There are many reasons why student protests occur in universities and other institutions of higher learning. Nationally, the typical motives are ongoing financial exclusion, racism,

sexism, gender-based violence, and the slow rate of decolonisation (Manderson, 2016). Nakalanzi (2019) revealed numerous reasons for student protest actions including delays in the disbursement of student funds by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), tuition fee increments, lack of student engagement in and by university management, financial and academic exclusions, to mention but a few. Luescher et al. (2020) revealed that issues facing students had been recurring grievances throughout the past 25 years. If attending to these grievances is not fast-tracked in the course of the academic year, protesters often resort to violence. Can the failure to address these recurring issues be seen as fostering conditions that may lead to the violent behaviour shown by the students? If not, then why do the protests become violent? A tertiary institution is a place to learn and develop academically and be prepared for the job market. If this is the case, why do students risk a potential life of future prosperity through the job market by tainting their image and that of their institution by participating in hooliganism during protest action? Puzzled by these questions, we sought to gain insight into the problem so that it could be developed further, and further thinking and engagements on these issues could be stimulated.

Hooliganism

The definition of hooliganism is vague and broad and there are several behaviours that can be categorized as hooliganism. They include public disturbances, stone-throwing, mugging, stabbing, armed assaults, blasphemy, singing ribald songs, selling pornographic material in public, cursing at or otherwise molesting women, shoving and beating innocent pedestrians, tormenting domestic animals, destroying property, and gang-fighting (Tanner, 2000). According to Merriam-Webster, hooliganism is a term to describe any "rowdy, violent, or destructive behaviour" (Merriam-Webster, 2021). There are many different theories about the origins of the term 'hooliganism' (Kuru, 2009, as cited in Gumusqul & Acet, 2016, p. 32). It has been thought that the hooligan concept was derived from the *Daily News* when it gave this name to fans that fought during a sports match in 1898 because of a drunken man named Patrick Hooligan. Today, a hooligan is a person who sees violence as favourable, harms his environment, and displays wild behaviour (Sahin, 2003, as cited in Gumusqul & Acet, 2016, p. 32).

It can be argued that hooligan behaviour describes the behaviour typical of some participants when students engage in rioting protest actions. And yet, the violent student protests and demonstrations are usually not classified as hooliganism. Violence seems to have become normalised; to the extent that when students participate in violent behaviour during protests, they are regarded by some as revolutionists instead of hooligans, despite exhibiting the very same behaviour described by Tanner (2000). They throw stones at the police and security guards, mug non-protesting students, sing revolutionary songs, curse at those students and ordinary people who are not part of their protest actions, and destroy or vandalise university property. The cars of passers-by usually are also targeted. This normalisation may be an indirect consequence of South Africa's history of protesting under the apartheid regime, when violent protest actions were part of the repertoire of liberation movements.

Therefore, for this article, hooliganism refers to disruptive or unlawful behaviour, such as rioting, bullying and vandalism, usually connected with crowds at sporting events. The term has been derived from sporting events where it describes unlawful spectator behaviour, such as rioting and vandalism. The study adopted this term as an attempt to refer to the disruptive behaviour of students exhibited during violent protest actions, whose behaviour can be likened to that of hooligans at a sporting event; since their disruptive actions often encompass vandalism of university property, rioting accompanied by revolutionary songs, arson, assaulting other students who are not part of the protest, and causing chaos and destruction. All these actions perpetrated by the students are viewed as hooliganism.

Finally, as Kuru (2000) points out, the important thing for the hooligans at a sporting event is fighting and vandalism – irrespective of whether their team wins or loses. Likewise, the students' aim during violent protest actions, irrespective of the negotiations underway with management, is to create chaos, disruption, vandalise, and raise fires, disrupting the university's normal functioning. Stuurman (2018) acknowledged that the instability among students at universities is not expected to fade any time soon in a democratic South Africa. This has been evidenced by the violent protests occurring at the beginning of every academic year.

Theoretical Framework

For this article, we adopted the social learning theory by Albert Bandura (1977) to better understand the factors that lead to student violence and hooliganism during protest action. From Bandura's perspective, social behaviour is the result of observational learning and reinforced learning. Hesselink-Louw (2009) emphasises that violent behaviour is best explained through theories because social actors select and interpret the behaviour. The theory is then applied to explain the behaviour.

Social learning theory

When looking at aggression, Bandura (1978) sought to determine how aggressive behaviours are established, why individuals behave antagonistically, and how to determine if an individual will continue to display patterns of aggression (Warburton & Anderson, 2015). According to Walinga (2019), individuals can attain new behaviour through the observational learning process called imitation. This theory is valuable in explaining how people learn by imitating influential figures (e.g. friends, family members, people they look up to with shared beliefs such as student leaders) and modelling their behaviour if it is rewarded (Sutton, 2021).

Through social learning processes such as observational learning, violence becomes used as a habitual response to conflict during some student protest actions by channels of learned behaviour (Bandura, 1983; Widom, 1989). The theory also maintains that violence is a cycle passed from one generation to another through observational learning. The theory is based on the idea that we learn from others in a social context by observing their behaviours and people then develop similar behaviours. After observing the behaviour

of others, people assimilate and imitate that behaviour, especially if their observational experiences are positive ones or include rewards related to the observed behaviour. In this study we shared the same sentiments as Bandura. We believe that during violent protest actions, students learn violent behaviour in a social context of protesting by observing the rewarded violent behaviours of influential students (student leaders), which they may perceive as rewarding as they instigate a quick response from the vice-chancellor and management. According to Bandura (1978), imitation involves the actual reproduction of observed motor activities. Imitation has also been found to be " … more important in the initial acquisition and performance of novel behaviour than in its maintenance or cessation of behavioural patterns once established" (Akers & Jennings, 2019). His major premise was that we can learn by observing others (Bandura, 1978). He considered vicarious experience to be the typical way that human beings change. He used the term "modelling" to describe the process of response acquisition by the observation of another's response and copying it. He claimed that modelling could have as much impact as a direct experience.

Ahead of our study, we observed that students imitated the behaviour by influential students involved and modelled it during a protest action. They observed the behaviour of others, learned from it and repeated it. This meant that if student leaders acted in a hooligan manner during protest action, observing students would act as hooligans as well by imitating the same behaviour to achieve the desired effect (i.e. a response from the university management).

Social learning theory predicts that criminal behaviour is a positive function of the degree to which a person possesses favourable attitudes towards hooligan behaviour. Consequently, hooliganism during student protests is prevalent among students who possess favourable attitudes towards violence during a protest action in achieving desirable effects. These attitudes may approve, disapprove or be morally neutral towards violence. Social learning theory also predicts that individuals associate with people or other sources of information containing social meanings that directly promote hooligan behaviour.

According to social learning theory, exposure to other individuals' behaviours and attitudes can significantly impact one's own behaviours and attitudes. Therefore, non-violent students who associate themselves with violent students during student protests indirectly promote violence. Other students may identify with those who used violence during student protest action historically to address their issues, such as the Soweto Uprising on 16 June 1976. Consequently, some students imitate violence from other university student protests because it has historically worked and has been displayed throughout mass media. They adopt violent tactics due to how violence has seemed to work historically and how it has been effective in drawing the attention of the vice-chancellor.

Finally, social learning theory also argues that a person experiences reinforcement for criminal behaviour. According to social learning theory, an act expected to produce a greater balance of benefits than costs is more likely to be engaged in. Consequently, during student protest action, those who engage in hooligan behaviour view its effects as rewarding rather than costly. In contrast, those who do not engage in violence view it as more costly than rewarding. The cost is usually fear of arrest and injury during a violent

student protest (Risager & Thorup, 2016). These students experience a behaviour change and avoid the university campus out of fear.

Bandura (1978) used the term *motivation* to refer to rewards and punishments. The use of physical force accompanies a student belief. Would he go to jail for striking an enemy, or gain status for being an activist? In our review of the literature, we found that the leading factor for the onset of hooligan behaviour has been associated with frustrated protesting students who model violence because it has been rewarded historically. Witnessing the actions of others, especially people that are close to us, can affect our participation in both conforming and non-conforming behaviours (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2018).

Students are exposed to behavioural models that indirectly promote violent behaviour. These models are most likely to be people leading the protest action. Students observe the violent behaviour of their leaders during protest action. Should the leaders with whom they identify resort to hooliganism, they will observe the behaviour of their representatives with access to favourable definitions (e.g. yielding a quick and favourable response from the VC) to the behaviour and imitate the violence. Social learning theory provides an insight into the factors that contribute to hooliganism, and, in the present case, the effect violence has on the university environment.

Method

This study employed a case study research design. Neale et al. (2006) define a case study as a story about something unique, special, or interesting about individuals, organisations, or events. Our aim to ascertain the effects of student hooligan behaviour during student protest actions at UKZN informed the choice of a case study design for this research project. In attempting to understand the instigation and the effects of violence during protest actions at UKZN, a qualitative method seemed appropriate. This approach is deemed best when the researcher wants to explore a subject they do not know much about in advance or when they want to understand the meanings, motives, or reasons of the phenomenon in question (Cropley, 2019). We use the social learning theory by Bandura (1977) to better understand the factors that lead to student hooliganism and the effects of violence on the university community during protest action.

The research aimed to better understand the current research subject by interviewing affected UKZN participants with first-hand experiences. Kim et al. (2017) postulate that qualitative research is "… important and appropriate for research questions focused on discovering the who, what, and where of events or experiences and on gaining insights from informants regarding a poorly understood phenomenon". It is in the vein of the assertion in Kim et al. (2017) that this study embraced a qualitative approach.

Research setting

The study was conducted at UKZN, which has a rich history of hooligan behaviour during student protests. UKZN was established on 1 January 2004 when the former

universities of Durban-Westville and Natal and the Edgewood College of Education were merged. The university comprises five campuses in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, namely, Edgewood in Pinetown, Howard College and Nelson Mandela School of Medicine, both in Durban, and Pietermaritzburg and Westville campuses.

Sampling and procedure

In keeping with a qualitative research design, the study used non-probability, purposive sampling to identify research participants. In purposive sampling, research participants are chosen because they illustrate explicit features of a particular study (Vos et al., 2011), based on the researcher's judgement in selecting the sample (Neuman, 2013). We recruited members of the university community that meet the primary inclusion criteria, which was that one must have witnessed a violent student protest and been part of the university community for more than three years.

The sample of 25 participants included 10 student leaders, 10 Bachelor Honours students, and five risk management staff (RMS). All of whom were part of the university community and were affected by student hooliganism during protest actions. The participation of student leaders was secured through cooperation with the Student Representative Council (SRC), from which body student leaders were selected based on their experience and willingness to participate in the study. They represent the university student body; moreover, their opinions as members of the community who are directly involved with university management, staff and the students were critical. According to Barasa (2002), university student leaders have been seen more as abrasive young politicians critical of the existing establishment and overseeing a renaissance in progress.

We also went to a Bachelor Honours class and selected students after having asked for verbal permission from the lecturer. UKZN-registered Bachelor Honours students were selected because they had been enrolled at UKZN for more than three years. Therefore, they were more likely to have had experiences as witnesses or victims or even perpetrators of violence during student protest actions. They were selected to give clarity on the factors that contribute to student hooliganism behaviour and the effects of violent student protests on the university community.

RMS staff members were selected based on their availability and experience of the phenomenon of interest to give their opinion on student hooligan behaviour during student protest as they were directly involved with the safety and security of the university community. Only permanent UKZN RMS staff gave their opinions. They were asked to share the ideal university operations protocol during student protests and to clarify how the university as a whole is affected by the violence emanating from student protest action and the measures in place to ensure the safety and security of the university community.

The participants consented to providing detailed accounts and were also able to express their thoughts and feelings regarding the factors that contribute to hooliganism and the effects of violence during student protest action.

Research ethics and research permission

The permission to conduct this study was requested and attained from the responsible authority at UKZN, and ethical clearance was granted by means of certificate number HSS/1742/017M. We also considered the participants' indication of willingness to participate in the study.

Data collection

In-depth interviews were conducted because of their significance in allowing participants to provide detailed information. Each face-to-face interview lasted for 30-45 minutes, depending on the responses provided by participants. Interviews were conducted over a week. The participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions regarding their knowledge of student hooligan behaviour during protest actions within a university environment. The study was guided by an interview schedule to facilitate the discussion, incorporating the topic and themes to be covered. The items on the guide were generally minimal to foster opportunities for in-depth discussion.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

The interviews were transcribed and then analysed using thematic analysis. We familiarised ourselves with the collected data. This was achieved by listening to the recorded audio interviews to have a clear perspective on topical subjects under discussion. With this, we were able to extricate the themes, and also familiarised ourselves with the data by reading through the field notes recorded during data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Qualitative research is reliable when it represents the experiences of the study participants precisely. Credibility, conformability, dependability, and transferability are utilized to quantify the trustworthiness of data. This study will adopt Guba's (1981) model for establishing trustworthiness. Guba's model identifies truth, credibility, applicability, transferability, consistency, dependability, neutrality, and confirmability as criteria for establishing trustworthiness (Polit & Beck 2004, p. 36; Streubert Speziale & Carpenter, 2011, p. 38).

Results and Discussion

The two main themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview material were (1) the factors that lead to hooligan behaviour during student protests, and (2) the effects of student protest action on the UKZN community.

Factors contributing to student hooliganism at UKZN

It was found that poor communication between student leaders and university management causes conflict in the university community and results in student hooliganism when student grievances are not addressed.

Before students embark on protest action, the student leaders raise student grievances to the university management, namely student academic exclusion, tuition fee increments, and lack of student engagement in running the universities. Subsequently, when their grievances are not addressed, they embark on a violent protest, which attracts sanctions from the university management (Morwe et al., 2018). The quotations below reveal that student leader efforts to communicate with university management seem ineffective:

> One thing we do ... Before we embark on mass demonstration the case is always that we have tried all possible means to solve the issue without going to a strike or mass demonstration for that matter. So the university is the one that mostly provokes students by taking irrational decisions or reactional decisions to some extent or decisions that do not seek to transform the university community and then the students react on that but before they react on that through a protest they always go to a boardroom and engage and try to come up with the amicable solutions in trying to resolve that. (Student leader 1)

> Student leaders don't see eye to eye with university and then the university says we know that since we don't see eye to eye you are going to the streets and then when we go to the streets they say we are ready for you and then they deploy external factors such as deploying the police, dogs and the pepper spray. For example, we ask for the roads to be fixed and they would say No, we don't have funds. (Student leader 7)

The findings also suggest that the most common factors leading to student hooligan behaviour during protests were the engagement of the services of Mi7, a private security company, and the police (SAPS) by the university management to manage and control protest actions and their use of weapons when managing crowds. The presence of violence in any community affects community members and the various community operations. Moreover, the impact of hooligan behaviour on the community is often neglected. Figure 1 illustrates the nature of student hooliganism and violence between students and law enforcement officials.

The three images that comprise Figure 1 depict the severe degree of hooliganism displayed by the students, evident in the forms of destruction of property, rioting, clashes with the police, and disturbing the university's operations.

The UKZN community has suffered violence during almost every student protest action in the last decade (Sibeko, 2016; Wicks, 2017; Singh, 2019; Nxumalo, 2020), and it is evident that hooligan behaviour during student protests affects the university community and has significant implications. Nyamnjoh et al. (2012) deduced that the interposition of the SAPS and Mi7 into the context of a student protest, breeds a dialectic of violence. Student leaders that were interviewed reported that the tactics used by the SAPS and Mi7 to control and manage the protest action instigated hooligan behaviour. Their tactics engendered hooliganism as it led to students retaliating violently to those tactics and thus becoming rebels.

The academic programme on UKZN's Edgewood campus was suspended as students burnt tyres and blocked roads around the campus.

(Photograph: Blue Security) (Wicks, 2017)

Students at UKZN Westville campus burnt a furniture storeroom during a violent protest action.

(Photograph: twitter.com/ Orrin417) (Singh, 2019)

Students protestors demanded that historical debt be dealt with. Students were throwing bricks and rocks at the officers.

(Photograph: African News Agency/Doctor Ngcobo) (Nxumalo, 2020)

Figure 1: Severity of violence during the #FeesMustFall student protests

Similarly, in this study, the participants believed that when the SAPS and Mi7, deployed by university management, used force to dispense the student crowd, the crowd used violence in return. To some extent, the students became much more violent and directed their anger towards the university buildings. Sigmund Freud referred to this as a displacement defence mechanism. Instead of channelling their anger towards university management, they channelled it to what seemed to be owned by the management.

Student leaders revealed that the university management incites violence by deploying the SAPS and Mi7. Evidently, student leaders viewed university management as the core perpetrator of violence when deploying the SAPS and Mi7. The deployment happens when student leaders and university management fail to resolve issues through negotiation.

Consequently, most participants were of the view that students always react when the SAPS are deployed. Student leaders added that the draconian policies employed by the university during student protest actions frustrated students. It was also revealed that students retaliated to measures the university deployed to curb and prevent student hooligan behaviour during protest actions. They perceived these measures as provocative and retaliated. To students, these measures illustrated the university managements intention to end the protest action without reaching a consensus. Student leaders shared:

> Students, we are usually provoked by the deployment of Mi7 and SAPS because it indicates that the management would go out of its way to stop what we are doing. (Bachelor Honours student 6)

> It is the university and the police that initiated the violence; these are the two people that are responsible and external forces deployed by the university they are the ones that cause the chaos. (Student leader 3)

> The university is the one that mostly provokes students by taking irrational decisions or reactional decisions to some extent or decisions that do not seek to transform the university community and then the students react on that. (Student leader 5)

Correspondingly, risk officers admitted that the members of the deployed SAPS incited student hooliganism because they used weapons in the university environment. One risk officer said:

> The people with weapons initiate violence because we do not have weapons, and there is usually no violence when we are around because we do not have any weapons. The SAPS shoot the students, and the students fight back whichever way they can. Therefore, it can be the students but not us … (Risk Officer 5)

Most risk officers reported that armed law enforcement agencies were the initiators of violence. Some risk officers argued that a university community should always be a weapon-free zone. Student leaders believed that the university management and Mi7 were the core initiators of violence because the management deployed Mi7 to manage protest action by any means necessary. Fomunyam obtained a similar pattern of results and found that one of the contributory factors towards violence during student protests in university communities were clashes with private security and police, deployed to suppress protest action (Fomunyam, 2017). In collaboration with university management, the law enforcement agents use force to manage students during protest actions, and students always react, either towards university management or law enforcement.

Most student leaders vented that the SAPS treated students like criminals by using rubber bullets and tear gas, which resulted in more violence. Student leaders also indicated that police officers targeted student leaders in their residences after the protest and sometimes during the protest. Two student leaders mentioned:

> Usually, the police target people that they will arrest during late hours after the protest. These targets are student leaders, and they are fetched in their rooms by force and arrested. (Student leader 4)

> We are not safe because of what usually follows after the protest and or even immediately during the protest where leaders are collected from their rooms in the night by virtue of just being leaders in the protest. (Student leader 8)

> [P]olice fetch us in our rooms at night and we get arrested for leading at that moment no one can protect my safety even that RMS. It goes both ways for me. (Student leader 2)

The student leaders suggested during the interviews that the university management usually issued a list of names of student leaders to be arrested. Student leaders were very concerned with being harassed and arrested by the police in their university rooms after demonstrations ended (usually at night). They believed that the management would instruct the SAPS to arrest certain student leaders who were part of the protest or leading it. Student leaders have been apprehended at night after being victimised and interrogated (Oxlund, 2016; Thamm, 2015).

It has been shown in this study and other studies that using force (brutality) by the police creates cycles of violence when protesters react (Reynolds-Stenson, 2018; Maguire et al., 2018; Reinders, 2019). In order to break these cycles, the SAPS needs to apply certain basic principles of public policing, including containment, holding the line, facilitation, and negotiation. These principles are effective in de-escalating and managing protests as well as in maintaining public order. With this understanding, the Mi7 security company and the police should approach crowd management situations with extreme care and sensitivity because the use of unnecessary stringent measures against student protesters could be construed as denying them their right to protest.

The theory of Bandura maintains that violence is a cycle passed from one generation to another through observational learning, which can be attributed to the demonstrations that have been happening throughout South African history and could have been passed from generation to generation. After observing the behaviour of others, students assimilate and imitate that behaviour, especially if their observational experiences are positive ones or include rewards related to the observed behaviour. In this study, we believe that students observe the behaviour of others when demonstrating using violence, assimilate it and imitate it by acting violently to yield positive rewards by management agreeing to meet their grievances. This means that if other students acted in a hooligan manner during protest action, observing students would act as hooligans as well by imitating the same behaviour. Thus, the study finds that hooligan behaviour is learned through observing other students acting violently through modelling.

Moreover, management usually positively reinforces this student hooligan behaviour by acquiescing to the demands of the protesting students. To break the cycle, management should be dealing with the issues at hand before they instigate the violent student protest actions.

The effects of student protest action on the UKZN community

This study found that the community was susceptible to academic, psychological, and behaviour-related effects. Similarly, Glewwe and Kremer (2006) found that individual academic achievement can be influenced by several factors such as personal, household and school characteristics as well as local and national socio-economic conditions. Kallsen et al. (2020) also obtained similar results, showing that no matter how it enters the building, violence simply stands in the way of having an environment conducive to education.

This study found that protesters disrupted classes using pepper spray, burning buildings, and clashing with SAPS and Mi7, resulting in slow academic progress. The quotes below capture the student's sentiments about the effect of violence on academic progress:

> For students that are just starting, it is their first protest and it is violent it is going to affect even their performance at the end of the day. So personally, I am one person who is not entirely bothered by what happens because I have witnessed many and I know as student you are going to have to bounce back but then I fear for those who are seeing the violent protests for the first times because I remember for me the first one shook me and it took a while for me to get back on track with my academic studies. (Student leader 9)

> You cannot even study, how will you study when you are in fear? And while you are attending you will most likely be chased out of the lecture venue by protesters, and lecturers are forced to stop lecturing. (Bachelor Honours student 3)

The above reveals that student protest actions affect academic performance because protesters often disrupt classes. It was also revealed that first-year students exposed to a violent protest action for the first time face a greater burden to catch up on their studies. Antunes and Ahlin (2017) indicated that exposure to community violence, either as a witness or as a victim, has been found to produce negative learning outcomes for students.

Student protest actions have affected the university operations and its community to the extent that the university management can choose to suspend operations. This has resulted in the university's closure at times. Students have been faced with the burden of having to catch up on lectures and tests when university operations resumed. Therefore, the outcome of a protest is also associated with increased academic workloads for students.

Bacchini and Esposito (2020) highlight that any form of violence, such as family violence, community violence, or child maltreatment, could have different effects (i.e. psychological, behavioural effects) on those exposed to it. Esposito et al. (2017) indicate that victimisation during a violent student protest action had been found to compromise a person's ability to regulate their emotions. In contrast, exposure by witnessing community violence might lead to depression and increased anxiety (Bach & Louw, 2010) due to feelings of insecurity and perceptions of being unworthy of protection. Per Mitchell et al.:

> Exposure to violence involving highly lethal weapons is associated with higher trauma symptoms, over and above exposure to all other types of violence, making it a strong contributor to depression, anxiety, and aggression. (2015, p. 11)

Correspondingly students reported being anxious in the presence of SAPS and Mi7 due to the violence that occurs during protest action. It was found that members of the UKZN community, specifically Bachelor Honours students and student leaders, feared going to campus, thinking they might be the next victim after experiencing violence and hooliganism during previous student protests. Kallsen et al. (2020) indicated that regardless of whether a learner's fear of violence is real or exaggerated, it is often stimulated by previous exposure. It was found that some experienced a change in behaviour by withdrawing from attending classes because of previous exposure to violence. A synopsis of their expressed fear is provided by the quotes below:

> Anything can happen during the student protest such as when police throw tear gas and there is usually a stampede and you find that some students get hurt in the process, therefore you always have to be cautious around me because anything can happen at any moment. Sometimes you end up getting hurt when you are not even part of the protest. (Bachelor Honours student 4)

> [F]irstly what you think about if you live in off-campus residences … once there is something that says there is a protest on campus and then you get those who will say to each other they will not go to campus because they do not want to get involved because

> the police don't come to campus to see if people are getting mugged, instead they are on the lookout of those who will be deviant in the protest. Then when there is a quarrel between the protesters and law enforcement, even when you are not part of the protest you get affected. Even the lecturers, when lectures are being disturbed with pepper spray and everything that is not right, the sticks that students are carrying that you have no clue who they are going to hit. (Bachelor Honours student 9)

> The presence of SAPS is for the purpose of instilling fear on us, we are threatened for being leaders and jailed for fighting for what is right. (Student leader 10)

The majority of the participants shared the same sentiment of fear of harassment on campus, even as bystanders. As a result, they chose to avoid the university environment. Students shared their fears of the chaos on campus because students get injured when they clash with armed police and private security personnel and attending classes because they are sensorily disturbed when pepper spray is used by security officials to disperse protesters. Moreover, SAPS and Mi7 had difficulty identifying who was and was not protesting within the university community, resulting in all members of the community becoming potential victims of violence.

Richmond (2014) revealed that students exposed to violence are vulnerable to psychological effects, especially when there is a lack of support services. Similarly, this study found that student leaders and students do not have adequate counselling services to help and/or cope with community members exposed to violence.

> … no, the one that we have is not effective in assisting those who are traumatised during the violent protest. (Student leader 8)

> Our counselling services need to be protested even… that department is very understaffed. We need adequate support structures here at UKZN; what is happening is a joke. (Student leader 6)

Student leaders reported a lack of counselling services to cater for university community members affected by violence during student protests. This indicated that students become psychologically affected by violence and need adequate counselling services to ease traumatic experiences of the university community. Students stated that the counselling services are short-staffed to assist 15 students daily.

The participants identified the university environment as a community that wreaks fear of victimisation and property damage. The fear manifests through anxiety and concentration problems. It can also affect their daily functions. For example, the traumatised may avoid the spaces where the traumatic incident happened, which will hinder the academic progress of the students and affect the functionality of the university.

With SAPS and Mi7 carrying weapons and often using force to manage protestors, the data gathered revealed that the academic, psychological, and behaviour-related effects of violence are prevalent in the university community, and significantly impact the community's sense of safety on campus and learning outcomes. Due to previous exposure to violence (Kallsen et al., 2020), students avoid the university campus and have observed

that anyone can be victimised (i.e. injured) during student protest action because law enforcement fails in distinguishing protesting students from non-protesting students. These students learn through observing the cycle of violence (Bandura, 1983) during protest actions and decide to avoid the university environment, believing that the act of avoidance will save them from the effects of violence (i.e. being a potential victim).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study found that the different factors that contribute to student hooliganism include poor communication between student leaders and university management regarding student grievances, the presence of SAPS on campus, SAPS being armed and shooting rubber bullets at students, and the presence of private security/Mi7. Some of the students who engage in violent student protest actions do so because they perceive university management as irresponsive to their grievances. The finding revealed that violence during protest actions has become not only the problem-solving mechanism, but it has also become the language of the protesters. Students use hooliganism as a language through which to be heard and the language the university management uses to signal attentiveness to the protesting students. The violent acts perpetrated by students during the demonstrations can influence other students to become violent in a process of modelling. Students will become hooligans simply because other students act in a hooligan manner. The operating assumption seems to be that to achieve goals, they need to be violent. Such violent acts can be assimilated and performed by other students, whether on the same campus or another campus.

This study found that the university community has been affected by violent protest actions in several ways, psychologically, emotionally, and behaviourally, resulting from the fear of violence. Some community members felt they could not freely access the university environment because they constantly feared what could happen to them. Some protesters underwent a behaviour change by withdrawing from the university environment, for example, while others became violent or irrational during students protest actions. The exposure to violence or being a victim was found to be an experience that left most community members vulnerable and feeling unsafe within the UKZN environment. These community members avoid the university environment as a response to fear during a student protest action. Students who have been adversely affected by violence or threats of violence need psychological support. However, the UKZN counselling service has a limited number of professionals, being able to assist only about 15 students per day. As a result, when students are faced with such difficulties, they may become fearful and frustrated. And while some students may end up tending towards avoiding the university environment, others may resort to participating in the violent protests. UKZN needs to immediately address student issues, cater to student needs and implement safety and security measures that will help the institution become safer and more secure as an essential beacon in pursuing excellence. No institution can function effectively with minimal support services.

To reduce and end hooligan behaviour during student protest action, the university management, protesters, law enforcement and the university community at large need to

understand that a university is a community where differences of opinion are common, and conflict must be managed. Moreover, a university environment should always be a space that accommodates and is conducive to the coexistence of different voices, different ideologies, several ways of being, various ways of seeing and learning, and it should not privilege one over the other when dealing with dissent. A university community is complex, and ideal methods of conflict resolution should reflect an awareness and acceptance of these complexities.

Negotiations between the university management and the protesters need to be, where possible, continuous and visible, not only "behind closed doors". The university management and student leaders need to establish clear communication channels to avoid mistrust and conflict. The police and private security need to understand what is expected of them during student protest actions while considering the rights of the public and the protesters. The police need to manage protests without resorting to force and treat the university environment as a weapon-free zone. They need to apply certain basic principles of public policing, including containment, holding the line, facilitation and negotiation.

We maintain that peace and reconciliation initiatives need to be explored to repair relations when student protests occur at universities. It appears that some universities have been highly polarised after experiencing protest action. Genuine dialogues between university management, staff and students are needed to ensure that existing hostilities are resolved. A continuation of violent protests will be destructive and divisive, preventing the university from moving forward, united, on its path to healing.

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Research article

Ceremonial Transformation: The Significance of Renaming Memorial Hall after Sarah Baartman at the University of Cape Town

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Abstract

At the end of 2018, the University of Cape Town renamed its prominent Memorial Hall after Sarah Baartman, which signalled a significant contribution towards transformation endeavours for the institution. This article is a critical literature review of institutional transformation and practice at UCT which examines the significance of renaming the Memorial Hall. Relying on already published work, it explores student and staff experiences to argue that renaming buildings without changing the lived experiences of those who occupy such buildings is not enough. Therefore, the article concludes that attempts at transformation need to stop being solely ceremonial and recommends that UCT improve its transformation efforts. A process that will hinge on the interrogation of the non-traditional experiences of those who now occupy the buildings during and after the renaming processes, especially for buildings as significant as the Memorial Hall.

Keywords

black students, higher education, renaming of buildings, transformation, universities

Introduction

This article aims to provide a critical evaluation and interpretative analysis of literature on the significance of renaming the famous University of Cape Town (UCT) building, formerly known as the Jameson Hall, the Sarah Baartman Memorial Hall. Renaming the hall is an achievement in UCT's transformation efforts and it serves both existential and political needs of the institution. This article uses the higher education transformation framework to contextualise UCT's transformation processes, which, in 2018, culminated in the renaming of one of the university's landmarks. We acknowledge, however, that the transformation discourse of recent years has been complicated, signifying different things to different people.

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Like Ismail (2011), this article subscribes to the notion that knowledge and experiences are situated, and therefore the reader has to take into account the context and researchers' positionalities. Researcher positionalities foreground the way in which research is conducted and how the social and political positions of the researcher(s) influence the research.

It is essential to note that we, the authors, would previously not have been admitted into UCT as either students or scholars, had it not been for transformation efforts in higher education institutions. We are black and hail from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. We also share the experience of having been students at UCT. The first author is a postgraduate student and a part time employee in the institution and the second author is a member of faculty. Meaning that we are active participants in the environment under study.

Further, we are also, in one way or the other, involved in and with the university's transformation endeavours. Finally, it is important to acknowledge the recognized and unrecognized power dynamics between us (that is, student-lecturer; supervisor-supervisee; race and class dynamics) as influenced by our individual positionalities. The significance of our positionalities can be related to how we both became interested in the research fields of higher education transformation and student access and success, as influenced by our lived experiences as black students in a historically white university.

Defining Transformation

For Pattman and Carolissen (2018, p. 1), transformation refers to "ways in which unjust and discriminatory institutional structures and practices engineered to privilege dominant cultures during apartheid South Africa had to be reshaped for a just and equitable society". Therefore, nominal changes, such as UCT's renaming of Jameson Hall, exemplify institutional responses to the previously unacknowledged potential psychological impacts of historical aesthetics on those from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, as they echo harmful ideologies. However, this type of transformation arises not wholly from a sympathetic impulse. By changing "the names of buildings, […] the iconography, the economy of symbols whose force is to create or induce particular states of humiliation; pictures or images that mentally harass Black students on an everyday basis because these students know whom these images represent" (Mbembe 2016, p. 29), it also attempts to refine the public image of universities.

Albertus (2019) suggests that transformation in higher education aims to change the social structures of colonial education embodied in our universities. And meaningful transformation should be about changing the curricula and increasing the number of black academic staff. This means that transformation must be all-inclusive, politically and philosophically, with the intention of changing the historically Eurocentric intellectual tradition (Albertus, 2019). Through the work of Taylor and Taylor (2010), we understand transformation in higher education as endeavours that seek to redress the marginalization of African civilization in the processes of knowledge production and its dissemination.

Transformation at UCT

UCT is a significant space in which to evaluate transformation because it is one of the historically whites-only universities which now is "a highly ranked, research-led university in South Africa" (Morrell et al., 2020, p. 2), and it is also argued to be one of the best universities on the African continent. UCT also became one of the critical sites where students initiated the active and symbolic removal of the statue of colonialist Cecil John Rhodes, which previously stood at the centre of upper campus, in 2015. #RhodesMustFall was followed by #FeesMustFall student protests which erupted from the University of Witwatersrand (Ndelu, 2017) as a way of agitating for transformation and claiming space.

The renaming of buildings that had previously been named after people with a dishonourable colonial history was in response to the demands of #RhodesMustFall activists. Such demands rest on the argument, forwarded by Manatsha (2014), that the inherited colonial names of buildings glorify colonial brutality and racism and this glorification has to end (see Ndletyana, 2012). This compelled UCT to establish task teams to audit the work of transformation committees that had been established before the student protests, including the Naming of Buildings Committee (NoBC).

The decision to rename the building now known as the Sarah Baartman Memorial Hall lay in its significance to university culture. The building is meaningful to the experiences of UCT students because it houses graduation ceremonies, thereby bringing together different families from different walks of life to celebrate success. Therefore, renaming this building could be understood as a practice of material and symbolic inclusion of students and staff of previously excluded identities (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). It is an attempt to centre the feelings of students from previously marginalized backgrounds, which are normally not accorded significance, especially in comparison to the glorification of the institution.

Furthermore, the institution recognizes that transformation is an ongoing process, and it has committed itself to reinforcing a new, inclusive identity for UCT through an appropriate display of artworks, symbols, and building names and through the use of indigenous South African languages for official informational purposes (UCT, 2016).

This article presents several factors related to transformation in addition to renaming of buildings, which are relevant to histories resisting change and institutional culture, namely curriculum change, student accommodation and demographics. We argue that if such examples are not linked with positive lived experiences of staff and students, they represent what we have termed ceremonial transformation – and ceremonial transformation has to end. The article starts with research methodological insights on how data has been collected. It then provides background on the life of Sarah Baartman and the significance of her name replacing that of a colonialist. Literature on histories resisting change and on institutional cultures will then be reviewed, followed by a discussion. The article contributes to the research on transformation and specifically the debates about the significance of renaming buildings at higher education institutions in South Africa.

Research Methodological Insights

This article was developed within a qualitative research paradigm through a critical literature review. We have used the literature review to critically discuss prior research and strengthen knowledge by giving focus and direction to studies for further improvement (Pare & Kitsiou, 2016). Jesson and Lacey (2006) argued that critical literature reviewing is based on a selection of sources; it is perceptive and analytical. Our selection is based on the relevance of research done in this area, thereby identifying the gap in what still needs to be researched. Critical literature review has enabled us to demonstrate that, although changing building names is significant, it is not enough to alter the lived experiences of students and staff.

Sebidi and Moreira's (2017) research, conducted to understand black students' lived experiences concerning transformation in extended degree programmes, is imperative in our evaluation of the significance of renaming the hall after Baartman. Their work is relevant for its discussion of alienating, exclusionary, and structurally violent experiences of the student body at UCT. This takes place despite the positive shifts in student enrolment demographics and the renaming of buildings.

Moreover, Luckett and Shay's (2020) critical evaluation of transforming the curriculum is crucial for understanding the significance of renaming the hall. Their conceptualization of transformation, coupled with black African students' lived experiences, offers a critical appraisal of the transformation process on which the university has embarked. They demonstrate confidence in using curriculum transformation to challenge broader structural injustices. They also argue for going beyond the concept of justice and emphasising ethical responsibility, which needs to be devised politically and practically by all who are affected by transformation processes (Luckett & Shay, 2020).

The Significance of Sarah Baartman

According to Scully and Crais (2008), Sarah Baartman was a woman of Khoisan descent born in the Eastern Cape in the mid-1770s. She had three children, who all died in their infancy. Her husband was Hendrik de Jongh. She was more than 30 years old when she was brought to London by Hendrik Cesar. In London she was exhibited as a freak show attraction. On stage, Baartman had to erase aspects of her personal history, experience, and identity in order to make her performance of "the Hottentot Venus", as she was nicknamed, credible to her audience. From Magubane's (2001) article, we deduce that "Hottentot Venus" was a derogatory description of the Khoikhoi and San people as a way of othering them.

Sarah Baartman experienced harsh racism and exploitation with which our world still grapples (Scully & Crais, 2008). In 1814 she was sold as a slave to an animal trainer in France, where she died barely a year later of disease and homesickness. Her humiliation did not end there: a plaster cast was made of her body, which was then dissected, and her brain and genitalia were preserved. Her body was dissected by European scientists of that century despite the Griqua people's request to have her remains returned in the 1950s (Scully & Crais, 2008). Finally, in May 2002, Sarah Baartman's remains were repatriated to South Africa and a traditional Khoisan ceremony was held on 9 August 2002 (Pityana & Phakeng, 2018).

On 13 December 2018, UCT officially renamed the hall after Sarah Baartman (Pityana & Phakeng, 2018). The Jameson Hall was originally named after Sir Leander Starr Jameson, the former prime minister of the Cape Colony who initiated an unlawful raid that brought war to South Africa. Therefore, the university determined that it was fitting that the name of Sarah Baartman, a victim of colonial inhumanity, should replace that of a perpetrator of colonial crimes (Pityana & Phakeng, 2018). This action was rationalised by the university as a proud, important, and symbolic step towards ongoing transformation within the institution. According to Kessi (2019), it was also a claim, justification, support for, and legitimisation of the transformative ideas and perspectives officially embraced by the university.

Furthermore, the renaming of the hall was done in the "hope to honour her memory and to restore to her name the dignity that was so brutally stolen from her in the 19th century" (Pityana & Phakeng, 2018, para. 1). The renaming of the hall after Sarah Baartman can be located within the broader context of attempts to eradicate colonial memory and efforts to satisfy black existential identity post-colonialism (Ndletyana, 2012). It was also a significant moment for recognition of the past traumas especially of black students and staff and signify the institution's attempts at fostering healing (Kessi, 2019).

The idea of renaming the hall was initially communicated to staff, students, and alumni in 2016 (Pityana & Phakeng, 2018) and it is aligned with the *UCT 2020 Strategic Plan Framework*. After the university had invited students, staff and alumni to suggest possible names for the hall, the NoBC proposed Sarah Baartman as the new name and initiated the appropriate procedures and consultations with members of UCT and the Khoisan community.

The consultation process included university, community, faith, political and cultural organisations, (Pityana & Phakeng, 2018). UCT committed itself to address practices that have been exclusionary for marginalized identities within UCT. This commitment intended to further motivate the imagination about alternative practices that advance social justice and, as such, contribute to sustainable development (UCT, 2016).

Findings

Histories resisting change

According to Manatsha (2014), people who resist change posit that it is important to "preserve" history by leaving the colonial names unchanged. Similarly, others argue that while renaming buildings may tell a new tale, the old names also tell a story. They therefore believe that there is a need to strike a balance (see Ndletyana, 2012). Striking a balance would be acknowledging that both the formerly oppressed and the oppressors are going through a change, which would see both lose some history and gain some new experiences. Ndletyana, (2012), however, highlights that the black population responds differently to colonial memory – some relate to it, while others are ambivalent – whereas most white people feel that they are losing their identity and privilege in this transformation process.

The movements of 1976 and 2015/2016 have demonstrated how, whatever changes governments have proven unwilling to institute, South African students have shown that they would agitate for themselves. From 2015 to 2017, predominantly black students

under the banners of the #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall and #Shackville movements expressed the persistent exclusion that black students and staff are subjected to at UCT. It is for this reason that black students in their large numbers called for the fall of the Rhodes statue at UCT, regarding it as a symbol oppression of black people (Ndelu, 2017).

After nearly 30 years of democracy, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is still planning to tackle the lack of student accommodation, evidenced in the *DHET Strategic Plan 2020-2025* (Nzimande, 2020). It is for this reason that Luckett and Shay (2020) proposed that, in order to transform higher education, it is important to address black students' material needs. Provision of student accommodation, for which previously disadvantaged students are prioritised, is an important part of transformation, and it is also one way of addressing black students' material needs and hence changing their lived experiences. Under the banner #Shackville, black students at UCT highlighted the difficulties of lack of accommodation (Ndelu, 2017), which, as we know from Xulu-Gama's (2019) work, has adverse consequences for black students.

In a study by Sebidi and Moreira (2017), black students were able to identify the differences between a curriculum with content which they felt was too Western and did not reflect their lived experiences, and the courses and a curriculum that they felt spoke to their identities and experiences. These students are the same as those housed in university student accommodation and lecture halls whose renaming was celebrated at UCT, and this shows that transformation needs to be comprehensive. While transformation might be partly addressed by renaming buildings, it may continue to be disregarded in course content or living conditions at residences.

Luckett and Shay (2020) document that South Africa's inherited curriculum does not meet the needs of the majority of the student body. It is for that reason that they argued for the salience of reframing or decolonising the curriculum to recognize the plurality of the student populace, given that the current curriculum is defined by an overwhelming privileging of white culture. They envisioned that a truly transformed curriculum would encompass different cultural backgrounds, dismantling the asymmetrical, hierarchal dynamics of current popular education systems, which see the teacher cascading knowledge down to unquestioningly receptive students (Luckett & Shay, 2020).

However, the mostly white male traditionalists resisting change at higher education institutions argue that transformation would mean lowering the standards of education and knowledge produced by higher education institutions (Kessi, 2013; Kessi & Cornell, 2015; Ramphele, 2008). This resistance leads us to explore the significance of institutional culture.

Institutional culture

UCT has acknowledged that institutional culture change is their greatest challenge. Therefore, they have made it the cornerstone of UCT's vision of transformation (DVC, 2018). For a long time, UCT has had transformation policies that sought to change its institutional culture and it continues on this trajectory. For instance, under the leadership

of Vice-Chancellor Ramphele, UCT had goals to increase the number of black students and academics, and thus introduced Growing Our Own Timber (GOOT). GOOT intended to recruit black students to encourage them to consider a career in academia, (Ramphele, 2008).

Sadiq et al. (2019) argue that, notwithstanding increases in the number of black scholars over the years, the majority of UCT academic staff is still white. Furthermore, the recent, aforementioned example of bringing back a white male professor (Hall) to fill a position vacated by a black female professor (Feris), who was a deputy vice-chancellor (DVC), is indicative of a faltering in the institution's efforts to institute a transformed institutional culture (Naidu, 2021).

UCT's strategy to change its institutional culture is characterized by six key focus areas, namely (1) students and staff; (2) place and space; (3) institutional responses to discrimination, harassment, and violence; (4) community engagement; (5) African identity; and (6) curriculum support. The focus of this article is on place and space, which has to do with artworks, symbols and naming of buildings (DVC, 2018). For us, this key area does not make sense on its own but is intricately interlinked with the experiences of the students and staff, the first key area. From the background provided above, it is evident that UCT, through the process of renaming the hall, tried to work through most of these focus areas, bearing in mind the continuous transformational processes that the university continues to engage with.

Ramphele (2008) described UCT's institutional culture as entrenched practices that favour white males at universities at the expense of others. On the same note, Nhlapo et al. (2020) conceptualized institutional culture as white, un-communicated practices that are exclusionary and discriminating to black academics and students at UCT. They noted, however, that not all white academics at UCT harbour racist sentiments against black academics and students.

According to Ismail (2011, 2007), institutional culture is often described as chauvinistic, cold and competitive, and is often cited as a barrier to attracting and retaining black staff and students. Other factors which add to the complexity of institutional culture are a great divide in rank between junior and senior academic staff, and between administrative and academic staff. Unfortunately, this one example of Professor Hall replacing Professor Feris aligns with the definitions of institutional culture documented above.

A more relational interpretation of institutional culture has been provided by Van der Westhuizen (2018) who acknowledges that institutional culture is not quantifiable; hence a lot needs to be done in order to eradicate institutional practices of domination, exclusion, stigmatisation, and marginalization. For the UCT community, this implies that simply presenting statistics indicating growth in black student admissions to the institution cannot be regarded as an adequate reflection of transformation. This also applies to the number of buildings that have been renamed and the number of sculptures and artworks which have been placed around campus.

Institutional culture has also been seen as part of the hidden curriculum. Van der Westhuizen (2018) explains that:

> [the] hidden curriculum consists of everyday, normative, cultural assumptions that form part of and are productive of the institutional culture, that it encompasses both the informal and formal statements in educational spaces, that it should be broadly contextualised to ascertain the social norms that inform it; that it represents a contact point for acculturation into dominant norms that draw on race, gender and other categories to determine recognition of subjects within an institution. The hidden curriculum is a situated, determinable instance of the institutional culture at micro level. (p. 345)

Van der Westhuizen (2018) approaches these elements as operating in a dynamic co-constitutive interrelatedness:

> They mutually construct each other and together, interactively constitute the whole of institutional life, formal and informal, individual and collective, micro and macro, at universities. Therefore, transformation in one or more of these areas will affect other areas, either in advancing transformation or in invoking resistance to transformation. (Van der Westhuizen, 2018, p. 340)

As part of institutional culture, the chances of seeing black bodies at UCT campuses have increased greatly, as evidenced by Luckett and Shay (2020), Kessi and Cornell (2015) and Ramphele (2008). Luckett and Shay (2020), however, noted the ambivalence of the transformation embodied in the extended degree programme with black students feeling that such a programme, couched in a modernising development discourse, creates colonial binaries of us and them; the educated and uneducated. Taylor and Taylor (2010) warn that there is a massive clustering of African women in social sciences and humanities as well as in education, a large number of whom end up not even graduating.

While UCT has witnessed a few black women in key strategic and management positions (such as former VC, Dr Ramphele, chancellor, Dr Precious Moloi-Motsepe, VC, Professor Phakeng, chair of council, Ms Ngonyama and Ms Mohamed as deputy), if people in such positions – nominally of power – continue to experience bullying, alienation, marginalization and stigmatisation, similarly to the many black staff and students, the transformative processes and achievements would surely be put into question. Their positioning would be revealed to be exemplary of ceremonial transformation. Leading us to ask: what is the significance of these transformative actions? Are they merely for window-dressing UCT as a truly inclusive African university? Do the experiences of the UCT community at large signify the institution's commitment to changing the institutional culture?

Discussion

The process of renaming buildings is an ongoing initiative, geared towards righting the colonial wrongs and thereby reclaiming African identity in the university space. Manatsha (2014) attests that renaming buildings usually follows some kind of a revolutionary change, be it social, political, or economic change. At UCT, a kind of revolution was revived by students through the #RhodesMustFall movement. Munyuki et al. (2018) argue that while universities frequently have formal policies in place to declare their commitment

to inclusion and non-discrimination, there are a number of ways in which institutional cultures do not support the espoused policies. For example, having a black woman professor who was a DVC for transformation replaced by a retired white male professor signifies historical institutional culture refusing to change.

With the renaming of the Sarah Baartman Hall, the university tried to decentralise power and authority, to communicate that any part of the university community stood an equal chance of coming up with the new name. The process of renaming critical landmarks is a power play and such processes are always contested (Manatsha, 2014; Ndletyana, 2012). It evokes identity politics and unequal power relations and dynamics, as well as deep ideological deliberations (Manatsha, 2014).

Ismail (2007, 2011) recognized the demonstration of an awareness of cultural diversity by identifying suitable names for buildings as an important step towards transformation. We also acknowledge the efforts that UCT made in forming the NoBC, as well as the NoBC choosing Sarah Baartman's name. Indeed, it is significant that such a structure exists and that the new name is not of a male politician, but that of a poor black South African woman. Manatsha, (2014, p. 272) argues that, "colonialism played a major role in 'erasing' the identities of the conquered and colonised communities in many ways". Therefore, using her name for an important building at UCT is a way of reasserting the history of UCT, rewriting her history, and endowing her memory with the significance and dignity she was denied in her later life and that of the many people she represents.

However, in a study done by Kessi and Cornell (2015) at UCT, many of the participants, who were black students, described how arriving at UCT was marked by "feeling black" (p. 3) for the first time. The feelings of students as they walk up and down these buildings and corridors do not match the status accredited to the institution worldwide. These feelings also cannot be matched with the respect accorded by family, friends and their communities when they learn that students are part of the top-achieving university. One participant from Kessi and Cornell's study said it seems the institution is more privileged than the students, as students see themselves as insignificant (Kessi & Cornell, 2015).

The UCT environment marginalizes and alienates black people and this is unfortunately an important part of transformation era experiences at UCT – a lack of belonging and low self-esteem amongst black students and staff who are left to grapple, often for the first time, with the reality of what it means to be black in South Africa today. Kessi and Cornell's (2015) findings show that students' perception of themselves impacts on their academic performance, similarly to how Xulu-Gama (2019) shows that access to student accommodation positively impacts their academic performance.

In this article, various transformative processes have been discussed, with the focus being on the renaming of the Sarah Baartman Memorial Hall. We argue that what we have termed ceremonial transformation is that which can be recognized quantitatively and symbolically but not felt qualitatively: it renames buildings (whether it is lecture halls or student accommodation) and hosts huge events to launch the new names without changing the lived experiences of the people occupying those buildings. One example of ceremonial transformation is the appointment of black people to higher positions without

providing adequate support to the newly appointed individuals. Another example would be increasing the number of registered black students in former white universities without providing the necessary academic support, including providing student accommodation for the back students who are in need.

Conclusion

This article argues first that renaming the hall after Sarah Baartman inadequately signifies transformation or changing institutional culture if the structures and the practices of those who occupy these buildings remain the same. Second, the renaming of the hall as an act of transformation stands in contradiction to other seemingly anti-transformative practices (such as the appointment of a white male professor as DVC of transformation). While a black woman's name and history is being glorified, many black women's experiences are undermined and disqualified in the country and in historically racially exclusive spaces, such as UCT. The large numbers of black students without accommodation, and who struggle with course content and end up not graduating reflect the soft underbelly of ceremonial transformation. Therefore, bringing an end to ceremonial transformation is one way of successfully fighting the histories that resist change as well as changing the stubborn institutional culture plaguing our institution. We recommend that UCT must further interrogate if there are any new meanings and experiences that staff and students associate with these renamed buildings. What are the ways in which students and staff can resist the feelings of isolation, alienation, inferiority, inadequateness and incompetency as they occupy these renamed buildings?

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Research article

An Exploratory Qualitative Study on the Perceived Barriers to Accessing Ghanaian University Counselling Services

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Abstract

Despite research emphasis on university students' counselling needs and service benefits, barriers to counselling service participation for students have been less explored in Ghanaian higher education. Yet literature is replete with reports on high undergraduate student attrition and a low sense of belonging, stressing the severe need for increased counselling service participation among students in higher education. This article explored the barriers to increased counselling service participation faced by Ghanaian public university students. Our research engaged 13 counselled undergraduate students, purposively selected via snowball and convenience sampling techniques. We engaged study participants in in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion to gather appropriate data and further used the interpretive phenomenological approach to find meaning in the gathered data. Students revealed their perceptions on poor counsellors' sense of initiative, their low service awareness, and their misconceptions which seem to hinder students' counselling service participation. Our results underscore the need for more service advertising and possibly increased counsellor initiative to promote counselling service use among higher education students in Ghana. Daily service advertising with counsellors' reliance on text and WhatsApp messaging, still pictures and short videos on the various campuses (Amos et al., 2020) would considerably increase students' awareness of counselling services.

Keywords

counselling, academic achievement, higher education, student support service

Introduction

Higher education students derive immense benefits when they engage with the institutional counselling services made available to them (Colón & Stern, 2011). This service notably promotes students' academic performance and therefore facilitates their timely and successful graduation (Stallman, 2012). Without undermining the key role played by first-year orientation programmes in facilitating student institutional adjustment

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and actualisation of a meaningful college experience (Owusu et al., 2014; Cooper, 2021), compelling evidence confirms the usefulness of engagement with individual and group counselling services for first-year students especially. In terms of the former, research has shown that those first-year students who had engaged in the carefully planned orientation programme of the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, for instance, were more likely to easily receive promotion to their second year of study in the 2013/2014 academic year (Owusu et al., 2014). Many of these new students reported having a stronger sense of belonging, and experiencing less stress, confusion, and anxiety once they had participated in the institution's lively orientation programme in their initial year of study (Owusu et al., 2014; Ocansey & Gyimah, 2015; Cooper, 2021). However, the benefits students draw from experiencing a comprehensive orientation programme are indisputable. For instance, many report an improved sense of academic direction and motivation (Aidoo, 2011), and also learned how to practise worthwhile study habits at university when counselling complemented orientation (Essuman, 2007). Such academic habits include improved library use, prompt lecture attendance, and time-management skills (Quampah, 2010). Student experiences with their institutional counselling facilities have also been shown to bring improvements in mental health (Andoh-Arthur et al., 2015), relational skills to foster the establishment and maintenance of more reliable personal emotional and romantic relationships (Liem & Martin, 2011). Students additionally gained robust financial management skills, marriage satisfaction, and encountered fewer accommodation problems on their respective campuses, all of which culminated in their improved academic performance (Quampah, 2010). The aforementioned equally endorse the utility of counselling services in ensuring overall improvement in students' lives (Choi et al., 2010).

Thus, the institutionalisation of the counselling facility in Ghanaian higher education as early as 1997 was a matter of course (Essuman, 1999, 2015). However, the recent past has seen Ghanaian university students' continual overlooking of their institutional counselling services, despite their severe need for support, which has increased to a worrying extent (Andoh-Arthur et al., 2015). Cultural factors generally underpin students' disregard for counselling services, promoting their preference for prayer camp services and traditional healing centres instead (Asamoah et al., 2014; Osafo et al., 2015). Fear of social stigma and rejection also deter students from participating in counselling centre activities on various Ghanaian university campuses (Andoh-Arthur et al., 2015). Other service barriers include students' low problem perception, poor service awareness (exacerbated by low service advertising on university campuses), and excessive workload (Vidourek et al., 2014; Marsh & Wilcoxon, 2015; Armstrong & Young, 2015). Low service awareness often leads to poor service use (Stallman, 2012; Kituyi, 2014) and it is common for Ghanaian university students to experience severe service ignorance which often results in institutional resources going unused (Kituyi, 2014). Educational stakeholders are severely disturbed by the situation, given their profound insight into the services' usefulness in promoting students' academic and general well-being (Ahyia, 2010; Aidoo, 2011).

Following students' and tutors' popular confessions about counselling service usefulness to their studies and teaching (Ahyia, 2010; Aidoo, 2011), stakeholders have

committed to increasing professional counselling service use among student groups in both Ghanaian universities and colleges of education. Our research thus adopted a phenomenological approach to explore higher education students' reservations to greater counselling participation in Ghanaian public institutions of higher learning. We settled on in-depth interviews and a focus group session to gather data, in consonance with our phenomenological research focus to make worthwhile student idiographic findings from which to derive recommendations towards growing counselling service use by students in Ghanaian higher learning.

Accordingly, the study aimed to achieve the following:

- Gain insight into the unique counselling experiences of academically counselled public university students in Ghana;
- go in depth and highlight individual interpretations of the unique service barriers expressed by academically counselled public university students in Ghana; and
- make appropriate recommendations to forestall the identified service barriers to students' increased service participation in Ghanaian universities.

Theoretical Framework

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), the attitudes humans adopt in their diverse circumstances engender varied outcomes. To be active and persistently engaged (autonomy) or to remain passive and alienated (relatedness), depends largely on the conditions in which one operates. Given the reality of service barriers, and the need for a resilient attitude on the part of students to confront and overcome their individual service access barriers, we adopted self-determination theory as a guide for our research. We found the theory apt for this purpose based on its emphasis on motivation in driving satisfactory human behaviour that gratifies diverse human needs (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Determination in this theory simply refers to the desire, urge, or drive to pursue and fruitfully accomplish an act (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Determination may also be naturally stimulated (intrinsically motivated) or externally activated (extrinsic motivation). While intrinsically motivated behaviours tend to flow spontaneously from within and are thus often propelled by an internal drive to achieve a specified desired goal, extrinsically driven acts oftentimes rely on potent external and attractive elements to drive their goal-achievement process (Ryan & Deci, 2009). Despite their marked differences, both models of motivation thus often integrate meaningfully to facilitate human life advancement.

The theory's key factors, namely autonomy, relatedness, competence, intricately integrate to gratify diverse human psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Unmet psychological human needs are known to often create deep-seated behavioural problems that necessitate professional intervention to overcome them (Vescovelli et al., 2017). Following the profound insight he gained regarding the key concepts of self-determination theory from his experience applying them in an educational setting, Reeve (2002) encouraged teachers to offer their students greater autonomy in order to promote their students' intrinsic motivation and creative competencies (Ryan & Deci, 2009). In agreement with the latter, Turner et al. (2009) also identified intrinsic motivation not only as a key predictor of students' fruitful

academic achievement but also as a potent strategy in sponsoring autonomy, relatedness, and competence to remarkably propel students' academic goal-attainment. The aforementioned elements interestingly endorse the importance of counselling services in augmenting students' academic attainment that further attract students' increased counselling service use at university (Ryan & Deci, 2009; Turner et al., 2009).

In effect, the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) provided a meaningful and logical roadmap that directed our research.

Method

Procedure

We adopted the phenomenological multiple case study design to accomplish this study. Phenomenological studies generate multiple realities from the perceivers' unique understanding of the specified phenomenon to facilitate rich description of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). We deemed the design most appropriate to our study, following our goal of exploring participants' personal experiences with the counselling service in an effort to identify the idiosyncratic barriers relevant to higher learning students in Ghana. The counselling cases explored in this study enriched our ability to identify service barriers, while simultaneously endowing us with "heuristic" knowledge that exclusively aligns with the case study research method we adopted (Salhi, 2017).

Research was conducted in three southern-based Ghanaian institutions, namely institutions A, B, and C. We subsequently provide an overview of each research site in the study.

Overview of the research sites

Institution A

Institution A is located in the coastal, Fantse-speaking town in the Central regional capital. The establishment is well-known for providing high quality education, both to the general populace and training of teachers for all three educational levels in Ghana. The institution boasts a vast landscape, conveniently couched in the Southern and Northern campuses, where over 74 720 students pursue their various educational goals. The institution's major educational facilities, comprising the main library, science laboratories, lecture theatres, and halls of residence, among others, are presently located at the new site, though the counselling centre is currently located at the old site. Currently, Institution A runs about 210 study programmes across the first-, second- and third-degree levels, some of which include the Arts, Science, Education, Psychology, and Computer Sciences studies. We completed the research field work at the new site.

Institution B

Institution B on the other hand is located in the heart of the business and capital town. Founded in 1965, the institution was the first and sole dual-purpose university established

in Ghana. Primarily, institution B provides professional training in the areas of Accountancy, Management, and related disciplines. Students' socio-academic welfare is the responsibility of three professionally trained counsellors who operate from the modern-styled building housing the counselling and gender unit. Institution B currently has a student population of 14 000, many of whom reside in various hostel facilities scattered around the vicinity. The institution is located in a city of over 2.27 million people (representing 70% of the entire country's population), which renders it one of the most populated towns in the country.

Institution C

Institution C is also situated in the relatively small Central regional Efutu-speaking Central region town. Established in 1992, the institution remains an affiliate of institute A, both of which are charged with providing major higher education training programmes in Ghana. Institution C also has the core mandate of training professional teachers for the nursery and primary schools in Ghana. The institution was established from a merger of seven diploma-awarding colleges from various regional capitals in the country. Presently, the institution comprises four campuses, with the north campus being the central site hosting the administrative seat of the vice-chancellor, as well as the main institutional administration block and four other student halls of residence. The north campus also houses the institution's counselling facility, charged with providing socio-personal, academic, and career counselling services to students in the institution. Over 18 000 students are registered to various academic programmes at institution C. We held all our study interactions at the institution's conference room in the main administration block.

Participant characteristics

We engaged 13 participants for this study, comprising eight females and five male students in total. The interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) stresses the importance of using small homogenous sample sizes for high data richness (Holland, 2014; Wagstaff et al., 2014). We also purposively targeted counselled students in this study, in view of their rich knowledge regarding our research focus on students' lesser-known counselling service barriers, in order to derive appropriate answers to our earlier outlined research questions. One out of the 13 research participants was a 32-year-old student, with the remaining 12, aged between 21 and 26, and also being direct university entrants from senior high institutions in Ghana. All study participants identified themselves as adherents of the Christian faith and were registered to programmes in pursuit of either a Bachelor of Education or Science degree.

Research instruments

We used two pre-constructed data collection instruments, namely an in-depth interview and a focus group discussion guide in this study. Both methods enhanced researcher-participant rapport and further afforded participants the liberty to rationalise and articulate their personal thoughts regarding barriers to counselling in Ghanaian institutions (Josselson,

2007). We derived each instrument's items from the study's research question, but also used a conversational and flexible interactive method, replete with open-ended questions, to promote in-depth participant accounts regarding their counselling service deterrents. The strategy further enabled us to probe deeper where necessary, for further clarification regarding students' service barriers. Additionally, we audio recorded all the field interactions, made notes, and also captured some interesting field events in this study, to enrich the final research report. The audio recordings for instance captured participants' unique narratives regarding their counselling service hindrances which greatly enriched the final research report.

Ethical considerations

Qualitative research essentially seeks to understand individuals' context-specific experiences and perspectives for the purpose of new knowledge creation. This critical aim of the research approach underscores the need for ethical considerations in conducting credible qualitative research (Kyngäs et al., 2019). Though extremely extensive, ethical considerations are fundamental to the credibility of all exploratory research (Pietilä et al., 2019). In this regard, Tweedlie (2016) asserts that qualitative research informants are often vulnerable due to the probing nature of exploratory studies. We thus took great care to follow due ethical qualitative procedures in this study, by seeking ethical clearance and research permission from appropriate agencies, providing participant briefing regarding the research, and further requesting participant consent prior to their engagement in the study. The detailed participant briefing and informed voluntary consent afforded participants the liberty and confidence to comprehensively articulate their views regarding the research topic in this inquiry process. According to Yeong et al. (2018) a reliable interview protocol generates detailed qualitative data in all exploratory studies. Such comprehensive data enrich the research, thereby enabling the inquirers "to gain better understanding of the respondents' experience and identify crucial elements relevant to the subject matter" (Yeong et al., 2018, p. 1).

Participant selection and data collection procedures

At institution A we employed the snowball sampling method to gather data for this study. Our first contact, a lecturer and counsellor, linked us to two counselled students, Lady and Mawutoh, who we engaged in the study after a thorough briefing regarding our research purpose and their expected roles, among other ethical requirements. We assigned them pseudonyms in order to protect their personal identities, in line with confidentiality requirements. Similarly, Nhyira (female) and Nelson (male) heard about our research and joined at the recommendation of a former student at institution A.

At institution B we recruited five students, comprising three males (Seerious, Gordee and Kwesi) and two females (Pee and Esi), for our research purposes. After a long process of searching for counselled students at institution C, the institutional chaplain roped in three female students (Bigails, Yaa and Baby) for our research engagement. We complied with the approved ethical research requirements throughout our field work in this study and further

offered our volunteers the opportunity to opt out of the research project at any time they so desired, without any consequence to them. We further ensured that all participants were well-informed about their expected roles, felt safe, and provided their written consent prior to their engagement in the study. We eventually held two in-depth interviews with 10 of the 12 participants we engaged in the research. Each interview session lasted between 30 to 45 minutes.

In the case of the focus group discussion held at the main students' hostel in institution B, a total of eight participants were in attendance. To accomplish this, one researcher facilitated the session while the other assisted with the audio recording, with permission from participants. We subsequently kept the gathered raw data safely in the institution's archives for confidentiality purposes.

Establishing trustworthiness in the study

The foregoing detailed information provided regarding our research processes and adopted methods serves to paint a clear picture of our study for credibility purposes. Credible qualitative research often reflects the three measures of transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Sousa, 2014; Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016). To promote research transferability, we described our physical research settings, the type of participants we engaged in the study, and elaborated on the appropriateness of the methods we applied in accomplishing this study. According to Sousa (2014) it is important for the research design to fit the kind of research question to which a study seeks to respond, the selected participants to engage the research question, and the methods applied to reach credible findings. In phenomenological studies like the one in hand, the suitability of the adopted methods should enable the research findings to naturally emerge from gathered data, rather than to reveal the personal predispositions of the researchers.

Sefotho (2015) thus describes such findings as the personal or internal ideas and belief systems of social actors about the social phenomenon under study. We carefully chose a well-informed set of participants (counselled university students) to inform our investigation of barriers to accessing counselling services faced by students (Sousa, 2014). Our further efforts at ensuring data consistency, such as conducting occasional member-checking during field work, and also cautiously triangulating our gathered data from both sources to achieve data comprehension, equally aimed at confirming the credibility of our research findings. The faithful reproduction of the above details ensures the dependability of our research, as it may enable other researchers in the field to replicate our study over time to assess the consistency of the study's results (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016).

Data analysis

We combined the interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) with thematic analysis in this study to unearth participants' exclusively articulated personal barriers to counselling service access in Ghanaian universities (Nizza et al., 2021). We chose the abovementioned meaning-making methods because interpretive phenomenological study participants

actively interpret their subjective world, rather than remaining passive recipients in the knowledge-creation process (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Nizza et al., 2021). By fervently relying on their reported terminologies and texts in our knowledge-creation process, we stressed participants' context-specific and time-bound realities (Sefotho, 2015). This served the purpose of endorsing the ontological underpinnings of participants' lived experiences with counselling service barriers, many of which largely depended on the physical, social, and cultural circumstances in which they were grounded; and more especially that their reported service barriers emerged solely from their periodic encounter with their institutional counselling service (Nizza et al., 2021).

Our initial transcript re-readings then saw us noting all thoughts, observations and reflections that occurred to us on the left transcript margin (Wagstaff et al., 2014). We subsequently captured recurring phrases and personal questions that engulfed our thoughts during further readings on the right side, and also used bracketing to centralise participants' actual field presentations, rather than our private researcher presuppositions and judgements in this mission (Tufford & Newman, 2012). We then engaged theme re-grouping or clustering to re-arrange the set of ideas we had earlier gathered into a more hierarchical and coherent picture that reflected participants' expressed counselling service barriers. We again ensured that the broader themes we derived essentially reflected participants' ideas to maintain credibility in our research. Finally, we derived a master list of themes on a summary table, with corresponding interview quotations, as evidence of participants' actual accounts regarding their barriers to the institutional counselling service.

Results

Major themes related to factors derailing students' use of counselling service in the studied public Ghanaian institutions of higher learning emergent from the study included students' perceptions of counsellors' low sense of initiative, low counselling service awareness, poor first-year orientation service, students' counselling service misconceptions, poor service location and uninviting counselling setting, and counsellor unavailability.

Counsellors' lack of initiative

Regarding the perceived lack of initiative of counsellors at her institution, a participant called Esi reported that "… counsellors stay in their offices and expect students to come to them before they get to know that counselling exists in this institution … I'm not sure it's the best idea …" (Participant from institution B). She went on to say: "I frankly think counsellors should be more up and doing … they should step out of their comfort zones and work …" (Participant from institution B). This was later confirmed by another female participant from institution A named Nhyira, who went on to make an important suggestion regarding counsellors' sense of initiative. She noted that "… they should come out and educate us more about counselling … and its benefits … because a lot of people do not know the essence of the service …". Likewise, another female participant from institution B, Pee, confidently agreed with Esi and Nhyira's observations. Pee shared that

"… some students … are ignorant about counselling". In addition to the aforementioned reports, participants' criticisms of counsellors' limited use of information-sharing strategies for counselling purposes also emerged as a theme in this study. For example, many participants accused counsellors of adopting outmoded and mundane strategies, like word-of-mouth invitations, and cited a lack of prior advertising for counselling-related activities on campus, instead of using modernized and student-friendly data-dissemination tools like flyers, brochures, banners and positive declarations from popular student leaders and role models. Information dissemination regarding counselling-related issues thus presented a key barrier to participants' enthusiastic use of the counselling service in the studied institutions.

A number of study participants also criticised the first-year orientation. For instance, Pee from institution B remarked that "… organised orientation events were quite limited because there were many students in other departments the counselling staff needed to talk to within their usually restricted time frame …". She further added that her first-year orientation event was "… boring and restricted ... Because they just come to talk to us about what they do and all that … but it's … just for few minutes … yes, just few minutes during my orientation in level 100 …". In a similar manner, Esi noted that: "... I realise that it's only during the orientation that counsellors are made known and that for me is problematic. There are no side programmes … they don't organise any programme for you to be aware that, yes this is going on … Because when other people who are transferred from various institutions join us, how do they get to know about counselling if they missed orientation …?"

Low counselling service awareness

Related to the abovementioned service barriers was the reported poor counsellor-sense-of-initiative and related poor institutional counselling service promotion among students on the various campuses. In this regard, 23-year-old Esi confessed, for instance, that: "Me, initially I didn't know that counselling existed here, it was someone who even told me about it, I didn't know there was a counselling unit in my institution …" (Participant from institution B).

From the same institution B, 21-year-old Pee explained that "People don't really know that there is counselling session that you can just walk in and talk about your problems in this institution". On three different occasions, 25-year-old Nelson, from institution A, likewise confessed his ignorance about the location of his institution's counselling centre. He claimed: "I didn't even know the place". Bigails from institution C, the oldest participant in the group, later contributed to the discussion, saying: "In fact, whenever you tell people to go for counselling, they often say we don't know the counselling centre". Further, Baby, another 21-year-old, also confessed her ignorance about the availability of counselling services at institution C when she noted that: "I haven't been there before, I don't even know the place".

Baby further echoed Pee's views as a reason for her delayed use of institution C's counselling centre. She explained that: "Because I didn't know we have a counselling

centre here … yes, I have been in this institution for the past two years but I didn't know ... in fact I think a lot of people don't also know the place".

Poor first-year orientation service

Participants' expressions on the nature and quality of their respective institutions' organised first-year orientation event were generally unflattering. Participants' field accounts about the yearly orientation event revealed a rather brief, monotonous and mechanical encounter. With less time spent at the event, coupled with the unending monotony of its presentation, the students had very little to benefit from their orientation experiences. The implications of students' lack of interest in the first-year orientation were severe and unfortunate. Many of them ended up losing interest and therefore feeling uninvolved in the orientation programme. For example, 21-year-old participant, Pee (from institution B) perceived the event as "… quite limited". She explained, "… it's ... just for few minutes … yes, just few minutes during my orientation in level 100".

Likewise, at institution A, 23-year-old Mawutoh described the same programme "… as too brief and fast … it's always as if we were being chased out of the place". At institution C, Baby, who is 21 years of age, also described the orientation programme as "… extremely short and hurriedly organised…". Pee subsequently explained her orientation experience thus: "… because there are other departments the organisers have to talk to … it takes only few minutes". Going on to articulate another weakness of the programme, she noted that "…they just come to talk to us about what they do and all that … in fact, a level three hundred friend told me it's been like that for years now".

Students' counselling service misconceptions

The qualitative data gathered from our 12 students revealed that misconceptions regarding the counselling services prevail in Ghanaian institutions. Aside from not fully trusting their counsellors with their private lives, our participants also misconstrued the roles of their counsellors on their various campuses. These erroneous perceptions of counsellors' roles and poor service awareness led them to consult their parents and guardians regarding their personal problems, instead of relying on the geographically more accessible counsellors on the various campuses. For instance, Nelson (from institution A) reported on the matter this way: "Even the close friends I have have never gone for counselling ... They tell me they don't know the use of the counselling centre. Yes, after all they can call their parents for counselling".

Mawutoh's initial misconception of counselling practice was evidenced in her remark that "at first I was thinking if you go for counselling, people will get to know my problem". Her fears of the shameful effect of such a situation increased her reluctance to attend counselling: "that seems like you are exposing yourself and that is very, very bad because it can bring shame to you" (26-year-old Participant from institution A). Similarly, Yaa's service misconception related to fear of breach of confidence and prevented her from seeking early counselling assistance when she really needed it. She reported that: "I feared that my

problem would go to the social media and then a lot of questions may come after. That can be disastrous. I could even be ridiculed by my friends on campus" (Participant from institution C).

In the same vein, Nelson's counselling misconception as a strictly freshers activity almost denied him the opportunity to benefit from the facility. He admitted: "I thought counselling was solely meant for level hundreds (first-year students), so I was shy to attend counselling".

Poor service location and uninviting counselling settings

The physical appearance of the buildings housing the counselling facilities of the various institutions also presented as a barrier to students' service use. As noted by some participants, the seemingly poorly located, unlabelled, and unpleasant look of the service buildings prevented students from visiting the place. Thirty-two-year-old Bigails from institution C shared that "the counselling centre's appearance doesn't look attractive. You see sometimes you have a nice building and the way the environment is, attracts you to go inside and see what is happening there. This one doesn't have it".

On another note, institution A participants, Nhyira and Nelson, thought the facility was poorly located on their institution's campus. "I don't think the counselling centre on campus is easily locatable. Because at first I even thought it was an office or a department for the education students, because there is a bold inscription of the Department of Educational Foundations printed in black paint on the wall, adjacent to the entrance of the Counselling centre", said Nhyira. Confirming the facility's poor physical location, Nelson's specific words were: "one other thing is that where the counselling centre is currently located is wrong. I think it should be brought to where students can easily access it. Or where students can see it. Where it is now, if you are not told that this is the counselling centre, you wouldn't know. Most people don't know that counselling centre". Nelson's concerns seem to support Bigails' earlier observation regarding institution C's counselling facilities: "people say we don't know the counselling centre, because there is no sign to point out the office to visitors. I think the facility should have an indication, something to specify that this is the counselling centre". In that vein, Nelson (institution A) also critiqued the poor condition of the billboard advertising the counselling facility in institution A. He remarked that "the inscriptions on the counselling centre billboard are faded. It's difficult to see".

Counsellor unavailability

Many participants in the study also perceived the frequent unavailability of counsellors at the institutional facilities as a limitation to service access on their various campuses. In their view, counsellors' inability to be available on campus and/or accessible to students at all times either due to their excessive workloads or many other responsibilities outside the institutions' premises does students a disservice when they have to walk long distances to seek counselling, only to find no counsellor on duty. Commenting on this subject, Yaa, the 22-year-old student from institution C, stated: "I will say availability all the

time. Because as we are in our hostels, at times we face certain difficulties and then if a counsellor is available at that time, you can consult him. Because at times your roommate may misbehave and then it will turn into a fight so if a counsellor is available the situation will be solved".

Likewise from institution C, 21-year-old Baby asserted that "Sometimes you, you will be thinking about your problem so much but when you come to see the counsellor, he will not be available. So I think they should be there always".

Discussion

Guided by the interpretive phenomenological research approach, alongside the theoretical underpinnings of the self-determination theory that anchored this study, we identified participants' perceptions of counsellors' low sense of initiative as the greatest service barrier to students from the three Ghanaian public universities featured in our study. Apart from the two extrinsic factors, perceived counsellor unavailability and inconvenient physical location of service facilities on the various institutional campuses, all other mentioned barriers reflect study participants' intrinsic service factors.

Taking the initiative to perform an act fundamentally relates to internal human thought processes, though the ability to persevere through the act for goal-achievement requires considerable force to drive the individual into action (Oudeyer & Kaplan, 2009). In this case, more active drive also implies greater inner determination and a relentless effort to reach the desired goal, which Oudeyer and Kaplan (2009, p. 1) simply refer to as "spontaneous exploration and curiosity". The innate source of such internal drives renders them most enduring and ultimately worthwhile (Chaudhuri, 2020). For that matter, Cholewa et al. (2016) found school counsellors' use of initiative as a major step towards providing worthwhile support services to their groups of students. In their study, counsellors' useful sense of initiative to promote their work often demanded more creativity and intelligence, to increase the value of their work (Cholewa et al., 2016).

Taking initiative and intrinsic interest or motivation represent the primary dual factors propelling worthwhile goal-attainment generally (Esposito et al., 2014a; Oudeyer & Kaplan, 2009). By directly impacting goal-setting and perceived difficulty of the anticipated task (the key elements to goal-achievement) (Esposito et al., 2014b), taking personal initiative and intrinsic interest can be considered as the most critical promoters of life advancement. Equally, self-efficacy beliefs align meaningfully with intrinsic motivation and a sense of initiative, given their exclusive role in promoting resilience and greater inner determination during the entire goal-attainment process (Chaudhuri, 2020). In effect, every commendable activity outcome often results from an internal will and desire to bring the specified goal to fruition. The counsellors' low "self-efficacy beliefs" as perceived by participants in the present research study (Esposito et al., 2014b, p. 1) are thus central to the additionally identified students' subjective service barriers in this study.

As major service providers, it is expedient that counsellors make time to strategize and put greater effort into utilizing their available resources for the smooth implementation of their service-delivery plans (Oudeyer & Kaplan, 2009; Cholewa et al., 2016). Participants'

perceptions of counsellors' seemingly low sense of initiative comprise the greatest service barrier in this study, considering its devastating effects on students' sense of belonging at the institution (Cooper, 2021). It is also the general belief that once students get securely attached to their respective institutions, their levels of academic commitment and educational resilience appreciate profoundly, culminating in their improved academic performance, promotion and timely graduation. Students' sense of connection to their institutions thus simply resonates in their greater self-confidence, academic excellence and institutional retention (Cooper, 2021), which remain the key desires of each student at the higher education level. Some of the participants' perceptions of the current situation in the studied institutions reflect a loss of self-confidence, increased academic stagnation and greater risk of attrition from university.

Participants' perceived lack of counsellor initiative in this case likewise has implications for their reported low service awareness, perceptions of counsellor unavailability and seemingly uninviting physical settings of facilities on the various institutional campuses. It is worth noting, however, that a number of participants' accounts in the study stressed awareness of counsellors' excessive workloads as a principal hindrance to their perceived unavailability. For this reason, participants expressed their desire for counsellors' reduced workload to allow them ample time with clients at the service centres.

Ultimately, the study revealed that counsellors' perceived low sense of initiative appears to precipitate some key student service barriers, including poor service awareness, the prevalence of service misconceptions among the participant population and a correspondingly poor service advertising effort. Evelyn and Tyav (2012) stressed the potential fallout of students' high service ignorance in many institutions. Related to the issues raised in the present study, in their study, participants' service accounts highlighted the subject of students' lacking familiarity with the uses of flyers, identifying pictures and brochures as their preferred forms of disseminating counselling-related information.

Recommendations

To offset the students' counselling hindrances in Ghanaian higher education, as highlighted in the present study, we offer the following recommendations. First, to establish a student-friendly advertising committee that will consistently facilitate service awareness and delivery on the various campuses, thereby fostering counselling service use among students at public universities. Second, the organisation of bi-annual training programmes for the purpose of providing students with better understanding of counsellor roles and functions on the various institutional campuses would be of great benefit to the entire student population regarding counselling services. Finally, petitioning the Ghana Education Service for the reduction of teaching loads of counsellors, thus allowing them more time to dedicate to their counselling service.

Conclusion

Overall, the subjective narratives of the participants in this research study underscored the personal barriers encountered by participants as they sought counselling services at their

respective institutions. The key barriers comprised poor service accessibility, perceived counsellor unavailability, perceived uninviting conditions of counselling service buildings and locations, and low levels of awareness of counselling service availability in the engaged institutions. To reduce students' service barriers to accessing counselling, counsellors are encouraged to show greater initiative and further establish a regime of daily service advertising. The results of this qualitative study, based on the perceptions of 13 students, contribute to our understanding of students' perceptions of counselling services at three public universities in Ghana.

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Book review

Creating conditions for student success: Social justice perspectives from a South African university by M. Fourie-Malherbe (Ed.) (2016). Stellenbosch, South Africa: African Sun Media.

Reviewed by Nico Venter*

The title immediately draws the attention of anyone working in higher education. I work in a counselling centre at the University of the Free State, and often see students struggle with the same challenges that are described in the book. Students struggle not only psychologically; they face social and academic challenges as well. This book is necessary reading for those of us working in the field. While the research on which the book is based is context-specific, the challenges described therein are applicable to most universities in South Africa. Hence, this volume could serve as a great guide for other universities and could also be used as a benchmark for initiatives in other universities that aim to develop conditions that encourage student success.

Creating conditions for student success: Social justice perspectives from a South African university by Magda Fourie-Malherbe is a compilation of original research conducted by various authors at Stellenbosch University. The book offers a holistic perspective on student success. Through research, various challenges faced by modern-day South African students are addressed. The book focuses not only on academic performance, but also on adjustment to university, and increasing students' chances of employability through the development of graduate attributes. Although this book is based on the experiences of Stellenbosch University students, the research findings could be generalized to other South African universities.

The book is divided into four parts and each part focuses on a different aspect of student success. The first part attributes student success to the quality of adjustment to university life. The second part discusses in four chapters the different in-class experiences of students. These include the relationship between the student and lecturer, developing a sense of mastery, and the use of technology in class. The third part considers out-of-class experiences and is comprised of three chapters. The overarching theme in this part is fostering a sense of relatedness amongst students which can contribute to their success. It also addresses students' emotional and psychological well-being. The last part consists of four chapters and focuses on engagement, graduate attributes, and employability. These chapters emphasise various university experiences that contribute to student success.

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Part one, which focuses on access and the first year, discusses students' experiences and adjustment to university, especially non-traditional students who may have had no prior (even second-hand) exposure to the university community, environment, and its workings. It deals with the experiences of students as they first arrive at university and their sense of belonging. Furthermore, it looks at research done at Stellenbosch University which indicates that a mentoring programme could assist students in their adjustment to university life. One of the chapters also looks at empowering students through participation in an advanced mathematical programme. The advanced mathematical programme requires students to master various competencies, which include critical thinking, time management, managing large workloads, perseverance, comprehension, and confidence in mathematical abilities. The programme was found to have contributed to assisting students with the adjustment from school to university. However, as the author notes, implementing such a programme can have serious financial implications for the school and students. However, its importance cannot be ignored.

Part two focuses on in-class experiences and starts with a chapter on using audience response technology to enhance the educator-learner relationship. This chapter explores an alternative to the traditional method of teaching. In the highlighted case studies, audience response technology was developed for students to use on their mobile devices. Mixed results were received. On the one side, the learners have to participate with technological advancements and on the other side, the educator's capability with these technological advancements might influence this two-way relationship. This chapter concludes that both the learner and educator have a responsibility to work on the two-way relationship utilizing technology such as this. Part two also addresses the issue of student exclusion from technology-based academic practices and that the academic environment should focus on fostering inclusivity for people lacking access to technology-based academic practices. Furthermore, this part also looks at the willingness of academics to use technology to educate learners. As mentioned in the book, there is not a straightforward question and answer, but an interplay of factors can contribute to the eagerness of academia to use technology in academics. Furthermore, this part looks at some of the means through which a well-rounded student capable of being employable can be formed. One programme looked at teaching students an extra language to help them communicate more effectively with others. In this instance, by teaching the students the basics of isiXhosa, they were better able to relate to others. Part 2 provides great insight into new ways of approaching academics, and so could be a benefit to lecturers.

Part 3 focuses on out-of-class experiences. This immediately drew me in, since I felt the subjects explored therein could assist me in my own work with students in a counselling centre. Although universities focus on academics, the social aspect of student well-being cannot be ignored. I personally have a lot of interest in how social environment can affect academics. This part addresses various factors that can play a role in student success

outside the classroom. A major focus is creating a sense of belonging, in part achieved by Stellenbosch University through encouraging students to question and challenge stereotyping and personal bias and creating shared spaces for students that live on and off campus. Both were implemented successfully. This part further looks at the role management can play. In this scenario, it looked at the importance of the roles residence heads can play in the achievement of success by acting as mentors. Knowledgeability and good leadership skills are emphasised as significant characteristics residence heads should possess to make a positive impact in these roles. Furthermore, the book posits that counselling centres can play an important role in advocating for and promoting social change. This way, counselling centres could also bolster their significance to student well-being by including advocacy for change to their traditional roles of diagnosing and providing therapy.

Part four addresses student engagement, graduate attributes, and employability. Programmes can be launched at universities to promote social change, such as having critical discussions about diversity, the importance of exchange programmes, as well as networking opportunities. By addressing inequalities such as these, graduates might stand a more equitable chance at landing the jobs for which they have studied. Student success is not only about academics, but also about opportunities after study completion. Graduation does not guarantee a job, therefore, I felt like Part 4, Chapter 16 especially, can give students a glimpse of what they can do to improve their chances of navigating their way successfully into and adjusting to the work environment.

Creating conditions for student success: Social justice perspectives from a South African university shatters the notion that studying alone is sufficient for student success, highlighting the importance of striking a healthy balance between students' academic, personal and social lives. Although this book is based on the research done at Stellenbosch University, it could serve just as well in assisting other universities in their endeavours to create conditions for student success. It offers a good benchmarking tool for other universities. A further important note is that the book is accessible. I personally enjoyed reading the book. It was an easy read; thus its potential beneficiaries are not only those involved in higher education. Prospective students and anyone with an interest in the inner workings of a South African university today stand to profit from this reading.

I hope its reception encourages Stellenbosch University and other institutions to continue to develop and build on programmes that have been found to contribute to student success.

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Prof. Maximus Monaheng Sefotho has contributed to the development of the competency framework for career development practitioners. He works in career transitioning from home and into the world of work of differently abled persons. Prof. Sefotho is an Associate Professor specialising in Career Guidance and Disability in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

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André van Zyl is the Director of the Academic Development Centre (ADC) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), South Africa. His career in higher education at UJ began in 2004 and has since been defined by roles related to first-year student integration. His research interests include first-year student transition and success in the South African higher education environment and the interface between the students and their institutional environments.

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Dr Matthew R. Wawrzynski is professor of Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education in the Department of Educational Administration at Michigan State University, USA. Wawrzynski co-leads an international professional collaborative experience to Nelson Mandela University, South Africa. Also, he is Principal Investigator for the USAID Higher Education Career Development Initiative in Mozambique.

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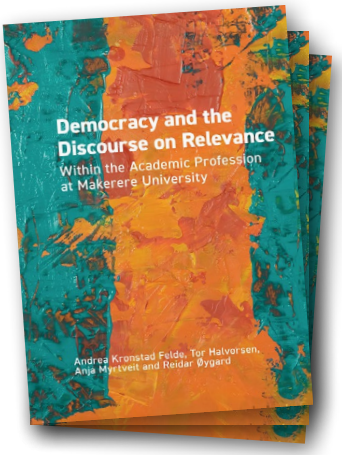

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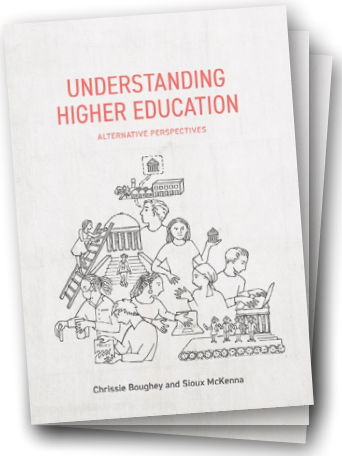

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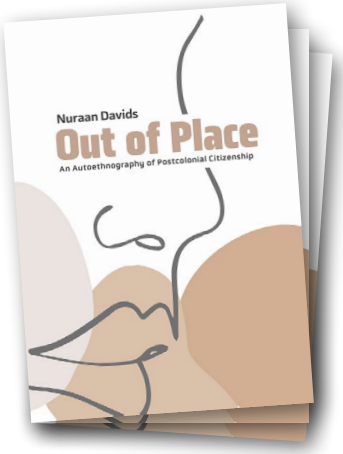

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