

UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND

**FIRST TIME ENTRANTS' STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES
IN CONTRIBUTING TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN
TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND
TRAINING COLLEGES**

PHIWOKUHLE BONGIWE NGUBANE

2018

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CONTRIBUTING TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN TECHNICAL AND
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGES**

BY

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION IN
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DOCTOR OF
EDUCATION DEGREE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM
AND INSTRUCTIONAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
ZULULAND**

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DECLARATION

I, PHIWOKUHLE BONGIWE NGUBANE hereby declare that this thesis, entitled '*First time entrants student support services in contributing to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training*', is my own original work and has never been submitted to any university for the award of any degree. All the sources used have been acknowledged in the form of references.

Signed by _____ on the ____ day of _____ 2018

ABSTRACT

The vision of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is about increasing enrolments and marketing Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges as viable institutions. The first college entrants often have hurdles that can challenge qualification completion, placing them at high risk of dropping out. The focus of the study was to determine the level of contribution student support services may have on the academic success of first college entrants.

The study was carried out in two public TVET Colleges, purposely selected. Data were collected from a sample of 172 respondents of which 100 were first-year students, 20 entry-level lecturers, 20 Campus Management Team members, 2 Student Support Service Managers, 10 Student Liaison Officers, 10 SSS-SACs, and 10 Career Development Officers, purposively and randomly selected. Thirty two participants were purposively selected from SSS unit personnel for qualitative data collection. The study used questionnaires and structured interviews as data collection instruments. Validity was warranted through the judgement of experts in the SSS unit, CMT and lecturing staff, and made possible by allowing them to have access to the instruments of data collections. Reliability was determined by ensuring that an audit trail was done, and it was made available to all participants. Post-positivism paradigm was employed as the study utilised mixed methodology which incorporate both quantitative and qualitative approaches in one study.

The findings of this study revealed that, students with learning challenges are not adequately supported to better cope with the college lifestyle. It was also discovered that, opportunities provided by the campuses for academic support were not enough to support the first college entrants. Findings revealed that (100 %) respondents agreed that opportunities provided by the campus for academic support were not enough to support the first college entrants. It was evident from the findings that (62, 2 %) percent respondents disagreed that a major share of SSS budget was allocated for academic support programmes. Equality of opportunity and outcomes is constrained by inadequate funding to address under preparedness (conceptual, knowledge, academic literacy and numeracy) for higher education programmes of especially indigent students. The findings revealed that over eighty percent respondents disagreed that they were satisfied with technological facilities.

Furthermore, a majority of participants interviewed remain resolute that the existing infrastructure does not allow effective rendering of support services to students. The study concluded with a recommendation of an initial student integration model, which supports Tinto's (1993) model of student integration. Adding to that, this study recommended that further research be conducted on academic support focusing primarily on private TVET colleges for comparison purposes, as the present study focus was mainly on public TVET colleges. The study is significant in the sense that its' findings would provide insight into the TVET college governance councils, management at all levels, SSS managers, SSS units at campus level and policy makers to understand the role of a SSS unit, and the positive impact it may have on students' academic success.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my son Luyanda Ntuthuko Mthembu, my mother Mrs K.S Ngubane for instilling the love of education and for funding my tertiary education taking from nowhere, as well as to my entire family and extended family for their never failing support.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ACUHO	Association of College and University Housing Officers
ASAC	African Student Affairs Conference
CDC	Curriculum Development Committee
CDO	Career Development Officer
CHE	Council of Higher Education
CMT	Campus Management Team
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DOE	Department of Education
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
FAPSA	Financial Aid Practitioners of South Africa
FET	Further Education and Training
GENFETQA	General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions

HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HRDC	Human Research Development Council
HRDCSA	Human Research Development Council of Southern Africa
HRDSSA	Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICT	Information, Communications and Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISAC	International South Africa Chapter
KZN	Kwa-Zulu Natal
NASDEV	National Association of Student Development
NATED	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NCV	National Certificate Vocational
NDP	National Development Plan
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NPC	National Planning Committee
NQF	National Qualifications Authority
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OTL	Opportunity to Learn
PL	Post Level
PQM	Programme for Qualification Mix
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
QMS	Quality Management System
SAASSAP	South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Professionals
SAC	Senior Administration Clerk
SAQA	South African Qualification Authority
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SES	Socio-Economic Status

SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SL	Salary Level
SLO	Student Liaison Officer
SRC	Student Representative Council
SSACI	Swiss South African Cooperative Initiative
SSS	Student Support Services
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE PROBLEM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The vision of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) as defined in the Green Paper for further education and training (FET) colleges is about increasing enrolments and marketing technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges as viable institutions (DHET, 2012). The above-mentioned is not an easy task for TVET colleges, considering the undercurrents of South Africa's post-schooling education sector (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014). The post-school space is occupied by a variety of institutions (TVET colleges included), and learning pathways which intersect are bound to be very confusing to prospective students (Higher Education South Africa, 2009). Therefore, it is crucially important to create links between TVET colleges and their prospective students. Furthermore, "a dichotomy prevails in the South African labour market where there is large youth unemployment juxtaposed with a dire shortage of scarce skills. Youth unemployment continues to remain stubbornly high at (36.1%) in 2014" Young, Screiner & McItosh (2015, p.3). The National Development Plan affirms that one of the nine challenges confronting South Africa is that "*too few people work*" (National Development Plan, 2011), a clear indication of lack of employment opportunities for South African youth.

The South African government of national unity has long recognised that the majority of the unemployed youth are poorly educated, and do not have the essential skills to productively partake in a technologically advanced economy (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). Consequently, the government has over the past years instituted strategies to reconcile the employers' demands for specific skills with young people's aspiration to attain decent work Gil-Jaurena (2014). One such policy has been the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa (HRDSSA), which was launched in 2001 to provide people with a solid educational foundation for social participation, and to develop relevant and marketable skills at further and higher educational levels. According to Gil-Jaurena (2014), post-school education is deemed critical to improve the skills of the youth to meaningfully participate in the economy.

According to Gil-Jaurena (2014), TVET colleges' (previously referred to as further education and training [FET] colleges) main aim is to provide educational opportunities to those who either do not qualify for tertiary education, or require vocational training with direct application to the workplace. The National Development Plan (NDP) states that the sector has a critical role to play in the development of practical, employable skills, and thus the reduction of youth unemployment and skills shortages in the country (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014). This is reflected in the plan to increase enrolments in public TVET colleges from approximately 639,618 in 2013 to 2.5 million in 2030, and thereby make the colleges larger, by enrolments, than the university sector; as is also reflected in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2014).

Student support service officials meet regularly at national bodies such as the South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Professionals (SAASSAP), the National Association of Student Development (NASDEV), or the branches of these structures, such as the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International South Africa Chapter (ACUHO-ISAC), Financial Aid Practitioners of South Africa (FAPSA), and Student Health, Sports, Women and Justice structures, to mention but a few (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

Adding to that, in line with the ideals of a democratic country, the above-mentioned structures and substructures are not separated by affiliation to one or other racial group, nor are they separated by ideological preferences, but by their functions (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). If there are any discrepancies in practice, they are based on the benefits different institutions can afford for their student support and development programmes. This is not said naively, considering the historical imbalances which have given some institutions a financial and material edge over others (Higher Education South Africa-(HESA), 2009).

However, the free access policies for all students who meet the requirements of various institutions must be recognised as a way of addressing past imbalances. Understandably, the South African higher education system has only been consolidated under one department since 1994 (DoE, 2009). Before that, there were practically three systems based on unequal racial differentiation, which in effect produced different epistemologies with varying methodologies in student affairs practice (HESA. 2009).

A proposed question to be asked is: what can be done to ensure that TVET Colleges become institutions of choice amongst prospective students and parents? Naturally, students must find it appealing to enrol for studies at a particular TVET institution, not only because they are motivated by the content of the training programme, but also more fundamentally as a result of how their association with the college will position them for careers afterwards (HESA, 2009). In order to achieve this, TVET colleges should create links with students even before their enrolment. The role of student support services (SSS) comes in handy at this point, as it is to address the challenges and review opportunities regarding pre-enrolment engagement between TVET colleges and prospective students. Consequently, enrolment management and career development form a greater part of the SSS role for the new college entrants (DHET, 2012).

According to Speckman and Mandew (2014), higher education institutions, TVET colleges included, are plagued with continuing challenges of access and success – their understanding of how best to address the deeply incoherent preparation of students for higher education. Students' educational, social and emotional preparedness for higher education is always at the heart of the debate, especially when the dropout rate of students (30%) is considered (Zungu and Munakandafa, 2014). This is shockingly higher than in other university systems.

Speckman and Mandew (2014) maintain that student welfare and student development must be at the heart of any student-centred system that begins to conceptualise itself around the needs of the students. Zungu and Munakandafa (2014) attest that failure from the SSS office to provide holistic support to students may give rise to the danger of creating a revolving door syndrome, recreating apartheid graduate dynamics, developing graduates who are not active and creative participants in the economy. The point to emphasise is that specialists in the areas of student services and student development are fundamental to the proper functioning of TVET colleges and universities. Accordingly, the specialists are essential in order to develop and nurture student growth in and beyond the classroom so that learning that prepares students for their future roles as active participants and contributors to the development of the economy, and the deepening of our democracy (DHET, 2015) takes place.

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) began many new initiatives, all presumably to improve the quality of the student experience (DHET, 2015). The massive increase in the financial aid allocation from the Treasury, the development of a process of engagement on transformation, and the commissioning of

a study on student accommodation are examples of the kinds of intervention that impact on the quality of student experience. These have drawn heavily on those individuals and teams that work in the student services and student development arenas (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

Furthermore, the National Curriculum (Vocational) (NCV), which comprises levels 2 to 4 of the national qualification framework (NQF), was introduced in January 2007 by the DHET (DHET, 2009). The national accredited technical education diplomas (NATEDs), commonly known as the N-courses (N1-N6), have long been part of the TVET, and are delivered under the auspices of the DHET with the ultimate goal of awarding the student studying the course with an N6 Diploma (DHET, 2009). Entry requirements for the NCV is Grade 9, for N-courses Grade 12, the National Senior Certificate for the N6 Diploma, and Grade 9 for N1(Engineering).

In 2010, approximately 1.6 million students were enrolled in South African universities and further education and training colleges, while twice as many young people (3.2 million) were “NEET” (not in education, employment or training) (DHET, 2012, p.11). It is therefore, worth noting that student development and student success occur as a result of deliberate, well-planned and carefully structured development programmes and support initiatives and activities on the part of those who have been entrusted with this responsibility at higher education institutions (DHET, 2015).

The nature and extent of student development and success depends largely on the extent to which SSS critically reflect upon the assumptions, content, delivery and appropriateness of student development programmes, support structures, services and initiatives on a regular basis to ensure effectiveness and relevance. According to Gil-Jaurena (2014), this process of critical reflection, examination and renewal needs to be rigorous, goal-oriented and theoretically informed. Zungu and Munakandafa (2014) suggest that it must take serious cognisance of all factors which include personal, structural, social, cultural, psychological, internal and external that impact on student ability to develop and succeed. In the final analysis, the process must produce sound knowledge and propose solutions that are practical and implementable, contributing towards student development and success (Gil-Jaurena, 2014).

The NCV qualification has attracted students who have passed Grades 10 to 12, not only Grade 9 as per the minimum requirement for the qualification. NATED qualifications (N1-N6) and

NCV qualifications attract students with different educational backgrounds and different needs, hence the SSS office becomes vital at this point to support students. Remarkable growth in terms of numbers in the NCV programme became noticeable during the past years, as is the case at present (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). The qualification is provided by the Department of Higher Education and Training through the TVET colleges in South Africa. There are fifty public TVET colleges in South Africa, and only nine in KwaZulu-Natal province, with multiple campuses for each college (National Development Plan, 2011). This is a clear indication of the shortage of such institutions in the province.

The above developments, in terms of numbers necessitated the establishment and publication of an SSS framework, which was completed in April 2008. The framework provides clear guidelines to students for achieving academic success (DoE, 2008). All colleges were instructed by the Department to implement the SSS framework, and many colleges had to establish the SSS unit as a way of responding to the Department's instruction.

The need for SSS in TVET colleges can never be overlooked as there are numerous and very critical challenges encountered by the TVET colleges; to mention but a few:

- the shift in student population;
- massification;
- the diversity of students, which includes multiple language groups in one classroom;
- different age groups;
- different student needs on one campus;
- a higher level of cognitive demand in new programmes (NCV entry level 2);
- a wider range of academic support requirements;
- Student protests; and
- demand for adequate infrastructure and resources for teaching and learning (DHET, 2015).

The range of factors in the higher education (HE) sector had an impact on the student retention rate (DHET, 2013), which includes the following aspects: pre-entry information, preparation and administrative processes, and induction and transition support. Research by Gil-Jaurena (2014) on SSS in open and distance education focuses on these areas pertaining to evaluation of SSS, support services' entry rate for first-year students, services after completion of distance learning programmes, and use of technology for SSS. The shift underscores integration of support with teaching and learning instead of isolating SSS within the institution (DoE, 2008).

Perhaps student affairs specialists should not be surprised by the combative stance of many of the student governance leaders. HEIs' managements are well aware of a plethora of problems and challenges that students continue to contend with. Also, HEIs management is aware that the problem of hunger is faced by thousands of students on a daily basis; the problem of student accommodation forces many students into a life of squalor as they become virtual squatters in the grime- and crime-ridden parts of our towns and cities; the issue of poverty means that many students share their already inadequate financial aid grant with their impoverished families; and academic and financial exclusions cast students into the world of the unemployed and dependent, indebted to NSFAS. In a sense one should not be surprised that the "struggle" continues unmitigated (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

Philosophies of foundational support for students have been criticised as focusing on a unique, separated and identified group of underprepared students (Kioko, 2010). In South Africa, as early as 1986, academic support was criticised as focusing on students rather than challenging the institutional practices that require transformation and diversity in HEIs, because access leads to equal success. Akoojee and Nkomo (2007) argue that HEIs necessitate an emphasis on the system in order to achieve transformation goals. Kioko (2010) warns against support premised on notions of adaptation, and argues that student determination to succeed and institutional resources depend on the extensive transformation of educational structures.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The National Development Plan (National Planning Committee (NPC), 2011, p.1) mentioned a number of accomplishments since 1994, such as the adoption of the Constitution, the establishment of institutions of democracy, the building of a non-racial and non-sexist public service, and restoring the health of the public finances since 1994. It also proclaimed that "democracy has not just restored the dignity of all South Africans. It has also translated into improved access to education, health services, water, housing, electrification and social security" (NPC, 2011, p.1).

The NDP identified poverty and high levels of inequality as the key challenges for the country, with millions of people remaining unemployed and many working households still living close to the poverty line (CHE, 2010). It proposed the writing of a new story for South Africa in which young people would have "the capabilities and confidence to grasp the opportunities of

a brighter future” (NPC, 2011, p.5). In this regard, education, training and innovation are central elements in eliminating poverty and reducing inequality (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

The National Planning Commission (2011, p.261) indicates that “Education empowers people to identify their identity, take control of their lives, raise healthy families, take part confidently in developing a just society, and play an effective role in the politics and governance of their communities” (NPC, 2011). Hayter (2015) posits that the increasing awareness of the need for a TVET college qualification led to the ongoing evaluation of how to increase retention and graduation numbers, especially among new entrants. The support system which TVET colleges put in place to support their structures has a significant influence on how well the students achieve academically (CHE, 2014). It is, therefore, an indisputable truth that students are likely to succeed academically when they are supported by colleges to make the correct career choices that match their interests, abilities and capabilities.

If they are also properly orientated to the college and supported academically, they are very likely to succeed academically (DoE, 2008). Furthermore, these colleges are also expected to provide relevant opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. Career choices made correctly can contribute positively to students’ academic success. This is some of the support that can be regarded as a first stop for all new entrants at any TVET college or higher education institution (Boughey, 2010). Zungu and Munakandafa (2014) maintain that TVET colleges have been plagued by low pass rates, poor retention and low throughput of learners.

This implies that an effective student support service would help increase the graduation and college retention rates. The framework for the SSS TVET colleges states that “Students are likely to achieve academically when they are supported by colleges to make the correct programme choices, properly oriented to the college, supported academically and provided with opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities” (DoE, 2008, p.1).

SSS should be able to provide students with pre-entry, on course and exit level support (DoE, 2009). In order for a college to be able to provide these services, a clear vision must be crafted that would make it possible to respond to the needs of its clients. The SSS plan is to lead in the provision of SSS. The stated mission is to serve a diverse student population with an enabling learning environment. One of the objectives of the SSS annual plan is to improve student success in programmes offered at TVET colleges, which in turn resonates with the role of the SSS office (DHET, 2016).

1.3 STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Speckman and Mandew (2014) observe some of the challenges and opportunities emerging from globalisation and internalisation, and describe the trend of professionalism which has swept over international student support services since the benchmark was set by the United States of America. Higher education institutions globally are under constant pressure to address issues related to massification, which include, amongst others, access and quality, issues of efficiency, student success and employability beyond graduation (UNESCO, 1998; Gupta, 2006). These issues affect both developed and developing countries, although in different ways, and the student affairs office is uniquely positioned to contribute towards engagement with these issues (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). According to Schreiber, Luecher & Moja (2016) in the International Association of Student Affairs and Services, the aim of SSS is to assist students in navigating their journey through the tertiary education landscape, and add to their repertoire of educational and lifetime learning experiences.

1.4 STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN DEVELOPED REGIONS

1.4.1 United States of America

In the USA, the SSS divisions emerged from within the Anglo-American model of strong faculty affiliation in higher education, and have advanced from a narrow *in loco parentis* model, which primarily concerned itself with student discipline, conduct, social and moral development, to a theoretical discipline which informs a normative meta-framework supported by rigorous research and prolific publications (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In a review on the trends of SSS in the USA, Fang and Wu (2006, p.6) commented that:

The relationship between student affairs and academic affairs in the US higher education institutions has undergone the spiral evolution from original natural unification to conscious differentiation and independence, and later moving towards collaborative and integrating educational partnership. Such a development course reflects not only the inner logical demands for continuous professional and academic growth of student affairs in American universities, but also the profound changes in its basic aim, conception, concrete mission and role orientation.

1.4.2 Australia and the United Kingdom

These two nations' student affairs divisions are similar to the USA model of viewing student affairs as a profession which significantly contributes to institutional goals through holistic student development, and has "much to contribute to maintaining and improving student retention" (Trainor, 2002, p.4). The shift in the United Kingdom has been from perceptions of student affairs as a welfare service, a reactive support department which is the "last resort for students with problems", to the perception that student affairs is the "first port of call involved in supporting all students", which is "fundamental to the work of HEI as a whole" (Trainor, 2002, p.11). This implies that the professionalism of student affairs has contributed much to the perception of student affairs as a key contributor to the work of higher education as a whole.

1.4.3 Europe

Mainland Europe, reflecting the European continent higher education model, has a rather young student support history (Du Toit, 2009). Mainland Europe only began addressing student life, student development, student services and student support as part of university life in earnest during the 1950s (Nuss, 2003). During the 19th century, German universities were based on the highly contested notion of the "value-free academic ethos" (Dalton, 1999, p.5). Currently, European student affairs are explicit about their values and principles, and include a focus on services such as counselling, disability, childcare, career development, accommodation support, sports and others (UNESCO, 2012). Some student affairs are separate from the core business of the university, and located in local government or municipal services, where funding and accountability lines are shared between the institution and the local or national government, or public social services (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). The challenges for student affairs in the developed world centre more around student affairs' relationship with the community within which it defines itself, and to which it relates.

1.5 STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN DEVELOPING REGIONS

1.5.1 Brazil

Countries with developing democracies and developing economies share many issues, particularly around higher education. Consequently, student affairs divisions within developing countries and economies are not as professionalised and explicitly articulated as student affairs in the developed world (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

In a way similar to South Africa, higher education in Brazil was designed to support the economic and political élite and was tightly controlled by a military system. Furthermore, Brazil nowadays is facing a challenge similar to South Africa and it is the need to produce “equity, quality and efficiency” (Sidhu, 2006, p.283).

As is the case with South Africa, Brazil’s dilemma is to produce research which attracts international interest while finding solutions to local problems (Sidhu, 2006; Buroway, 2010). Brazil, like India, is focused on promoting international student mobility along North-South and South-South lines, and student affairs in these contexts are frequently geared towards supporting these goals.

1.5.2 India

India’s educational system, owing to its colonial roots, is much like South Africa’s. The Anglo-Saxon system of higher education informed the basic structure of the institutions and student affairs within it (Du Toit, 2009). India, like most of the rest of the developing world, is engaged in improving success and equity across higher education to become an “economic powerhouse” (Gupta, 2006, p.2).

Adding to that, India is struggling with a deeply embedded class system and, like South Africa, is trying to redress the detrimental effects of its colonial and political history (Du Toit, 2009). Of great interest is the country’s attempt to improve access of the different castes to higher education. In spite of many recorded highlights, it seems that Indian higher education is burdened by inequalities, challenges around implementation, poor accountability, underfunding, dated pedagogical practices, student unrest, migration of students to first-world higher education institutions, and other factors deeply rooted in the historical, cultural and social norms (George & Raman, 2009, p.3).

1.5.3 China

In China, during the 1970s, a new stance towards education was adopted, with a move away from the Maoist centralist model to decentralisation, which gave local authorities the autonomy and flexibility to create more opportunities for access, and respond to societal needs, while improving relations with Western higher education institutions (Liu, Rhoads & Wang, 2007). Adding to that, by the 1980s, formal agreements on educational exchange and partnerships with the West were quite common for higher education institutions in China. The development of student affairs “does not seem to represent the result of systematic or strategic planning at

higher level” (Wang, 2004, p.9). Initially, a division named Student Residences and Career Services was introduced, which later morphed into student affairs.

China’s academic disciplines seem to engender a sense of belonging, reminiscent of the original student affairs model of *in loco parentis*, where academic staff were entrusted with moral and professional caretaking of their protégés. It appears that “little attention is being paid to either the theoretical or practical aspects of facilitating student development through student support programs and services” (Wang, 2004, p.11).

1.5.4 The African continent

African universities are as young as Africa’s independence from colonial powers, bar the few established by the ex-patriot expatriate communities and colonialists (Cooper, 2010). Africa “became independent with no more than a handful of university graduates in the population” (Du Toit, 2009, p.56). In order to promote African independence and African nation-building, higher education should function as an integral part of the post-independence African nationalist movement. Universities have support structures and increased enrolments owing to the demand of people for holding higher educational qualifications, but it does not equal the degree of support directed to first entrants.

Higher education institutions across Africa grapple with issues similar to those of South African universities (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). Throughout Africa, as in South Africa, the university is considered a key contributor to national development, as is reflected in student enrolment, which has increased fivefold in the 20th century across the African continent (Cooper, 2010).

In general, African student affairs divisions follow the US model of a student affairs domain with a focus on student development, student support and student services for holistic student development aligned with the institutional goals, as at Strathmore University in Kenya, and the University of Zambia (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). African student affairs domains are staffed by a Dean of Students, with a balance of staff focusing on planning, coordinating and implementing a variety of programmes and services which are designed to assist students in achieving academic and personal success (Du Toit, 2009).

The African Student Affairs Conference (ASAC, 2011) hosted university deans and student affairs professionals of African universities, and the papers which were presented revealed that the student affairs domains focus on issues around campus conflicts, race and gender violence, and basic problems of living, such as food and housing (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

However, the conference papers do not shed much light on the scope, role and functions of African student affairs, on frameworks and theories, and conceptual issues around student affairs philosophy (ASAC, 2011). A review of student affairs in the developing world reveals that there is little coherent collective framework for student affairs at national level (Cooper, 2010). A recommendation to be made is to develop a rational framework for SSS units, and control measures must be put in place to check whether the framework is complied with by colleges.

1.5.5 Kenya

According to Michubu, Nyerere and Kyalo (2017), the demand for and increasing importance of higher education is rising across the world, Kenya included. The demand is mostly ascribed to the large number of secondary school graduates pursuing higher education, as is the case in South Africa today (DHET, 2013). Consequently, it is unfortunate that government subsidy for institutions of HE in Africa has been declining, hence institutions are forced to operate under tight budgets, and as a result it has been very difficult to provide adequate student support services, thus compromising the quality of HEI in Kenya.

Materu (2007) postulates that the labour market is in demand for graduates with a range of new knowhow, over and above the demand for qualified manpower for the 21st Century. The increase in expansion, both in terms of enrolments and the number of HEIs, has, however, not been matched with a corresponding increase in support for quality teaching and learning (World Bank, 2015).

Furthermore, it is fitness for purpose, which is based on the view that quality has no meaning except in relation to the purpose of the product or service. Fitness for purpose, that is seen by many quality assurance experts as a meaningful way of defining quality, because it includes all other definitions, embraces all types of institution, and is flexible, according to the Commission for Higher Education (CHE, 2008).

According to Michubu et al. (2017), SSS are those services that are meant to make the students' academic lives more effective and comfortable, thus assisting them to succeed academically. The Glossary of Quality Assurance in Japanese Higher Education (2007, p.71) defines "learning support" as a "comprehensive support system in higher education institutions which enables students to concentrate in studying effectively, such as guidance for taking courses, student counselling and advice." This implies that SSS include those human aspects that support individual students in their academic life and provide a supportive learning environment.

The support services may be categorised to include: student advisory services such as academic advice, guidance and counselling, financial advisory services, and professional services such as research services and communication services, among others (Cooper, 2010). These may also include non-academic services needed by the student, such as school social work, tutorials or special education, medical/dentistry treatment, and accommodation. These services are critical, especially for university or college students where heterogeneity in terms of student's age, gender, socio-cultural and economic backgrounds are likely to come into play. It is therefore generally acknowledged that students need support in order to fit within this environment, which will in turn enable them to concentrate on their academic work and consequently succeed in it (Michubu et al., 2017).

These services help students to make decisions regarding the career aspirations they want to pursue, and address the difficulties they may be facing in their academic life. The services are normally carried out by academic advisers who are mandated to guide students in their academic journey (Muola & Mwanja, 2013). This service is an essential one to guarantee students' success in their programmes of study (Michubu et al., 2017, p.21).

Gudo, Olel and Oanda (2011) posit that the service is a professional service aimed at assisting students to understand themselves, others, and the school environment, and acquire the ability to adjust accordingly. Students have differing needs that may affect their learning. Once they get into the college they are independent, and in most cases away from their parents. Some students are not able to cope with this new environment, and may resort to drugs and other immoral behaviour (Junio-Sabia, 2012). Guidance and counselling services therefore come in handy in such situations to help students facing these new challenges (Gichui, 2015). These focus on preparing students for unanticipated life events, and ongoing personal difficulties and challenges that they face in colleges and universities (Cooper, 2010).

Finances are central in sustaining the life of the students in colleges and universities (Michubu et al., 2017). A study that was conducted by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CSSE) in 2008 discovered that finances were crucial for their continued stay in HE institutions. With rising economic challenges in Kenya, as in many developing countries, students have found themselves struggling to survive in the college, and most households have found it very difficult to finance education for their children. According to Gichui (2015), this situation has been worsened by the reduction in financing of education by the government, which in turn has adverse results on poor households.

It is against this backdrop that students need information on alternative and appropriate avenues to raise money for their education (Gichui, 2015; Michubu et al. 2017). They must also be equipped with financial management skills and spending habits, a process which forms part of a good student support service. In order to positively respond to the above concerns, financial management skills must form part of an SSS activation programme to assist first-year students to handle their finances. This will not only assist them for the duration of study in the college, but will mark a lifelong learning experience.

1.5.6 South Africa

According to Young and Hopp (2014), issues concerning throughput are manifest throughout the undergraduate curriculum. In addition to that, the first year is a point in the educational pipeline at which students are particularly vulnerable. SSS come in handy at this juncture to assist students, especially the first-year entrants, to cope academically. In contact institutions nearly a quarter of all students leave after the first year, which is a serious cause of concern (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014). In fact, one-half to two-thirds of all attrition in higher education occurs after the second year, and the remaining amount of attrition that occurs after the second year is not insignificant.

While estimates of student departures between years two and three are not available, second and third year is the period in which the second largest group of students leave their studies. Conversely, a substantial proportion of students remain in institutions for five years or longer. The CHE (2012) reported that fourteen per cent of the year 2000 cohort was still registered after five years. This is arguably the main reason which marks the importance of a functional SSS office to support students facing this ordeal.

The discussion about simply admitting and graduating students without attention to the quality of their educational experience is incomplete, argues Young, Screiner & McItosh (2015). Student access to university or college goes beyond simple completion of the requisite number of modules in their prescribed sequence (Schreiber, Luecher & Moja 2016). In fact, many stumbling blocks to successful completion of coursework are not directly related to academic life skills.

Students need to develop as whole individuals for life beyond the university, learning how to become engaged citizens, responsible leaders and thoughtful employees. Scott, Yeld and Hendry (2007) posit that any discussion of student success must include issues related to the co-curriculum, where many of these skills are developed.

In order to help facilitate entry into higher education, universities and colleges have developed initiatives, including, among others, pre-term orientation, bridging programmes and extended curriculum (Jones, Coetzee, Bailey, & Wickham, 2008). Some institutions, such as Stellenbosch University, have developed an institution-wide approach to orientation and the first-year-experience that extends well beyond the first weeks of the semester (Botha & Van Schalkwyk, 2009). Institutional attention to the first-year transition has given rise to two national conferences on the topic, one hosted by Stellenbosch University in 2008, and the other sponsored by the newly established (in 2015) South African National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Furthermore, the support of senior students and students preparing for graduation comes through other academic support offices (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). Improving access, success and throughput must be a priority, through support initiative efforts like the Brawam-Siswam programme (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012) in the University of the Western Cape, which connects students and their communities. The researcher sees this project (Brawam-Siswam) as a model for acknowledging diversity as a battle that prevents the majority of students from failing in HEIs. These students need to be supported as it is a known fact that the socio-economic constraints in poor households compete with education and other priorities. Failure to access education will lead most of these students to have a low standard of living.

Higher education has the potential to open access to an opportunity to reduce poverty, but learning and teaching in a classroom where the medium of instruction is not the student's home language is a complicated matter. Support services typically occur in situations where students engage with units focused on providing services related to writing and language support,

academic advice and career development. These services are frequently administered under the banner of an academic development department on campus (Schreiber, Luecher & Moja 2016). While these services may not carry the title of “transition programmes” as such, they play a critical role in the ongoing support of students as they progress through the educational pipeline (Young & Hopp, 2014).

1.6 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The SSS role of giving academic support, if effective, well-structured and monitored, may help address the recurring challenge of students’ failure and dropout rate, especially for new entrants in the NCV, and in a few more NATED programmes. Therefore, this study has explored the contribution of first-time entrants’ SSS to academic success in technical and vocational education and training. The researcher observed, whilst lecturing in the TVET sector that as per the SSS framework (DoE, 2008), students must be supported in three ways: they must have pre-entry support, on-course support, and exit support. The researcher observed that the pre-entry support is the only support prioritised in the sector at the expense of the other two categories.

The SSS, if done right, with all three categories prioritised, may help in mitigating a persistent drop in the pass rate in the sector, especially in the ministerial approved programmes (NCV and NATED). The extent of support that can be given to first-time entrants, and its contribution in assisting them to succeed academically, will help address the high dropout rate in TVET colleges.

The main problem explored in this study is the recurring student failure rate and high dropout rate in TVET colleges owing to lack of necessary balanced support, which includes pre-entry support, on-course or academic support, and exit support, which the SSS unit is mandated to afford every TVET college student, especially the first-year entrants.

This study set out to answer the following questions:

- What is the key role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges?
- How do support services impact on the academic success of first-time students?
- What are the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to first-year entrants?
- What are the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to first-year entrants?

1.7 AIM OF THE STUDY

The overarching aim of this study was to explore the contribution of SSS to the academic success of first-year entrants in technical and vocational education and training. The effects of the support on first-year entrants enrolled for TVET programmes, its assistance to and influence on the certification rate of the TVET sector, were explored in this study.

1.8 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study set out to achieve the following objectives by relying on the background of the study, a literature review, a problem statement and the motivation of the study:

The objectives were to:

- explore the role of SSS units in TVET colleges;
- determine the extent to which academic support can impact on the overall pass rate in the TVET sector;
- determine the factors that could positively contribute to the improved certification rate in the TVET sector; and
- identify the key challenges experienced by the SSS officials in implementing the SSS framework.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The contribution of the present study towards a PhD degree was envisioned as follows:

- The findings of the study would provide insight into the TVET colleges' senior management, college governance councils, SSS managers, SSS units and policy makers in order to understand the role of an SSS unit, and the positive impact it may have on students' academic success.
- The findings would affirm that academic support can be successful if incorporated in the college timetable, and monitored and funded accordingly.
- The findings would provide feedback to TVET curriculum developers on the implementation of academic support, who will thus be in a position to effect improvements that address any problem uncovered.
- The findings would assist the DHET to see the need to beef up personnel in SSS, and ensure that personnel employed are suitably qualified and skilled to perform their respective duties.

- The findings of the study would assist students, especially the new entrants into TVET colleges, with first-hand information on strategies to succeed academically, and find ways of coping with college life.
- Findings from students who have experienced college life would enable those not yet registered to understand factors which contribute to academic success from the students' point of view

1.10 EXPLANATION OF OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

The following are operational concepts employed in this study.

1.10.1 Academic success

It refers to a wide variety of instructional methods, educational services or college resources provided to students in the effort to help them accelerate the learning progress, catch up with peers and meet the learning standards (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2016).

1.10.2 First-time entrants

The term is used mostly to refer to a person in the first year of an experience (especially in the college), or “freshman year in high school or college” (DHET, 2016).

1.10.3 Student Support Services (SSS)

Student Support Services are a resource that provides tailored and comprehensive support services for eligible participants to help them achieve their full potential. The focus of SSS is to engage students' potential in order to assist them in achieving their personal and academic goals, and to develop responsible and responsive citizens in the future (DoE, 2009). The Student Support Unit strives to provide all the necessary support and development services to make the time a student spends at all colleges as fulfilling as possible (Maimane, 2016).

1.10.4 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Technical and Vocational Education and Training is defined by UNESCO as those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic life (UNESCO, 2012, p. 209). TVET thus equips people not only with vocational skills, but also with a broad range of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are now recognised as indispensable for meaningful participation in work and life.

1.11 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is a set of specific techniques for selecting cases, measuring and observing aspects of social life, gathering and refining data, analysing the data and reporting the results (Neuman, 2011; Kumar, 2014). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2013), research methodology dictates and controls the acquisition of data, collates data after their acquisition, and extracts meaning from them. Furthermore, methodology examines the core substance of quantitative and qualitative practice, to include methods, theory, and substantive interests to be investigated. This study used both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis.

1.11.1 Research paradigm

The philosophical paradigm employed in this study is post-positivism. Post-positivism is a useful paradigm for researchers who display an interest in some aspects of positivism such as quantification, and yet wish to incorporate interpretive concerns around subjectivity and a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Maree, 2007). Furthermore, Maree (2007, p.65) states that “positivists focus on establishing and searching for evidence that is valid and reliable in terms of the existence of phenomena rather than the generation thereof”. It was in the best interests of this study to use post positivism in order to get the best out of both data collection methods, as each has its own pros and cons, but together they have the ability to complement each other and make the argument watertight.

1.11.2 Sampling procedures

Sampling is the technique through which a sample is drawn from the target population (Brink, Walt and Rensburg, 2012). Furthermore, further explain that the sample size is a subset of the whole target population that was actually investigated, in which characteristics are generalised to the entire population. The study used a simple random sampling method to select approximately (5%) precision levels of the 172 target population of the SSS personnel and first-year students. The calculation of the sampling size was based on Israel’s (2009) sampling size model.

Sampling procedures refer to a large body of scientific methodology in which a sample of a larger matrix of data is used to arrive at conclusions about the whole population (Neuman, 2011). It consists of probability sampling and non-probability sampling methods. In the

probability sampling method, the researcher knows the exact possibility of selecting each member of the population, while in non-probability the chance of being included is not known (Neuman, 2011, p. 220).

According to Leedy and Ormond (2013) probability sampling permits the researchers to make statistical generalisations from their results. However, Brink, Walt and Rensburg (2012) categorised the different types of probability sampling into simple random sampling, stratified sampling, quota sampling, cluster sampling and multistage sampling. Simple random sampling is the method of survey research that gives each person in the sampling frame an equal chance of being included in the study. Brink et al. (2012) indicated that the characteristics of a simple random sampling involves a one-stage selection process in which each participant has an equal and independent chance of being drawn, and the study population needs to be identified and listed.

Kumar (2014) state that there are various techniques that can be used to randomly select respondents. The simple random sampling comprises three categories: the use of a table of random sampling numbers; placing the numbers or names in a bowl, known as the “fishbowl technique”; and using a computer-generated selection of random numbers. For the purpose of this research, a computer-generated selection of random sampling was used to select the respondents from first-entry level students and lecturing staff.

1.11.3 Selection of the target population

The study targeted a random sample of 100 first-year students in NCV and NATED programmes (50 females and 50 males), 10 Student Liaison Officers, 10 SSS administrative clerks, 10 Career Development Officers, two SSS Assistant Directors of two TVET colleges in KZN based in the Central Office of each college, 20 lecturing staff at entry level, and 20 campus management team members. This study used a sample of 172 respondents. The targeted total of 172 respondents willingly participated, filled and returned the questionnaires. The questionnaire was simple to complete in a short space of time, this accelerated the response rate. The targeted number of students was 150 but only 100 were willing to participate and those were the students who were given informed concerned and they were also told participation is voluntary they can withdraw if they feel uncomfortable.

1.11.4 Data collection instruments

Data collection is the process of collecting data to be analysed and interpreted with the aid of questionnaires, structured interviews and observation instruments (Leedy & Ormond, 2013). A questionnaire is a data collection instrument where the researcher waits while a whole group of respondents complete the questionnaire in a short space of time (Maree, 2007, p. 157).

The interview is a conversation between respondents and the researcher (Gray, 2009, p.369). Leedy and Ormond (2013, p.190) explain that interviews can be useful to get the required responses from the participants, while observation is a method that involves the systematic process of purposefully selecting, watching, listening and recording the interaction as it takes place (Kumar, 2014, p.140).

1.11.4.1 Quantitative data

A self-designed structured questionnaire was adopted to collect data from the students at the entry levels (NCV Level 2, NATED Engineering [N1] and NATED Business [N4]), the campus management teams, and lecturers lecturing at entry levels. The questionnaire had two sections: Section A required the bio-data information of the students, and Section B focused on the research objectives of the study.

1.11.4.2 Qualitative data

In accordance with Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.135), “open-ended questions are used for qualitative investigation, because they provide rich and personal data, possible answers are unknown, and it is exploratory and appropriate to solicit participants’ views,” The study conducted oral interviews using structured interview questions to elicit quality and relevant information from the ADs, SLOs, CDOs and SSS-SACs.

1.11.4.3 Data analysis and presentation of data

This study employed the use of descriptive statistics to analyse the questionnaires. A descriptive statistic approach employs measures such as frequency distributions, measures of central tendency, dispersion or variability, and measures of relationship (Brink et al., 2012, p.179). For the purposes of this study, the responses to the closed-ended questions were numerically presented in a frequency distribution table and analysed.

The Likert-scale statements with both positive and negative responses were used, in which respondents were asked to rate their responses. The responses to the open-ended questions of the qualitative investigation were captured verbatim on a matrix. Responses were analysed to identify commonalities and trends. Completed questionnaires were carefully analysed. Tables were used to present data collected. Responses from interviews were analysed using content analysis, which was done through the use of thematic use of common and recurring words.

1.11.4.4 Planning for fieldwork

The following procedure was followed. The researcher sent a letter to the college principals of two TVET colleges chosen as data collection sites, requesting permission to conduct research in KwaZulu-Natal. Copies of the approval letter from the college principals, participants' consent forms, standard ethics protocol forms and the participants' informed consent declaration accompanied each questionnaire and interview procedure.

1.12 DELIMITATION OF THE FIELD OF STUDY

In KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province, there is a total of nine public TVET colleges, and there are fifty in South Africa. The study is limited to KZN, where the researcher chose two TVET colleges and earmarked five campuses in each of the above mentioned TVET colleges, and two central offices of each college (because central offices house the college senior management, and the campuses house the campus management) as the field of study. College management, which comprises the Deputy Principal (Academic Services), and the Assistant Director (Student Support Services), and the campus management, which comprises campus manager, heads of division, education specialists, and the lecturing staff (especially those at entry levels), student liaison officers, SSS administration clerks, career development officers, and first-year students formed part of the study.

1.13 DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

This study has six chapters, which are organised as follows:

Chapter One: Orientation to the problem

This chapter provides the introduction and background to the study, describes the conceptual and contextual setting of the research work, and states the research aims, objectives, research questions, scope, limitation and significance of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature review

This chapter covers in depth the review of literature related to previous works that have been written on the subject. It provides a general problem statement, and an in-depth synthesis of the role of SSS in contributing towards academic success.

Chapter Three: Theoretical framework

This chapter discusses at length the theoretical fields conceptualising first entrants' support services. It also presents a paradigmatic framework for theoretical discourse about the research problem. The works of various theorists, and theories underpinning student development and support, are reviewed and discussed.

Chapter Four: Research design and methodology

This chapter explains the details of the selected methodology the researcher employed in the project. It focuses on how the research has been designed, and the research paradigm, the selection of the sample used in this study, the research instruments, and the data analysis employed in trying to extract answers on the afore-mentioned research problems. The question of how trustworthiness was ensured, and the ethical considerations involved in the research are discussed in depth.

Chapter Five: Data analysis and presentation of findings

This chapter tackles the presentation of fieldwork, and provides a comprehensive elaboration of results based on the findings obtained from fieldwork.

Chapter Six: Summary, findings, conclusion and recommendations

This chapter gives the conclusion of the study, makes recommendations, and suggests a number of future works to improve the study. Self-assessment provided immediate feedback to the students, because it is always accompanied by self-appraisal, which is a critical skill, helpful for success not only in formal learning activities, but also for lifelong learning that is such an essential part of our living in this rapidly changing world.

1.14 CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the field of study; the national and international perspectives on SSS provided a necessary platform for conducting the in-depth synthesis of the role of SSS or student affairs in contributing towards academic success. A clear picture of the rationale for the study makes it relatively easy to understand the significance of an SSS office in contributing towards student success. Furthermore, the research problem was contextualised in this chapter; the delimitation of the field of study; the aim, objectives, research questions; and an explanation of operational concepts shaped this chapter.

The next chapter presents the review of the literature related to the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a critical review of literature on the contribution of first-time entrants' SSS to academic success in technical and vocational education and training. The literature review introduces a general problem statement, and gives a short overview of the support system which TVET colleges put in place to support their structures, which is viewed as a significant influence on how well the students achieve academically (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

A critical synthesis of literature also provides the necessary platform for conducting an in-depth synthesis of the role of SSS in contributing towards academic success. In Chapter one, it is clearly stated that an early identification of academic support needs is crucial as part of the system, because students will be able to determine where to find assistance. By mid-year, or the time for final examinations, it is often too late to remedy a situation. While the assessment tools used during orientation are helpful in showing areas where students are capable and interested, they do not fully identify academic support needs.

In addition to the above, the challenges encountered by TVET colleges such as high student dropout rates, low completion rates (mainly for African and Coloured students), and low marginal increases in overall higher education participation rates (HESA, 2009, p.5) will be discussed at length. Kelly and Strawn (2011) state that the demand for individuals holding a higher education qualification is expected to increase by sixteen per cent in the year 2018, with approximately sixty-six per cent of all jobs requiring some form of post-high school training. There will also be an increase in the numbers of part-time college students seeking a qualification, and support in order for them to succeed academically. These college entrants, and those who are mostly accommodated through e-learning, often have hurdles that can hinder qualification completion, placing them at high risk of dropping out (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

The above scenario requires the effective strengthening of SSS to support and advise students. The current year has been announced by the Head of State as the beginning of free education in TVET colleges in South Africa, following a Fees Must Fall campaign which has plagued the HEIs nationwide (DHET, 2014).

This chapter hopes to paint a clear picture of the rationale for the study; an international perspective of support; theories underpinning student development and support; the key role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges; the impact of SSS on the academic success of college entrants; the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to entrants; the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services; student support services in inclusive education; integrated student support services; and the global impact of equal access to education.

2.2 SSS AND THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF FIRST COLLEGE ENTRANTS

South Africa's combination of a low participation rate and a high dropout rate has been called a "low participation, high attrition" system (CHE, 2013, p.52). The report indicated that not only are South African students and institutions failing to create a situation in which students have a reasonable chance of success, the report also indicates that the net effect of the current situation is that only about five per cent of African and Coloured young people are able to succeed in higher education. Scott et al (2007) attest that the main reason which summarises why students in South African HEIs find it so hard to succeed academically is that most students who fail are poor. The following are other reasons for this predicament:

1. Tinto (2014, p.6) states that "Providing students' access without support is not opportunity. Without support, academic, social, and financial, too many students do not complete their programmes of study. In actual fact, once an institution admits a student, it becomes indebted to provide, as best as it can, the support needed to translate the opportunity accessed to provide success".
2. Poor students do not have the necessary skills and support to manage on their own (Kur, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2012).
3. Socio Economic Status (SES) is an important factor in student career choice, lower levels of academic preparedness, general academic performance, and ability to complete their studies. Lower SES students are often first-generation university entrants, have poorer high school education, and have access to very low levels of financial support and other socio-cultural factors (Jones et al, 2008).
4. Poorer students experience higher education differently from their rich colleagues. This includes their perceived ability to make friends and "fit-in", their experiencing pressure more acutely, and the fact that they experience pressures to access basic necessities. Such students often also lack the ability to make the necessary social links needed for academic success (Astin, 2005).

5. Bailey (2010) uses words “deprivation” and “extreme poverty” to indicate the deeper level of financial constraints faced by students in the South African context. When someone is poor in South Africa, it often means that they do not have access to many relatively basic life requirements. A lack of finances tends to impede their academic success more acutely, and the wide range of serious financial side effects might cause them to drop out at any point during their academic career. Breier (2010) found that “financial constraints” have a greater and a more continuous effect on poorer students in South Africa than on their rich counterparts.
6. South Africa still suffers from deep economic fragmentation linked to the country’s history, clearly illustrated in one of the higher Gini-coefficients in the world 0, 63 in 2011 compared to 0, 41 in the USA. This deep level of poverty prevalent in South African society is illustrated in the publication *Poverty Trends in South Africa* (Statistics South Africa, 2014). In this document it was reported that (45%) of the South African population (approximately 23 million people) were classified as “poor”, with (20.2%) (20 million people) living “extreme poverty”. Not only is there an exceptionally wide division between the rich and the poor (as reflected in the Gini coefficient), that division is still strongly delineated according to race (Manik, 2014). This is illustrated by the fact that 54 of black Africans are classified as poor, and only (0.8%) of whites (Statistics South Africa, 2014).
7. According to Breier, (2010) these patterns of poverty continue to reflect the country’s racially divided past. Consequently, Letseka, Breier and Visser (2009, p.25) apply the concept of “two nations” living simultaneously in South Africa to the South African context.
8. When students from the very poor SES enter institutions of higher education, they often struggle to meet the basic financial requirements of university studies. Any unforeseen circumstances aggravate the problem they face, and hence a possibility of dropping out is inevitable.

It is thus, apparent that, many talented students in South Africa find themselves inhibited by lack of finances and, as a result, unable to turn their potential into actual performance. Yorke and Longden (2004) indicate that making progress in the area of student success in a relatively poor country like South Africa is a far greater challenge than in richer countries with more resources available to them. It is therefore of vital importance to unpack the various socio-economic status levels by looking into their constituents. As Reason (2009) argues, such

understanding will allow institutions the benefit of being able to target interventions at specific subgroups of economic level.

According to Maimane (2016), the starting point for all prospective college students is to make career choices that match their interests, abilities, and aptitudes. In order for the college to be able to provide, it must have a vision that will make it possible to respond to the needs of its clients, the students. According to the National Development Strategy, in South Africa TVET colleges are core components to contribute towards the improvement of the capacity of the workforce to respond to developmental needs nationally, and respond also to the demands of an ever-changing world (DHET, 2013).

2.2.1 CONTRIBUTION OF SSS TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Firstly, SSS contribute to the development and welfare of a diverse body of students (DoE, 2009). A diverse body of students involves students from all walks of life, some from the poorest of the poor backgrounds hoping to make the most of their lives and change their background by obtaining HEI qualifications, and maybe obtain a good job. Amongst this body of students, the majority are first-year hopefuls. Secondly, SSS are concentrating on assisting students of different ages, heterosexual and homosexual, religious and non-religious, physically able and physically challenged, different race groups and nationality, hence a diverse body of students in one class (Kioko, 2010).

The SSS also exist to increase the college retention and throughput rate. They give students the opportunity for academic development and assist students with basic college requirements to motivate them to successfully complete their post-secondary education (Balkrishen, 2016). The SSS are there to implement the student-centred approach and welcoming environment for students, which is a shift in the right direction for students' academic success. Student support service is a resource that provides tailored and comprehensive support services for eligible participants to help them achieve their full potential (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014).

Through vocational guidance and counselling services offered by an SSS unit, students get to know which occupations and jobs are best suited to their interests, values, and skills, and they have to understand the kind of qualifications and personal attributes required (Maimane, 2016). Finally, the focus of SSS is to engage students' potential in order to assist them in achieving their personal and academic goals, and to develop responsible and responsive citizens in the future (Harper & Quay, 2009).

The Student Support Unit strives to provide all the necessary support and development services to make the time a student spends at college as fulfilling as possible (Maimane, 2016). The SSS should play a major role in ensuring inclusive access to education and training, and in developing individuals holistically (Motheo TVET College Prospectus, 2015, p.26).

2.3 FACTORS THAT CAN IMPROVE THE PROVISION OF SSS TO FIRST-TIME ENTRANTS

In addition to the benefits above, there are also numerous factors that contribute to the success of first-generation students in college. One such factor (in Cummings, 2014) is family involvement, the importance of which cannot be overstated. Therefore, TVET colleges and university administrators must find ways to engage students' families in order to facilitate constant learning increases in reading, writing, and maths. Many schools engage family members by offering workshop sessions in reading, organising reading volunteers, and helping parents strengthen students' reading skills, which include reading for pleasure at home (Seitz, 2010). Similarly, Seitz, (2010) recognises that involving student families in maths curriculum, assessments and homework support activities could have a positive effect on student academic achievement.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) examined patterns of interaction between students and their immediate environment, referred to as the *proximal process*, noting that the most important proximal processes were interaction and support from family members, both of which played a critical role in student achievement. Markus and Kitayama (1991) established that motivation to attend college can be both interdependent and individualistic, and that interdependent students, those who sought the support of their family while in college, were generally motivated by their desire to meet their parents' expectations, while individualistic, self-regulated students were motivated by personal reasons. However, research by Cote and Levine (1997) suggested that students who possess the intellectual motivation to attend college tend to perform better than students with other forms of motivations.

2.3.1 The impact of SSS programmes on student success

Research has shown a correlation between students' attitudes towards reading and the motivation to read (Duncan, 2010; Seitz, 2010). The more enthusiastic a student is about his or her reading, the more enthusiastic that student becomes about their learning (Duncan,

2010). Instructors play a pivotal role in motivating students to read more in the classroom. Boughey (2010) discovered that by assessing students' reading interests, creating peer grouping, understanding students' abilities, increasing reading time, and evaluating their accomplishments, instructors motivate students to read more. Consequently, the above-mentioned actions help students develop a better understanding of their attitudes toward reading. Seitz (2010) created an assessment tool to examine students' attitudes in this area.

The ten question assessment instrument consisted of yes or no answer choices to reading behaviour typically displayed by students. The results of the assessment allowed instructors to provide students with constructive feedback that kept them interested in reading. According to Loh (2009), research has shown that instructors have a significant effect on the amount of time students spend reading, and their degree of reading fluency. Seitz (2010) discovered that reading fluency contributed to both the number of word errors made while reading, and the oral reading rate or the chronometric aspect of processing words. This is a significant observation, because many students enter the college with low SAT scores in reading (The College, 2005). Loh (2009) also found that learning reading fluency begins in elementary school and is enhanced throughout life.

A meta-analysis of intervention studies on reading between 1975 and 1998 showed that supplemental readings were highly effective in boosting reading fluency among elementary school children (Elbaum, Vaughn, Tejero, & Watson, 2000). In a study of elementary and middle school readers and college level students, Rheinheimer and McKenzie (2010) found that tutoring produced consistently positive results. In their study, Elbaum et al. (2000) examined reading outcomes for more than 1,500 students, and compared 29 studies. The researchers used a data set of 241 effect sizes from the total number of studies identified. It was therefore apparent that reading-related tutoring is the most effective means of boosting student achievement, and increase the certification rate in TVET colleges.

Rheinheimer and McKenzie's (2010) study shows that students who received tutoring had a lower expectation of withdrawal and a higher expectation of graduation. Nevertheless, tutoring did not necessarily increase Grade Point Average (GPA) scores. Mathes and Fuchs (1994) published studies that showed college students who received tutoring in the classroom made significantly higher gains academically than students who received no tutoring services. The contribution of tutoring is also mentioned as contributing to improved academic performance

of students. Both studies revealed that a high percentage of these students at entry level were at risk of failing because tutoring services were not available. According to the studies, teachers recognised the benefits of tutoring, but had concerns of classroom time constraints.

Seitz (2010) discovered an increase in the number of college students who were struggling academically turning to one-on-one tutoring services. With the implementation of tutoring in schools, teachers struggled with limited sessions that were insufficient in addressing student needs for tutoring. Adding to that teachers spent tutoring sessions clarifying information for students the need for tutoring (Duncan, 2010).

However, one-on-one instruction by trained personnel during classroom hours was a way of ensuring that all students received the necessary reading instruction that they needed to be successful academically (Rheinheimer & McKenzie's, 2010). Therefore, educational leaders and policymakers, favoured the idea of offering one-on-one instruction to struggling readers. They provided financial support that increased personnel to boost students' one-on-one tutoring services.

2.4 KEY CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY THE SSS PERSONNEL IN PROVIDING SUPPORT

2.4.1 Under-resourced education support services

Mahlo (2011) argues that since education support services are under resourced and unable to deal with the large numbers of students in need, their barriers to learning are not being addressed. Taking all of the above into consideration, it has been stated by Steyn and Wolhuter (2008, p.87) that “education support services [are services] aimed at achieving effective teaching and learning”.

They may have an interest in one particular job, but they also have to know whether there is a demand for the jobs, and how changes in the labour market will affect their chosen occupational field. Mahlo (2011) states that counsellors can only guide and counsel learners; the final decisions rest entirely on them. Career guidance helps students to find out which courses will supplement their choices and what the entrance requirements for these courses are (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014). They also need to know what costs will be involved to attain the specific qualification, and what options are available to attain further qualifications on completion of their college studies (DHET. 2013).

2.4.2 High student dropout rates

Major challenges such as high student dropout rates, low completion rates, mainly for African and Coloured students, and low marginal increases in overall higher education participation rates (HESA, 2009, p.5) remain. A recommendation to be made is that SSS units ought to be strengthened so that the support given to students, especially first-year students, is so effective that they remain with the college for the duration of the course they registered for.

2.4.3. Level of unpreparedness of college leavers

A particularly daunting challenge faced by HEIs during this period, and one which seems set to continue facing HE for the foreseeable future, concerns the inadequate levels of preparedness of school leavers for HE study (HESA, 2009). This has resulted in most HE institutions entrenching school level education functions within their HE mandate, which could have damaging long-term consequences for HE and for education in SA in general. An SSS unit's responsibility comes in handy to remedy the situation.

2.4.4 Students enrolled on a part-time basis

There are also challenges specifically for those who are not studying full-time as they are considered as very diverse in terms of the challenges they encounter and the support they need compared to full-time students. Kinghorn and Smith (2013) attest that part-time students have several barriers identified as huge obstacles. Soria (2012) identified various obstacles which can often compromise academic success for part-time students. Multiple barriers are often the result of part-time students trying every possible means to bridge two vastly different cultures, and not feeling as though they belong to either (Jahangir, 2010; Tinto, 2012).

2.4.5 Psychological barriers of enrolled part-time students

According to Kinghorn and Smith (2013), the psychological barrier is significant, often resulting in poor attitude and even poorer self-image related to one's role as a student. Unsuccessful past attempts to attain a desired qualification may contribute to a part-time student's poor self-image, thereby increasing the barrier to achieving a successful outcome upon returning to school to pursue a qualification. Another challenge is that part-timers often struggle with being fully prepared and having far less cultural capital for normal expectations within academia than their traditional full-time student counterparts, and may perform poorly (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012; Petty, 2014).

This lack of social capital needed for success in the college environment often causes stress, resulting in part-time students who have decreased coping mechanisms to deal with that stress (Mehta, Newbold & O'Rourke, 2011). The above challenges necessitate the strengthening of the SSS units in TVET colleges, as they are not immune as far as these challenges are concerned. The TVET sector has undergone major transformation, and a number of positive changes have been made. To mention only one, there was the merger of technical colleges into 50 colleges with multiple campus sites (DoE, 2008).

As a means to address these challenges, the Teaching and Learning Plan (DHET, 2014) postulates the need for the following strategies to ascertain that students are supported academically. Firstly, special needs student requirements identified as per the student development services (SDS) policy on academic support has given rise to the college SDS policy on academic support. Requirements must be made readily available for students to assist them to succeed academically (DHET, 2012).

Secondly, the development and use of a user-friendly software programme should be in place to assist students with poor foundational skills to be advanced from lower levels of learning (DHET, 2014). It is a well-known fact that with regard to the Annual National Assessments results for Grades 1 to 6 for literacy and numeracy, some schools obtained 0% in numeracy, and below 30% for literacy. This is a clear indication of poor foundational skills; hence academic support becomes a priority to assist students to succeed academically. Thirdly, the tutor programme, which includes lecturer assistants and peer mentors, should design a programme of assistance and be well scheduled, strategically monitored and evaluated to gauge whether the set goals are being achieved (CHE, 2010).

2.4.6 Shifted focus of Student Support Services office

According to Zungu and Munakandafa, (2014), student support services in TVET colleges have focused mainly on the management and awarding of financial aid to students since 2007. This approach compromised the provision of other kinds of support required by students. Support to students must focus on holistically addressing different socio-economic backgrounds and the diversity of students (Maimane, 2016). The implementation of a holistic national student support plan across the TVET sector, which should take into account differentiation across localities within the sector, and respond to geographical, sectorial and academic challenges, is necessary to deal with all the economic and sociological profiles of students (DoE, 2008).

2.4.7 Increased dropout rates for financial reasons

An empirical literature suggests a number of reasons students choose to drop out of college. Students leave for financial reasons, concerns about the learning environment of the institution, inability to manage their workload, or lack of motivation (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). Terenzini and Pascarella (2005) note that students who left school for financial reasons cited changes in their career and personal goals and incompatibility with the institutions as contributing factors.

These reasons, although troubling, were largely beyond the control of college administrators (Taylor & House, 2010). Students who cited environmental concerns as their reason for leaving college early mentioned that their institution simply did not provide the quality of education or educational environment they had envisioned at the initial enrolment phase. Students who indicated that they had trouble managing their workload were shown to have lacked the fundamental basics in mathematics and writing before enrolling in college, an area in which college administrators were seen as having limited control because of their inability to provide prerequisite courses in mathematics and writing (Terenzini & Pascarella, 2005).

2.4.8 Lack of motivation to continue studying

Students highlighted lack of motivation as a reason for leaving college early, another factor in which college administrators were seen as having limited control (Hayter, 2015). According to the findings in the Terenzini and Pascarella (2005) study, administrators acted appropriately in assisting students in transitioning from high school to college by providing struggling students with mentors. This support helps students adjust to college life through counselling services. Mentors were tasked with supporting new students to ensure a smooth transition to college life. These practices motivated students to stay in school and eventually graduate. If colleges and universities are to maintain a competitive edge in the 21st Century, it is vital they implement ways to sustain a motivated student population. Student trust in a college or university thereby becomes a vital component that enhances the achievement of their academic goals (Taylor & House, 2010).

Elliott and Haley (2001) surveyed 1,805 college students ranging from freshman to senior status to determine their degree of satisfaction with their college in areas such as academic advice, campus climate, campus support services, instructional effectiveness, recruitment and

financial aid assistance. The findings showed that students were most satisfied with matters of academic advice and instructional effectiveness. In other words, students trusted their institution with their academic progress (Hayter, 2015). The students remained enrolled at their respective institution until they graduated. The survey also showed that if students trusted their institution, the institution could retain students and better compete with similar institutions.

2.4.9 The effects a college may have on students

In a related study, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) examined more than 2,600 research studies to determine how college affects students. Their findings revealed six areas of interest: (a) long-term effects of college, (b) conditional effects of college, (c) within effects of college (i.e. inside experience), (d) between college effects (i.e. postsecondary school experience), (e) net effect of college, and (f) change during college which speaks to changes in behaviour. These factors are vital for higher education policymakers and practitioners to consider when developing recruitment and retention policies and programmes. They are also important for studies which attempt to explore the impact of a federal programme on student success in HBCU institutions. A thorough exploration of these factors could offer new and better ways of administering SSS resources to participants of the programme (Hayter, 2015).

In order to curb the above challenge, efficient and effective SSS must address the sector inefficiencies, particularly regarding student success and study completion rates (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014). Furthermore, for support services that are provided at the college level to be effective, planning should be at the core of curriculum delivery. In order for students to succeed academically and have increased employability chances, holistic student support must be encouraged at a college level. Students are not only supported academically, but the support starts at registration, and continues during their studies until they exit the system (DoE, 2008).

The following are indicative of the few support services that are provided at the college level, which embrace student induction programmes, educational advice, library assistance, study skills, examination preparation, language assistance, computer skills assistance, placement, occupational and subject choices, financial aid and bursaries, entrepreneurial skills training, sport assistance, cultural activities and social adjustments (Maimane, 2016).

There has been substantial investment in the sector which resulted in billions of rands pumped into the sector by government (Du Toit, 2012). In order to be more precise, Government invested R1.9 billion in the recapitalisation of TVET colleges, and the R600 million DoE TVET College Bursary Scheme was made available to needy and academically deserving students (DoE, 2008). Sector Education and Training authorities (SETAs) and many other departments and professional bodies also invested huge funds into the TVET sector.

Replacement of outdated NATED programmes with new, relevant and market-responsive NCV programmes was one of the positive changes. In 2007, TVET colleges enrolled over 25 000 students in NCV programmes, the enrolment figure in 2008 doubled to over 60 000. It was a target which was set by DHET to achieve an increase of one million students in the TVET sector by the year 2014. Consequently, the increase in enrolment targets required the SSS unit to be strengthened by TVET colleges (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

The purpose of conducting student satisfaction surveys is to strengthen the quality of students' experience on campus through comprehensive satisfaction questionnaires, which are filled in voluntarily and anonymously (Balkrishen, 2016). The survey tool is a powerful means to improve the quality of student life and learning. The tool measures student satisfaction and identifies which issues are important to them. The data obtained from the survey, when analysed, can be used for determining the perception of students about the campus, guiding future planning, strengthening student support; and identifying areas that need improvement.

2.4.10 Change in the South African higher education system

Change in post-1994 South African higher education has been characterised by ruptures and discontinuities with the past, resulting in a recasting of higher education values, goals and policies; by the emergence of a new institutional landscape and configuration of public universities; and by continuities in institutions and conditions such as institutional cultures, greater access (with lesser funded and structured SSS) and success for students from the capitalist and middle classes, and limited change in the social composition of academics (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014).

2.4.11 Lack of enabling policy framework for SSS

According to Jansen (2012, p.41-43), another challenge is “policies that have served as political symbolism in that at particular moments policy development hinged largely on the symbolism

rather than the substance of change in education or was limited to the symbolism of policy production rather than the details of policy implementation.” It is indisputable that an enabling policy framework that encompasses thoughtful state supervision, effective steering, predictability, continuity and consistency in policy is vitally necessary for higher education to realise its social purposes and goals (DHET, 2015). However, while an enabling policy framework is vitally important, it is on its own not enough, which then poses a serious challenge for institutions of HE.

2.4.12 Increased access to HEIs coupled with inadequate funding

According to Schreiber, Luecher and Moja (2016), the Higher Education and Training ministry’s commitments to increasing enrolments and participation rates and access, equity and redress may be handicapped by the inadequacy of the state budget devoted to higher education. Similarly, equity of opportunity and the enhancement of quality may be retarded by the absence of or limited funding for programmes of academic staff and student academic development at institutions (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). It is increasingly clear that public funding of higher education is inadequate in the face of the legacy of past inequities and the new demands on and expectations of TVET colleges in particular.

At least two areas of higher education are in need of either additional funding or dedicated new funding: The NSFAS, in order to provide equity of access, opportunity and outcomes for talented students from indigent and lower middle-class families; and earmarked funding for high academic development initiatives to enhance (1) equity of opportunity and outcome, (2) curriculum innovation, renewal and transformation to enhance the capabilities of institutions to meet the graduate needs of the economy and society; and (3) production of the next generation of artisans and workplace education (Du Toit, 2012).

In 2001 the National Plan for Higher Education estimated the gross participation to be fifteen per cent and set a target of twenty per cent gross participation by 2016 (Schreiber, Luecher & Moja 2016). Clearly, there has been only a minimal improvement in the overall gross participation rate and inequities continue to exist in the participation rates of African and Coloured South Africans relative to white and Indian South Africans. Approximately twelve per cent of the South African and Coloured 20-24 age groups, are participating in higher education which is a serious cause of concern, for political, social and economic reasons, if the sector is not able to accommodate a higher and more equitable proportion of those social groups

that have been historically disadvantaged and underrepresented in higher education sector (Scott, Yeld, & Hendry, 2007, p.11).

2.5 STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS KEY CHALLENGES IN PROVIDING SUPPORT

2.5.1 Improving the participation rates

A recommendation to be made in the light of the above statements is that giving exceptional attention to improving the participation rates of African and Coloured students should be a national priority. On the one hand, this is dependent on improving conditions in schooling. On the other hand, it highlights that the NSFAS needs to be better funded so that African and Coloured students can be supported to access higher education.

2.5.2 Enhancement of pass and graduation rates

Judging by dropout, throughput and graduation rates a substantial improvement in equity of opportunity and outcomes for black students remains to be achieved. The contact undergraduate success rate should be eighty per cent (DoE, 2009, p.56) “if reasonable graduation rates are to be achieved”. Instead, they range from (59% to 80%) with an average of seventy-five per cent (Human Sciences Research Council, 2010). The white student success rate in 2005 was eighty-five per cent and the African students’ rate was seventy per cent. The DoE’s targeted throughput rate “is a minimum of twenty per cent which would infer that a final cohort graduation rate of about sixty-five per cent. Instead, throughput rates for 2000-2004 were between (13% and 14%), and the cohort rate was forty-five per cent in 2004, with an overall dropout rate of forty-five per cent” (HSRC, 2010, p.213).

A recent study notes that the major racial inequalities in completion rates in undergraduate programmes, together with particularly high attrition rates of black students across the board, have the effect of negating much of the growth in achieving black students’ access (Schreiber, Luecher & Moja 2016). “Taking account of the black participation rate, the overall attrition rate of over 50% and the below average black completion rates, it can be concluded that the sector is catering successfully for under (5%) of the black (and coloured) age-group” (Scott et al., 2007, p.37).

It is therefore worth noting that “racial inequalities and high attrition rates have central significance for development as well as social inclusion”, and “equity of outcomes is the overarching challenge.” Clearly, if higher education institutions “are to contribute to a more equitable South African society, then access and success must be improved for black (and

particularly black working-class) students, who, by virtue of their previous experiences, have not been inducted into dominant ways of constructing knowledge” (Boughey, 2008, p.87).

There is, however, a further and important conclusion, namely that the underperformance of black students “will not change spontaneously. Thus, decisive action needs to be taken in key aspects of the educational process and at key points of the educational pipeline in order to facilitate positive change in outcomes” (Scott et al., 2007, p.20). Efficient academic support may be an answer to this challenge. It is argued that “such key points occur particularly at the interface between major phases of the system: between general education and FET, for example, as well as between TVET and higher education, and, increasingly significantly, between undergraduate and postgraduate studies” (Du Toit, 2012, p.67). Continuity in the system as a whole is necessary for improving graduate outcomes, without which meeting national developmental needs will continue to be an elusive goal.

2.5.3 Adequate public funding for academic support

The enhancement of academic capabilities includes adequate public funding for academic support initiatives. Equity of opportunity and outcomes is constrained by inadequate funding to address under preparedness (conceptual, knowledge, academic literacy and numeracy) for higher education programmes of especially indigent students (Du Toit, 2012). Another useful recommendation to make is that, in the light of unacceptably poor current pass and graduation rates and high dropout rates, the enhancement of the academic capabilities of TVET colleges, and specifically academics, and rigorously conceptualised and designed high quality academic development programmes to support academics and students are urgent and important tasks in order to ensure equity of opportunity and outcome, especially for students of working-class and rural poor social origins (Human Resource Development Council, 2014).

There is accumulated knowledge, expertise and experience at some TVET colleges related to the design and implementation of high quality academic support programmes, and more generally to enhancing the learning and teaching capabilities of students, especially the first-years. This dexterity should be harnessed, expanded and put to work for the benefit of all TVET colleges.

2.5.4 Adequate state funding for TVET colleges

One reason for the very high rate of dropouts among black students is almost certainly inadequate state funding in the form of scholarships, bursaries and loans (Hayter, 2015).

Although the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which operates on a means-test basis, has been successfully established and considerable funding has been allocated to promote redress for indigent students, the overall amounts allocated fall far short of providing effective support for all eligible students in need (DHET, 2013). This highlights the reality of the interconnection of race and class and equity of access for students. Mostly black students, from working-class and impoverished rural social backgrounds, will continue to be severely compromised unless there is a greater commitment of public funding for financial aid to poverty-stricken students (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

It is abundantly clear that the pace of social equity and redress in higher education continues to be severely constrained by conditions in South African schooling. Despite almost universal formal participation in schooling, South Africa's schools evince significant problems related to dropout rate, retention, progression and successful completion (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014). As has been noted, "the simple reality is that enrolment is not the same as attendance and attendance does not imply learning" (Bass, 2012, p.30). South African school students perform extremely poorly on a range of international assessment tests, in terms of which "65% of school leavers are functionally illiterate" (HSRC, 2010).

One statistic indicative of the formidable challenge is that currently 10% of some 7 000 independent secondary schools and public schools previously reserved for white students produce 60% of all Senior Certificate endorsements, which are the entrance requirement to higher education. Another 10% of mainly historically black schools produce a further 20% of all senior certificate endorsements. Thus 80% of Senior Certificate endorsements are generated by 20% of secondary schools, while the remaining 80% of secondary schools produce a paltry 20% of Senior Certificate endorsements.

It is clear that a fundamental challenge is to improve the quality of education and schools (DHET, 2014). It is also blatantly clear that improved access to and outcomes in higher education, especially for black South Africans, and in the fields of science, engineering and technology, are strongly dependent on significant improvements in the quality of South African schooling.

2.5.5 Making TVET colleges institutions of choice

The critical issue as far as enrolments are concerned is how to make TVET colleges the institutions of choice for students (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014). Part of the task includes increasing public awareness of what TVET colleges have to offer, and the potential

development opportunities open to students upon completion. Short-term tasks may include having the DHET to engage with the various TVET colleges to get a better sense of what interventions are being implemented. The Department would then have to strengthen existing programmes or develop capacity in cases where there are no interventions in place (DoE, 2012). TVET colleges across the national system will have to start engaging with schools to increase their visibility to students and position themselves as feasible education alternatives (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014).

An early understanding that the college offers various types of support programmes, for example, career guidance and counselling, academic support, health and well-being, life orientation and financial aid, is crucial (DHET, 2012). It is of paramount importance that students know who they are in terms of interest, personality, attributes, abilities and motivations. Only if such information is available can they discover and end up in careers in which they are interested, and for which they have the required ability (DoE, 2009). This implies that the fundamental role of the SSS office cannot be over-emphasised.

Support services, according to Steyn and Wolhuter (2008, p.25), are “one of the four basic components of any education system. “Students’ first experience of the college is that of being welcomed into an organised, student-focused environment where everything is done to help them become successful members of the college community.” This leads to a sense of pride in and belonging to their new college, and motivates them to become involved in their academic work when the academic timetable begins. These services form part of the education system, as they support students and assist them to succeed academically, thus improving the certification rate in TVET colleges.

Petty (2014) confirm that support services are organised in a system to assist individual colleges so that their education can be more effective. Education support services, as part and parcel of the entire school practice, include all human and other resources that provide support to individual students with other aspects of the education system (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014).

However, while these services attempt to lessen and eliminate learning and development barriers, they also focus on the prevention of such barriers and on the development of a supporting learning environment for learners. Mayet (2016) posits that the low level of student success in South Africa is a persistent problem, with levels of success differing between the various groups that make up South African society. One of the major limitations influencing

student success involves the socio-economic status (SES) of the newly entering students. In the South African context, with its very high levels of SES inequality and other social stratifications, a better understanding of issues related to SES would allow them to be addressed in targeted ways that lead to improved student success.

2.6 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996) highlights the obligations of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996). It states that public schools must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfair discrimination in any way. In determining the placement of learners with special education needs, the Heads of Department and the Principal must take into account the rights and wishes of the parents and of such learners, and uphold the principle of ‘what is in the best interest of the child in any decision making. The Act (RSA, 1996) further states that “where reasonably practicable”, the State must provide education for learners with special education needs at ordinary public or independent schools, and provide relevant educational support services for such learners.

The Education White Paper 6 that was published in 2001 set out the implementation strategy for the short-, medium- and long-term implementation of inclusive education. The first stage of implementation of the policy set out a number of clear objectives and key strategic levers. In order to bring about the changes, the White Paper stipulated various actions, including orientating management, staff and governing bodies to the inclusion model. Classroom educators are recognised as the primary resource needed to form an inclusive system. Over and above actions, there are also various intervention strategies and implementation which include, amongst others, the following. (DoE, 2008). It is stipulated that:

1. Learners who are immigrants, or whose home language is not English, be given additional oral and written work;
2. Learners with impaired vision be given test and examination papers in large font;
3. Learners with impaired hearing be placed in front of the class, and be given increased written work;
4. Learners with speech disabilities/stutter not be exposed to ridicule or whole class presentation of oral work, and be allowed a one-on-one interaction with the educator and;
5. Slow learners be given additional time to complete tasks and activities.

Regular feedback must be given to parents on progress or retrogression of the child in the form of reports from remedial teachers or occupational therapists which must be filed in the Learners with Barriers to Learning File. All interviews with learners must be documented, all meetings with parents must be recorded, and duly noted in the Principal's journal. Parents must be encouraged to continue regular sessions with professionals who may advise other strategies for improvement (CHE, 2009).

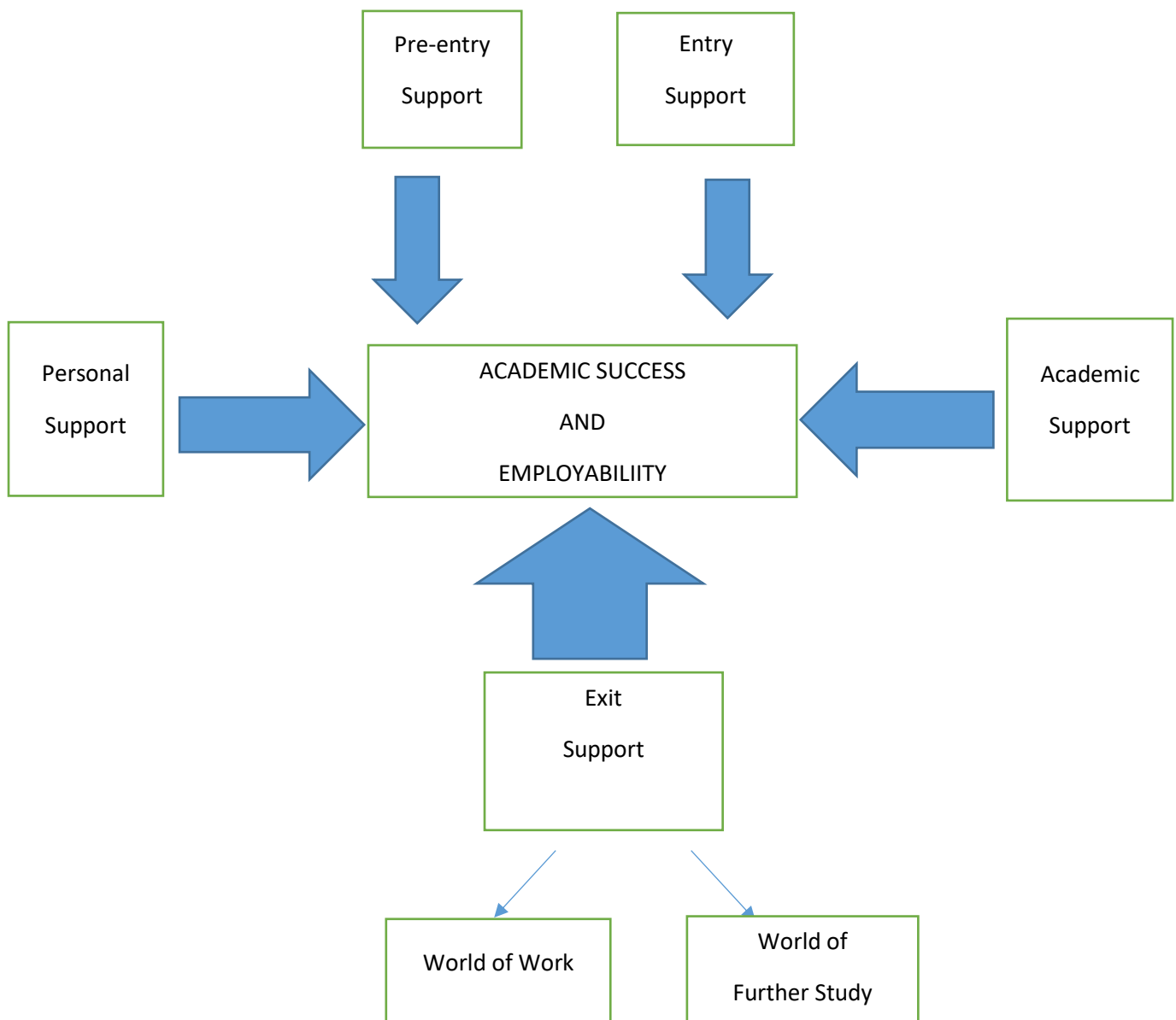
According to Cummings (2014), SSS also assists students with physical and academic disabilities. Incapacitated students receive access to similar support services that all other students enjoy, but are given more access and support services than other (abled) students. Since the 1960s, there have been a couple of programmes targeted to support disabled individuals (DoE, 2006). SSS staff also ensure that students with disabilities have access to all resources available within the programme. Some schools across the country have on-campus special learning environments with compassionate mentors in place to help students with disabilities to adjust to the truths of learning in a college setting (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2007). Research has shown that students with disabilities who receive support early in college tend to need fewer support services as they switch over the years from freshman to senior status (Zafft, Hart & Zimbrich, 2004).

2.7 INTEGRATED SUPPORT IN SOUTH AFRICAN TVET INSTITUTIONS

The diagram below shows how all aspects of student support are integrated into a system which has academic success and employability at the centre, and which eventually leads successful students to the world of work or further study. The diagram graphically illustrates the direct connection between effective academic support and the chances of employment opportunities for students if effectively supported.

In order for supported services to be integrated, it must cover the following aspects: pre-entry and entry support, which occurs before a student is enrolled for a particular programme in a TVET institution; personal and academic support, which occurs during the course of study; and exit support (after completion), which may take a student straight into employment, or to pursue further study.

Figure 2.7: An integrated student support system



Source adapted from DoE (2009)

The integrated student support system illustrated in Figure 2.7 show a pathway that leads from access (pre-entry and entry support. The pathway of support lead to academic success and employability, the SSS office should strive to be enabling rather than prescriptive when giving support to students (DHET, 2013). Furthermore, integration means that SSS are no longer isolated elements, but work together to form a solid system which places academic support at the centre of the college work. Student support is not an isolated or superficial activity but becomes an integral part of the quality management system (QMS), and is viewed as the best practice (DoE, 2009).

In an integrated approach, selection and placement no longer take place on a “first come, first served” basis to fill the given programme allocation. Assessment and placement tools assist in ensuring that potential students have the basic knowledge of English and mathematics or mathematical literacy skills that will enable them to cope with academic learning material (DoE, 2009). However, if for any reason students are not assisted and effectively supported during this process of selection and placement, chances are they may be placed in wrong programmes, which may result in their not succeeding academically, and not coping with the academic learning material. Selection and placement also take into account the students’ interests and abilities are crucial starting points towards achieving academic success (Maimane, 2016). Orientation is not an ordinary or procedural information-giving session, but an opportunity to make a positive first impression that becomes a lasting impression on students who want to be members of the college.

Personal support is an indispensable part of academic support, as no student can perform well when experiencing problems with physical, emotional and social health and well-being. Student development for all students and for SRC leadership builds students into rounded, confident people who can achieve success within a broader culture of institutional health and well-being. Parental involvement is crucial to academic success. Exit support paves the way for students to prepare for labour market entry or further study (Maimane, 2016).

Other studies of transition programmes in South Africa and the US have characterised connections between efforts as primarily administrative or transactional rather than based on meaningful connections, coherence and interdisciplinary (Padgett & Keup, 2011; Young & Hopp, 2014). Vertical integration of transition programmes, that is, integration across the undergraduate experience from beginning to end, is related to curricular sequencing and scaffolding (Cummings, 2014). Vertically integrated programmes have coherence between initiatives, support campus-wide learning standards, and attend to student developmental and educational progression.

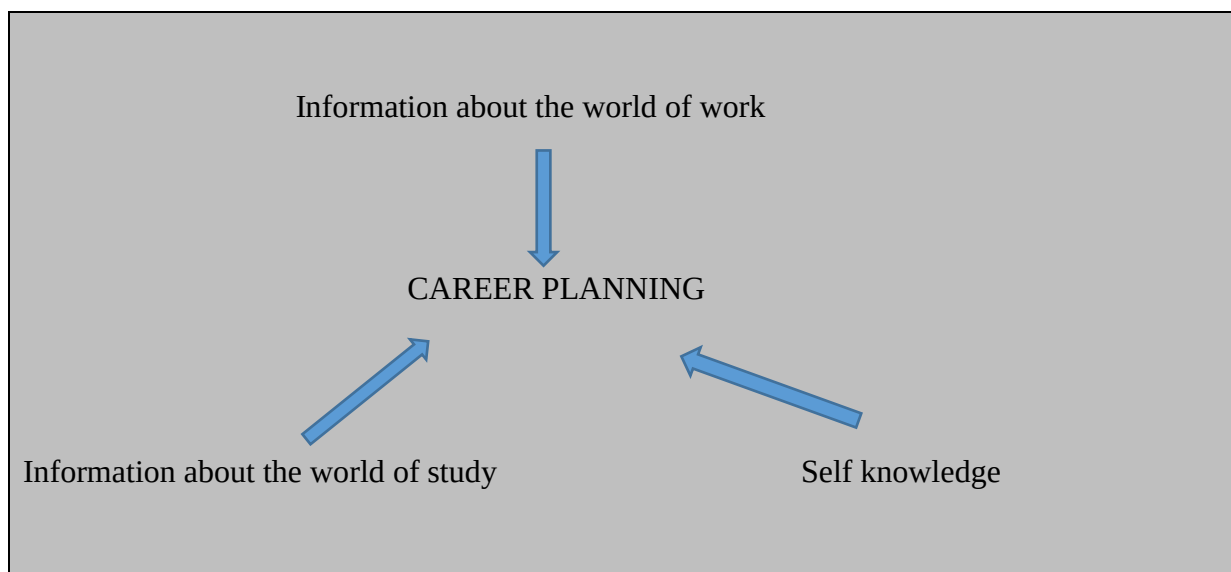
Moreover, the “vertical” aspect of the integration suggests that not only are students’ needs attended to and supported at each step along the path, but that each experience is coordinated so that the one that precedes dovetails into the one that follows (Padgett & Keup, 2011). Therefore, an integrated approach to support structures, curriculum and pedagogy would

improve the effectiveness of the delivery of SSS, generate efficacies and economies of scale at the institutional level, and create a more engaging and satisfying educational environment for students (Young, Screiner & McIntosh, 2015).

2.7.1 Pre-entry and entry support

Figure 2.7.1. Inter-relationship between three forms of knowledge

The diagram below shows the interrelationship between the three forms of knowledge and information. Jointly, they provide a basis for sound pre-entry career planning.



2.7.1.1 Career guidance and placement

Pre entry support, career guidance and placement (*Figure 2.7*) is to help each college and campus to ensure that the career guidance provided is of a high and consistent standard. It is characterised by two stages of practice, which are called getting started and doing more (DoE, 2009). There are two steps which are important aspects of pre-entry career guidance and placement, which form a critical role in SSS, namely: making prospective students aware of career options, and assessment and placement of prospective students.

Pre-entry career guidance and placement

The starting point for all prospective college students is to make career choices that match their interests, abilities and aptitude (Maimane, 2016). It is of vital importance that students enrol for the right programmes and courses in order to avoid adding to the rate of unnecessary dropouts (Cummings, 2014). The ultimate goal of correct selection and placement is for

students to be adequately prepared in terms of knowledge, skills and motivation so that they can develop further in their chosen fields. They do so by getting and keeping a job, or by being on the right path for further studies (Schreiber, Luecher & Moja 2016). Lack of informed career planning and decision making may result in wasted money, frustration, discontent and hardship. The focus of pre-entry career guidance and placement of prospective students in NCV programmes is to assist them in order to successfully

- select correct subject combinations;
- gain focus, clarity and confidence in respect of career, academic and job searches;
- choose careers, and associated education and training programmes that match their needs, interests and aptitude;
- develop a plan to meet their academic, career and life goals and:
- activate such plans (DoE, 2009, p.16).

In order for prospective students to be in a position to know what to study, where to study and what kind of support they can expect, they need to have access to relevant information in three key areas as suggested by the DHET (2013), namely: information about the world of work, information about the world of college study, and knowledge about themselves.

2.7.1.2 Student registration

Student registration is a very crucial process of any HEI (DHET, 2013). The aim of this process is to help each college and campus to ensure that the registration process is of a consistent and acceptable standard, and that students are supported accordingly. There are two stages of practice which are called “getting started” and “doing more” in this process. The following two steps also mark important aspects of effective student registration, namely: preparation for successful registration, and implementing the registration process. The following aspects answer the question of the importance of efficient administration of registration, especially for new college entrants. A college which has invested in implementing efficient contracting processes makes a strong contribution towards the academic success of its students (DoE, 2009).

Administrative processes that are transparent, user-friendly and streamlined allow students to settle down to their studies more readily. The students’ first experience of college is that of being welcomed into an organised, student-focused environment where everything is done to

help them become successful members of the college community. This is part of the support given to students during the registration process (Maimane, 2016).

If students' first experience is welcoming, it results in a sense of pride in and belonging to their new college, and motivates them to become involved in their academic work when the academic timetable begins (CHE, 2013). When preparing for successful registration, the Further Education and Training Colleges Act, No.16 of 2006 (Republic of South Africa, 2006) states that every college must have an admissions policy which is determined by the council of the college after consultation with the academic board, and with the approval of the members of the Executive Council (Gewe, 2010). Conversely, the admissions policy may not unfairly discriminate in any way, and must provide appropriate measures for redress of past inequalities.

The Council may, subject to applicable policy, determine admission requirements, the number to be admitted, and the minimum requirements for readmission, and refuse readmission if deemed fit by the situation. The Council must also ensure that a disability policy is in place that provides adequate access and support structures for students with disabilities (CHE, 2013). Other aspects that can be included are the application producer; academic requirements; policy and procedure for international students; and the appeal process in the case of refusal of admission (DoE, 2009).

A programme with easy steps, times and venues for students and their parents or guardians must be available. The Student Representative Council (SRC) or senior students have a very important role to play in welcoming all newcomers, working in close collaboration with the SSS office for monitoring and control purposes. The SRC also plays a key role in directing and assisting students throughout each day of the registration process (DoE, 2008). It is apparent that an administrative process which is unfriendly, difficult or complicated will alienate students and their parents or guardians. The following documents: admission policy, college application form, checklist for students and parents, checklist for college, student code of conduct, bursary application form, selection and placement test, date for registration must be readily available for students, as they help to simplify the registration process and avoid unnecessary confusion and waste of time.

2.7.1.3 Financial aid

One of the reasons students do not complete their studies is lack of money. Support is envisaged academically, but without money, that too may suffer (DoE, 2009). The following are the reasons efficient administration of the bursary process is important: firstly, the

provision of student financial aid through the Department of Education's TVET college bursary scheme is critical to access TVET colleges; secondly, it provides an opportunity for the following groups of students to be enrolled for NCV programmes (DoE, 2009, p.36): "South African citizens who are registered or intend to register for NCV programmes; talented students who can show evidence of good academic achievement and who stand to benefit from financial assistance; financially needy students with academic potential, and unemployed youth."

Academically deserving students who are committed to intense vocational study, and who complete all forms accurately and timeously must also be funded through NSFAS bursaries, and be granted internships after the successful completion of their studies at the college. The Department of Education requested NSFAS to administer and manage the DoE TVET colleges' bursary scheme, and NSFAS has adapted the Means Test Tool for the TVET college sector. The Means Test Tool should be used only as a guide when awarding bursaries to students (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

2.7.1.4 Student orientation

Academic success for students is the goal that every college community strives for (Maimane, 2016). For a student at any TVET college, success begins with participation in a well-planned and implemented orientation programme. The orientation programme's aim is the improvement of academic success and social integration to enable students to make the transition from their previous world to the world of the TVET College. If there is no structured, well-coordinated orientation programme, students will take longer to adjust to academic life on the new campus. Duties of the SSS office come in handy in this crucial time to ensure that the orientation programme is designed to support students, more especially the new college entrants.

Most new college entrants are at risk of not coping with life on campus, and not succeeding academically if they are not supported and properly orientated (DoE, 2008). This implies that academic success is more possible if new students meet new people, find out about the expectations of and issues supporting academic life, learn to find their way around the campus early, and have some fun about the process. If orientation is well advertised as a step towards success during the previous year, on the college open days and during registration, students

will understand the difference it will make to their studies and personal well-being, and consequently assist them to succeed academically (DHET, 2013).

Orientation follows registration, and must be seen as an integral part of the academic timetable (DoE, 2009). As registration often continues into the academic term to accommodate students who apply at the start of the academic year, orientation could be moved to the end of the first academic week or even later to allow most of the students to attend. Furthermore, late comers will have to be accommodated at a session later in the term at a special time decided on by the Orientation Committee working in conjunction with the SSS office. Orientation is more than a few days of activities. It is an ongoing process to ensure that new students attend various events during the year. College could adjust the timetable by shortening periods by five to ten minutes once a week to accommodate a session for this important educational intervention, and the SSS office should communicate the importance of this support to the college community.

According to Maimane (2016), orientation is the best possible start to the academic year and as an ongoing process, it cannot be successful if the whole college community, that is, every staff member on every campus, does not accept ownership. It must be a collective effort for it to bear good fruit.

All staff members have to reach out and join hands so that together they can make a difference to the potential success rate of the new students. The benefits of an integrated approach to orientation are as follows (DoE, 2009, p.54):

The students will be ready to start their academic year, fully prepared in every respect; they will feel excited, quite at home and proud to be part of the student community of this particular college; they will not only know their lecturers, many of their peers and the college layout, but also what is expected of them and who to contact with a problem; they will also know that many other challenges will be discussed with them during the year at specific times on their timetable, and they can walk confidently through the college doors on the first day of academic classes.

2.8 BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT

The aim of building a system of academic support is to help each college and campus to ensure that academic support is methodically provided to all students, with additional support available to those who need it most (DoE, 2009). In order to achieve this aim, the following steps are considered as of fundamental importance in an effective academic support system. Firstly, the planning for a system of academic support which sits at the centre of the system for

it to be considered effective; secondly, building a “catch-up” into the system; and lastly, identifying students’ academic needs.

The following marks the importance of a system of academic support. All students need academic support and development. This does not mean that each student must get special attention over and above what lecturers are able to provide in their daily teaching (DHET, 2013). It means that a broad approach has to be adopted to academic support and be thought as part of the curriculum, or as part of what happens in classroom and workshops every day. Academic support can only be part of the “mainstream” of teaching and learning when it is systematically planned. Such planning includes special intervention in areas of low achievement, but this is by no means the only component it adds (Maimane, 2016).

A pre-emptive step to academic support would be to ensure that the regular teaching timetable for all subjects is planned in a way that facilitates teaching and learning in all components of the curriculum (DoE, 2009). A well-thought out college timetable is the first and foremost requirement for learning effectiveness, and consequently contributes to the academic success of first entrants.

In addition to timetabling, the college must develop and establish a standardised college-wide system of assessment and moderation, as required by the Internal Continuous Assessment (ICASS) and Integrated Summative Assessment (ISAT) components of the curriculum. SSS comes in handy in this regard (Hayter, 2015). The purpose is to ensure that through systematic assessment planning and assessment, students are well aware at the start of each academic year of the assessment requirements. This contributes to greater awareness and, in general, to greater preparation on the part both of the lecturer and the student (Schreiber, Luecher & Moja 2016).

In order to understand how academic support works as part of curriculum one has to first look at the idea of curriculum more closely. Any curriculum can be broken up into three components (DoE, 2009, p.65). Firstly, there is the intended curriculum, which describes what is to be taught and learned. Then there is the implemented curriculum, or the actual teaching and learning that take place. Finally, there is the assessed curriculum, which seeks evidence that the intended outcomes have been achieved.

The term that best sums up all these aspects of a curriculum is often called “opportunity to learn”. Opportunity to learn (OTL) has a number of dimensions (Maimane, 2016). Some of them are: content coverage, which sums up the topics and subtopics actually taught during the course of a college year; content emphasis, which entails the amount of time or class periods

devoted to particular topics or subtopics; pacing, which is a check whether teaching progresses at an appropriate pace for a particular level of teaching and learning, and across levels (for instance, across NCV levels 2, 3 and 4); coherence or sequencing checks on whether content is systematically and logically presented so that sequential steps are not missed; and the level of cognitive demand, which determines whether there is opportunity for conceptual development from lower order (factual recall and recognition) to middle order (comprehension and application) to higher order (thinking and problem solving), with the top layer underpinned by the lower layers (DoE, 2009, p.66).

This is a different approach from dealing with students on an individual or ad hoc basis. Each college needs to build a systematic academic support system that is available to all students. As part of this system, lecturers allocate specific times when students can make appointments to discuss individual arrears of academic difficulty (for example, from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. on a Thursday). In DHET (2013), it is stated that academic support does not mean that lecturers should be available at all times. This implies that students must learn to trust the system that is set up, and to be disciplined in the expression of their academic support needs. This will only happen if there is a clearly communicated system, and if the system works well.

Lastly, a final part of putting the academic support system in place is to ensure that there are regular meetings between lecturers who deal with a particular level of students, student support officers and counselling specialists that the college may employ. Through such information exchange a complete picture of students can be developed that makes academic support a whole-college responsibility which does not rest with a single person or department (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). At colleges, such units are made up of experienced lecturers under the leadership of the academic manager. They are commonly known as Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) (DoE, 2009, p.71).

The purpose of a CDC is to build a core team of people to take overall responsibility for the implementation of the college's curriculum. The team meets on a regular basis, usually for at least one class period per week, but they meet more often towards the end of the year when planning for the following year needs to be put in place. The CDC has the following three main tasks:

1. to coordinate curriculum activities across the programmes offered by the college. This is done through a college year plan that shows all the important submission dates, for example, subjects' year plans, portfolios, internal and external examination and

moderation dates. The college year plan shows the “big picture” of how the overall college curriculum will work during the year, and then the subject year plans break this down into details appropriate for each subject.

2. to moderate the standard of assessment. When lecturers do not yet have a great deal of teaching experience they find it difficult to set assessments and tasks that provide for the full range of levels of cognition and demand. CDCs set up moderation subcommittees for subjects that are offered across all TVET college levels.
3. to contribute to the professional development of lecturers. Lecturers benefit from expert opinion on their assessment tasks, and those lecturers who serve on moderation committees deepen their own practice by learning from others. CDCs also coordinate joint materials development projects, which they undertake internally or contracted out.

When all the above components are planned and actually happen, lecturers are providing mainstream academic support to all students (UNESCO, 2012). However, local and international research suggests that in institutions where lecturers do not work closely together across levels and subjects, the curriculum is often little more than a repetitive cycle of basic skills instruction. In such a curriculum certain concepts and skills are taught over and over. As the pace is slow, critical parts of the content are often left out, or they are covered in a very superficial manner. Instead of benefiting from the slow pace, students who are already struggling often fall further and further behind and there is no time to catch up (Schreiber, Luecher & Moja 2016). Creating opportunity to learn is the basis of academic support that should be available to all students. Therefore, this form of academic support requires very good planning in order to be effective.

Identifying students’ academic needs at an early stage is of vital importance (DHET, 2013). By the time it comes to the mid-year or final examinations, it is often too late to remedy the situation, so early identification is a priority. While the assessment tools used during orientation are helpful in showing areas where students are capable and interested, they do not fully identify academic support needs. In every subject area it is essential that students complete a diagnostic baseline test within the first week or two of the academic year. Baseline test is not a multiple-choice test where students can try to guess the answers, but a written test or practical task where students must explain the reasons for their answers.

Furthermore, it is only when the reasoning is made explicit that the lecturer can see how each student will cope with the demands of the subject, and offer support as early as in the first term, failing which a referral can be made to the SSS office (Schreiber, Luecher & Moja 2016). Lecturers need to spend time on methodically examining the errors made by the students to identify areas where most students are not performing to the required standard. This is basic for determining where the content emphasis needs to be placed, what must be included in academic support tutorials, and where additional testing is needed (DoE, 2009).

Speckman and Mandew (2014) emphasise that the term “academic development” can mean different things depending on the context and purpose it is used. For example, in South Africa, the term is also used in a general sense to refer to all academic personnel “doing developmental work in higher education institutions” (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004, p.58).

Moreover, the concept of academic development is used in a more focused way in two very closely related senses. In the first instance, it is used to denote the overarching discipline constituted by deliberate and structured interventions in the areas of learning, teaching and the curriculum initiated by higher education institutions specifically to assist students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds to enter, cope with and succeed at university.

Volbrecht et al. (2004, p.58) define academic development as “an open set of practices concerned with improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education.” Put differently, the overarching concept of academic development is used to refer to a structured and integrated process of raising the standard and improving the levels of the interrelated and mutually influencing staff development, student development and curriculum development activities designed to facilitate student access to and success in higher education. In this second instance, the term is used in a much narrower sense to refer to a specific trend, approach, or moment in the evolution of the overarching discipline of academic development.

In order to plan for the future best practice, the first task to be undertaken by TVET colleges or campuses is an audit of current academic support systems (DoE, 2009). In this task a lecturer or student support academic must think about his or her own academic support practice, and also about that of colleagues who teach on the same programme, or in the subject area. If one is a campus manager or academic manager, he or she can think of the academic support system under his or her control as the whole campus. In the case of an SSS specialist, one can think

generally about the academic support systems on the campus or campuses where one offers services (HESA, 2009).

During the post-1994 period, the DHET was subject to some far-reaching legal, administrative and policy changes as well as a significant restructuring of the HEI landscape. (Higher Education South Africa [HESA], 2009). This gave rise to the colleges which were later named TVET colleges. This period has also seen some unquestionable advances in HE, predominantly regarding achieving greater levels of equity in access to HE, increased enrolments for advanced postgraduates' studies, and increased research outputs (DoE, 2008). The relationship between retention and throughput rates versus academic support necessitated the most fundamental postulation to be made in this research project, i.e. that necessary support given to students will lead to higher retention and throughput rates (Balkrishen, 2016).

In Cummings (2014), student retention refers to those students who did not advance to the next level, whereas retention rate refers to the percentage of students who did not transfer and withdraw during the first two semesters of the study period. Retention is defined as a measurement of the rate at which students' progress through an institution of higher education, either as a beginner student starting the process to attain a degree, or a returning student from the previous semester, or a re-enrolment student from the previous semester (Balkrishen, 2016). Throughput rates are ideally calculated by measuring what proportion of a cohort of students that start a qualification eventually complete that qualification.

Students' active involvement in the learning process is as stated in an old Chinese proverb: *"Tell me, and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn"* (Confucius, 450 BC). According to Astin (1999, p.26), student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan and Rak (1997) found that first entrants, within the first two years of entering the programme, typically increased their GPA scores by more than a tenth of a percentage point when they were directly involved in their academic tasks. The research showed that by year three of the SSS programme, student retention grew by at least ten per cent (Chaney et.al., 1997). Student access to SSS resources resulted in improvements in their academic performance, which contributed to the increases in GPA scores and third-year student retention rates.

However, the development of such support has been uneven across the 50 TVET colleges in South Africa, and has not been prioritised (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). SSS as a priority, should not be treated as a “nice-to-have”, and ought to be student-centred, and an integral part in the TVET teaching and learning system. There have been significant policy changes in the HE sector to disseminate policies widely known which might not be much of a challenge, but to introduce and maintain educational practices that give effect to policy injunctions appears to be a challenge (DoE, 2008).

2.9 CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides the background to the “first time entrants” SSS’s contribution to academic success in technical and vocational education and training. SSS and distance education were critically analysed, and an integrated SSS was reviewed. In addition to that, the global impact of equal access to education was also discussed, and SSS in developed and developing countries. The benefits of and challenges encountered by an SSS office were reviewed. It became evident that integrated academic support is the most important aspect of a student support service, and it must be prioritised to assist first entrants to succeed academically. A point to be made after the review of literature is that students are likely to succeed academically when they are supported by colleges to make the correct career choices that match their interests, abilities and capacities, and are properly orientated to the college, and supported academically. However, there are few gaps in literature which require further review of the kind of support directly linked to students with special didactic needs, students enrolled on part-time basis and students from diverse backgrounds.

The next chapter discusses, at length, the theoretical underpinnings of student support and development.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter, discusses at length, the theoretical fields conceptualising first-year entrants' support services. It follows a review of literature on the contribution of first-time entrants' SSS to academic success in technical and vocational education and training. The theoretical perspectives established through the review of literature capture the intellectual underpinnings of student support and development, and the contribution of the support to academic success.

This study explores the works of the following theorists which form the basis of this study: Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering; Tinto's theory of departure, theory of students' adjustment and theory of students' progression; Chickering's theory of identity development; Phinney's theory of racial and ethnic identity development; Super's theory of career development; Perry's theory of cognitive development; Kohlberg's theory of moral development; Park's theory of faith development; and Astin's theory of student involvement. The theories are further divided into the theories directly linked to the study and the student support theories in general.

3.2 STUDENT SUPPORT THEORIES FOR THE STUDY

It is important to understand how students develop so that support given will be in line with their developmental stages. As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, student development theories are underpinned by an old Chinese proverb: *"Tell me, and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn"* (Confucius, 450 BC).

An understanding of student support and development theories will provide SSS officials with a framework for creating programmes that encourage holistic student development and support (Long, 2012). These theories will also paint a clear picture as to why some students succeed in college while others do not. Furthermore, some theories may help serve as a foundation for the knowledge, expertise and practice of the student support office.

In a longitudinal study on student learning, Schroeder (1996) and Tinto (1987) found, through a predictive model of integration, that student departures from institutions of higher learning might have been linked to institutional integration. This study examined Astin's theory of student involvement, which suggested that students who study often, spend much of their time

on campus, interact frequently with faculty and staff, and participation in various school organisations were self-regulated. Uninvolved students were those who spend little time on campus, rarely interact with school officials, and decline to take part in group activities. The study used a series of interviews with and surveys of students attending the college. The following family of theories and models are those that student support officials commonly use to create meaningful educational experiences and programmes, and thus assist first-year entrants to succeed academically. Long (2012) and Hayter (2015) explain how students grow and change during the course of their college experience.

Long (2012) mentions that student development and support families of theories are broadly divided into four: psychosocial, cognitive structural, person-environment interactive and humanistic existential. Psychosocial theories focus on the self-reflective and interpersonal dimensions of students' lives. Cognitive structural theories explain how students think, reason, organise, and make meaning of their experience. While, person-environment interactive theories mostly focus on how student's behaviour and growth are directly affected by their educational experience, the humanistic existential theories explain how students make decisions that affect themselves and others.

3.2.1 Psychosocial theories

According to Long (2012), psychosocial theories explain in depth how people grow and develop over their life span, which marks the strength of this theory. This family of theories examines development as sequential in nature, generally accomplished through tasks or stages that must be mastered before advancement to the subsequent phase of development. Chickering's theory of identity development (1969) form part of psychosocial theories. In this theory, Chickering mentions seven vectors of identity development. He suggests that the development of students' identities is the prime issue during students' college years, and that students move through seven distinct vectors. Each vector can be considered a developmental stage or phase of the students' lives. These vectors are: developing competence, which is the first vector of identity development, followed by managing emotions, moving through autonomy, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and lastly developing integrity.

In the developing competence vector, students acquire a wide range of new cognitive, psychosocial, and technical skills as they encounter new academic challenges, living

environments, diversity and technology. In the vector of managing emotions, students develop the ability to recognise the appropriateness of certain emotions and reactions in different contexts. They are able to control and express their emotions accordingly.

The moving through autonomy vector is characterised by students' achieving autonomy by learning to solve problems on their own. It is therefore worth noting that in the vector of autonomy, students recognise that their goals must be accomplished largely through their own actions and decisions rather than through reliance on parents, peers and others (Odey & Carey, 2013). In the developing mature interpersonal relationships vector, students develop an appreciation of others based on the qualities they possess. This leads students to develop both a tolerance of differences, and the capacity for intimacy (Chickering, 1969). In the vector of establishing identity, students construct a secure and comfortable sense of identity in regard to physical appearance, gender, race, and sexual orientation. They are aware that their identity is composed of multiple dimensions, and how their identity is integrated with the broader society, culture and history posits (Pather, 2015).

In the vector of developing purpose, students develop a set of clear career goals, personal aspirations, and commitments to family, friends, and self (Long, 2012). Lastly, in the vector of developing integrity, students' progress from "black and white" thinking on complex moral and ethical issues to acknowledging the perspective of others as valid. Students' behaviour aligns with the values and goals they have established previously. Van Zyl, Gravett and De Bruin (2012) posit that students' progress through the first four vectors during the first and second years of college, and through the last three vectors at different rates, and can move back and forth between vectors as they re-examine issues and experiences.

Phinney (1999) developed a theory describing an identity process applicable to all minority racial or ethnic groups. Her model features three stages: diffusion-foreclosure, moratorium and identity achievements. She proposes that students who belong to minority racial or ethnic groups experience fundamental conflicts that occur as a result of their membership in a minority group, which may be considered as a weakness in this stage. Adding to that, students experience threats to their identities as they experience stereotyping and prejudicial treatment.

In the diffusion-foreclosure stage, the students have not scrutinised their own identity. Students also experience a fundamental conflict with their identity as they experience stereotyping and prejudicial treatment (Taylor & House, 2010). During the moratorium stage, students will explore their ethnic background and seek to understand what being a member of the minority

race or ethnic personally means to them. Lastly, in the stage of identity achievement, students accept their membership in a minority racial or ethnic group; they become more comfortable with their identity. Students at this stage attain an openness to other cultures, and tolerance for differences (Pather, 2015).

Although there are a number of theories of career exploration and development, Super's theory is the most widely adopted by career counsellors today (Brooks & Brown, 2002). Super proposed that career preferences and competencies change with time and experience. He developed the concept of vocational maturity, which is a strength, in which people pass through five developmental stages during their lifetime: growth stage, exploratory stage, establishment stage, maintenance stage and decline stage (Pather, Norodien-Fataar, Cupido & Mkhonto, 2017).

In the growth stage, students build a general understanding of the world of work and the need to work. In the exploratory stage, people try out a variety of occupational choices through classes, work experience, and hobbies. This stage relates to the experience of college students as they collect information about careers, and develop career interests (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2012). It plays a pivotal part in shaping the career choices of students, most particularly the first-year entrants. In the establishment stage, people acquire the entry-level skills for their chosen occupation, and focus on expanding their knowledge and experience. Finally, Wyatt (2011) posits that in the maintenance and decline stages, people are focused on career advancement and ultimately retirement.

Taylor and House (2010) identify six factors associated with the exploratory stage that help students to select appropriate career choices and advance to the establishment stage. Selecting appropriate career choice is a strength and contributes to student success. They maintain that decision-making skills, long-term planning skills, knowledge and use of information resources, general information about the culture rules, etiquette of the world of work and detailed information about occupations were necessary for students in the exploratory stage.

3.2.2 Cognitive-structural theories of student development

Long (2012) postulates that the cognitive-structural family of theories describes how students interpret and make meaning out of their experiences. He adds that teaching, learning, reflection, change, and empathy are values that inspire many cognitive-structural theories. Perry's theory explains how students perceive and arrange and organise knowledge. He identifies nine sequential positions which are grouped into *four* major periods of students' cognitive

development: the dualistic period, multiplicity period, relativistic period, and commitment to relativism (Pather, 2015).

Soria (2012) posits that in the dualistic period, students exhibit rigid, inflexible attitudes towards knowing which, on its own is a weakness. He adds that students resist learning new information or interpretations that challenge their established beliefs. In the multiplicity period, students recognise that knowledge has shades of grey, and that the information imparted by teachers and parents is imperfect.

However, students perceive knowledge as still absolute, but ultimately unknowable because not all facts are known about certain issues. This period of cognitive development is associated with students in the early years of college, mostly first and second years (Soria, 2012). In the relativistic period, students recognise the strategies of information seeking and analysis, designing experiments, comparing interpretations, and analysing evidence. Finally, in the commitment to relativism period, the students commit to a value system or ideology through which they construct their world-view or paradigm for perceiving knowledge.

This period is mostly associated with students in the later years of college study (Long, 2012). Perry's theory of cognitive development is mostly used by SSS officials for facilitating student learning outside the classroom through programmes, service learning, and other opportunities designed to challenge their beliefs (Soria, 2012).

Kohlberg's (1976, p.4) theory of moral development explains "how students' ability to reason affects their behaviour and conduct". He describes *six stages of moral development* through which students develop a sense of personal responsibility for their actions, and ultimately for the actions of a morally just society. Each stage requires a moral conflict before progression to the subsequent stage can occur. Hayter (2015) states that the six stages are categorised into three distinct levels: pre-conventional morality, conventional morality and post-conventional morality.

Pre-conventional morality consists of the first and second stages of moral development, and is characterised primarily by a wish to avoid punishment or injury, and a limited interest in others only when one's own interest is fulfilled. Conventional morality is composed of the third and fourth stages of moral development (Leach & Zepke, 2011). During the third stage, people shift from egocentricity to a desire to conform to a specific social role. During the fourth stage, people recognise the need for law and order to maintain a healthy, functioning society.

According to Kohlberg (1976), many traditional-age college students operate at a conventional level of morality which on its own, is a strength.

Lastly, post-conventional reasoning is composed of the fifth and sixth stages, and is characterised by a recognition that situations are often ambiguous, and law and order are not unfailingly just. People develop a sense of ethics, and consider moral dilemmas in the light of those ethics. People develop integrity through their consistent application of those ethics (Taylor & House, 2010).

Kohlberg's (1976) theory of moral development has profoundly affected the way SSS personnel approach student discipline and conduct, which marks the strength of this widely used theory. His theory resonates with those of Chickering and Perry. Kohlberg's work has inspired new theories by subsequent researchers. Long (2012) argues that theories in development of college students' ethics, faith, and spirituality have arisen from Kohlberg's work.

Parks' theory of faith development is indisputably the most dominant theory of faith development in student affairs. Parks (2000, p.18), describes faith development as "the process of discovering and creating connections between/among experiences and events." This implies that faith is the process of spiritual development that is concerned with meaning making, and spirituality is the activity of faith.

Love (2001) defines spirituality as the recognition and acceptance that unknowable higher powers exist and influence the direction of one's experiences. Parks (2000) focuses her theory on young adulthood as a critical point of life where faith develops. She maintains that young adulthood is marked by probing commitment, in which students recognize that it is necessary to choose their own path in the world, and forms of community are of vital importance to fostering students' faith development. She argues that a community needed by students during this time is a mentoring community. She defines a mentoring community as "a compatible social group of belonging in which young adults feel recognised for who they are, and as who they are becoming. It offers good company for both the emerging strength and the distinctive vulnerability of the young adult" (Parks, 2000, p.18).

SSS officials work to integrate the recognition of spiritual development into student support programmes and activities (Hayter, 2015). Campus ministries are frequently viewed as the avenue where spiritual development is best supported and explored, especially at state-supported colleges and universities. Love (2001, p.14) clarifies: "Students' involvement in

social, volunteer, leadership and community service activity may be a manifestation of their spiritual development and quest for meaning.”

3.2.3 Humanistic-existential theories of student development

SSS officials recognise that dimensions of student development do not exist independently of each other, hence identity development is intrinsically linked with psychosocial and intellectual development (Long, 2012). It is therefore extremely difficult for a student to reflect on his or her cultural identity without also reflecting on the social dynamics of race relations or the social constructs of race and ethnicity (Hayter, 2015). SSS officials therefore have a duty to ensure that programmes are put in place where students will be motivated to develop healthy relationships with others and the society as a whole.

Hettler (1989) proposed that students cannot develop psychosocially and intellectually without wellness. Hettler (1989, p.94), defines “wellness as a state of complete physical, intellectual, social or emotional, spiritual, environmental, and occupational”. Schuh, Jones and Harper (2015) consider that each dimension requires a deliberate personal commitment and time to reach an optimum level necessary for balance. It is therefore of vital importance for each student to achieve each of the six dimensions to fully experience learning and development that is positive, healthy, and complex. Consequently, Hettler (1989) posits that SSS personnel must ensure that activation programmes designed for students emphasise the issue of balance ranging from physical to occupational development. The dimensions, which are the strengths of this theory, are explained at length below.

In the physical dimension a student must be well nourished and well rested, and to maintain a regular regimen of physical activity (Leach & Zepke, 2011). The intellectual dimension involves students’ continuous active learning and the effort to acquire new knowledge and skills. In the social dimension, healthy friendships, relationships, and social interactions assist students to make meaningful interactions and find a sense of belonging. The spiritual dimension focuses on exploring students’ value systems and philosophies. The environmental dimension explores the students’ connections and interdependence with their physical and natural surroundings (Schuh et al., 2015).

Lastly, the occupational dimension involves finding a fulfilling career or vocation and developing lifelong learning as an occupational value as neatly outlined in Hettler (1989) and Long (2012). Student support professionals recognise that students will struggle in their academic, personal and social lives, and career development without a critical understanding

of the dimensions of wellness (Hayter, 2015), hence activation programmes should be intensified in order to ensure that students develop in each of the dimensions mentioned above. This will yield positive results, as students developed holistically may perform better academically.

3.2.4 Person-environment interactive theories

Many student support scholars remark that theories of student development are more like personal development theories. Most young people will experience conflicts that challenge their perspectives and subsequently spur their progress through the development stages of Chickering's, Perry's and Kohlberg's theories (Long, 2012). Astin (1987) proposed that students are more academically and socially proficient the more they are involved in the academic and social aspects of college life. Involved students are those who participate actively in student organisations, spend considerable time on campus, interact in activities of the classroom, and devote much time to learning.

Astin (1987) added that students are more likely to be involved if they have access to high-quality programmes and services that stimulate and challenge their learning. If extracurricular activities and classroom assignments are not directly relatable to students' goals and lives, and if faculty, student support officials, and resources are not directly involved in campus life, they will not feel involved and this will mark the major weakness of this theory. Webber, Krylow and Zhung (2013) emphasise the importance of students' involvement which resonates with Astin's theory.

Tinto (2012) developed a theory to explain student retention. Students depart from higher education without earning a qualification because of the nature and quality of their interactions with the college or university. According to Tinto (1987, p.17), students enter higher education with unique and individual characteristics ranging through socio-economic circumstances, family support, clarity of purpose for higher education, and cultural and social values. Integrated SSS will assist them to adjust accordingly, and find the balance necessary to see them to graduation, which marks the most significant strength of this theory.

According to Wyatt (2011), the characteristics of students and the college or university they attend may not necessarily match, and therefore may bring the students into conflict with the college or university. Students may depart, or drop out, if the source of conflict is not resolved. Tinto (1987) proposed that the reasons for student departure are primarily in *three* specific

areas: academic problems, failure to integrate socially and intellectually with the culture of the college or university, and a low level of commitment to the college or university.

Pather et al (2017) maintains that it is of fundamental importance that colleges integrate students deliberately in all three areas to decrease the chances of departure. Tinto (1987) argued that in most instances colleges or universities interpret the students' lack of attaining a qualification to be a failure. In fact, students leave a college for a variety of reasons, such as career advancement, family obligations, or health. They may also transfer to other institutions or return to higher education to attain degrees at a later time. The latter makes it extremely difficult to postulate the reasons for dropping out. The student may not interpret departure as a failure at all. Student support officials help students make the academic and social transitions at their colleges through early contact with students, and community building. They monitor students' academic performance and make referrals to counsellors, academic advisers, and tutors (Wyatt, 2011). Student support professionals must help create supportive social and educational environments in which students are valued and full members of their communities (Tinto, 1987).

Long (2012, p.53) proposed a model for the assessment of student development, or change, in which he considered the direct and indirect effects of a college or university's structural characteristics as well as its campus culture. According to Terenzini (1987), students' growth and development is affected by *five* sets of variables: students' precollege traits, the college structural or organisational characteristics, the campus culture or environment, socialising agents on the campus, and the quality of effort put forth by the students as outlined below.

Firstly, precollege traits include students' socio-economic backgrounds, preparation for college work, and demographic traits. Secondly, the size, selectivity, geographical location, secular or faith affiliation, and residential character of colleges and universities define their structural or organisational characteristics. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) maintain that the combination of the aforementioned variables shape the third variable: the campus culture or environment. Terenzini (1987, p.31) defines "the fourth variable as the frequency, content and quality of the students' interactions with the socialising agents on the campus, namely the faculty, administrators, and student support officials".

Lastly, the fifth variable, the quality of effort put forth by the student, may be directly affected by the fourth variable, by their own individual characteristics, and the cultural norms and expectations of the college or university (Odey & Carey, 2013). A weakness of this theory is

that, students who are less involved because of work or family responsibilities, have little access to faculty and student support services officials, and attend a college or university whose culture tolerates mediocre academic performance, will not develop as vigorously as they would under different circumstances. Hayter (2015), explicitly claims that theories of development are helpful for student support professionals in several different ways.

Theories explain and describe student behaviour and create meaning for students' unique perspectives and experiences. Therefore, student support professionals ought to intentionally design educational experiences and programmes using theories of student development to support students in their endeavours to succeed academically.

3.2.5 STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT THEORIES IN GENERAL

3.2.5.1 Theory of marginality and mattering

Schlossberg (1989) studied at length student perceptions and the correlation of those perceptions with students, which is the reason why his theory of marginality and mattering is the main one to be explored in this study. Marginality is always explained using two conceptual frameworks; spatial and social (Greenberg & Shenaar-Golan, 2017). The spatial marginality can be referred to as an economic concept in which a region is deemed marginal when distant from economic services, and is not autonomous. The social marginality is when an individual is excluded from a privileged social space. Most of the time students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds experience low self-esteem, especially when they are placed in a group where material well-being is what the members show off; they will be intimidated and feel unaccepted (Van Zyl et al, 2012).

The above theories are key factors of connection with the college environment. Marginality has a lot to do with the feeling of neglect or being marginalised (Schlossberg, 1989). This may be because every time an individual, particularly a first entrant, changes roles or enters a new environment, the potential of feeling marginalised is inevitable. Lack of support may result in students feeling totally left out, which may hinder their performance (Tinto, 2012). It is therefore, of vital importance that TVET colleges put in place an environment which supports students in their academic journey. Kur, Kinzie, Schuh and Whitt (2012) echo the fact that many students struggle to fit in and become a part of the astounding college world.

Mezirow (2000) contends that feeling marginalised may make it difficult for students to work well, which supports Schlossberg's theories. Strayhorn (2012) and Tinto (2012) assert that many students experience stress over fitting in, or having a sense of belonging. Kuh et al. (2012) postulate that stress levels can be worsened by the fact that many institutions are not strategically positioned to offer student support services, especially for first-year students. The researcher agrees with Michubu, Nyerere and Kyalo (2017) that there is a need to decontextualize the curriculum because it appears socially removed from the realities facing the students to which it is directed. For the past year, the discourse of decolonisation has been taking place within the high walls of universities, but it seems the underlying factor within the discourse has never been unravelled by the DHET and other relevant stakeholders.

Tinto (2012) concludes in his theory of departure that retaining a student is predominantly dependent on several extrinsic factors, which can be directly related to a student's social and academic involvement. Tinto's theory supports Schlossberg's theory of mattering and marginality, which claimed that students are much more likely to withdraw if they do not feel connected in some manner. Students will often leave an institution owing to a lack of connection, either through peer or faculty relationships, explains Lau (2003). These connections then create important social support and acceptance (Mezirow, 2000).

Conceptualisation of the first-year entrants is found in three theoretical fields: firstly, within adjustment frameworks of student retention and persistence, where the focus is predominantly on students' adjustment in terms of behaviour, cognition, personal function and attitudinal change, in order to adapt to the new demands of an HE context (Tinto, 2014). Secondly, first-year entrants may be conceptualised within stage models of student progression in which the first-year experience (FYE) forms one stage through which students need to progress in order to engage with undergraduate studies, and transition to work or enrol for postgraduate studies (Schlossberg, 2006). The third conceptualisation of first-year entrants centres on epistemological access to HEI. This surpasses adjusting and potentially assimilating to the demands of HE, and it is totally different from normative changes expected at this developmental juncture (Harper & Quaye, 2009).

3.2.5.2 Astin's input-environment-output model (I-E-O)

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005); Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton and Renn (2009) posit that Astin's model is framed by concepts that explain issues related to the effect of SSS on academic success. The college environment and student involvement significantly influence students'

persistence, learning outcomes, satisfaction and achievement (Thurmond, Wambach, & Connors, 2002; Norwani, 2005). Astin (1993) observed that a student's involvement in learning (for example, the amount of time a student spends on classroom assignments, or a student's ability to understand what he or she learned in class) guides the cognitive thought process. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) also noted that the extent of this involvement has a profound impact on a student's academic success.

The model in Figure 3.2.5.2 illustrates the relationship between the environments students find themselves in at college, displayed as a process. Student involvement in the learning process is displayed as input, and the actual students' achievements are displayed as outcomes. The three combined may contribute greatly towards students' success rate in TVET colleges.

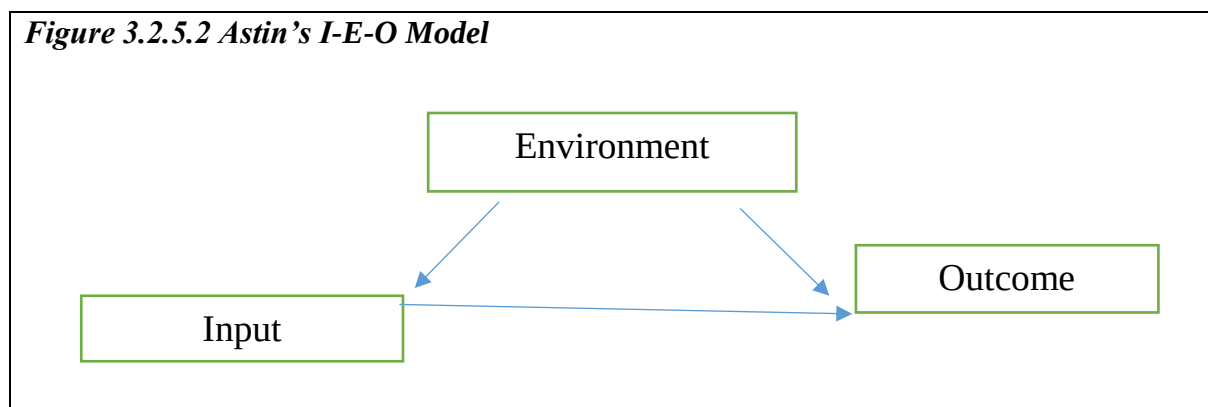


Figure 3.2.5.2 Astin's model (1993) showing the relationship between the college environment (process), student input (involvement) and student outcomes (achievements).

In his theory of student involvement, Astin (1993) asserted that such results were evident when students became more involved in their own learning. Pather, (2015) noted that the measurement of student involvement was potentially both qualitative and quantitative by monitoring behaviour in an academic setting.

In line with Astin's model, the following theories can be used to describe the SSS impact or contribution to academic support of first-year entrants: Schlossberg's theory of marginality claims that students who did not have the sense of belonging to the college were more likely to achieve adverse outcome academically (Evans, Forney, & Guido-Dibrito, 1998). The same theory emphasises the fact that new students should feel included, not marginalised, as early as possible in the college (Pather et al, 2017). This, indisputably becomes the duty of the post-

secondary education institutions (the TVET sector included) to particularly reach out to first-year entrants and ensure that they are supported.

The fact that most SSS students are from first generation, low income households (DoE, 2011), exposes them to marginalisation in a college setting. Schlossberg (1989) explains that some individuals become obsessed with the problem of marginality, and this becomes their dominant mode of thinking and behaving. Such marginalisation could interfere with students' ability to fine-tune successfully while in school (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2007) while restricting their chances of succeeding academically, which is a weakness (Van Zyl et al, 2012).

Research reveals that most first-year entrants enter college with paucities in reading, writing and mathematics, subject areas reckoned to be essential to academic success (Gewe, 2010). Pather (2015) found that college students who were uncertain about their academic goals tended to struggle the most in school. Goal clarification, as Tinto (1993) believes, is a complex part of a student's personal growth and has observed, low-income, minority, first-generation students, who stereotypically have the greatest need for remedial assistance, enrol in these services the least.

3.2.5.3 Theory of sensory stimulation

Laird (1985), in his theory of sensory stimulation, asserted that (75%) of adult college-age students learned best when given visual aids. He said that (13%) of adults preferred hearing instructions read aloud to them, and (12%) learned best using a hands-on, constructivist, active approach to learning. SSS should therefore offer services that are diverse and tangible approaches to increase the chances of students' sound academic performance.

3.2.5.4 Holistic theory

The holistic theory strength, suggests that an individual's character incorporates many factors, including emotions, desires, intelligence, and intuition (Laird, 1985), all of which can influence behaviour. In order for meaningful learning to take place, these factors must be activated or initiated through meaningful experiences and determined action. Uyder (2010) claims that a well-designed college curriculum should reflect all these elements and relate them to the needs of students and their academic success. It is of fundamental importance that TVET colleges scrutinise whether an academic programme is producing the intended results or meeting expectations. Continuous programme or curriculum reviews and students' evaluation can assist

in generating information so that campus can be well informed in providing practical support to students (Pather, 2015).

3.2.5.5 Theory of learning

Burns' (2000) theory of learning, cited in Cummings (2014), acknowledged several factors that explain learning as a behavioural change, factors that include adaptation of one's thinking, attitude, and emotions. Pather (2015) distinguished the importance of curiosity and the fact that educators understand obliquely that students are inherently inquisitive, and can be stirred to learn. The Council for Opportunity in Education (2007) underscores the importance of developing positive classroom environments that kindle students' inquisitiveness. Tinto (1993) mentioned that instructional experience directly influenced and facilitated students' social and academic assimilation in the higher education environment. Riley and Coleman (2011) have noted that educators often indicate that one of the reasons students leave low-performing schools is their experience of poor learning environments.

3.2.5.6 Facilitation theory

Lastly, the facilitation theory suggests that students learn better if educators, in this case SSS staff, facilitate the learning in an environment that is nonthreatening (Laird, 1985). This theory's strength assumes that students have a natural willingness to learn, which may not necessarily be the case at the college (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2012). It also promotes the view that many students are reluctant to change ideas or beliefs they thought were true, thereby making it much more difficult for educators to reach them intellectually. As facilitators, the SSS staff must be aware of these potential pitfalls if they are to promote a student programme that creates an internal locus of control (Hayter, 2015).

3.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided the theoretical frameworks and the impact they have on academic success of first-year entrants in technical and vocational education and training colleges. The theories underpinning student development and support were reviewed and discussed at length. It was worth noting that without a sound understanding of how students develop, the support given may not necessarily be congruous with their development stage. Conversely, an integrated student support service, coupled with an understanding of the above theories, may assist students to fine-tune and discover the balance necessary to see themselves to graduation.

The next chapter presents a detailed discussion of the research methods and the entire design used for this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to discuss the methodology used in this study to guide the collection of data to answer the following research questions highlighted in Chapter one of this study: (1) what is the key role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges? (2) how do support services impact on the academic success of first-time students? (3) what are the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to first entrants? and (4) what are the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to first-year entrants?

The brief profile of the respondents gave a better understanding, aided in the analysis and the interpretation of the findings. For research questions 1, 2 and 3, the process of analysing data began immediately after all questionnaires were collected from the respondents. Data analysis for the fourth question took a little longer as the recorded interviews were to be transcribed to capture the responses verbatim. The responses for the data collected using the questionnaire as an instrument were coded and analysed using SPSS output, and summarised and presented using tables.

The chapter focuses on how the research has been designed; the research paradigm; the research methodology; the selection of the sample used in this study; the research instruments; and the data analysis used in trying to solicit answers on the afore-mentioned problems. This chapter also explains how trustworthiness was ensured throughout this study. Finally, it gives a detailed outline of the ethical considerations pertaining to this study.

Research methodology is a set of specific techniques for selecting cases, measuring and observing aspects of social life, gathering and refining data, analysing the data and reporting the results (Kumar, 2014; Neuman, 2014). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2013), research methodology dictates and controls the acquisition of data, and collates data after their acquisition to extract meaning from them. In the words of Kumar (2014), methodology examines the core substance of quantitative and qualitative practice, to include methods, theory, and substantive interests to be investigated. This study employed both qualitative and

quantitative methods. Research methods are a group of tools and techniques used to answer research questions in a scientific manner (Salkind, 2012, p.47).

4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

According to Adams (2014), positivism, empiricism, post-positivism or the anti-positivist (interpretivist) approach refers to the epistemological and methodological frame of reference that defines the attitude and relation of the researcher to the production of data and the selection of research tools and methods. The philosophical paradigm (which is basically a worldview that underlines theory) employed in this study is post-positivist. Weismann (2011, p.198) define post-positivism as “a certain pluralism” which balances both positivist and interpretivist approaches.

Maree (2007, p.65) states that positivists focus on establishing and searching for evidence that is valid and reliable in terms of the existence of phenomena rather than the generation thereof. Employing only a positivist rather than post positivist paradigm was going to jeopardise this study, as the data to be furnished were not going to be enough to try to solicit the information required to answer the research questions. It was in the best interests of this study to use post positivism in order to get the best out of both data collection methods, as each has its own pros and cons, but together they have the ability to complement each other and make the argument watertight.

Before one can try to define the post-positivist paradigm one has to first define positivism. According to Weismann (2011, p.260), positivism refers to an evidence-based reality that can be mathematically interpreted. However, scientists have come to the realisation that all observation, including objective reality, is imperfect, which has led to the emergence of the post- positivist paradigm. Conversely, positivist and post positivist designs are on a continuum between the quantitative and qualitative paradigms. Positivism is still the dominant quantitative paradigm, say Hunter and Leahey (2008), but recently, there seems to have been a shift towards post-positivist thinking.

According to Krinsler (2011), the paradigm the researcher opts for determines the research methodology. It is worth noting that the post-positivist paradigm evolved from the positivist paradigm. Post positivism is concerned with the subjectivity of reality, and moves away from

the purely objective stance adopted by the logical positivists, asserts Ryan (2011). Adding to that, there are generally three paradigmatic determinants: the ontology, the epistemology, and the methodology or strategy used to seek the truth and answers to research questions. According to Waismann (2011, p.275), positivist generalisations are based on “real” causes, which are perceived as the true source of behaviour, and are based on unchangeable, sound foundations. The true reality is attainable, can be identified and measured. Positivism sets out to predict and control reality. It strongly focuses on the deterministic view of cause and effect (causality), which derives from the deductive approach, that research is guided by theory (Kinsler, 2011, p.205). Adams (2014) considers that, in essence, post-positivism attempts to transcend and upgrade positivism, not reject all positivists’ ideas and postulates of the scientific method.

It also does not reject the quantitative methodology, but attempts to harness it within a more complex research design; hence these two methods complement each other. The post-positivist critique of implicit positivism and empiricism can be useful as it is orientated towards a more complex and more comprehensive explanation of a specific phenomenon and the relations within it (Waismann, 2011). Adams (2014) cautions about the methodological errors and shortcomings inherent in the quantitative positivist approach, especially in the comparative framework of cross-national research.

Positivism somehow presupposes that data are good quality and adequate if they can be quantified, and bypasses the problem of context by dealing with the multitude of variables and correlations between them. The disadvantage of this approach lies in the fact that it generates insufficient knowledge, and it has no built-in mechanisms for self-correction and self-reflection (Kinsler, 2011). However, it should be mentioned that the critique of positivism does not contain a kind of ideological connotation or disqualification, but only calls attention to the methodological and epistemological dilemmas of contemporary social science research (Waismann, 2011).

The post-positivist paradigm is important for this study for the following reasons:

- It is considered as a form of justification for an alternative paradigm after the failure of positivism or neo-positivism (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2012).

- Neuman (2014) argue that positivism alone was discovered to be inadequate for social sciences research as it bases itself on observable and empirical, analytical facts; hence the idea of a mixed paradigm combining positivism and interpretivism, and making a new paradigm named post-positivism.
- According to Kinsler (2011), it is a revolt against the limitations of positivism, which solely associates itself with empiricism and rejects the existence of an individual or subjective perspective on facts.
- Post-positivism is a useful paradigm for researchers who display an interest in some aspects of positivism such as quantification, and yet wish to incorporate interpretive concerns around subjectivity and a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Maree, 2007).
- Post-positivism focuses on researching issues in the context of involving experiences of the majority, and announcing the results of what the majority says is acceptable.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study obtained relevant data useful and adequate for understanding the role of SSS units in TVET colleges; the extent to which academic support can affect the overall pass rate in the TVET sector; the factors that could positively contribute to the improved certification rate in the TVET sector; and the key challenges experienced by SSS officials in implementing the SSS framework. Research design focuses on the matter that involves designing a research study and developing a strategy to guide the research process (Neuman, 2014, p.165). De Vaus (2009) makes clear that the function of research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible. In simple terms, research design “is more a logical structure of enquiry than mode of data collection”, according to Neuman (2014, p.149).

Maree (2007:68) notes that mixed methods combine qualitative and quantitative strategies within one study, which employs the use of both numeric (numbers) and thematic expressions. This research used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The historical development of mixed methods research has been recently outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011).

Leedy and Ormrod (2013, p.189), explain that survey research methods involve obtaining information from one or more groups of people by asking those questions relating to their characteristics, opinions, attitudes, and experiences, while recording their answers. This study

adopted a descriptive survey approach which involved the use of multiple data-collection methods to collect data from student liaison officers (SLOs), SSS managers (in some literature referred to as Assistant Directors: SSS), SSS administrative clerks, career development officers (CDOs), campus management teams, lecturers lecturing at entry levels, and first- year students.

Mixed methods research has become popular as the newest development in research methods, and in approaches to “mixing” quantitative and qualitative research. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) define mixed methods research design as a procedure for collecting, analysing and “mixing” both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study, or a series of studies, to understand a research problem. Greene (2007), and Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) define mixed methods research as the research paradigm that encourages the combined use of qualitative and quantitative research elements to answer complex questions. Mixed methods is further defined as “the mixture of qualitative and quantitative in many phases in the research process. As a method it focuses on collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p.5).

The basic postulation is that the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination, provides a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method by itself, hence the use of this advanced methods procedure (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). One has to state that the procedure, advanced as it is, is time-consuming, requiring all-encompassing data collection and analysis. Mixed methods design consists of merging, integrating and linking the two components of data mixed in this approach. The underlying idea of mixed methods research is to combine different strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses of quantitative methods (large sample size, generalisation) with qualitative methods (small sample size, in-depth enquiry).

The main reason this study used mixed methods is because triangulation, when applied to research, means that investigators could improve their inquiries by collecting and integrating different kinds of data and illuminate the phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The three points to the triangle are the two sources of the data and the phenomenon. The improvement of inquiries would come from blending the strengths of each type of method, and neutralising the weaknesses. Integrating data in a single study continues to be an attractive approach to mixed methods research nowadays.

De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2011, p. 435-436) “are of the view that the mixed methods design underscores the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination of research problems than mere using one approach”. They outline the following values of the mixed methods approach:

1. Mixed methods research provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research, and therefore has the potential to provide stronger inferences.
2. Mixed methods research provides the opportunity for a greater assortment of divergent views and perspectives and makes researchers alert to the possibility that issues are more multifaceted than they may have initially supposed.
3. Mixed methods research is said to be practical in the sense that researchers are free to use all methods possible to address a research problem as well as the fact that they combine inductive and deductive reasoning processes.
4. Mixed methods research eliminates different kinds of bias, explains the true nature of the phenomenon under investigation, and improves various forms of validity or quality criteria.
5. Mixed methods research provides more comprehensive evidence for studying a research problem than either method by itself;
6. Mixed methods research is a good design to use when seeking to build on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data, hence the reason it was employed in this study.
7. It can also be conducted when one type of research is not enough to address the research problem and answer the research questions. More data is needed to extend, elaborate on, or explain the first data base, which in this study is the quantitative data.
8. Another reason for mixed methods research may be to follow up a quantitative study with a qualitative one to obtain more detailed, specific information than can be gained from the results of statistical tests obtainable from quantitative study.
9. Mixed methods research is useful when one want to provide an alternative perspective in a study, the need to generalise and contextualise, explain and understand, deduct and induct and integrate data collection and analysis to overcome limitations in using one method.
10. Mixed methods research is a design used for the acknowledgement of different worldviews and paradigms, and to satisfy the need to ask more complex questions than one can answer with a purely quantitative or purely qualitative study.

4.3.1.1 Types of mixed methods research design

Convergent parallel design

The purpose of a convergent parallel or concurrent mixed methods design is to concurrently collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data, and use the results to better understand a research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Two basic reasons for this design are that one data collection method supplies strengths to counterbalance the weaknesses of the other method, and that a more complete understanding of a research problem results from collecting both quantitative and qualitative data (De Vos et al, 2011).

Explanatory sequential design

In an explanatory sequential design, as compared to the convergent parallel design, instead of collecting data at the same time and merging the results, a mixed methods researcher might collect quantitative and qualitative information sequentially in two separate phases, with one form of data collection following and informing the other (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). The rationale for this approach is that while the quantitative data and results provide the basic picture of the research problem, more analysis, specifically through qualitative data collection, is needed to refine, extend or explain the general picture.

Exploratory sequential design

In an exploratory sequential design, rather than first analysing quantitative data as is done in the explanatory sequential design, the mixed methods researcher begins with qualitative data, and then collects quantitative information (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The purpose of the exploratory sequential mixed methods design involves the procedure of first gathering qualitative data to explore the phenomenon, and then collecting quantitative information to explain relationships found in the qualitative data. In the light of the above types of research design, this study used the explanatory sequential design.

4.4 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The target population is the specific pool of cases that a researcher wants to study, according to Neuman (2011, p.224). Brink et al. (2012, p.131) explain that “the target population consists of the total population with which the researcher intends to generalise the findings.” The target population of this study involved a total number of 172 respondents and Table 4.4 illustrate the

study population. The population of the study comprised the staff (campus management team members, lecturers, SSS unit staff members) and a total of 100 first-year students.

Table 4.4 Illustration of the study population

POPULATION	JUSTIFICATION	TOTAL
Campus Management Team	Two per campus in 10 campuses	20
SSS Officials		
SSS-ADs	One AD in each TVET College. Each college has one.	02
SLOs	One per campus in 10 campuses. Each	10
CDOs	campus has one of each SSS officials.	10
SSS-SACs	32 of the SSS officials were also participants for qualitative data collection.	10
Lecturers at entry levels	Two per campus in 10 campuses	20
First Year Students (50 males and females)	Ten per campus in 10 campuses	100
TOTAL		172

4.5 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

4.5.1 Data collection instruments

Data collection is the process of collecting data that will be analysed and interpreted with the aid of questionnaires, structured interviews and observation instruments. A questionnaire is a data collection instrument where the researcher waits while a whole group of respondents complete the questionnaire in a short space of time (Maree, 2007, p.157).

The interview is a conversation between participants and the researcher (Gray, 2009, p.369). Leedy and Ormond (2013, p.190) explain that interviews can be useful to get the required responses from the participants, while observation is a method that involves systematic, purposeful selecting, watching, listening and recording of the interaction as it takes place (Kumar, 2011, p.140). A self-designed structured questionnaire was adopted to collect data

from the students at the entry levels, namely NCV Level 2, NATED Engineering (N1), and NATED Business (N4), the campus management team and lecturers lecturing at entry level.

According to Ruusuvuori and Perakyla (2011, p.529), most qualitative researchers use interviews for good reason: by using interviews, the researcher can reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible, such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes. The choice of interviews as a tool is in line with the objectives of this study. As a result, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used in order to build this relationship and generate relevant information towards answering the research questions. The manageable distance between campuses to reach the participants allowed the use of face-to-face interviews. A voice recorder was used to capture every detail in answers given by the participants to the questions. All the participants were informed about and gave consent to being recorded, and the reasons for recording their responses were explained to them (*see Annexure F*).

In this study, oral interviews were conducted using structured interview schedules to elicit quality information from 32 participants on the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to first-year entrants. Participants were the 10 SLOs, 10 CDOs, 10 SSS-SACs, and two SSS Assistant Directors, which comprised a total of 32 participants. The interview schedule is attached in Section F (*see Annexure D*).

The questionnaire covered five sections: Section A, which required the biodata information of 72 college staff members and 100 entry level students; Section B focused on establishing the key role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges. Section C covered information on how support services can affect the academic success of first-time students. Section D focused on determining the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to first entrants. Lastly, Section E focused on the perceptions of CMT on challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in implementing the SSS framework.

4.5.1.1 Quantitative data collection

Quantitative research is defined as a study where data are collected from a large sample in a numerical format (Creswell, 2014). This further includes survey research using Likert-type rating scales, and counting methods. Quantitative data were collected in this study to try and establish the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to

first-year entrants. The results of quantitative research is the collection of numbers that can be used to analyse the produced results (Cohen, et al., 2007).

A structured questionnaire was used as the research instrument for data collection. It was developed by the researcher to elicit information from the TVET college staff members and first-year students, and was divided into five sections: Section A, which contained demographic information of the respondents; Section B, which contained information on the views of respondents on the key role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges; Section C, which contained information on the impact of support services on the academic success of first-time entrants at a TVET college; Section D contained information on the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to first entrants; and Section E covered information on the perceptions of the CMT on challenges experienced by SSS officials in providing support services to first entrants to college.

A questionnaire is relevant to this research as findings are presented in numerical format, and questions require a choice between definite answers. The questionnaire had closed-ended questions, using a Likert scale and descriptive statistics. The Likert scale was measured on a four-point scale marked Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The collected questionnaires were kept safe in a lockable cabinet until the study was completed. The descriptive statistics employed in this study involved the use of frequency counts, percentages, charts and tables. The information below marks the breakdown of the respondents and the research questions they responded to:

Section A was for all study population to respond (BIODATA) as seen in Annexure C1. Section B was earmarked specifically for CMT and lecturers (What is the key role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges?) as seen in Annexure C2. Section C for SSS officials (How do support services impact on the academic success of first- year students?) as seen in Annexure C3. Section D for Lecturers (What are the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to first entrants?) as seen in Annexure C4. Section D targeted SSS officials and students (What are the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to first entrants?) as seen in Annexure C5. Section E was assigned for CMT (What are the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to first-year entrants?) as seen in Annexure C6. Section F covered Interviews and was assigned solely for SSS officials (What are the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to first-year entrants?) as seen in Annexure D attached.

Advantages of using a questionnaire

Burns (2000, p.581), Imenda and Muyangwa (2006:122) and Kumar (2014:181) have identified the following advantages:

- It offers greater anonymity, as there is no face-to-face interaction between respondents and interviewers.
- The instructions and questions are simple and the purpose of the survey can be explained clearly in print.
- The absence of an interviewer, or third party, contributes to the standardisation of responses, as variations in voice inflection, word emphasis, or the use of probes, are eliminated.
- Through the use of a questionnaire errors resulting from the recording of responses by interviewers are reduced.
- The interviewer, whose personal appearance, mood or conduct may influence the results of an interview, is not present when the questionnaire is completed.

Disadvantages of using a questionnaire

A questionnaire has several drawbacks, but according to Kumar (2014, p.181) it is important to note that not all data collection using this method has these disadvantages. The prevalence of disadvantages depends on a number of factors, but you need to be aware of them to understand their possible bearing on the quality of the data. Burns (2000, p.581), Leedy and Ormrod (2005, p.185), Imenda and Muyangwa (2006, p.123) and Kumar (2014, p.181) have identified the following disadvantages:

- People are generally better able to express their views verbally than in writing.
- One main disadvantage is that its application is limited to a study population that can read and write. It cannot be used on a population that is illiterate, very young or very old.
- Questionnaires are notorious for their low response rate; people fail to return them. If you plan to use a questionnaire, keep in mind that because not everyone will return their questionnaire, your sample size will in effect be reduced.
- Respondents may be prevented from providing free expression of opinion as a result of instrument-design considerations.

- If, for any reason, respondents do not understand some question, there is no opportunity for them to have the meaning clarified.
- The response to a question may be influenced by the response to other questions. As respondents can read all the questions before answering, the way they answer a particular question may be affected by their knowledge of other questions.
- Written questionnaires do not allow the researcher to correct misunderstandings or answer questions that the respondent might answer incorrectly or not at all, owing to confusion or misinterpretation.

Questionnaires were most appropriate for this study to help solicit useful information from a massive number of respondents, which was not going to be easy with face-to-face interviews. Questionnaires are not expensive, as respondents are not interviewed. They save time, human and financial resources (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this study, questionnaires were administered collectively to a study population, which makes them an extremely inexpensive method of data collection.

4.5.1.2 Qualitative data collection

Qualitative research is defined as a study where data are collected from a small sample (usually a few participants) in the form of words (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This includes studies where researchers interviewed participants and collected documents to review.

Qualitative data are employed to solicit information from the respondents in the sample. They are used mainly because they are concerned with the why and not the how part of the topic through the analysis of unstructured information, which in the context of this study is the analysis of interviews. These data are chosen because they do not only rely on statistics or numbers, as is the case with the quantitative data. The main purpose of the researcher is to dig deep in getting understanding through looking closely at people's words and actions while responding. In accordance with Cohen et al. (2007), open-ended questions of the interview were used for qualitative investigation, because they provide rich and personal data, possible answers are unknown, and it is exploratory and appropriate to solicit participants' views. Creswell (2014) asserts that qualitative data usually involve direct interaction with individuals on a one-to-one basis, or in a group setting. Open-ended interview questions were used to collect data on the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to first-year entrants.

Oral interviews were conducted using structured interview schedules to elicit quality information from 32 participants: the 10 SLOs, 10 CDOs, 10 SSS-SACs, and two SSS Assistant Directors. They were purposively chosen because they were believed to have first-hand and rich information on the operations of the unit, and they are the personnel responsible for the day-to-day processes of the SSS unit at a TVET college and campus. The interview schedule is attached as Annexure D.

(a) Advantages of using interviews

It has been stated in Imenda and Muyangwa (2006, p.122) and Kumar (2014, p.181) that the same considerations and techniques used in constructing questionnaires could be used in constructing interview schedules. Interviews are regarded by the same authors as having the following advantages:

- The researcher is able to get facial and other expressions of the participants.
- The reactions and expressions of participants may add flavour or even unspoken content to the research process.
- Interviews are able to provide meaning out of the information provided by participants.
- Interviews are more appropriate for complex situations in preparing participants before asking questions.
- They are useful for collecting in-depth information through further probing participants.
- Information can be supplemented from that gained from observation of non-verbal reactions.
- Questions can be explained or be restructured so that participant can understand.
- An interview can be used with almost any type of population.

According to Newton (2010), “facts” are always socially produced, and the influence of a responsibly engaged researcher helps interviewees describe perceptions they would otherwise think irrelevant, or in their normal social context feel inhibited from mentioning. It is worth noting that most participants appreciated being given a platform to vent their frustrations and share their experiences.

(b) Disadvantages of using interviews

- Interviews are regarded as time-consuming and expensive, especially when participants are scattered over a wide geographical area.
- The quality of the data depends upon the quality of the interaction, which can affect the quality of the information.
- The quality of the data also depends upon the quality of the interviewer: the experience, skills and commitment of the interviewer can affect the quality of the data.
- The quality of the data may vary when multiple interviewers are used; multiple interviewers may magnify the problems mentioned in the previous two points.
- There is a possibility of researcher's bias, especially in the framing of questions, or in the interpretation of responses obtained.

Drawing from both the advantages and disadvantages of using interviews as a data collection instrument, a reason was necessary for using mixed methods to Cresswell (2014) posits that mixed methods are used when one method of collecting data is not enough to address the research problem, or even answer the research questions. One of the ways to counter the disadvantages is to frequently reflect on the interview process. It was beneficial to transcribe the interviews immediately in order to do this.

4.6 DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

This study employed descriptive statistics to analyse the questionnaires. A descriptive statistical approach employs measures such as frequency distributions, measures of central tendency, dispersion or variability and measures of relationship (Brink et al, 2012, p.179). For the purposes of this study, the responses to the closed-ended questions were numerically presented in a frequency distribution table and analysed.

Data management in qualitative research is basically finding ways to stock the data. Face-to-face interviews were used, and the responses were immediately transcribed. In the transcription process, a voice recorder was played briefly, and then stopped to type out the words, and started again. Thirty-two participants were interviewed. Their designation and a number were given to each participant in order to help identify them. At some point during the interviews, it was evident that there were commonalities in the responses given. This resulted to data saturation, which Merriam (2009), views as a point in data collection when no new or relevant information emerges with respect to the newly constructed theory. The step to be followed was to analyse the data collected, as elaborated in the next section.

4.7 METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

According to Ruusuvuori and Perakyla (2011, p.529), data analysis is basically about making sense of the data collected in order to summarise it and draw necessary conclusions.

4.7.1 Quantitative data analysis

The questionnaire's design was informed by the research objectives as it covered five sections: Section A, which required the biodata information of 72 college staff members and 100 entry level students. Section B formulation of questions was informed by the overarching aim of the study under scrutiny and the three of the four objectives of the present study. Theoretical underpinnings explored in the previous chapter also inform the design of questions for the questionnaire. Furthermore, Section B focused on establishing the key role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges. Section C covered information on how support services can affect the academic success of first-time students. Section D focused on determining the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to first entrants. Lastly, Section E focused on the perceptions of CMT on challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in implementing the SSS framework.

A self-designed structured questionnaire was adopted by the following respondents to collect data from the students at the entry levels, namely NCV Level 2, NATED Engineering (N1), and NATED Business (N4), the campus management team and lecturers lecturing at entry level. Responses to the closed-ended questions were numerically presented in a frequency distribution table and analysed. The Likert-scale statements with both positive and negative responses, were used, Completed questionnaires were carefully analysed. Tables were used to present data collected.

Once the questionnaires were completed and returned they were manually entered onto code sheets. Data were captured in Excel, imported into SPSS Computer Programme for analysis. Kumar (2005, p. 224) argues that “the type of statistical procedures the researcher applies to the data are dependent not only upon the purpose of the analysis, the way the researcher wants to communicate the finding to the reader and knowledge of statistical procedures, but also on the capabilities of the software.” The summarised data was presented using tables.

4.7.2 Qualitative data analysis

Face to face interviews were used to collect data, an interview schedule (See Annexure D) was used in order to provide direction on the kind of questions to lead the process. The responses to the open-ended questions of the qualitative investigation were captured verbatim on a matrix. Responses were analysed to identify commonalities, trends and themes in the use of common and recurring words. Thematic analysis was an essential method, which reports the experiences, meanings and reality of participants. The steps followed to analyse the data are described in the table below. In this study, oral interviews were conducted using structured interview schedules to elicit quality information from 32 participants on the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to first-year entrants. Participants were the 10 SLOs, 10 CDOs, 10 SSS-SACs, and two SSS Assistant Directors, which comprised a total of 32 participants. The interview schedule is attached in Section F (see Annexure D).

Table 4.7.2 Procedure for analysing qualitative data (Interviews)

Step 1	Conducted interviews.
Step 2	Transcribed interviews.
Step 3	Read transcribed interviews several times to establish and highlight which codes occurred.
Step 4	Put all codes in a table with a description of each. Added columns to give an indication of how often this particular code was mentioned by the respondents (verifying data saturation).
Step 5	Grouped codes together to establish themes that emerged.
Step 6	Put themes in thematic networks with the codes that informed the themes in order to gain an overall picture of the data collected.
Step 7	Trimmed the codes and added them together to give a better coherent picture, and worded the themes that were found more coherently
Step 8	Wrote Chapter Five, where the themes were described in detail in relation to answering the research questions as set out at the beginning of this chapter.

4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Allan (2011, p.294), the integrity principle is very important in all areas of research. This basically means that the whole research process should be transparent and subject to peer review. The essence of integrity is all about being ethical in the approach used throughout the study. Tracy (2010), goes deeper by breaking the ethics up into different aspects that are relevant to this research process. The breakdown includes procedural, situational, relational, and exiting ethics. Tracey (2010) stresses the importance of accuracy and avoiding fabrication, fraud, omission and contrivance. This suggests that research participants and respondents have a right to know the nature and potential consequences of the research, and understand that their participation is voluntary (see Annexure G).

4.8.1 Situational ethics

According to Tracey (2010), situational ethics refers to the context within which a study takes place. It assumes that each circumstance is different, and that researchers must repeatedly reflect on, critique and question their ethical decisions. This study was conducted at an organisation, in this case, TVET college campuses, where the possibility of politics and internal dialogues was high. The researcher was vigilant about strictly focusing on the research questions at hand. In order to protect my respondents and participants, the researcher was cautious not to dig into sensitive information regarding the institution, no matter how my participants wanted to vent. It is normal to want to vent, especially when an outsider shows an interest in the operations of the institution, and seeing someone who was willing to listen worsened the situation.

4.8.2 Relational ethics

Relational ethics involves an ethical self-consciousness in which researchers are mindful of their character, actions, and consequences to others. Relational ethics are related to an ethic of care that “recognises and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” (Ellis, 2007, p.4). The researcher/participants/respondents’ relationship was based on an understanding that the researcher was a curious observer frankly interested in what the participants had to say, without any hidden agendas. In the light of this statement, the researcher took care to treat respondents and participants with the necessary respect.

4.8.3 EXITING ETHICS

Exiting ethics refers to the fact that ethical considerations continue beyond the data collection phase to how researchers leave the scene and share the results (Tracey, 2010). This ethic comprises keeping the participants and respondents involved in the study, sharing the findings with them and ensuring that you do not just go in, get the data and leave again. After the study has been concluded, the researcher is planning to attend at least one quarterly meeting organised by the SSS unit, and one Academic Board meeting to report the findings and have a discussion with them about the findings.

The University of Zululand research ethics policy defines research ethics as the principles and practices that guide the ethical conduct of research. These should embody respect for the rights of others who are directly or indirectly affected by the research. Such rights include the rights of privacy and confidentiality, protection from harm, giving informed consent, access to information pre- and post-research, and due acknowledgement. Ethical conduct in research also includes the avoidance of inflicting animal suffering of any kind, and protection of the environment.

The University of Zululand's ethical guidelines and policies regarding plagiarism, participants and non-participants were observed in this research. The issue of confidentiality was discussed with all the participants involved. The confidentiality agreements were signed and proper acknowledgment was given to authors for using their materials. During a meeting the researcher introduced herself, and in inviting participants and respondents to be part of the study, explained that the research was a low-risk study, but they were protected, and their names would not be revealed in the study. The participants were informed before they signed the informed consent that all information collected would remain confidential, and all files and material would be kept safe. They were further informed that their participation was strictly voluntary, and they could choose not to take part at any point before or during the interviews. All participants signed the informed consent (*see Annexure F*), and upon signing they were reminded that they were not restricted if they wanted to withdraw from the study.

All the material and sources used were acknowledged as references. The researcher engaged with the university's policy and procedures on research ethics, and managing acts of plagiarism, and understood the grounds for the authorities' consent. The supervisors and the researcher have considered and discussed the ethical issues that arose from this research. The researcher therefore declared to the best of her knowledge that:

- The research did not fall into any category that requires special ethical obligation. Only individuals directly involved in the SSS unit and academic staff in a TVET college were used as participants in this study. The letter seeking permission to conduct research was forwarded to the TVET college principals attached in the annexure section as Annexure A.
- The letter granting permission from the TVET colleges used in this study was granted by the institution at which research was conducted, as seen in Annexure B. The participants' and respondents' names were not used in order to protect their identities. There were usually about four respondents and three participants per campus. A number and a role were given to each participant (for example, Assistant Director, AD 1). The onus rested entirely on the researcher to ensure that any data used in this study when reported could not be traced to a particular campus, and thus a certain respondent or participant.
- The researcher had to apply for ethical clearance from the University of Zululand Higher Degrees Committee before she could conduct her study. Her ethical clearance application was approved, and the ethical clearance certificate is attached as Annexure G.
- The research did not create any conflict of interest, real or perceived.
- The researcher was not involved in or associated with any project or activity that would become the subject-matter of the research, nor were the researcher's family members, close friends or associates involved in any way.
- The researcher undertook to abide by the general principles set out in the University's policies, and by the obligations which the policies imposed, and to mitigate any ethical and other risks that might occur. In particular, the researcher undertook to: respect the dignity as well as anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.
- Ensure that the research was relevant to the TVET sector, and directed towards discovering the role of first entrants' SSS in contributing to academic success in technical and vocational education and training, and the effects the support of the SSS unit may have on first entrants enrolled for TVET programmes, specifically its influence on the success rate of the TVET sector.

- Conduct the research and produce her own thesis, subject to normal supervisory and collegial assistance.
- Acknowledge and attribute to others the ideas, designs, and writings that were not original.
- Reference her work accurately according to her chosen referencing guide. The researcher complied with copyright requirements and the necessary permission to use material.

Should circumstances arise that could compromise her ethical obligations, the researcher undertook to disclose them to her supervisors, and to take appropriate action in terms of relevant university policy.

4.9 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

The validity issue in mixed methods research

In quantitative research, the importance of validity has been long accepted (Neuman, 2011). In qualitative research, discussions of validity have been more contentious and different typologies and terms have been produced in mixed methods research. Where quantitative and qualitative approaches are combined, discussions about “validity” issues are in their infant stages. It is argued that because mixed research involves combining complementary strengths and no overlapping weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative research, assessing the validity of findings is particularly complex.

A recommendation put forth was that validity in mixed research be termed “legitimation” as, so to speak, a “bilingual” term. To summarise Tashakkori and Teddie’s (2006) evaluating criteria frameworks involving the concept of inference quality: although providing a framework for assessing legitimation in mixed methods research will always be incomplete, it is important to address several legitimation types that come to the fore as a result of combining inferences from the quantitative and qualitative components of the study into the formation of meta-inferences.

4.9.1 Validity of the instrument

Validity is a measuring criterion used to find the degree to which the instrument measures what it ought to measure (Gray, 2009, p.155). Neuman (2011) identifies four types of validity: face validity, content validity, construct validity and criterion validity. Validity was justified through the judgement of experts in the SSS unit, CMT and lecturing staff, and made possible by allowing them to have access to the instruments of data collections.

4.9.2 Reliability of the instruments

According to Gray (2009, p.155), reliability is an indicator of consistency between measures of something which could be two separate instruments, e.g. two halves of an instrument, which means the instrument applied on two occasions. Neuman (2011) lists various ways of measuring reliability: stability, equivalence, internal consistency and interjudge reliability. An audit trail was done, and it was made available to all participants.

4.9.3 Data verification and trustworthiness

According to Merriam (2009, p.209), “producing valid and realistic knowledge in an ethical manner” when conducting qualitative research is of fundamental importance. Ethical considerations form part of trustworthiness. Given (2008) emphasises the fact that all research must respond to principles that stand as criteria against which the trustworthiness of a study can be evaluated. This trustworthiness includes adherence to concepts such as credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability in a research study. Merriam (2009) mentions some of the strategies that can be used for data verification, which inevitably answers the question of trustworthiness in the process. These strategies include an audit trail and reflexivity.

Audit trail

The audit trail provides documentation of the decisions and descriptions of the research process, with particular attention paid to the collection and analysis of data (Merriam, 2009). In this study, Chapters 4 and 5 provide this documentation of the exact process involved in the completion of this study, including description about the data collection, data analysis and interpretation thereof.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the process of constantly reflecting on what is being done and why it is being done, while conducting the study. Neuman (2011) state that the researcher is a central figure in the research process, as each researcher brings his or her own personal history and worldview

to the process, thereby influencing it. In reflecting on the study, the personal history of the researcher must always be considered at every step. In the light of this statement, the researcher provided a thorough reflection in Chapter Six. The constructs to be discussed below are the ones the researcher used to achieve trustworthiness in connection with the data verification strategies. These strategies include credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility acknowledges that reality is subjective, and that it can be influenced by many perspectives. Credibility is therefore the correspondence between the way in which the researcher interprets and presents the research findings, and the meanings and perspectives of the research participants and respondents (Merriam, 2009, p.213-215).

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the context of a study has been described to ensure internal validity so that the other researchers may know the extent to which the study can be applied to other contexts (Given, 2008). Merriam (2009) suggests that we need to think of generalisability in ways appropriate to the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research, namely that the findings of research can be transferred to certain other contexts if the contextual influences are documented in the research in question, and are applicable to other situations. This study was limited to two of the 50 TVET Colleges in South Africa, but could be transferred to any other college that could be seen as related situation and context.

Confirmability

Confirmability captures the traditional concept of objectivity, and refers to the degree to which the research findings reflect the meaning intended by the participants, rather than the preconceptions of the researcher (Jensen, 2008). In order to achieve this, the method of data verification was used. The researcher verified with the participants during the interviews whether she had correctly understood the concerns and realities they raised.

4.9 PILOT STUDY

The questionnaire was pretested at one TVET College, with a sample of 10 lecturers, three of the SSS unit staff, three CMT members and 10 students. Information obtained and problems raised were used to modify and improve the questionnaires. The participants in the pilot study did not form the sample in the main study. The pilot study was done to establish any

misunderstandings that could arise from the statements. The tools were submitted to the supervisors for their input before they were administered for the main study. The administration of the questionnaire had to be about the same as that to be used in the main study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p.204). Kumar (2014) mentions that a pilot study is done in order to develop, refine, and test an instrument to collect data. Piloting is an introductory exploration of the main study. Fox and Bayat (2007, p.102) emphasise that a pilot study is a trial run of an investigation conducted on a small scale to determine whether the research design and methodology are relative and effective. It is best to locate a sample of subjects with characteristics similar to those that were used in the study. Cohen et al (2007, p.341) have identified the following main purposes of a pilot study:

- To check the clarity of the questionnaire items, instructions and layout.
- To gain feedback on the validity of the questionnaire items, the operationalisation of the construct, and the purposes of the research.
- To check the time taken to complete the questionnaire.
- To identify commonly misunderstood or non-completed items to try out the coding system for data analysis.

These purposes were taken into consideration to refine the tool to be used in the main study.

4.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed at length the post-positivist paradigm, comparing it with the positivist one and a description of the research design. It explained that the research process is commonly informed by the qualitative or quantitative method, or by both. A detailed explanation of research methods employed was given, with reference to the context of the study, selection of the target population, and how access was gained to the sampled respondents and participants. The chapter has defined the study population and the actual instruments that were used to collect data. The use of both questionnaires and face-to-face interviews was explained, together with the advantages and disadvantages of using each tool. Data management was explained, and the data collection methods were discussed at length. The verification of the data, and ethical considerations were discussed.

The next chapter analyses and presents the data, and discusses the results and their implications.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings and also gives an in-depth analysis of the results of the research questions presented in Chapter one, which are; (1) What is the key role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges? (2) How do support services impact on the academic success of first time students? (3) What are the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to first entrants? And (4) What are the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to first year entrants?

The findings presented below are organised in line with the research questions and the way they are answered after analysing data. Merriam, (2009, p.175) defines data analysis as the process of making sense of the data. A detailed explanation of how quantitative data was analysed was mentioned in (Chapter Four, section 4.7.1). It was also mentioned how qualitative data were to be analysed, and emphasis was put on the thematic analysis for identifying, recognising and reporting themes within data (Chapter Four, section 4.7.2). The participants' perceptions of the key role of an SSS unit, and how it can contribute to improving the pass rate of first entrants were the lens through which data were interpreted.

A brief profile of the respondents paved the way for the findings. This study used a population of 172 respondents, who were divided as follows: two SSS Assistant Directors (as there is only one per college, and this study used two TVET colleges for data collection). They were chosen as they were the ones responsible for the SSS units in all campuses, and for effective implementation of the SSS framework and SSS plan; 20 campus management team members (Table 5.2.1) as accounting officials at the campus level, responsible for monitoring and evaluating the framework; 20 lecturers (Table 5.2.3) lecturing at entry levels as they were responsible for on-course classroom support; in fact they were implementers of academic support working in close collaboration with the SSS unit, academic support officials and peer tutors; 10 student liaison officers (Table 5.2.2), as they were the counting officers for the SSS units at the campus level; 10 career development officers, and 10 senior administration clerks for career advice and the administration of the SSS units; and 100 first-year students (Table 5.2.4), who were directly affected by the support given, be it negative or positive.

Respondents were given different questionnaires as indicated in the Table 5.1. The researcher waited for questionnaires after distributing them to respective group of respondents. The questionnaire was simple to complete in a short space of time, this fastened the response rate.

Table 5.1 presents the respondents designations, the questions they responded to, division of sections, table numbers and appendices

RESPONDENT DESIGNATIONS	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	SECTIONS	TABLE NUMBERS	ANNEXURES
ALL	DEMOGRAPHICAL DATA	SECTION A		Annexure B1
Campus Management Team (20)	Question 1 Role	SECTION B	Table 5.3.2	Annexure B2
SSS Unit officials (32)	Question 2 Impact	SECTION C	Table 5.3.2	Annexure B3
Lecturers (20)	Question 3 Factors	SECTION D	Table 5.3.3	Annexure B4
Students (100)	Question 3 Factors	SECTION D	Table 5.3.3.7 Table 5.3.3.8	Annexure B5
Campus Management Team (20)	Question 4 Challenges	SECTION E	Table 5.3.4	Annexure B6

SECTION A

5.2 RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHICAL DATA

5.2.1 Campus management team

The profile information relating to lecturers who participated in this project is given in Table 5.2 under different subheadings. The analysis of data presented the respondents' responses to the questionnaire asking biographical data, which are believed to shed more light on the extent of academic support required for first-year students.

The analysis of data presented in Table 5.2.1 shows the distribution of the sampled campus management team by highest qualifications, work experience, levels lectured, location of campuses, gender and age.

Table 5.2.1 Distribution of Sampled Campus Management Team (n=20)

PROFILE OF CAMPUS MANAGEMENT TEAM	Frequency	Percentage
Highest Qualification		
National Diploma/Diploma	10	50.0
Degree	3	15.0
Postgraduate Degree	7	35.0
Total	20	100.0
Work Experience		
0 – 2 years	4	20.0
3 – 4 years	5	25.0
5 – 10 years	4	20.0
More than 10 years	7	35.0
Total	20	100.0
Levels Lectured		
Level 2 – 4 (NCV)	5	25.0
N1 – N3 (Engineering Studies)	5	25.0
N4 – N6 (Business Studies)	6	30.0
Others	4	20.0
Total	20	100.0
Location of Campus		
Urban	8	40.0
Semi-Urban	6	30.0
Rural	6	30.0
Total	20	100.0
Gender		
Male	10	50.0
Female	10	50.0
Total	20	100.0
Age		
18 – 25	2	10.0
26 – 35	12	60.0
36 – 45	6	30.0
Total	20	100.0

Respondents must have a certain degree of pedagogical and applied competence to enable them to effectively support students from pre- and entry stages until they graduate or exit the TVET sector. Firstly, in terms of data presented in Table 5.2.1, all respondents had post-matric qualifications. The table indicates that 10 (50%) had diplomas at National Qualifications Framework NQF Level 6 of the National Qualifications Framework Act of 2008 and Higher Education Qualifications Framework (2013); seven (35%) had postgraduate degrees and three (15%) had an undergraduate degree. On average 10 (50%) of the campus managers had the necessary qualification (a degree) which is at NQF Level 7 of the HEQF (2013), as stated by requirements for employment. The DHET minimum requirement in order to qualify for a management position is a recognised undergraduate qualification or a Bachelor's degree or equivalent qualification (Department of Public Services and Administration, DPSA 2014).

The distribution in Table 5.2.1 indicates that respondents were suitably qualified to manage campuses and oversee the smooth running of support programmes. The applied competences for a qualification at NQF level 7, which is the minimum requirement for a lecturer to be appointed in a management position, are as follows: “Demonstrate integrated knowledge of the areas of one or more fields, disciplines or practices, including an understanding of and ability to apply and evaluate the key terms, concepts, facts, principles, rules and theories of that field, discipline or practice, and detailed knowledge of an area of specialisation and how that knowledge relates to other fields, disciplines and practices” (DPSA, 2014, p.27).

In SAQA (2012), it is alluded that NQF level descriptors were developed by the South African Qualifications Authority, and agreed to by the Quality Councils (Council on Higher Education; General and Further Education and Training Quality Council (UMALUSI) and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations. They were published in the Government Gazette in November 2011.

In Table 5.2.1 it is indicated that four (20%) respondents had 0-2 years' and four had 5-10 years' experience. Seven respondents (35%) had more than 10 years' and 5 (25%) had 3-4 years' work experience. It is a cause for concern to see that four (20%) of the respondents had 0-2 years' work experience. The minimum requirement in terms of experience for a management position is two years in the TVET sector, or in a similar environment. All of the above respondents were suitably qualified to lead and manage the campuses, and consequently drive the effectiveness of academic support.

CMTs are developed in order to give necessary support to first-year students. One of the tasks of the Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) is to contribute to the professional development of lecturers and make it available to all the lecturing staff. This development has a positive bearing in ensuring that lecturers are continuously developed to cope with the advancement of technology so that they can easily support students academically. Arguably, despite planned staff development initiatives, a CMT remains duty-bound to offer direction to the rest of staff members on campus.

It emerged from the table 5.2.1 that five (25%) respondents' lectured NC (V) Level 2-4, five (25%) of respondents lectured in NATED Engineering N1-N3, six (30%) lectured in the NATED Business N4-N6. and only four (20%) taught other subjects. Campus Management Team comprises a Campus Manager, Deputy Campus Manager and HODs who have no contact hours. Education specialists or senior lecturers do have contact hours of a minimum 18 periods a week in a 35-hour work-week as stipulated in the Public Administration Management Act, 2014.

Table 5.2.1 indicates that six (30%) of campuses are located in rural areas, another six (30%) in semi-urban areas and eight (40%) in urban areas. This is a clear indication that most campuses are situated in urban areas. One thinks of the students from rural areas, and the ordeal they face when they have to struggle to get transport to attend classes on time. One also thinks of their safety, as sometimes they have to attend classes late in the afternoon, and have to get transport back home, or to apartments they rent. This is all because of the shortage of on-campus accommodation for students. Furthermore, these areas are the ones that suffer from having underqualified lecturers, as most lecturers prefer working in towns.

This necessitates the building of safe students' residences to cater for all students who live far from home. Off-campus residences like flats pose health and safety risks to students, because college officials do not check on the students' situation. The college only gets to know about the risks the students are exposed to once the death of a student in those facilities hits the news headlines.

Findings based on Table 5.2.1 revealed that 10 (50%) of the sampled CMT respondents were male and 10 (50%) female. There are no data available which indicate that gender affects provision of support to college students: relevant qualifications, experience and expertise are fundamental elements necessary to provide meaningful support.

Lastly, Table 5.2.1 indicates that two (10%) respondents were 18 to 25 years old, 12 (60%) 26 to 35 years old and two (10%) were 36 to 45 years old. It is interesting to learn that there were at least about six (30%) Campus Management Team members who were only 18 to 25 years old. The findings imply that, the TVET sector has, as young as age 25, staff members managing campuses, which reveals that, the future does not look gloomy for TVET colleges. It is clear from the findings that, there is a shift in terms of age limit, from the staff members to assume management positions. There is a variety of ages ranging from 25 to 45 years of staff members in campus management positions, a clear indication that more youth are considered for management positions.

5.2.2 Student support services officials

The analysis of data presented in Table 5.2.2 shows the Distribution of sampled SSS officials by highest qualification obtained, work experience, designation, location of campuses, gender and age.

Table 5.2.2 Distribution of sampled SSS officials (n=32)

PROFILE OF SSS OFFICIALS	Frequency	Percentage
Highest Qualification		
National Diploma/Diploma	13	40.6
Degree	18	56.3
Postgraduate Degree	1	3.1
Total	32	100.0
Work Experience		
0 – 2 years	7	21.9
3 – 4 years	13	40.6
5 – 10 years	12	37.5
Total	20	100.0
Designation		
AD: SSS	2	6.3
SLO	10	31.3
CDO	10	31.3
SSS Admin Clerk	10	31.3
Total	32	100.0
Location of Campus		
Urban	12	37.5
Semi-Urban	9	28.1
Rural	11	34.4
Total	32	100.0
Gender		
Male	10	31.3
Female	22	68.8
Total	32	100.0
Age		
18 – 25	12	37.5
26 – 35	17	53.1
36 – 45	3	9.4
Total	32	100.0

Data presented in Table 5.2.2 above indicates that all respondents had post-matric qualifications, 13 (40.6 %) have diplomas, one (3.1%) had a postgraduate degree, and 18 (56.3%) had undergraduate degrees. The sampled SSS officials included SSS managers, SLOs, CDOs and SSS-SACs. On average, (59.4 %) of SSS managers have degrees, which implies that they are suitably qualified to offer holistic support services to students, especially the first-years.

Findings presented in Table 5.2.2 revealed that seven (21.9%) respondents had 0-2 years' experience, 13 (40.6%) had 3-4 years' experience, and 12 (37.5%) had 5-10 years'. Over 70% of sampled respondents had over 3-10 years' experience in an SSS unit, which made them suitably qualified to render holistic support to first-year students.

Table 5.2.2 indicates that 10 (31.3%) of sampled respondents were SSS-SACs, SLOs and CDOs, and two (6.3%) were SSS-ADs. The percentage of SSS-ADs is low because each TVET college has only one SSS-AD. Table 5.2.2 above indicates that (34.40) of SSS officials were working in rural areas, (37.50%) in urban areas, and (28.10%) in semi-urban areas. Furthermore, (31.3 %) of SSS respondents were males, and (68.8%) females.

SSS officials' minimum qualifications

The Table 5.2.2.1 showed the respective SSS officials' minimum qualifications and basic duties.

Table 5.2.2.1 SSS officials' minimum qualifications

DESIGNATION	QUALIFICATION	DUTIES
Assistant Director (AD)	Bachelor's degree in Psychology/Social Work	Manage SSS office and coordinate all SSS units on all campuses.
Student Liaison Officer (SLO)	Bachelor's degree in Psychology/Social Work/Advanced Diploma	Ensure coordination of the unit at a campus level. Offer guidance, counselling, activations, referrals, oversee the implementation of all support services.
Career Development Officer (CDO)	Bachelor's degree in Psychology/Social Work	Responsible for career guidance and development.
Senior Administration Clerk(SAC)	NSC and relevant office administration qualification	Responsible for all administrative duties of the office.

Academic structure of campuses

The Table 5.2.2.2 presents the academic structure of campuses in a TVET college. It varies from college to college as it has not been standardised as yet across colleges and campuses.

Table 5.2.2.2 Academic structure of campuses

DESIGNATION	POST LEVEL/ SALARY LEVEL	SCOPE OF MANAGEMENT
Campus Manager	PL 4 (SL 11)	Manages operations of the entire campus
Heads of Department	PL 3 (SL 9)	Manages the programmes
Education specialists	PL 2 (SL 8)	Responsible for each programme
Lecturers	PL 1 (SL 7)	Lecture different subjects as per their areas of specialisation

The Table 5.2.2.2 is a representation of campuses sampled for this study, but not an ideal structure at campus level. The above is the bare minimum a campus should have for its day-to-day operations (DHET, 2016).

5.2.3 Lecturers

The analysis of data presented in Table 5.2.3 shows the distribution of lecturers by highest qualification obtained, work experience, levels lectured, location of campuses, gender and age.

Table 5.2.3 Distribution of sampled lecturers (n=20)

PROFILE OF LECTURERS	Frequency	Percentage
Highest Qualification		
National Diploma/Diploma	5	25.0
Degree	13	65.0
Postgraduate degree	2	10.0
Total	20	100.0
Work Experience		
0 – 2 years	0	0.0
3 – 4 years	6	30.0
5 – 10 years	14	70.0
More than 10 years	0	0.0
Total	20	100.0
Levels Lectured		
Level 2 – 4 (NCV)	4	20.0
N1 – N3 (Engineering Studies)	6	30.0
N4 – N6 (Business Studies)	10	50.0
Total	20	100.0
Location of Campus		
Urban	5	25.0
Semi-Urban	10	50.0
Rural	5	25.0
Total	20	100.0
Gender		
Male	9	45.0
Female	11	55.0
Total	20	100.0
Age		
18 – 25	1	5.0
26 – 35	14	70.0
36 – 45	5	25.0
Total	20	100.0

In Table 5.2.3 all respondents have post-matric qualifications. Five (25%) have diplomas, 13 (65%) had undergraduate degrees and two (10%) had postgraduate degrees. 18 (75%) had degrees, which means they should have the proper skills to guide students in the various TVET learning programme, or in the courses they teach. The minimum requirement for an employee to apply for a management position is a degree relevant to the field, or a recognised three-year diploma plus a minimum three years' experience in the TVET sector or in a similar institution.

It emerged from the data analysis that there were no respondents with 0-2 years' experience, six (30%) had 3-4 years', 14 (70%) had 5-10 years', and none had more than 10 years' experience as lecturers at first entry levels. The level or the number of years as a lecturer

does have an impact on the support to be given to students. A lecturer who has been in class for more than two years is better equipped with skills to assist students. Lecturers are the first stop for students who need support as they interact with students on daily basis. Lecturers spend more time with students than any other officials on campus. With expertise, experience and dedication they can contribute meaningfully towards students' academic support, and their holistic development.

Table 5.2.3 shows that four (20%) respondents had lectured at NC (V) Level 2-4, six (30%) had lectured in NATED Engineering N1-N3, and 10 (50%) in NATED Business N4-N6. Lecturers at entry levels are regarded as implementers of on-course classroom support. This is because they spend more contact time with students and they are better able to spot gaps in performance early, and devise strategies to assist students to cope with their studies.

Data presented in Table 5.2.3 indicates that five (25%) of the sampled lecturers are working in rural and urban areas, and 10 (50%) are in semi-urban areas. It appears that a huge percentage of lecturers are working in semi-urban areas as compared to urban and rural areas. Most campuses are situated in semi-urban areas and they attract a high number of students from townships and rural areas. By implication, semi-urban campuses are the ones which must be well resourced to support the high number of first-year students flocking to them to study.

In Table 5.2.3 nine (45%) of sampled respondents are male and 11 (55) are female, which is almost an equal distribution, and may be a very useful balance to support male and female students. Finally, the findings revealed that one (15%) of the sampled SSS respondents is between ages 18-25, five (25%) are between 36-45, and the biggest of 14 (70%) are between 26-35 years of age.

5.2.4 First-year students

The analysis of data presented in Table 5.2.4 shows the distribution of sampled first-year students by highest qualification, location of campuses, gender and age.

Table 5.2.4 Distribution of first year students (n=100)

PROFILE OF SAMPLED FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS	Frequency	Percentage
Highest Qualification		
Matric/Grade 12/N3	100	100.0
Total	100	100.0
Location of Campus		
Urban	20	20.0
Semi-urban	48	48.0
Rural	32	32.0
Total	100	100.0
Gender		
Male	49	49.0
Female	51	51.0
Total	100	100.0
Age		
14 – 17	8	8.0
18 – 25	86	86.0
26 – 35	6	6.0
Total	100	100.0

Data presented in Table 5.2.4 indicates that all respondents had matric/N3 qualifications. All students have matric certificates for them to qualify to enrol at TVET colleges, even though the minimum entry requirement is Grade 9 for NCV. But owing to the demand for the TVET college qualification, many high school graduates prefer enrolling with the TVET sector, especially after trying their luck in other higher education institutions, especially because there are bursaries and allowances in the TVET sector and the minimum requirements are lower than those of universities and universities of technology. It is the responsibility of the campus to provide support to these students for retention until they complete their qualifications. (2018) argue that academic achievement by students is likely to take place in an environment where there is possible support in terms of correct programme choices, proper orientation and academic support for students.

It emerged from the data presented that (0, 20 %) of the first-year students were in urban areas, (0, 32 %) in rural areas, and (0, 48%) in semi-urban areas. The location of campuses does have an impact on the extent of support of students because campuses in urban areas are better resourced to support students. Urban campuses are technologically more advanced than rural campuses in terms of affording students support using technology. In rural campuses, Wi-Fi is not readily available for students to be connected to the internet. This implies that urban

students are better able to do research and make meaningful use of their new environment than those in rural and very remote areas.

The data analysed in Table 5.2.4 indicates that (49 %) of the sampled first-year students were male and (0, 51%) female in terms of age it emerged that (0, 8%) of respondents were 14-17 years old, (0, 86%) were 18-25, and (0, 6%) were 26-35 years. The (0,8%) of very young students is understandable as the NC (V) Level 2 programme's minimum requirement is a Grade 9 pass. Students aged 14-17 require extensive academic support in order for them to adjust to the new college environment. SSS is there to contribute to the development and welfare of a diverse body of students. Students aged 18-25 are more mature to take sound decisions about their studies and future.

The vision of SSS as indicated in the SSS plan is to increase the retention and throughput rate in TVET colleges (DoE, 2008). According to the National Development Strategy in South Africa, TVET colleges are core components to contribute towards skills development (DHET, 2016). Simply put, TVET colleges are key components in improving the capacity of the workforce to respond to national developmental needs, and the demands of an ever-changing world.

It is worth noting that an audit conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council on the efficiency of 50 FET colleges in 2010 measured by throughput rates found that

- NC (V) achieved a national average throughput rate of (30%) per annum over a three-year period (2007-2009),
- The NATED Engineering and Business Programmes (N1-N6) achieved (47%), and
- Other programmes achieved (66%) (HSRC, 2012)

The above figures sum up the perilous state of our country's vocational training system. This is evident in the (0, 02%) of students entering TWET colleges who qualify in the minimum period of three years. Hardly a third graduate, and many of those who do wait years for their certificates owing to the reported backlog in the Department of Higher Education's issuing of certificates. It is not known how many student graduates got jobs because the government and DHET do not track their progress.

A similarly uninviting image emerged from a study published by the Swiss-South African Cooperation Initiative (SSACI). In the SSACI study, it was revealed that 33 of every 100 students who enrolled for these courses (NCV, NATED Engineering and Business) passed their

first year, 15 passed their second year and six graduated on schedule. This scenario calls for the strengthening of the SSS unit to offer holistic support services which will assist students to succeed academically.

SECTION B

5.3 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of data presented in Table 5.3.1 indicates the perceptions as presented by the Campus Management Team members on the key role of SSS units in TVET colleges.

Table 5.3.1 The role of SSS unit in TVET colleges

PERCEPTIONS OF CAMPUS MANAGEMENT TEAM ON THE ROLE OF SSS UNITS IN TVET COLLEGES	SA Freq (%)	A Freq (%)	D Freq (%)	SD Freq (%)
5.3.1.1 Students with learning challenges are accommodated, taking into account current campus resources.	2 (10.0)	6 (30.0)	9 (45.0)	3 (15.0)
5.3.1.2 Accurate and timely information is provided concerning academic queries.	0 (0.0)	10 (50.0)	10 (50.0)	0 (0.0)
5.3.1.3 The Academic Head handles such queries responsibly.	0 (0.0)	3 (15.0)	15 (75.0)	2 (10.0)
5.3.1.4 Perception of accessing the college addressed.	0 (0.0)	16 (80.0)	4 (20.0)	0 (0.0)
5.3.1.5 Code of conduct for students clearly explained.	1 (5.0)	19 (95.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
5.3.1.6 Adequate information given regarding career choices.	1 (5.0)	11 (55.0)	8 (40.0)	0 (0.0)
5.3.1.7 The support given impacted positively on students' level of performance.	0 (0.0)	10 (50.0)	10 (50.0)	0 (0.0)
5.3.1.8 Academic opportunities provided by the campus are adequate to support first campus entrants.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	16 (80.0)	4 (20.0)
5.3.1.9 Academic support period allocated and monitored.	0 (0.0)	9 (45.0)	11 (55.0)	0 (0.0)
5.3.1.10 SSS framework (pre-entry, entry, on-course and exit support) implemented effectively.	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	9 (45.0)	10 (50.0)

Findings in Table 5.3.1 Section 5.3.1.8 revealed that (100%) of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that academic opportunities provided by the campus are inadequate to support

first campus entrants. However, while these services attempt to reduce and eliminate learning and development barriers, they also focus on the prevention of such barriers and on the development of a supportive learning environment for learners.

Mayet (2016) posits that the low level of student success in South Africa is a persistent problem, with levels of success differing between the various groups that make up South African society. One of the major limitations influencing student success involves the socio-economic status (SES) of the newly entering students. In the South African context, with its very high levels of SES inequality and other social stratifications, a better understanding of issues related to SES would allow them to be addressed in targeted ways that lead to improved student success.

Human Resources Development Cooperation in Southern Africa HRDCSA (2014), revealed several major challenges facing college leadership. The most pressing issues that came to light were, firstly, that management in general fails to offer proper instructional guidance to lecturers and students. Secondly, lecturers display blatant weaknesses in their lecturing capabilities, and thirdly, the NC (V) attracts large numbers of students with different levels of academic readiness, thus requiring lecturers to teach two extremely different cohorts of students in the same classroom (DHET, 2012). This arguably causes high levels of frustration for both lecturers and students.

A performance and expenditure review appointed by the Treasury exposed some of the colleges' shortcomings. It found that the average throughput rate in NC (V) courses in 2013 ranged from a dismal (0.6%) in Civil Engineering to (5.9%) in Tourism; the national certification rate was just (32.5%) for first-year students, and the dropout rate was (28.2%) (DHET, 2016).

Ensure that students with learning challenges are accommodated

Findings revealed in 5.1.3.1 that (60%) of the sampled respondents disagreed that students with learning challenges are accommodated, taking into account current campus resources. SSS staff ensure that students with disabilities have access to all resources available within the programme. Some schools across the country have on-campus special learning environments with compassionate mentors in place to help students with disabilities adjust to the truths of learning in a college setting (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2007). In order to qualify for SSS, students with disabilities must prove that they pre-qualify to receive disability

services as approved by the national government. Research has shown that students with disability who receive support early in college tend to need fewer support services as they switch over the years from freshman to senior status (Zafft, Hart & Zimbrich, 2004). Support given at very early stages encourages willingness in students to stay at the college and perform well academically.

Academic queries attended promptly

An equal distribution in terms of responses in 5.3.1.2 indicated that 10 (50%) agreed and 10 (50%) disagreed that accurate and timely information is provided concerning academic queries. The (50 %) negative responses are shocking in that if academic queries are not attended to accurately and timeously, intervention strategies will not be embarked on as early as possible. Prolonged unattended academic issues may hinder students' success.

In 5.3.1.3, 17 (85%) of the respondents disagreed that the Academic Head handles such queries responsibly. This indicates a gap in performance and sets up students for failure. In an ideal situation, such queries must be forwarded to an SSS unit for further interventions in order for students to be supported. It remains the duty of the campus management to see to it that students' queries are promptly and accurately attended to. Effective support given to students encourages them to perform well.

Information on career choices

It emerged from the findings presented in 5.1.3.6 that a total of (60 %) of respondents agreed that giving adequate information regarding career choices remains the key role of an SSS unit, as failure to perform it may increase the rate of dropouts the moment the students realise at mid-year that they have made a wrong career choice. According to the National Development Strategy, in South Africa TVET colleges are core components to contribute towards the improvement of the capacity of the workforce to respond to national developmental needs, and the demands of an ever-changing world (DHET, 2013).

Impact of support on students' academic performance

Findings revealed an equal distribution, in 5.3.1.7, of 10 (50%) agrees and 10 (50%) disagrees. There is accumulated knowledge, expertise and experience at some TVET colleges about the design and implementation of high quality academic support programmes, and more generally about enhancing the learning and teaching capabilities of students, especially the first-years

(Mayet, 2016). This dexterity should be harnessed, expanded and put to work for the benefit of all TVET colleges' students. Effective student support services motivate students to work hard and graduate, thus decreasing the dropout rate.

Available academic opportunities to support first entrants

Academic support for first entrants (pre-entry support) is supposed to be provided before a student is enrolled; entry support on the very first day a student sets his or her foot on a TVET college campus; on-course support after registration in class; and exit support on leaving the campus to find employment, pursue further studies, or start a business (DHET, 2012).

Findings presented in 5.3.1.8 revealed a shocking 20 (100%) of the sampled respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed that academic opportunities provided by the campus were adequate to support first-campus entrants. Efficient academic support may be an answer to this challenge. It is argued that "such key points occur particularly at the interface between major phases of the system: between general education and FET, for example, as well as between TVET and higher education, and, increasingly significantly, between undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Continuity in the system as a whole is necessary for improving graduate outcomes, without which meeting national developmental needs will continue to be an elusive goal" (Du Toit, 2012, p.67).

5.3.1.9 Academic support period

It emerged from the findings in 5.3.1.9 that only (45%) of respondents agreed that there is an allocated and monitored academic support period. Lecturers are key in offering classroom support as they spend most of their contact time with students, and know them better than other staff members do. For that reason, if there is no academic support period allocated for at least one hour a day to support students who are not coping in some complex subjects like mathematics and science, it may retard the progress of first year students. An academic support period must be allocated to subjects which contribute to the continued drop in the certification rate. In order to be certified, for instance, an NC (V) student must pass all seven subjects. A student may progress to the next level only when five subjects are passed. The two subjects which are problematic will be identified and form part of the academic support period.

SSS framework: full implementation

Findings in 5.3.1.10 revealed that 15 (95%) of the respondents disagreed that the SSS framework is implemented effectively. This means that an effective student support service would help increase the graduation and college retention rates. The framework for the SSS at TVET colleges states that “Students are likely to achieve academically when they are supported by colleges to make the correct programme choices, properly oriented to the college, supported academically and provided with opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities” (DoE, 2008, p.1).

SSS should be able to provide students with pre-entry, entry, on-course and exit level support (D0E, 2009). In order for the college to be able to provide this service, a clear vision must be crafted that would make it possible to respond to the needs of its clients. The SSS annual plan’s vision is to lead in the provision of SSS. The mission is to serve a diverse student population with an enabling learning environment. One of the objectives of this annual plan is to improve student success in programmes offered at TVET colleges, which in turn resonates with the role of the SSS office (DHET, 2016).

SECTION C

5.3.2 The impact of support services on academic success of first-time entrants.

The analysis of data presented in Table 5.3.2 indicates the perceptions as presented by the SSS officials on the impact of support services on the academic support of first-time college entrants.

Table 5.3.2 Impact of support services on academic success of first-time entrants

PERCEPTIONS OF SSS OFFICIALS ON THE IMPACT OF SUPPORT SERVICES ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF FIRST TIME ENTRANTS.	SA Freq (%)	A Freq (%)	D Freq (%)	SD Freq (%)
5.3.2.1 You possess a full understanding of the SSS framework.	1 (3.1)	8 (25.0)	15 (46.9)	8 (25.0)
5.3.2.2 The SSS plan is linked to other plans in the college.	1 (3.1)	16 (50.0)	14 (43.8)	1 (3.1)
5.3.2.3 Orientation and induction programmes are well structured and programmatic	2 (6.3)	25 (78.1)	5 (15.6)	0 (0.0)
5.3.2.4 There is well-functioning administration of registration	0 (0.0)	24 (75.0)	6 (18.8)	2 (6.3)
5.3.2.5 Students are given the opportunity to enter and succeed in the college.	6 (18.8)	20 (62.5)	5 (15.6)	1 (3.1)
5.2.3.6 Students are assisted to make meaningful career choices.	4 (12.5)	21 (65.6)	5 (15.6)	2 (6.3)
5.3.2.7 Information on funding opportunities is provided to new entrants.	5 (15.6)	16 (50.0)	11 (34.4)	0 (0.0)
5.3.2.8 Academic support is a priority to ensure students' success.	4 (12.5)	13 (40.6)	12 (37.5)	3 (9.4)
5.3.2.9 A major share of the SSS budget is allocated to academic support.	6 (18.8)	14 (43.8)	7 (21.9)	5 (15.6)
5.3.2.10 The SSS unit is adequately staffed with competent personnel to support students in all aspects of campus life.	2 (6.3)	14 (43.8)	10 (31.3)	6 (18.8)

Understanding of the SSS Framework

Findings presented in 5.3.2.1 revealed that 23 (71.9 %) of sampled respondents do not have a full understanding of the SSS framework. This is a serious cause for concern as SSS officials are supposedly implementers of the framework. It is therefore extremely difficult to comprehend how they can implement what they do not understand, as many say that knowledge is power.

Orientation and induction programmes for new entrants

Collected data in 5.3.2.3 revealed that (84.4%) agreed that orientation and induction programmes are well-structured and programmatic. This is really positive as first year students have to be orientated and fully inducted in order for them to cope in the new campus

environment. Academic success for students is the goal that every college community strives for (Maimane, 2016). Therefore, if there is no structured, well-coordinated orientation programme students will take longer to adjust to academic life on the new campus. The duties of the SSS office come in handy at this crucial time to ensure that an orientation programme is provided to support students especially the new entrants.

Academic support as a priority to ensure students' success

It emerged from the findings in 5.3.2.8 that (53.1%) of the respondents agreed that academic support is a priority to ensure students' success, and (46.9%) disagreed. There is a clear indication of poor foundational skills, and hence academic support becomes a priority. Research findings revealed that the tutor programme, which includes lecturer assistants and peer mentors, should design a programme of assistance and be strategically scheduled, monitored and evaluated to gauge whether the set goals are being achieved (CHE, 2010). Policies or systems must be in place for academic support, identification and referral of students in need of support.

Opportunities to access and succeed in the college

Data collected in 5.3.2.5 revealed that (81.3%) of the sampled respondents agreed that students are given the opportunity to access and succeed in the college. This is indeed a step the right direction. Tinto (2014, p.6) states that "providing students' access without support is not opportunity." This is clearly reflected in the plan to increase enrolments in public TVET colleges from approximately 639,618 in 2013 to 2.5 million in 2030, and thereby make the sector larger, by enrolments, than the university sector, as reflected in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training. Opportunities to access the college should match opportunities given to students for academic support for them to succeed academically.

Meaningful career choices made

Findings in 5.3.2.6 revealed that (78 %) agreed that students are assisted to make meaningful career choices. This is the perception of SSS officials who are the ones fully responsible for effectively driving the process. According to Maimane (2016), the starting point for all prospective college students is to make career choices that match their interests, abilities, and aptitudes. In order for the college to be able to provide for them it must have a vision that would make it possible to respond to the needs of its students.

Funding opportunities

Data in 5.3.2.7 revealed that (65.6 %) of sampled respondents agreed, (43.4%) disagreed that information on funding opportunities is provided to new entrants. Funding has a huge impact on access as many students socio-economic backgrounds do not allow them to pay for their college tuition fees. One reason for the very high rate of dropouts among black students is almost certainly inadequate state funding in the form of scholarships, bursaries and loans.

SSS major share budget

It emerged from the findings in 5.3.2.9 that (62.6%) of respondents agreed that a major share of the SSS budget is allocated to academic support, and (37.4%) disagreed. Equality of opportunity and outcomes is constrained by inadequate funding to address under preparedness (conceptual, knowledge, academic literacy and numeracy) for higher education programmes of especially indigent students (Du Toit, 2012).

SSS unit staffing

Collected data in 5.3.2.10 showed that (50.9%) disagreed that the SSS unit is adequately staffed with competent staff to support students in all aspects of campus life, and (49.1%) agreed. The higher percentage of those who disagreed obviously believe that lack of SSS unit staff is detrimental to students' success, and robs them of a fair opportunity to be effectively supported and to pass. When academic support and development are part of the mainstream of teaching, they often achieve specialist status through the establishment of a curriculum development unit. At higher education institutions such units are usually staffed by full-time specialists in curriculum, materials development and assessment (DoE, 2008).

Clear selection and placement policies based on redress

Findings revealed that (100%) of the respondents disagreed that there are clear selection and placement policies that focus on redress. The Further Education and Training Colleges Act, No.16 of 2006 (Republic of South Africa RSA, 2006) states that every college must have an admissions policy which is determined by the council of the college after consultation with the academic board, and with the approval of the members of the Executive Council (Gewe, 2010). The admissions policy may not unfairly discriminate in any way, and must provide appropriate measures for redress of past inequalities.

However, if for any reason students are not assisted and effectively supported during this process of selection and placement, they may be placed in wrong programmes, which may result in their not coping with the academic learning material. Selection and placement also take into account the students' interests and abilities, and are crucial starting points towards their achieving academic success (Maimane, 2016).

Systems for tracking and reporting

Data collected showed that (100%) disagreed that there are such systems in place. In justification, respondents complained that there is no follow up on students who exited the system, there is no record kept for future reference, and basically no student tracking, or at least there is none known for the college. Exit support paves the way for students to prepare for labour market entry or further study (Maimane, 2016).

SECTION D

5.3.3 Factors that can help improve the provision of support services to first-entrants

The analysis of data presented in Table 5.3.3 indicates the perceptions as presented by lecturers at entry levels on the impact of academic support on the overall pass rate of first-time entrants in the TVET sector.

Table 5.3.3 Perception of lecturers

PERCEPTION OF LECTURERS ON THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT ON OVERALL PASS RATE IN THE TVET SECTOR	SA Freq (%)	A Freq (%)	D Freq (%)	SD Freq (%)
5.3.3.1 You possess full understanding of the SSS framework implementation.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	11 (55.0)	9 (45.0)
5.3.3.2 You have knowledge of the Teaching and Learning Plan.	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	16 (80.0)	3 (15.0)
5.3.3.3 Your input was considered in the SSS Plan.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	19 (95.0)	1 (5.0)
5.3.3.4 An academic support period is helpful and monitored.	0 (0.0)	16 (80.0)	4 (20.0)	0 (0.0)
5.3.3.5 There are control mechanisms to combat student absenteeism.	0 (0.0)	16 (80.0)	4 (20.0)	0 (0.0)
5.3.3.6 You are supported with continuous professional development.	0 (0.0)	14 (70.0)	6 (30.0)	0 (0.0)
5.3.3.7 Student's gaps in performance are identified early, and intervention strategies prioritised.	0 (0.0)	13 (65.0)	6 (30.0)	1 (5.0)
5.3.3.8 You are provided with necessary support from the SSS manager to offer academic support to students.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	12 (60.0)	8 (40.0)
5.3.3.9 There are enough resources in place to provide academic support to students.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	13 (65.0)	7 (35.0)
5.3.3.10 Academic support done right may impact positively on student's success.	13 (65.0)	7 (35.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)

Understanding of the SSS framework

Findings presented in 5.3.3.1 revealed that (100%) of the sampled respondents who are lecturers disagreed or strongly disagreed that they possess full understanding of the SSS framework implementation. This marks another major cause for concern as lecturers are key when it comes to implementing on-course classroom support. If they all do not understand the framework, it will be difficult to implement, SSS should be able to provide students with pre-entry, on-course and exit level support (D0E, 2009). This framework ought to be cascaded to the lecturers as they have such an important role to play in on-course classroom support.

Monitored academic support period

Data collected as seen in 5.3.3.4 showed that (80%) of the respondents agreed that there is an academic support period which is helpful and monitored. This is a step in the right direction, as it will intensify the provision of on-course classroom support, which is highly effective support. Academic support can only be part of the mainstream of teaching and learning when it is systematically planned. Such planning includes special intervention in areas of low achievement, but this is by no means the only component (Maimane, 2016). Only (20%) of the respondents disagreed with calls for improvement, as an academic support period is helpful if it is effectively monitored.

Mechanisms to combat students' absenteeism

It emerged from collected data in 5.3.3.5 that (80%) of the sampled respondents agreed that there are controlled mechanisms to combat student absenteeism. Absenteeism alone, if not monitored, may defeat the whole purpose of academic support programmes.

Support with continuous professional development

Findings as presented in 5.3.3.6 revealed that (70%) of the sampled respondents agreed that there has been support given for continuous professional development, and (30 %) disagreed. Lecturers benefit from expert opinion on their assessment tasks, and those lecturers who serve on moderation committees deepen their own practice by learning from others. CDCs also co-ordinate joint materials development projects, which they undertake internally or contract out. (DoE, 2009, p.71).

The responses revealed that there is a lack of capacitation of key SSS unit staff members in order for them to be able to carry their duties effectively. These findings also show the lack of balance in terms of professional development earmarked for lecturing or academic staff as compared to support staff. It appears as if academic staff members are prioritised as compared to support staff members. Professional learning and development should be related to institutional structures and rewards. This implies that any programme of professional learning should be self-directed and related to the needs of the individual. The need for opportunities for collaboration is inevitable, and must be considered.

Early identification of gaps in students' performance

It emerged from the findings presented in 5.3.3.7 that (65%) of the respondents agreed that students' gaps in performance are identified early and intervention strategies prioritised. However, (35%) disagreed, which is a serious cause for concern for the sector. Lecturers display patent shortcomings in their lecturing capabilities (Badenhorst & Radile, 2018, p.92). In Chapter one it is clearly stated that an early identification of academic support needs is crucial as part of the system because students will be able to determine where to find assistance. By the time of the mid-year or final examinations it is often too late to remedy the situation.

Academic support impact on student's success.

Findings in 5.3.3.10 revealed an overwhelming (100%) of respondents agreed that academic support done right may impact positively on student's success. A pre-emptive step to academic support would be to ensure that the regular teaching timetable for all subjects is planned in a way that facilitates teaching and learning in all components of the curriculum (DoE, 2009).

5.3.3.7 Perception of students Table of contents

The analysis of data presented in Table 5.3.3.7 below shows the perceptions of students at entry levels on factors that could positively contribute to improved certification and throughput rates in the TVET sector.

Table 5.3.3.7 Perception of students

PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS ON FACTORS THAT COULD POSITIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO THE IMPROVED CERTIFICATION RATE IN THE TVET SECTOR	SA Freq (%)	A Freq (%)	D Freq (%)	SD Freq (%)
5.3.3.7.1 College programmes met your expectations.	22 (22.0)	49 (49.0)	27 (27.0)	2 (2.0)
5.3.3.7.2 You were satisfied with perceived relevance of coursework.	32 (32.0)	49 (49.0)	17 (17.0)	2 (2.0)
5.3.3.7.3 Off-campus interactions supported you academically.	4 (4.0)	15 (15.0)	53 (53.0)	28 (28.0)
5.3.3.7.4 You were satisfied with technological facilities.	1 (1.0)	13 (13.0)	36 (36.0)	50 (50.0)
5.3.3.7.5 There is an allocated academic support period.	0 (0.0)	31 (31.0)	23 (23.0)	46 (46.0)
5.3.3.7.6 Your perceived academic challenges were dealt with.	3 (3.0)	49 (49.0)	35 (35.0)	13 (13.0)
5.3.3.7.7 Lecturers gave necessary classroom support to help you cope with your studies.	16 (16.0)	78 (78.0)	6 (6.0)	0 (0.0)
5.3.3.7.8 You were satisfied with an overall quality of instruction and classroom activities.	10 (10.0)	70 (70.0)	20 (20.0)	0 (0.0)
5.3.3.7.9 Family responsibilities interfered with your campus work.	3 (3.0)	31 (31.0)	56 (56.0)	10 (10.0)
5.3.3.7.10 Your family supported you to succeed academically.	38 (38.0)	19 (19.0)	42 (42.0)	1 (1.0)

Expectations met through college programmes offered

It emerged from the presented findings in 5.3.3.7.1 that (71%) of the sampled student respondents agreed that college programmes met their expectations, whereas (29%) disagreed. This marks a move in the right direction. If students' perceived programmes offered as irrelevant, chances are inevitable of being dropouts.

Relevance of coursework

Findings in 5.3.3.7.2 revealed that (81 %) of the first-year students agreed that they were satisfied with the perceived relevance of coursework. The discussion about simply admitting and graduating students without attention to the quality of the educational experience is incomplete (Young & Hopp, 2014). Student access to university or college goes beyond simple

completion of the requisite number of modules in their prescribed sequence (Schreiber, Luecher & Moja, 2016). In fact, many stumbling blocks to successful completion of coursework are not directly related to academic life skills.

Off-campus academic interactions

Data collected and presented in 5.3.3.7.3 showed that (81%) of the respondents disagreed that off-campus interactions supported them academically. This is very bad when one contemplates the fact that a majority of students enrolled in the TVET sector lives off-campus as the existing infrastructure does not allow students to stay in campus residences as they are too few to cater for the whole student body. Students living off-campus are just as important as those living in the campus residences.

Technological facilities

Findings in 5.3.3.7.4 showed that (86%) of the sampled respondents disagreed that they were satisfied with technological facilities. Research by Gil-Jaurena (2014) on SSS in open and distance education focuses on these areas pertaining to evaluation of SSS: support services' entry rate for first-year students, services after completion of a distance learning programme, and use of technology for SSS. The shift underscores integration of support with teaching and learning instead of isolating SSS within the institution (DoE, 2008). Another view shared among some education pundits, policymakers and professionals has been to increase access to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and computer science skills.

Necessary classroom support by lecturer

Collected data in 5.3.3.7.7 revealed that (94%) of the respondents agreed that lecturers gave necessary classroom support to help them cope with their studies. Mathes and Fuchs (1994) published studies that showed college students who received tutoring in the classroom made significantly higher gains academically than students who received no tutoring services.

Overall quality of instruction and classroom activities

Findings in 5.3.3.7.8 revealed that (80%) of students sampled agreed that they were satisfied with the overall quality of instruction and classroom activities. The level of satisfaction is instrumental in ensuring the academic success of first-year students. One-to-one instruction by trained personnel during classroom hours contributes positively to ensure that all students receive the necessary reading instruction that they need to be academically successful.

Family support on academic issues

It emerged from findings presented in 5.3.3.7.10 that (57%) of respondents agreed and (43%) disagreed that their family helped them to succeed academically. A longitudinal study conducted by Dennis, Phinney and Chuateco (2005), that examined 100 minority first-generation college students, found that social environmental support and personal motivation both played significant roles in helping students become successful in college. The study showed that lack of family and peer support were good predictors of failure in college. Despite the fact that students in the study came from households with parents who had never attended college (Duncan, 2010), they typically did well in school when encouraged by their parents to do better for themselves (Lopez, 2001).

The analysis of data presented in Table 5.3.3.8 displays the perceptions of students at entry levels on factors which may positively contribute to improved certification and throughput rates in the TVET sector.

Table 5.3.3.8 First-year students' ratings on factors of support (n=100)

RATING BY FIRST YEAR STUDENTS ON FACTORS	VERY GOOD		GOOD		POOR	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
5.3.3.8.1 Extra and co-curricular activities	20	20.0	19	19.0	61	61.0
5.3.3.8.2 Students' housing facilities	8	8.0	34	34.0	58	58.0
5.3.3.8.3 Ease of adjustment to the college life	8	8.0	77	77.0	15	15.0
5.3.3.8.4 Financial aid support	8	8.0	66	66.0	26	26.0
5.3.3.8.5 Health and wellness programmes	44	44.0	39	39.0	17	17.0
5.3.3.8.6 Policy, registration and induction	13	13.0	74	74.0	13	13.0
5.3.3.8.7 Campus buildings, sports and cultural developments	5	5.0	16	16.0	79	79.0
5.3.3.8.8 SSS personnel responsible for academic support	17	17.0	38	38.0	45	45.0
5.3.3.8.9 Support in dealing with risky behaviour	5	5.0	34	34.0	61	61.0
5.3.3.8.10 State of the Campus SRC	16	16.0	49	49.0	35	35.0

Adjustment to the college life

Findings in 5.3.3.8.3 revealed a striking (85%) of the sampled respondents agreed that opportunities given them to adjust to college life were good. Only (15%) of the respondents differed, as they believe they are lacking. The following are some of the support services that are provided by the college: student induction programmers: educational advising, library assistance, study skills, examination, language assistance, computer assistance, placement, occupational and subject choices, financial aid and bursaries, entrepreneurial skills training, sport assistance, cultural activities, and social adjustment, to name a few (DHET, 2016).

Financial aid support

Data collected and presented in 5.3.3.8.4 showed that (74%) of respondents rated between very good and good the funding opportunities available, whereas (26%) rated them as poor. This highlights the reality of the interconnection of race, class and equity of access for students. Mostly black students from working-class and impoverished rural backgrounds will continue to be severely compromised unless there is a greater commitment to public financial aid to poverty-stricken students (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

Personnel dealing with academic support

Results in 5.3.3.8.8 showed that (55%) of the respondents rated campus SSS personnel responsible for academic support between good and very good, and (45%) rated them as poor. This is an indication of a need for improvement and development of the personnel responsible for academic support. Capacitation will assist them to better assist and support students.

Support in dealing with risky behaviour

It emerged from the findings presented in 5.3.3.8.9 that only (39%) of the sampled respondents rated between very good and good the support in dealing with risky behaviour, and a striking (61%) rated this aspect as poor. This is a serious cause for concern, mostly because nowadays students on and off campus are faced with risky behaviour almost daily. Once students get into the college, they are independent, and mostly away from their parents. Some students are not able to cope with this new environment, and may resort to drugs and other immoral behaviour Junio-Sabia (2012). Personal support is an indispensable part of academic support, as no student can perform well when experiencing problems with physical, emotional and social health and well-being. Parental involvement is crucial to academic success.

Campus SRC

Data collected in 5.3.3.8.10 revealed that (65%) of the sampled respondents rated the campus Students Representative Council (SRC) between very good and good, whereas only (35%) rated it as poor. The SRC or senior students have a very important role to play in welcoming all newcomers, working in close collaboration with the SSS office for monitoring and control purposes. The SRC also plays a key role in directing and assisting students throughout each day of the registration process (DoE, 2008). Student development for all students and for SRC

leadership builds students into rounded, confident people who can achieve success within a broader culture of institutional health and well-being

SECTION E

5.3.4 The key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support

Challenges faced by the post-school vocational education system are frightening. Eventually they tend to cause detachment by students, lecturers and ultimately prospective employers (Field, Musset and Alvarez-Galvan, 2014). Given these challenges, it is apparent that the South African TVET college system needs to be strengthened in order to provide access to high quality, differentiated, technical vocational education for all (Mitgang, 2012). It may be argued further that access without support and success is not opportunity. Students must be given access and be supported to succeed academically.

The analysis of data presented in Table 5.3.4 presents the recorded perceptions of a Campus Management Team on challenges experienced by the SSS officials when implementing the SSS framework.

Table 5.3.4 Challenges experienced by SSS officials when implementing the SSS Framework

PERCEPTION OF CMT ON CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY THE SSS OFFICIALS WHEN IMPLEMENTING THE SSS FRAMEWORK	NO		YES	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
5.3.4.1 Does the college have well established comprehensive academic support services?	8	40.0	12	60.0
5.3.4.2 Does the college offer computer-based and non-computer based academic support programmes that support learning?	11	55.0	9	45.0
5.3.4.3 Do students have access to the internet? If so, is the necessary guidance given to the first entrants?	14	70.0	6	30.0
5.3.4.4 Is there a library or resource centre in on the campus?	9	45.0	11	55.0
5.3.4.5 Are students encouraged to form reading clubs?	2	10.0	18	90.0
5.3.4.6 Are campus facilities upgraded to accommodate disabled students?	20	100.0	0	0.0
5.3.4.7 Are there any established linkages with external institutions for referrals?	13	65.0	7	35.0
5.3.4.8 Can academic support contribute to student success?	0	0.0	20	100.0
5.3.4.9 Are there any systems in place to monitor students' progress?	0	0.0	20	100.0
5.3.4.10 Is there any assigned person responsible for counselling and life skills?	4	20.0	16	80.0

The following marks some of the facilities the lack of which may hinder provision of effective academic support services to first-year students: comprehensive academic support programmes; computer- and non-computer-based academic support; internet access; campus library and resource centre; facilities to accommodate disabled students; systems to monitor students' progress; assigned persons responsible for counselling and life skills; established linkages with external institutions for referrals and encouragement to form reading clubs.

SSS unit personnel should be easily accessible to students, and the institutions should have a clear map on how this can be done (Badenhorst and Radile, 2018). Du Toit (2012) states that although a number of support services are available to all students, they may not be accessible at the time and place opportune for students, which remains the challenge.

Comprehensive academic support programmes

Data collected in 5.3.4.1 revealed that (60%) of respondents agreed that there is a comprehensive academic support programme to support first-year students, and (40%) disagreed, the support services are there to implement the student-centred approach and welcoming environment to students, which is a move in the right direction, regarding students' academic success. SSS is a resource that provides tailored and comprehensive support services for eligible participants to help them achieve their full potential (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014). In order for supported services to be integrated, they must cover the following aspects: pre-entry and entry support, which is before a student is enrolled for a particular programme in a TVET institution; personal and academic support, which is during the course of study and exit support (after completion), which may take a student straight to employment, or to pursue further study.

Computer- and non-computer-based academic support programmes

Findings in 5.3.4.2 revealed that (55%) of the respondents disagreed that the college offered computer-based and non-computer-based academic support programmes that support learning, whereas only (45%) agreed they had such programmes. Academic support does not refer only to computer-based remedial interventions, but is foundationally about student support services personnel and academic staff at the college.

Internet access

It emerged from the findings presented in 5.3.4.3 that a striking (70%) of the respondents disagreed that students have access to the internet, and only (30%) agreed that they do have access to the internet in this day and age of advanced technology, it is extremely difficult to contemplate the idea of students having to cope with their studies without access to the internet. Research forms part of all studies, and with on-line learning internet access is a must-have, no longer a nice-to-have for all college students.

Another point to make is that TVET colleges have a mandate to educate students to become productive and employable. However, there is also a need to educate students to be able to create a society that is liveable in and sociable, one in which civilized human interaction is important.

Campus library and resource centre

Results presented in 5.3.4.4 showed that (55%) of the respondents agreed that there is a library or resource centre on the campus, and (45%) disagreed. Petty (2014) confirm that support services are organised in a system to assist individual colleges so that their education can be more effective. Education support services as part and parcel of the entire school practice include all human and other resources that provide support to individual students with other aspects of the education system (Zungu & Munakandafa, 2014). Ideally, there should be a library to support investigative, research and exploratory tasks, study centres, computer laboratories and internet connectivity.

Facilities to accommodate incapacitated students

Data collected in 5.3.4.6 showed that a striking (100%) of the respondents disagreed that there are campus facilities upgraded to accommodate disabled students. The college council must ensure that a disability policy is in place that provides adequate access and support structures for students with disabilities (CHE, 2013). Other aspects that need attention are the application procedures; academic requirements; policy and procedure for international students; and the appeal process in the case of refusal of admission (DoE, 2009). A view shared by one interviewed respondent below explicitly points out the state of existing infrastructure.

An extended academic support structure can contribute to student success

Findings in 5.3.4.8 revealed that (100%) of respondents agreed that academic support can contribute to student success. This resonates with (Du Toit, 2012, p.67), that efficient academic support may be an answer to this challenge.

Systems to monitor students' progress

It emerged from the data collected in 5.3.4.8 that a remarkable (100%) of the respondents agreed that there are systems in place to monitor students' progress. Vertically integrated programmes have coherence between initiatives, support campus-wide learning standards, and attend to student developmental and educational progression. Moreover, the "vertical" aspect

of the integration suggests that not only are students' needs attended to and supported at each step along the path, but that each experience is coordinated so that the preceding one dovetails into the one following.

SECTION F

5.4 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DATA ANALYSIS

The following themes were generated from the participants' responses:

The use of interviews allowed the researcher to reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible with the use of other research instruments, such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes. The choice of interviews as a tool is in line with the objectives of this study. As a result, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used in order to build this relationship and generate relevant information towards answering research questions. The manageable distance between campuses to reach the participants allowed the use of face-to-face interviews.

Participants were given pseudonyms in line with their designations. This was done to ensure that anonymity was maintained throughout the study. Participants were coded as follows throughout this analysis:

Assistant Director: AD plus a number, for example AD 1

Student Liaison Officer: SLO plus a number, for example SLO 2

Career Development Officer: CDO plus a number, for example CDO 3

SSS-Senior Administration Clerk: SAC plus a number, for example SAC 4

The following are the themes generated from the interviews;

1. SSS unit funding earmarked for support
2. Existing TVET colleges' infrastructure
3. SSS unit staffing
4. SSS staff capacitation programmes
5. SSS framework implementation

1: SSS funding to support first entrants

It is worth-noting that TVET colleges were given extensive funding dating back to 2007 when a national certificate vocational certificate NC (V) was announced. However, the TVET college sector has not delivered on the expectation of becoming institutions of choice and assisting in alleviating the difficulty of skills shortages in South Africa. Papier (2009), noted disappointing results and the dismal performance of students. Furthermore, in 2007, a national certificate vocational rate of not more than (20%) was recorded – around (10%) to be precise.

The success rate continued to be generally poor as evidenced by the (0, 04%) throughput rate obtained in 2009. The trend of poor performance still persists, with a certification rate hovering between (29% and 40%). These figures can hardly validate the substantial capital injection from the DHET. Field et al. (2014) remark that the present mix of programmes and qualifications in the sector is complex to administer. Given the above substantial funding pumped into the sector, SSS units continue to be grossly underfunded. The deficiency severely limits students' ability to succeed in their studies.

Students' funding has a huge impact on access as many students' socio-economic backgrounds do not allow them to pay their college tuition fees. The enhancement of academic capabilities includes adequate public funding for academic support initiatives. The point emphasised by the participants below is that a big portion of the SSS budget goes to other support services rather than on-course academic support, hence the responses below on whether funding is adequate:

CDO 1: "No, a bit of funding caters for pre-entry and entry support programmes. None is prioritized for on-course academic support. It is more like the college cares about having students enrolled to accumulate numbers, hence they are not prioritised and adequately assisted and supported during the course of their study."

CDO 2: "No, funding is prioritised for other services, not academic support."

CDO 3: "No, a lot goes to activation programmes such as (HIV/AIDS awareness, drugs and substance abuse) Very little is prioritized for academic support programmes."

Responses from the participants below revealed that although funding is available, it is not even close to being enough:

AD 1: "There is funding, but not enough to prioritise academic support."

AD 2: “No, most funding goes to pre-entry support, very little is prioritised for academic support as stand-alone on-course support.”

An important view was shared by SLOs below of funding being centralized, which creates serious obstacles to its fair distribution to campuses:

SLO 2: “Not accordingly: academic support is mainly for new entrants, but not enough to help them grow or adapt to the challenges of college life.”

SLO 3: “No, funding is centralised (controlled in central office) and filtered down to campuses.”

The participants below revealed that funding is on a very limited scale to contribute to student success.

SAC 1: “No, not accordingly, little or no budget at all is reserved strictly for academic support. A lot goes to student governance, SRC activities.”

SAC 2: “Not proportionately, it is at a very limited scale and contributes very little to students’ success.”

2: State of existing SSS infrastructure

The participants below were adamant that the state of the existing infrastructure does not allow effective rendering of support services to students. A revamp is necessary as it was not originally designed to support students in this day and age, but only inherited from the former teacher training colleges.

AD 1: “About seventy-five per cent of campuses infrastructure does not allow rendering of effective support service to college students.”

SLO 6: “It is not in a good condition to support new college entrants’ holistic support.”

The participants below emphasised the issue of having the existing infrastructure renovated and critical resources put in place to support holistic development of students:

SLO 7: “Revamping of the existing infrastructure is necessary, and it should be treated as a matter of urgency.”

CDO 1: “There are no proper resources to support students, Wi-Fi, for example, is NO longer a nice-to-have, but a requisite to assist students to research in order to produce well researched assignments and connect with the world.”

A view shared by one participant below on lack of key resources to support students holistically:

CDO 4: “It does not allow rendering effective support as there is no resource centre, counselling room (secured), no sickbay, library or computer labs to allow students an opportunity to do studies and assignments on their own, to supplement the classroom teaching.”

SAC 3: “No, a lot of SSS essentials like libraries and e-learning centres are not readily available to support first-year students.”

Almost all participants thought that existing infrastructure does not allow the implementing of inclusive education:

SLO 1: “The campus is in no position to enroll students with learning challenges, as there are not even basic facilities in terms of infrastructure to cater for the disabled.”

CDO 5: “Existing facilities do not cater for disabled students for ease-of-adjustment to campus life.”

The views above are a clear indication that an infrastructure revamp should be treated as a matter of urgency, if the inclusive education vision is to be a dream come true. Denying students their constitutional and basic human right to learn because of an infrastructure not developed to cater for all, irrespective of their disability statuses, may not be regarded as student support.

Other points were made below on the fact that the existing infrastructure does not allow effective rendering of support services to first entrants, which has been a challenge forever:

CDO 6: “No, campus facilities are in a bad condition. Most students are not proud to point to the facilities as belonging to their own campus.”

CDO 7: “Mostly inherited infrastructure, and with the increasing demand for TVET colleges, numbers grew rapidly, but infrastructure was not revamped to cater for growth.”

Adequate staffing to offer diverse support to students

It emerged from the findings below that excessive workload demotivates staff as participants had to eventually do what they were not necessarily trained to do:

SLO 8: “Not at all: I get overwhelmed with a lot of programmes, and end up failing in many of my tasks.”

SLO 9: “I get to do a lot of work to cover for personnel not employed in the unit.”

SLO 10: "Extremely understaffed, DHET has to quickly fill the positions, before we burn-out."

SLO 1: "No, a lot of work falls on my shoulders as an accounting officer at the campus level.

If I were asked what my role is in the office, I wouldn't know where to begin trying to explain, as I do almost everything."

SLO 2: "There are seven key functions at SSS which I have to handle single-handedly."

CDO 1: "No, I end up doing everything, which results in a lot of mistakes, and students not assisted as I would love them to be assisted."

CDO 8: "No, hence I get demotivated as there is a lot I must do to support the students during limited time."

CDO 9: "No. For example, there should be someone responsible for placement."

CDO 10: "I think exit support is compromised as I deal mainly with career guidance."

The above views of participants are very disturbing, and they remain a critical challenge in their damaging effect on students' development and success.

4: Turnout of workshops or capacitation programmes

It is clear from the sampled participants' views that there is a shortage of workshops and programmes to capacitate SSS officials to cope with their day-to-day duties effectively.

AD 1: "I have only ever attended one workshop, and it was not meant to focus on work demands, it was not intended to turn around the situation we are in."

AD 2: "Mostly a feedback workshop which is organised annually. Most colleges' common factor is finances, as there are no resources in place to effect such workshops, and none organised for capacitation and development."

SLO 3: "I attended one only, in 2017, and it was for the first time after I joined the college in 2010, and it was only focusing on provision of career guidance."

CDO 2: "I have never attended any. Only the SLO used to attend, and no feedback was given back to me at the campus."

SLO 4: "I am eventually, at peace with the fact that no training or development will ever be planned for us as support staff, whereas a whole lot are organised for academic staff (lecturing staff). In many instances I feel we are not taken seriously by the college and campus management, nor is our office."

In terms of the Labour Relations Act (1996) and Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1998), every person employed is entitled to continuous development specific to their field, in order

for them to deliver quality service. The above views point to the contrary. It is not acceptable that SSS officials are not afforded opportunities for development in terms of continuous professional development. One training in a space of seven years. Financial constraints as a reason given supplied by the college management is not adequate, as it makes the staff feel if they are not taken serious.

5: Difficulties in implementing the SSS framework

In essence, SSS should be able to provide students with pre-entry, on-course and exit level support (DoE, 2009). The respondents below revealed that they are short-staffed, and there are key areas of support which can hardly be driven by a few inadequately trained individuals:

AD 1: “We are mostly too short-staffed to offer diverse (pre-entry to exit support) services to students.”

SAC 7: “My duty is mostly administration, but I end up doing everything, as we are only two in the SSS unit, whereas we are supposed to be seven in an ideal situation.”

SAC 8: “In most cases, I find myself doing what I was not trained to do, as there is no-one who can, due to our being short-staffed.”

AD 2: “Important key areas are driven by one person, which include amongst others, disability support, academic support, registration and induction, guidance and counselling, sports, arts and culture, students’ placement and student governance – SRC elections.”

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a comprehensive elaboration of results based on the findings obtained from fieldwork. It was overwhelmingly evident from the findings that efficient and effective academic support provided to first-year students contributed to their success, as revealed by a majority of respondents. Lecturers lack full understanding of the SSS framework and the comprehensive implementation thereof. It was crystal clear that the SSS unit is not adequately staffed to support students. Campus facilities are not upgraded to accommodate disabled students. It was revealed that students have no access to the internet and to other resources to support their learning.

Furthermore, the state of the existing infrastructure does not allow effective rendering of support services to students. Parental involvement was discovered to be lacking to support their children's' studies. The findings revealed a lack of capacitation programmes to assist SSS officials to better cope with their day-to-day duties.

The final chapter provides the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the research findings, presents concluding remarks, makes recommendations and suggests a model of support that could better respond to the findings and be of benefit for further research in this area of exploring first entrants' student support services function in contributing to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges. Brief notes on the strengths and limitations of this research study are presented. The study has explored the contribution of academic support towards the academic success of first college entrants. A mixed methods design based on the post-positivism paradigm was used to investigate and make sense of the research questions. The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To establish the key role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges,
2. To find out how support services impact on the academic success of first-time students,
3. To establish the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to first entrants.
4. To determine the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to first-year entrants.

6.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The contribution to the body of knowledge of the present study was envisioned as follows;

- The findings of the study would provide insight to the TVET colleges' senior management, SSS managers, SSS unit, and policymakers to understand the role of the SSS unit and the positive impact it may have on students' academic success.
- The study would affirm that academic support can be successful if incorporated in the college timetable, and monitored and funded accordingly.
- The study would provide feedback to TVET curriculum developers on the implementation of academic support. They would thus be in a position to effect improvements that address any problem uncovered.

- The study would assist the DHET to see the need to beef up personnel in SSS, and ensure that personnel employed are suitably qualified and skilled to perform their respective duties
- The findings of the study would assist students, especially the new entrants at TVET colleges, with first-hand information on strategies to succeed academically and find ways of coping with college life.
- The study derives findings from students' experience of college life to enlighten those not yet registered about factors which contribute to academic success from the students' point of view

6.3 SUMMARY

6.3.1 The problem

The study was designed to explore student support services' contribution to first entrants' academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges.

The problem was stated in the form of the following questions:

1. What is the key role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges?
2. How do support services impact on the academic success of first-time students?
3. What are the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to first entrants?
4. What are the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to first-year entrants?

6.3.2 Chapter One

The overarching aim of this study was to discover how much student support services contributed to first entrants' academic success in technical and vocational education and training and the SSS influence on the success rate of the TVET sector. The problem statement underlined in Chapter One revealed students' recurring failure rate and high dropout rate in TVET colleges owing to a lack of indispensable support, which includes pre-entry, on-course or academic, and exit support which the SSS unit is mandated to afford to every TVET college student, especially the first entrants.

6.3.3 Chapter Two

The in-depth and careful analysis of literature formed a foundation for discovering the crucial role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges, determining how support services influence the academic success of first-time students, establishing the possible factors that may help improve the provision of support services to first entrants, and zooming in to the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to first-year entrants. It emerged from the same chapter that the current national average certification rate is below (60%) which is regarded as a serious cause for concern for TVET colleges. The persistent drop in certification and throughput rates necessitates the strengthening of the SSS unit to better cater for first-year students in particular, but not neglecting other college students. Student failure to succeed academically and dropout rates were predominant for first-year students, who formed the focus of this study.

6.3.4 Chapter Three

This chapter formed the basis for discovering a theoretical framework which outlined the work of various theorists. Schlossberg's (1989) theory of marginality and mattering, Tinto's theory of departure, theory of students' adjustment and theory of students' progression, are a few of the theorists' works considered. It was evident that, without a sound understanding of how students develop, the support given may not necessarily be congruent with their developmental stage. The chapter shed light on the fact that an integrated student support service coupled with an understanding of the intellectual underpinnings which may assist students to fine-tune and discover the balance necessary to see them to graduation.

6.3.5 Chapter Four

This chapter discussed, at length, the post-positivism paradigm and the rationale behind employing a mixed methods design. A detailed explanation was given of research methods employed with reference to the context of the study, selection of the target population, the study population and the actual instruments used to collect data. The use of both questionnaires and face-to-face interviews was explained, together with the advantages and disadvantages of using each tool, and conclusion was drawn as to why they were selected considering the context of the study. Data management and data collection methods were explained. The verification of the data, as well as ethical considerations were discussed in detail.

6.3.6 Chapter Five

This chapter provided a broad explanation of results based on the findings obtained from field-work. It was evident from the findings that academic support provided efficiently and effectively to first-year students may contribute to their success as revealed by a majority of respondents. Lecturers' lack of understanding of the SSS framework and comprehensive implementation thereof featured prominently in the findings. It was also clear that the SSS unit is not adequately staffed to support students. Campus facilities are not upgraded to accommodate disabled students. It was revealed that students have no access to the internet and other resources to support their learning.

6.4 FINDINGS

6.4.1 Objective one: Establish the key role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges.

Ensure that students with learning challenges are supported

Findings of the study revealed that students with learning challenges are not adequately supported to better cope with the college lifestyle. In Chapter 2 it was mentioned that students with a disability who receive support early in their college career tend to need fewer support services as they switch from being new college entrants to senior students. A striking majority of respondents thought that campus facilities must be upgraded to accommodate students with special educational needs.

Handling of academic queries

It emerged from the findings that of the total number of the sampled respondents, fifty percent disagreed that academic queries are attended to timeously. This report was shocking in the sense that if academic queries are not attended to accurately and appropriately, intervention strategies will not be embarked on as early as possible. Prolonged unattended academic issues had a damaging impact on students' chances of success. It is the duty of the Academic Head and the CMT to ensure that academic issues are attended to timeously.

Relevant information about career choices

Research findings revealed that (65, 6%) of CMT respondents agree that adequate information was given regarding career choices. Students are also guided towards choosing correct careers, to avoid unnecessarily dropping out the moment they realise at mid-year that they had chosen the wrong career.

Available academic opportunities to support first entrants

Findings revealed that respondents unanimously agreed that the available accumulated knowledge, expertise and experience at some TVET colleges in the design and implementation of high quality academic support programmes was not sufficient to support first entrants. Hence, enhancing the learning capabilities of students, especially the first entrants, ought to be expanded to holistically support them.

SSS framework's full implementation

Findings revealed that ninety-five percent of sampled CMT respondents disagreed that the SSS framework was implemented effectively. An ideal scenario of implementation would mean that SSS should be able to provide students with pre-entry, on-course and exit level support. The CMT is responsible for executing the framework, monitoring its implementation, and devising strategies for doing so if there is non-compliance.

6.4.2 Objective two: Find out how support services impact on academic success of first college entrants

Availability of orientation and induction programmes for new entrants

An overwhelming majority of respondents, (84, 4%) to be precise, agreed that first-year students are orientated and fully inducted in order for them to cope in the new campus environment. These findings are a step in the right direction as success for students at any TVET college begins with participation in a well-planned and aptly implemented orientation programme. The programme is aimed at improving academic success and social integration to enable students to make the transition from their previous world to the world of the TVET College.

Academic support as a priority to ensure students' success

This study revealed that (53, 1%) of the sampled respondents agreed that academic support is a priority to ensure students' success. However, as stated previously, there is a clear indication of poor foundational skills in many students entering the TVET sector, and hence academic support becomes a priority to assist students to master those skills and succeed academically.

Opportunities to access and succeed in the college

A total of (81, 3%) of respondents agreed that students are afforded opportunities to access and succeed in the college. It must be emphasized that without necessary support, academic, social and financial, too many students may not complete their programmes of study. In fact, once an institution admits a student, it becomes indebted to provide, as best as it can, the support needed to translate the opportunity to academic success. Opportunity without academic success may not necessarily be regarded as an opportunity.

Funding opportunities

Sixty five percent of respondents agreed that information on funding opportunities is provided to new college entrants. Although NSFAS, which operates on a means-test basis, has been successfully established, and considerable funding has been allocated to promote redress for needy students, the overall amounts allocated fall far short in providing effective support for all eligible students in need (DHET, 2013). There are opportunities, but not enough to support all disadvantaged students.

SSS unit budget

A total of (62, 6 %) of the sampled respondents were against the idea that a major share of the SSS budget is allocated to academic support. The enhancement of academic capabilities includes adequate public funding for academic support initiatives. This can be viewed as a step in the right direction for the TVET sector.

6.4.3 Objective three: Establish the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to first entrants.

Monitored academic support period

Fifty-five percent of respondents agreed that there was an allocated academic support period which is helpful and well monitored. This makes the period part of curriculum, which is an ideal situation. It was mentioned in the review of literature in Chapter 2 that a broad approach to academic support has to be adopted, and be thought part of the curriculum, or as part of what happens in classrooms and practical workshops every day.

Mechanisms to combat students' absenteeism

This study revealed that (80%) of the sampled respondents agreed that there are controlled mechanisms to combat student absenteeism. In an ideal situation there should be policies, systems and processes in place in respect of student attendance, marked by recording of attendance, monitoring of class registers, capturing of attendance on the management information system (MIS), and evaluation and reporting on attendance. There should also be monitoring strategies in place to improve attendance, as 100% of class attendance is a requirement to ensure students' success.

Support with continuous professional development

A high percentage of eighty lecturers agreed that there has been support given for continuous professional development. One of the tasks of the curriculum development committee (CDC) is to contribute to the professional development of lecturers, and make it available for all the lecturing staff. This development has a positive bearing in ensuring that lecturers are continuously developed to cope with the advancement of technology so that they can easily support students academically. Eraut (1994), and Badenhorst and Radile (2018), have submitted that support for professional development requires a suitable combination of learning environments; appropriate time and space; availability of both learning resources and people who are able to offer support, and the capacity of the professional to learn and to make the most of available development opportunities.

Early identification of gaps in students' performance

This study has revealed that (65%) of respondents believed that students' gaps in performance should be identified early, and intervention strategies prioritised. In Chapter 1 it is clearly stated that an early identification of academic support needs is crucial as part of the system for academic support, because students will be able to determine where to find assistance. There should be identification and referral of students in need of academic support through the use of the PACE test results used for referral purposes by subject lecturers. This information should always be readily available from lecturers and academic support officers.

Academic support impact on students' success

A remarkable (100%) of the sampled respondents agree that academic support done right may contribute towards students' success. A well-thought out college timetable is the chief requirement for the academic success of first entrants. This support should be a collective effort from the CMT for academic support officials.

Students' expectations met through college programmes offered

This study has revealed that over fifty percent of the sampled student respondents agreed that college programmes met their expectations. If students perceive programmes offered to be irrelevant, the chances are inevitable of their not progressing to the next level, or becoming dropouts.

Relevance of coursework

A total of seventy-one percent of first-year students agreed that they were satisfied with the perceived relevance of coursework. The process of merely admitting and graduating students without attention to the quality of the educational experience defeats the purpose of seeing students into employment opportunities, or giving them the expertise to create their own. This touches mainly on exit support as part of the SSS framework.

Off-campus academic interactions

A large number of student (81%) to be precise, disagreed that off-campus interactions supported them academically. Students living off-campus are just as important as those in the campus residences for having access to campus facilities earmarked for academic support. They alike remain the responsibility of the campus academic support office and SSS unit, and must be afforded all the support they require for their academic success. Support in this instance

means arranging late transport and providing meals for them to stay on campus and access academic support facilities, instead of having to rush to their places of residence and worry about their safety off-campus.

Advanced technological facilities

This study's findings revealed that over eighty percent of respondents disagreed that they were satisfied with the technological facilities. This is an alarming reality when one considers how technology is advancing, and its relevance to the way students' learn nowadays. The country is gearing towards the so-called 4th Industrial Revolution, a term to describe a time when new technologies will blur the physical, digital and biological boundaries of our lives. Every generation confronts the challenges of preparing its children for an uncertain future.

In a world that will be shaped by technologies like artificial intelligence, 3D printing and bio-engineering, how society should prepare its current students and tomorrow's workforce to be better fit for such change is a million-dollar question. One wonders whether to be afraid, or be prepared to embrace and face change head-on. If in this day and age technology is still an issue in HEIs, TVET institutions will always lag behind. One question to ask, though, is: *Will the TVET colleges' students be able to compete globally after they graduate if they are enrolled in institutions where there is no internet connection for them to undertake research and engage with technology?*

Family support on academic issues

An almost equal distribution of respondents agreed that their family supported them to succeed academically. Students come from families, and support from the family goes a long way in helping students to succeed, whereas absence from family does the contrary. The significance of family support and involvement for the education of young people can never be overemphasized. Parental involvement is crucial to the academic success of their children over and above the contribution of the college SSS unit.

Adjustment to college life

This study revealed that (85%) of respondents sampled, agreed that opportunities given to adjust to college life were commendable. A sense of belonging goes a long way in ensuring that students feel that they fit into their new environment, and that feeling contributes towards

their success. The moment they feel they belong, their confidence is built, and they can make the most of the opportunities given to them to study and succeed.

Support in dealing with risky behaviour

A total percentage of sixty-one of the respondents disagreed that they were supported to deal with risky behaviour. Some students are not able to cope with this new environment, and may resort to drugs and other immoral behaviour, which may badly affect their ability to succeed academically, and the quality of their lives in general.

Campus SRC

Student development for all students and in particular for SRC leadership builds students into rounded, confident people who can achieve success within a broader culture of institutional health and well-being. This study has revealed that (75%) of students are satisfied with the campus SRC, which is a step in the right direction as student governance is nowadays a crucial structure in TVET colleges.

6.4.4 Objective 4: Determine the key challenges experienced by the SSS personnel in providing support services to first-year entrants.

The unavailability of computer- and non-computer-based academic support programmes

Fifty-five percent of the respondents disagreed that the college offers computer- and non-computer- based academic support programmes that support learning. If such support is not made readily available, students may struggle to succeed academically. TVET colleges must position themselves to better equip students to compete in a global competitive world.

Lack of internet access

A total of (70%) sampled respondents disagreed that students have access to the internet. Research forms part of every study, and with on-line learning internet access is a must-have, no longer a nice-to-have for all college students. The college should be moulding future researchers to produce knowledge, not only consume what is already there.

Systems to monitor students' academic progress

Seventy percent of the respondents agreed that there are systems in place to monitor students' progress. Vertically integrated programmes have coherence between initiatives, support

campus-wide learning standards, and attend to student developmental and educational progression.

SSS funding to support first entrants

This study revealed that a big portion of the SSS budget goes to other support services rather than on-course academic support. The enhancement of academic capabilities includes adequate public funding for academic support initiatives, which is mostly not available. In spite of the significant increase in state resources for the TVET sector, there has been a weak output of graduates, and low throughput rates of students, thus hampering the progression of students into the labour market, and restricting access for large numbers of school-leavers.

State of existing SSS infrastructure

Most participants interviewed were resolute that the state of the existing infrastructure does not allow effective rendering of support services to students. The managers of a historically poorly resourced campus in a rural location may be faced with different challenges to an urban-based and historically well-resourced campus.

SSS unit staff to offer diverse support to students

Findings revealed that the SSS unit is not adequately staffed to support students. A majority of participants agreed that there are serious shortages in staffing, which limits the holistic support given to first-year students. The study also revealed that most respondents maintained that there is a shortage of workshops and programmes to capacitate SSS officials to cope well with their day-to-day duties.

6.5 CONCLUSION

It may be concluded that the CMT, SSS officials and lecturers who are regarded as key implementers of on-course support are not adequately equipped to drive integrated and holistic support as stipulated in the SSS framework and plan. SSS should be able to provide students with pre-entry, on-course and exit level support (DoE, 2009). Furthermore, opportunities provided by the campuses for academic support are not adequate to support the first college entrants. Once an institution admits a student, it becomes indebted to provide, as best it can, the support needed to translate the opportunity access provides for success.

Continuous professional development (CPD) must be treated as a normal part of professional life for all academic staff in order to ensure the efficacy of providing academic support to first-year students. Both academic and support staff should be supported in enhancing their understanding of their preferred style of teaching, and meeting their needs in order to make the most of available opportunities for developing their practice. The CPD of lecturing staff should be high on the agenda for the DHET to help assist staff members responsible for academic support in the TVET colleges. Taking into cognisance the challenges cited above, there is an urgent need for the Department to intervene, and a collaborative effort and collective wisdom in tackling these key challenges are crucial for the sector to improve its success rate.

The TVET college system is not effective. It is too small and the output is poor. Continuous quality improvement is needed as the system expands yearly. The quality and relevance of courses need urgent attention. When quality academic support services start to improve and the employability of graduates begins to increase, demand for TVET services will rise automatically. This has been evident from 2013 in particular till to date. Simply growing the sector without focusing on quality, and with such persistent failure rates, is likely to be expensive and demoralising for young people, further discrediting the system.

It must always be remembered that the TVET sector's mandate is to enable students to acquire the necessary knowledge, practical skills, applied vocational and occupational competence, and personality traits required for employment. This is the principal purpose of the sector's existence. Accordingly, the above requirements focus attention on improving the quality of academic support programmes, upskilling SSS personnel, strengthening governance and management, improving IT systems and increasing learner support.

The main aim of TVET colleges is to provide educational opportunities to those who either do not qualify for tertiary education or require vocational training with direct application to the workplace. The National Development Plan (NDP) states that the sector has a critical role to play in the development of practical, employable skills and the reduction of unemployment and skills shortages in the country.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.6.1 Recommendations related to the study

- Current campus infrastructure needs serious refurbishment so that students are inclusively catered for, failing which those with learning challenges are automatically failed by the system, thus contributing further to the failure rate in the sector.
- There is a need for a clear vision to be crafted that would make it possible to respond to the needs of students in order for the college to be able to provide effective academic support programmes.
- Staffing in the SSS unit must be improved, as there are a lot of shortages, which consequently lead to some support services being neglected.
- Technology is way behind; it must be advanced to support students. Wi-Fi, for example, is NOT a nice-to-have anymore, but a necessity to assist students to produce well-researched assignments.

6.6.2 Recommendations for the study

- Harness ICT to improve teaching and research activities in higher education institutions
- There is an immediate need to reconceptualise and clarify the scope, structure and landscape of the post-school system and institutions.
- The expansion of opportunities in higher education will require injections of new funds into both NSFAS and HEIs, and proper administration of those funds in TVET colleges in particular.
- There must be capacitation of SSS staff members and continuous development of lecturers to better cope with their day-to-day challenging work.

6.6.3 Recommendation for policy

- The above developments, in terms of numbers necessitated the establishment and publication of an SSS framework, which was completed in April 2008. The framework provides clear guidelines to students for achieving academic success (DoE, 2008). All colleges were instructed by the Department to implement the SSS framework, and many colleges had to establish the SSS unit as a way of responding to the Department's instruction.

- The researcher observed, whilst lecturing in the TVET sector that as per the SSS framework (DoE, 2008), students must be supported in three ways: they must have pre-entry support, on-course support, and exit support. The researcher observed that the pre-entry support is the only support prioritised in the sector at the expense of the other two categories.
- The onus rests entirely on the TVET College councils ascertain that a disability policy is in place that provides adequate access and support structures for students with disabilities.
- Policies and systems should be in place concerning student attendance, and be implemented and monitored by the college senior management and be cascaded down to campuses.

6.6.4 Recommendation for further research

Include issue that further research need to include TVET that are in other cities including private TVET where good practice can be replicated

- It is recommended that further research be conducted on academic support focusing primarily on private TVET colleges for comparison purposes and for replicating good practice, as the present study focus was mainly on public TVET colleges.

6.6.5 Initial student integration model

Tinto (1993) asserted in his theory of departure that retaining a student is predominantly dependent on several extrinsic factors, which can be directly related to a student's involvement or engagement, either on a social level or the academic level. His theory aligns with Schlossberg's (1989) theory of mattering and marginality, which claimed that students are much more likely to withdraw if they do not feel connected in some manner. For that reason, students will often leave an institution owing to the lack of connection, either through peer or faculty relationships (Lau, 2003). These connections create important bonds, including increased social relationships and acceptance (Mezirow, 2000).

Whenever an individual, particularly a first entrant into college, changes roles or enters a new environment, the potential for feeling marginalised is inevitable. Lack of support may result to students feeling totally left out, which may impair the student's performance (Tinto, 2012). It is therefore of vital importance that TVET colleges put in place a service environment which supports students in their academic journey a view shared by (Leach & Zepke, 2011).

The model as seen in Figure 6.6.3 puts forward the following suggestions: (1) Students' family background; pre-entry qualifications, skills and abilities; and individual attributes, including race, gender and nationality, will be associated with their initial goals and institutional commitments. (2) Their initial goals and institutional commitments will be associated with their academic integration and later goals and commitments. (3) Their academic integration and social integration will be associated with their later goals and institutional commitments. (4) Students' later goals and institutional commitments will be associated with their retention status.

Figure 6.6.5 Initial Student Integration Model

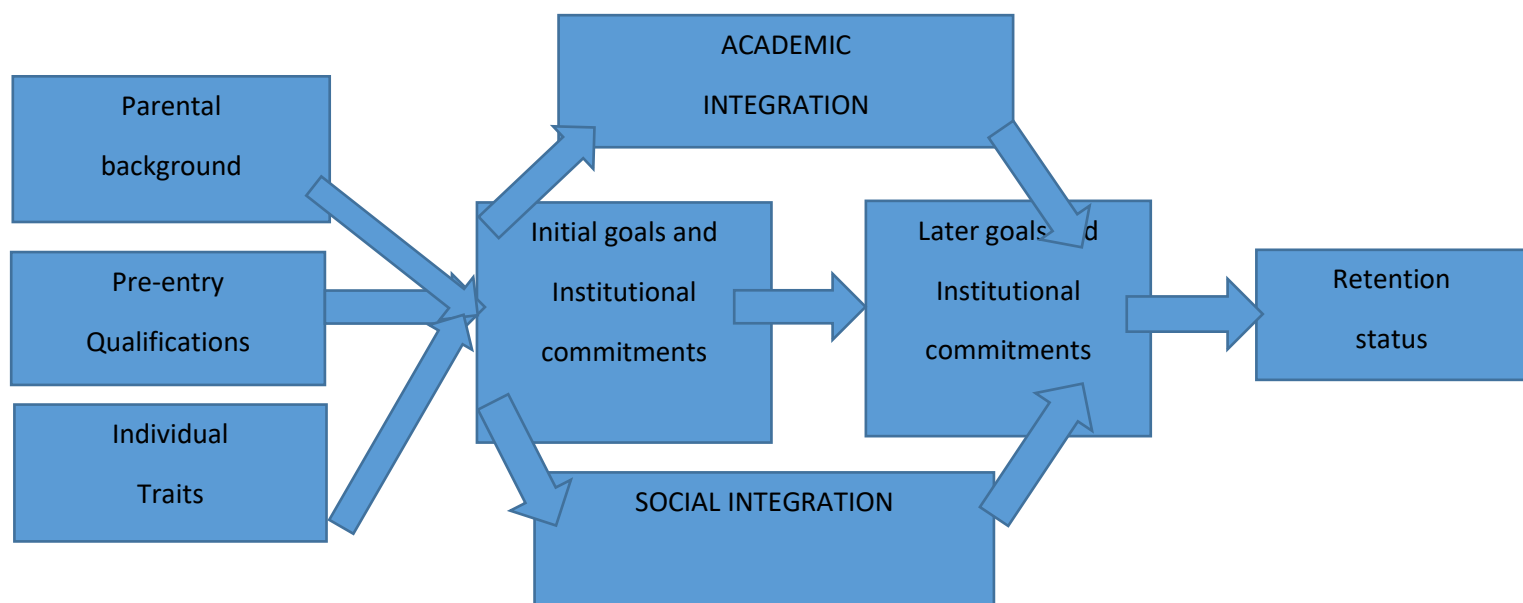


Figure 6.6.5 shows the model which supports Tinto's (1993) initial student integration model as the relevant model to be developed at this level of the study.

This model resonates with Tinto's theory of integration alluded to in Chapter 3 of this study. The combination of social and academic integration in relation to a student's commitment to the college may lead to student academic success. Conversely, students bring to the college prior qualifications, skills and abilities. In other words, students are well aware of what they want to achieve before their enrolment in their first academic year. This means that institutions must be clear on students' expectations as early as their induction, an activity carried out by

the SSS office in conjunction with the academic staff members of the college, which is believed to assist students succeed.

Students must have an ability to develop social and academic integration skills in both formal and informal ways. Formal academic integration includes, inter alia, researching topics (with Wi-Fi), independent learning, and engaging in other activities relating to academic success. Informal academic engagements include students' interaction with SSS officials, lecturers and CMT members outside the classroom hours, interaction that can have a positive impact on student retention. These interactions can lead to an increased bond between students and their college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Social integration has a lot to do with extra-curricular activities. Higher levels of interaction can lead to higher levels of student persistence, and eventually to their graduation (Tinto, 1993).

6.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study, like most studies, was not embarked on without limitations. It was limited in terms of data collection methods: a deeper understanding was possible if all staff members were interviewed. Shortage of money limited the selection of the sample for this study. As a result, the findings presented cannot be generalised. Another limitation to this study is that the contribution of SSS unit to students' achievement and success in the TVET sector is grossly under researched.

6.8 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

The study made it increasingly possible for the CMT, lecturers, SSS officials and students to be able to share their perceptions, views and experiences of being involved with first-year students and the role they play, and share possible factors for success both from the staff's and students' point of view. Participants were also able to discuss challenges they experienced, and recommend valuable solutions. The persistent drop in the certification rate, the low throughput rate, and the return on the substantial funding of the sector, are current issues that plague everyone involved. An understanding of the critical importance of academic support can help to limit this challenge. Understanding the key role of the SSS unit, and exactly what fulfilling this role entails could assist in the necessary policies being implemented for this endeavour.

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ANNEXURE A

LETTER SEEKING FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND
Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies



Ngubane Phiwokuhle Bongiwe

P.O BOX 38229

ESHOWE

3815

Cell: +2760 5039 647

Email: phiwokuhle.ngubane@umfolozi.edu.za

01 August 2017

The Principal-Mr. S.Z Zungu

Umfolozi TVET College

Private Bag x 5023

RICHARDS BAY

3900

Dear Sir

**Re: REQUEST FOR A PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN CAMPUSES
OF UMFOLOZI TVET COLLEGE**

I am a registered PhD student at the University of Zululand hereby request a permission to conduct research in Campuses under Umfolozi TVET College. This research is part of the study pursued towards a Doctorate Degree in Curriculum and Instructional Studies, with the University of Zululand. Eight Campuses will be targeted for this research viz, Mandeni,

Eshowe, Esikhawini, Richtek, Nkandla, Bambanani, Sundumbili/Isithebe and Chief Albert Luthuli Campus. I will be administering questionnaires.

I will interview AD: SSS, SLOs, CDOs, SSS Admin clerks, CMT members. Lecturers lecturing at entry levels on first time entrants' student support services in contributing to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training

The main focus will be on the support services provided for new college entrants to succeed academically. Some SSS offices will be visited for the purpose of observation. The proposed data collection period will cover the beginning of second term of the NC (V) calendar, second month of the first trimester-Engineering Studies and third month of the first semester of Business Studies calendar.

I am therefore requesting your kind approval to conduct the study and a letter of introduction to Campus Managers to facilitate my gaining access to the respective Campuses and meeting the participants for this study. Furthermore, I would appreciate if you can nominate a contact person within the College to liaise with for successful conduct of the study, preferably a person directly involved in Student Support Services. Should you require any more clarification about this research, I could be contacted through my cell phone number: 060 5039 647 or preferably through my e-mail address: pmangubs@gmail.com. Attached here-with is a summary of my proposal outlining the major phases in the research and the research ethics.

Thanking you in advance.

Your co-operation in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Ngubane P.B, Campus Manager at Nkandla Campus. Supervisors: Dr M.S Mabusela.

Co-supervisor: Prof D.R Nzima.

UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND
Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies



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Cell: +2760 5039 647

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01 August 2017

The Principal-Ms. P.N Ntshangase

Umgungundlovu TVET College

PO BOX 9060

PIETERMARITZBURG

3200

Dear Madam

**Re: REQUEST FOR A PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN CAMPUSES
OF UMGUNGUNDLOVU TVET COLLEGE**

I am a registered PhD student at the University of Zululand hereby request a permission to conduct research in Campuses under Umgungundlovu TVET College. This research is part of the study pursued towards a Doctorate Degree in Curriculum and Instructional Studies, with the University of Zululand. Four Campuses will be targeted for this research viz, Edendale, Midlands, Plessislaer and Msunduzi Campus. I will be administering questionnaires. I will

interview AD: SSS, SLOs, CDOs, SSS Admin clerks, CMT members. Lecturers lecturing at entry levels on first time entrants' student support services in contributing to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training

The main focus will be on the support services provided for new college entrants to succeed academically. Some SSS offices will be visited for the purpose of observation. The proposed data collection period will cover the beginning of second term of the NC (V) calendar, second month of the first trimester-Engineering Studies and third month of the first semester of Business Studies calendar.

I am therefore requesting your kind approval to conduct the study and a letter of introduction to Campus Managers to facilitate my gaining access to the respective Campuses and meeting the participants for this study. Furthermore, I would appreciate if you can nominate a contact person within the College to liaise with for successful conduct of the study, preferably a person directly involved in Student Support Services. Should you require any more clarification about this research, I could be contacted through my cell phone number: 060 5039 647 or preferably through my e-mail address: pmangubs@gmail.com. Attached here-with is a summary of my proposal outlining the major phases in the research and the research ethics.

Thanking you in advance.

Your co-operation in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely



Ngubane P.B, Campus Manager at Nkandla Campus. Supervisors: Dr M.S Mabusela.

Co-supervisor: Prof D.R Nzima.

ANNEXURE B

LETTER GRANTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



higher education & training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Let the future be known

29 May 2018

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

The purpose of this letter is to grant permission to **Phiwokuhle Bongiwe Ngubane**

As per the request to conduct the research project :

Research Project Title: 'First time entrants' student support services in contributing to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges'

Aim of the Research: The overarching aim of this study is to explore first entrants' student support services in contribution to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training. The effects of the support SSS unit can have on first entrants enrolled for TVET programmes and assistance may be very instrumental to improving the certification rate of the TVET sector.

Tertiary Institution: University of Zululand

Faculty or School: Education

Qualification: D. Ed Degree (Curriculum and Instructional Studies)

Name of Supervisor: Dr S.M Mabusela and Professor D.R Nzima

Study Site Location: Umfolozi TVET College

Consent of participants: A letter requesting their consent will be signed by respondents prior the data collection procedures commence.

Confidentiality: The dignity of the participants will be respected as well as anonymity and confidentiality.

Permission granted by:

SZ ZUNGU

PRINCIPAL



higher education
& training
Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



08 June 2018

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

The purpose of this letter is to grant permission to **Phiwokuhle Bongiwe Ngubane**

As per the request to conduct the research project :

Research Project Title: *'First time entrants' student support services in contributing to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges'*

Aim of the Research: The overarching aim of this study is to explore first entrants' student support services in contributing to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training. The effects of the support SSS unit can have on first entrants enrolled for TVET programmes and assistance may be very instrumental to improving the certification rate of the TVET sector.

Tertiary Insitution : University of Zululand

Faculty or School : Education

Qualification: D. Ed Degree (Curriculum and Instructional Studies)

Name of Supervisor :Dr S.M Mabusela and Professor D.R Nzima

Study Site Location: Umgungundlovu TVET College

Consent of participants : A letter requesting their consent will be signed by respondents prior the data collection procedures commence.

Confidentiality: The dignity of the participants will be respected as well as anonymity and confidentiality.

Permission granted by:

P N Ntshangase

PRINCIPAL

ANNEXURE C

QUESTIONNAIRE

VOLUNTARY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS



Researcher: NGUBANE P.B

Supervisor: DR. M.S MABUSELA

Co-supervisor: PROF. D.R NZIMA

Faculty of Education

Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies

Introduction

This questionnaire aims at collecting data from you as SSS:AD, SSS personnel at the Campus, CMT, Lecturers and students (first entrants) regarding your views on: First time entrants' student support services in contributing to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training. The data that you provide will remain confidential and anonymous, therefore, you do not have to write your name in this questionnaire. Please respond as honestly as you can. There is no right or wrong answer; it all depends on your views.

Please answer the following questions by putting a (✓) in the box that corresponds to your answer:

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

ANNEXURE C 1

RESPONDENT'S PROFILE

1. Participant's Highest Qualification

	√
Matric/Grade 12/ N3	
Matric + N4-N6 certificates	
National Diploma/Diploma	
Degree	
Post graduate Degree	

2. Work Experience (Years)

	√
Years 0-2	
Years 3-4	
Years 5-10	
Years 11+	

3. Levels lectured by the respondents

	√
Level 2 (NCV)	
N1(Engineering Studies)	
N4(Business Studies)	
Other(Specify)	

4. Location of campuses

	√
Urban	
Semi-urban	
Rural	
Other(specify)	

5. Designation of respondents in SSS

	√
AD: SSS	
Campus Management Team	
Lecturer	
SLO	
CDO	
SSS Admin clerk	
Student	

6. Gender

	√
Male	
Female	

7. Age

	√
14-17	
18-25	
26-35	
36-45	
Other(Specify)	

SECTION B: ANNEXURE C 2

The following statements are designed to seek your views regarding your views on First time entrants' student support services in contribution to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training. For each statement put a cross (X) on a category which best describes your view, according to the following Likert Scale.

SA= Strongly Agree

A= Agree

D=Disagree

SD=Strongly Disagree

8. *CMT (Campus Management Team)-CMs (Campus Managers), HODs (Heads of Department) and ESs (Education Specialists)*

The key role of SSS unit in TVET colleges

STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD
1. Students with learning challenges are accommodated, taking into account current campus resources				
2. Accurate and timely information is provided concerning academic queries				
3. The Academic Head handles such queries responsibly				
4. Perception of accessing the college addressed				
5. Code of conduct clearly explained				
6. Adequate information given regarding career choices				
7. The support given impacted positively on students' level of performance				
8. Academic opportunities provided by the campus are adequate				
9. Academic support period allocated and monitored				
10. SSS framework implemented effectively				

SECTION C: ANNEXURE C 3

9. SSS OFFICIALS: MANAGER, SLO, CDO.SSS ADMIN CLERKS

STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD
1. You possess a full understanding of the SSS Framework				
2. SSS plan is linked to other plans in the college				
3. Orientation and induction programmes are well structured and programmatic				
4. There is well functional administration of registration				
5. Students are given opportunity to enter and succeed in the college				
6. Students are assisted to make meaningful career choices				
7. Information on funding opportunities is provided to new entrants				
8. Academic support is a priority to ensure students' success				
9. A major share of SSS budget is allocated to academic support				
10. SSS unit is adequately staffed with competent personnel to support students in all aspects of campus life.				

SECTION D: ANNEXURE C 4

10. LECTURERS-LECTURING AT ENTRY LEVELS

STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD
1. You possess full understanding of the SSS framework implementation				
2. You have knowledge of the Teaching and Learning Plan				
3. Your input was considered in the SSS Plan				
4. Academic support period is helpful and monitored				
5. There are control mechanisms to combat student absenteeism.				
6. You are supported with continuous professional development				
7. Student's gaps in performance are identified early and intervention strategies prioritised.				
8. You are provided with necessary support from the SSS manager to offer academic support to students				
9. There are enough resources in place to provide academic support to students				
10. Academic support done right may impact positively on student's success.				

SECTION D: ANNEXURE C5

11. FIRST YEAR STUDENTS-NEW ENTRANTS

FACTORS THAT CAN IMPROVE THE PROVISION OF SUPPORT SERVICES

STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD
1. College programs met your expectations.				
2. You were satisfied with perceived relevance of coursework.				
3. Off-campus interactions supported you academically.				
4. You were satisfied with technological facilities.				
5. There is an allocated academic support period.				
6. Your perceived academic challenges were dealt with.				
7. Lecturers gave necessary classroom support to help you cope with your studies.				
8. You were satisfied with an overall quality of instruction and classroom activities.				
9. Family responsibilities interfered with your campus work.				
10. Your family supported you to succeed academically.				

12. Briefly mention FIVE (5) factors you think can contribute positively on the provision of academic success for first year students.

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

13. FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

How would you rate the availability/state of the following? Please Tick (✓) a box applicable to you.

	Very Good	Good	Poor
1. Extra and co-curricular activities			
2. Student's housing facilities			
3. Ease of adjustment to the college life			
4. Financial aid support			
5. Health and wellness programmes			
6. Policy, registration and induction			
7. Campus buildings, sports and cultural developments			
8. SSS personnel responsible for academic support			
9. Support in dealing with risky behaviours			

SECTION E: ANNEXURE C 6

14. CAMPUS MANAGEMENT TEAM

Please Tick (✓) a box applicable to you.

1. Does the college have well established comprehensive academic SS?	YES	NO
2. Does the college offer computer-based and non-computer based academic support programmes that support learning?		
3. Do students have access to the internet? If so is the necessary guidance given to the first entrants?		
4. Is there a library or resource centre in the campus?		
5. Are students encouraged to form reading clubs?		
6. Are campus facilities upgraded to accommodate disabled students		
7. Are there any established linkages with external institutions for referrals?		
8. Can academic support contribute to student success?		
9. Are there any systems in place to monitor students' progress?		
10. Is there any assigned person responsible for counselling and life skills?		

ANNEXURE D

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies



Ngubane Phiwokuhle Bongiwe

P.O BOX 38229

ESHOWE

3815

Cell: +2760 3590 647

Email: Phiwokuhle.ngubane@umfolozi.edu.za

The Principal(s)

Umfolozi and Umgungundlovu TVET Colleges

KwaZulu Natal

South -Africa

Dear Sir/Madam

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT INTERVIEW

My name is Phiwokuhle Bongiwe Ngubane, student number (19961453). I am currently enrolled in the Faculty of Education, Curriculum and Instructional Studies at the University of Zululand. I would like to conduct the interview for my Doctoral thesis under the supervision of Dr. M.S Mabusela and Prof, D.R. Nzima. The study is entitled: First time entrants' student support services in contributing to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

Research Objectives are:

1. To explore the role of SSS unit in TVET colleges.
2. To determine the extent to which academic support can impact on the overall pass rate in the TVET sector.
3. To determine the factors that could positively contribute to the improved certification rate in the TVET sector.
4. To identify the key challenges experienced by the SSS officials in implementing the SSS framework.

I am hereby seeking your consent to conduct interviews with the SSS officials, CMT and lecturers. With your permission, I will tape record the interviews so I don't have to make so many notes.

Time required: The interview will take approximately 1 hour.

Risks: No risks are anticipated.

Benefit: It will contribute to the existing knowledge in the field of curriculum studies and to impact positively on first entrants academic success as the main focus is on academic support.

Your co-operation in this study will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,



Ngubane Phiwokuhle Bongiwe

Interview schedule

DATE	DAY	TIME	CAMPUS	RESPONDENT'S DESIGNATION
01/03/2018	Thursday	09:00-10:00	Central Office PMB	AD 1
	Thursday	11:00-12:00	Edendale Campus	SLO 1
	Thursday	12:00-13:00		CDO 1
	Thursday	13:00-14:00		SAC 1
02/03/2018	Friday	09:00-10:00	Midlands Campus	SLO 2
	Friday	10:00-11:00		CDO 2
	Friday	11:00-12:00		SAC 2
05/03/2018	Monday	09:00-10:00	Plessislaer Campus	SLO 3
	Monday	12:00-13:00		CDO 3
	Monday	13:00-14:00		SAC 3
06/03/2018	Tuesday	10:00-11:00	Northdale Campus	SLO 4
	Tuesday	12:00-13:00		CDO 4
	Tuesday	14:00-15:00		SAC 4
07/03/2018	Wednesday	09:00-10:00	Umsunduzi Campus	SLO 5
	Wednesday	10:30-11:30		CDO 5
	Wednesday	12:00-13:00		SAC 5
08/03/2018	Thursday	09:00-10:00	Umfolozi C/O	AD 2
	Thursday	10:30-11:30	Richteck Campus	SLO 6
	Thursday	12:00-13:00		CDO 6
	Thursday	13:00-14:00		SAC 6

12/03/2018	Monday	09:00-10:00	Esikhawini Campus	<i>SLO 7</i>
	Monday	10:00-11:00		<i>CDO 7</i>
	Monday	11:30-14:30		<i>SAC 7</i>
13/03/2018	Tuesday	09:00-10:00	Mandeni Campus	<i>SLO 8</i>
	Tuesday	10:00-11:00		<i>CDO 8</i>
	Tuesday	11:00-12:00		<i>SAC 8</i>
14/03/2018	Wednesday	09:00-10:00	CAL Campus	<i>SLO 9</i>
	Wednesday	10:30-11:30		<i>CDO 9</i>
	Wednesday	11:30-12:30		<i>SAC 9</i>
15/03/2018	Thursday	10:00-11:00	Isithebe Campus	<i>SLO 10</i>
	Thursday	11:00-12:00		<i>CDO 10</i>
	Thursday	12:00-13:00		<i>SAC 10</i>
16/03/2018	Friday	09:00-10:00	Nkandla Campus	<i>SLO 11</i>
	Friday	10:00-11:00		<i>CDO 11</i>
	Friday	11:00-12:00		<i>SAC 11</i>
19/03/2018	Monday	10:00-11:00	Bambanani Campus	<i>SLO 12</i>
	Monday	11:00-12:00		<i>CDO 12</i>
	Monday	12:00-13:00		<i>SAC 12</i>

KEY: Assistant Director: SSS -AD 1

Student Liaison Officer -SLO 1

Career Development Officer- CDO 1

SSS Administration Clerk- AC 1

ANNEXURE E

STANDARD ETHICS

PROTOCOL

UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND



My name is Phiwokuhle Bongiwe Ngubane (19961453). I am a researcher on the study entitled: First time entrants student support services in contributing to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training. This study is supervised by Dr M S Mabusela and Prof D R Nzima of the University of Zululand. Dr M S Mabusela can be contacted at this phone number: 083 590 9432/035 902 6220 should you have any clarity seeking questions.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. Your participation is extremely appreciated. Before we commence with the interviews, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this research, you have several very definite ethical rights namely:

- Voluntary participation.
- Freedom to refuse to answer any question at any time.
- Freedom to withdraw from the interview at any time.
- The confidentiality aspect of the interviews.
- Debriefing will be offered to the client after the interviewing session.
- Freedom of using language of your choice.

Excerpts of this interview will be made part of the thesis, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in the Thesis.

Please sign below if you have read and also understood the researcher's explanation of the content of the research ethics protocol.

_____ (signed)

_____ (Printed)

ANNEXURE F

INFORMED CONSENT

DECLARATION

ANNEXURE A: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

(Participant)

Project Title: **First time entrants' student support services in contribution to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training**

Ms Ngubane Phiwokuhle from the Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies University of Zululand has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project, and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to explore first entrants' student support services in contribution to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training. The effects of support SSS unit can offer to first entrants enrolled for TVET programmes and the impact of the support to the certification rate of the TVET sector.
2. The University of Zululand has given ethical clearance to this research project and I have seen/ may request to see the clearance certificate.
3. By participating in this research project I will be contributing towards new knowledge generated to share with educational authorities. I provide insight to the TVET colleges' senior management, SSS managers, SSS unit, policy makers to understand the role of the SSS unit and the positive impact it may have on students' academic success.
4. That the study would affirm that academic support can be successful if incorporated in the college time table and monitored and funded accordingly.
5. I will provide feedback to TVET curriculum developers on the implementation of academic support thus be in a position to effect improvement that address any problem uncovered.
6. I will participate in the project by responding to the questions during the interview that will be asked to me (**state full details of what the participant will be doing**)
7. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.
8. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but my out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed. (**There is no compensation**)

9. There may be risks associated with my participation in the project. I am aware that
- a. the following risks are associated with my participation: N/A
 - b. the following steps have been taken to prevent the risks: N/A
 - c. there is a **0%** chance of the risk materialising
10. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of **Presenting in a conference and publishing recognised journal**. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained and that my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conduct of the research.
11. I will not receive feedback/will receive feedback in the form of **money** regarding the results obtained during the study.
12. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research or my participation will be answered by **Ms PB Ngubane (19961453)** (*provide name and contact details*)
13. By signing this informed consent declaration I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.
14. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.

I, have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

.....
Participant's signature

.....
Date

UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND



Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies

PhD Curriculum and Instructional Studies Research Project

Researcher: Ms P B Ngubane (060 5039 647)

Supervisor: Dr M S Mabusela (035 902 6220)

Co- supervisor: Prof D.R Nzima (035 902 6374)

Dear Respondent,

My name is Ngubane Phiwokuhle Bongiwe (Student Number 19961453) I am a Doctorate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies at the University of Zululand. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled: First time entrants' student support services in contributing to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

Through your participation I hope to understand;

1. To explore the role of SSS unit in TVET colleges.
2. To determine the extent to which academic support can impact on the overall pass rate in the TVET sector.
3. To determine the factors that could positively contribute to the improved certification rate in the TVET sector.
4. To identify the key challenges experienced by the SSS officials in implementing the SSS framework.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this research project. Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained by the researcher. If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study, please contact me or my supervisors at the numbers listed above. It should take you about 10 - 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. I hope you will take the time to complete the questionnaire.

Sincerely

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____

ANNEXURE G

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
(Reg No: UZREC 171110-030)



RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Website: <http://www.unizulu.ac.za>
Private Bag X1001
KwaDlangezwa 3886
Tel: 035 902 6731
Fax: 035 902 6222
Email: MdutshaneN@unizulu.ac.za

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

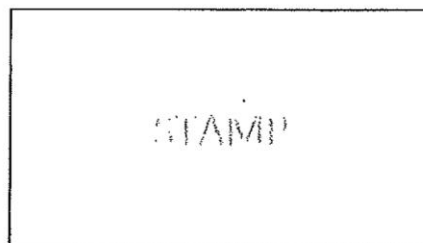
Certificate Number	UZREC 171110-030 PGD 2017/194						
Project Title	First time entrants students support services in contributing to academic success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training						
Principal Researcher/ Investigator	Ngubane PB						
Supervisor and Co-supervisor	Dr MS Mabusela			Prof DR Nzima			
Department	Curriculum and Instructional Studies						
Faculty	EDUCATION						
Type of Risk	Medium risk – research						
Nature of Project	Honours/4 th Year		Master's		Doctoral	x	Departmental

The University of Zululand's Research Ethics Committee (UZREC) hereby gives ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project. The Researcher may therefore commence with data collection as from the date of this Certificate, using the certificate number indicated above.

- Special conditions:
- (1) This certificate is valid for 2 years from the date of issue.
 - (2) Principal researcher must provide an annual report to the UZREC in the prescribed format [due date-01 July 2018]
 - (3) Principal researcher must submit a report at the end of project in respect of ethical compliance.
 - (4) The UZREC must be informed immediately of any material change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the documents that were presented to the meeting.

The UZREC wishes the researcher well in conducting research.


Professor Gideon De Wet
Chairperson: University Research Ethics Committee
Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research & Innovation
29 November 2017



**UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND
HIGHER DEGREES COMMITTEE**



RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Website: <http://www.unizulu.ac.za>
Private Bag X1001
KwaDlangezwa 3886
Tel: 035 902 6374
Fax: 035 902 6222
Email: LundallN@unizulu.ac.za

Confirmation of Project

Registration Number	S1178/17									
Project Title	First time entrants students support services in contributing to academic success in technical and Vocation Education and Training									
Principal Researcher/ Investigator	Ngubane PB									
Student number	19961453									
Supervisor and Co-supervisor	Dr MS Mabusela				Prod DR Nzima					
Department	Curriculum and Instructional Studies									
Nature of Project	Honours/4 th Year			Master's			Doctoral	x	Departmental	

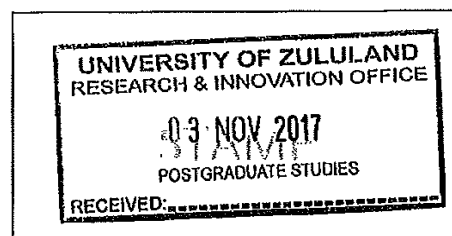
Dear Student

I have the pleasure of informing you that the Higher Degrees Committee, at its meeting held on 11 October 2017, approved your research proposal.

Please note: Your proposal can now be considered for ethical clearance after which you can apply for research funding. Kindly provide this letter with your ethical clearance certificate when submitting your final thesis for external examination.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. Nomnikelo Lundall
Post-graduate Studies
03 November 2017



Ngubane S1178/17

