Journal of Student Affairs in Africa

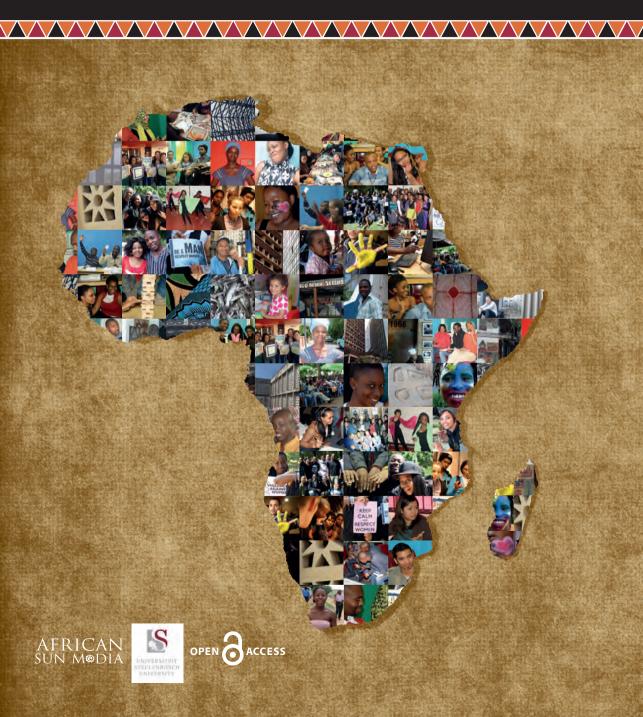## Student well-being and quality services

Journal of Student Affairs in Africa

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

Vision and mission

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

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

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

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

Submissions are encouraged from scholars and reflective practitioners from across the globe. Submissions must be original and relevant to the mission, scope and focus of the journal. Especially encouraged are submissions from African scholars and professionals working in higher education on the African continent. Submissions dealing with student affairs issues from other contexts (e.g. the African diaspora; other emerging economies; developed countries) that are transferable to the African context are also considered for publication. Submit by email to: jsaa_editor@outlook.com.

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Editorial team

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Towards Student Well-being and Quality Services in Student Affairs in Africa

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

Two themes define this issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*: student well-being, and the provision of quality Student Affairs services. The themes of student well-being in general, and mental health in particular, have become prominent in higher education in recent years, and Student Affairs is implicated in the solutions. In this issue, a more systemic approach – with less hyperbolic and reductionist notions – is put forward to illuminate not only the incidences, but also the contributing factors to student mental health and well-being along with its correlates in academic achievement and recommendations for intervention. The articles in this group cover the topic broadly and inclusively across the fully student lifecycle and from different theoretical, methodological and empirical standpoints.

Amongst the articles on student well-being, mental health and academic achievement, the first two articles take as their starting points prevalent social problems in their respective countries and how they impact on student attitudes and well-being. Against recurring incidents of xenophobic violence in South Africa, Akande, Musarurwa and Kaye present their findings of a study of student attitudes towards, and perceptions of, xenophobia at a university in Durban. They find traces of xenophobic perceptions and attitudes particularly amongst first-year students from low income areas. In reflecting on their findings, they reaffirm "the importance of educational institutions in intercepting negative ethnic/racial sentiments" and call for interventions that reach into the communities with, for example, dialogue sessions.

The second article was prompted by the high level of unemployment in Zimbabwe since the economic downturn; it studies the mental health of unemployed graduates. The research by Mutambara, Makanyanga and Mudhovozi shows that factors like age, gender,

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marital status and period since graduation were significant for explaining variations in psychological distress and optimism amongst unemployed graduates, and that optimism was a significant factor in enhancing general health. An important learning for student affairs professionals here is that so-called 'outduction' programmes may need to include not only career counselling but also prepare graduates for the eventuality of unemployment.

Melese Astatke's article examines the relationship of emotional intelligence and help-seeking behaviour with the academic achievement of first-year students at a teacher training college in Ethiopia. Melese finds that emotional intelligence and academic and psychological help-seeking behaviour have a significant positive impact on students' academic achievement. The implication of this finding is clear: student affairs practitioners, along with academic and administrative staff and parents should work on promoting students' emotional intelligence and encourage students' help seeking behaviours as this is not only good for their own well-being, but also enhances their academic achievement.

A positive correlation between better health and academic achievement is also suggested by the article by Morris-Paxton, Van Lingen and Elkonin. Their interest is specifically on students from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds and they argue that the incidences of educational failure that such students often face in higher education could be lessened by instituting a holistic health promotion programme within the first year of study.

Finally, do we really know who our students are as they enter university, asks Hundermark? Her study conducted for the Humanities' Teaching and Learning Unit of the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa sought to better understand the backgrounds of new first-year students, as well as to proactively determine the factors that may place them at risk academically. However, rather than reporting on actual survey result, Hundermark reflects on the process of research. She thereby provides a number of recommendations to inform future praxis, both in researching students and designing interventions that can be implemented to address risk factors that students present.

A last contribution on the topic of mental health is presented by Schreiber where she puts forward the notion that students are active collaborators in the work on well-being and mental health. The publication, *University World News*, reports on a number of university responses to mental health, which Schreiber critiques as theoretically unsound. She highlights the importance of systemic conceptualisations and emphasises the role of professional care, rather as against using monitoring mechanisms by lay university staff without professional training in matters of mental health and well-being.

The second, smaller theme in this issue engages with the question of the quality of student affairs services in Africa. It showcases two different approaches to assessing quality. The first gauges the extent of service quality by means of a survey with final-year undergraduate students at Ethiopian public higher education institutions. Using a modified version of the SERVQUAL questionnaire, Lodesso, Van Niekerk, Jansen and Müller assess three dimensions of service quality perception or satisfaction: expectations of service quality; perceived experience of service quality; and the importance of service quality at their university. The results were sobering: "the majority of the elements that constitute

attributes of service quality were perceived by students to be very poor". Given the need to target resources in a constraint environment, the authors recommend that institutions identify those service areas that have *high perceived importance scores* and *low perception scores on service experience* in order to redeploy some of the resources and implement measures to improve service quality where it is perceived to be the most important.

The article by Luescher in this theme critically reflects on a quality enhancement process that was conducted at a South African university in 2015. The article shows how the Student Affairs Review was designed with reference to a number of procedural and substantive principles, and implemented by means of a process of internal self-evaluation and an external panel assessment. Considering the aspirations of the review with regard to the professionalisation of Student Affairs at that university, alignment with social justice commitments, and initiatives towards co-curricularisation, the article also critically highlights potential pitfalls in the design and implementation of quality enhancement processes.

Perhaps as important as the case study of the quality enhancement process itself is the methodology by which Luescher reflects on the intervention. *JSAA* has been seeking to encourage student affairs practitioners to critically reflect on their practices and specifically provides a platform for such reflections. Now, Luescher's article proposes a way of conceptualising a reflective scholarship of practice in Student Affairs in Africa and method to conduct reflective practice studies aimed at building a relevant knowledge base. We hope that student affairs professionals from across the continent will find this framework a useful tool for writing reflective practice articles on their day-to-day student affairs work.

In our on-campus section, this issue reports on two interesting events that have taken place recently and in which African student affairs has played a key role: the Southern African Federation of Student Affairs (SAFSAS) and the Global Summit of Student Affairs (IASAS-NASPA). Both events reach beyond national-local issues and foreground the importance of collaborations across entire regions. The SAFSAS event brings together the Southern African region and the IASAS-NASPA event in Chile this year, brought together student affairs professionals from 32 countries who translated UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals into local applications.

Finally, we publish two book reviews. The first book reviewed in this issue is edited by Sherran Clarence and Laura Dison and entitled *Writing Centres in Higher Education: Working in and across disciplines* (2017, African Sun Media). Across its diverse chapters, the book reviews the historical development of writing centres in South Africa and – uniquely – the theoretical and pedagogical approaches used in writing centres. While it draws its examples and cases specifically from the experience of writing centres in South African universities, the book reviewer, Annsilla Nyar, argues that the themes and issues expressed in the book will have a much wider resonance.

The second book review discusses Jonathan Jansen's book, *As by Fire: The End of the South African University* (2017, Tafelberg). Trowler, a senior higher education scholar, takes a critical and academic perspective on the book and offers interpretations that illuminate the controversial reception this book has received.

For us as the *JSAA* editorial executive, we have welcomed the enthusiastic contributions of our new Journal Manager, Maretha Joyce, who has taken on the pre-publishing aspect of the work. Since the 2017 recognition and approval of *JSAA* as a DHET-accredited scholarly journal, the work for the editorial executive has taken on huge proportions and we are very grateful that Ms Joyce is supporting our work.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Students' Attitudes and Perceptions on Xenophobia: A Study of a University in Durban

Olubunmi Damilola Akande,* Hilary Jephat Musarurwa** & Sylvia Blanche Kaye***

Abstract

The recurrence of xenophobic violence in South Africa has been attributed to the proliferation of anti-migrant sentiments that stems from social, political, economic and cultural misconceptions and cleavages. The study presents the results of a survey undertaken at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of DUT students on xenophobia in South Africa. A questionnaire was designed and employed to collect data from 547 registered students of a university in Durban. The result reflects the existence of satisfactory awareness on xenophobia and low levels of anti-migrant sentiments which show that the majority of the students are not xenophobic. Traces of xenophobic perceptions and attitudes were observed in the responses of entry-level students from low-income areas, thus pointing to entry-level students and younger students as being more disposed to xenophobic tendencies. This trend echoes normative conceptions concerning xenophobia in South Africa, particularly, as a phenomenon deeply ingrained in socioeconomic inadequacies. However, the positive disposition of most students towards xenophobia reaffirms the importance of educational institutions in intercepting negative ethnic/racial sentiments as well as calls for intensified integration programmes and the extension of such into the communities.

Keywords

attitudes; migrants; perceptions; stereotypes; violence; xenophobia

Introduction

The end of apartheid marked the beginning of a new trend of aggression in South Africa, this time between local populations and the growing migrant population. The upsurge in cases of these forms of aggression and violence are deepened in the permeation of particular perceptions and attitudinal patterns which have brought to the fore a lot of questions on the nature and manifestation of such traits (Crush & Pendleton, 2004; Ogunyemi, 2012). The transfer of such sentiments beyond the immediate sites of xenophobic violence to other places, such as institutions of learning, has warranted concerns. This is especially

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relevant in cities that have experienced incidents of violence against foreigners. Since 1990, various degrees of coordinated attacks have been orchestrated mainly against African migrants in provinces such as Gauteng, Western Cape, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal (Choane, Shulika & Mthombeni, 2011; Crush, Ramachandran & Pendleton, 2013). Most prominent of these outbreaks is the 2008 pogrom that started in Alexandra and later spread to cities around Durban and Cape Town (Hickel, 2014). The study seeks to undertake a contextual investigation on the existence and nature of xenophobic sentiments amongst university students in Durban University of Technology (DUT).

Background

Since the 2008 widespread aggression against foreign nationals (mainly of African descent) which culminated in the deaths of over 60 people, xenophobia has assumed prominence in discourse as a recurrent cause of social unrest in different parts of South Africa. In 2015, Durban was a flashpoint for xenophobic violence with over five people killed and thousands more rendered homeless in a spate of violence that lasted about two weeks (Asakitikpi & Gadzikwa, 2015, p. 227). Anti-migrant sentiments and stereotypes that stem from social, political, economic and cultural misconceptions and cleavages have been commonly identified as driving forces for this kind of aggression. A number of studies have confirmed the existence of high levels of stereotypes and anti-migrant sentiments amongst the South African population, more openly displayed by the black population mainly due to their engagements with migrant populations (Crush & Pendleton, 2004; Laheer, 2009; Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh & Singh, 2005, p. 8; Tshishong, 2015). These anti-migrant sentiments are deeply rooted in social misconceptions and political/economic cleavages; identifying and understanding such sentiments is crucial for ameliorating the tensions and violence associated with xenophobia in South Africa.

Inequality and poverty have been identified as the major precipitators of the proliferation of anti-migrant sentiments. This position becomes more apparent in the face of economic downturn, inadequate social amenities and an unstable political climate. Consequently, the quest for ownership and control of limited resources strengthens, resulting in an articulation of identity differences and the emergence of exclusionary measures for eradicating more 'vulnerable' competitors. Central to this approach is the scapegoating of foreign black Africans who are perceived as direct threats to job security and also blamed for the shortfalls of governance (Tella, 2016, p. 144). Solomon and Kosaka (2014, p. 5) explain that "xenophobia basically derives from the sense that non-citizens pose some sort of a threat to the recipients' identity or their individual rights, and is also closely connected with the concept of nationalism: the sense in each individual of membership in the political nation as an essential ingredient in his or her sense of identity". A new wave of nationalism born out of the complexities of increased migration, economic inequalities and underdevelopment has pitted local groups against external groups, depicting them as opportunists and threats to the economic security of indigenous groups. Xenophobic attitudes are mainly influenced by a sense of deprivation which is aptly captured by the "relative deprivation" theory.

Xenophobia has been commonly analysed through the constructs of relative deprivation (Dassah, 2015; Ejoke & Ani, 2017; Hopstock & De Jager, 2011; Human Sciences Research Council, 2008). Relative deprivation affirms the connection between violence and economic inequalities. It holds that discrepancies between expected economic conditions and reality fuel the feeling of frustration that precipitates violence (Džuverovic, 2013, p. 3). Psychological stress and tensions are triggered when individuals perceive their inability to access their entitlements in terms of goods and living conditions. The tensions are released through aggressive actions against those responsible for the situation or other accessible target. In South Africa, antagonistic sentiments towards foreigners are underlined by a sense of deprivation and driven by anger. The deprivation comes from the widespread inequality, poverty and also the deplorable nature of service delivery mainly experienced by the local population who had high expectations of the post-apartheid regime (Hopstock & De Jager, 2011). The frustration and emergent violence are directed towards accessible groups such as African migrants who are perceived as opportunistic and a hindrance to the attainment of an ideal society.

In cases where the media portrays foreign nationals negatively, it plays a crucial role in the creation of a derogatory image of foreigners and fosters the xenophobic discourse. The print media has frequently been accused of utilising labels and metaphors that foster the creation of a homogenous identity for African migrants in South African (Danso & McDonald, 2001; Pineteh, 2017; Tella, 2016). Most often, migrants are framed as smugglers, drug traffickers and fraudsters, thereby fostering the classification of African migrants into different criminal groups as well as affiliating individual countries with a specific crime (Solomon & Kosaka, 2014, p. 12). Pineteh (2017, p. 10) points to the negative influence of local print media coverage of the 2008 and 2015 xenophobia incidents which encouraged the reinforcement of negative sentiments and the escalation of more violence. On one hand, this draws attention to the positive potential of the media in altering the pro-xenophobic narrative through constructive news reportage. Other factors, such as perceived cultural supremacy and provocative statements, also occupy prominent spots as drivers and triggers of anti-migrant sentiments and violence. The long years of colonial occupation coupled with a detachment from the rest of Africa have contributed to the development of an exclusive cultural identity that disregards alien cultures and values (Tella, 2016, p. 144). The emergent identity particularly perceives other African cultures as inferior and threatening, thus lending credence to the 'afrophobia' hypothesis (Dassah, 2015, p. 134). Added to this are inflammatory and controversial remarks from political office holders and traditional leaders which legitimise exclusionary narratives and trigger aggressive actions against immigrants. This was evidenced in the 2015 outbreak of violence in Durban which was ignited after the Zulu King, Goodwill Zwelithini, made a call for migrants from other African countries to return to their home countries (Saleh, 2015, p. 304).

There have been a number of investigations into the perceptions and attitudes of South Africans towards xenophobia. The results of these studies are varied, but overall indicate the existence of anti-immigrant sentiments amongst South Africans. This position was affirmed by SAMP (South African Migration Project) in Rukema and Khan (2013, p. 178)

when they pointed to South Africa as being one of the most xenophobic countries in the world. The nature and expression of these sentiments take different forms. For example, in institutional settings such as universities, xenophobic sentiments are more likely to be expressed in subtle ways but with demoralising impacts on the subjects, thereby raising concerns about the nature of xenophobic perceptions in such settings (Singh, 2013). Overall, the general persistence of xenophobic violence in the face of increasing globalisation has had dire implications for the status of South Africa on the international scene (Kang'ethe & Duma, 2013), thereby justifying the need for extensive exploration of issues of migration and attitudes towards migrants.

The nature and manifestations of xenophobic violence have drawn attention to the impact of certain intervening factors in the construction and reinforcement of anti-migrant sentiments and behaviours. Xenophobia has been commonly described as a phenomenon rooted in the micro politics of townships and informal settlements (Misago, 2009, p. 3). This is mainly because the majority of the violence starts from these areas, thereby raising questions on the level of inequalities and poverty being experienced by the inhabitants of informal settlements. The correlation between xenophobic sentiments and individual level of life satisfaction becomes apparent. Kayitesi and Mwaba (2014, p. 1128) further explain that "the targeting of African migrants living in these poor communities may be explained by the perception of black South Africans that the migrants exacerbate their dissatisfaction with poor government service delivery".

Kayitesi and Mwaba (2014) and Coetzee (2012), in their studies on perceptions and attitudes towards xenophobia, revealed the existence of a minimal level of xenophobic attitudes amongst some university students and workers while a similar study conducted in Limpopo and the Western Cape revealed a high level of xenophobic practices amongst university students (Ritacco, 2010; Singh, 2013). From the foregoing, it can be deduced that people's perceptions and attitudes towards xenophobia are not static; they vary from province to province and are influenced by key factors such as the nature of study, participants' status, participants' demographics, and location, amongst others, thus elevating the need for a robust body of literature on the subject. By engaging a broader sample size, this study investigates perceptions on and attitudes towards xenophobia, and interrogates the influence of mediatory factors such as gender, age and location on xenophobic attitudes. A study of this nature will contribute in developing a pool of information which could help in identifying the patterns associated with xenophobia. This could serve as a foundation for broader engagement on the impact of xenophobia on the tertiary education landscape. This engagement is pertinent in view of the multi-cultural nature of South African tertiary institutions. In line with the pervasive notion of global consciousness, South African universities attract a considerable number of students from other African countries, thereby encouraging the internationalisation of the university environment. Understanding the impact of such trend on culture and constructions of realities could assist student affairs practitioners to devise appropriate strategies to improve the learning experiences of students (foreign and local).

Rationale

The study is driven by the pervasive nature of anti–migrant sentiments and its impact on different sectors of the society. By exploring students' knowledge and attitudes towards xenophobia in Durban University of Technology, the study aims to contribute to an emerging body of knowledge on attitudes towards xenophobia in South African tertiary institutions. In addition, a number of social and economic initiatives have already been instituted by the government and civil societies to curb the violence and improve the relationship between immigrants and locals. Prominent amongst these is the introduction of stiffer migration policies, security reforms and reconciliatory/healing programmes (Adjai & Lazaridis, 2014, p. 245; Asakitikpi & Gadzikwa, 2015, p. 229). An inquiry into the nature of the dispositions towards xenophobia will provide valuable insights on the impact of such measures. In this vein, the study sought to investigate through a survey the knowledge and attitudes of Durban University of Technology (DUT) students on xenophobia. The objectives of the study include:

- To investigate the awareness and disposition of DUT students on xenophobia and examine the level of xenophobic sentiments and attitudes amongst DUT students;
- To examine the link between their perceptions on xenophobia and their conduct; and
- To investigate factors influencing their perceptions on xenophobia in South Africa.

Methodology

The research was conducted at the Durban University of Technology, Durban, where the student population is set at approximately 26 000. Two of the researchers are postgraduate students of the university whilst the third is a senior lecturer at the same. Data was collected using a closed–ended questionnaire which was designed in line with the objectives of the study. The research instrument was approved by the Institutional Research Ethics committee and administered to 547 registered students of South African descent from all races and course levels. The respondents were voluntarily drawn from six faculties of the university located at the M.L. Sultan, Steve Biko, Ritson and City campuses. Stratified random sampling was employed to recruit respondents. Stratified random sampling involves partitioning the target population into strata and randomly selecting respondents from each stratum to make up a single sample (Salkind, 2010). For this study, stratification was done according to the faculties in order to facilitate fair representation of the faculties. In total, 547 questionnaires were retrieved from respondents above the age of 18 selected from undergraduate, bachelors and postgraduate levels. Willingness to participate and being of South African origin formed the basis for recruiting respondents.

Research Ethics

The study was approved by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee of the university (Ref: REC 70/60). Questionnaires were administered directly by the researchers at locations such as lecture rooms, residences and laboratories amongst others. In most cases, approval was sought from lecturers to administer the questionnaires during classes. During the distribution, a brief yet detailed introduction of the study was relayed after which verbal

dissent or assent to participate was elicited. The questionnaires were anonymously filled in and therefore did not expose the identity of the respondents. No incentives (monetary or otherwise) were offered for participation. The responses were handled confidentially and were analysed by the researchers using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Research Instrument

The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first section features questions that investigate the demographics of the respondent and their basic knowledge on xenophobia in South Africa. The second section investigates the attitudes of the respondents towards xenophobia through hypothetical questions that juxtapose the knowledge of the respondents with their attitudes. Short scenarios were created where respondents were asked to choose their potential responses from a list of options ranging from 'definitely not', 'probably not', 'probably yes', 'definitely yes' and 'don't know'.

Results and Discussion

Of the 547 respondents, 67.1% were females and 32.7% males with 76.2% aged between 18 to 24 years. In terms of enrolment, 81.7% were studying for diploma programmes, 9.6% for Bachelors, 7.6% for master's whilst only 1.1% were studying for a PhD. 39.7% of the respondents came from urban townships with 36.6% coming from urban suburbs whilst the remaining 23.6% came from rural farming and mining communities. 77.5% of the respondents were black, 16.4% Indian with only 4.1% and 1.5% being white and coloured respectively.

The first part of the study involved asking respondents about their knowledge of xenophobia. 94% indicated that they were aware that xenophobic attacks had occurred within South Africa. The majority of the respondents, 57.9%, relied solely on the media for information on xenophobia, while 37.9% depended on all sources which included the media, family/friends, community meetings and university/college. It is worrying to note that only 0.9% of the respondents relied on the university as a source for such information. Furthermore, only 29.8% of the respondents were aware of the National Action Plan (NAP) to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances. NAP was introduced by the government in March 2016 with a central focus on raising awareness as well as collecting crucial information on xenophobia and other related intolerances (BBC Monitoring Africa, 22/03/2016). The lack of awareness of this policy reflects a significant gap in the circulation of the policy which could imply that tertiary education populations were not adequately covered during the public consultation processes of this policy. Such omission could have implications for the articulation of often silenced yet crucial narratives on racial and inequality issues.

Cross-tabulation analysis was used to determine if age, location or ethnicity influenced the level of awareness on xenophobic issues (see Table 1). There were no significant differences between these variables concerning the level of awareness. We observed, though, that the respondents from rural mining areas scored highly – 100% and 75% on the two questions – in comparison with the other groups.

Table 1: Cross-tabulation of awareness by age, location and ethnicity (per cent)

Awareness					
by age	**18-24**	**25–30**	**31–35**	**Above 35**	
• of recent xenophobic attacks	93.5	93.3	100.0	96.4	
• of NAP	30.0	22.7	40.0	37.0	
by location	**Urban suburbs**	**Urban townships**	**Rural farming**	**Rural mining**	
• of recent xenophobic attacks	93.4	96.3	90.3	100.0	
• of NAP	29.8	31.5	26.3	75.0	
by ethnicity	**Black**	**Indian**	**White**	**Coloured**	**Other**
• of recent xenophobic attacks	95.2	92.0	86.4	87.5	66.7
• of NAP	30.9	22.1	40.0	12.5	66.7

To investigate the disposition of DUT students towards xenophobia and the link between their perception on xenophobia and their conduct we posed four short scenarios (listed in the left-hand column of Table 3). We asked (1) whether the student regarded the described behaviour as xenophobic, and (2) whether the student would engage in the activity. The results are reported in Tables 2 and 3 respectively. Many of the scenarios drew on cases of possible xenophobia reported in the South African media during 2015 when the attacks resurfaced. Prominent amongst these were reports of foreign-owned spaza (small) shops being looted, of King Zwelithini being alleged to have sparked fresh xenophobic attacks by calling for foreigners to be sent back to their countries, and of foreigners being mocked in public places such as taxis and being called derogatory names.

Table 2 indicates that all four scenarios were judged to be very xenophobic or fairly xenophobic by half or more of the respondents. The average proportion of respondents who rated a scenario as very or fairly xenophobic was 69.6 per cent. This implies that the majority of the respondents are knowledgeable on the manifestation of xenophobic attitudes.

Table 2: Perceptions of xenophobic attitudes in the four scenarios (per cent)

Scenario	Xenophobic				
	No	Not sure	Little bit	Fairly	Very
Leader makes a call for foreigners to leave the area	5.1	16.6	8.7	17.3	52.4
Group mocks foreigner for inability to speak local language	7.9	8.6	15.2	19.2	44.8
Mob loots foreign-owned spaza shop	4.6	10.6	8.8	13.5	58.3
Taxi driver calls a foreign commuter a "kwere kwere"	5.9	9.0	8.6	14.8	58.1

On the conduct of respondents in specific xenophobic scenarios, the majority of the respondents indicated that they would not be involved in any of the listed activities (see Table 3). The average proportion of respondents who indicated that they would definitely or probably not participate in a xenophobic activity was 81%. This indicates that a large proportion of the respondents are not disposed to xenophobic attitudes, possibly indicating a disapproval of xenophobic violence by DUT students. This finding is congruent with a similar investigation undertaken at the University of Johannesburg which reported a widespread condemnation of xenophobic violence by students (Naidoo & Uys, 2013, p. 20). In terms of the link between the perception and conduct of the respondents, a significant positive correlation is observed between the responses on their perception and their conduct with a slightly higher proportion of respondents not willing to engage in xenophobic attitudes.

Table 3: Willingness to engage in xenophobic activity depicted in the four scenarios (per cent)

Your possible response in that situation	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably yes	Definitely yes	Don't know
Would you ask foreigners to leave?	41.5	31.6	8.2	4.2	11.3
Would you mock a foreigner for not speaking your local language?	73.1	16.5	3.3	0.5	3.1
Would you loot a foreign-owned spaza shop?	69.5	14.8	2.7	1.5	7.5
Would you call a foreigner a "kwere kwere"?	59.6	17.4	12.2	4.0	0.5

The third aim of the article was to examine the factors influencing the disposition of the respondents towards xenophobia. Specifically, the study sought to investigate the influence of gender, location, age, enrolment and ethnicity. Cross-tabulations were carried out to investigate how these played out across age, location, enrolment levels as well as the respondents' ethnic background (see Tables 4 and 5). A small proportion of the respondents (16% male and 17% female) would engage in certain xenophobic activities (calling a foreigner a 'kwere-kwere') regardless of the fact that a majority (79.7% males and 86.8% females) regard such behaviour as xenophobic. This discrepancy presents a gap in knowledge that could be further interrogated through Focus Group Discussions to identify drivers behind xenophobic tendencies. One plausible explanation could be that those calling foreigners a 'kwere-kwere' do so innocently because it is a norm within the places they come from and they do not realise that it is xenophobic. We must highlight that understanding the reasons for xenophobic dispositions was not the aim of the study although the traits manifested by some students would call for further investigations into this. This is therefore one of the limitations presented by this study and it creates room for additional data to be collected using qualitative methods.

There were no significant differences across all variables concerning these four scenarios. However, Indian and white respondents were significantly more likely than African respondents to regard scenarios 1 and 2 as xenophobic. As indicated in Table 6, 85.2% and 95.2% compared to 75.4% respectively for scenario 1, whilst for scenario 2, it was 94.2% and 90.5% compared to 79.8% respectively. It should be noted that a small proportion in all groups were most likely to engage in all four xenophobic activities. Interestingly, the students who came from rural mining locations were most significantly likely to engage in scenario 1 and 2 in comparison with those from other locations (Table 5). The findings imply variations (most likely racial/geographical) in the respondents' disposition and conduct towards xenophobic scenarios. The differences in perceptions and attitudes challenge normative notions that xenophobic sentiments are prevalent across all socioeconomic groups in South Africa (Neocosmos, 2010, p. 2; Solomon & Kosaka, 2014, p. 9). None of the PhD students were likely to engage in any xenophobic activity at all. This could be as a result of the correlation between higher levels of education and increased ethnic/racial tolerance (Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007, p. 400; Hjerm, 2001, p. 40).

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of gender against the four scenarios (per cent)

Scenario	Xenophobic		Engage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Ask foreigners to leave	72.3	81.0	14.9	11.9
Mock foreigner for not speaking local language	86.4	86.3	6.6	2.8
Loot foreign-owned spaza shop	77.1	87.4	6.0	3.6
Call a foreigner a "kwere-kwere"	79.7	86.8	16.6	17.0

Cross-tabulation was further used to analyse the gender, age and enrolment level of those who had reported xenophobic perceptions and were likely going to engage in one of the four scenarios under review (see Tables 6 and 7). It was discovered that female respondents, 57.8%, 66.7% and 65.7 %, constituted those who were likely to engage in the xenophobic behaviours in scenarios 1, 3 and 4 respectively. This discovery is in sharp contrast with previous reports that associate females with more positive dispositions towards diversity and other migration-related issues (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2010; Naidoo & Uys, 2013, p. 11). However, the gender composition of the sample population must also be taken into account as females constituted 67.1% of the total number of respondents. Table 7 shows the observation that students aged between 18 and 24 as well as those studying at Diploma level constituted the greater majority of those who would engage in xenophobic behaviour across all four scenarios. The display of xenophobic sentiments by younger and entry-level students suggest this population is more disposed to xenophobic sentiments and less tolerant of racial diversity and multiculturalism. This finding re-echoes the relationship between education levels and racial tolerance. The economic undertones to this factor must not be ignored as the majority of these respondents were from communities (rural mining) synonymous with high levels of socioeconomic inadequacies.

Table 5: Cross-tabulation of age, location, enrolment level and ethnicity against the four scenarios (per cent)

	Xenophobic				Engage			
By age	18–24	25–30	31–35	Above 35	18–24	25–30	31–35	Above 35
Ask foreigners to leave	79.7	71.2	74.0	81.5	12.6	9.5	18.5	12.0
Mock foreigner for not speaking local language	85.3	71.2	76.9	80.8	3.7	4.2	11.1	0
Loot foreign-owned spaza shop	84.0	82.0	82.3	84.6	4.8	2.8	7.4	0
Call a foreigner a "kwere-kwere"	85.3	81.9	84.6	81.5	15.1	20.5	22.2	22.2
By location	Urban suburbs	Urban townships	Rural farming	Rural mining	Urban suburbs	Urban townships	Rural farming	Rural mining
Ask foreigners to leave	82.8	78.0	71.7	50.0	7.3	14.3	18.5	50.0
Mock foreigner for not speaking local language	85.9	81.7	78.7	100.0	2.1	4.3	6.7	0
Loot foreign-owned spaza shop	90.0	81.7	78.9	50.0	3.2	4.3	5.9	0
Call a foreigner a "kwere-kwere"	84.8	78.1	78.1	100.0	10.1	23.2	16.7	25.0
By enrolment level	Diploma	Bachelors	Master's	PhD	Diploma	Bachelors	Master's	PhD
Ask foreigners to leave	77.2	81.7	85.0	100.0	13.9	8.5	7.5	0
Mock foreigner for not speaking local language	83.7	73.0	82.1	100.0	3.5	8.2	2.6	0
Loot foreign-owned spaza shop	83.8	81.7	89.5	100.0	3.9	8.4	2.6	0
Call a foreigner a "kwere-kwere"	84.8	87.6	84.7	100.0	16.5	22.0	13.2	0
By ethnicity	Black	Indian	White	Coloured	Black	Indian	White	Coloured
Ask foreigners to leave	75.4	85.2	95.2	100.0	15.7	2.3	4.8	12.5
Mock foreigner for not speaking local language	79.8	94.2	90.5	87.5	4.9	1.2	0	0
Loot foreign-owned spaza shop	81.6	94.2	95.3	87.5	5.5	1.2	0	0
Call a foreigner a "kwere-kwere"	85.1	83.7	81.0	87.5	24.7	3.5	5.0	25.0

Table 6: Gender composition of respondents who would engage in xenophobic activities (per cent)

Scenario	Probably yes		Definitely yes	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Ask foreigners to leave	42.2	57.8	26.1	73.9
Mock foreigner for not speaking local language	55.6	44.4	33.3	66.7
Loot foreign-owned spaza shop	33.3	66.7	62.5	37.5
Call a foreigner a "kwere-kwere"	34.3	65.7	22.7	77.3

Table 7: Age composition and enrolment level of respondents who would engage in xenophobic activities (per cent)

	Probably yes				Definitely yes			
Age composition	18–24	25–30	31–35	35+	18–24	25–30	31–35	35+
Ask foreigners to leave	82.6	8.7	4.3	4.3	72.7	11.4	9.1	6.8
Mock foreigner for not speaking local language	66.7	16.7	16.7	0	100.0	0	0	0
Loot foreign-owned spaza shop	80.0	6.7	13.3	0	87.5	12.5	0	0
Call a foreigner a "kwere-kwere"	66.7	19.7	7.6	6.1	77.3	9.1	4.5	9.1
Enrolment level	Dipl	B	M	PhD	Dipl	B	M	PhD
Ask foreigners to leave	88.9	8.9	2.2	0	90.9	0	9.1	0
Mock foreigner for not speaking local language	70.6	23.5	5.9	0	100.0	0	0	0
Loot foreign-owned spaza shop	71.4	21.4	7.1	0	87.5	12.5	0	0
Call a foreigner a "kwere-kwere"	80.0	12.3	13.2	0	86.4	13.6	0	0
Dipl = Diploma; B = Bachelors; M = Master's								

Discussion

The results will be discussed in accordance with the key themes that emerged from the study.

Education and xenophobic sentiments

The findings presented in the study reaffirm the popular conception of a negative correlation between xenophobic sentiments and education, especially higher education (Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007, p. 405). The display of negative dispositions towards anti-migrant sentiments and attitudes by the majority of the students cannot be disconnected from the role of higher institutions of learning as venues of cultural, ethnic and racial convergence. This is especially relevant in the South African higher education system which is known to attract a high number of foreign students (Kalpana, 2015). The belief is that increased positive contact between different groups in the school system tends to ameliorate racial/ethnic polarisation (Kayitesi & Mwaba, 2014). University systems,

through their academic and non-academic programmes, provide ample opportunity for intercultural education and cohesion between divergent social groups. Interestingly, the widely acknowledged correlation between economic status and enrolment trends also offers plausible explanations for the low levels of xenophobic sentiments. Student populations at higher education institutions are marked with poor representation of students of low economic status (Frempong, Ma & Mensah, 2012; Nel, Kistner & Van der Merwe, 2013; Thomas & Quinn, 2007). This implies that the majority of the registered students are likely from economically stable backgrounds and therefore less exposed to the economic irregularities that drive xenophobic sentiments. Other factors that could account for low levels of xenophobic sentiments amongst higher education students include: individual values, enlightenment, exposure to apartheid and life expectancy. Further inquiry into the subject will provide more insights on the influence of these mediating factors. Further inquiry is also required to shed more light on the link between gender and xenophobic sentiments. Whilst appraising the place of education in ameliorating xenophobic sentiments, a reconsideration of the centrality of competition for limited socioeconomic opportunities and amenities to the xenophobia discourse is pertinent. Aggressive responses to migrants' residency have been frequently linked to a competition for limited jobs, housing and business spaces (Pineteh, 2017; Solomon & Kosaka, 2014). This suggests that the emergence of certain conditions, such as limited scholarships and job opportunities, could trigger extreme notions of group rights and claims to spatial ownership even in the university.

The economic factor

The results confirm the assumptions of the relative deprivation theory which essentially relates violence to economic inequalities. What this implies is that respondents from disadvantaged areas are more likely to display anger or negative sentiments about migrants. This was confirmed by the study as most of the xenophobic responses were traced to students from a disadvantaged location (rural mining). The possession of xenophobic sentiments by students from a particular location (rural mining) is generally reflective of the patterns of xenophobia in South Africa with a high concentration of aggressive anti-migrant stereotypes in specific areas. Low-income areas such as informal settlements, townships and other underdeveloped areas have been identified as 'hotspots' for the expression of xenophobic attitudes and eruption of violence (Kersting, 2009, p. 16). This trend is widely connected to the high levels of poverty and socioeconomic insufficiencies prevalent in such locations, thus lending some credence to Misago's (2009, p. 3) conceptualisation of xenophobia as a phenomenon peculiar to informal settlements and underdeveloped areas. The informal settlements are typically inhabited by a large population of low-income earners comprising mostly natives and migrants of African descent who all compete for meagre economic opportunities and social services. To limit threats to livelihoods and bolster claims to amenities and services, social distinctions are accentuated and projected through what has been described as a new wave of nationalism. Central to this form of nationalism is a narrow conception of citizenship and indigeneity as exclusive to persons with identical historical, cultural, geographic and ethnic inclinations

(Solomon & Kosaka, 2014, p. 8). Foreigners (those who fit specific descriptions) are thus labelled as threats (job stealers, criminals, opportunists, disease agents) to the acquisition of the socioeconomic benefits that accompanied the end of apartheid.

Apartheid and ethnicity

Not directly linked to the findings but crucial for understanding the construction of xenophobic sentiments are the concepts of apartheid and ethnicity. The history of separatist notions of nationalism and migration is rooted in discriminatory immigration policies inherited from apartheid which stratified immigrants into two groups – the white migrants and the black African migrants. The former were seen as investors and therefore enjoyed more favourable immigration treatments than the latter who were collectively seen as a dispensable source of cheap labour (Harris, 2001). This partly explains the lop-sided nature of xenophobia in South Africa. Also contributing, though not widely explored, are perceptions on white supremacy vis-à-vis racial inferiority complex (subordination of blackness to whiteness). This flows from internalised prejudices regarding the exceptionalism of the white race and the self-acceptance of unflattering notions regarding disadvantaged races. The consequences of this go beyond a diminished sense of self-worth to an increased devaluation and intolerance towards people of similar racial orientation (Vincent, 2008, p. 1442). This partly explains the skewed conceptions about outsiders and intolerance towards other Africans.

In addition, there have been references to the centrality of ethnicity to the xenophobic discourse although not widely discussed in the literature. During the outbreak of violence, the status of foreigners was determined by superficial factors such as physical features and mastery of certain local languages, suggesting the existence of deeper rivalries. Individuals without these typical traits were tagged as foreigners or outsiders, explaining why locals from minority groups have also been affected by xenophobia. In 2008, a third of the people killed were South Africans from minority groups who were not fluent in the main languages and had different skin tones (Sharp, 2008). This draws attention to pre-existing antagonisms and fissures between local ethnic groups, responsible for a number of violent outbursts in the 1990s (Kynoch, 2005, p. 500; Steinberg, 2008), thus, positioning xenophobia as partly rooted in deeper cultural constructs and power tussles. In this realm, ethnicity is influential in determining belongingness, resulting in a blurry distinction between foreigners and outsiders. Zegeye (2012, p. 335) makes reference to a precolonial period where authentic Zulu identity served as the basis for a politics of exclusion.

Recommendations

To disrupt the circulation of this antagonistic/pro-xenophobic discourse, there is a need to revitalise the education system and institutions at all levels to further accommodate multiculturalism, tolerance and diversity (Matunhu, 2011). Emphasis could also be placed on enlightenment on the state of affairs in other African countries especially on refugee dynamics and other migration-related issues. Entrepreneurial education may also be given some consideration to lessen the adverse effects of the current economic downturns on

unemployed persons. For widespread impact, this form of education could be extended beyond the formal institutions to communities, especially those with heterogeneous features. The media could also play an important role by embarking on aggressive campaigns against the proliferation of negative anti-migrant stereotypes. The strong correlation between socioeconomic inadequacies and xenophobic sentiments reflects the need for extensive and continuous interventions aimed at disrupting the negative legacies of apartheid. The persistence of poor living conditions in the rural areas and informal settlements replicates the legacies of an oppressive regime that must be broken before sustainable change can occur. This suggests a multi-level approach for tackling the widespread scourge of xenophobia. The psychological component aspect also deserves more attention, particularly the impact of long years of oppressive rule on internalised prejudices about race. Most importantly, the wind of change should commence with a transformation of the authorities' controversial stance on xenophobia, evidenced through discriminatory policies and a mostly lackadaisical outlook on xenophobic violence.

In the study context, there may be intensification of integration programmes for entry-level students; more attention should be focused on engaging younger students in constructive discourses on migration issues. Dialogue sessions using the community of inquiry format (Spiteri, 2013) where students (local and foreign) are given the opportunity to openly articulate their perceptions about specific issues and also freely ask questions of one another can be encouraged for entry-level students and extended to all students. Further qualitative investigation on the disposition of both local and migrant students towards xenophobia will provide valuable insights on topic. This is especially relevant in view of the methodological risks associated with a study of this nature where there's a possibility of collating more socially desirable (expected) responses than factual responses. The emergent comprehensive study could provide useful background information for the design of a future intervention.

Conclusion

From the results presented it can be concluded that DUT students have satisfactory levels of awareness on xenophobia. However, the lack of knowledge on the NAP (National Action Plan) reflects a significant gap in this regard. This calls for more concerted approaches in engaging the discourse on xenophobia in university environments. Those concerned with students' welfare such as the Student Affairs Department need to engage more with the issue of heterogeneity and how it impacts the social and formal systems on campus. The establishment of interactive forums for engagement and enlightenment on immigration-related matters could be instrumental in improving the knowledge of students on such issues. A widespread negative disposition towards xenophobic sentiments was observed as well as a positive correlation between respondents' perceptions on xenophobia and their willingness to engage in xenophobic attitudes. This outcome lends credence to the importance of education in curbing the proliferation of negative ethnic/racial perceptions and stereotypes. However, consideration should also be given to the influence of economic indices on student enrolment trends in tertiary institutions. The expression of anti-migrant

sentiments by students from specific disadvantaged areas reinforces the influence of location and economic factors on the cultivation of anti-migrant sentiments. This calls for the implementation of appropriate programmes on social integration, especially for entry-level students. These programmes should aim at familiarising new students with concepts such as liberal education, global consciousness and tolerance, amongst others. The design of the potential intervention should be driven by qualitative inquiries into the underlying nature and manifestation of xenophobic sentiments.

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Psychological Health and Optimism amongst Unemployed Graduates in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study sought to examine the relationship between optimism and general health amongst unemployed graduates in Zimbabwe. Most of the studies on unemployment have focused on job loss but this study is based on failure to get employment after graduating with a university degree in a resource-constrained environment. One hundred and twelve (112) graduates were selected using non-probability sampling methods. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilised to analyse data. Age and period after graduation were found to be negatively related to both general health and optimism amongst the unemployed graduates. Overall optimism and general health were found to be inversely related. The study calls for the need for psychological interventions for unemployed graduates in Zimbabwe.

Keywords

general health; graduate; optimism; unemployment

Introduction

The world is presently confronted by a youth unemployment crisis (UNESCO, 2013). Globally, youth represent 43.7% of unemployed individuals. In Sub-Saharan Africa the figure is higher with 60% of the unemployed being youth (ILO, 2010). In Zimbabwe large numbers of graduates remain unemployed for several years following graduation. Unemployment in Zimbabwe continues to rise – it was 10.8% in 1982; 21.8% in 1992; 30% in 1995; and 95% by 2012 (Ncube, 2000; *Econometer Global Capital Report*, 2013). Currently, the country has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world (*CIA World Factbook*, 2017).

Periods of unemployment on someone's curriculum vitae (CV) have been perceived as signalling low productivity, hence increasing the likelihood of a person not being hired or being offered a job (Mcquaid, 2017). Unemployment at the start of a career may lead to loss of skills or to a general loss of confidence by the individual. Youth unemployment,

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especially for those who have skills, leads to a higher likelihood of long-term 'scarring' in later life in terms of subsequent lower pay, higher unemployment and reduced life chances (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010).

Periods of unemployment result in reduced income which is directly related to deteriorating health (Tøge, 2016), depression (Holland, 2012), reduced job satisfaction and well-being (Mcquaid, 2017), young adults' heavy episodic drinking and smoking (De Visser & Smith, 2007; Reine, Novo & Hammarström, 2004). It is also associated with an increased risk of mental illness, self-harm and suicide (Haw, Hawton, Gunnell & Platt, 2015; Hollederer, 2015; Norström & Grönqvist, 2015), and distress including financial, physical health and mental health distress (Chen et al., 2012). In addition, the risk of morbidity and of premature mortality has been found to be significantly higher for unemployed persons compared to the employed (Hollederer, 2015). The health effects of unemployment have been found to be more pronounced in later in life than at younger ages (Reine, Novo & Hammarström, 2004).

Graduating with a degree in a country that is going through economic hardships has been found to have worse health impacts compared to leaving school when the country`s economy is flourishing (Maclean, 2013). In a study that investigated the lasting health effects of leaving school in a country going through an economic recession, drawing data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Maclean (2013) noted that by age 40 men who left school in a depressed economy have worse mental and physical health than men who did not. Graduating in bad economies has been shown to result in job mismatching (Kahn, 2010) and lower self-esteem (Maclean & Hill, 2015). However, these effects do not emerge immediately but develop over time, especially amongst highly skilled workers.

Therefore, unemployment not only has short-term effects but long-term effects have also been observed. These effects include lifelong scarring (negative long-term effect that unemployment has on future labour market possibilities) which reduces resilience (Nilsen & Reiso, 2011), difficulties in returning to normal life (Guintoli, South, Kinsella & Karban, 2011) and greater incidence of suicide (Milner, Page & LaMontagne, 2013). Unemployment-related stress calls for people to develop effective coping strategies so as to avoid the negative effects.

Optimism has been found to moderate the effects of unemployment on psychological stress (Lee, 2008). Optimism can be defined as a generalised positive expectation for the future (Scheier & Carver, 1985) and optimists tend to have a general expectancy of positive results which is associated with greater success in attaining goals (Shepperd, Maroto & Pbert, 1996). When faced with a difficult situation, optimists are most likely to experience positive feelings since they expect a positive outcome. According to McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg and Kinicki (2005) high unemployment rates result in pessimism which reduces the job seeker`s tenacity, thereby reducing the probability of getting employment.

Optimism has been shown to be very important in predicting psychological well-being as it is an effective coping strategy (ChengTing, Mauno & Lee, 2014; Lee, 2008). Young graduates are particularly vulnerable to the effects of stress as it is a period when one makes important decisions in life concerning education and career as well as parenthood (Kito &

Ueno, 2016). In African contexts, especially after graduation, the young adult feels obliged to compensate the family financially for the sacrifices that they would have made to send him/her to school/higher education. In addition, graduates feel the need to take over family responsibilities from their parents as some of their younger siblings may not have received proper schooling as a result of their parents' sacrifice for the sake of the graduate's university education.

There are many stressors that are faced by unemployed graduates. However, there is a lack of research on the subjective experience and mental health of graduates in Zimbabwe. Many studies have looked at unemployment as a result of cessation or termination amongst those who were previously employed. However, this study focuses on unemployment amongst graduates who have attained degrees and yet have never been employed before. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between demographic characteristics and optimism amongst unemployed graduates?
2. What is the relationship between demographic characteristics and psychological health amongst unemployed graduates?
3. What is the relationship between optimism and psychological health amongst unemployed graduates?

Methods

Zimbabwe is a country in Southern Africa with a population of slightly over 13 million. It has both rural and urban areas with 32.2% of its inhabitants residing in urban areas (Index Mundi, 2018). In 2016, about 20 000 individuals graduated from state universities in the country and more than this number from private universities, polytechnics, teachers' training colleges and other institutions of higher learning. But of those, only a tenth are absorbed into employment, locally (*The Herald*, 2018).

The researchers used a quantitative approach. Quantitative research refers to explaining a phenomenon by collecting numerical data that is analysed using mathematically based methods (Muijs, 2004). A descriptive survey design was used to collect information from a representative sample of unemployed graduates.

Sample and sampling techniques

The target population of this research was graduates who hold degrees from colleges and universities but who have never been employed and are aged between 21 and 30. These were recruited from amongst students who were doing postgraduate studies and from employment agencies.

Convenient sampling was used to select participants who were willing to take part in the study. A total of 112 unemployed graduates took part in the current study. In terms of age 15.2% (17) of the participants were aged 21–24; 49.1% (N = 55) were within the 25–29 age range; 28.6 % (N = 32) were aged 30–34 and the age range 35–39 consisted of 7.1% (N = 8). 58.9% (N = 66) were male and 41.1% (N = 46) were female. Regarding marital status, 33.9% (N = 38) were married and 66.1% (N = 74) were single.

Instrument

To measure psychological health the researchers used the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) which was established by Goldberg and Hillier (1979). The GHQ-12 is a self-administered screening questionnaire used mainly used to detect psychological distress. In support of its usefulness Sanchez-Lopez & Dresch (2008) reiterate that the GHQ-12 has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76. The questionnaire has twelve questions which assess general health and scoring was done using a four-point Likert scale. The General Health Questionnaire is a widely used screening instrument. It detects a wide range of psychological disorders, mainly on the anxiety/depression spectrum, and has been shown to be a valid and reliable instrument across cultures. The tool was chosen because it was found to be reliable with reported factor structures that were consistent with the original studies (Kihç, 1996).

Optimism was assessed through the revised version of the Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994) with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70. The instrument was chosen for this study because it has adequate predictive and discriminant validity, and overall is a good measure of optimism (Scheier, 1994). The LOT-R measures dispositional optimism which is defined as general positive outcome expectancies. This section is composed of six questions that assessed the orientation to life that is possessed by optimistic and non-optimistic people. The LOT-R had three negatively worded items, for example, items like: "Generally speaking, looking into the future I do not see positive things." The LOT-R has a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The negative phrases that showed less optimism were reverse-coded in the SPSS. In the current study GHQ-12 and the LOT-R had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 and 0.76 respectively.

Data collection procedures and ethics

Ethical clearance was obtained from Midlands State University. Employment agencies gave permission to the researchers to access their participants who in turn signed consent forms to participate in the study. All individuals signed consent forms. One of the researchers, a clinical psychologist, was on standby to assist those who showed symptoms of distress as a result of the study. Thus, those who reported high levels of distress were referred to the psychologist.

Data analysis

The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21. Thereafter, the researchers identified the patterns of the relationship between optimism and general health amongst unemployed graduates, as well as the influence of demographic characteristics on optimism and general health. An examination of the predictive relationship between optimism and general health was done at the end through ANOVA and Pearson correlation. The 5% ($P < 0.05$) was applied. Data analysis was done to examine the relationship between optimism and general health amongst unemployed graduates in Zimbabwe.

Results

Table 1: General health and demographic characteristics

	Age	Gender	Marital status	Period after graduation
Pearson correlation	–0.193★	–0.592	0.111	–0.784★
Sig (2-tailed)	0.042	0.340	0.245	0.028
N	112	112	112	112
★ *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*				

The findings showed that there is a weak negative relationship between age and general health (r = –0.193). The relationship is statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05, (r) = –0.193, P < 0.042. Table 1 shows that there is a moderate negative relationship between gender and general health (r = –0.592). The relationship was found to be statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05 (r) = –0.592, P < < 0.340. The findings showed that there is weak positive relationship between marital status and general health (r = 0.111). The relationship was not found to be statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05, (r) = 0.111, P < 0.245. This implies that marital status has no influence on general health. The findings showed that there is a very strong negative relationship between duration after graduation and general health. The relationship was found to be statistically significant at 0.05, (r) = –0.784, P < 0.28. This means that graduates who have spent more years being unemployed after graduation are less likely to have good health.

Table 2: Optimism and demographic characteristics

	Age	Gender	Marital status	Period after graduation
Pearson correlation	–0.513★	–0.190	0.759★	–0.478★
Sig (2-tailed)	0.027	0.010	0.036	0.030
N	112	112	112	112
★ *Correlation is significant at 0.05.*				

As shown in Table 2, the relationship between age and optimism was found to be statistically significant at a 0.05 level (r) = –0.513, P < 0.027. The negative correlation implies that graduates who are older are more likely to score less on optimism. Results did not show any relationship between optimism and gender (r) = –0.190, P < 0.010. The relationship between marital status and optimism was found to be statistically significant at significance level 0.05, (r) = –0.759, P < 0.036. This relationship (r = –0.759) implies that marital status has a negative influence on optimism. The results showed a relationship between optimism and duration after graduation (r) = –0.478. The relationship is a moderate negative relationship. The relationship was found to be statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05, (r) = –0.478, P < 0.30.

Table 3: Correlation between optimism and general health

Correlations			Optimism totals	General health totals
Optimism totals	Pearson correlation		1	–0.337★★
	Sig. (2-tailed)			0.000
	N		112	112
General health totals	Pearson correlation		–0.337★★	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	
	N		112	112
★★ *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*				

Table 3 presents the relationship between optimism and general health. The results indicate that there is a weak negative relationship between optimism and general health ($r = -0.337$). The relationship was found to be statistically significant at a significance level of 0.01, $r(112) = -0.337$, $P < 0.00$. The findings show that a decrease in optimism will result in an increase in health problems. This relationship is converse because as the independent variable decreases (optimism) the dependent variable increases (health problems). It, therefore, implies that graduates who score low on optimism will score high on health problems.

Discussion

The first research question in this study sought to explore the relationship between various demographic characteristics and general health amongst unemployed graduates. The results of the study found a positive association between general health and marital status. While general health was negatively correlated with age and period after graduation, this may imply that older graduates presented with higher levels of self-reported distress compared to those who were younger. In line with this finding, Bell & Blanchflower (2009) noted that being unemployed when young leads to a higher likelihood of long-term 'scarring' in later life in terms of subsequent lower pay, higher unemployment and reduced life chances. This study did not show that older unemployed graduates suffered more difficulties than younger unemployed graduates. Another study also found that unemployment amongst young men had more impact on psychological health compared to older man (Reine, Novo & Hammarström, 2004). This study may have focused on job loss and not on those who have never been employed as is the case in the current study.

Although gender differences in distress were noted in this study, its not clear which gender is more prone to stress caused by unemployment after graduation. Although this study did not compare gender differences, it is important to note that within traditional gender roles men are expected to be productive and failure to secure employment despite possession of relevant qualifications may prove to be very distressing (UN, 2003; UNICEF, 2005).

Lastly, the duration of the period after graduation was found to be related to self-reported distress, meaning that those graduates who had more years of unemployment had higher scores on the GHQ and thus were more stressed compared to their counterparts. McQuaid (2017) noted that unemployment at the start of a career may lead to having lower skills or to a general loss of self-confidence by the individual. Optimism has been found to be related to self-confidence (Boden, 2004).

Age, marital status and period after graduation were found to be related to optimism amongst the study participants. These findings may point to the fact that as an individual grows older, the less optimistic they would be of positive outcomes in life. Optimism was found to be related to marital status which may imply that being married could lead to better outlook for the future. Optimism was found to be negatively correlated with period after graduation.

Lastly, the research found a negative correlation between optimism and general health (distress) amongst unemployed graduates in Zimbabwe. This may imply that the more optimistic an individual was, the less distressed they were. Similar to this finding, Lee (2008) in his study of Hong Kong graduates, also found a negative correlation between optimism and general health. He noted that optimistic unemployed graduates showed fewer symptoms of general health deterioration and displayed more positive emotions (Lee, 2008). The findings of this study are therefore similar to those of other studies that have been done elsewhere.

Limitations of the Study

This study relied extensively on questionnaires that are closed-ended, and therefore respondents were not afforded the opportunity to narrate the challenges that they were encountering. The study relied mainly on an urban sample and thus the views of rural graduates were limited. Again, the use of non-probability sampling may have limited the generalisability of the findings to the target population. Another limitation of the study is that the study sample was made up of graduate students and this could have skewed the results of the study to the extent that the results cannot be generalised to the whole population.

Conclusions

The results of the study showed a relationship between age and general health, implying that age was a factor in reporting of distress amongst the study participants. Also, psychological distress varied with the gender of the participants as well as the duration of the period after their graduation. Optimism was shown to be related to age, marital status and period after graduation. Given the growing number of unemployed graduates in Zimbabwe, their mental health should be given priority, especially in light of the economic downturns experienced by the country. More qualitative research is needed to explore the experiences of unemployed graduates since questionnaires as used in the current study do not provide details on the lived experiences of unemployed graduates.

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First-Year College Students' Emotional Intelligence and Help-Seeking Behaviours as Correlates of their Academic Achievement
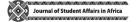
Melese Astatke*

Abstract

The main purpose of the study was examining the correlations of emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour on students' academic achievement in Woldia College of Teacher Education (WCTE), Woldia, Ethiopia. The participants were 283 first-year regular diploma students of the college in the academic year of 2015/2016. The study employed a quantitative approach which followed correlation design involving four instruments to collect data for the study: Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, Academic Help-Seeking Behaviour Questionnaire, Psychological Help-Seeking Behaviour Questionnaire, and Cumulative Grade Point Average.

To answer the research questions raised in the study, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation and Pearson product-moment analysis, as well as inferential statistics such as independent sample t-test, multiple regression tests, and beta coefficients were conducted. The Pearson correlation analysis reported the following findings: (1) emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour and, psychological help-seeking behaviour had a significant positive correlation with students' academic achievement; (2) emotional intelligence and academic help-seeking behaviour had a positive but not significant correlation with each other; (3) however, emotional intelligence was negatively but not significantly correlated with psychological help-seeking behaviour.

The multiple regression analysis showed that there was a significant contribution of emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour and psychological help-seeking behaviour to the total variance of academic achievement. The beta coefficients revealed that the independent contributions of independent variables of the study to the total variance of academic achievement were found to be emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour, respectively. The independent sample t-test reported that there were significant gender differences in students' emotional intelligence and psychological help-seeking behaviour. The gender differences in academic help-seeking behaviour and academic achievement were not statistically significant. Finally, it was recommended that parents, instructors, counsellors, and administrative bodies should work on promoting students' emotional intelligence and developing students' help-seeking behaviours (academic and psychological help-seeking behaviours) to enhance academic achievement of students in WCTE.

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Keywords

academic achievement; academic help-seeking behaviour; emotional intelligence; psychological help-seeking behaviour

Background of the Study

College-level academic activities are different in many ways from the students' high school experiences. For instance, according to Bohanan (2008), a typical course load in high school includes more than 30 hours of classroom instruction, but 12 to 15 hours is considered a full load in college. As Bohanan points out, the reason for this is that college courses typically require two to three hours of preparation for each hour spent in the classroom. Students are expected to come to class having already studied the material, so that more information can be covered each semester than is possible in a typical high school setting. In high school, academic requirements are not as demanding and most assignments are completed at school or within short periods of time at home, whereas in college, academics are more demanding and more difficult. Most classes require several hours of homework each week in order to complete assignments. In addition, effective college-level study skills are critical to success.

Focusing specifically on first-year students' academic, social and emotional problems, a preliminary survey conducted at the University of Zambia indicated the presence of a large number and a wide variety of problems that are sufficiently potent, general and persistent to be a cause of concern to university authorities (Wilson, 1984, cited in Kabtamu, 2009). A similar study conducted in two universities of Thailand also showed that the most severe adjustment problem of first-year students was related to adjustment to college work (Barnacle & Cheunarrom, 2000, cited in Kabtamu, 2009). The studies further disclosed that adjustment to college was strongly associated with the academic achievement (AA) of the students.

There seems to be general agreement amongst scholars that students' academic achievement depends on several interlocking factors (Gifford et al., 2006). Socio-demographic factors (such as age, income and gender), psychological factors (e.g. motivation, stress and study strategies) and other factors like study hours and understanding the language of instruction are amongst the factors that could play substantial roles in students' academic success.

Despite other numerous types of variables that could affect students' academic achievement at different levels of schooling, the current study examined the correlates of emotional intelligence (EI) and help-seeking behaviour dimensions (academic help-seeking behaviour [AHSB] and psychological help-seeking behaviour [PHSB] on students' academic achievement at college level.

The concept of emotional intelligence is a very interesting topic of psychological research, especially in regard to how it affects the workforce and social functioning of citizens in the process of helping needy people and delivering public services (Gregg, Grout, Ratcliffe, Smith & Windmeijer, 2008, cited in Gemechu, 2014). Moreover,

Goleman (1998) referred to emotional intelligence as the ability to be aware of one's emotions and managing those emotions in one's daily interactions with people, to establish emotional connections. In addition, Bhadouria (2013, p. 8) defined emotional intelligence as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate amongst them and to use this information to guide ones thinking and actions".

Regarding college students, research conducted by Mestre et al. (2006) showed that college students who have high emotional intelligence tended to perform better in terms of academic achievement. In line with this, researchers, for instance Bhadouria (2013), found out that the correlation between emotional intelligence and academic achievement, and teaching emotional and social skills at school, not only positively influence academic achievement during the year when these were taught but also have an impact on long-term achievement. On the other hand, Gemechu (2014), after conducting a study, reported a positive but not statistically significant correlation between the students' emotional intelligence and academic achievement of $r(213) = 0.01$, $p = 0.87$.

Diener and Dweck (1978) described help-seeking behaviour that is directed towards finding the solution to a problem as promoting extended task involvement. Academic help-seeking is viewed as an important instrumental (also known as autonomous, adaptive, or strategic), self-regulatory behavioural strategy that successful learners use to help achieve their academic goals (Karabenick, 2004; Karabenick & Shim, 2005). With regard to the urges of psychological help-seeking, Sarson and Sarson (2002) as cited in Kabtamu (2009) wrote that some people seek professional help when they are dissatisfied with themselves, or because of concern expressed by family members, friends or co-workers.

There are arguments in the research studies concerning gender differences in emotional intelligence and help-seeking behaviour dimensions (academic help-seeking behaviour and psychological help-seeking behaviour) and academic achievement amongst male and female students. Regarding gender difference in emotional intelligence Ciarrochi, Chan and Bajgar (2001) found that emotional intelligence was higher for females than for males. Similarly, Charbonneau and Nicol (2002) in their study revealed that the women scored somewhat but not significantly higher than the men on emotional intelligence.

By contrast, Mishra and Ranjan (2008) studied whether the gender difference affects the emotional intelligence of adolescents and the results showed that adolescent males and females differ significantly on emotional intelligence, with the males found to be significantly higher on emotional intelligence than the females.

While there is limited research on gender difference in academic help-seeking behaviour, the results from Holt's (2014) study revealed that female students reported more positive attitudes towards seeking academic help than their male counterparts. However, Holt did not suggest why there are gender differences in academic help-seeking behaviour. This finding led to the proposition that the gender differences presented in Nam et al.'s (2010) meta-analysis on students' attitudes towards seeking psychological help also pertain to students' attitudes towards seeking academic help. As described by Addis

and Mahalik (2003), males' reluctance to seek help is motivated by a complex interaction of their socialisation, the social construction of masculinity, and the meaning of giving and receiving help in a particular situation. However, the limited research in the extant literature does not offer empirically supported explanations for this gender difference in academic help-seeking. Contrary to Holt's (2014) finding, Sager (2015) reported no gender differences in attitudes about seeking academic help.

Many studies reported gender differences in psychological help-seeking behaviour, showing that females report more positive attitudes about seeking psychological help than their male counterparts (Holt, 2014; Elhai, Schweinle & Anderson, 2008; Larose & Bernier, 2001; Lopez et al., 1998). Nam et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis on gender differences in attitudes towards seeking psychological help. In their studies of college students, their main finding was that female college students exhibit more favourable attitudes about psychological help-seeking.

Abdu-Raheem (2012) stated that gender differences and academic achievement amongst students in schools is one of the most topical issues in the current debate all over the world. According to Abdu-Raheem, a major area of concern has been the effects of gender differences on academic achievement of students. In Ethiopian-context research conducted by Atsede (1991), cited in Ayele (2012), it is contended that cultural systems of Ethiopia, particularly gendered socialisation (i.e. females' marginalisation), prevent them from being as successful as males. In fact, over the years, there has been a growing awareness of the role of females at home, in schools and community in general. However, worries have equally been expressed about the role of females in the political, social, cultural, psychological, economic, spiritual, scientific and technological development of the nations. In this regard, Tadesse (2011), in his study, reported that there was a statistically significant difference in the academic achievement of male and female students. However, other researchers (for instance, Ewumi, 2012) reported that there were no significant gender differences in students' academic achievement.

To summarise, the studies mentioned above are preliminaries in the Ethiopian context, suggesting that there is a knowledge gap in the literature with respect to the correlates of emotional intelligence and help-seeking behaviour dimensions (academic help-seeking behaviour and psychological help-seeking behaviour) with students' academic achievement and gender differences in these variables. Essentially, therefore, it was plausible for the current researcher to see the correlates of students' emotional intelligence and help-seeking behaviour dimensions (academic help-seeking behaviour and psychological help-seeking behaviour) with their academic achievement in Woldia College of Teachers Education (WCTE) first-year regular diploma students. The college is one of the ten government teacher education colleges of Amhara region, North East Ethiopia.

Statement of the Problem

According to Kabtamu (2011), the first year of college life is usually acknowledged as a stressful time for social and academic adjustment. During this period, first-year students face

many social challenges (e.g. moving away from their primary support systems − parents) and intellectual challenges (e.g. more demanding course work or heavy work load). To this end, some local studies have revealed that Ethiopian collegians, particularly the freshmen, encounter enormous psychological and social hazards that require professional help in addition to help rendered by friends and relatives (Abdu, 2003; Tsige, 2001).

However, it is a common observation that most college students in our country tend to be uncomfortable about disclosing themselves to professional help providers, especially when they are expected to share intimate personal feelings and emotions with a new advisor or counsellor. Moreover, as reported in Tadesse (2011), it was indicated that students' academic achievement can be largely associated with many variables, but the current study focused on examining the correlations of three variables: emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour and psychological help-seeking behaviour on students' academic achievement in WCTE. With this in mind, the following rationales initiated the current researcher to conduct this study.

Primarily, since the researcher is an instructor and guidance and counselling officer of the WCTE, his own experience of teaching the students (mainly first-year students) revealed the many psychosocial problems that they face (for instance, their academic, emotional and psychological problems), and this urged him to conduct this type of study in the college. In WCTE, students' CGPA is frequently daunting from year to year. In this case, the yearly reports of students' academic achievement scores recorded by the registrar's office of the college show this academic trend. In this regard, in view of the social, academic and personal challenges that students are supposed to adjust to, the researcher believed that it would be worthwhile to assess the students' emotional intelligence and help-seeking behaviours.

Second, the controversies and uncertainties regarding the relationship between EI, AHSB, PHSB and academic achievement, the predictive power of EI, AHSB, PHSB on students' academic achievement, and gender differences amongst these variables raised above, evoke additional interest. So the researcher wanted to arrive at a conclusion through conducting his own research.

Finally, in the college, while there are different types of research studies conducted on different issues, the researcher did not come across such a study about examining the correlates of students' emotional intelligence and help-seeking behaviour dimensions (academic help-seeking behaviour and psychological help-seeking behaviour) with students' academic achievement, and he finally reached a conclusion that there is a scarcity of research resources in the area emphasised. Therefore, the current study will give an overview of the correlates of students' emotional intelligence and help-seeking behaviour dimensions (academic help-seeking behaviour and psychological help-seeking behaviour) with their academic achievement in this level of education. Bearing in mind the above justifications, the study is designed to find answers to the following three major research questions:

1. Are there relationships amongst emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, psychological help-seeking behaviour, and academic achievement?
2. Which independent variable(s) is (are) the strong predictor(s) of academic achievement?
3. Are there statistically significant gender differences in students' emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, psychological help-seeking behaviour and academic achievement?

Methods

Design of the study

As mentioned earlier, this research project aimed at investigating the correlates of first-year college students' emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour with their academic achievement. To achieve its purpose, the research followed a quantitative approach. This research approach allowed the researcher to numerically analyse the relationships amongst the dependent and independent variables in the study. The students' emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour were the independent variables whose changes presume to influence the dependent variable (academic achievement). Thus, the study came under the umbrella of correlational research design.

Population, sample and sampling techniques of the study

The population of this study were first-year regular diploma trainees of Woldia College of Teacher Education ($N = 972$, $M = 615$ and $F = 357$) in the 2015/2016 academic year. From this population, 179 male and 104 female (total = 283) first-year regular diploma students were selected as source of information using the sampling determination formula of Yamane (1967, p. 886) cited in Israel (2009), i.e.:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)2}$$

where n is the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the level of precision. Since the study focused on first-year students, only first-year students were selected through employing purposive sampling. To do so, stratified random sampling as well as probability proportional to size techniques was used. To make the sample size proportional across departments and gender, their stream (department) and gender were considered as two strata. The following table depicts samples selected in the above-mentioned sampling techniques.

Table 1: Summary of the sample size by stream and gender

Stream (Department)	Population			Sample		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
New modality	562	262	824	164	76	240
Special needs	53	16	69	15	5	20
Kindergarten (KG)	0	79	79	0	23	23
Total	615	357	972	179	104	283

Source: WCTE Registrar's office

Data gathering instruments

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, four kinds of instruments – emotional intelligence questionnaire, academic help-seeking behaviour questionnaire, psychological help-seeking behaviour questionnaire, and the cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of WCTE first-year regular diploma students of 2015/2016 academic year of first semester – were used to gather the necessary data from students.

Questionnaires

A total of three types of questionnaires were developed and administered to collect data on learners' emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour. The scales were tested for their reliability. The questionnaire consisted of four major parts. In the first part, the respondents were requested to supply general demographic information. The second part consisted of the emotional intelligence questionnaire, the third part consisted of the academic help-seeking behaviour questionnaire, and the fourth part consisted of the psychological help-seeking behaviour items. To lessen the communication or language barrier of the respondents, all the questionnaire items in this study were translated into their mother tongue with the help of two teacher educators of WCTE qualified in English Language. In addition, with the recommendation of two psychology teacher educators some ambiguous items were re-defined so as to provide more clarity. For all of the three scales (emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour and psychological help-seeking behaviour) all of the items were Likert-scaled on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

A. Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire

Students' level of emotional intelligence was measured by using 33 items adopted from a previous study (Gemechu, 2014) and adding four additional items from different literature sources. The questionnaire consisted of 37 items.

B. Academic Help-Seeking Behaviour Questionnaire

The academic help-seeking behaviour questionnaire used to measure the level of students' academic help-seeking behaviour scale was developed by Julia C. Sager (2015). The questionnaire consisted of 14 items.

C. Psychological Help-Seeking Behaviour Questionnaire

Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale – Short Form (ATSPPHS-SF): This is a ten-item measure adapted from the original Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Help Scale (Fischer & Farina, 1995). It is the most widely used measure of individuals' attitudes towards seeking psychological help (Elhai, Schweinle & Anderson, 2008). Higher scores on this measure indicate a more positive attitude about treatment, and are associated with greater intentions to seek psychological help.

Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)

The cumulative GPA of first-year regular diploma students of the 2015/2016 academic year first semester (in all courses) for each student was collected from the registrar's office of Woldia College of Teacher Education to measure academic achievement score.

Data gathering procedures

Pilot study

Before administration of the questionnaires, the college dean's consent was required in giving access and permission to conduct a study in the college and to allow students to participate in the study. The researcher asked the consent through describing the purpose of the study and the ethical guidelines to be considered in the study. The informed consent was provided through discussion. The researcher administered the questionnaires (pilot test) to 30 students (15 males and 15 females) who were not part of the study, and calculated item total correlations. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of reliability (or consistency) was used to measure internal consistency of the scales. The responses were coded and the reliabilities of the three questionnaires were calculated. Accordingly, reliabilities of Cronbach's alpha 0.856, 0.882 and 0.873 for emotional intelligence (comprising 37 items), academic help-seeking behaviour (comprising14 items) and psychological help-seeking behaviour (comprising 10 items) respectively were obtained. The reliability coefficients indicated that the items were highly reliable. George and Mallery (2003) suggested the following rules for evaluating alpha coefficients: >0.9 – excellent; >0.8 – good; >0.7 – acceptable; >0.6 questionable; >0.5 – poor; <0.5 – unacceptable. The face validity of the scales was tested by psychology teacher educators in the Department of Education of WCTE. After the reliability score, further modifications were made to make the items clear and understandable.

The main data gathering process

After the questionnaires were ready for administration, the researcher followed the following data-collection procedures. The questionnaires were administered in students' respective regular class periods by the researcher himself and four other instructors of the college. After the purposes of the research were clarified and informed consent was gained from respondents, the participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire without a time limit. Following this, the questionnaire booklets (emotional intelligence questionnaire,

academic help-seeking behaviour questionnaire and psychological help-seeking behaviour questionnaire) were handed out to the respondents. Respondents were asked not to discuss the items as the response of one could influenced another. Explanation and examples as to how students should respond to the questionnaire were given by the researcher. Instructions and further explanations were given to the effect that first they needed to fill out the demographic questionnaire which requests them to write their gender, section, and roll number (which was used to collect their academic achievement scores).

After completing the demographic questionnaire, the participants were told to start completing the questionnaire through reading the instructions. Adequate time was provided for the participants to fill out the questionnaires. In order for the students not to provide invalid answers to the questionnaire items, they were allowed to raise any question or doubt while filling out the data. Administration of the final version of the questionnaires took place during March 2016. When the students had finished, all the booklets were collected by the researcher's assistants and the researcher himself. The researcher then thanked the respondents and the assistants for their cooperation. Finally, all the data was coded once the coding process was completed and organized for analysis.

In addition, regarding the data-collection process through analyzing students' achievement scores (to measure their academic achievement), the researcher used the following procedure:

1. First, the researcher informed the registrar officer of the college of the purposes of reviewing students' achievement scores.
2. Students' average achievement scores (CGPA) of all courses taken in first semester were collected by using their roll number.
3. Finally, their CGPAs were received from the registrar.

Data analysis techniques

The statistical analysis was carried out based on the basic research questions that the study aimed to answer. As it was explained in the previous sections, this research is quantitative. The data were analysed using different statistical tools. So, in this study, to see the general feature of the data on each variable, descriptive statistics like the mean and standard deviation of each variable were calculated.

After the data-gathering and coding process, the researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-version 20), amongst the various computational techniques for analysis. Three statistical techniques were employed. Correlation (Pearson's product-moment correlation) was used to assess the relationship between emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour (predictor variables) on the one hand, and the criterion variable (academic achievement) on the other and between the independent variables. Thus, whether these predictor variables (emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour) predict students' academic achievement was examined. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine how well emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and

psychological help-seeking behaviour (predictive variables) predict students' academic achievement (criterion variable). Lastly, *t*-test (independent sample *t*-test) was used to see if there existed any significant gender differences in the variables of the study. The students' first semester CGPA was used to represent their academic achievement.

Ethical considerations

Prior to administering the questionnaire, the objectives of the study were clearly explained to the participants and oral informed consent was obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the execution of the study.

Operational definitions

Emotional intelligence: refers to the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions to discriminate amongst them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions as measured by an emotional intelligence scale.

Academic help-seeking behaviour: refers to cognitively-oriented achievement behaviour involving the search for the employment of a strategy to obtain academic success.

Psychological help-seeking behaviour: refers to emotion-oriented counselling services requested by students and delivered by the guidance counsellor.

Academic achievement: refers to WCTE first-year regular diploma students' first semester CGPA scores in all courses taken in the 2015/2016 academic year.

Results

Pearson product–moment correlation

As denoted in the statement of the problem, one of the objectives of this study was to examine the relation between emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, psychological help-seeking behaviour, and academic achievement of college students, especially first-year regular diploma students at the WCTE. To do this, the Pearson product–moment correlation was conducted and the results are indicated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: **The correlation between emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, psychological help-seeking behaviour, and academic achievement**

Variables	Mean	SD	Pearson correlation coefficients			
			1	2	3	4
1. EI	3.1731	0.3426	1			
2. AHSB	3.4643	0.5623	0.153	1		
3. PHSB	2.9871	0.4742	–0.089	0.252**	1	
4. AA	2.5713	0.3317	0.483**	0.409**	0.226*	1
N = 283 {Codes were 1 = Male, 2 = Female}; ★ Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level; ★★ Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level						

As indicated in Table 2 above, the results of Pearson correlation showed that there was a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic achievement, $r(283) = 0.483^{\star\star}$, $p < 0.01$. Similarly, academic help-seeking behaviour had a significant positive correlation with academic achievement, $r(283) = 0.409^{\star\star}$, $p < 0.01$. In addition, academic help-seeking behaviour had a significant correlation with psychological help-seeking behaviour, $r(283) = 0.252^{\star\star}$, $p < 0.01$. Furthermore, there was a positive significant correlation between psychological help-seeking behaviour and students' academic achievement, $r(283) = 0.226^{\star}$, $p < 0.05$. The correlation between emotional intelligence and academic help-seeking behaviour was positive but not statistically significant, $r(283) = 0.153$, $p > 0.05$. However, there exists a negative but not statistically significant correlation between emotional intelligence and psychological help-seeking behaviour, $r(283) = 0.089$, $p > 0.05$.

Multiple regression analysis

The second purpose of this study was to examine how well independent variables predict the dependent variable. Hence, multiple regression analysis for all variables was computed. Regression analyses typically follow significant correlations and are used to determine the extent to which academic achievement (dependent variable) can be predicted from emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour (independent variables). The utility of regression lies in its future use.

The following table presents the result of the multiple regression analysis in which the independent variables were identified in the order of their importance in predicting students' academic achievement.

Table 3: Multiple regression statistics of emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour on academic achievement

Variables	β	Std. Error	β	T	P	R	R^2
1. EI	0.441	0.071	0.456	6.223	0.000	0.6199[a]	0.383
2. AHSB	0.171	0.044	0.290	3.852	0.000		
3. PHSB	0.136	0.052	0.194	2.592	0.011		

The regression analysis results indicated that there was a significant contribution of emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour and psychological help-seeking behaviour to academic achievement ($R^2 = 0.383$, $F = 24.789$, $P < 0.05$).

Furthermore, the direct effects of the independent variables on academic achievement were determined using beta coefficients. The effects on academic achievement of emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.456$, $t = 6.223$, $P < 0.05$), academic help-seeking behaviour ($\beta = 0.290$, $t = 3.852$, $P < 0.05$) and psychological help-seeking behaviour ($\beta = 0.194$, $t = 2.592$, $P < 0.05$) were statistically significant.

The independent contribution of emotional intelligence to the total variance in academic achievement was found to be 22.0248%, which was 57.4634% of the total R^2 (i.e. 0.383). The independent contribution of academic help-seeking behaviour to the

total variance of academic achievement was found to be 11.861%, which was 30.9457% of the total $R^2(0.383)$. This means the composite contribution of emotional intelligence and academic help-seeking behaviour to the variance of academic achievement was 88.4091%. The remaining 4.4426% contribution of the total R^2, which was 11.5908% of the total R^2, was contributed by psychological help-seeking behaviour,

Independent sample *t*-test

The third purpose of this study was to examine whether there is a statistically significant gender difference of the variables in the study. To do this, independent sample *t*-test was conducted and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Independent sample *t*-test

Variables	Male ($N = 179$)		Female ($N = 104$)		T	Df	Sig (2–tailed)
	Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*			
EI	3.2562	0.31947	2.9341	0.29479	5.007#	282	0.000
AHSB	3.5481	0.61163	3.4532	0.27500	2.899	282	0.104
PHSB	2.8848	0.50360	3.2812	0.16547	-4.362#	282	0.000
AA	2.6007	0.33984	2.5419	0.30280	1.308	282	0.193
#P < 0.01							

Results of *t*-test analysis in Table 4 above revealed that there were significant gender differences in emotional intelligence, $t(282) = 5.007$, $p < 0.05$, and psychological help-seeking behaviour, $t(282) = -4.362$, $p < 0.05$. The results showed that male students scored statistically higher mean emotional intelligence scores. On the other hand, female students showed more psychological help-seeking behaviour than their male counterparts. However, significant gender differences were not found on academic help-seeking behaviour, $t(282) = 2.899$, $p > 0.05$, ns and academic achievement, $t(282) = 1.308$, $p > 0.05$, ns.

Discussion

The present study examined the correlates of emotional intelligence, AHSB, and PHSB, on academic achievement. The discussion was first about the results obtained with regard to the relationship of EI, AHSB, and PHSB with academic achievement. Second, regression analyses of the influences of EI, AHSB, and PHSB (predictive variables) on academic achievement (criterion variable) were conducted. Finally, gender differences in EI, AHSB, PHSB and academic achievement were dealt with.

Intercorrelations amongst variables

Previous research has shown conflicting information about the relationship between emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, psychological help-seeking behaviour and academic achievement. The results of the Pearson correlation analysis presented in Table 2 of this study clearly shows that the relationships between students'

academic achievement (dependent variable) and emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour and psychological help-seeking behaviour (the independent variables) were statistically significant.

The results of this study indicated that emotional intelligence had a significant and positive correlation with the students' academic achievement. This indicates that as students' emotional intelligence increases, their academic achievement increases and vice versa. These findings are similar to the findings of many previous international studies, for instance, Tamannaifar et al. (2010) and Mestre et al. (2006). In addition, in line with the current study, researchers such as Yahaya et al. (2011) and Mulugeta (2011) found that emotional intelligence significantly and positively related to students' academic achievement.

Contrary to the present findings, studies conducted by Barchard (2003); Bracket and Salovey (2006); Marquez et al. (2006); Sunbul and Alsan (2007); Newsome, Day and Catano (2000) cited in Mulugeta (2011) reported findings that revealed very weak and non-significant correlation between emotional intelligence and students' academic achievement.

The relationship between emotional intelligence and students' academic achievement indicated that, as students' emotional intelligence grows, it is likely that their academic achievement increases and vice versa. The Pearson correlation coefficient presented a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement. In view of this, it is absolutely essential for teacher education colleges to enhance their students' emotional intelligence, and by so doing, improve the academic achievements of their students. For instance, teachers can enhance students' emotional intelligence by: embedding social and emotional learning into their teaching practices, encouraging students to develop and share opinions, engaging students in problem-solving, etc.

Furthermore, the result of this study shows that students' academic help-seeking behaviour has a significant and positive correlation to students' academic achievement. This shows that students who have good academic help-seeking behaviour also show good academic achievement. To this end, teachers can improve students' academic help-seeking behaviour by restructuring the learning environment to one that does not emphasise competition and grades, but focuses more on understanding. In addition, trying to be more interactive and engaging may help to increase students' academic help-seeking behaviour and decrease ambivalence towards a topic or content area. In line with this, after conducting research on attribution analysis of help-seeking in academic settings Ames and Lau, (1982); Karbenic and Kanp (1991) cited in Kitsance and Chow (2007), concluded, "… when college students are confronted with poor performance, they engage in both achievement-related and help-seeking behaviour". In addition, the findings of the previous scholars and researchers (such as Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Ryan et al., 1998; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997) are in line with the result of this study. According to Karabenick and Knapp (1991), students who encounter academic difficulties are more likely to first engage in instrumental activities designed to help one improve his/her academic performance, followed by seeking help from informal sources (primarily from peers), seeking help from formal sources (instructors and support services), and lastly, lowering their aspirations and altering their goals.

Moreover, burgeoning research studies have investigated a significant positive relationship between academic help-seeking behaviour and academic achievement (for instance: Triandis, 1994; Volet & Karabenick, 2006; Newman, 1998). According to Volet and Karabenick (2006), help seeking is currently considered an important learning strategy that is linked to students' academic performance. According to Triandis (1994), cultural factors can influence whether and in what situations students seek help. Similarly, Volet and Karabenick noted that the more students are culturally different from their peers, the less likely they are to approach them for needed academic assistance. For this matter in classroom instruction it is important to understand the multidimensional nature of cultural diversity and inclusion and how this understanding can be used by teachers to more effectively develop varied instructional strategies that will allow them to teach with better cultural responsiveness.

Newman (1991) stated that help seeking in the classroom is a social transaction. Thus, teachers establish and students internalise patterns of classroom discourse, helping students both to accomplish difficult tasks and to learn that questioning is an invaluable academic strategy. In contrast, teachers who take on the role of experts are likely to support over-dependent executively expedient help seeking. At this point, teachers' feedback helps students learn the difference between adaptive and non-adaptive (i.e. expedient) help seeking. Encouraging students to go back to an incorrect problem and try to resolve it may convince them of the importance of determining whether they need future assistance. Additionally, it may be instrumental in students' coming to appreciate the function of questioning and help seeking in the ongoing process of self-monitoring and teaching (Newman, 1991).

In addition, the present study found a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic help-seeking behaviour. This, in other words, means emotional intelligence and academic help-seeking behaviour are significant/positively dependent on each other and students with good academic help-seeking behaviour are likely to have high emotional intelligence and vice versa. The result of this study also revealed that there is a negative and non-significant correlation between emotional intelligence and psychological help-seeking behaviour. This indicates that, students who have high emotional intelligence seem less likely to be psychological help seekers and vice versa.

With regard to the relationship between psychological help-seeking behaviour and academic achievement, the findings of this study revealed a positive and significant correlation between students' psychological help-seeking behaviour and academic achievement, $r(283) = 0.226^{\star}$, $p < 0.05$. The finding of this study is consistent with Goodwin (2008). The findings reported that there existed a significant positive relationship between psychological help-seeking behaviour and academic achievement. This means that when psychological help-seeking behaviour increases, academic achievement increases and if psychological help-seeking behaviour decreases, academic achievement falls.

The contributions of emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour on students' academic achievement.

The multiple linear regression analysis results indicated that there were significant contributions of emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour to students' academic achievement ($R^2 = 0.383$, $F = 24.789$, $p < 0.05$).

Furthermore, the beta coefficient analysis was conducted to see the direct effects of study variables on students' academic achievement. In the current study, the beta coefficient analysis showed that the multiple contributions of emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour were significant (i.e. the composite contribution of these variables was 38.3%). Amongst the total contribution of the three independent variables of the study, emotional intelligence and academic help-seeking variables made a great contribution (i.e. the composite contribution of these two variables was 88.4% to the total R^2 which was 38.3%). It is also indicated that emotional intelligence, which accounts for 22.02% of the total variance, was the strongest predictor of students' academic achievement. When the direct effects of the predictor variables on criterion variables are examined for the overall sample, in support of the literature, in this study emotional intelligence had a significant and positive direct effect on the achievement of students ($\beta = 0.456$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that emotionally highly intelligent students had higher academic achievement compared to their counterpart students who had lower emotional intelligence.

Researchers like Guil, Mestre and Gil-Olarte (2004) found that emotional intelligence was a strong predictor of academic achievement. According to them, when other variables were controlled, it was indicated that emotional intelligence contributed significantly to academic achievement. Similarly, Bhadouria (2013) stated that more than any other variable emotional intelligence was found to be a reliable predictor of academic achievement. Findings from this study are consistent with those of the above researchers. In line with this, other researchers (for instance, Chew, Zain & Hassan, 2013) also indicated that emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of academic achievement.

Furthermore, in this study, academic help-seeking behaviour significantly and positively predicted academic achievement amongst WCTE first-year regular diploma students ($\beta = 0.290$, $p < 0.05$). Students who scored high on measures of academic help-seeking behaviour were more likely to score higher on academic achievement results than students who scored low, and vice versa. This finding was consistent with the findings of Ryan and Pintrich (1997) and Ryan, Pintrich and Midgley (2001).

In addition, in this study, psychological help-seeking behaviour was found to be a positive and significant predictor of academic achievement of WCTE first-year regular diploma students ($\beta = 0.194$, $p < 0.05$). Hence, students who scored high on measures of psychological help-seeking behaviour were more likely to score higher on academic achievement than students who scored low and vice versa. In line with this study, Goodwin (2008) reported that negative attitudes towards psychological help seeking correlated with lower GPAs.

Gender differences in emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, psychological help-seeking behaviour, and academic achievement

Previous research findings reported argumentative statements regarding gender differences in the emotional intelligence of students. For instance, Ciarrochi, Chan and Bajgar (2001) stated that female students reported better emotional intelligence than male students. In line with this, Viswantha and Siva (2013) also reported that higher emotional intelligence and being female are positively associated with academic success.

Contrary to the above findings, in line with the present study, researchers, for instance, Mishra and Ranjan (2008) have studied whether the gender difference affects emotional intelligence of adolescents and the results showed that adolescent boys and girls differ significantly on emotional intelligence, and boys were found to be significantly higher on emotional intelligence than girls.

Regarding gender differences on students' academic help-seeking behaviour, researchers, for instance, Holt, (2014); Elhai, Schweinle and Anderson (2008); Larose and Bernier (2001), revealed that females report more positive attitudes about seeking academic help than their male counterparts. In the same vein, Holt's (2014) study revealed that female students reported more positive attitudes towards seeking academic help than their male counterparts. In connection with the findings of the assumption that high performance of female participants was linked to their seeking behaviour, girls are more likely to seek academic help than boys. In this perspective local study, for example, Dawit (2008) showed that there is a significant difference between male and female students in academic help-seeking performance.

Contrary to the above findings, the present study shows no significant gender difference on students' academic help-seeking behaviour. In line with this study, Williams (2011) in his research findings, points out that there was no gender difference with regard to frequency of academic help-seeking behaviour. Similarly, Kabtamu (2009), in his research findings, explained that no statistically significant difference was obtained in academic help-seeking behaviour between male and female participants.

Furthermore, with regard to gender differences in psychological help-seeking behaviour, Nam et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis on gender differences in attitudes towards seeking psychological help amongst college students. Their main finding revealed that female college students exhibit more favourable attitudes towards psychological help seeking. The finding of this study is in line with Nam et al.'s (2010) report that indicates female students' higher psychological help-seeking behaviour than their male counterparts. The probable explanation for this may be due to the fact that females reported lower emotional intelligence scores compared to their male counterparts and their lesser tendency to express their emotions.

In the same vein, research has consistently found that females and people with previous counselling experience show more favourable attitudes towards seeking help than males and people with no previous counselling experience. In this regard, Addis and Mahalik (2003) concluded that across ages, ethnicities and social backgrounds, males are less likely than females to seek help for physical and mental health problem. In line with this,

evidence indicates that help-seeking behaviour might be different from culture to culture or from place to place (Tien, 1997, cited in Kabtamu, 2009).

With regard to gender differences in academic achievement, there are argumentative findings. For instance, Ewumi (2012) reported a negative significant relationship between gender and students' academic achievement. Of course, there are also contrary findings, which stated that no significant difference between gender and academic achievement was observed (Farook, 2003; Naderi et al., 2009, cited in Tadesse, 2011).

The result of the current study indicated that there was no statistically significant gender difference in students' academic achievement. Consistent with the findings of Farook (2003) and Naderi et al. (2009) cited in Tadesse (2011), the result of the present study revealed no statistically significant academic achievement difference between male and female college students, even though male students scored higher on academic achievement ($M = 2.6007$, $SD = 0.3398$) than their female counterparts ($M = 2.5419$, $SD = 0.3028$). The probable explanation for the finding that there is no statistically significant difference in the academic achievement between female and male college students could be that, mostly in rural Ethiopian culture, societal as well as parental attitudes and expectations favour males' education over females' education. The assumption is that female students are kept busy doing home circumstance routine duties and do not have time to do their academic activities which might have affected the academic achievement of male students positively while it affected the academic achievement of female students negatively. However, at this level of education (college education), since female students are living away from their parents, they do not devote much of their time to doing home circumstance tasks. Rather, their study hours are equal to their male counterparts' which enables them to perform effectively in academic endeavours.

Conclusions

In conclusion, in this study emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour are significantly and positively correlated with the WCTE first-year diploma students' academic achievement. The multiple regression analysis revealed that emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour and psychological help-seeking behaviour positively and significantly predict the students' academic achievement. The independent *t*-test analysis results indicated that there exist statistically significant differences on students' emotional intelligence and psychological help-seeking behaviour based on gender. In this regard, male students were found to have higher emotional intelligence than female students and female students were found to be more psychological help seekers than male students. In contrast, there were no significant gender differences on students' academic help-seeking behaviour and academic achievement.

In general, this study clearly shows that emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, and psychological help-seeking behaviour variables are related to WCTE first-year college students' academic achievement. Thus, we have to find ways to foster the students' emotional intelligence, academic help-seeking behaviour, as well as psychological help-seeking behaviour in the interests of better academic achievement.

Recommendations

Based on the major findings and the conclusions drawn, the following points are implied to be taken into account by line stakeholders:

1. The college should:
   - prepare intensive orientation material about the importance of seeking academic and psychological help by initiating contact with professionals and present academic support when they first come to the college; and
   - emphasise social life, academic activities and adaptation mechanisms to the new environment by addressing problems of cultural norms and gender differences.

2. The college instructors ought to:
   - create smooth and friendly relationships with their students, and let the students know that the instructors are usually open and helpful;
   - give emphasis in the classroom and throughout the whole teaching and learning process to promoting emotional intelligence and academic help-seeking behaviour amongst the students; and
   - design lessons in a way that appeals to students' emotional needs and enhances emotional abilities.
   The reason for this is that even if they are academically successful but lack these skills, they may not be productive, especially in the areas of dealing with the emotional, social and behavioural issues of human beings.
   Additionally, the ability to integrate emotional information into cognitive activities is essential to effective functioning across the entire course of the students' lives.

3. On their part, the students have to:
   - develop the habit of asking for academic and psychological help/advisory and counselling services from their parents, teachers and counsellors; and
   - create friendly relationships with their parents and teachers so as to develop their emotional intelligence and help-seeking behaviours for their academic success as well as social relationships.

4. All bodies concerned, such as family, school community and community-based organisations should:
   - avoid imposing any cultural practices that could promote gender differences of emotional intelligence and help seeking behaviours;
   - play a greater role to prepare the students for high emotional intelligence through rewarding them and giving them recognition for their improved emotional intelligence within the family, the school environment and the community they live in; and
   - consider academic help-seeking behaviour and psychological help-seeking behaviour to prepare the students to contribute significantly to social capital and community services. Accordingly, attention should be given to the

emotional intelligence and help-seeking behaviours of college students rather than focusing only on their cognitive intelligence because these behaviours will be of vital importance in their professional services to the community.

Overall, the researcher would like to recommend that parents, instructors, counsellors and the college administrative bodies work on promoting students' emotional intelligence and help-seeking behaviours to enhance academic achievement of students in the WCTE. In addition, since the study was conducted in a limited area, it is more important to conduct a similar study that would represent a larger population of college students. In fact, it would be advisable for educators, curriculum designers, counsellors, etc., to focus not only on cognitive factors, but also on non-cognitive factors such as emotional intelligence and psychological help-seeking behaviour etc. in the teaching and learning process.

In summary, these findings have offered insight into the correlations between students' emotional intelligence, help-seeking behaviours and their academic achievement. Future research will also be needed to clarify the causes of gender differences between students' emotional intelligence and psychological help-seeking behaviour variables.

Acknowledgements

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Research article

Student Satisfaction Regarding Service Quality at Ethiopian Public Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study

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Abstract

The quality of services rendered to stakeholders at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is of critical importance to the esteem of these institutions. Perceptions of the quality of such services can be measured in various ways. This study assesses the extent of service quality as evaluated in students' satisfaction with services received at Ethiopian HEIs. To this end, data was collected from final-year undergraduate students at Ethiopian Public Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs). The Service Quality (SERVQUAL) questionnaire was administered. The collected data was analysed using the methodology of the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) model. Findings indicated that the majority of the elements that constitute attributes of service quality were perceived by students to be very poor. This is reflected in low satisfaction scores. It is recommended that HEIs identify those service areas that have high perceived importance scores and low perception scores on service-experience in order to redeploy some of the resources and implement measures to improve service quality.

Keywords

Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) model; public higher education institutions in Ethiopia; service quality; service quality improvement; student satisfaction

Introduction

Service quality in education, and particularly in higher learning, is a fundamental and important aspect of educational excellence (Malik, Danish & Usman, 2010). Universities are cognisant of the fact that exceptional service quality will set them apart from their competitors and therefore HEIs strive to incorporate sound market–orientation strategies into their business plans (Järvinen & Suomi, 2011). Universities in Ethiopia are no exception to this.

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Total enrolment at PHEIs[1] in Ethiopia escalated from 326 318 in 2007/08 to 729 028 in 2014/15 (Ministry of Education, 2016). This illustrates that the annual intake of undergraduate students has increased dramatically. Limited numbers of academic staff, many of whom are inexperienced, have accompanied this expansion of higher education. The situation has been exacerbated by limited funding and insufficient infrastructure, which have had a negative effect on the quality of education offered, resulting in stakeholder dissatisfaction (with reference to both the academic and administrative components of service). Therefore, to improve the sense of dissatisfaction and other conditions, several service quality improvement initiatives are currently underway at HEIs. However, despite dissatisfaction being expressed frequently, it is not common practice in Ethiopian education to measure service quality against variables of student satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This study identified satisfaction measurement as a gap in research knowledge and, in the research discussed in this article, measured service quality against specific dimensions which are based on the SERVQUAL (Service Quality) methodology and questionnaire (Malik et al., 2010). Malik et al. (2010) define service quality in terms of stakeholders'/students' perceptions of service once exposed to a specific service – be it academic or administrative – offered at their institution. According to SERVQUAL methodology, characteristics of quality can be identified, defined and measured (Malik et al., 2010). For example, identifiable service quality characteristics/quality criteria may include the reliability of the service (will the service/s be constantly available when required?); assurance (the assurance that issues raised will be attended to); tangibility (general appearance and upkeep of physical structures); empathy (the attitude of staff rendering services); and responsiveness (whether service requests are dealt with speedily). Mentioned quality characteristics are also referred to as SERVQUAL dimensions. These dimensions are further elaborated on in the methodology section of the article.

HEIs need to understand the quality attributes held by their stakeholders (Zafiropoulos & Vrana, 2008). For Shah (2009), institutions can improve the quality of service they offer if they listen to and incorporate feedback given by stakeholders. In 2008, all "first-generation universities" (universities established prior to 1998 are said to be first generation) carried out formal institutional self-evaluation processes for the first time to highlight good practices and identify ways of enhancing quality in all aspects of their institutions. HERQA's (Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency) quality audit teams assessed each HEI's self-evaluation document and feedback was given to each university. HERQA reported the strengths and weaknesses of these institutions; however, students' satisfaction with service delivery was not incorporated in this assessment. This fact motivated the current research because similar research into service quality in the Ethiopian context has not been undertaken. Accordingly, the purpose of the research reported in this article is to provide insight into the extent of students' satisfaction regarding the service delivery at Ethiopian PHEIs by posing the following research questions:

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1   The Higher Education Proclamation (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2003) regards "HEIs" and "PHEIs" as umbrella terminology for all universities, university colleges, colleges and institutes. In this study, "universities" is used interchangeably with "HEIs".

- To what extent are students satisfied with the service quality improvements at PHEIs?
- Which dimensions of service quality need to be prioritised because they are considered crucial by students in improving the service quality?
- Are there any gaps between the perceptions and importance of dimensions of service quality improvement?

The concepts of service quality and the measurement of service quality will be elaborated on in the following two sections. This is followed by a methodology section and the presentation of deductions derived from the quantitative results. Recommendations and conclusions form the last sections of the article.

Service Quality

Brysland and Curry (2001, p. 391) define service quality as "providing something intangible in a way that pleases the consumer and that gives some value to that customer". Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), in an earlier work, provide a comprehensive definition of service quality as a function of the difference between perceptions of service quality and expectations of what service quality ought to be. The literature furthermore defines service quality as the extent to which the quality of a service rendered matches the customer's expectations (Kitchroen, 2004; Kassim & Zain, 2010; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985).

According to Gbadamosi and Jager (2009), service quality in higher education is determined by the extent to which stakeholders' needs and expectations are satisfied. Okunoye, Frolick and Crable (2008) support this idea by stating that meeting the needs and expectations of stakeholders and complying with their values is an important competitive factor for the success of HEIs.

One of the fundamental and challenging steps in the improvement of service quality is the identification of the key stakeholders (Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno, 2008). According to Alves, Mainardes and Raposo (2010), stakeholders are individuals or groups of individuals who have the power to affect an institution, or to affect the objectives of the institution. Okunoye et al. (2008) describe staff (administrative), faculty and students as key stakeholders of services provided by HEIs. The research reported in this article focuses on the perceptions of students as stakeholders.

Ethiopian HEIs are expected to provide quality service to students. With reference to types of services students may expect to receive, the Business Process Re-engineering Document (Hawassa University, 2008) of the Hawassa University, for example, specifies services such as quality education at reasonable cost; swift and quality student services (e.g. registration, dissemination of examination results, and assured and reliable responses to valid queries); a peaceful and conducive environment; courteous treatment when dealing with university staff; proper advocacy and guidance services; and opportunities to develop leadership potential – to name but a few. Providing these and other services to students requires that university management and providers of services (both academic and administrative staff) be aware of students' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with such services.

The conceptual relationship between student satisfaction and service quality

Satisfaction is the difference between stakeholders' expectations and their perception of the service quality improvement. The higher the perceived service quality improvement, the higher stakeholders' satisfaction will be (Petruzzeluca, Uggento & Romanazzi, 2006). Knowledge of the stakeholders' expectations helps HEIs to reduce the gap between their expectations and service delivery. It also aids in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the service delivery of institutions. As a result, the institution improves its performance (Jackson, Helms & Ahmadi, 2011; Chen, Yang, Lin & Yeh, 2007; Petruzzeluca et al., 2006).

There is a positive correlation between satisfaction and loyalty, where an increase in satisfaction leads to an increase in loyalty (Douglas, Douglas & Barnes, 2006; Chen et al., 2007). The loyalty of stakeholders has implications for institutions and is manifested through returns to the organisation. Jongbloed et al. (2008), state that HEIs should frequently evaluate their level of commitment and degree of involvement in serving the demands of students. Superior service quality is achieved in an institution where students' needs are identified and addressed (Toremen, Karakus & Yasan, 2009; Jongbloed et al., 2008). Kitchroen (2004) contends that the dissatisfaction of students with HEIs' service quality is expressed in a decline of student admissions. Therefore, student satisfaction is a critical measure of service quality and HEI management should regularly evaluate student satisfaction.

In general, according to Chen et al. (2007), when student satisfaction is assessed to be low (dissatisfaction), such an assessment assists the institution in prioritising improvement initiatives. Knowledge of the perceptions of students assists institutional management in maximising satisfaction and minimising dissatisfaction. Jackson et al. (2011, p. 393) argue that "educational institutions, like businesses, are forced to confront the fact that, since perception is reality to customers, it is the perceptions that must be considered if improvements are to be recognized". The argument set out in the discussion up to this point leads to the deduction that the service-quality criteria of the SERVQUAL methodology (mentioned in the Introduction section of this article), namely: tangibles; responsiveness; reliability; assurance and empathy – when expressed as quantitative measurable concepts in the empirical research – serve as the operational framework for the study.

Models developed to quantify service quality attributes

Literature on service quality in the educational field proposes several models that measure or quantify criteria of service quality. These include, for example, the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988), the SERVPERF (Service Performance) model (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), the Evaluated Performance (EP) model (Teas, 1993), the IPA model (Martilla & James, 1977) and the HEdPERF (Higher Education Performance) model (Firdaus, 2006). This research uses a combination of the most commonly used models, namely the Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA) model and the SERVQUAL model to measure students' experience of service quality in Ethiopian HEIs.

Several empirical studies in various fields have been conducted using IPA models to assess service quality, for instance in higher education (Wright & O'Neill, 2002), amongst university students (Angell, Heffernan & Megicks, 2008; Douglas et al., 2006; O'Neill & Palmer, 2004; Joseph & Joseph, 1997) and in the transport service sector (Wang, Feng & Hsieh, 2010). Wright and O'Neill (2002) investigated the service quality at Western Australian higher education institutions by employing the IPA model. Douglas et al. (2006) measured student satisfaction at Liverpool John Moores University in the United Kingdom, using the IPA model. Angell et al. (2008) also used the IPA model for identifying the service factors used for quality evaluation by postgraduate students to analyse the appropriateness of IPA in the assessment of service quality and to provide a working example of IPA's application at a British university. They confirm that the IPA is a suitable tool for measuring service quality in HEIs.

In Wright and O'Neill's (2002) investigation of service quality at Western Australian HEIs based on the IPA model, results revealed that students' satisfaction level differed statistically significantly for certain core service quality dimensions compared to other dimensions. These results illustrate the usefulness of the IPA technique in evaluating service quality in a HEI context. Angell et al. (2008) similarly used the IPA model to quantify and identify critical service factors in a quality evaluation research project with postgraduate students of a HEI. Identification of specific critical factors in this instance again illustrates the suitability of the IPA model in measuring service quality at HEIs.

The IPA technique was originally developed by Martilla and James (1977). This technique seeks to identify the underlying importance ascribed by consumers to various quality criteria being assessed, when compared with perceived service satisfaction of delivered services (Wright & O'Neill, 2002). The objective of the IPA is to identify which attributes or combinations of attributes are the most influential in student satisfaction. Martilla and James (1977) state that the IPA assesses the underlying importance accorded by consumers to quality criteria, while simultaneously expressing satisfaction with services delivered according to the same quality criteria. The technique therefore delivers, pair-wise, importance/perceived service satisfaction ratings, which gauge agreement between perceived importance of a service and perceived service experienced.

Methodology

Sampling

The population for this quantitative study consisted of all final-year undergraduate students registered for an academic degree at 6 of the 31 public universities in Ethiopia (Ministry of Education, 2012). The six mentioned universities were selected as a first step of a two-stage stratified random sampling process. The establishment date of universities served as the first-level stratification classifier: universities established prior to 1998; those established between 1998 and 2011; and universities established after 2011. Two universities per stratum were randomly selected (universities per stratum were numbered and two numbers per stratum were drawn using a table of random numbers), namely Hawassa and Addis Ababa

universities from the first stratum (first-generation universities); Dilla and Woliata Soddo universities from the second stratum (second-generation universities); and Meda Wolabo and Dibre Markos universities from the third stratum (third-generation universities). Subsequently, students (250 per university) were proportionately and randomly selected per faculty for each university – faculties serving as a second-level stratification classifier. (The alphabetic faculty lists of undergraduate third-year students per university were numbered in each case. Using a table of random numbers, a proportion of 250 students was then randomly selected per faculty (depending on faculty size) for each university. This resulted in a total of 1 500 (6 x 250) students being selected from six universities.

Ethics

The ethical aspects of research were addressed in that ethical clearance for the research (which originally formed part of the doctoral studies of the first author) was applied for and granted by the Ethics Committee of the College of Education at Unisa. The necessary permission – via permission letters addressed to relevant academic managers – was also obtained from each university and faculty prior to questionnaire distribution and completion. Student respondents indicated their willingness to partake in the study by means of informed consent on the questionnaire.

Measuring service quality satisfaction perceptions: The SERVQUAL questionnaire

The modified SERVQUAL questionnaire (Parasuraman et al., 1991) was used to assess respondents' perceptions/or satisfaction of their *expectations of service quality*; *perceived experience of service quality*; and the *importance of service quality* at their university. Respondents expressed these three types of perceptions (*importance*, *experience of services rendered* and *expectations*) by rating three sets of 22 identical service criteria issues on a seven-point Likert rating scale. *Importance* perceptions were expressed according to a rating scale where 1 indicates "not important at all", up to 7, which indicates "extremely important". Likewise, *expected* and *experienced* perception scale ratings measured agreement: a score of 1 indicates "very strong disagreement", up to 7, which indicates "very strong agreement". The 22-item questionnaire probed dimensions/criteria of service quality labelled as *tangibles* (items 1–5), *reliability* (items 6–10), *responsiveness* (items 11–14), *assurance* of service delivery (items 15–18) and *empathy* (items 19–22). Of relevance to the discussions in this article are the rating responses of *importance* and *experienced service* perceptions to the 22 questionnaire items.

Parasuraman et al. (1988) explain that the *tangibles* dimension of the SERVQUAL questionnaire refers to the surroundings, physical facilities and equipment used in the delivery of services (e.g. the particular HEI) and to the appearance of the personnel. The dimension of *reliability* describes the ability of the service provider to deliver dependable and accurate services as promised. *Responsiveness* describes the service provider's willingness to assist stakeholders by providing prompt service, while *assurance* addresses the service provider's knowledge and ability to instil confidence in its stakeholders. The dimension

of *empathy* refers to the institution's readiness to provide individual care and attention to stakeholders.

Questionnaire administration

The responses to a total of 1425 completed questionnaires (of 1500 distributed) were electronically captured to an EXCEL spreadsheet for analysis purposes. The 1425 questionnaires represented a 95% response rate, which can be regarded as very good, since this far exceeds the response rate of similar studies (Nadiri, Kandampully & Hussain, 2009). The excellent response rate can be ascribed to the fact that respondents at each university completed the questionnaire in a single session, convened specifically for this purpose at each university.

The IPA strategy

The analysis and interpretation of captured data according to IPA methodology is based on the analysis strategy and reasoning set out below:

Mean rating responses (and their standard deviations) for the above mentioned *importance* and *perceived service experience* perceptions for each of the 22 service quality criteria questions are calculated. The differences between each mean–experience perception and mean–importance rating (referred to as the "gap" score) for each of the 22 service criteria are also calculated. This forms the crux of the IPA methodology argument: if the perceived *importance* (as reflected in the mean importance rating) and the *experienced perception* of service delivery (as reflected in the mean perception rating) on any of the 22 aspects of service quality agree, the gap score (which measures discrepancy between the two perceptions) will be small, as opposed to a larger gap score when perceptions of an aspect differs. A substantial gap will indicate a type of disparity between experience and expectation of service quality (to be elaborated on in terms of quadrants below).

IPA methodology simplifies the interpretation of the "gap" between perceived *importance* and *experienced* service delivery for all 22 service-delivery criteria by means of an IPA grid system (Figure 1). The grid system is structured in such a way that the two-axes system represents the *importance component* of the service quality assessment (the Y-axis) and the *perceived experience* of service quality (the X-axis). The origin of the grid system is positioned (the (x; y) coordinate in Euclidean space) where the x-coordinate assumes the value of the overall mean *perception rating* (also referred to as "perception of the experience of service quality rendered") of all 22 service quality criteria combined, and the y-coordinate assumes the value of the overall mean *importance rating* of all 22 service quality criteria. The 22 paired *importance/perceived service experience* service quality criteria ratings are then mapped onto the IPA grid system. If complete *importance–experience* agreement exists for any criterion, IPA methodology argues that the specific (x;y) coordinate will be positioned close to the origin. Any deviation (*importance/perceived service experience* discrepancy) will be indicated by plotted (x;y) coordinates positioned some distance from the origin in one of the four quadrants of the plot – an indication of satisfaction discrepancy.

Critical service areas that need improvement initiatives can be identified according to the quadrant that a specific (x;y) service-criteria coordinate falls in. Figure 1 below explains the quadrant interpretation of the IPA analysis technique: quadrant A (regarded as the quadrant that requires attention/**Concentrate here)** identifies service attributes perceived to be important, but are under-performing; quadrant C (**Low priority**) identifies service attributes perceived not to be that important, but that are also under-performing; quadrant B (**Keep up the good work**) identifies service attributes that are perceived to be important and that are performing well; and quadrant D (**Possible overkill**) identifies service attributes that are performing well, but are less important. Figure 1 summarises this argument.

Figure 1: Interpretation of the four quadrants in the IPA technique
Source: Adapted from Martilla & James (1977, p. 78)

Results and Discussion

The research context

Frequency tables (not included in this article) of biographical properties probed in the SERVQUAL questionnaire, described the biographical profile of the respondents and indicated a young, predominantly male group of respondents: 69.5% were male and 30.5% female. In the Ethiopian higher education system, the majority of students are still male, as reflected in the sample composition. Distribution according to age indicated that almost 64% of the respondents were between the ages of 22 and 24 years, and an additional 27.5% in the 19–21 age-bracket. Only 8.2% of the sampled students fell in the 25–27 age bracket and 0.3% were older than 27 years.

Results of the Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA)

As described in the methodology section, mean perception rating-scores (and standard deviations) were calculated for service *experienced* and *importance* perceptions of service quality for the 22 aspects of the SERVQUAL questionnaire. Results are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Perceived performance, importance and gap scores of individual IPA items for the student data set

Service dimension	Aspects of service probed	Perception of service experienced (P)		Perception of importance (I)		Gap score (P–I)	
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Tangibles	1. Modern equipment	3.13	1.74	6.77	0.53	–3.64	1.21
	2. Facilities appealing	3.51	2.04	6.61	0.70	–3.1	1.34
	3. Neatly dressed	2.83	1.72	6.63	0.68	–2.58	1.14
	4. Resources appealing	4.05	1.82	6.74	0.57	–3.91	1.15
	5. Fulfil promises agreed	3.14	1.81	6.75	0.57	–3.61	1.24
Reliability	6. Intent solve problem	3.37	1.78	6.76	0.53	–3.39	1.25
	7. Satisfactory service	3.44	1.77	6.73	0.57	–3.29	1.2
	8. Timely services	3.35	1.87	6.74	0.55	–3.39	1.32
	9. Error-free records	3.25	1.73	6.72	0.63	–3.47	1.1
	10. Inform re services	3.70	1.76	6.74	0.58	–3.04	1.18
Responsiveness	11. Prompt service	3.59	1.68	6.76	0.55	–3.17	1.13
	12. Willingness to assist	3.68	1.70	6.74	0.54	–3.06	1.16
	13. Not too busy, respond	3.42	1.71	6.60	0.70	–3.18	1.01
	14. Radiate confidence	3.57	1.70	6.64	0.64	–3.07	1.06
Assurance	15. Feel safe dealing university	3.72	1.73	6.72	0.59	–3.00	1.14
	16. Courteous behaviour	3.68	1.74	6.72	0.56	–3.04	1.18
	17. Sufficient knowledge	3.81	1.74	6.76	0.56	–2.95	1.18
	18. Individual attention	3.59	1.70	6.66	0.66	–3.07	1.04
Empathy	19. Convenient hours	3.72	1.79	6.68	0.62	–2.96	1.17
	20. Personal attention	3.12	1.65	6.66	0.62	–3.54	1.03
	21. Student–interest important	3.31	1.66	6.69	0.58	–3.38	1.08
	22. Understand needs	3.33	1.64	6.75	0.58	–3.42	1.06
	Overall Mean	**3.47**		**6.71**		**–3.24**	
	Valid N (multiple responses)	1425				–3.17	0.63

Figure 2 below provides a graphical presentation of the paired importance–experienced perceptions of students on the 22 aspects of service quality. Deductions summarised in the discussion section below Figure 2 are based on the quadrant guidance provided in Figure 1 of the methodology section.
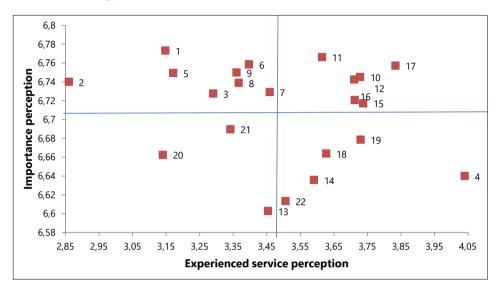

Figure 2: IPA plot of students' importance/experienced service delivery rating

Findings derived from the IPA (Table 1) and IPA plot (Figure 2)

The most crucial finding: quadrants A and C

The IPA rationale explained in the methodology section can be applied to Figure 2 and indicates that service aspects and dimensions that fall within quadrants A (Very important; poor service) and C (Not important, poor service) identify services that students perceive to be critical with respect to service quality. The labels and services that fall within these two quadrants are discussed under the next two bullet points:

- *Quadrant A: Important, but underperforming*

The IPA plot mapped services 1–3 and 5–9 (*modern equipment*; *appealing facilities*; *well-dressed staff*; *promises fulfilled*; *sincere problem-solving approach*; *satisfactory service*; *error-free records*; *punctuality*) onto quadrant A. These services describe the *tangibles and reliability* dimensions of service delivery. Students regard these two dimensions as important, but they are underperforming in terms of service quality. The deduction can be made that students regard the surroundings, physical facilities and equipment used to deliver services as important, but that these are lacking (*tangibles*). Students also place a high premium on *reliability* and find that service delivery in this regard is poor.

   In particular, the largest gap scores in quadrant A are identified as item 3, *staff neatly dressed* (*tangibles dimension*); item 5, *fulfil promises* (*reliability dimension*); and item 1, *modern*

equipment (*tangibles dimension*). The gap scores for these aspects are –3.91; –3.61 and –3.64 respectively. This suggests that, according to student perceptions, the appearance of the university staff and equipment, in particular, are unsatisfactory, and that service in Ethiopian higher education institutions is unreliable.

- *Quadrant C: Underperforming, but not critically important*

The IPA map reflects that students perceive elements of the *empathy* and *responsiveness* dimensions of service delivery to be underperforming, although they do not regard these elements as being critically important for service quality. These include item 20, *personal attention by staff*, and item 21, *an institution that has students' interests at heart*, which describe the *empathy* dimension of service delivery. Mean gap scores of –3.54 and –3.38 respectively were reported. The magnitude of these gap scores indicates a discrepancy between expectations and experiences. Likewise, item 13, *staff at an excellent university will not be too busy to respond to requests*, describes an aspect of the *responsiveness* dimension of service quality. A mean gap score of –3.18 is reported in this instance, which again identifies a discrepancy between expectation and experience.

These listed services will also affect students' perceptions of service quality because they (the students) noted their experiences of underperforming services. Therefore, although the students did not place as high a premium on these services as on those listed in quadrant A, these services nevertheless influence their general perception of service adequacy. Universities would do well to institute improvement initiatives in these areas. It can be deduced that students view willingness to assist (*responsiveness*) and readiness to provide individual care (*empathy*) as aspects of service that are underperforming at their higher education institution.

In general, services and service dimensions falling into quadrants A and C require serious attention from university management to ensure student satisfaction.

Other findings derived from the IPA and IPA plot: quadrants B and D

The IPA rationale explained in Figure 1 indicates that services classified as falling within either quadrant B or D define services viewed as *important and performing well* – in other words, quality service – or services that are *good performers, but not that important* (once again quality service). The labels and services that fall within these two quadrants are discussed under the next two bullet points:

- *Quadrant B: Important and performing well*

The IPA plot mapped services 10–12 and 15–17 (*staff inform students of services to be performed*; *staff provide prompt services*; *staff are willing to assist*; *students feel safe to deal with the university*; *staff are courteous towards students*; *staff are knowledgeable regarding services*) onto quadrant B. These services describe elements of the *reliability*; *responsiveness* and *assurance* dimensions of service quality. Students regard aspects or elements of these dimensions as important and experience these aspects as quality service. In this regard the deduction can be made that, to students, certain aspects of their institution's *reliability* regarding services rendered;

willingness to assist students (*responsiveness*) and their institution's knowledge and ability to assure students (*assurance*) are important and that students perceive these components of service as quality services. This finding proves that universities have, to a certain extent, achieved an acceptable level of service quality – according to students – with specific components of their services. Therefore, the good work achieved in these areas should be acknowledged.

• *Quadrant D: Not important, but performing well*

The IPA plot mapped services 4, 14, 18–19 and 22 onto quadrant D (*visual appeal of services*; *staff behaviour that instils confidence in students*; *staff pay individual attention to students*; *convenient lecture and office hours*; *staff understand special needs of students*). These services describe elements of the *tangibles*; *responsiveness*; *assurance* and *empathy* dimensions of service quality. Students regard these elements of the greater dimensions as less important but appreciate the quality of services delivered in these areas. It can be deduced that students perceive specific components of their institution's willingness to assist students (*responsiveness*), *physical appearance* surrounding services (*tangibles*); *assurance*; and readiness to provide individual care (*empathy*) as quality service elements even though they do not perceive these elements to be that important. Management could well reflect on whether attention given to these areas could be scaled down to some extent and focus intensified on elements identified as important issues where students expressed dissatisfaction.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed that students' satisfaction with service quality was low. Most aspects of the service quality dimensions of *reliability* and *tangibles* proved to be the criteria of service quality that students considered to be very poor. The two other dimensions are of somewhat lesser importance (*responsiveness-assurance* and *empathy*). The implication is that an improvement of service quality in especially specific aspects of the dimensions of *reliability* and *tangibles* will lead to satisfaction perceptions of service quality amongst students as stakeholders of HEIs. In order to improve students' service quality satisfaction, university management should therefore design workable improvement initiatives focused on the identified aspects of especially *reliability*, *tangibles*, *empathy*, *responsiveness* and *assurance*.

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Quality Enhancement in Student Affairs and Social Justice: A Reflective Case Study from South Africa

Thierry M. Luescher*

Abstract

Quality enhancement in student affairs is an integral part of professional practice, and its documentation and reflective evaluation are important in the ongoing professionalisation of student affairs in Africa. This article proposes a way of conceptualising a reflective scholarship of practice in student affairs in Africa and method to conduct reflective practice studies to build a relevant knowledge base. Based on this methodology, it then analyses a student affairs quality enhancement review at a South African university in detail, showing its conceptualisation and implementation, and reflecting on its outcomes. The article thus provides evidence of a 'home-grown', 'activist' quality enhancement review that focuses on key issues in the South African context and the context of the case university: the professionalisation of student affairs, the co-curriculum, and social justice models such as participatory parity, universal design for learning, and student engagement.

Introduction

Quality assurance and a commitment to the enhancement of quality in student affairs and services is an integral part of professional practice (Mandew, 2003). While quality assurance (QA) generally refers to processes "designed to ensure that specific standards are met and maintained through policies, procedures, monitoring and evaluation", quality enhancement (QE) is conceptually different in that it focuses on "deliberate, continuous, systematic and measurable improvement" and is meant to facilitate a process to "raise the standards, creating different benchmarks and new standards to be quality assured" (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2014, pp. 10–11). Both processes are a kind of assessment, i.e. "a systematic and critical process that yields information about what programmes, services, or functions of a student affairs department or division positively contribute to

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students' learning and success and which ones should be improved" (Bresciani, Gardner & Hickmott, 2012, p. 16, in Gansemer-Topf, 2013, p. 26). Unlike the continuous and day-to-day types of assessment done as part of the professional work of student affairs, such as needs assessments, participation and satisfaction surveys, and outcomes assessments (Gansemer-Topf, 2013, p. 27), QA and QE processes provide a macro-level, meta-assessment of student affairs and services. In the South African context, these processes are particularly important as part of the ongoing process of professionalisation and the need to ensure that as higher education further massifies and diversifies, student affairs plays its distinctive role of focusing on the personal, cognitive and emotional growth and maturation of all students as well as enhancing students' attainment of graduate attributes and contributing to student engagement and success (Kuh, 2009; Ludeman, Osfield, Hildago, Oste & Wang, 2009; Luescher-Mamashela, Moja & Schreiber, 2013).

In South Africa, a uniform, systematic national approach to QA in higher education was developed and implemented from the early 2000s. However, only its reconceptualisation in line with a QE model in the last five years has included a deliberate focus on student affairs and services (CHE, 2014, 2016). At the institutional level, a number of South African universities are applying in some functional areas and often for accreditation purposes either the widely used international system of quality assessment in student affairs developed by the American Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), or specific assessment tools developed by South African professional councils. A key issue with using CAS, as with regard to any QA instruments, is "the transferability of systems established elsewhere in the world" (Harvey & Williams, 2010).

Whereas the national QE process of student affairs and services in South Africa has been well documented by the CHE (e.g. CHE, 2015), there is little literature available as yet on institution-level processes of QA/QE in student affairs in South Africa or more widely across the continent. Annual reports of certain universities, such as Makerere University in Uganda, suggest that quality assessments of student affairs are taking place (MAK, 2013). However, documentation specific to student affairs is scarce, and there is almost no evidence of reflective student affairs scholarship on the topic coming out of Africa. Meanwhile, the professionalisation of student affairs requires a reflective scholarship (Carpenter & Haber-Curran, 2013) that critically engages with national- and institutional-level experiences of QA/QE in student affairs and thus adds to the growing knowledge base of student affairs in Africa.

This article describes and analyses the conceptualisation and implementation of an institutional student affairs QE process at a medium-sized public university in South Africa. The student affairs QE review conducted in the course of 2015 was purposed as means to enhance the quality of student affairs and services at that university. The university leadership intended the review to provide evidence of the 'transformation' of student affairs in line with strategic goals of the university. The review should therefore show how projects and services had been re-conceived over the term of the outgoing dean in line with the university's commitments to social justice, reconfigured as co-curricular programmes, and

were contributing to student engagement, while also producing recommendations for further improvements to this effect. It thus sought to give effect to Tinto's maxim:

> Effective student support does not arise by chance. It is not solely the result of good intentions. Rather it requires the development of an intentional, structured, proactive approach that is coherent, systematic and coordinated in nature. (Tinto, 2014, p. 17)

As a reflection on QE as a student affairs practice at the example of a particular case university, this article considers first the concept and methodology of a reflective scholarship of practice for student affairs in Africa. It proposes a definition of a scholarship of practice in student affairs and a method and way of reporting engagement in reflective practice by means of a scholarly article. It thus provides a practical proposal for a contextually relevant, critically reflective scholarship of practice as foundation for the development of theory grounded in student affairs practice.

The article then introduces the setting and organisation of student affairs and services at the case university at the time of the review, followed by an outline of the conceptualisation of the Student Affairs Review, the principles underpinning it, and its methodology and implementation. In its third part, the outcomes of the review are discussed with reference to the report of the external review panel, and as part of the final reflections it considers the social justice dimensions of the review, its conception as 'activist' review, as well as other learnings that can be derived from the review overall.

A Reflective Scholarship of Practice as a Methodology in Student Affairs

Carpenter and Haber-Curran (2013) discuss key principles involved in the development of scholarly practice in African student affairs to "promote data- and theory-based intentionality of practice" (p. 1). They argue that scholarly practice requires relevant data and theory that is meaningful in an African context. Correspondingly, Blumberg (1990) had argued earlier that scholarly practice requires the intentional development of a body of knowledge that is useful to practitioners; one that does not claim universality but is focused on practice itself; one that is specific to the 'craft' and yet not esoteric or trivial. Based on Blumberg's insightful discussion, a fit-for-purpose scholarship of practice in student affairs therefore involves a number of elements:

- A scholarship of practice in student affairs deals with problems that are meaningful to practitioners and that practitioners can experientially relate to; it understands practice as action, as performance, as a deliberate, skilled way of doing things.
- It studies practice in a scholarly manner that is intentional and part of a process of learning, academically rigorous and systematic, and that results in trustworthy accounts, analyses, and interpretations.
- It can address different kinds of practitioner-relevant knowledges: (1) the nature of the practice and the circumstances it is practised under, and/or (2) matters of practitioners' self-understanding and personal skills. It does so by means of description, analysis, critical reflection, interpretation, and even speculation.

- It seeks to attain a body of knowledge that enables practitioners to transfer learning to their own practice reflectively so as to enhance their practice.
- It produces the empirical building blocks towards the development of a theory of practice that enables scholars to ask yet better questions and reflective practitioners to understand their practice in ways they have not previously.

As a way of translating this conception of a purposeful scholarship of practice in student affairs into the format of a reflective practice article, case studies in Morgan's (2012) book, *Improving the Student Experience*, provide a worthwhile template to draw on. Building on her work, the structure and key components of a reflective practice article could respond to the following points and questions:

- **Contextual information** about the higher education system, the institution and its student body, and the student affairs department where a practice is housed;
- **Title and description of the practice**, i.e. an intervention, project, initiative, programme or service;
- **Reasons for the practice**: Why was this practice developed and adopted? What was its purpose and objectives? Who was the target group? What outcomes were envisaged?
- **Conceptualisation and implementation of the practice**: How was the practice conceived and developed? What was included/excluded? How was the practice implemented? What were its costs (including non-costed issues like time)? How was it managed, monitored and evaluated?
- **Reflections on the practice**: What were the outcomes in terms of achieving its purposes? What worked, what did not work, and why? What recommendations for improvement can be made?
- **Reflections on ethics and transferability**: What ethical considerations must be noted in relation to the practice? What is the potential of transferring the practice to other target groups or implementing it in different institutional and campus settings?
- **Reflections on the account**: What is the trustworthiness of this reflective practice account? What biases may be implicit? How does it contribute to a scholarship of practice in student affairs? What further research may be required?

It is with this definition of a scholarship of practice and related method in mind that this article has been developed.

This article draws on three sets of data:

1. Widely accessible documented data on the higher education system and institution, particularly annual reports, institutional policy documents, and the like;
2. Internal university documents specifically developed for the student affairs review at the case institution. While these documents are not publicly available (e.g. not uploaded on the institutional website), they have been distributed internally and are in no sense 'classified' and can be distributed without restriction; and
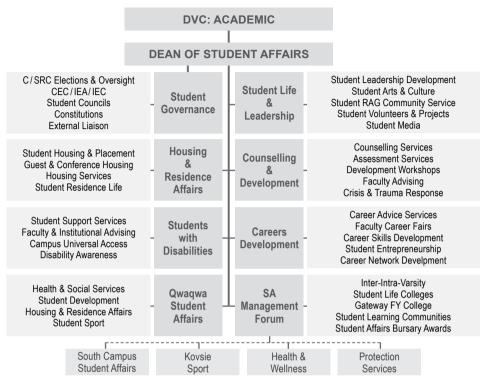3. Personal insights into the review process.

At the time, I was responsible for institutional research at the case university and tasked by the university leadership and QA directorate to conceptualise and implement the student affairs QE review together with the leadership and practitioners of student affairs at the university, as well as other stakeholders. This article is therefore strictly speaking not the reflection of a student affairs practitioner but that of an institutional researcher-cum-QE practitioner at the case university.
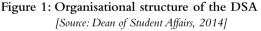
Student Affairs and Services at the Case University

In the year preceding its student affairs QE review, the case university celebrated 110 years of existence during which it had become a medium-sized public university operating from two metropolitan campuses in a provincial capital of South Africa and a smaller campus in a rural part of the province. Its student body was made up of just over 31 000 registered students, of which 73% were undergraduate, 22% postgraduate and 5% occasional students; 2 092 were international students, and 2 200 in campus-based residences (and many more in private off-campus student residences and privately rented accommodation surrounding the campuses) (UFS, 2014, p. 10). Overall the student body was starting to reflect the demographic composition of wider South African society.

Having been designated during apartheid as exclusively white, Afrikaans-tuition university, the institution was amongst the public universities in South Africa to undergo a set of far-reaching changes, including an ongoing process of language policy review (e.g. Van der Merwe & Van Reenen, 2016). In the early 1990s, after the removal of restrictions on access for black students, the institution adopted a dual English/Afrikaans tuition model and thereafter admitted increasingly larger numbers of black students. In the early 2000s, the originally white metropolitan campus was merged with two smaller campuses of historically black universities in a deliberate attempt by the national government to break with "the geopolitical imagination of apartheid" in the higher education sector (Asmal, 2002, p. 1). By 2014, the racial composition of the student body had changed in such a way that black students made up 71% and female students 62% of the student body. In contrast, the vast majority of permanent academic and student affairs staff remained white and male (DIRAP, 2016, pp. 9–10).

Student support services were delivered primarily by three independent units: Student Academic Services, the Division of Student Affairs (DSA), and a Centre for Teaching and Learning. The DSA, headed by a dean of student affairs, reported directly to a vice-rector/deputy vice-chancellor responsible for academic and student affairs. The DSA was internally structured into several units and departments, respectively responsible for student governance, student life and leadership (including student media, arts and culture, and leadership development), student housing and residence affairs (including eight clusters of student residences called 'student life colleges'), student counselling and development, a unit for students with disabilities, and a unit for careers development (Dean of Student Affairs, 2014; UFS, 2015, p. 61; see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Organisational structure of the DSA
[Source: Dean of Student Affairs, 2014]

Student affairs at the case university was an institutional function operating across the three campuses, with an emphasis (or rather bias) towards the metropolitan, historically white campus. Moreover, a few years ago, the university had notionally established eight student life colleges as clusters of existing on-campus residences and day student houses, which were meant to act as the delivery sites of the student affairs co-curriculum. However, in reality the 'old' centralised structure of student affairs and service model remained operationally dominant and responsible for the delivering of services, training and projects in a traditional centralised 'service model' manner, following the functional areas of student affairs (see Figure 1). The restructuring of student affairs in alignment with the college life model and a co-curriculation of student affairs were considered ongoing processes.

Conceptualising the Review

Given that the dean of student affairs, who had been put in place in the wake of a widely publicised racist incident at the university in 2009 (i.e. the 'Reitz incident' analysed in detail in Van der Merwe and Van Reenen, 2016), was leaving the institution by the end of 2014, an assessment of progress made by the DSA in terms of its transformation was timely. The DSA strategic plan sought to position its core student life function as part of "the heartbeat of the transformation process within various student cohorts" (DSA, 2013, p. 6).

Meanwhile, there was a concern by a new vice-rector responsible for academic and student affairs that the DSA transformation was strong on claims and weak on evidence. A QE review would ensure that the rectorate knew exactly what was being handed over to a new dean due to be appointed in the course of 2015. The institutional QA directorate, which facilitates the process of quality reviews at the university, was tasked to drive the conceptualisation and implementation of a student affairs QE review in collaboration with the DSA and to account for its outcomes to the responsible vice-rector.

The Student Affairs Review was conceived in line with the university's general institutional QE framework (DIRAP, 2014), which outlines the rationale and conceptual and practical principles for QE at the university across its academic core functions. The same also apply to quality reviews of administrative and support functions of the institution, and the framework had previously been applied to a review of the university's library and information services. Within that broad framework, the Student Affairs Review methodology followed closely that of the university's *Guidelines for the Institutional Curriculum Review* (DIRAP, 2012). It was therefore based on QE guidelines originally developed for *academic* learning programmes. This implied that the co-curricular programmes of the DSA ought to be comparable to the curricular programmes offered in the faculties.

As starting points, a set of process principles and substantive review principles were elaborated in collaboration between the university's QA directorate and the DSA. The six process principles to guide the operationalisation of the review were: peer review; honesty and openness; accountability; collegial leadership; programme focus; and knowledge-based improvement (DIRAP, 2015, p. 5). The ten substantive review principles contained in the *Guidelines for the Student Affairs Review* acted as high-level assessment criteria (DIRAP, 2015). They were more contextual to the specific situation of the university, more normative and evidently conceptualised to steer the thinking of student affairs practitioners into key directions.

A key area of assessment was to be the DSA's *contribution to human reconciliation* or what the university called its 'human project'. Commitments to equity and social justice also informed principles such as *open and comprehensive access* (to student affairs programmes) and the notion of *pathways of lived experience*. The assessment should consider the extent to which *all* students[1] have *equal access and opportunity to participate, diversity of perspectives* in programmes and achieve programme goals; and therefore that programmes are designed to *serve a cross-section of students* that is representative in terms of the demographics of the student body.

The principle of *broader and higher impact* focused the assessment not only on questions of *efficiency, effectiveness* and *value for money*, but also prompted the focus on enhancing student success – both in specific academic terms as well as with respect to a number of civic graduate attributes – in line with the assessment principle of *student engagement*. The

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1   The listing of relevant demographic characteristics in the *Guidelines* is extensive and includes: race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth; as well as academic qualification, discipline, and year of study.

question here was to reflect on ways in which student affairs programmes enhance student engagement, for instance, by means of using 'high-impact practices' (HIPs).[2]

The idea of co-curriculation infused in the QE review was prominent and meant to provide a way of re-conceptualising student affairs towards strengthening the delivery of interventions as part of co-curricular programmes in support of fostering graduate attributes.[3] Related principles included *co-curricular integrity and alignment with graduate attributes* and the notions of *progression* and *combination*. The argument was that the endpoint of all student affairs restructuring should be a 'seamless' co-curriculum (compare Moja & France, 2015).

The final two substantive principles for the QE review focused respectively on students and staff. The principles of *student-centredness* and *responsiveness to special needs* required evidence to demonstrate the responsiveness of student affairs programmes to student interests and needs. The principles of *professionalism* and *quality* then spoke to the idea that the review ought to enhance the professionalism of student affairs practitioners.

Operationalisation

From the perspective of the practitioners involved in the actual review, the most important part of the *Guidelines for the Student Affairs Review* were the so-called 'focus areas'. The outline of focus areas provided specific instructions for conducting a self-evaluation of all offerings, and the structure of self-evaluation reports. Firstly, it required that departmental ad-hoc task teams were constituted to prepare a complete list of all programmes and activities per department; a list of evidence collected for self-evaluation including existing policies, strategic or action plans, milestones and goals, monitoring data and other evidence of performance such as evaluation surveys, student data and evaluations, etc; and a four- to six-page-long self-evaluation report per programme. In this manner, every department was required to self-evaluate its offerings using the points and questions listed by focus area (see Box 1; DIRAP, 2015, pp. 10–11).

Implementing the Review

The pre-review process unfolded with initial meetings in late 2014 between the outgoing dean of student affairs, the incoming acting dean of student affairs, the vice-rector: academic and student affairs, and the assistant director for institutional research in the university's QA directorate who led the process. During these meetings, subsequent drafts of the *Guidelines for the Student Affairs Review* were discussed. Given the ambitiousness of the QE process,

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2   Student engagement is defined as "the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities" (Kuh, 2009, p. 683). It involves aspects of academic engagement and social integration, as well as social and political engagement (e.g. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Kuh, 2009; Strydom & Mentz, 2010; Luescher-Mamashela et al., 2015).

3   The graduate attributes proposed in the case university include: (1) scholarship; (2) active *glocal* citizens; (3) lifelong learning; (4) inquiry focused and critical; (5) academic and professional competence; (6) effective knowledge worker; and (7) leaders in communities.

Box 1: Self-evaluation focus area

Focus 1: Design of the programme
- ✓ Illustrate how the programme reflects the interests/needs of students.
- ✓ Describe the purpose, objectives, and strategies of this programme.
- ✓ Does the programme meet specific requirements of national policy and legislation and/or of national/international professional associations in this area of Student Affairs (if applicable)?
- ✓ Compare the purpose and type of programme to the applicable CAS standards and criteria. (This is optional and must be done separately.)
- ✓ Is the programme an integral part of the co-curriculum of the UFS? Consider: How do the programme design and intended outcomes fit into the bigger picture of the co-curriculum and the academic curriculum? Specify the following:
    - Appropriate programme title
    - Intended learning outcomes and/or graduate attributes to be fostered
    - Target students: numbers, year(s) of study, special constituencies; assess the actual number and representivity of participants with programme goals
    - Articulation with other co-curricular and curricular programmes, e.g. UFS gateway programme; UFS101; other relevant curricular and co-curricular programmes.
    - Methodology of programme delivery
- ✓ Discuss the effectiveness of the programme in attaining identified objectives/outcomes and attributes:
    - To what extent are the identified purpose and objectives met and intended learning outcomes and graduate attributes attained? What evidence exists to substantiate this or, in other words, how do you know what you have done well?
    - What challenges and obstacles do the department/office face in accomplishing programme objectives?
    - What has been accomplished and done well?
    - What is needed to achieve objectives and what are your ideas for the future of the programme (especially in relation to the restructured, student life college-based Student Affairs)?
- ✓ Explain how the department addresses the issues of:
    - Professionalism and quality
    - Knowledge-based improvement

Focus 2: Integration in the co-curriculum, college structure, and articulation
- ✓ Does the programme articulate/integrate with the totality of the co-curriculum? Illustrate how the programme (and its activities, events) forms part of a coherent co-curriculum that provides for meaningful articulation with cognate curricular/co-curricular programmes, including those offered by CTL (e.g. UFS 101).
- ✓ Explain how the programme enables combinations with other programmes and progression towards the attainment of graduate attributes.
- ✓ Reflect on the programme's current institutional location in our office and department; its relation to the structure of student life colleges; and its relation to other structures in the curricular and co-curricular space.
- ✓ Reflect on the department's capacity to offer the programme, including the possibility of upscaling and enhancing the programme to reach a broader student population and have a higher impact (also see below).

Focus 3: Human reconciliation and student engagement
- ✓ Demonstrate how the programme acknowledges the importance of human reconciliation by reflecting on:
    - The content and strategies of programme delivery in relation to the UFS human project.
    - The programme purpose, outcomes and types of assessment/evaluation.
    - Integration of human reconciliation in students' lived experience; pathways of lived experience; diversity of perspectives (see 'substantive principles of review' above).
- ✓ Does the programme target any specific groups of students? Reflect on the suitability of limiting access to participation in the programme in terms of:
    - Principles of open and comprehensive access; effective provision with broader and higher impact; responsiveness to student interests and needs (including special needs) (see 'substantive principles of review' above).
    - Resource needs (current costs; capacity constraints; costs of a potential upscaling).
- ✓ Reflect on ways the programme enhances student engagement.
    - How does the programme relate to and impact on students' academic success?
    - Does the methodology of programme delivery involve any high-impact practices of student engagement (such as staff-student interaction; first-year seminars; learning communities; meaningful engagement with diverse others; etc.)?
    - How does it relate to the development of high level graduate competences such as critical thinking skills, leadership skills, civic skills, diversity and social skills (cf. proposed graduate attributes).

[Source: DIRAP (2015, pp. 10–11]

it was clear to all that this would be a laborious undertaking. Two staff members – one in the dean's office and another in the QA directorate – were assigned full-time to work on the review and support student affairs unit heads and staff in the process. In addition, a budget of about R100 000 (USD 8 000) was set aside for the visit of the external panel, to cover all travel costs as well as honoraria for the panel members. As part of the pre-review process, the QA directorate made several presentations to the Student Affairs Management Forum, i.e. a forum of all heads of departments and units in the DSA, and upon invitation, to the individual departments and units included in the QE review. It was also during these meetings that some of the issues arising – including fears of retrenchments – could be addressed.

Almost all student affairs core units were included in the review:

- **The Office of the Dean of Student Affairs**, including but not limited to the DSA Secretariat; the Student Affairs Management Forum; the Student Affairs Research Desk; the student bursary awards; as well as student governance.
- **Department of Student Life**, which was responsible for the first-year orientation programme "Gateway"; student leadership development; student arts and culture; student community service programmes "Receive and Give/RAG"; student volunteers and projects; student media (including the student-run radio and TV station); the "No Student Hungry" campaign; and other programmes and activities.
- **Department of Residence Life**, including the structures and programmes of the student life colleges, as well as its peer mentoring programme.
- **Department of Health and Wellness**, especially including all programmes related to student health and wellness.
- **Student Affairs and Services** offered on the two satellite campuses of the university, including the areas and related units reviewed on the main campus.
- **The Unit for Students with Disabilities** programmes and **Student Counselling and Development**, which also included careers development, asked to be voluntarily included in this review.

The review excluded programmes in student housing and residence affairs other than those offered by the Department of Residence Life. It also excluded the departments responsible for student sport and protection services. Amongst the reasons for this exclusion were that these departments reported to the vice-rector: operations, rather than via the dean of student affairs to the vice-rector: student affairs. The structures of student government, such as the Central Students' Representative Council (SRC), the campus SRCs, and student government structures in student residences, faculties and departments were also excluded and eventually reviewed separately a year later. Overall, the Student Affairs Review was implemented in a two-phase process that officially started in February 2015 and was concluded in August of the same year.

Review Process

The process of evaluation comprised two phases: a self-evaluation of programmes (Phase 1) conducted by the student affairs practitioners themselves; and an external review involving a visiting panel of expert peers (Phase 2). The full process is outlined in Figure 2.
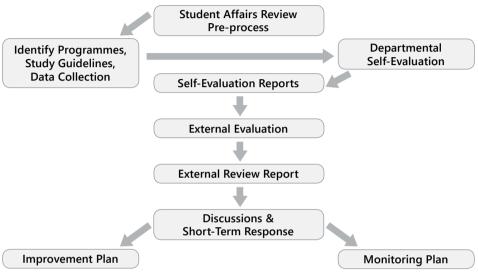

Figure 2: Student Affairs review process
[Source: DIRAP, 2015, p. 13]

Phase 1: Self-evaluation

The process of self-review involved that all units formed task teams to evaluate their programmes in terms of the principles and objectives of the review, using the three focus areas as specific guidelines and template. In addition, it was initially proposed that the acting dean of student affairs, in consultation with programme coordinators, would assist departments in identifying relevant CAS Standards. A CAS standards–related evaluation exercise parallel to the assessment in line with the focus areas (box 1 above) was meant to provide a platform for an (international standards–based) critique in addition to the specific foci of the review. However, most departmental task teams opted *not* to use the CAS standards but to only use the internal review guidelines.

The task teams were appointed by the head of each department and comprised a programme coordinator and others involved in the delivery of a programme (or intervention, activity, project or service) and, as far as possible, a student leader and a programme alumnus as a way of incorporating the student voice in the process. Thus, Phase 1, as a process of self-review, affirmed the professional responsibilities of student affairs practitioners and enabled them to take ownership of the process and accordingly facilitate

a trustworthy review. All self-evaluation reports were concluded and submitted to the QA directorate within three months (by May 2015), following which they were edited and put into a uniform format to be submitted to the members of the external evaluation panel.

Phase 2: External panel evaluation

The purpose of the external peer review was to provide a holistic, external, expert view of student affairs provision at the case university, including commendations of good practice and recommendations for improvement. For this purpose, an external evaluation panel was constituted which originally comprised of six peers selected to have collectively professional and/or academic expertise of all the areas of student affairs under review. Additional appointment criteria were that they needed to have prior assessment experience, a good understanding of the South African and university-specific context, and be representative demographically in terms of race and gender.

On the advice of the QA directorate and in consultation with the acting dean and the Student Affairs Management Forum, the vice-rector appointed: a retired vice-rector of a South African university as chair of the panel; a director of student affairs of a South African university; the author of the student affairs 'bible' *A Guide to Student Services in South Africa* (2003) who at the time was campus director of a university of technology; a clinical psychologist who was director of a local university's centre for student support; an American expert in student affairs and professor of educational leadership working at a university in California; and the director of QA of an East African flagship university. Eventually, only the first five were able to participate in the panel. The panel was provided with summaries of the self-evaluation reports ahead of their site visit. The actual site visit was conducted over a week in June 2015. During their intense time on campus, the panel members perused the self-evaluation reports and related evidence in detail, visited a number of departments, interviewed student affairs staff, students and student leaders, and had meetings with the university leadership.

Outcomes of the review

The external QE panel concluded its work in August 2015 by submitting a 30-page report to the QA directorate. Amongst its first set of recommendations was that student affairs at the university needed to build "a strong and intellectually respected identity" (External Panel 2015, p. 14) and its discourse, culture and practices had to become part of the institutional culture and practices (p. 18). The panel proposed that student affairs adopts a theoretical change-behaviour model for changing the institutional and student culture of the university (p. 16). For this purpose, not only governance and management changes would have to be introduced but there was a need to develop an overarching strategic plan for student affairs aligned to the university's strategic plan (p. 11), campus-specific strategic plans, and a better integration of the DSA across all campuses and units (p. 14). The latter would also help to create a sense of common purpose and belonging across all campuses and eventually ensure equivalence in facilities, resourcing and service provision across all campuses (pp. 10–11).

The co-curriculation of DSA offerings and its interface with the academic curriculum featured strongly in the report. The panel recommended that the DSA conducts a rigorous design, conceptualisation, implementation, and assessment of programmes (p. 15) and ensures that its co-curricular programmes would be informed by a critical pedagogy, that they would be evidence-based and research-driven. It would need to identify high-impact practices and have ongoing QE processes (p. 13). In the process, the DSA should reduce the overall number of student affairs programmes, invest in fewer, stronger, and better designed programmes (p. 15), and create a deliberate, 'hard' interface between the student affairs co-curriculum and the academic curriculum (p. 13). It argued that such a 'hard' interface would be easy to create with the formal curriculum as regards, for example, Student Affairs Arts and Culture and the academic departments of fine arts, drama and theatre arts; Student Affairs Media and the academic Department of Communication Sciences, Student Affairs Volunteerism and the Directorate for Community Engagement, and so forth. (p. 15)

With regard to the college model, the panel argued that the DSA should not consider day students as 'appendages' to the residence system, but consider the development of a day students/commuter students' resource centre and related programmes (informed *inter alia* by needs assessment studies) (p. 7). The college model was seen as an opportunity to emphasise "an academic focus, cultural theme, social justice emphasis, environmental ecological lens, wellness scope, etc." in the creation of student learning communities (pp. 5–7).

Finally, with respect to the professionalisation of student affairs, the report argued that a new, yet to be appointed dean of student affairs should have a doctoral qualification. Collaborations with research and academic units on campus should be harnessed to develop programmes and training programmes on building community, anti-racism, reconciliation, etc. (p. 15). The university's School of Higher Education Studies, in turn, was named as the place to develop short learning courses for DSA staff and eventually professional qualifications focused on student affairs to contribute to the professionalisation of student affairs at the university and beyond (p. 8).

Final Reflections

In keeping with the purposes of a reflective practice account, a number of matters deserve deeper consideration and reflection. They include substantive matters related to the conceptualisation of the QE review, like the way it sought to give effect to notions of social justice, the pitfall of conceiving a QE process too much in activist terms, and process-specific matters such as the locus of accountability in the implementation of an institutional QE review.

Social justice and the QE review

The place of social justice in assessment has received growing attention in scholarly literature on learning assessment (e.g. McArthur, 2016). In context-specific student affairs literature, Schreiber (2014, p. 211) has recently proposed participatory parity, universal design for learning (UDL), and student engagement, as three conceptual models to enhance student affairs' contribution to social justice in South Africa.

She notes that participatory parity involves that student affairs must "create opportunities for people to participate on an equal footing" and that a transformative, social justice approach to student affairs must address the "underlying social structures that [continue to] generate these inequities" (Bozalek & Carolissen, 2014, pp. 15–16, in Schreiber, 2014, p. 214). This implies that "we need to organise student support services and programs in such a way that all students have equal opportunity to interact and participate in them" (Schreiber, 2014, p. 214).

With respect to UDL, Schreiber argues that UDL "affirms students' diversity and promotes flexible learning environments as a normative framework to accommodate the range of individual styles of learning and development". In the practice of student affairs it requires "multiple means of representation", "multiple means of expression", and "enticing students to engage in support and development via multiple routes". UDL thus requires that student affairs services and programmes "span the range of interactions, modalities, styles, and media" so as to reach a diversity of students (Schreiber, 2014, p. 215).

Thirdly, the student engagement model implies that student affairs work must become increasingly "integrated into and articulated with the academic life of the institution". Schreiber argues that there is ample evidence in the literature to show that "the goals of student engagement serve the goals of equity and participation, especially if the engagement framework is conceptualised beyond the normative and focuses on those specific groups for whom engagement with and connection to the academic environment is already a challenge" (Schreiber, 2014, p. 216). Especially groups of students that do not fit the 'traditional' student model need to be reached with newly designed institutional strategies and interventions that promote engagement. The promotion of student engagement in student affairs thus involves bringing on board previously excluded and marginalised student groups, creating opportunities for active and collaborative learning, and promoting learning communities, diverse relationships and affirmative and formative modes of communication amongst students and between staff and students (Schreiber, 2014, p. 216).

It is evident that the student affairs QE review at the case university did not only seek to assess progress of DSA programmes and services towards social justice goals. Rather, by its very conceptualisation and implementation, it sought to actively steer a reconceptualisation of student affairs at the case university towards social justice models and goals. Given the university's history of institutionalised racism, racial and ethnic exclusion, social justice concerns and particularly redress based on race, gender and sexual orientation, and overall the integration of human reconciliation in students' lived experience has been a key area of the strategic re-direction of the institution since 2009. Participatory parity and UDL principles of *open and comprehensive access*, the notion of *pathways of lived experience* and the assessment principle that *all* students should have *equal access and opportunity to participate* in programmes and achieve programme goals, and therefore that programmes ought to be designed to *serve a cross-section of students* that is representative in terms of the demographics of the student body, illustrate this point.

Similarly, the assessment principle of *diversity of perspectives* required reflection in the process of review on the extent to which a programme was oriented towards introducing

students to the complexities of *living in a diverse, multi-cultural, democratic society*, and thus to learn to think critically. The assessment principle of *broader and higher impact* focused the review on questions of participation and student engagement, to move away from a plethora of expensive boutique offerings (many of which were only accessible to the small number of on-campus resident students and a legacy of the university's Afrikaner institutional culture). A future suite of programme offerings thus ought to comprise a smaller number of culturally inclusive *high-impact programmes/activities* offered more cost-effectively to an upscaled number of students that reflect the diversity in the student body. The latter was also a recommendation by the external review panel. With all this in mind, the review thus sought to assess current practice in social justice terms and use social justice concerns for improvement purposes.

The pitfalls of designing a 'home-grown', 'activist' review

Along with the intention to enhance the uptake of social justice models and practices in the DSA, the QE review sought to contribute to professionalisation by emphasising process principles such as peer review, collegiality, professionalism and evidence-based improvement. These two aspects of the change orientation may well be seen as a normal part of the 'activist' intervention of enhancement-focused reviews in the student affairs domain. However, the 'activist' nature of the review went beyond this and overall faced three conceptual problems.

Firstly, the idea that distinct project activities and services should be reviewed *as if they were elements of a co-curricular programme* turned out to be ill-conceived. By the time of the review, the DSA had actually not reconfigured its diverse offerings as co-curricular programmes. Rather, student affairs had continued to operate in departmental 'silos', each offering a distinct and traditional set of projects, training interventions and services. In most cases they had not been designed as a co-curriculum that constructively aligns intended (learning) outcomes with related learning and assessment activities, articulates with other academic and co-curricular offerings, and articulates in terms of progression and combination with other offerings (e.g. Biggs & Tang, 2007). If there was a sense of progression, this was merely within a distinct set of offerings (e.g. in student leadership development where participation in one offering could require prior participation in another offering). As the external panel also pointed out, there was little to no communication and collaboration with the faculties and academic development centre, and thus no sense of an 'interface' between the academic curriculum and what could eventually become the co-curriculum in student affairs (with the exception of careers development, gateway, and student governance, which necessarily coordinated some offerings with faculty structures). Expecting the review to reconceptualise in its self-evaluation what student affairs did *in co-curricular terms* and then assess it *as if* it operated in co-curricular terms, contradicted the idea of reviewing *what is* rather than *what should be*. In this respect, the QA directorate sought to do what the DSA had failed to achieve since 2009: a comprehensive redesigning of student affairs in line with social justice models, a new theory of change, and the co-curriculation thereof.

A second pitfall manifested in relation to *the principle of accountability* built into the process, which it turned out mainly worked bottom-up, but not top down. Too little emphasis was on the accountability of the university and student affairs leadership as to what will happen with the outcomes of the review process. One matter could be resolved: ahead of, and during the review, several student affairs staff expressed the fear that the review could lead to retrenchments. These fears were allayed in staff meetings of the DSA and by an address of the vice-rector to the Student Affairs Management Forum in the course of the review. However, at the end of the review, a lack of accountability of the top university leadership to the DSA revealed itself in another, major way. When the student affairs portfolio was shifted unexpectedly to a different vice-rector, the external panel report and its recommendations were shelved. The new vice-rector did not recognise the importance of the work done. The focus rather turned to crisis management in the face of an escalation of student protests at the university in early 2016, as the #FeesMustFall and #EndOutsourcing campaigns of the SRC and the Free Education Movement turned violent (Luescher, Loader & Mugume, 2017). Nonetheless, while the review itself did not result in an explicit improvement and monitoring plan as envisaged in the process guidelines (see Figure 2 above), the newly appointed dean of student affairs eventually took many of the external panel recommendations on board when he developed an integrated strategic plan for the DSA (see DSA, 2016a, 2016b).

Thirdly, the attempt to do a parallel assessment using CAS standards in addition to the 'home-grown' assessment based on the internal guidelines and focus areas outlined in the *Guidelines for the Student Affairs Review* clearly failed. Student affairs practitioners gave three reasons for having opted out of doing a CAS-based assessment: workload, lack of training and support, and relevance. With regard to the first two, staff noted that the compulsory assessment based on the internal guidelines was already onerous and in addition to normal workloads. They also argued that using an advanced system like CAS required training and support, which was not available to them at such short notice. Finally, in terms of relevance, the argument was that the 'home-grown', internal guidelines were clearly highly applicable to the university context and DSA's strategic repositioning; meanwhile the contextual applicability of CAS standards would require an in-depth consideration, which again needed time and effort that was beyond the review's timelines. The lesson is that in both cases, 'home-grown' and adapted international review methodologies, adequate resourcing is required for their successful conceptualisation and implementation, including staff training, staff time allocation, and finances.

Conclusion

The scholarly documentation of student affairs practices in higher education in Africa is an important process in its professionalisation. This article has sought to make a two-fold contribution by conceptualising a reflective scholarship of practice and related method for producing context-relevant reflective practitioner accounts on student affairs, and then producing such a reflection at the example of a QE review in a South African university.

The article describes and reflects on the conceptualisation, operationalisation and implementation of a 'home-grown', 'activist' student affairs QE review in a South African university in detail. It shows how the review sought to focus on key issues in the South African context and the context of the case university: social justice, the co-curriculation of student affairs services, and professionalisation. It thus provides a practice-relevant empirical example of an institutional QE process in student affairs while also reflecting on the pitfalls that may be encountered along the way.

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Who Are Our First-Year At-Risk Humanities Students? A Reflection on a First-Year Survey Administered by the Wits Faculty of Humanities Teaching and Learning Unit in 2015 and 2016

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Abstract

Do we really know who our students are as they enter university? This was the question that the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand was grappling with. In response, the Humanities' Teaching and Learning Unit compiled a registration survey for first-year students to complete that gives an overview of who our incoming students are. The characteristics surveyed include students' demographic and personal variables, such as the regions they came from, parental and support influences, time demands, financial and technology considerations, motivation for attending university, reading frequency, and interests. The purpose of the survey was two-fold: firstly, to understand who our students are in terms of their background; and, secondly, to proactively determine what factors potentially place them at risk academically so that the Teaching and Learning Unit could identify, and direct students to or implement support mechanisms to assist them.

This article reflects on the survey that was conducted in 2015 and 2016 and rather than report on the findings of the survey, looks at how the survey and the "survey practice" adopted can be improved. The aim of this article is to reflect on the process used by the Humanities Teaching and Learning Unit to implement and improve a survey to determine different factors that potentially place first-year students at risk. Reflecting on this process, as opposed to reporting on the results of the survey, is important because it contributes to an action research process where future praxis is informed by reflection on previous action. This process is helpful to identify survey questions and administration that can be improved so as to gain more accurate data, as well as to identify proactive interventions that can be implemented to address risk factors students present and support students to be successful in their studies.
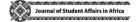
Keywords

at-risk students; first-year experience; student success; student support; transition

Introduction

There are many factors that contribute to higher education students being potentially at risk of either failing or dropping out of university. These include their academic ability, traced through previous academic performance (such as school–leaving results), as well as

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other non–academic factors such as access to funding and food (Eiselen & Geyser, 2003; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001).

Historically, students in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand were understood in terms of limited data such as admission data, which covered basic demographic information, for example age, race, gender, home address, matric/school–leaving results and related Admission Point Score (APS). Little more was known about the diverse student population in the faculty and their potential needs, such as who might need additional support in the transition to university based on factors that place students "at risk". Furthermore, students were only identified as being at risk after their Semester 1 (mid–year) results, and therefore missed out on opportunities to be supported early in the year.

The Humanities Teaching and Learning Unit decided to address this issue by devising a registration survey for first–year full–time students so we could better understand who these students were, and identify factors that might place them at risk academically and support measures needed. The survey was informed by a body of literature and staff input and conducted in 2015 and 2016. The 2016 version included amendments based on additional factors that had been identified. In both years, the results of the survey were shared with various forums within the faculty (such as the Undergraduate Studies Committee, the Teaching and Learning Committee and First–Year Coordinators) with the aim of increasing faculty and first–year lecturers' understanding of their students and their potential risk factors.

This article gives an overview of the literature that informed the survey and reflections of the effectiveness of the registration survey. A number of factors were considered in compiling the survey, although this is by no means a complete list. Lessons were learnt from the administration of the survey as well as its compilation so that students' support needs could be identified and addressed earlier in the academic year to assist them to succeed from the start of their higher education journeys. The article concludes with recommendations on how this "survey practice" can be improved, and future research projects that can assist with understanding and supporting incoming students.

Context and Problem

The Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand employs two "At Risk Coordinators" in its Teaching and Learning Unit (TLU). These coordinators are tasked with identifying and supporting at–risk students, focusing mainly on first–years. The TLU understands the term "students at risk" to be those who require temporary or ongoing interventions to assist them to achieve academically in order to be successful at university, and/or not drop out of university.

Our problem in Humanities was two–fold: we only identified "at risk" students after the first semester (mid–year) based on their academic results, and secondly, we did not know enough about our first–year students. Previously, only students' school–leaving results (APS – Admission Points Score for South African students) were used as an indicator of academic

success prior to commencing their studies. However, this is not the only measure. As we wanted to know more about our students and identify those who could be at risk earlier, we devised a survey that included a number of factors that could assist us in identifying them. We decided on a survey as the matric results of South African students that determine their APS are becoming less reliable – exam cheating is becoming a more frequent occurrence in some centres (Mlambo, Fredericks & SAPA, 2015; Peters, 2015). The National Benchmark Tests (NBTs) can be used to gauge academic readiness for higher education but NBTs are not used throughout the faculty. A survey seemed to be a reliable mechanism to assist us to gauge risk as well as understand who our first-year students are.

We compiled the survey based on literature on what constitutes academic risk, the first-year experience, and student retention and attrition. Staff input across the faculty was also considered. By understanding the background of first-year students and early identification of at-risk factors, support structures and mechanisms could be identified to assist students early in the academic year so that they could be more likely to experience success in their studies (Purnell, McCarthy & McLeod, 2010).

The Faculty of Humanities Registration Survey

The first survey that the TLU drafted for the 2015 cohort included factors that students could self-report. Students were provided options to select from. It comprised 22 statements, covering a range of factors:

- **Demographics**: age; first/home language; region that the student came from
- **Parental/ support influences**: first-in-family/ first-generation student; parents' qualifications/level of education; family history of mental illness; students' special learning needs; residence during semester
- **Demands on time**: part-time employment; outside responsibilities; transport to campus
- **Financial considerations**: number of meals per day; funding for studies
- **Technology considerations**: access to technology; ability to use software programs (self-assessed)
- **Interest/Motivation/Involvement**: Bachelor of Arts (BA) as choice of degree; the University of the Witwatersrand as choice of university; career certainty
- **Reading**: when students last read a book; reading frequency

With regard to **demographics**, students' age, their home language and the region they come from impact on their academic achievement and "staying power", with older students having a greater tendency to drop out (Fike & Fike, 2008; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005). Students' proficiency in the language of instruction also impacts the demands they experience academically – students who have the language of instruction as an additional language tend to experience difficulty with their academic studies (Eiselen & Geyser, 2003; Stephen, Welman & Jordaan, 2004). The region that students come from can also act as an indicator of risk with students from certain provinces (e.g. Gauteng) being depicted as more successful in higher education (Soudien, 2014).

Parental and support influences include whether the student was first-generation, their parents' level of education, the student's special learning needs and where the student resides during semester. First-generation students tend to have a higher attrition rate than their counterparts – they experience more difficulty in being prepared for and adapting to the university environment, and tend to lack adequate family support (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004). This often correlates with their parents' level of education – students whose parents have lower levels of education and whose parents did not attend university, tend to have lower levels of academic achievement and lack the requisite parental support and understanding to encourage them in their studies (Fike & Fike, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004). Students with learning disabilities or special needs are potentially at risk, and an awareness of who these students are can assist in directing them to resources and interventions on campus that can contribute to academic success (Reed, Kennet, Lewis, Lund-Lucas, Stallberg & Newbold, 2009). Where students reside during semesters can contribute to the support they receive for their studies – students who stay in a university residence tend to have lower dropout rates than their day-student counterparts (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005). Students who stay at home during the semester may also receive adequate social support from their parents (Pascarella et al., 2004), or they may have additional burdens and responsibilities placed on them, such as reliance on public transport, chores and so on.

We also surveyed family history of mental illness for two reasons. Firstly, if there is mental illness in the family we posited that the student may be supporting or dealing with such a family member and this can place an additional stressor on the student. Secondly, mental illness tends to be hereditary (Hemmings, Kinnear, Lochner, Niehaus, Knowles, Moolman-Smook, Corfield & Stein, 2004) and experience in the Faculty shows that some students develop or become aware of mental illness in the course of their studies. These students often need time off for diagnosis and treatment, which then impacts on their academic performance, and potentially results in attrition (Megivern, Pellerito & Mowbray, 2003).

Students tend to experience a number of **demands on their time** outside the university context, impacting their time management and academic performance. These demands include part-time employment responsibilities (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001) and "out-of-class" activities or responsibilities (Terenzini, Pascarella & Blimling, 1996), such as extra-curricular (sport, social clubs) activities and care-taking or household chores. Transport to campus potentially indicates additional demands placed on students' time because public transport is not always reliable in South Africa, with strikes, large numbers of passengers and long queues impacting on travelling time, which then negatively impacts students' time management and ability to cope with academic demands.

Students who experience **financial** difficulties experience additional stress in higher education (Bojuwoye, 2002) impacting their retention and academic success (Hinton, 2007). They tend to have difficulty focusing on their studies as they worry about whether they will be able to continue studying. However, students who receive financial aid tend to have lower dropout rates (Fike & Fike, 2008). Funding may be available from

a variety of sources, such as parents or family, scholarships, bursaries, loans or personal resources, each with its own set of advantages and disadvantages. An awareness of students' funding sources can assist with understanding additional sources of stress that may impact on students, their academic success and support needs.

Related to financial considerations is the socioeconomic status and income levels of the households students come from (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005). These factors were not surveyed but students were requested to indicate the number of meals they ate per day. Food security is often related to socioeconomic status. Access to meals was surveyed for two reasons – firstly, students who lacked food security could be directed to campus resources to assist them with meals, and secondly, low-income students are often academically underprepared for university (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008), impacting their academic achievement.

Technology considerations were included in the survey, as the university is becoming increasingly dependent on electronic platforms for students to access learning material and submit assignments. Students tend to have varied levels of access to and proficiency in ICT (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2010). Currently, if students do not have access to electronic mechanisms off-campus, such as computers or smart phones, they are likely to experience difficulty in keeping up with the demands of their studies. This can impact their time management as they need to schedule additional trips, at extra cost, to campus over weekends to access computers in 24-hour centres. Proficiency in using computers is also an important consideration – some students enter university having few or no computer skills and this can impact their time management, ability to access learning material hosted on electronic platforms, and ability to complete assignments timeously.

Motivation to succeed and the **level of interest** that a student displays in his or her studies contribute to academic success. Students who have a work-life orientation to their studies are more likely to achieve academically at university (Mäkinen, Olkinuora & Lonka, 2004), particularly disadvantaged youth who are goal-oriented (Dass-Brailsford, 2005). Certain traits, such as achievement motivation, also play a role in students' academic achievement (Busato, Prins, Elshout & Hamaker, 2000). Motivation and interest can be gauged through the students' choices of university, degree and career and how certain they are of these aspects. If students are uncertain of any of these factors, they are less likely to succeed academically (Willcoxson & Wynder, 2010).

In addition, students require a range of academic skills in order to cope with academic demands and succeed at university (Bojuwoye, 2002). These skills include **reading** skills (Pretorius, 2002). If students are not able to read at the required level for tertiary studies, they are less likely to achieve academically and cope in a higher-education environment. Reading is "a powerful learning tool, a means of constructing meaning, and acquiring new knowledge" (Pretorius, 2002, p. 169). The reading culture of students can be gauged by how often they read. This information helps to indicate whether students may experience academic challenges, as those who do not read frequently may struggle to deal with the volume of reading they are exposed to at university.

Students were requested to complete the survey in 2015 and 2016.

Administration of the Survey

In 2015, the survey was paper-based and completed by first-year students at registration while they were waiting in line. This helped the students to pass the time and contributed to a high response rate (95%). The responses were then captured by two data capturers, which was a time-consuming process. The capture and analysis of the data took a month from registration and presented a time-lag.

In 2016, the university moved to online registration and not all students were present at the registration day. We changed our approach by setting up a google survey for students to complete, emailed them the link, and requested them to complete the survey. Although this approach assisted with reducing the time-lag in collating data and communicating the results, the response rate was lower – only 40% of students completed the survey. There was also confusion concerning the survey – the University implemented an online biographical questionnaire that was completed during registration and many students commented to the Teaching and Learning Unit that they did not complete the faculty survey as they thought both surveys were the same.

Ethical Considerations

In both 2015 and 2016, there was an informed consent process – students were informed in writing at the start of the survey that the information they shared was confidential and would be used to research and identify how the Teaching and Learning Unit could better support students. Only the two data capturers in 2015, who had signed non-disclosure agreements, and the coordinators had access to the data. Hard copies of 2015 surveys were stored in locked cupboards in a coordinator's office, while access to the results of the 2016 online survey was password protected.

When students were identified for particular interventions, only the coordinators had knowledge of the particular factors that were considered for their selection. When students were contacted to participate or access interventions and/or support services, they were emailed or contacted individually rather than as part of a group.

Data reported to different forums and committees were presented as a group and no individual information was disclosed so as to protect the identity and confidentiality of students.

What We Did with the Survey Results

The survey results were used to inform various interventions, disseminated to Humanities' staff through different forums, to identify students who had a particular need (food, special needs, etc.) and track potential at-risk students and their progress.

When we collated the results in 2015, we identified students who presented six of the 22 at-risk markers surveyed; for example, if a student was first-generation, an additional-language English speaker, had access to two or fewer meals a day, last read a book more than six months prior to registration, had restricted access to ICTs and lived in rented accommodation. These factors were considered with students' APS and identified students were invited to apply to attend the First-Year Experience (FYE) camp. This camp assisted

students to develop skills for university success, such as academic writing, goal setting, time management and so forth. The TLU sponsored 30 applicants to attend this camp during the first-semester break in 2015.

In 2015 and 2016, the survey results were presented to Humanities staff through different forums. Presentations were given to the Teaching and Learning Committee, the Undergraduate Studies Committee, First Year Coordinators and lecturers, and staff in campus support structures such as the FYE office and the Careers and Counselling Development Unit (CCDU). Feedback and discussions during these presentations indicated that the survey exercise was useful and helped staff to understand the first-year cohort of students. We were also able to gain ideas on how to improve the survey and possible strategies to assist students; for example, additional support that is needed for additional-language English speakers for reading and managing the volume of reading they are required to do. The presentations helped to raise the participants' awareness of first-year issues and encouraged various support strategies to be considered.

We used survey data to identify students who had a particular need (food, special needs, etc.) and then emailed or contacted them individually to direct them to relevant campus support structures. Students who lacked food security were directed to the Student Affairs' food bank and those with special learning needs were informed of the Disability Unit, where they could be assisted. In addition, an email was sent to the entire cohort each year, detailing where different campus support structures could be located. This was done as a mitigating measure in case we overlooked some students, or some may not have disclosed particular information, or did not complete the survey (for example, if they registered late).

We correlated students' marks with the survey results in order to understand which factors, or combination of factors, place students most "at risk" (for example low-income, first-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2008)). We intend to conduct a longitudinal correlation study that will help us to identify "at-risk" students early in the first semester so that we can proactively direct them to the assistance they may need to be successful at university. We are, however, cautious of stigmatising students and will continue to be sensitive in the way that we deal with them. The correlation study, however, is likely to evolve; based on feedback from our presentations and through our subsequent research and experience, we have reflected on the survey and how it can be improved.

Reflections on the Survey

After administering the survey in 2015, we noticed that there were aspects that the survey did not take into account and that could be (some of which, were) added to the 2016 version to enhance the quality of the data gathered and give further indications of students' risk and potential support needed.

What the 2015 survey did not take into account

It would be naïve to think that the surveyed aspects were a complete list of factors that determined if students were at risk academically or of dropping out. There is a range of other factors that students bring with them that contribute to their success or lack thereof,

as well as experiences they have during their studies. The factors that were included in the survey are those that students could readily self-report and were not available elsewhere in the university: for example, students' school-leaving results and APS were not surveyed as these are available in university databases. The role of previous academic performance should not be negated, as there is a strong correlation between this and academic achievement in higher education (Eiselen & Geyser, 2003; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). However, there are other factors that impact student performance, which can be broadly categorised into four areas: academic, personal, support and university experiences. Some of these factors could be included in future versions of our registration survey, or be independent studies.

Academic factors include academic self-efficacy (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Nel, Troskie-de Bruin & Bitzer, 2009); students' study habits; communication skills (Eiselen & Geyser, 2003); the development of academic skills for higher education (Purnell et al., 2010; Reed et al., 2009); and the academic achievement students experience at university (Muckert, 2002). University under-preparedness is an important factor that needs to be considered – South African students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, "are increasingly underprepared for higher education studies" (Nel et al., 2009, p. 974) and an awareness of this lack is crucial in order to develop effective programmes that develop the academic skills students need. The TLU developed some academic development programmes but the efficacy of these needs to be evaluated.

Personal factors comprise the students' expectations and whether those expectations are matched (Bean & Kuh, 1984; Purnell et al., 2010); students' motivation and level of commitment to attending and staying at university (Dass-Brailsford, 2005); personality factors that contribute to student resilience (Busato et al., 2000) or "grit" (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, Kelly, 2007); integration into the social and academic systems of the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980); and students' assimilation of the university's values and their capacity to reject prior attitudes and values that may inhibit them from continuing with higher education (Elkins, Braxton & James, 2000).

Support factors in the form of students' support networks and their ability to develop these, including peer support; the ongoing support students receive from parents and family during the course of their studies; and students' participation in support programmes also play a role in their performance (Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Purnell et al., 2010).

Furthermore, students' **university experiences** contribute to their performance, such as their holistic student and campus experience; membership of campus clubs or organisations; teaching and learning experiences; and the adjustment difficulties they may experience that can assist or hamper them (Bean & Kuh, 1984; Purnell et al., 2010).

Enhancing the survey

From our dealings with students, and feedback gained from presentations to faculty staff in 2015, there were other factors that could have been included in the 2016 survey. The factors included: the size and type of schools that students matriculate from; family

circumstances; the amount of time students spend on social media; and their motivation to attend university.

The size of the schools that students matriculate from was included in the demographic section of the 2016 survey. This aspect provides insight into the students' ability to locate resources and support – it is probably easier to find assistance in a small school (e.g. 300 learners) versus a large school (1 500 learners). There may also be a correlation between the setting and type of school the students matriculated from – the language of instruction, whether the school is rural or urban and public or private – as the quality of education in these types of school varies and contributes either negatively or positively to matriculants' levels of university preparedness and their subsequent academic success (Bojuwoye, 2002; Pretorius, 2002).

Another aspect that could be included in the survey is the family circumstances of students, for example, if parents are married or single. From exit interviews conducted with students who deregistered during 2015, there appeared to be a stronger likelihood of attrition if students came from single-parent households. This aspect can provide insight into parental/support influences as well as the financial considerations sections of the survey. This question was not included in the 2016 survey as we felt it was intrusive and needed to be piloted.

There is apparently a correlation between the amount of time students spend on social media and their academic achievement (more time on social media leads to lower academic achievement) (Sauti, 2015); so this aspect was included in 2016 in the section relating to demands on time.

The reason why students attend university links to their motivation to study (Kift, 2004) and is a factor that would be helpful to understand – for example, whether students are at university for their own reasons or under duress as a result of parental pressure. This aspect was included in 2016 under the section concerning students' interest/motivation/involvement.

In terms of administering the survey, a paper-based approach seems to be more viable for yielding a high response rate. Students will be given the opportunity to complete future surveys during Orientation Week when they have a slot with the TLU. Not all students have access to devices to complete the survey online and the TLU will have to factor in time for capturing paper-based surveys.

The survey could be a viable mechanism to test these additional factors and check for correlations with students' results or attrition in order to understand the impact of these factors on student risk. The survey should also be verified statistically so as to get a more accurate tool.

Conclusions and Recommendations
The South African higher education landscape draws a diversity of students from various regions and backgrounds, with markedly different high school experiences. Knowledge of who our students are can assist educators to adapt their teaching and university structures

in order to be better prepared to host and support incoming students. For this reason, the practice of the registration survey should continue as valuable information is gained. The survey can be enhanced by including additional aspects discussed in this article. However, gauging the risk factors that students present should not be considered the only predictor of student success. There are a number of other factors that impact student persistence, resilience and academic achievement. Identification of students' risk factors will, however, assist with directing them to support structures and interventions that can assist them earlier in their higher education studies.

The results of the survey should be communicated to faculty staff as early as possible in the academic year so that they are aware of the cohort they are engaging with. The information can assist teaching staff with their teaching strategies in order to effectively communicate with and support students. An efficient method to ensure a quick turn-around time between the survey and the report disseminating the results needs to be investigated.

In light of this reflective discussion, there are possible future research projects that can assist with understanding and supporting incoming students. These include the following:

- Students who register late should not be negated. They may require their own survey to assist in identifying additional support structures needed to help them catch up the work they have missed.
- The survey should be tested with different intakes of students and collated with students' mid-year and first-year results to identify potential predictors, or combinations of factors as predictors, for students at risk of failing or dropping out. This will enable the validity and reliability of the survey to be examined.
- To further ensure the validity and reliability of the survey, survey questions could be rigorously tested through statistical analysis.
- It could be worthwhile to have students complete the survey again at the end of their first year to determine if their at-risk factors have changed and if there is a correlation with their marks as a result. For example, students move in and out of campus residences during the year and their academic performance may be impacted as a result.
- A follow-up study should be done to identify how students are and can be supported by the university system (at institutional, faculty, school and course level). Support gaps can then be identified and strategies put in place to further assist students to be successful in their studies.
- Other factors identified in this article can be researched in more depth to gain insight into how these factors impact students and how students can be better supported to manage these factors, for example, the role of academic, personal, support and university experiences (factors that this article did not investigate and report on).

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Holistic Health, Disadvantage, Higher Education Access and Success: A Reflection

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to reflect upon the relationships amongst health, disadvantage, educational opportunities, and higher education access and success. This is a reflective article taken from the literature review of a doctoral study on the relationship between health, access to, and success within, higher education. The importance of health in education and the practical implementation of programmes resulting in enhanced health and academic success amongst higher education students is reviewed. Literature for the doctoral study on which this reflection was based was sourced predominantly from Pub-Med Central, the U.S. National Institute of Health National Library of Medicine and The South African South-East Academic Library Services. From this discussion, the rationale for a holistic health promotion programme within the higher education setting, for students from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds, is given. The problem of educational failure of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education could be lessened by instituting a holistic health promotion programme within the first year of study. Evidence suggests that such a programme would have both health and educational advantages.

Keywords

disadvantage; health; higher education; holistic health promotion; student success

Introduction

Educational opportunities have been greatly expanded globally, and there is no more powerful a force for the eradication of poverty and the deepening of sustainability than to build a better future for all (UNESCO, 2015). Unfortunately, educational attrition, especially at the tertiary educational level, is a global problem that increases unemployment, decreases economic stability and compromises sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). This problem of educational attrition compromises especially the middle- and lower-income countries who cannot afford the wasted expenditure and curtailed development arising from it. Research

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findings indicate that education confers better health which, in turn, increases educational opportunities (Cohen, Rai, Rehkopf & Abrams, 2013). An individual's level of health, in turn, affects educational development (Ansari & Stock, 2010). The relationship between holistic health, access to and outcomes of educational development is the focus of this reflective article, which has been taken from a doctoral study into the relationship between health and educational outcomes of disadvantaged students. All attempts to mitigate the problem of educational attrition and promote global educational and economic success benefits all concerned, from the individual learner through to regional, national and global socioeconomic well-being and long-term stability. For the purposes of this reflection health takes the holistic definition of the World Health Organization (WHO) in that:

> Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.   (World Health Organization, 2006)

The purpose of this reflection is to draw attention to the fact that in the current practice in higher education, educational opportunities may have been adversely affected due to compromised levels of health, both in the wider and localised contexts. This results in high educational attrition amongst those who are disadvantaged, resulting in further socioeconomic disadvantage. The authors put forward the view that improving health in higher education students may improve both health and education outcomes.

A discussion of the overall relationship between health and education globally, beginning with the link between socioeconomic disadvantage and poor health, will follow. These circumstances translate into insufficient education which, in turn, leads to the inability to make appropriate health-related decisions, or inability to improve one's overall level of health and lifestyle circumstances. Additionally, there are complex health-related problems experienced by populations in socioeconomic developmental transition, which applies to Southern Africa in general and South Africa in particular (Allender, Wickramasinghe, Goldacre, Matthews & Prasad, 2011; Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Day et al., 2014; Williams, Grier & Seidel, 2008). These issues are discussed before moving on to how such transitional health-related problems affect the population in the local area of the Eastern Cape Province.

The authors continue with a discussion of how we mitigate this problem and the relationship between education and health; in addition, how health promotion and better health can translate into academic success, will be reviewed. Thereafter, the outcome of studies relating to the impact of health on education within the Southern African region will be discussed. To conclude, the authors rationalise the use of a holistic health promotion programme in the first year of higher education learning to promote both health and academic success. Literature for the doctoral study on which this reflection was based was sourced predominantly from Pub-Med Central, the U.S. National Institute of Health National Library of Medicine and The South African South-East Academic Library Services.

The Relationship amongst Health, Education and Disadvantage in the International Context

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in respect of health, which were agreed upon by the United Nations member states, were supposed to be met by 2015; however, for most of the lower-income developing countries and many of the middle-income countries, including South Africa, many of these goals have not been met (Buse & Hawkes, 2014; Day et al., 2014; Shaikh, 2014). For some lower-income states and in poorer areas of wealthier nations, the goals are unlikely to be met in the near future (Shaikh, 2014). Additionally, the MDGs did not set specific goals for non-communicable diseases (Buse & Hawkes, 2014). In developing nations and poorer areas of middle-income countries, the finance, manpower and technology required to support a health system that has a disease-focused approach, are far less than those of developed nations, which have greater resources (Shaikh, 2014). In the opinion of Shaikh, a re-think is perhaps required, in terms of how health-related resources are utilised (Shaikh, 2014). Shaikh maintains that a more holistic and decentralised approach to community health may serve to improve well-being sufficiently for it to positively affect the other MDGs, such as improvement in education, HIV management and the eradication of poverty (Shaikh, 2014). Day and her colleagues (Day et al., 2014) contend that, with respect to South Africa, what is needed to maintain the MDGs met so far, and to meet those unmet goals with respect to health, is a post-2015 workable disease-prevention plan.

Although compromised levels of health in childhood is often a consequence of socioeconomic disadvantage; repeated illness and chronic conditions during childhood and adolescence have lasting educational and socioeconomic effects (Jackson, 2009). Those with health-related problems may be disadvantaged with respect to receiving adequate education (Cohen et al., 2013). Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular, those from homes where there is financial hardship, or whose parents have not had a tertiary education, do not have an equal chance of entering university due to socioeconomic-related conditions, and compromised levels of health and nutritional status (Baraldi & Conde, 2014; Guimaraes, Werneck, Faerstein, Lopes & Chor, 2014; Jackson, 2009; Kestilä, Martelin, Rahkonen, Härkänen & Koskinen, 2009; Koivusilta, West, Saaristo, Nummi & Rimpelä, 2013; Labadarios et al., 2011). Moreover, when students from deprived backgrounds do attain sufficient secondary education to permit entry into the higher education environment, their participation is compromised due to socioeconomic and health-related disadvantages (Jackson, 2009; Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007; Stephens, Hamedani & Destin, 2014).

Conversely, students who enter higher education and succeed, tend to come from a background where parents have been better educated, have skilled employment and more positive health behaviours (Jackson, 2009; Kestilä et al., 2009; Koivusilta et al., 2013; Stephens et al., 2014). Ultimately, this leads to better health and higher than average living conditions (Jackson, 2009; Kestilä et al., 2009; Koivusilta et al., 2013; Stephens et al., 2014). Getting learners into education is not enough; the playing field has to be levelled and learners, regardless of socioeconomic background, must be aided to succeed in the

compulsory and post-compulsory education system if the long-term global goals of education, development and sustainability are to be achieved (UNESCO, 2015).

The link between disadvantage and poor health

In poverty-stricken and under-resourced developing countries where most of the population lacks access to higher education, there appears to be a strong link between poverty, lack of education and chronic disease (Ignacio et al., 2015). This problem, however, is not a new one: from as early as 2002 the links between lifestyle-related behaviour, disease and poverty were identified in the WHO report of that year (World Health Organization, 2002). The main factors that were linked to poor health were those of malnutrition (including under-nutrition, obesity and nutrition-related hypertension), unsafe sex, unsafe water consumption, insufficient hygiene, indoor air pollution, tobacco and alcohol consumption (World Health Organization, 2002). These same factors were directly linked to both poor health and poverty because of poor choices regarding expenditure and reduced income due to poor health (World Health Organization, 2002). The catchphrase "enemies of health, allies of poverty" was coined in the report (World Health Organization, 2002, p. 8). In a report the following year, inappropriate dietary patterns and an increase in nutrition-related diseases of lifestyle were identified as a major health threat to both developed and developing countries, which the developing economies could not afford (World Health Organization, 2003). This is due, in part, to governmental inability to fund health-promotion programmes adequately in developing economies (World Health Organization, 2003, 2013). Given that these very same countries, in general, have the lowest household incomes and the largest out-of-pocket health expenses, in terms of the WHO, this situation constitutes 'catastrophic health expenditure' exacerbating existing poverty (World Health Organization, 2013, pp. 13, 18).

In developed countries, the poorer sectors of society may not fare better than those in developing countries, as they tend towards health-compromising behaviour, which negatively affects education and further compromises socioeconomic status (Koivusilta et al., 2013). A study conducted in Finland found that young people from single-parent families, whose parents had not attained higher education, demonstrated higher levels of health-compromising behaviour (Koivusilta et al., 2013). These adolescents also fared less well in the educational system (Koivusilta et al., 2013). This, in turn, perpetuates a lower socioeconomic standard, and further health-compromising behaviour in adulthood (Koivusilta et al., 2013). A study conducted in Spain revealed similar results amongst adults of lower socioeconomic status, who were found to have higher rates of Non-Insulin Dependent Diabetes Mellitus (NIDDM) and Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) than those who were educated and regularly employed (Palomo et al., 2014). An identical situation played out in New Zealand, where the poorer sectors of society with lower socioeconomic status and financial restraints had poor diets, poor lifestyle and poor health outcomes in the long term (Wilson, Gearry, Grant, Pearson & Skidmore, 2014). Deprivation, lack of good health, insufficient education and their combined consequences result in a vicious

cycle that always leads back to poverty and deprivation (Jackson, 2009). The morbidity and mortality statistics do not always correlate with self-rated health when the latter is skewed by higher or lower expectations of the population concerned (Delpierre et al., 2012). In essence, the poor expect less when it comes to health, report better subjective health and often fail to ask for, or receive, preventative care or educational information, whilst those with a better education and higher socioeconomic position may be more demanding (Delpierre et al., 2012).

Insufficient education and the inability to make health-related decisions

As much as poor health behaviour and poor health-related decision-making are a cause of socioeconomic disparity, the same socioeconomic disparity is also a cause of poor health-behaviour (Mulder, De Bruin, Schreurs, Van Ameijden & Van Woerkum, 2011). People with lower levels of education, higher levels of daily stress and fewer resources, including perceived lack of life-control, tend towards more health-compromising behaviours and do not have the psychosocial resources to manage health-related change (Mulder et al., 2011). Breaking this cycle of poor health and poor education may not have the desired results if the benefactors are not able to make appropriate economic and health-related decisions (Kestilä et al., 2009). Those with reduced educational and economic opportunities may also have lower expectations of educational attainment, or may believe, due to a health-related condition such as asthma or depression, that they cannot be expected to achieve academically (Jackson, 2009). Increasing the perception of an internal locus of control, alongside social support and social cohesion, is important in building the capacity to make appropriate health-behaviour decisions (Mulder et al., 2011).

The effect of education on health disparities

Narrowing the gap in health disparities between the better-off and poorer populations may be achieved by placing a higher premium on health as a contributor to increased socioeconomic status (Cohen et al., 2013). Health literacy and health behaviour, however, along with empowerment and change in the locus of control from health information provider to health information consumer, may also be determining factors in health outcomes (Cohen et al., 2013). To be acknowledged, there is the problem of poverty accompanied by insufficient knowledge and impetus to improve health (Cohen et al., 2013). For those who have managed to break the poverty-low-education-illness cycle, however, there lies a better future.

There is evidence that adolescents from two-parent families, whose parents had skilled white-collar employment, were more likely to engage in health-enhancing behaviour (Koivusilta et al., 2013). These adolescents were more likely to successfully complete their own education, attain a higher level of socioeconomic status and better health as adults (Koivusilta et al., 2013). In the U.S. it was also found that those who had a better education and higher socioeconomic status had higher expectations of life in general and health in particular (Delpierre et al., 2012). In short, education has been positively linked to

health outcomes in developed countries (Baker, Leon, Greenaway, Collins & Movit, 2011; Cohen et al., 2013; Rosenbaum, 2012). The vast majority of research findings on the link between health and education have indicated that education itself is a strong and enduring mediator of health (Baker et al., 2011). With the institution of community colleges, further education colleges and other intermediary educational opportunities, for those who would not normally enter higher education, health disparities may be mitigated by the opportunity to obtain a higher qualification, thus changing the socioeconomic perception and identification of those taking part (Rosenbaum, 2012).

The relationship amongst health, educational outcomes and disadvantage in the Southern African region

Within the Southern African region, there has been little research on the effect of poor health on education in general, or within the university setting. Adverse effects of ill health on the socioeconomic development of the population appear to follow similar patterns to those of other developing and rapidly urbanising countries (Delisle, Agueh & Fayomi, 2011; Kengne, Awah, Fezeu & Mbanya, 2007; Kirigia, Sambo, Sambo & Barry, 2009; Micklesfield et al., 2013; Vorster, Kruger, Venter, Margetts & Macintyre, 2007). These health-related problems, such as obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes are increasing, more so in late adolescence and early adulthood (Kengne et al., 2007; Kirigia et al., 2009; Sodjinou, Agueh, Fayomi & Delisle, 2008; Vorster et al., 2007).

In Southern Africa the health and education systems have to contend with both the emerging problems of lifestyle-related disease, as well as enduring problems of lack of food security and disparities in access to health care (World Health Organization, 2010). Additionally, this region has the world's highest incidence of infection with HIV and TB often occurring concurrently (World Health Organization, 2009). The predominant adverse effect of ill-health on education in Southern Africa concerns the dual burden of HIV with other opportunistic infections and the concurrently rising, opportunistic TB infections[1] (Boutayeb, 2009). Survival to older childhood with vertically acquired HIV infection is rapidly becoming the norm rather than the exception (Ferrand et al., 2010). Additionally, these youngsters may have developmental and educational challenges that are unique to their situation (Pufall et al., 2014). As these young people progress through the education system, the system itself may find itself ill prepared for their needs (Ferrand et al., 2010; Pufall et al., 2014).

The relationship between health, educational outcomes and disadvantage in South Africa

South Africa has many higher education students who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Poverty and the resultant poor health experienced during

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1   TB infections may be single-site bacterial, or multi-site bacterial, either of which may be treatable by conventional means; or possibly single-drug-resistant, or multi-drug-resistant.

childhood and adolescence have far-reaching economic and educational consequences (Guimaraes et al., 2014; Jackson, 2009). There appears to be a relationship between early life levels of health and later educational success. There is emerging evidence which suggests that the use of a holistic health education programme in the first year of higher education learning, could serve to address the problem of ill health, which negatively affects students' academic development (Ansari & Stock, 2010; Ansari et al., 2011).

South Africa follows a similar pattern of both health and the relationship between health (or lack thereof) and education to that of many other emerging middle-income, rapidly urbanising economies (Allender et al., 2010; Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Day et al., 2014; Delisle et al., 2011; Kengne et al., 2007). Non-communicable chronic diseases of lifestyle are on the increase, requiring both national planning and national educational interventions (Day et al., 2014; De Villiers et al., 2012). Contrary to the previous two decades where HIV was the predominant cause of death in Sub-Saharan Africa, in some areas, years of life lost due to preventable lifestyle-related diseases have overtaken those of HIV and TB combined (Day et al., 2014). This is especially the case where antiretroviral therapy has been instituted at a relatively early stage and the long-term outcome of the HIV infection is now one of chronic disease management (Degroote, Vogelaers & Vandijck, 2014). In this emerging scenario, the health care focus needs to be the long-term maintenance of quality of life (Degroote et al., 2014). Against this background, socioeconomic determinants of self-rated health play a major role in South Africa (Cramm & Nieboer, 2011). The disadvantaged members of society have the most to lose with respect to poor levels of health and inadequate education (Cramm & Nieboer, 2011; De Villiers et al., 2012). In turn, poor levels of education and unemployment contribute to poor health outcomes, thus creating a cycle of poor health, poor education outcomes, ongoing poverty and low standards of living (Cramm & Nieboer, 2011)

Despite being a middle-income country[2] with many aspects of first-world development, there are nonetheless pockets of poverty in South Africa and a wide disparity between the haves and have-nots, that manifests in adverse outcomes in respect of health (Ataguba, Akazili & McIntyre, 2011). This is similar to other middle-income and southern hemisphere countries, as well as minority groups within developed countries, in respect of both demographics of the population that experience the disadvantage and the nature of the disadvantage itself (Friel et al., 2011; Guimaraes et al., 2014). Education has the potential to mediate this problem and a better education has been linked to better health outcomes (Baker et al., 2011; Cohen et al., 2013; Rosenbaum, 2012). International research has demonstrated that the educational aspirations of adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds, if accommodated, could compensate over the longer term for the socioeconomic disadvantage (Madarasova Geckova, Tavel, van Dijk, Abel & Reijneveld, 2010; Noble & Henderson, 2011). As socioeconomic status is generally linked

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2   Per the World Bank data indicators for 2014 South Africa's GNI was US$ 6 800 per capita against a world average of US$ 10 787. South Africa is listed as a middle-income country. http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD

to health status and long-term health outcomes, providing a means for adolescents to realise their academic aspirations can improve both the socioeconomic standing and the health prospects of a disadvantaged population (Madarasova Geckova et al., 2010; Noble & Henderson, 2011). In this respect, the need to improve higher educational outcomes amongst those from disadvantaged backgrounds has become paramount in South Africa (Scott et al., 2007).

The relationship amongst health educational outcomes and disadvantage in the Eastern Cape

The Eastern Cape Province is the second-poorest province in South Africa; additionally the Wild Coast and surrounding rural area, which is the main catchment area for students attending two of the province's three universities, is one of the most socioeconomically deprived in the province (Mitchell & Andersson, 2011). As of 2016, 18.7% of the population of the Eastern Cape higher education catchment area was living on or below the poverty line (Statistics South Africa, 2016). Students from this area are less likely to have secure or clean water sources, household food security or parents who are educated beyond secondary school (Mitchell & Andersson, 2011). Despite the disadvantages, there were indications of a correlation between higher scores on a wellness questionnaire and better academic outcomes (Van Lingen, Douman & Wannenburg, 2011). In this respect, an undergraduate nursing programme in the Eastern Cape that incorporated counselling on holistic health improved student scores on a wellness questionnaire and academic outcomes overall (Van Lingen et al., 2011).

Current policy and practice in health education in South Africa

In 2003, South Africa instituted a national policy on school health services; this focused, however, on the provision of a school nurse for basic education institutions, and in the higher education sector, the provision of an on-site health clinic (Subedar, 2011). In the re-engineering of the primary health care sector in South Africa, these services will be strengthened in the poorest areas and will be specifically focused on the needs of the area concerned (Subedar, 2011). There is no provision in the primary health care sector for educational policies, although secondary education incorporates life skills, which focuses predominantly on psychosocial health and HIV education (Lai et al., 2013). To date there is no statute policy on health education beyond secondary school in South Africa. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) makes provision for continuing life skills/health promotion in the new four-year extended curricular programme (DHET, 2012). As there is no national policy on the educational content of life skills education, universities that offer life skills or health-promotion programmes have generally tailored the content to their respective institutional requirements. The authors could find no evidence of comparative research on university health-promotion offerings in South Africa.

The rationale for holistic health promotion in higher education in South Africa

The higher education system in South Africa has increasingly attempted to redress the high level of attrition with regard to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, by instituting an additional year of study for those who seek to further their education, thereby improving their future socioeconomic standing (DHET, 2012, 2013). Changes in policy and the introduction of four-year extended programmes led to a widening of higher education access (DHET, 2012). Due to the widening of access to university even more students will enter the system with a double set of challenges – those of educational disadvantage and a concomitant health disadvantage (DHET, 2012; Scott et al., 2007). Higher Education brings with it its own stressors such as living away from home, dealing with financial constraints and taking more personal responsibility, over and above those of academic challenges (Welle & Graf, 2011).

Students who possess better coping skills are less likely to drop out of higher education and have a greater chance of overall success (Welle & Graf, 2011). Stress intervention programmes for those struggling to cope may not be as effective as imparting the skills required to understand and personalise one's own stress-management strategy (Welle & Graf, 2011). There is evidence that a holistic health-promotion programme offered to students in higher education has the potential to build the fundamental skills required for voluntary, positive and successful health behaviour change (Ansari & Stock, 2010; Brookins-Fisher, O'Boyle & Ivanitskaya, 2010) and with that, as will be discussed below, a marked increase in academic success.

Few studies have been conducted within the higher education sector on the effects of health education and health-management programmes. These studies have demonstrated that health per se, and health-promotion programmes in particular, have had a positive effect on academic outcomes (Ansari & Stock, 2010; Ansari et al., 2011; Deasy, Coughlan, Pironom, Jourdan & Mannix-McNamara, 2014; Fernandez, Salamonson & Griffiths, 2012; Flueckiger, Lieb & Meyer, 2014; Gwandure, 2010; Van Lingen et al., 2011). Given the opportunity to engage in a health-promotion programme, higher education students have the potential to develop the skills required to make their own decisions with respect to health and bring about the kind of positive change that enhances their individual chance of success (Brookins-Fisher et al., 2010; Gwandure, 2010).

Inequity of access to preventative measures and health promotion has been identified as one cause of inequity in health outcomes (Mitchell & Andersson, 2011; Vearey, 2011). Ignorance may well have a negative effect on the statistical outcome of preventable disorders of lifestyle; however, lack of knowledge is not the sole problem. The way knowledge is imparted plays a major role in its implementation. Provision of written material, individualised goal-setting and opportunities for monitoring and counselling, appear to be more successful than information alone (Berry & Mirabito, 2011). Restructuring information to allow the recipient to become part of the decision-making process can be more successful if a concordance model is applied (Fraser, 2010; Gucciardi, Cameron, Liao, Palmer & Stewart, 2007; Hoddinott, Allan, Avenell & Britten, 2010). In the opinion of the

authors embedding a holistic health-promotion programme within the higher education curriculum could potentially contribute towards improved health, educational success and socioeconomic enhancement in South Africa.

Conclusion

This reflection drew attention to the fact that in the current practice in higher education, educational opportunities may have been adversely affected due to compromised levels of health, resulting in a high educational attrition amongst those who are disadvantaged. The relationship amongst health, disadvantage and education is unequivocal as an increased standard of education has been found to lead to higher levels of health and better health affords greater participation in the education system, which in turn affords better socioeconomic opportunities. Prospective students who come from compromised backgrounds, however, may fail to access higher education and, when they do, they may be less well prepared than their better-off middle-class counterparts. Evidence suggests that the use of a holistic health education programme in the first year of higher education learning could serve not only as a health-enhancing intervention but also to improve students' holistic development and academic success.

The authors put forward the view that improving health in higher education students may improve both health and education outcomes. The higher education system itself may benefit disadvantaged students by providing holistic health-promotion courses within the university's first-year curriculum. A built-in compulsory credit-bearing holistic health-promotion course stands a better chance of being effective due to the increased opportunity for participation and retention. In the Eastern Cape Province, which is particularly disadvantaged, evidence suggests that such a programme would have both health and educational advantages.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there was no conflict of interest.

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IASAS-NASPA: 4th Global Summit on Student Affairs and Services

Tiki Ayiku, Lisa Bardill–Moscaritolo, Stephanie Gordon, Brett Perozzi & Birgit Schreiber[*]

The International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS) and NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education have collaborated over the past decade on a biennial basis, sponsoring the Global Summit on Student Affairs and Services. In the past, the Summit has taken place in Washington, D.C.; Rome, Italy; and Cape Town, South Africa.

This year, the Summit took place in Santiago, Chile, on 24–26 October 2018. La Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (UC) and sister institution DUOC served as hosts. Specially selected representatives from countries from across the globe were invited to take part in discussions regarding delivering on and implementing the United Nations Development Programme Sustainable Development Goals within the local and regional higher education sectors from which the representatives came.

Below are outcomes from this global gathering of student affairs and services leaders from higher and tertiary education sectors around the world.

The planning committee used the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a guide and framework for the Summit. Participants were sent a survey prior to the programme asking which of the 17 SDGs were most relevant to them and their work in their home countries. The following six SDGs were those that had 52% consensus or more from Summit participants:

- Good Health and Well-being
- Quality Education
- Gender Equity
- Decent Work and Economic Growth
- Reduced Inequalities
- Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

During the Global Summit, participants discussed each of the top six SDGs in small groups. Many also provided short presentations on current examples of how participants have an impact on specific SDGs within their regions. These updates and small group activities provided rich opportunities to understand commonalities in their work in the region and around the world, holding true to the outcomes of past Global Summits. At the end of

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two days of intellectual dialogue, several SDGs arose as most central to the work of student affairs and services leaders and practitioners in higher education.

The same two SDGs emerged as the top two most important SDGs from three separate groups working independently. The third SDG selected by each group was three different SDGs from each group. The salience of the top two was extraordinary:

• Quality Education
• Reduced Inequalities

The three others that emerged with slightly less salience were:

• Decent Work and Economic Growth
• Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
• Good Health and Well-being

Participants left the Global Summit with a deeper understanding of the SDGs and plans for spreading and implementing these ideas. Leaders shared examples of how they would accomplish this task and how they can use the SDGs as a framework for educating college students on global citizenship. Participants left with a clear understanding of their responsibility to make an impact on world problems and the importance of supporting the United Nations Development Programme in goal attainment. Participants discussed partnerships and collaborations across regions in order to promote the delivery on SDGs.

The Global Summit is not only an event where the leaders in higher education student affairs and services join to deepen their understanding and enhance their impact, but it is also a coming together of like-minded people from far-flung corners of the world. Together we realise our shared humanity that motivates us to use higher education in more effective ways to impact the world in sustainable ways to make it a better place for everyone.

For more information, see: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1A-vuzLj86TUP_RJPhq GaJsdTiZWzu_eO/view

SAFSAS Summit 2018: Looking Back, Looking Forward: Understanding Our Space In and Role In the New Normal

Saloschini Pillay, Birgit Schreiber* & Sibusiso Chalufu

The Southern African Federation for Student Affairs and Services (SAFSAS) held its bi-annual Southern African Summit in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, from 26–27 November 2018.

The SAFSAS Summit 2018 provided a platform where key role players discussed the latest developments in student support and services, student life and the student experience. The Summit provided theoretical papers, keynote address by Prof. Yunis Ballim, vice-chancellor and principal: Sol Plaatje University, and a presentation by Ms Thandi Lewin of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

The organising committee, which comprised Dr Saloschini Pillay, Dr Sibusiso Chalufu, Mr Doc Nhassengo, Ms Nobuntu Rabaza, Dr Matome Mashiapata, Dr Birgit Schreiber and Ms Suzanne Stokes, explored a new format for this summit where each session had a theoretical paper, a position paper and invited responses, which then were discussed and themes extracted. Overall, the importance of data and evidence-based decision making, especially around mental health, became apparent. In addition, notions of decoloniality and their implications for the entire domain of student affairs and services were debated and the need for further engagement identified in order to ensure relevance and impact.

Ms Thandi Lewin (DHET) opened the event and Prof. Yunis Ballim, vice-chancellor of Sol Plaatje University, provided the keynote address on the first day. Both reminded the audience of the enormous task ahead of higher education, not only in terms of supporting the widening base of NSFAS beneficiaries, but also in terms of offering this support in decolonialised contexts, which generate mature graduates who take responsibility for their learning and contribute towards the reconciliation within the social and cultural fabric of South Africa.

The first session was on "professionalization and decoloniality" where Mr Thabo Shingange from the South African Union of Students (SAUS) and Dr Matete Madiba (University of Pretoria) were the panellists.

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Dr Birgit Schreiber opened the next session with a detailed analysis of data that informs our approach to mental health care provision in higher education. Mr Jerome September and Ms Laetitia Permall offered responses. Overall, mental health is not a new issue, but our vocal and empowered students are putting this on the map and want to be part of the solution – indeed as vocal and empowered adults. Together as institutions, mental health care providers and student leaders we need to learn from the data (for instance the 'Caring Universities Project' that spans Southern African higher education institutions) and focus interventions where effective. Our students, too, have their role to play as does our South African public health care system.

The third session was opened by Mr Luthando Jack, who addressed the #hashtag era and *inter alia* posed the question of how we as student affairs and services practitioners reinvent ourselves for "post-normal" times where we have to deal with complexity, chaos and contradictions. We welcomed contributions from Mr Garth van Rooyen (University of the Western Cape) and Mr Tshegofatso Mogaladi (University of South Africa), who were the panellists for this session.

The second day was opened by Mr Lukhona Mnguni, a PhD candidate and political analyst from the Maurice Webb Race Relations Unit, who, amongst others, challenged student affairs and services practitioners on dealing constructively with disruptive forms of engagements.

The final session of the Summit, which was facilitated by Dr Sibusiso Chalufu, focused on redefining our engagement with students. Apart from engaging in critical reflection on the role of student leaders in the current higher education challenges, this session also looked at the issue of meaningful engagement with student leaders and the need for a student governance model for higher education institutions in Southern Africa. The panellists for this session were Ms Nompendulo Mkhatshwa, an activist and former SRC President from the University of the Witwatersrand, Mr Lwandile Mtsolo, the Secretary-General of SAUS, and Prof. Lumkile Lalendle, the Executive Director: Student Life at the North-West University.

The Southern African Federation for Student Affairs and Services (SAFSAS) was established on 25 October 2012 in Mangaung, Bloemfontein. The formation of this body was initiated by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in September 2007 to establish a single higher education student services practitioners' body and a common understanding on quality student development and support for Southern Africa.

The affiliated associations are College and University Housing Officers International–Southern African Chapter (ACUHO-I-SAC), National Association of Student Development Practitioners (NASDEV), Southern African Association for Counselling and Development in Higher Education (SAACDHE), South African Association of Campus Health Services (SAACHS), South African Association for Senior Student Affairs Professionals (SAASSAP), Financial Aid Practitioners of South Africa (FAPSA), and Higher and Further Education Disability Services Association (HEDSA).

The 2018 Summit highlighted the importance of recognising the differentiation within and across student affairs and higher education. The SAFSAS executive committed to continued collaboration across the associations and will strengthen its work with the DHET to increase reach and impact on student success.

For more information on SAFSAS, see: http://safsas.ukzn.ac.za

Mental Health at Universities: Universities are Not In Loco Parentis – Students are Active Partners in Mental Health

Birgit Schreiber*

Mental Health in the Spotlight

Mental health is currently in the national and international and African spotlight (Jacaranda, 2018; Mabasa, 2018). Recently, the South African higher education mourned losses at Wits University, Stellenbosch University, as well as other institutions of higher learning (Mabasa, 2018). The U.K. media featured an article in *The Guardian*, quoting the U.K. minister of higher education as saying that higher education institutions risk "failing an entire generation of students" (Adams, 2018).

This article takes position on the emerging discourse around mental health in higher education. It discusses the extent of the problem and reveals the challenges in our understanding in terms of the absolute measures and highlights that particularly female students are at risk (Lochner et al., 2018). This article emphasises that constructions of students as active partners in higher education opens the opportunity to enlist students as active partners in creating conditions conducive to health and healthy choices that promote mental health.

Hyperbolic responses like Bristol University's call for all academics to go on suicide watch training and the BBC's suggestion for students choosing the 'opt-in' service (Adams, 2018; BBC, 2018) and blame-discourses focusing on higher education are unconsidered, reductionist and simplistic. These positions deepen the myth that there is one pathogen that causes mental ill-health and one solution that forestalls it.

The ecosystemic and multi-etiological framework of mental health is far more useful in illuminating factors that impact mental health. The most critical factors which need to be emphasised include multiple sociocultural contextual factors including gender violence, the 'always on' Y-Generation, promoting help seeking enablers and putting pressure on the public health and school system to respond during early adolescence which is onset for most mental health issues.

Student Affairs in higher education institutions needs to focus on ecosystemic interventions, working towards a caring and engaging institutional context, and focus on promoting help-seeking behaviours as well as doing targeted intervention focusing on at risk groups. Specific at risk groups include high alcohol users, female students with history of self-harm and students with low social embeddedness.

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Extent of Problem

The *Official Journal of the World Psychiatric Association* collects data on life time prevalence and projected lifetime risk of mental disorders via the WHO's World Mental Health Survey of young adults (Kessler et al., 2007). Seventeen countries across the world are compared (n = 85 052) and very useful and reliable data emerges. The highest prevalence of anxiety and mood disorder are reported in the U.S. and Columbia. According to the WHO study, the South African figures for anxiety and mood disorders are much lower than these and lower compared to The Netherlands, Mexico, Germany and Italy (Kessler et al., 2007). Figures from Nigeria suggest that prevalence of mental illness there is much lower than South Africa (Kessler et al., 2007). These figures suggest that the causality is much more complex. The simplistic leap to blaming socioeconomic status of students and the performance focus of higher education is unhelpful.

To examine the data on the South African student population, the recent 'Caring University Project' has gathered data on mental health from 18 universities in 8 countries across the continent (Lochner et al., 2018). It emerges that 24,68% of students reported at least one lifetime Major Depressive Disorder and 20,8% a Generalised Anxiety Disorder (Lochner et al., 2018). The onset of mental illness is around 14 years of age and the most vulnerable group appears to be females (Lochner et al., 2018). Amongst the students in this study, race, first generation, or financial vulnerability did not emerge as a risk factor (Lochner et al., 2018).

In a meta-analysis examining sixty-one studies that explored hopelessness as correlators of mood disorders, Lester (2013) found that there was only small increase in hopelessness since 1978, with American undergraduate students scoring significantly better than students from other nations. Twenge (2015) reviewed research on incidence of mental illness and found that there has been a steady increase in mental health issues for the past decade.

We see a decline of suicidality since the 1990, and while this may be an indication that there has been an improvement of mental illness, this may be related to the increased prescription of antidepressants and more readily accessed mental health care services (Twenge, 2015).

It is evident, that the research on increase in reporting and/or incidence of mental illness is not conclusive. There are questions on what exactly is measured: Increase in reporting? Increase in availability of mental health care services? Increase in accessing services? A reduction of stigma (Lochner et al., 2018) and thus a breaking of the silence around mental health? Are students more psychologised and thus quicker to identify symptoms and seek help more readily (Koppetsch, 2018)? Is there a cultural shift towards a higher demand on subjective wellness? Is there a quicker leap from distress to disorder? Or do we indeed see an increase in depression and anxiety in our student population?

These are questions that are not fully explored.

Constructions of Students – Active Partners in Mental Health

Mental health issues are not going to be addressed by focusing on higher education institutions as the curative driver. This focus on higher education as the responsible agent

is regressive and reminds of the in loco parentis model of higher education. It positions higher education in a paternalistic role and reduces students to helpless minors and vulnerable victims. The focus, at least in part, needs to be on students as active collaborators in the fight against mental health issues.

South African higher education and the larger part of Africa is currently in the throes of de-colonialisation, reconceptualisation of the curriculum, considering higher education practice and principles, and examining its own *raison d'être* (Le Grange, 2016). The guiding framework for this renewal borrows from socially just pedagogies and liberation education. Within social pedagogies students are conceptualised as active partners in education; and within socially just pedagogies, students are constructed as active agents and collaborators in addressing conditions that perpetuate social inequalities. Students are active partner within the system of education and they cannot be treated "as the unfortunate" (Freire, 1970, p. 54). So, too, are students active partners in considering issues around mental health.

Martín-Baró (1989), a scholar of Freire, who applied liberation education principles to psychology maintains that "psychotherapy must aim directly at … shaping a new identity for people as members of a human community" (1994, p. 43). Martín-Baró (1989) thus argues that students need to be enlisted to address issues that perpetuate ill-health and are active agents of promoting conditions that are conducive to mental health.

This article argues that the basic stance of any Psychological and Counselling Service within Student Affairs in current African higher education should be aligned to the tenets of socially just pedagogies. Students are part of Martín-Baró's 'human community' and are part of efforts to improve mental health.

The construction of the active and engaged student as a key collaborator in successful education is akin to the notion of agency in psychotherapy. These are important constructions of the student-patient, as participation, agency, subjective engagement and active involvement is a key predictor for therapeutic success (Orlinsk et al., 2004). In a meta-analysis of 27 therapeutic outcomes, it appeared that patients' therapeutic agency leads to improved therapeutic outcomes (Bohart & Wade, 2013; Coleman & Neimeyer, 2015).

Students as active partners is not only a conceptual argument aligned to liberation education and social justice, but also an established tenet of successful psychological and medical treatment.

Hyperbolic and Alarmist Responses Deepen Erroneous Myths

The idea that suicidality and mental ill-health can be 'addressed' or 'dealt with' in the higher education sector by general university staff, academics and management – as argued by Adams in *The Guardian* based on Bristol University's and the Universities U.K.'s report (Adams, 2018) and the reveals a lack of knowledge of mental illness, is simplifying the interacting causal aspects of precipitating and predisposing factors, fudges the scope of higher education, and furthermore, and perhaps the most sinisterly, implies that higher education is the central caretaker responsible for the prevention of and treatment on suicidality, anxiety and depression.

The idea that academics should "intervene when students get into difficulties" (Adams, 2018, p. 2) is counter to what academia is about. Students indeed need to be challenged and some of these challenges are uncomfortable, unsettling and confront the status quo. To sanitise the higher education experience of challenges is absurd.

As recent as 2015/2016 the #Fallist student movement reminded the world that students are indeed adults who engage with adult issues and can take on oppressive and unjust systems. We have empowered and vocal students who can make conscious choices.

Suicide, as part of a range of mental illnesses, premised on psychological dysfunctions such as impaired impulse control and mood disorder cannot be contained by general university staff as suggested by the *The Guardian* (2018) and Naledi Pandor (UWN, 2018). While 'gatekeeper programmes' (Lochner et al., 2018) are useful, these need to include students to make them effective.

Universities need to create inclusive environments of care and compassion and support the outliers and courageous thinkers and student leaders. The 'alert system to detect patterns of difficulty' proposed by Bristol University (Adam, 2018, p. 2) is akin to Big Brother watching, premised on homogenous and uniform behaviour patterns. Any such alert system stifles free expression, original behaviour and curbs free thinking. Only a narrow band of normative behaviour and conformist thought can survive such watchful alert systems.

A Look at Scope and Role

There are at least six reasons why the implicit suggestion that higher education holds the key, the responsibility or blame, for student mental health is unhelpful.

1. By focusing on universities, one lets the real culprit off the hook: the public health care system and the secondary school system is responsible to address mental health issues. The onset of mental health issues is around age 14 (Lochner et al., 2018; WHO, 2011) and it is at that point – and prior to that – that effective services need to be provided.

2. Role clarity is essential: Staff in higher education should teach socially just curricula and facilitate relevant co-curricular programmes which are inclusive and caring, which promote healthy choices and active global citizens, and develop empowered graduates who are active agents of sustainable change towards social justice and towards conditions that are conducive to mental health.

3. Students in higher education should risk being challenged and engage with new ideas and indeed push their boundaries. Higher education's role is to challenge students, not cocoon in comfortable narratives premised on assumptions of students' psychological fragility.

4. Students need to make healthy choices. Lifestyle choices of the 'always on' millennials and 'Generation Y', who engage in pervasive hypercritical self-evaluations, make this generation of students more ambitious, more vulnerable and less self-reliant than previous generations (Koppetsch, 2018). The misuse of performance enhancers, such as the illicit overuse of Ritalin, the misuse of alcohol

and substances in an attempt to enhance performance are choices that students need to consciously manage. For instance, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) warns that almost 40% of students in the U.S. engage in binge-drinking once per month (NIH, 2018). These are choices that students make and while mental ill-health and insidious social factors are contributors and precipitants, students do need to realise their agency within this and make conscious choices that promote health rather than ill-health.

5. By focusing on 'how universities deal with mental health problems' (Adam, 2018), the author somehow implies that universities are in a paternalistic caretaker role – in loco parentis – and that the students are passive bystanders vis-à-vis their own mental health.

    The narrative of students as helpless minors has long gone and was finally dispelled by the 2015/2016 student unrest which displayed the immense student power, decisiveness and leadership that precipitated wide change across the affected countries, especially South Africa, Canada and the U.S.

    Indeed, in late adolescence and early adulthood, in this prolonged developmental moratorium, students may oscillate between regression and precociousness but to reduce them to vulnerable victims that rely on universities for mental health interventions is miss-constructing the student–university relationship and corrupts the teaching–learning process. It is not a binary: at times, students may indeed be vulnerable but also have internal locus of control that enables them to be competent partners in mental health promotion.

    The treatments for mental health rely most centrally on the patient and not on the university. He and she, the student, has to report, has to engage, make choices, seek help, comply with treatment, reach out, and be a collaborative and active partner in treatment. The depressed and vulnerable student, paradoxically, needs to be positioned as the central partner in any intervention. When universities position themselves as the saviours, it deepens the sense of patient victimhood, promotes welfarism and social disempowerment discourses.

    September (2018) rightly points out that universities need to enable accessible services, accessible to the vulnerable and disenfranchised, but it is a three-way partnership of the adult student and the compassionate institution and functioning public health care system that will shift the status of mental health.

6. The mental health care professionals, the psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses are the best trained and most insightful group of professionals who are equipped to diagnose and treat. It is ill-guided to appoint well-meaning academics and benevolent university managers as caretakers and mental health experts who should monitor students for self-harm risk and give alerts (UWN, 2018). The training for such interventions is not done over a weekend short course and minimises the risks associated with assessments for self-harm.

The risks of such naïve plans, like the one proposed by Bristol University (Adam, 2018), are not only for the staff who need to live with the burden of ever-scanning students for suicide risks and living with the guilt when they fail. But also, such a system would narrow the spectrum of behaviours and be akin to Big Brother watching any behavioural outliers and reporting these to the mental health police.

This call made by the Universities U.K. (Adams, 2018) to train all staff in suicide prevention is absurd. The reductionist approach encapsulated in their 'checklist of steps that university leaders can take to prevent suicides' (Adams, 2018) minimises the contributing and multiple factors, neglects the biomedical aspect of mental health, disempowers the vulnerable, and wrongly allocates agency to university leaders while absolving each and everyone of us of the responsibility to contribute towards a healthier society.

We must remember that suicide and suicidal behaviours peek during late adolescence and early adulthood and again around retirement. And let us also remember that "the rate of suicides among students is significantly lower than among the general population" (Adams, 2018).

Capacitation and Outsourcing

The current trend by universities based in part on reduced government funding, to reduce mental health care staff, to outsource or to establish free emergency telephone or e-services to deal with spiking mental health issues is compounding the issues around mental health (UWN, 2018). Responses tend to be crisis and emergency driven, rather than preventative and proactive, and systemically integrated and articulated to teaching and learning. The splitting off of mental health care as a short-term treatment outside of the daily lived experience does not assist in addressing systemic factors that are causally implicated in mental health.

South African Minister of Higher Education, Naledi Pandor, announced in November 2018 that ZAR 900 million (60 million Euro) will be invested in "university capacity development in order to support universities in developing programs around issues of mental health and support to students that face gender-based violence" (DHET, 2018). This reveals profound understanding that violence, especially gender-based violence as a social-cultural systemic issue, is linked to mental health. Capacitation and support for universities is essential and it appears that South African Minister Pandor is impacting this very positively.

Conclusion

The concern for students' well-being is indeed a just, urgent and relevant one. But universities must not narcissistically appoint themselves as the only saviour, nor should students be robbed or their role in mental health or be limited in their spectrum of expressions by pathologising the outliers.

It takes a community to create conditions that instil hope and self-care in students. To isolate universities as the hotspot for suicide and then to add that universities ought to do something about it deepens the myths that universities are the centre of the universe and can save us all.

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Book review

Clarence, S. & Dyson, L. (Eds.). (2017). *Writing Centres in Higher Education: Working in and across disciplines.* Stellenbosch, South Africa: African Sun Media.
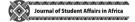
Reviewed by Annsilla Nyar*

A frustrated undergraduate student asked me in 2012: "Why is writing a paper at university so incredibly difficult?" It is only now, six years later, upon reading this excellent book that I feel fully equipped as a higher education professional to answer this age-old question in an informed and comprehensive manner. Certainly other higher education scholars and practitioners will similarly find the book of immense value to their work. It also provides an understanding of some of the complexity of academic reading and writing processes, particularly so in the South African context where lack of proficiency in English is seen as a barrier to student success. It is for this reason that this book is a most welcome addition to South African theory and pedagogy in the teaching and learning space. There is a need in South Africa to begin a truly national conversation about writing and this book would serve as a useful anchor for this type of conversation.

This edited collection of articles by Sherran Clarence and Laura Dison is firmly located in South Africa, and as such provides a uniquely South African take on writing centre theory and pedagogy. As a tool for effective teaching and learning practice, writing centres are now ubiquitous at many institutions of higher education. However there is not a great deal known about writing centres and their history and development. It can be said that it is also not common practice to question the epistemological assumptions underlying common pedagogical approaches used in writing centres. This is a knowledge gap that the book fills particularly well. Through the book it is interesting to have learned about the historical development of writing centres in South Africa and the theoretical and pedagogical approaches used in writing centres. Two articles herein can be singled out in terms of providing an in-depth understanding of how writing centres in South Africa are situated, theoretically and operationally, as well as in a historical sense: (a) Fatima Slemming's article, "The place of education theories in writing centres: Why this makes for significant research", and (b) Pamela Nichols' article, "Writing Democracy: From writing centres to writing fellows to writing intensive courses in a university-wide writing programme".

The book highlights the innovative nature of writing centre practice and continuing adaptation to the changing needs of students. For example, the article by Akisha Pearman,

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"Supporting academic communication in writing centres in the digital age", is a nod to the advent of the digital revolution and the increasing influence of multimodal tools of learning in higher education.

Kabinga Jack Shabanza's article, "Enhancing reflection on writing: using group writing consultations to develop meta-awareness of disciplinary writing", was very useful in highlighting the universal problem of large classes and the ways in which smaller group-based writing consultations can possibly offset the disengagement which may occur in the context of large classes. Shabanza draws on his experiences from writing centres at the University of Johannesburg. This article is thoughtfully written and provides much-needed reflection for higher education professionals, particularly busy lecturers teaching large numbers of students.

The concluding chapter of the book, "Reflecting on writing centre practice through students' experiences of a contextualised writing centre" by Laura Dison and Belinda Mendelowitz, provides an incisive summary of many key issues and themes interlinking the different articles in the book through the evaluation of a focus group conducted at the Wits School of Education (WSoE) Writing Centre. According to Dison and Mendelowitz, their focus-group data illuminate crucial issues of voice, identity and power which speak to broader issues of transformation in the higher education sector. The authors make a case for a discipline-based writing centre which would help students feel more situated in their own particular disciplines.

While the book is strongly rooted in South Africa, as can be seen in the case studies and examples drawn from South African universities, the themes and issues expressed in the book will undoubtedly find resonance with the global academic community who face similar challenges. This is particularly highlighted by Nicole Bailey Bridgewater's article, "Diversifying monolingual tongues: What American writing centres can learn from their multilingual South African counterparts". Bridgewater argues persuasively for the establishment of multilingual writing centres in the United States.

Producing a generation of confident academic writers should be one of the key goals of any institution of higher education. This book is testimony that there is a great deal of effort invested towards this goal in South Africa. It is well-written and solidly grounded in theory and pedagogy. It would not be an exaggeration to call the book required reading for all higher education professionals. Those working in the fields of education should be especially encouraged to read this book and see writing centres as an important form of student support. It is hoped that the authors may see fit to produce another book which would further broaden the scope of the book by featuring the perspectives of other universities in South Africa.

Jansen, J. (2017). *As By Fire: The End of the South African University*. Pretoria, South Africa: Tafelberg.
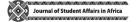
Reviewed by Vicki Trowler*

Jacob Zuma chose to mark the Day of Reconciliation by reaching out to protesting students and promising free higher education, an unsurprising but contentious move. That act spurred me to finish reading *As by Fire*, Jonathan Jansen's analysis of the responses of South African university vice-chancellors to the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall (and associated) movements.

By pure chance, I happened to be on the UCT campus on 9 March 2015, the day Chumani Maxwele decided to douse the statue of Cecil John Rhodes in excrement, kicking off a protest movement that called not only for the removal of the offensive statue, but for a removal of the hostile organisational climate that many black students felt permeated UCT and other Historically White Universities (HWUs). #RMF was not the first to call for this at UCT – similar calls had been made for as long as I can remember, with organisational climate surveys, research projects and outbreaks of protest underlining the need for what we then called "transformation" – but things were different this time: firstly, a mere month (to the day) after the initial protest action, the statue was removed.

This concrete response, while limited, was nonetheless symbolic, and signalled a difference from previous responses, which were usually to appoint task teams to frame new policies, to investigate renaming a few venues, or to review systems and procedures to speed up recruitment and retention of black students and staff. Secondly, the movement spread like wildfire. LUISTER, a documentary about the oppressive experiences of black students at Stellenbosch University and Elsenburg Agricultural College spawned #OpenStellies, which was soon joined by #WitsSoWhite, #RhodesSoWhite and similar movements at other HWUs, as well as splinter movements abroad such as #RhodesMustFallOxford. Months later, fresh impetus came with the beginnings of #FeesMustFall at Wits University, spreading beyond HWUs to Historically Black campuses and institutions, where long-standing protests about fees and resources became part of a national uprising. Jansen notes that, while many seemed surprised at the outbreak and extent of the protests, university leaders were not: they had for some time been warning of the "perfect storm" brought about by "massification" on the one hand, and cuts to resourcing on the other.

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Many news reports, blogs and scholarly articles have been written about "the hashtag movements", but *As by Fire* is the first comprehensive, systematic attempt at analysing the reflections on the movements from the perspectives of the leaders of those universities most closely involved. Jonathan Jansen is well-placed to undertake the task – the "servant-leader" of the University of the Free State at the time, himself no stranger to institutional climates hostile to black staff and students – and puts his privileged access to good use, soliciting accounts from his peers that are both frank and unguarded. Interviews with 11 vice-chancellors, and his own views as a 12th, form the bulk of the data around which the analysis is constructed. For this alone, this book is worth a read. The revelations go way beyond the carefully chosen responses which appear in newspaper reports, on institutional websites or in press releases. There is no attempt to balance these views with "student voice" – that is not the intention of the book, nor would such an attempt to provide "representative" views of a "leaderless" movement be feasible, as is underscored by accounts from several of the university leaders of constantly changing negotiating teams, priorities and positions, experiences which frustrated the university leaders but which reflect the dynamic nature of the protest movements.

Jansen locates the movements within the border political climate in the country, noting how the developments mirrored others happening within the ruling ANC, and traces the ideological trajectory within the movements from one initially apparently aligned with the ANC, to subsequent alignment with the EFF, Pan-Africanism and Black Consciousness. Noting that protest was neither sudden nor new to HBUs, which had experienced protests more or less consistently throughout, Jansen remarks that it was only when the HWUs experienced protest that the media, and the State, began to pay attention. Indeed, it is HWUs that draw the bulk of the focus in *As by Fire*, although HBUs such as UWC and NWU and merged institutions such as CPUT feature alongside. These very different histories imply very different trajectories, and these differences are drawn out together with similarities in the accounts and the analyses. For those whose exposure to the movements has been largely, or entirely, through the media, experiences on the ground from universities enjoying less media attention than UCT or Wits add nuance and texture.

I was interested in Jansen's choice to discuss first the financial "roots of the crisis" – the impetus for #FeesMustFall – before considering the cultural "roots of the crisis" (that gave rise to #RMF and associated movements), not only because chronologically #RMF preceded #FMF, but because I had noted a shift in sentiment in the reception of the movements when the focus moved from the symbolic to the material. Nancy Fraser (2013, p. 176) distinguishes between "injustices of distribution and injustices of recognition", stressing that while the latter are not reducible to the former, they are also not "merely cultural", and that both need to enjoy attention if social justice is to prevail. Observing the responses to the movements, I wondered if public sentiment as reflected in the social/media had been willing to countenance the need for greater inclusivity in the climates on campuses – after all, I do not know a single person who felt any affinity for Rhodes, despite the childhood thrill of climbing onto the backs of the lions at his memorial – but when it came to questions about the public vs the private good of higher education and, thus, who

should carry the costs, well, that was another matter. Polarising debates predicated on the need for social justice versus "affordability" (also characterised as "prioritisation" – assuming that the money could be found – were there not far more urgent needs, such as health care, early-years development for children, or investment in basic education?) gnawed away at the earlier support for the movement/s, and was matched by a progressive shift in the movement/s' rhetoric from the earlier intersectionality to a more Africanist, or as Jansen terms it, "nativist", position.

"Nativism" is not a term in common parlance in South Africa, although the sentiments are not unknown: more commonly referenced as "xenophobia", it is usually directed at *amakwerekwere*, who are constructed as "foreigners" from elsewhere in Africa. The term is seldom applied to foreigners from Europe,[1] the Americas or Australasia, for example, and has clear racial and class connotations. Choosing to use this term, which is most commonly associated with U.S. politics, Jansen appears to have in mind an American audience – backed up by his choices of U.S. comparisons when the more obvious ones might be found in the U.K. (where #RhodesMustFall had a splinter movement at Oxford, while the National Union of Students enthusiastically supported campaigns such as "Why is my curriculum white?", and fees protests dominated the headlines a few years ago) and elsewhere in Europe (for example, Nieuwe Universitiet in the Netherlands staged sympathy protests with #RMF; fees protests in Germany led to free higher education) or elsewhere in the "developing world" (student protests in Chile leading to fee-free higher education). It may be that, having worked in the U.S., Jansen is more familiar with that context, but given the very great differences between the U.S. higher education system and that in South Africa, it appears counter-intuitive to non-U.S. readers, and leaps out as a sop to publishers to lend an "international appeal" to the work.

Jansen's views on decolonisation are no secret – the discussion at http://www.litnet.co.za/problem-decolonisation-jonathan-jansen-seminar/ provides a good primer – so it is unsurprising that he dedicates a chapter of this book to outlining his scepticism towards the decolonial thrust of the movements. While he criticises the appropriateness of "decolonisation" in a political context that, he argues, saw off colonialism more than a century ago, his main concern stems from the targeting of the university curriculum – which he positions as a convenient scapegoat, reducing student concerns around curriculum to "flag waving" and institutional responses to review curriculum in the light of such concerns to "regrettable bowing and scraping". Anyone who has taught in a university knows that curriculum is not sacrosanct – while some disciplines do claim a "canon", this is seldom universal and is always open to contestation. While students – by definition, novices to a discipline – may perhaps not be the best arbiters of the fitness of curriculum, dismissing such concerns out of hand – and the sincere efforts to consider these – risks smacking of reactionary high-handedness.

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1   Francis Nyamnjoh's *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa* takes the unusual position of situating Rhodes as *makwerekwere*.

In a chapter discussing "Shackville" and the "welfare university", Jansen presents as a new phenomenon the expectation of a generation of students that "the university" (as a proxy for "the state") will take care of their needs, not just their education. This argument is premised on "born frees" having grown up with access to social grants, a new phenomenon unknown by previous generations. Yet, this argument reads a little disingenuously – those of us who studied on bursaries or scholarships in the "old days", before "massification", did indeed have our living expenses taken care of through such bursaries or scholarships at the more generous end. For others, student loans from banks were a possibility – working parents could sign surety against assets such as future paycheques or property, an option not available to many of the poorer students trying to make ends meet today. Is it unreasonable that today's students expect the same package that previous generations had access to – especially when discourse around making universities accessible to poor students neglects to spell out the limitations of resourcing not only in terms of numbers of beneficiaries but also in terms of what will, and will not, be covered by provision such as NSFAS? In the past, too, many students were able to secure part-time (or even full-time) work to support themselves while studying. In a massified context, a smaller proportion of the student body has access to such opportunities, and in a climate of heightened unemployment, that reduces still further. These are system-level problems, and students who experience them are right to raise them as such. If the system cannot accommodate the absolutely poor, but only the relatively poor, it should be honest about doing so and not mislead students for whom the wherewithal to feed themselves, travel to lectures or take care of their personal hygiene is simply not there. On a related note, the "black tax" – particularly the practice of sending remittances home to support the extended family – provides another example of the system's lack of comprehension of the requirements of what in international terms are referred to as "non-traditional students". It is slowly being accepted that, if access and participation are to be truly widened to "non-traditional" students, these students cannot simply be expected to adapt to the system, but the system reciprocally needs to adapt too. If the system does not adapt to the differing needs of a changing student population, the failings of the system become privatised and projected onto the individual students, who become pathologised as deficient – an argument that Jansen appears to be falling into in his discussion of the "welfare university".

It was while reading Jansen's chapter on the "anti-social media" that I struggled to continue reading. I began to wonder whether we had witnessed the same movements, whether we inhabited the same universe, never mind the same universities. Jansen laments the attributes of social media that shaped the movements in management-hostile manner – from the use of hashtags and WhatsApp groups to organise protest action speedily, to the university leaders' loss of control over the narrative though the spread of "fake news" through edited video clips shot on mobile phones. Personally, I do not see social media as bad, nor the democratisation of information authoring. The "higher" aspect of higher education, I would argue, involves engaging students critically, socio-culturally and politically – the latter requiring them to assume an authorial voice themselves instead of

merely commenting critically on others' authorship. While technology may have made containing the protests more difficult, as it most certainly did, it also provided tools for the university leaders and their own teams. Jansen's own descriptions of receiving late-night messages from a WhatsApp group of university managers show that this was used to some extent, while comments he cites of other vice-chancellors illustrate how the bureaucracy of university management was ill-suited to capitalise on the immediacy offered by social media in terms of constructing their own narrative. Decrying the tools because one lacks mastery demonstrates a lack of creativity in analysis, in my view.

Jansen really comes into his own with his discussion of the personal costs of leadership (by which he means university leaders; the personal costs of leadership amongst students can be surmised from allusions on social media and elsewhere, but have to my knowledge yet to be systematically analysed in the same way). He lists the high turnover rate amongst his sample – though, as his sample contains only vice-chancellors, the true extent is lost, since some universities are set to experience an almost entire turnover at senior leadership level. This focus on vice-chancellors only is both a strength and a limitation. In focusing on the individuals carrying the can, a nuanced picture of individuals, the people behind the statements, emerges. This, though, sets up a "hero" narrative – and there are indeed anecdotes where the VC is presented almost as a "saviour", stepping in to finance individual students' dire emergencies, for example – and raises questions about the role of the senior leadership team, and how this may have differed from institution to institution. One interviewee alludes to "disappointment" that his staff did not support the decision to securitise the campus, raising tantalising questions about the process and accountability for that decision, and the extent to which it was shared across the senior leadership team. Having watched over the years how differently different incumbents inhabited the role of vice-chancellor in a single university, I cannot help but wonder how differently the different VCs in Jansen's sample inhabited their roles, and the extent to which some leaders acted as Lone Rangers while others led as a team – and how this may or may not have affected both the handling of the crises on their campuses and their personal responses and costs to self.

Jansen closes his text by considering, when does a university cease to exist? He argues that underfunding, interference and instability have doomed SA universities, before offering the "ray of hope" that ordinary citizens recognise the value of the university and fight for its survival. Yet, Jansen's argument is predicated on recognising only a single valid model for criticality, for scholarship, for knowledge. I would argue that the university ceases to exist when it cannot conceive of possibilities outside of its current form, outside of the current body of knowledge and current limits of imagination. Universities should foster creativity as well as technical knowledge, and in the process of confronting their own limitations new possibilities emerge. I do not share Jansen's pessimism – universities have survived since the Middle Ages through far worse than student protests – but rather see the Fallist movements as providing opportunities for honest, thoroughgoing reflection in South African universities to consider how best to fulfil their mission, in their context, at this time.

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