

The Contribution of Student Support Services to Academic Success in South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges

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Abstract

Student support services were introduced into South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges to cater to students' diverse needs. This study explored the contribution that this support system has made to students' academic success. The humanistic-existential theory of student development underpinned this study. Quantitative data were collected from 172 participants consisting of student liaison officers, assistant directors, administrative clerks, career development officers, campus management teams, lecturers, and first-year TVET college students. The participants were selected using purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). The results indicated that there were insufficient academic opportunities for first-time college entrants. The article recommends that support programmes should be established to assist students transitioning out of the college for employment or further studies.

Keywords: academic success; humanistic-existential theory; student support services; Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges; first-time college entrants; academic support



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Introduction

During the apartheid era in South Africa, the educational system operated under severe segregation, creating significant differences in resources and opportunities among racial groups. This segregation deeply impacted the availability of student support services (SSS), resulting in limited access to resources for marginalised communities (Rakometsi 2008). Unequal distribution of quality education and support services hindered the academic progress of many students, particularly those in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges (Kallaway 1984). TVET colleges specialise in providing hands-on, practical learning experiences tailored to prepare students for specific vocational and technical fields (Ngcwangu 2019). These colleges serve a diverse student body and offer various programmes such as engineering, hospitality, information technology, business studies, and agriculture (Oosthuizen et al. 2022). These programmes focus on practical training (Bonvin 2018), ensuring that graduates possess skills directly applicable to their chosen industries. They prioritise bridging the gap between academic knowledge and industry demands, often incorporating internships, apprenticeships, or on-the-job learning opportunities to give students real-world experience.

Following the end of apartheid, South African TVET colleges underwent substantial transformations to redress historical educational disparities and challenges such as limited funding, infrastructure development needs, alignment of curriculum with industry requirements, and societal perceptions about vocational education (Powell and McGrath 2019). Extensive reforms were implemented to democratise educational access and amplify support services for students. The government spearheaded policies and initiatives aimed at elevating educational standards and fostering a more inclusive approach to student assistance. One notable policy is the SSS framework. SSS encompass extensive resources and aid mechanisms crafted to assist students throughout their educational endeavours (Papier and McBride 2019). These services span academic tutoring, counselling, mentorship initiatives, career guidance, financial aid, and other tailored supports catering to students' multifaceted needs. SSS cater to a diverse student body facing unique challenges which can significantly influence their educational journey (Shikulo et al. 2020). Hence, exploring the contribution of SSS to students' academic triumph in the TVET college framework becomes imperative.

The main problem explored in this study is the recurring student failure rate and high dropout rate in TVET colleges owing to a lack of necessary balanced academic support leading to academic success. Balanced support entails pre-entry support, on-course or academic support, and exit support, which the SSS unit is mandated to afford every TVET college student, especially the first-year entrants. Therefore, SSS have a significant role to play in supporting students to succeed academically. To uncover the contribution that SSS make to students' academic success, the following research questions were formulated:

- (1) How does the relevance of SSS manifest within the context of TVET colleges?

- (2) How do SSS officials perceive the influence of their support programmes on the academic success of first-time college entrants?
- (3) What specific academic support mechanisms do lecturers believe contribute significantly to enhancing pass rates within the TVET sector?

Literature Review

The Contribution of SSS to Academic Success

The contribution of SSS to the development and welfare of a diverse body of students is enormous. Students come from all walks of life; some are the poorest of the poor, hoping to make the most of their lives and change their background by obtaining a higher education qualification and a good job (Department of Education 2009). Most of these students are first-year hopefuls. Secondly, SSS assist students of different ages, heterosexual and homosexual, religious and non-religious, physically able and physically challenged, and different race groups and nationalities, hence a diverse body of students in one class (Kioko 2010). The role of SSS is to organise support programmes to assist students to succeed academically, which is the second component of support called “on-course or academic support.” Should this component of support be ignored and ineffectively implemented, students may struggle to succeed academically.

SSS increase the college retention and throughput rate. SSS give students the opportunity for academic development and assists them with basic college requirements to motivate them to successfully complete their post-secondary education (Balkrishen 2016). The relevance of SSS is manifested in the successful implementation of a student-centred approach and welcoming environment, which is a shift in the right direction for students’ academic success. SSS are resources that provide tailored and comprehensive support services for eligible students to help them achieve their full potential (Zungu and Munakandafa 2014).

Through vocational guidance and counselling services offered by an SSS unit, students get to know which occupations and jobs are best suited to their interests, values, and skills, and they come to understand the kind of qualifications and personal attributes required (Maimane 2016).

SSS and the Academic Success of First-Time College Entrants

South Africa’s combination of a low participation rate and a high dropout rate has been called a “low participation, high attrition” system (Council on Higher Education 2013, 52). This report indicated that not only are South African students and institutions failing to create a situation in which students have a reasonable chance of success, but the net effect of the current situation is that only about 5% of African and Coloured young people can succeed in higher education. Scott et al. (2007) attest that the main reason

why students in South African institutions of higher education find it so hard to succeed academically is that most students who fail are from the not so well-off families in terms of socio-economic status (SES). Therefore, when they enter institutions of higher education, they often struggle to meet the basic financial requirements of university studies. Any unforeseen circumstances aggravate the problem they face, and hence the possibility of dropping out is inevitable. Tinto (2014, 6) gives another reason for this predicament:

Providing students' access without support is not an opportunity. Without support, academic, social, and financial, too many students do not complete their programmes of study. In fact, once an institution admits a student, it becomes indebted to provide, as best as it can, the support needed to translate the opportunity accessed to provide success.

It is thus apparent that many talented students in South Africa find themselves inhibited by lack of finances and, as a result, are unable to turn their potential into actual performance. Yorke and Longden (2004) indicate that making progress in student success in a developing country like South Africa is a far greater challenge than in richer countries with more resources available to them. It is therefore of vital importance to unpack the various socio-economic status levels by looking into their constituents. As Reason (2009) argues, understanding this will allow institutions the benefit of being able to target interventions at specific subgroups of the economic level. According to Maimane (2016), the starting point for all prospective college students is to make career choices that match their interests, abilities, and aptitudes. For the college to be able to provide academic support, it must have a vision that will make it possible to respond to the needs of its clients, the students.

Factors That Can Improve the Provision of SSS to First-Time College Entrants

Numerous factors contribute to the success of first-generation students in college. One such factor is family involvement (Cummings 2014), the importance of which cannot be overstated. Therefore, TVET colleges and university administrators must find ways to engage students' families to facilitate constant learning increases in reading, writing, and maths. Many schools engage family members by offering workshop sessions in reading, organising reading volunteers, and helping parents strengthen students' reading skills, which include reading for pleasure at home (Muola and Mwanja 2013). Similarly, Norwani (2005) recognises that involving student families in the maths curriculum, assessments, and homework support activities may have a positive effect on student academic achievement.

Research has shown a correlation between students' attitudes towards reading and their motivation to learn (Kueng 2022). The more enthusiastic a student is about his or her reading, the more enthusiastic that student becomes about their learning (Kueng 2022). Instructors play a pivotal role in motivating students to read more in the classroom. Boughey (2010), discovered that by assessing students' reading interests, creating peer

groupings, understanding students' abilities, increasing reading time, and evaluating their accomplishments, instructors motivated students to read more. Consequently, the above-mentioned actions help students develop a better understanding of their attitudes toward reading.

Boughey (2010) discovered an increase in the number of college students who were struggling academically turning to one-on-one tutoring services. With the implementation of tutoring in schools, teachers struggled with limited sessions that were insufficient in addressing students' need for tutoring. Adding to that, the teacher spent tutoring sessions clarifying the significance of tutoring for the students, instead of actual tutoring (Kueng 2022). However, one-on-one instruction by trained personnel during classroom hours was a way of ensuring that all students received the necessary reading instruction that they needed to be successful academically (Rheinheimer and McKenzie 2010). Therefore, educational leaders and policymakers favoured the idea of offering one-on-one instruction to struggling readers.

Theoretical Framework

Humanistic-Existential Theory of Student Development

This study was underpinned by the humanistic-existential theory of student development founded by Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) and Carl Rogers (1902–1987) (Psychology Writing 2024). The theory highlights that students' development hinges on self-exploration, their personal encounters, and how they interpret the world. It further emphasises the pivotal role of personal initiative, self-awareness, and individual experiences in moulding students' growth and maturation. In the context of TVET colleges, this theory proposes that support services should aim to cultivate environments that are nurturing and empathetic. Such environments encourage students' academic success. Therefore, this theory was used to highlight the services that emphasise fostering positive relationships, building trust, and promoting understanding which are instrumental in helping students feel supported, consequently positively impacting their academic achievements. Further, the theory was utilised to interpret study findings and eventually draw sound recommendations.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey approach. Multiple data-collection methods were used to collect data from student liaison officers (SLOs), SSS managers (in some literature referred to as assistant directors: SSS-AD), SSS administrative clerks (SSS-AC), career development officers (CDOs), campus management teams, lecturers lecturing at entry levels, and first-year students. A total of 172 participants were included in the sample (Table 1). The members of staff (campus management team members, lecturers, and SSS unit staff members) were purposively selected based on their TVET knowledge and experience, while a simple random sampling technique was used to select the students.

Table 1: The study sample (n = 172)

Population	Justification	Total
Campus management team	Two per campus in 10 campuses	20
SSS-ADs	One AD in each TVET college. Each college has one.	02
SLOs	One per campus in 10 campuses	10
CDOs	One per campus in 10 campuses	10
SSS-ACs	One per campus in 10 campuses	10
Lecturers at entry levels	Two per campus in 10 campuses	20
First year students	Ten per campus in 10 campuses	100

A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions measured on a four-point scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). It comprised three sections. Section A focused on establishing the key role of the SSS unit in TVET colleges. Section B covered information on how SSS can affect the academic success of first-time students. Section C focused on determining the possible factors that can improve the provision of support services to first-time college entrants. The researchers sought permission from the management of all the TVET colleges. They also met with the participants and discussed the purpose of the study with them. Appointments were made based on the participants' schedules. The collected data were quantitative in nature, therefore descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to analyse them. It is worth mentioning that the humanistic-existential theory proved helpful in the structuring of the questionnaire because the proponents of the theory advocate for inventiveness, self-awareness, and individual experiences in moulding students' growth and maturation which ultimately lead into academic success.

Results and Discussion

Relevance of SSS in TVET Colleges

The data in Table 2 illustrate perceptions of campus management teams on the role of SSS units in TVET colleges. The data indicated unanimous agreement (100%) among participants regarding the insufficiency of academic opportunities for first-time college entrants. While these services strive to mitigate learning and developmental hurdles, their primary focus lies in not only alleviating existing barriers but also proactively preventing such obstacles. According to Mayet (2016), the persistent issue of low student success rates in South Africa manifests differently across various societal groups. A significant contributing factor to this challenge is the socio-economic status (SES) of incoming students. Given South Africa's pronounced SES disparities and social divisions, comprehending SES-related concerns is crucial for targeted interventions aimed at enhancing student success.

Table 2: Perceptions of campus management teams on the role of SSS units in TVET colleges (n = 20)

Statement	Strongly agree Freq (%)	Agree Freq (%)	Disagree Freq (%)	Strongly disagree Freq (%)
Students with learning challenges are accommodated, considering current campus resources.	2 (10.0)	6 (30.0)	9 (45.0)	3 (15.0)
Accurate and timely information is provided concerning academic queries.	0 (0.0)	10 (50.0)	10 (50.0)	0 (0.0)
The academic head handles such queries responsibly.	0 (0.0)	3 (15.0)	15 (75.0)	2 (10.0)
Perception of accessing the college addressed.	0 (0.0)	16 (80.0)	4 (20.0)	0 (0.0)
Code of conduct for students is clearly explained.	1 (5.0)	19 (95.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Adequate information given regarding career choices.	1 (5.0)	11 (55.0)	8 (40.0)	0 (0.0)
The support given impacted positively on students' level of performance.	0 (0.0)	10 (50.0)	10 (50.0)	0 (0.0)
Academic opportunities provided by the campus are adequate to support first-time college entrants.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	16 (80.0)	4 (20.0)
Academic support period allocated and monitored.	0 (0.0)	9 (45.0)	11 (55.0)	0 (0.0)
SSS framework (pre-entry, entry, on-course, and exit support) implemented effectively.	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	9 (45.0)	10 (50.0)

A report by the Human Resources Development Cooperation in Southern Africa (HRDCSA 2014) uncovered critical challenges confronting college leadership in Southern Africa. Firstly, it highlighted the overarching issue of inadequate instructional guidance provided by management to both lecturers and students. Secondly, it pointed out substantial deficiencies in lecturers' teaching abilities. Lastly, it underscored the complexity arising from the NC(V) programme, which draws students with varying levels of academic readiness, necessitating lecturers to navigate instructing significantly diverse student cohorts within the same class (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012). This situation seemingly results in heightened frustration levels among both lecturers and students. A review commissioned by the treasury to assess performance and spending shed light on colleges' deficiencies, revealing disheartening statistics. The findings revealed an alarmingly low throughput rate ranging from a mere 0.6% in civil engineering to 5.9% in tourism within NC(V) courses in 2013. Additionally, the national certification rate for first-year students stood at a meagre 32.5%, while the dropout rate registered 28.2% (Department of Higher Education and Training 2016).

The survey results indicated that a significant portion (60%) of the participants expressed disagreement regarding the accommodation of students facing learning challenges within the existing campus resources. However, the staff in SSS are dedicated to ensuring that students with disabilities can access all available programme resources. Notably, some educational institutions nationwide have established specialised learning environments on their campuses, equipped with empathetic mentors to assist students with disabilities in adapting to the academic rigors of college life.

An even split in responses was observed, with 10 individuals (50%) agreeing and an equal number (50%) disagreeing on the provision of accurate and timely academic information. The striking aspect lies in the 50% of negative responses, signifying that delays or inaccuracies in addressing academic queries might impede the initiation of necessary intervention strategies promptly. Prolonged neglect of academic issues can potentially obstruct students' paths to success. Moreover, a significant majority of participants (85%) disagreed with the responsible handling of these queries by the academic head. This discrepancy indicates a notable performance gap and creates an unfavourable setting for student achievement. In an ideal scenario, unresolved academic queries should be redirected to a dedicated SSS unit for comprehensive interventions to bolster student support.

From the insights gained from Table 2, it became evident that 60% of the participants affirmed the pivotal responsibility of an SSS unit in providing comprehensive information concerning career choices. Failing to fulfil this role may significantly heighten the dropout rates, particularly when students discover, midway through the academic year, that they have made an erroneous career decision. As outlined in the National Development Strategy, TVET colleges in South Africa hold a crucial position in enhancing the workforce's capacity to address national developmental requirements and the evolving needs of a dynamic world (Bowden et al. 2019).

In Table 2, an equal split was evident, with 10 participants (50%) expressing agreement, and an equivalent number of 10 participants (50%) expressing disagreement. Notably, certain TVET colleges have amassed substantial knowledge, expertise, and practical experience in devising and executing high-quality academic support programmes. Additionally, there is a wealth of insights into enhancing students' learning and teaching capabilities, particularly among first-year students (Mayet 2016). This reservoir of expertise merits harnessing, expansion, and widespread application across all TVET colleges for the collective benefit of students. The effective implementation of SSS plays a crucial role in motivating students, fostering diligence, and increasing graduation rates, thereby mitigating dropout tendencies.

Academic support for new students encompasses various stages: pre-entry support offered prior to enrolment, entry support during a student's initial arrival on a TVET college campus, on-course support following class registration, and exit support upon

departure for employment, further studies, or entrepreneurship (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012). The findings in Table 2 were striking, with all 20 participants (100%) expressing disagreement or strong disagreement regarding the adequacy of academic opportunities provided by the campus to support new entrants. Addressing this challenge necessitates effective academic support measures. It is posited that pivotal junctures, particularly at the intersections between key phases in the educational system (such as general education and FET, TVET and higher education, and the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate studies), play a crucial role. Du Toit (2012), argues that maintaining continuity throughout the entire educational system is essential for enhancing graduate outcomes. Without this continuum, achieving national developmental objectives remains an elusive aspiration.

From the insights provided by Table 2, it became apparent that only 45% of participants agreed that a designated and supervised academic support timeframe existed. Lecturers play a crucial role in providing classroom support, given their extensive contact hours with students, granting them a deeper understanding of students' needs than other staff members. Consequently, the absence of an allocated academic support period, specifically one hour per day, to assist students grappling with challenging subjects such as mathematics and science could impede the progress of first-year students. Implementing an academic support period targeted at subjects contributing to the declining certification rate becomes imperative. For instance, in the case of NC(V) students, certification necessitates passing all seven subjects, with progression contingent on passing at least five subjects.

Role of Support Programmes on the Academic Success of First-Time Entrants

Table 3: Perceptions of student support services officials on the effect of support services on academic success (n = 32)

Statement	Strongly agree Freq (%)	Agree Freq (%)	Disagree Freq (%)	Strongly disagree Freq (%)
You possess a full understanding of the SSS framework.	1 (3.1)	8 (25.0)	15 (46.9)	8 (25.0)
The SSS plan is linked to other plans in the college.	1 (3.1)	16 (50.0)	14 (43.8)	1 (3.1)
Orientation and induction programmes are well-structured and programmatic	2 (6.3)	25 (78.1)	5 (15.6)	0 (0.0)
There is a well-functioning administration of registration	0 (0.0)	24 (75.0)	6 (18.8)	2 (6.3)
Students are allowed to enter and succeed in the college.	6 (18.8)	20 (62.5)	5 (15.6)	1 (3.1)
Students are assisted to make meaningful career choices.	4 (12.5)	21 (65.6)	5 (15.6)	2 (6.3)
Information on funding opportunities is provided to new entrants.	5 (15.6)	16 (50.0)	11 (34.4)	0 (0.0)
Academic support is a priority to ensure	4 (12.5)	13 (40.6)	12 (37.5)	3 (9.4)

students' success.				
A major share of the SSS budget is allocated to academic support.	6 (18.8)	14 (43.8)	7 (21.9)	5 (15.6)
The SSS unit is adequately staffed with competent personnel to support students in all aspects of campus life.	2 (6.3)	14 (43.8)	10 (31.3)	6 (18.8)

The data presented in Table 3 show the perceptions of SSS officials (personnel) on the effect of support services on the academic success of first-time college entrants. The table indicates that 23 participants, constituting (71.9%) of the sample, lack a comprehensive understanding of the SSS framework. This poses a significant concern given that SSS officials are expected to execute this framework. The discrepancy arises in understanding how they can effectively implement strategies they do not fully comprehend, underscoring the importance of knowledge in executing responsibilities effectively.

Table 3 also demonstrated that an overwhelming majority (84.4%) acknowledged the well-structured and organised nature of orientation and induction programs. This positive assessment is crucial as it ensures that first-year students are appropriately oriented and seamlessly integrated into the new campus environment. Establishing academic success for students remains a paramount objective pursued by every college community (Maimane 2016). A structured and coordinated orientation programme is indispensable for aiding students in adapting to the academic rigors of their new campus life. At this pivotal juncture, the responsibilities of the SSS office are invaluable in ensuring the provision of comprehensive orientation programs, especially for incoming students.

The findings showed that 53.1% of the participants agreed while 46.9% disagreed on the prioritisation of academic support for ensuring students' success. This disparity underscores the evident need for prioritising academic support, particularly given the evident lack of foundational skills among students. According to research insights, the tutoring programme encompassing lecturer assistants and peer mentors should develop a structured assistance program that is tactically planned, supervised, and assessed to ascertain goal attainment (Council for Higher Education 2010). Establishing policies or systems dedicated to academic support, along with mechanisms for identifying and referring students in need of assistance, becomes imperative in this context.

The data showed a substantial agreement (81.3%) among the participants regarding students' accessibility and prospects for success within the college, marking a positive stride. As Tinto (2014, 6) aptly notes, merely providing access without concurrent support does not truly constitute opportunity. This sentiment resonates with the national plan aiming to amplify enrolments in public TVET colleges from approximately 639 618 in 2013 to an envisioned 2.5 million by 2030, surpassing the university sector in enrolments, as outlined in the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013). Opportunities for accessing the

college must align with opportunities for robust academic support to foster student success academically.

The insights from Table 3 unveiled a consensus among the participants (78%) regarding the assistance rendered to students in making significant career choices. This perspective stems from SSS officials who bear the responsibility for driving this process effectively. As Maimane (2016) asserts, prospective college students' foundational steps lie in aligning their career choices with their interests, abilities, and aptitudes. For the college to adequately cater to these needs necessitates a visionary approach that is responsive to the student's requirements. The data highlighted that 65.6% of the participants agreed while 43.4% disagreed with the provision of information on funding opportunities to new entrants. Access to funding significantly influences students, particularly those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, whose financial constraints may hinder college tuition fee payments. The notably high dropout rates among black students likely stem from insufficient state funding, such as scholarships, bursaries, and loans, exacerbating the challenges they face. The findings indicated that 62.6% of the participants agreed while 37.4% disagreed with the allocation of a significant portion of the SSS budget to academic support. This distribution of resources poses challenges to achieving equality in both opportunity and outcomes, particularly affecting indigent students who face inadequacies in preparedness (conceptual understanding, knowledge, academic literacy, and numeracy) for higher education programs (Du Toit 2012).

The data indicated that 50.9% of the participants disagreed while 49.1% agreed on the adequacy of staffing within the SSS unit to support students comprehensively in campus life. Those dissenting likely perceive the lack of staff within the SSS unit as detrimental to students' success, impeding their access to effective support mechanisms vital for academic progression. Integrating academic support and development into the core of teaching often involves the specialisation of units, such as curriculum development units, within higher education institutions. These units typically employ full-time specialists dedicated to curriculum design, materials development, and assessment (Department of Education 2008).

The findings uncovered that all of the participants (100%) disagreed regarding the existence of clear selection and placement policies with a focus on redress. The Further Education and Training Colleges Act, No. 16 of 2006 (Republic of South Africa 2006) mandates colleges to establish admissions policies formulated by the college council in consultation with the academic board and executive council members (Gewer 2010). These policies should prohibit unfair discrimination and incorporate measures to address historical inequalities. However, if students are not adequately assisted and supported during the selection and placement process, there is a risk of mismatches between students and programmes, potentially leading to difficulties in comprehending academic material. Effective selection and placement procedures consider students' interests and abilities, serving as critical initial steps towards their academic

accomplishments (Maimane 2016). The data indicated that all of the participants (100%) disagreed with the existence of such systems. Their rationale encompassed grievances about the lack of follow-up on students who left the system, the absence of maintained records for future references, and a dearth of student tracking mechanisms, at least none acknowledged within the college. The absence of exit support mechanisms creates a gap in assisting students in their preparation for entry into the labour market or pursuing further studies (Maimane 2016).

Academic Support Mechanisms to Enhance Pass Rates Within the TVET Colleges

Table 4: Lecturers' perception of academic support on overall pass rate in the TVET colleges (n = 20)

Statement	Strongly agree Freq (%)	Agree Freq (%)	Disagree Freq (%)	Strongly disagree Freq (%)
You possess full understanding of the SSS framework implementation.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	11 (55.0)	9 (45.0)
You have knowledge of the Teaching and Learning Plan.	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	16 (80.0)	3 (15.0)
Your input was considered in the SSS Plan.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	19 (95.0)	1 (5.0)
An academic support period is helpful and monitored.	0 (0.0)	16 (80.0)	4 (20.0)	0 (0.0)
There are control mechanisms to combat student absenteeism.	0 (0.0)	16 (80.0)	4 (20.0)	0 (0.0)
You are supported with continuous professional development.	0 (0.0)	14 (70.0)	6 (30.0)	0 (0.0)
Students' gaps in performance are identified early, and intervention strategies prioritised.	0 (0.0)	13 (65.0)	6 (30.0)	1 (5.0)
You are provided with necessary support from the SSS manager to offer academic support to students.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	12 (60.0)	8 (40.0)
There are enough resources in place to provide academic support to students.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	13 (65.0)	7 (35.0)
Academic support done right may impact positively on student's success.	13 (65.0)	7 (35.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)

Table 4 illustrates lecturers' perception regarding the impact of academic support on the overall pass rate in TVET colleges. Shockingly, all of the lecturers sampled (100%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with having a comprehensive understanding of the

implementation of the SSS framework. This poses a significant concern since lecturers play a crucial role in providing on-course classroom support. Their lack of understanding regarding the framework implementation might hinder its effective execution. The SSS framework ideally includes provisions for pre-entry, on-course, and exit-level support (Department of Education 2009). It is imperative that this framework is effectively communicated to lecturers, given their pivotal role in providing on-course classroom support.

Additionally, the data indicated that a significant majority (80%) of the participants acknowledged the presence and effectiveness of an academic support period that is both helpful and monitored. This represents a positive stride towards intensifying on-course classroom support, a crucial element in aiding student success. However, comprehensive academic support can truly integrate into the core of teaching and learning when it is thoughtfully orchestrated. Such planning encompasses targeted interventions in areas requiring improvement, yet this aspect alone does not define the entirety of academic support (Maimane 2016). It is noteworthy that only a minority (20%) of the participants expressed dissent, emphasising the need for further enhancement in the effectiveness and monitoring of the academic support period to ensure its efficacy. The findings further indicate that a significant majority (80%) of the sampled participants acknowledged the existence of controlled mechanisms aimed at addressing student absenteeism. However, it is crucial to note that absenteeism, without proper monitoring and intervention, can severely undermine the effectiveness of academic support programmes.

The data presented in Table 4 indicated that 70% of the participants acknowledged the provision of support for continuous professional development, while 30% disagreed with this statement. The data imply a disparity in professional development opportunities between academic and support staff within the SSS unit. It suggests a lack of equitability and balance in the allocation of resources for professional growth between these staff categories. The findings also highlighted a concerning lack of capacity building for key members within the SSS unit, potentially hindering their effectiveness in fulfilling their roles. Moreover, there seems to be an imbalance in the prioritisation of professional development, favouring academic staff over support staff. This imbalance might reflect an institutional bias toward academic staff, potentially overlooking the vital role played by support staff in enhancing student success. It is imperative that professional learning and development initiatives are tailored to individual needs and self-directed, aligned with the institutional structure and corresponding rewards. Collaborative opportunities should be integrated to encourage synergy between staff members, fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for both academic and support staff.

From the findings, it is evident that 65% of the participants recognised the importance of early identification of students' performance gaps and prioritised intervention strategies. However, the remaining 35% who disagreed pose a serious concern within

the sector. This disparity raises critical issues related to lecturers' shortcomings in their teaching capabilities (Badenhorst and Radile 2018). Research supports the notion that early identification of academic support needs is pivotal within the system. It enables students to locate and access assistance promptly, as highlighted by Mpuangnan et al. (2021). Waiting until mid-year or final examinations often proves too late to rectify academic challenges, underscoring the urgency of early intervention for student success. The findings indicated a unanimous consensus among the participants (100%) that effective academic support can significantly influence student success. An initial stride towards academic support involves ensuring that the regular teaching timetable for all subjects is structured to facilitate comprehensive teaching and learning across the curriculum components (Department of Education 2009).

Recommendations

- (1) Reinforce the understanding and execution of the SSS framework across TVET colleges. This requires comprehensive training programmes for SSS officials to ensure a clear grasp of the framework's objectives and strategies.
- (2) Develop and implement comprehensive career guidance programmes while ensuring transparent selection and placement policies that prioritise redress.
- (3) Provide balanced and relevant professional development opportunities for academic and support staff.
- (4) Establish proactive measures for identifying students' academic support needs early on. Implement strategies to intervene promptly, preventing academic gaps from widening and improving the effectiveness of support services.
- (5) Establish support programmes to assist students transitioning out of the college for employment or further studies.

Conclusion

In the context of TVET colleges, the relevance of SSS stands out. These colleges cater to diverse student populations with varying backgrounds, learning needs, and academic readiness levels. The role of SSS within these institutions is multifaceted, encompassing essential elements like pre-entry support, orientation, academic guidance, and exit assistance. This layered approach resonates with the principles of the humanistic-existential theory of student development, emphasising students' self-discovery, personal experiences, and perceptions as fundamental aspects shaping their growth.

Exploring the perspectives of SSS officials regarding the impact of their support programmes on first-time college entrants reveals a crucial aspect of creating an enabling environment for student success. These officials not only execute but also

mould the initial steps in students' educational paths. Their perceptions significantly shape the design, execution, and efficacy of support programmes, directly influencing how students adapt to the college setting. Aligned with the humanistic-existential theory, these officials play a pivotal role in fostering a supportive environment that encourages self-awareness, empowerment, and subjective experiences, setting the stage for students' overall development.

Lecturers, serving as key players in students' academic journeys, endorse specific academic support strategies that notably bolster pass rates within the TVET sector. Their beliefs centre around identifying early academic gaps, targeted interventions, and dedicated support periods for challenging subjects. These strategies, rooted in the humanistic-existential theory, resonate with the focus on personal growth through self-awareness and tailored interventions. Lecturers recognise the significance of proactive support mechanisms tailored to students' diverse needs, aiming to cultivate an environment conducive to holistic development.

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