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Student Voice in the Transitioning of First-Year Students in the College of Humanities

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The UKZN First-Year Experience Programme (FYEP) focuses on implementing a seamless transition for first-year students in university and creating a sense of belonging to support their academic success. This research examines the undergraduate First-Time Entry Students' (FTENS) voice in providing evaluations and feedback on the UKZN FYEP to understand their transition. Specific issues such as inadequate academic preparedness, social integration difficulties, and lack of emotional support contribute to these challenges. To address these issues, institutions must implement a structured, systematic, and coordinated FYEP that responds to the unique needs of FTENS. The University of KwaZulu Natal, College of Humanities (CHUM), anticipates using student voice to improve the FYE programme. This study adopts Lizzio's five senses of success theory (2006) to analyse how first-year students experience and navigate their transition in a higher education setting. A quantitative approach and census sampling methods were adopted. Of the 4,430 CHUM FTENS enrolled in the FYEP and invited to participate in the study, 1,190 participated. An online student evaluation and feedback questionnaire was designed with open and closed-ended questions for Units 1 and 2, which were available for completion in semester one. Frequency counts and thematic content analysis of the qualitative responses were used to analyse the data. The FTENS found the content supportive in their transition. FTENS who took longer to complete the Units reported that their focus was on their studies as they struggled to adjust to the academic demands of their studies. The FYE mentors played a vital in supporting FTENS to complete the FYEP. Also, the lack of digital literacy skills hindered the timely completion of the Units. Student voice in quality assuring an FYE programme is important. Feedback and evaluation of the FYEP must be regular and ongoing to enhance and improve the programme's delivery, curriculum content, and assessment.

Keywords: First-Year Experience Programme, student voice, student transition

Students' Voices as a Foundational Tool for Developing Critical Social Justice and Citizenship

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With the constant need to transform the social landscape of our country, the onus falls on educational institutions to develop teaching and learning environments which interrupt historical prejudices and discriminations, and facilitate the building of new ways of being in the world. Universities, especially, should be sites of struggle towards this end of developing the kind of students who will take their rightful place in a democratic, inclusive and socially just society and who will be able to contribute appropriately and meaningfully as citizens of such a society. UKZN is taking this project seriously through the creation of a compulsory module called Critical Social Justice and Citizenship, which is being offered to ALL first-year students across the entire University of KwaZulu-Natal. The module uses a blended learning delivery approach comprising 8 pre-recorded online lectures and 8 in-person small-group tutorials. These tutorials are designed to create safe and effective spaces for experiential and critical learning, where students are encouraged to participate and share their experiences while engaging in difficult, sensitive and sometimes taboo conversations about race and racism, xenophobia, gender and sexism, sexuality and homophobia, class and classism, religious discrimination and all other prejudices against those we have come to view as 'other'. Fuelled by a vision of human rights, inclusion and social justice, this module is designed to identify, challenge and interrupt these forms of prejudice and discrimination, with a specific focus on utilising students' voices as a foundational tool for developing critical social justice and citizenship in UKZN students. As a non-credit-bearing module with no formal quantitative academic assessment, this module has had to approach academic monitoring differently by focusing on student engagement. This paper draws on data generated from the participatory action research component of this module during the first-semester offering of the module in 2024, where feedback from students and tutors outlines the successes and challenges of incorporating students' voices in reaching the intended outcomes of this module and offers feedback on the systems of monitoring and supporting student engagement put into effect within the module

Keywords:

Foregrounding Student Voice in Evaluating Academic Advice for Postgraduate Students at the College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal

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This study investigates the effectiveness of academic and curriculum advice provided to postgraduate students (Honours, PGDIP, and PGCE) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) College of Humanities (CHUM) by foregrounding their perspectives. Previously, postgraduate students did not receive academic advice from Postgraduate Academic Development Officers, making this monitoring and tracking initiative a recent intervention by the College. Postgraduate students often face challenges that impact their ability to navigate and benefit from support services. The gap in understanding how postgraduate students experience and evaluate academic advice, especially with their limited research skills, presents a challenge in designing support programs that effectively meet their needs. The study explored the academic challenges students encountered, the support they needed, their satisfaction with the clarity of information, and the benefit of advice on their academic progress. In recent years, universities have increasingly focused on addressing the needs of postgraduate students. Academic advice plays a crucial role in student success and engagement, enhancing support services through student feedback and improving retention rates. The student voice conceptual framework emphasizes the ethical and educational importance of listening to students and acknowledging their perspectives. Academic advising is understood as ongoing intentional interactions between PGADOs and the postgraduate cohort through which curriculum advice and referrals to appropriate support units are provided. Tertiary institutions have largely relied on evaluation surveys to help in understanding the specific needs, expectations and challenges faced by postgraduate students thus enabling the development of tailored support programmes. The study adopted a quantitative approach and census sampling. Sixty-six CHUM postgraduate students responded to the online student evaluation survey. The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended questions. The data was analysed using frequency counts, and thematic content analysis for the open-ended qualitative responses. Findings revealed that while 90% of respondents provided positive feedback, with 65% "Strongly Agreeing" on their understanding of the demands of postgraduate studies, significant challenges were highlighted. Students reported difficulties with time management, understanding study material, and limited research skills, indicating a need for targeted strategies to support their academic focus. The study highlights the effectiveness of academic advising but underscores the need for improvement. The university should implement workshops on time management and research skills and prioritize ongoing collection of student feedback to continuously refine advising services, ensuring they meet the unique needs of postgraduate students.

Keywords: Postgraduate Academic Advising, Postgraduate Students, Student Voice, Postgraduate Student Support

From Access to Success: Student Experiences of the Science and Engineering Augmented Programmes at a Higher Education Institution

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Historical disparities within higher education in South Africa have led to the formation of Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECPs) in various institutions of higher learning. ECPs provide access to higher education for disadvantaged and under-prepared students. The programmes are centred around augmented curriculums specifically developed to adequately prepare students for mainstream courses as well as offering tailored support as the demographic of students is understood and well documented. Although these students are from similar educational backgrounds, they each experience the ECPs in a unique way, and it is these unique experiences that can be used to improve existing ECP models with regard to preparedness for mainstream as well as adequate student support. This study aims to understand the experience of students enrolled in science and engineering ECPs at a higher education institution in South Africa and how these experiences influence their academic progress and success. Employing a qualitative phenomenological research design, this study will use interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experiences of 30 purposively selected students currently enrolled in science and engineering access programmes and have transitioned into mainstream courses. Data collection will be conducted through semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions, allowing for rich, detailed accounts of participants' experiences. Thematic analysis will be used to identify common themes and patterns across participants' narratives. To ensure validity and reliability, the study will incorporate member checking, researcher triangulation, and maintain a reflexive journal to mitigate potential researcher bias. Results from this study will increase the understanding of the challenges experienced by this specific cohort of students and allow for tailor-made support structures to further enhance academic success and social integration. The findings will contribute to the improvement of existing ECP models and inform policy decisions regarding support for students transitioning from ECPs to mainstream programmes in South African institutions of higher learning.

Keywords: student experiences, Extended Curriculum Programme, success, support

Assessing the Influence of the FYE Programme on Academic Success: A Case Study of UKZN Augmented Science and Engineering Students

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The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) offers several extended curriculum (augmented) programmes across its four colleges to increase access for non-traditional students. Within the College of Agriculture, Engineering, and Science, the augmented programmes for Science and Engineering provide extensive academic support to address the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are underprepared for university. In 2022, an additional support mechanism was introduced: the First-Year Experience (FYE) programme. Designed to ease the transition to university life for all UKZN first-year students (including the augmented students), the FYE programme is structured as an online module comprising four units that focus on university transition, academic literacy, personal development, and financial literacy. Despite the relevance of the resources offered by the FYE Programme, many students fail to complete the module on time, missing out on valuable skills essential for their academic success. This study investigates the impact of FYE module completion on the academic performance of students in the Science and Engineering augmented programmes, using Tinto's theory of student integration as its theoretical framework. Employing a mixed methods approach, the study examines the correlation between FYE module completion and pass rates in the augmented modules, analyses variations in academic performance based on completion status, and explores students' perceptions of the FYE programme's influence on their academic progress. The research focuses on 483 augmented students enrolled in the first semester of the 2024 academic year. Quantitative data on academic performance and FYE module completion will be complemented by qualitative data from structured interviews and surveys to capture student perceptions. The findings will offer insights into the effectiveness of the FYE programme in enhancing academic success and inform strategies to improve both the programme and student completion rates.

Keywords: extended curriculum, academic success

Incorporating Student Voice in Academic Advising in the Bachelor of Social Science Extended Curriculum in the College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal

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In Academic Advising (AA), students must be co-creators of their educational experiences and contribute towards improvements in institutional procedures. Strydom and Loots, (2020) argue that student voice (SV) can contribute to enhancing AA. The study used SV as a transformative tool to examine how it can enhance AA within the BSS4 programme. The BSS4 programme aims to provide scaffolded support to students from disadvantaged communities to redress past inequalities. However, there is a limited understanding of student perceptions of the AA services offered by the programme. Therefore, this study aimed to explore students' perceptions of AA in the BSS4 programme. Foundation programmes in higher education in South Africa provide access for students from quintiles 1 to 3 schools who do not meet the college minimum entry requirements. Providing AA is, therefore, crucial to student success. Strydom et al. (2017) suggest that AA should be a coordinated and integrated intervention. The study will draw upon Burns Crookston's Developmental Advising Theory. This theory is particularly relevant in the context of the Bachelor of Social Science Extended Curriculum (BSS4) at the College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, where incorporating student voice is essential for enhancing academic advising practices, which is crucial for creating an inclusive and responsive advising environment by valuing student input, advisors can tailor their guidance to meet individual needs more effectively. The study draws upon the quantitative research methodology through the use of purposive sampling. A total of 150 final-year students participated in the survey. The study adopted a self-administered online questionnaire consisting of open- and closed-ended questions. Thematic analysis was utilized to analyse the data. This allowed the researchers to elicit relevant themes from the findings to understand student responses to academic advising. The final year students found the curriculum advice, degree planning and career pathing sessions helpful. However, the student feedback indicated a preference for contact academic advising over online. The evaluative feedback provided by students contributed to the review, improvements, and transformation of AA.

Keywords: Foundation programmes – higher education; Academic advising; Evaluating academic advising

How the Use of Code-Switching Supports and Helps Students to Succeed in the Classroom: Student Perceptions of the Advantages of CS in UKZN Tutorials

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Code-switching (CS) is a sociolinguistic phenomenon where bilingual or multilingual speakers switch from one language to another (Sampurna, 2023: 40) and is one of the most common multilingual teaching strategies used to disseminate information in a multilingual context in South Africa (Maluleke, 2019: 1). This study explores how CS aids student success in the tutorial environment at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), by focussing on the perceptions of undergraduate first-year Psychology students. The study aims to identify the benefits of CS in tutorials and how it contributes to comprehension, retention of complex concepts, and classroom participation. Using a qualitative research design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus groups in 2023 with students enrolled in Psychology tutorials at UKZN. Psychology is one of the disciplines within the College of Humanities that are at the forefront of implementing UKZN's bilingual language policy. The sample was purposefully selected to include students who frequently engaged in or observed CS during tutorials. The findings indicate that CS promotes inclusivity, particularly for students who are not fully proficient in English, by bridging cultural and linguistic gaps. Participants reported that CS allowed them to relate new information to their existing knowledge and cultural experiences, thus enhancing their academic success. This study highlights the influence of students' linguistic backgrounds and tutors' teaching styles on their perceptions of CS. Students who shared linguistic similarities with their tutors or peers viewed CS as a positive tool for learning. The findings align with existing literature that supports using CS as a pedagogical strategy in multilingual settings, underscoring its potential to create equitable and supportive learning environments for all students.

Keywords: code-switching, student support, tutorials, Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Student Voices as Producers of New Insight and Knowledge in the TransGariep Inter-Institutional Student Leadership Programme

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This paper explores student voices through the TransGariep Inter-Institutional Student Leadership Programme. The programme held at the University of Cape Town from July 10–20, 2024, aimed to foster self-leadership by foregrounding healing and compassion. Using the "Ecology of Self" as its foundation, the programme invited students to engage in self-reflection, healing practices, and spiritual contemplation. The programme was rooted in addressing the effects of historical trauma, including mental health issues, gender-based violence, and substance abuse, as they relate to academic success. Through immersive activities such as the circle of belonging, reflective journaling, and dialogical storytelling, participants explored personal and collective narratives, healing, and resilience. The second phase of the programme included mindfulness practices in nature to further the development of self-compassion and spiritual growth. The methodology used was ethnographic. Data was collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed for a deep exploration of participants' interactions and experiences within the programme. Participants were first-year students. They were selected based on their willingness to engage in self-reflection. They came from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, reflecting the programme's intention of inclusivity and multiple ways of knowing. The programme encouraged students to co-create knowledge, highlighting student participation in shaping learning outcomes. This collaborative approach aligns with literature advocating for student engagement as co-creators in education (Bovill et al., 2011; Healey et al., 2014). The main limitation identified was the programme's short duration, particularly the need for post-programme support to help participants integrate the healing practices into their daily lives. In conclusion, the programme spotlights the power of student voices in leadership development, creating a transformative space for self-leadership and healing. By centring students as co-creators, the programme provides a valuable model for integrating student agency and holistic support in leadership education.

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Keywords:

FYS Practitioners' Use of Student Voice as a Contributor to the Implementation of the FYS Programme at Nelson Mandela University

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There is a proliferation of discussions on the need to consider student voice in student support initiatives. It is apparent from these discussions that the student voice has always existed, but emphasis needs to be placed on situating it where it can be heard and thus maximising its potential. It is against this context that in this paper, we analyse how we use the student voice as a contributor to the implementation of the First-Year Success (FYS) programme at Nelson Mandela University. We adopt auto-ethnography as a qualitative research design to reflect on our lived experience as FYS practitioners working with senior students (FYS Buddies), to analyse how we use student voice to enhance the implementation of our FYS programme. We analysed the reflections through deductive thematic analysis guided by a framework that differentiates between four forms of student involvement in practice, placed within a spectrum of voice versus action and university versus student as drivers of voice or action. We found that the FYS Buddies' voice is an embodiment of their lived experiences and voices of the first-year students, thus affording us opportunities to understand students' needs relevant to the FYS programme. We conclude that student voice was used as an enabler for building interventions that aid student success and enhance social and academic integration for first-year students. Furthermore, student voice served as an immediate monitoring and evaluation tool which would allow us to make timely adjustments to the FYS programme. We recommend that FYS practitioners reflect in-action and on-action to maximise student voice as a contributor to the implementation of first-year experience initiatives.

Keywords: student voice, first-year experience, student success

Empowering Student Voices: Transgressive Pedagogies in Higher Education

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This study examines the transformative impact of centering student voices through a transgressive pedagogy in higher education, focusing on the module "Religion and Media" at the University of KwaZulu-Natal at Howard College. Employing diverse socio-religious and decolonial autoethnographic perspectives (Mbembe, 2016)—South African-Nigerian Christian and differently-abled Muslim feminist—the study analyses pedagogical methods that prioritize student agency and critical thinking in knowledge production (hooks, 1994). The study explores how reflective essays, blog posts, group presentations and co-creating the final assessment, facilitate student expression, identity development, and critical thinking within supervised educational settings. Drawing on our personal experiences as students of the module, together with theoretical insights, the study highlights the pedagogical efficacy of these assessments in fostering self-reflection, theory-practice connections, and inclusive learning environments. Key findings underscore student feedback as a tool of scaffolding student growth through constructive feedback, enhancing students' ability to articulate diverse viewpoints and contribute meaningfully to academic discourse. The approach validates student experiences and promotes a dynamic learning community where students become agents of change. Critically reflecting on their participation in the "Religion and Media" module, the authors discuss the initial challenges and subsequent empowerment derived from the student-centered approach. They examine how this pedagogical strategy not only supports their academic development but also challenges traditional teaching and learning boundaries while empowering marginalized voices. In conclusion, this study advocates for the continued implementation of student-centered pedagogies to enrich educational experiences, foster critical engagement, and promote inclusivity in academia. It underscores the significance of centering student voices within engaged pedagogy as a catalyst for knowledge co-creation and transformative change within higher education.

Keywords: transgressive/engaged pedagogies, student-centred agency, inclusivity, transformative change

Student Voice in the Evaluation of the Support Interventions in the Writing Place in the College of Humanities

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The College of Humanities (CHUM) Writing Place is an essential Academic Monitoring and Support (AMS) intervention to facilitate student success and good academic performance for undergraduates, including honours and postgraduate diploma students. This study examined the students' experiences and insights into the Writing Place services and workshops, the areas that can be improved and aspects that can be enhanced. Archer (2008:256) noted that student voice is indispensable to the writing centre's work. The Academic Literacies Model provided a foundational framework for this study, conceptualising writing and literacy as socially embedded practices influenced by specific academic and institutional contexts. This model acknowledges the nuanced complexities of students' writing experiences, individuality, and meaning-making. By adopting this approach, the study offers a holistic perspective on students' engagements with the Writing Place, supporting a more responsive and contextually informed enhancement of its services to meet the diverse academic needs of the students. A quantitative approach was adopted, and the data was collected using a census survey. About 1,000 students from Howard College, Edgewood, and Pietermaritzburg campuses were invited to participate in the student evaluation and feedback. The selection criteria for their participation: (1) the student must be currently registered at UKZN, (2) they must have used the Writing Place services in 2023 and 2024, and (3) the student must be in undergraduate, honours or postgraduate diploma programme. A total of 100 students participated in the study. The study revealed that students had diverse experiences and perceptions regarding the quality of the Writing Place (WP) services, and several challenges were identified. While students recognized the WP's positive impact on their academic writing and reading skills, they also encountered quality-related issues that required attention. This research underscored the significance of amplifying student voices and highlighted the WP's role in fostering student success and retention. To improve the WP's effectiveness, the study recommends that student feedback be consistently gathered and incorporated into ongoing service enhancements.

Keywords: Student Voice, Writing Place, Academic Literacy

First-year Student Voice and Feedback on the 2024 College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal Online Orientation and Academic Advising Programme

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This paper reports on student voice in the form of feedback from first-time entry (FTENs)/ first-year undergraduate students who participated in an online orientation and academic advising programme in the College of Humanities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in February 2024. The recurring 23-day online orientation sessions formed part of the College's First-Year Experience Programme (FYEP). The evaluation survey aimed to understand first-year students' insights and experience of the online orientation and academic advising programme, identify areas we could enhance/ improve, and areas where we were doing well. Lizzio's(2006) five senses of student success were used as the conceptual framework of this study. The student evaluation and feedback survey adopted a quantitative design. A total of 879 FTENs participated in the online orientation programme, and 343 of them volunteered and responded to the survey. The quantitative data was analysed using frequency counts, and thematic content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative responses. The findings show that over 80% were satisfied with the information on social adjustment.87% said the programme accommodated their questions. Furthermore, 86% of the respondents were satisfied with the information they were given on their degree structures, and 84% were satisfied with the information they were given on university academic expectations. The qualitative responses revealed challenges with access to data and issues of connectivity, language competence and diversity, and online vs contact(preferred) orientation. Recommendations include the adoption of a blended approach (online and contact) for future undergraduate FTENs orientation and academic advising programmes, addressing student digital literacy challenges, bilingual (isiZulu and English) orientation sessions and commencing orientation at the pre-registration phase of the student journey to enhance student transition, adjustment and success.

Keywords: first-year orientation programme, student voice, student transition, academic advising

Leveraging Student Voice to Enhance Academic Advising and Foster Student Success at Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT)

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Recognising students as key stakeholders, this study aims to demonstrate how their feedback and active participation can drive improvements in academic advising services, leading to more personalized and effective guidance. The purpose is to investigate the role of student voice in transforming academic advising practices to better support student success. A mixed-methods approach is employed to ensure the student's voice is heard, incorporating both quantitative surveys and qualitative focus groups. The surveys gather data on students' satisfaction with current advising practices and their perceptions of advisor accessibility and effectiveness. The focus groups delve deeper into students' individual experiences and specific suggestions for enhancing advising services. The study sample consists of three hundred which is made of one hundred undergraduate students per faculty from three faculties (Engineering, Natural Science and Management Science) at Mangosuthu University of Technology. The major findings from focused group interviews and surveys indicate that students who actively contribute to the development of advising policies and practices experience a higher level of satisfaction and academic success. Key insights reveal that students value advisors who are approachable, knowledgeable, and empathetic. Furthermore, students emphasize the importance of having a say in creating advising resources and structuring advising sessions. When student feedback is integrated into advising frameworks, there is a notable improvement in the alignment between student needs and the support provided by advisors. This study highlights the critical need for academic institutions to institutionalise student participation in the advising process. Universities can develop more responsive and supportive advising systems by fostering an environment where student input is clearly acted upon. The implications of this study suggest that leveraging student voice not only enhances the quality of academic advising but also contributes to overall student success and retention. This study further offers practical strategies for incorporating student feedback into advising practices, leading to more effective support systems that meet the diverse needs of the student population.

Keywords:

Medical Student Learning on a Distributed Training Platform in Rural District Hospitals

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Decentralizing medical student training enhances curriculum relevance, exposing students to generalist patient care in diverse contexts. This study explored student experiences of learning at rural district hospitals in KwaZulu Natal and provides insight into their experiences which contributed to their success. The aim of this study was to understand the experiences of learning of final-year medical students at UKZN during their 7-week Family Medicine rural rotation. This was a qualitative study done with students who completed their Family Medicine rotation in November 2022. Four students participated in semi-structured interviews, and 20 students participated in 4 focus group discussions (4 x 5 students). All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed. Analysis revealed positive learning experiences and identified the following themes: assuming learning responsibility, emphasizing generalist skills, fostering teamwork, and managing the learning environment which contributed to their learning and success. Meaningful relationships with local stakeholders were crucial, mediating significant learning experiences. Access to the clinical platform empowered students to take responsibility for patient care, stimulating profound learning. The context provided opportunities for holistic patient interactions, enlightening students about patient-centered care, social determinants of health, and contextual influences on health and illness. Encounters with complex patients in outpatient and community settings created disorienting dilemmas challenging assumptions about water access, food security, and other resources. Reflection on these dilemmas led to transformative learning, and knowledge co-construction. Active participation in hospital activities, and being 'part of the team,' facilitated symbiotic relationships and reciprocal learning among patients, students, staff, and faculty. The module design with small student groups, reflective practices on disorienting experiences, and clear expectations allowed for transformative experiential learning. In conclusion, this study reinforces the advantages of decentralized, experiential training, highlighting the positive impact of meaningful participation and transformative learning opportunities.

Keywords:

Student Voice in Evaluating the Academic Advice for Undergraduate Students at the College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal

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This study examines the role of curriculum and academic advising in enhancing undergraduate student success, particularly for those underperforming academically. It evaluates the effectiveness of online advising sessions introduced in the first semester of 2024, designed to guide students on degree structures, academic policies, and progress monitoring, focusing on incorporating student feedback. Rooted in Crookston's (2009) developmental advising theory, which highlights a supportive advisor-student relationship, the study evaluates the success of advising sessions through feedback from 1,125 students who completed post-session surveys. A quantitative research approach with a positivist paradigm was used, utilizing self-administered questions through MS Forms, and data was analysed using Microsoft Excel and thematic analysis. The findings of the study revealed high levels of student satisfaction, particularly regarding course requirements and progression clarity. However, areas for improvement were also identified, such as better accessibility to the Academic Development Officers, personalized support, longer session times, and improved session structuring. The study underscores the importance of a student-centred approach in academic advising, where student voices are actively considered in the evaluation process. Addressing these recommendations will enable the College of Humanities to develop a more inclusive, responsive, and effective advising system that meets students' needs and supports academic success. This study contributes to ongoing efforts to enhance academic support systems within higher education, particularly for students at risk of underperformance, and provides actionable recommendations for refining advising practices at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Keywords: student voice, academic advising, underperforming students, student support

PRESENTER BIO NOTES

Rakheeba Bux is an FYE Coordinator in the College of Humanities, School of Education. She is pursuing a PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, researching women in leadership and mentoring roles in higher education. As a coordinator and mentor, she supports students in their academic growth. Passionate about education and feminist research, she aims to empower others with resilience, empathy, and curiosity. She has presented her research at key academic forums and earned summa cum laude for her honours and cum laude for her master's degrees. Recently, she was recognized as one of the Top 100 GradStars of 2024 in the country



Antoinette (Toni) D'amant: I have been a permanent lecturer in the discipline of Social Justice Education at UKZN's School of Education in Durban since 2001. The focus of my work is facilitating critical self-reflection in educational practitioners in the areas of diversity, inclusion and social justice, specifically interrogating all issues and identities related to 'othering' and the subordination and mistreatment of one social group at the hands of another. I take my role as a transformative agent to heart and feel responsible for nurturing a vision that takes the project of human liberation and social justice seriously. This involves recognising and disrupting injustices in the hope of developing a world free of prejudice, discrimination and oppression. I encourage my students to consider the ways in which their socialization influences their personal and professional identities through the use of various visual arts-based methodologies as tools for developing self-reflexivity as part of personal and professional transformation and social awareness. I cannot expect my students to embark on this without engaging in the same critical reflection, and I am aware of the need to acknowledge and interrogate the issue of power relations and how these inform aspects of my identity formation and engage in constant critical interrogation of my own placed identity. My research, writings and community engagement highlight voices that have been previously silenced and ignored and reflect journeys of transformation towards inclusion and liberation.



Miss **Nyameka Diko** serves as a Principal Academic Development Officer for the PMB campus, overseeing the School of Chemistry and Physics, the School of Agriculture, Earth and Environmental Science and the School of Engineering. Miss Diko brings a wealth of experience in academic development and a deep understanding of student needs in higher education. She has worked as a Senior ADO and has also held other roles, such as Supplemental Instructor Coordinator and Residence Assistant at the Department of Student Residence Affairs. She is currently registered as a PhD student specializing in heterogeneous catalysis. She also holds an MSc and BSc Honours in Chemistry. Having attained SI Supervisor Training, SI Advanced Supervisor and Academic Advising certificates, Miss Diko demonstrates a commitment to the professional development of students and staff alike



Musawenkosi Dubazana is an academic leader and Team Leader at the Writing Place, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Pietermaritzburg campus. Currently pursuing a Master of Social Sciences in International Relations, Musawenkosi combines academic expertise with practical experience, effectively managing and developing a team of tutors to ensure high standards in academic support across disciplines. His role includes guiding Writing Place tutors to provide tailored support and mentorship that enhances student success. A former member of the Student Representative Council, Musawenkosi is skilled in academic advocacy and community engagement. His commitment to educational and social impact is reflected in his contributions to student development, outreach initiatives, and awareness campaigns at UKZN



Ms. **Azraa Ebrahim:** I am currently a 3rd year Bachelor of Social Science student at UKZN majoring in Industrial Psychology and Religion studies. I have a passion for breaking stereotypes associated with blindness as well as empowering differently-abled individuals, especially women within the Muslim community. My research interests lie within the intersection of Islam, disability, culture and gender, drawing from a research methodology embedded in auto-ethnography and decolonization. I have a fond interest in and a strong inclination towards Tassawuf (Sufism) as Islam's pathway to inner peace and spirituality, and I have a 1st Dan blackbelt in karate.



Hailey Fudu has been working in community development as both a teacher and through youth empowerment programme facilitation in South Africa for the past 20 years. Her work focuses on facilitating youth development through programmes that assist with values education, nurturing talents and providing space for them to participate in service. While facilitating and researching the Critical Social Justice and Citizenship Module at UKZN she has observed some incredible learning and insights from student voices. In addition to her work with UKZN, she runs the Ubuntu Wellness Project, the Baha'i Junior Spiritual Empowerment Programme for Grade 7s, she teaches Life Orientation and has begun a school library at Vezamafa Primary in Clermont. She is passionate about helping youth find their power and use it for social upliftment.



Bernhard Gaede is a family physician currently appointed as Associate Professor and currently is the HOD of Family Medicine at UKZN. Prior to joining the University, he worked in rural hospital settings for well over a decade. In 2014 he completed his PhD through the University of Pretoria, focusing on the experiences and challenges of health professionals working in the public sector bureaucracy. Areas of research and interest focus on healthcare systems, community-level care and medical anthropology. Recent research includes health professional education, decentralized training and community engagement.



Kudzai Goto is a PhD candidate in International Relations at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where she also plays a vital role as a Postgraduate Academic Development Officer at the Pietermaritzburg campus. Her research interests are deeply rooted in her passion for education, particularly in enhancing academic monitoring support and improving student support services to ensure student success. Goto aims to learn innovative strategies to support students in their educational journeys and equip them to become responsible and engaged global citizens. Through her work, she aims to contribute to developing a more inclusive and supportive educational environment that nurtures well-rounded graduates equipped to make meaningful contributions to society and globally.



Thandi Gumbi is a Postgraduate Academic Development Officer for the School of Education in the College of Humanities of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Her passions include enhancing student support, adult & community education and development, teaching, poverty, unemployment, and just peace. She began her career in basic education, taking on various leadership roles from teaching to strategic management. She later worked in the non-profit sector, wherein 2011, she earned a spot as a MACAIDS fellow, an HIV prevention leadership initiative that was hosted by the Universities of California & New York, HSRC and MAC. Thandi continues to be actively involved in higher education, community work and academic writing while pursuing her PhD at the UKZN's School of Education.



Zanenhlanhla Gumbi is a Principal Academic Development Officer at the Pietermaritzburg campus, and she currently services the School of Life Sciences and the School of Maths, Statistics and Computer Science. She has been actively involved in teaching and learning activities as well as academic support programmes, holding various positions such as SI leader, SI coordinator and FYE coordinator. She has also been involved in the CAES Matric Helpline Programme. Currently, Zanenhlanhla is pursuing her PhD in Biochemistry at UKZN, focusing on HIV prevention in adolescent girls and young women. She is an advocate for the importance of obtaining a good education, and the necessary qualifications as a start to achieving success in life, which is why she enjoys interacting and engaging with students on a personal level to assist them in achieving their academic goals.



Dr **Nirisha Haricharan** is the Teaching and Learning Coordinator in the College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science, where she oversees and reports on teaching and learning activities across the College. She facilitates capacity building initiatives for both staff and students, and manages the First Year Experience (FYE) Programme, along with other key teaching and learning initiatives. Nirisha holds a PhD in Linguistics and has 13 years of experience teaching scientific literacy modules in the Centre for Academic Success in Science and Engineering (CASSE). Her special interest is the role of language in the science curriculum.



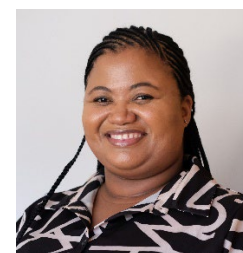
Mandlenkosi Robert Khumalo works as a First-Year Experience (FYE) coordinator at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) from the College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science at Howard College. He joined the FYE team in May 2023. He is also pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Chemical Engineering from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in collaboration with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) at the Durban campus. His research is based on Agricultural, forestry, and biological waste valorization into fine chemicals.



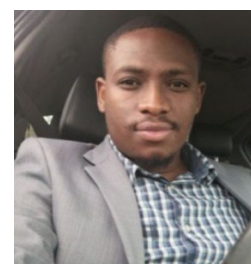
Sekwenele Khoza is a PhD candidate at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) School of Social Sciences. She is currently working for the Howard College Campus of the UKZN College of Humanities as a Postgraduate Academic Development Officer. Her areas of interest in research are women's empowerment, the value of education for young girls, and Zulu history. Khoza intends to develop her research abilities so she can contribute to the research community. She aims to work as a lecturer and to contribute to the academic development of students, mentor them, and potentially influence their future careers. Her degrees from the University of Zululand include a B.A. Dual major, P.G.C.E., a B.A. Hons. in History, and an MA in History.



Zintle Magele develops, coordinates and implements the First-Year Success programme across all seven Nelson Mandela University campuses. She supports students in academic and social adjustment to university to ensure they feel confident and prepared to start university life and build relationships. Zintle worked for the University from 2016 to 2017 as a Public Relations Intern for FYS@Mandela. In 2018-2020 she was appointed as the Orientation Admin Assistant and in 2020-2023 she was appointed as the FYS Practitioner and continued to develop and facilitate workshops for senior students, plan and implement the orientation programme. She assumed the role of FYS Coordinator in 2024. Zintle holds a BTech in Public Relations Management and a Diploma in Public Relations Management from Nelson Mandela University.



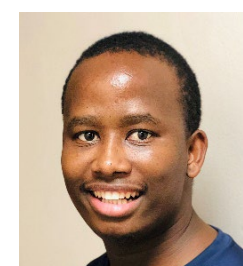
I am **Zipho Brandon Maphumulo**, an Academic Development Officer in the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics at Howard College. I hold a Master's degree in Industrial, Organizational, and Labour Studies, and I'm currently pursuing a PhD in the same field. I'm passionate about supporting students as they navigate university life, providing academic advice, practical study skills, and guidance in selecting modules that align with their career goals. I'm especially committed to helping students who may be underperforming to find ways to improve and reach their potential. My research interests focus on the career progression of students who work while studying full-time, a challenging balance that can be crucial for professional growth. I understand the difficulties that come with juggling academic and work responsibilities, and I'm dedicated to helping students succeed and thrive in their academic journeys.



Zonele Mdiya is a Student Success Coach at Nelson Mandela University, George Campus. She is responsible for providing academic support for students and coordinating the campus First-Year Success (FYS) programme. She holds a Master of Social Science in Counselling Psychology from the University of Fort Hare, registered with the HPCSA as a Counselling Psychologist. She has a passionate interest in student wellness and academic support with experience coordinating comprehensive programmes and interventions designed to address academic, eco-social, and psycho-social well-being. She is committed to promoting mental health and academic support through evidence-based practices and a holistic approach.



Kwanele Melane, recently completed his MA in Linguistics from UKZN where he focused on students' attitudes towards the use Code Switching at UKZN tutorials. Kwanele's academic journey has been marked by a strong commitment to understanding the intellectualisation of African languages in Higher Education. In addition to his research, Kwanele has co-presented at the 10th AMS colloquium, themed 'Technology-enhanced Teaching and Learning' under the topic 'Providing Academic Advice to Underperforming Students Using the University of Kwazulu-Natal Online Registration System: Experiences of Academic Development Officers Staff in the College of Humanities, UKZN'. He is passionate about indigenous language terminology development within linguistics and aims to continue advancing knowledge in this field through further research and professional engagement.



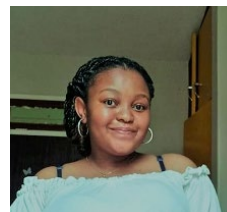
Mr Pura Mgolombane is well-versed in higher education, having worked in student affairs at no less than six institutions of higher learning in South Africa. After starting his career in higher education at the then Technikon Pretoria (now Tshwane University of Technology) as a facilitator in student governance, he continued to show strategic insights, the ability to make decisions and leadership skills – which culminated in his appointment as Dean: Student Affairs at UFS in 2016. During his time at UFS, among other things, he was responsible for creating humanising conditions for students in their daily lived experiences that are critical for social justice, social cohesion and academic success. As a university that aims to help build leaders of the future, these experiences and insights are invaluable to UCT. Having held positions such as Director: Student Affairs, Head of Department: Student Ethics and Judicial Services Department; Project Manager: Transformation and Diversity; and Manager: Diversity, Ethics and Social Justice at various top universities across the country, Mr Mgolombane also has a keen understanding of what it takes to manage a department responsible for students, who are the key stakeholders of a university. Besides his many career accomplishments, Mr Mgolombane holds numerous academic qualifications, including a Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) in corporate law, a PGDip in applied ethics for professionals, an honours degree in employment relations, a Master of Commerce in business management and a Master of Arts in diversity studies, and Advance Diploma in Theology. These qualifications not only enhance his ability to engage in student matters, but also his ability to lead a diverse team with widely different skill sets and objectives. Mr Mgolombane also played a role in the development of the student affairs profession through serving as the Deputy President of the National Association for Student Development Practitioners and, currently, as the Secretary General of the South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Professionals.



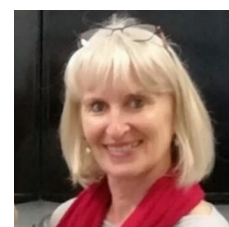
Lekwa Mokwana is the Director of Learning Development at Nelson Mandela University and is responsible for leading and driving the strategy for student success. As informed by research and data analytics, he leads the development and manages the implementation of student academic support services provided through the First-Year Success Programme, Supplemental Instruction, Student Success Coaching, Tutoring and Mentoring, and Academic and Writing Literacies. He holds a PhD in Mathematics Education from the University of Limpopo, where he served in various roles such as Senior Lecturer, Head of Programme, and Assistant Registrar and Head of Postgraduate Office. He continues to supervise postgraduate students in mathematics education, and his research interests include classroom interactions, classroom practice, classroom cultures and student success.



Nqobile Motsomane is the First Year Experience (FYE) Coordinator at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where they lead initiatives to help first-year students successfully transition into university life. Nqobile manages a team of 35 mentors who are dedicated to fostering community, building resilience, and promoting academic success among first-entry students. With a passion for supporting student growth, Nqobile is dedicated to enhancing retention rates and ensuring a positive start to the university experience. Alongside this role, Nqobile is pursuing a PhD in Biological Sciences, contributing to the field of sustainable agriculture and plant resilience.



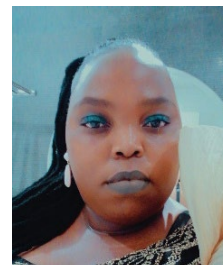
Cherry Muslim Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies, Academic Leader for Religion & Classics in the School of Religion, Philosophy & Classics. My transgressive pedagogy parallels my life's trajectory of pushing boundaries for transformational change and social justice, through centering the student voice and knowledges in their educational journey.



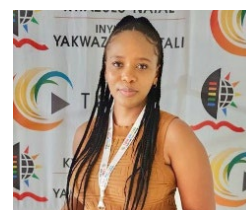
Angelbatch Zakhona Ndlovu is a dedicated Writing Place Team Leader at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Edgewood campus. In this role, she leads a team of WP Tutors who provide invaluable support to students, helping them refine their academic writing skills. Angelbatch is currently pursuing her Master of Education degree with a specialization in Curriculum Studies. She has extensive experience in WP tutoring across the campus, focusing particularly on academic writing, including essay writing and citation styles. She also served as a contract marker within the campus. Her commitment to excellence and passion for helping students succeed make her an invaluable asset to the university community.



Sduduzile Lizzly Ndlovu is an accomplished academic advisor at Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT). Her academic journey began at MUT, where she earned both her Diploma and Postgraduate Diploma in Human Resource Management. She later furthered her studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), completing her Master's coursework with only her dissertation remaining. Lizzly's career started in the retail industry, where she gained over six years of experience as a sales agent and worked for Mr Price Distribution as a general worker for four years. She also served as a mentor and tutor at MUT for over three years.



Snethemba Helen Ndlovu is the First-Year Experience (FYE) programme coordinator at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. She has experience in higher education student support initiatives and plays a pivotal role in fostering academic excellence and retention among first-year students in the College of Agriculture, Engineering, and Science. Snethemba oversees the mentoring programme, which focuses on guiding new students through their transition to university life by offering structured support through online units, workshops, and peer mentoring. Her approach is rooted in promoting student engagement, improving throughput, and enhancing the overall first-year experience.



Ms. **Slindokuhle Ndlovu** is a Wellness Coordinator at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg Campus under the Teaching and Learning Unit. She holds a Master of Theology (Gender and Religion), a BSS Honours in Psychology, and a BSS in Psychology and Management from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She has 4 years of working in student support services, in different capacities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her research interests are the intersectionality of gender culture and religion; ecclesiology and liturgy.



My name is **Nompilo Nonzuzo Nene**. I am an African female who was born with a disability called hemiplegia, which is the semi paralysis of one side of the body, and in my case it's the right-hand side both arm and leg. It was in 2013 when I obtained admission at the University of Kwa Zulu-Natal to do my Junior Degree in a Bachelor of Social Sciences where I majored in Political sciences and Management Studies. I did not stop there as I continued with my Honors in International Relations in the year 2016. It was in 2017 where I got an opportunity to work at the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs as an intern for a period of one year. The very same year, I had been enrolled for my Master of Social Science in Political Science, which I completed in the year 2019 in September. Due to a lack of employment, I decided to continue my studies to pursue my PhD, which I am currently registered for at the University of Kwa Zulu-Natal. I have served in a few posts within the institution. I have been a tutor, AMS mentor and Residence Assistant and am now currently serving as the ADO at the PMB campus.



Phindile Ngubane is an FYE Coordinator in the College of Humanities based in Howard College. She is a registered PhD student in the Population Studies programme, conducting a study focusing on the prospects of integrating indigenous birth practices in public health care in rural areas based in KwaZulu Natal. Phindile is a supervisor for Honours students who are completing their research reports. Before joining UKZN, she was a Research Methodology lecturer for honours students at a private higher education institution. She firmly believes that applied social science research, and academic enterprise can be used to gain insights which could inform policies and interventions which are better able to foster holistic and accessible healthcare.



Thandaza Nkabinde is a PhD candidate with his research focussed in medical education. He has extensive clinical experience in both urban and rural settings, and is involved in academia at UKZN's Department of Family Medicine. He operates a multidisciplinary private practice, and serves as the Principal Medical Officer at Quro Medical, a digital health company that provides innovative alternative health solutions. His interest in medical education involved him in various projects aimed at enhancing medical education and collaboration in rural district hospitals. His work in this field includes recent publications on medical students experiential learning in a district hospital and medical doctors' learning needs. He has authored a chapter on facilitating small group learning in the 4th edition of the *South African Family Practice Manual* and co-authored a chapter on experiential learning for medical students in a WONCA book published in 2023.



Sphamandla Josias Nkambule is a PhD candidate in Public Health at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), specializing in the role of community health workers (CHWs) in creating more equitable, shock-responsive health systems in low-income settings. Currently the Acting Assistant Project Coordinator for Critical Social Justice & Citizenship at UKZN, Nkambule champions inclusive learning environments and the power of underrepresented voices in both community health and academic settings. His commitment to elevating CHWs' voices aligns with the colloquium's theme of "student voice," highlighting the transformative potential of marginalized perspectives in reshaping support structures. Nkambule also serves as a Research Assistant with the Quality Evidence for Health System Transformation (QuEST) research network, having previously been a Doctoral Research Fellow at CAPRISA, UKZN's Centre for AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa.



Chukwudera Nwodo: I am currently a final year Bachelor of Social Science (General Studies) student, majoring in Sociology and Historical Studies at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, Howard College campus. I am interested in pursuing new ways of learning and knowledge creation in higher education, particularly in Religion, Classics and History. I am a tutor for the discipline of Religion and have also been working part-time in a pharmaceutical company since 2022. As an aspiring African academic, I thrive on the processes of teaching and learning that seek to produce knowledge embodying the essence of Africa and its people.



Andrew Ross is Family Physician based in the Department of Family Medicine at UKZN. Prior to joining the Department he worked in a rural district hospital. He completed his PhD in 2017 on "Being a rural origin health care professional: Lives, learnings and practice" based on the experiences of rural origin health care professionals supported by the Umthombo Youth Development Foundation (UYDF). He was the founder of UYDF which has supported over 590 rural origin health care professionals and was awarded the Order of the Baobab (in silver) in 2014 for his work with UYDF. Areas of research interest include medical education and continuing professional development. Hobbies include reading, bird watch and traveling and he enjoys spending time in the bush, berg and beach.



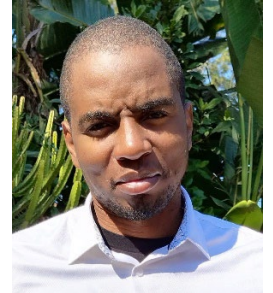
Sebastian Sanjiagdu is a Biological Sciences teacher, educator, and mentor at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal's School of Education (Edgewood Campus). He holds a PhD in Science Education from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Sebastian also holds a Masters (Cum Laude) in Education, B. Ed Hons. and a B. Ed from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. He specializes in social justice education with a scholarly focus is on the decolonization of science education. Sebastian is a post-doctoral fellow on the Critical Social Justice Project at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. He also is a Climate Change Education Online Course Developer on the Fundisa for Change Project at the Environmental Learning Research Centre (Rhodes University) His current interest is the use of education as a tool for social change and education for Sustainable Development. Dr. Sanjiagdu, as a member of The Academy of Science of South Africa, in collaboration with the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), has been invited to the BRICS Young Scientists' Forum 2024 to represent SA at this highly diplomatic forum in Russia 2024.



Melissa Lubelihle Sibanda, with a Bachelor of Social Sciences degree in Industrial Psychology and Psychology and a Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety, holds a Master's in Housing and is pursuing a PhD in the same field. She has served within the University of KwaZulu Natal as a Sports Coach, Building Surveyor, Research Assistant, Academic Tutor, Academic Mentor, and Academic Development Officer. Melissa has a passion in bettering the lives of others by contributing extensively through work and research in student support services within Higher Education. Within the professional sphere, she is dedicated to improving urban living conditions and safety standards in Human Settlement. Her interests resonate with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly concerning sustainable cities and communities, poverty alleviation and energy transition.



Ntokozo Howard Vundla is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, specializing in African burial rituals within African Traditional Religion. He holds a Master's of Social Science degree with first-class and an Honours degree with Summa Cum Laude from UKZN. Ntokozo currently serves as an Academic Development Officer in the College of Humanities and has held roles as a contract lecturer, Residence Life Officer, and AMS & Writing Place tutor. A former Student Representative Council (SRC) President and Residence Liaison Officer, he has also served on various university committees, including the University Senate and the School of Social Sciences Board. His work is deeply rooted in education, cultural studies, and student development.



Nontobeko Mbali Zulu is PHD candidate (First year) in Language and Media studies and holds a master's degree in education (Language and Media Studies) from University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her research interests include Indigenous language's development in education. She is currently an Undergraduate Academic Development Officer of School of Education at University of KwaZulu-Natal.

