Rurality and student transition in higher education: the views of University of Zululand rural students

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Abstract: Rural students in various universities in South Africa are usually confronted with series of challenges when transmitting from high schools into universities. Studies conducted on transition from rural areas to tertiary institutions have shown that environments most times are different from what exist in their high school environment. The focus of this study is to explore the academic impediments or hurdles confronting the undergraduate students at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU). As a rural institution, UNIZULU enrols many students from rural background. Using phenomenological qualitative research, the article delves into challenges and experiences that students faced while transitioning at UNIZULU. Twenty students were engaged in focus groups in-depth interviews. Findings reveal that students from rural areas face a variety of obstacles in their educational pursuit. Findings further indicated that rural students must survive unbearable circumstances such as lack of parental guidance and inability to cope with university life in the pursuit for higher education. This article therefore recommends that all stakeholders should provide essential and adequate support services for the students to integrate appropriately into the system.

Keywords: Higher education; rural students, rurality, transition

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right that is acknowledged on a worldwide scale and is outlined in numerous education legislation everywhere. It is essential to human existence and gives people the ability to work effectively and efficiently in their own environments. The idea of education implies the growth of important information and abilities in society. Culture is passed down through the years, people are raised, their morals are developed, and growth in society and the economy is promoted [1]. It involves regular education gained from practical experience or organised learning activities [2]. Due to the importance and necessity of education, there has long been the belief that someone who stops learning, even though they may still be alive, stops existing. Given this, all people must have access to education in order for them to survive and reach their full potential.

In the light of this, Msimuko noted that all races, no matter how primitive they are, have had an education system which has enabled them to survive in their respective environment [3]. According to him, education is a social mechanism created to help people survive in their current civilizations, regardless of how far behind other societies they may be in terms of development. Around the world, several programmes have been established in which the value of education has been repeatedly reaffirmed. Many nations have increased their efforts to provide education as a result of this knowledge. However, there are still issues with delivering education in rural South Africa.

Rural schools are often deprived of better education services. There is a marked shortage of teachers and learning material and other educational resources such as libraries [4]. Difficulties range from overcrowded classrooms to inadequate furniture such as desks, chairs and benches. Classes are too large to allow for individual attention being paid to learners and the drop-out rate between grades is too high. These are only a few of the disadvantages that make rural schooling difficult and unpleasant. These encounters suggest that growing up in a rural region entails entering adulthood without receiving a good education.

Although it has long been understood that education may help people overcome poverty, for many black South Africans, a lack of resources and the remaining effects of apartheid can make it difficult to attain higher and post-secondary education. In the global educational literature, the issue of access to higher education is examined in terms of economic and social justice [5]. The issue of racial inequality and disparate socioeconomic status regarding

participation rates in tertiary education is typically at the centre of discussion, with the lower socio-economic strata typically being associated with a decreased likelihood of successfully transferring from secondary to tertiary education [6]. When transitioning from high school to the universities in South Africa, first-year students are typically met with a number of difficulties. The environments are frequently different from those found in their secondary schools. High levels of tension and anxiety can also be brought on by changing from secondary school to university study [7].

Many of the high school graduates who apply for admission to universities come from underprivileged rural and township areas with underfunded and dysfunctional schools, poor education, a lack of information, isolation from urban educational institutions, and exposure to unqualified teachers who lack the English language proficiency necessary for success at the university [8]. Urban suburbs typically see development but underserved/rural communities may receive inadequate and limited services [9]. Additional considerations, such financial limitations, also have a real impact on how someone views the idea of attending university. For instance, the pressure placed on children from low-income families to drop out of school and make financial contributions to the family budget is a crucial factor. Pre-entry to a university is influenced by a variety of factors, including financial means, educational history, family background, and aptitudes and skills.

Access to higher education also depends on school-leavers' attitudes towards education, career guidance regarding subject selections for various fields of study, the availability of various career fields, admission requirements and processes at various educational institutions, as well as methods of obtaining funding and other resources. In order to pursue their chosen fields of study at the university, students must have chosen the appropriate subject in school. Many high school students do not receive career counselling from teachers or information about post-secondary education [10].

When promoting the many courses they offer, some higher education institutions fail to appropriately target rural schools, and this lack of knowledge can cause worry and generate unfounded worries in students who must make career decisions [11]. The post-school educational sector also does not seem to devote enough time to marketing the new Central Admission Procedure (CAP) online as well as other post-secondary options, like community colleges, Further Education and Training (FET), and vocational training. Because of this, many students are unaware of when to apply, how to apply, or how to receive financial help. Therefore, these elements might potentially affect how students view postsecondary education.

Studies conducted on transition from rural areas to higher education have clearly shown how difficult the sailing experience is. Research has shown that for quite some time research on students' transition was neglected for years. Most of the studies on student transition to tertiary institutions, in recent years, have attracted the attention of researchers and academics. The influence of rurality on students' transition at any university particularly but not limited to the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) is the topic of this paper. In 1960, UNIZULU was created as an essential institution of the University of South Africa (UNISA), with academic ties to UNISA. In 1970, UNIZULU was given a university status and renamed the University College of Zululand [12]. As a generally black university, UNIZULU was part of a subset of universities for Africans under the Department of Education and Training's administrative control.

Up until 1979, UNIZULU mostly served Zulu and Swazi pupils, but later welcomed and embraced black students from other ethnic groups. It opened its doors to people of all races in 1986. In 2002 it transitioned from a typical university to a comprehensive university, expanding its curriculum to include career-focused programs. Despite this limited history, UNIZULU is still a rural comprehensive university in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Its foundation was both political (maintaining the apartheid era's socio-political goal) and instrumental (teaching black people to be useful to the state). It continues to enrol a substantial number of students from rural areas. There is a great need to understand the experiences of rural students' transition, particularly to rural institutions like UNIZULU. This paper focuses on History first year second-semester students that enrolled full-time for the 2022 academic year.

This research aimed at exploring the influence of rurality on students from rural backgrounds, and to examine their transition experiences and challenges at UNIZULU. In this essay we pose and address several questions salient to rural students' transition from secondary schooling to UNIZULU: What are students' perceptions of rurality? What are the transition experiences shaping the learning of rural students at UNIZULU? Which are the challenges faced by rural students while transitioning at UNIZULU? What are the strategies adopted by rural students to adapt to transition challenges.

Materials and methods

A phenomenological approach was adopted as a method to allow researchers to understand the meaning that the participants ascribe to their experiences of transiting to UNIZULU. Phenomenology is a study method for describing the essence of a thing by looking at it through the eyes of those who have witnessed it [13]. The goal of phenomenology is to define the meaning of experiences in terms of both what occurred and how it occurred. It is the study of how people interpret everyday events. The strategy facilitated the exploration, understanding, explanation and description of different experiences of rural students' transition at UNIZULU.

The research paper used semi-structured interviews to get students' perspectives of rurality and its influence on their transition at UNIZULU. This interview method usually involves a conversation between the researcher and the subject, which is guided by a flexible interview procedure and augmented by follow-up questions, probes, and comments. The method allows researcher (s) to collect open-ended data, delves deeply into personal and often sensitive themes, and explore participants thoughts, feelings, and opinions about certain topics. Purposive and Snowball sampling was utilised in this research. A total of 20 students (10 males and 10 females) were involved.

This paper used thematic analysis. This form of analysis is defined as the process, within qualitative research, of establishing themes or patterns in qualitative data. Thematic analysis was used to determine the transition experiences of participating students. Qualitative data included interview transcripts from study participants and other identifiable writings that reflect experientiality on the topic of examination.

Ethical considerations

During the course of this research, ethical concerns were taken into consideration by the researchers. To obtain permission from the institution for the research team to work there, discussions were held with the Office of the University Registrar. The consent form was not signed by the students, but they orally agreed to take part in the study. We complied with their request to make the typed stories available to them. In order to maintain the participants' dignity throughout the study, we also made sure to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Results

Literature and theoretical framework

Ecclestone posits that there are four ways to think about transition. The first is what he refers to as 'institutional change,' which includes things like changing educational contexts, changing occupations, or changing structures or systems. The assumptions underlying this conceptualization are focused on individual making the shift and their involvement in it, with the individual bearing all responsibility and any lack of accomplishment is considered as a personal failing [14]. In this perspective, transition is considered as a continuous upward progression from one level to the next, with little consideration paid to the social, cultural, or societal factors that may impact the transition process. The 'structure and agency' debate, which pervades much of Ecclestone's writing on the topic of transition serves as a critical foundation for understanding how and why transition occurs, as well as reflecting the author's perspective within the field of educational sociology.

The second approach considers transition's social and contextual components, which have an impact on individual identity and contribute to cognitive and emotional changes. This conceptualisation has a more dispersed notion of transition responsibility because it recognizes the cognitive and emotional requirements that varied settings' demands and practices place on individuals.

Briggs, Clark, and Hall do not describe transition directly, but suggest that empirical investigation and desktop data analysis imply that the building of learner identity is key to successful transition. They show how the institution's own impacts, as well as the student's educational circumstances prior to enrolling, influence learner identity creation, and they present a model of learner identity formation that begins long before a student enrols at university.

According to Ecclestone, the third interpretation in the literature challenges the use of specific institutions or conditions to frame transition but rather emphasizes transition as a course of being and becoming. Milestones, turning moments, or significant life events are seen to act as catalysts for transformations in a person's capacity to be and do anything, whether professionally, personally, or educationally. This point of view contends that the shift is not perceptible and may happen years after an incident as a result of personal reflections and changes in feelings or attitudes.

The fourth categorization, which is prevalent in post-modern and feminist transition theories, challenges previous assumptions about the significance of life events, institutions, and milestones, among other things. Instead, the point

of view presented here is that human transformation is a long-term state. While the three perspectives above demonstrate that transition entails both stability and flux in some form or another, this viewpoint argues that life is an iterative process.

Leese concludes that, universities must stop viewing the "issue" of transition as a deficiency residing in particular students and instead work to adapt educational systems and procedures to accommodate diverse students, based on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, in order to meet the needs of extremely diverse communities of entrants to higher education [15]. According to Holdsworth, a student's university residential status (whether they live at home or move out) is an important factor in their transition to university life [16]. Holton examines the experiences of 'local' and 'non-local' students via the lens of Bourdieu's notions of capital and social organization, claiming that student origin plays a significant role in the construction of identity [17]. Murtagh studies the transition of first year students and their lecturers, concluding that students lack understanding of what is expected of them, which might be solved if faculty communicated their expectations more clearly [18].

Maxwell and Mudhovozi note that transitioning from rural high school to university is difficult enough. They argue that rurality is an important demographic to consider when identifying students for entry to and retention in higher education institutions [19]. According to them rural economies, for example, play a role in shaping students' career objectives and employment opportunities at these schools. Lefoka and Tlali investigate the impact of 'rurality' on students from Lesotho's rural areas, as well as their transition to the National University of Lesotho (NUL) [20]. The data demonstrated that rural students' educational paths are indeed fraught with difficulties, owing to impoverishment and little exposure to technology in their youth. Masaiti *et al.* just like Tlali and Lefoka examine the nature of rurality and its impact on students from rural homes transitioning to higher education. According to the findings of their study, students from rural regions suffer more obstacles in adjusting to university life than students from metropolitan and suburban areas [21]. Apart from the affirmative action admissions policy, there are no tools in place to help such students cope with the cultural shock they would experience once they get on campus.

Timmis et al. emphasise decolonial approaches on the access to and transitions to higher education for South African students with rural backgrounds [22]. Their book not only highlights the challenges of having a rural upbringing against the historical and contemporary backdrops of colonialism, but it also exemplifies the enormous value that students from rural areas offer to higher education. Through in-depth narratives created by student co-researchers, the book recalls early experiences in rural areas, negotiations of transitions to university and, in many cases, to metropolitan life, and students' future journeys through higher education settings and curricula.

Nonglait and Myrthong argue that every student must make the transition from rural high school to college as part of their quest for higher education. They further argue that many students, particularly those from rural areas and who come from impoverished backgrounds, find the transition period tough [23]. Rural students encountered two main problems, academic challenges, and socio-emotional issues, according to the study, and they used task-oriented and emotion-oriented coping mechanisms to deal with them. Their study concludes that rural students require greater assistance while transitioning to higher education.

Uleanya and Uleanya studied how students moved from urban to rural high schools to rural colleges, as well as some of the factors that influenced first-year rural university student experiences. The outcomes of the study show that factors such as parental involvement, socioeconomic background, and learner exposure, among others, have an impact on rural university students' first-year experiences. Furthermore, they contend that while students at rural institutions may easily adapt to their hometown, they frequently fail to acclimatize to campus life. Students from urban high schools, on the other hand, could have a harder time adjusting to the host rural areas where their colleges are located, but they often adjust to university life without any problems, despite some limitations depending on the quality of the university education offered. The report recommends hiring career counsellors to help students, guaranteeing quality in rural educational institutions at both the high school and university levels, and affiliating high schools with universities so they can oversee and direct certain high school activities [24].

This paper was informed by student development theories that are cognitive and structural. These theories were chosen because they describe how students think, reason, organise and interpret their experiences that develop throughout time [25]. These theories are interested in the epistemological structures that people create in order to provide meaning to their lives. By exhibiting the stages of growth, these theories helped in understanding why students exhibit various qualities as they advance through their university years.

Student development refers to how a student's developmental talents improve, progress, or increase as a result of studying in a higher education institution. Theoretical frameworks are used to describe, explain, predict, and/or

influence the development of students. To put it another way, student development theory can assist you in better comprehending, supporting, and serving students. When discussing student development theories, however, exercise caution. Students are unique people, and theory is only a guide; it does not apply to all students in all circumstances. Cognitive-Structural Analysis reveals changes in people's thinking and decision-making processes.

Findings

Findings have clearly indicated that students endured several challenges in their educational journey. Based on responses from each respondent, it is conspicuous that there are some common experiences and challenges among students from rural areas. As a result, findings have been categorised into subheadings and related themes.

Students' understanding of rurality

Almost all respondents associated rurality with low population density, abundance of farmland or remoteness. They also linked rurality with farming as being practised by most of their parents and guardians in the rural areas they originate from. They further associated the concept with small villages of few households and most of them that are of the same clan. Out of twenty, thirteen identified rurality as a settlement pattern where one had to travel long distances to reach administrative centres, banks, and other services.

From the interviews, one could tell that rural areas have not yet developed, and they are still associated with domestication of animals. Most of rural students indicated that in most areas where they originate from lack infrastructure and which most of the urban areas has. They also indicated that their rurality is characterised by little value to education and most of them were a first generation to finish matric and pursue tertiary education. From the above narrative, it became clear that the difficulties they face at tertiary level were inevitable because of their rural experiences. The lack of infrastructure is one of the major causes of difficult transition for rural students.

Lack of educational guidance and facilities

The respondents found that educational guidance or career advancement and opportunities for further study are often available at tertiary institutions, like UNIZULU. However, most of them argued that such initiatives were scarce in rural areas. Further, rural schools are characterised by lack of educational facilities, such as computer labs and libraries. As a result, most rural students lack career guidance and knowledge of how to use educational facilities. This is one of the myriads of factors that contributes to rural students' lack of readiness to adapt easily at UNIZULU.

Another contributory factor that affects rural schools to participate in career guidance programmes and to build educational facilities is that rural schools operate under small budgets. The career advancement programmes are usually organised in urban areas and for urban schools. The students who study in rural areas do not seem to be assisted with higher educational programmes. This appears when most of them, when completing matric, apply for courses they do not qualify for while some of them finish matric without applying to tertiary institutions. As a result, they are subjected to the so-called 'walk-ins' and late applications.

Participants argued that rural students have fewer opportunities than urban students for career exploration activities that are generally viewed as a best practice for career readiness. Rural areas' remote settings make it difficult for students there to take part in activities that might expose them to a variety of jobs. As a result, rural students go to tertiary institutions without a clear idea of what courses they want to enrol for. As the case, eleven of the students indicated that when they arrived at UNIZULU, they did not know what programme they wanted to enrol for.

Lack of parental support

The rural parents' socioeconomic standing places their children at a disadvantage in tertiary education. Parental involvement has been demonstrated to be a key factor for children's academic outcomes and socioemotional development. In addition to the lack of resources in rural areas, there is a lack of involvement by significant stakeholders like parents and the community in the education of rural students. Some parents are not educated, and they are unable to look after their children's education. However, not in all cases where uneducated parents fail to be involved in their children education. Some of the respondents have indicated that beside encouraging their children, their parents do take care and play an important role in their education. Some of them sell their livestock for their children to survive in their higher education pursuit. The degree to which parents may assist and become actively involved in their children's academic lives depends on their socioeconomic condition and level of education. A greater amount of financial aid is required for students who perform well academically but are unable to continue their studies because of financial challenges, as evidenced by the finding that fifteen out of twenty participants reported a need for financing assistance.

Some responses suggested that parents play a crucial role because they can guide their children's decision-making and because educated parents are more inclined to prioritise education. Twelve individuals said that their personal drive and capacity for hard effort was a motivating element. These pupils believe that motivation is the most fundamental element. This suggests that their success at tertiary institutions was entirely dependent on their own efforts. Another participant spoke about the necessity of assistance when it comes to relying on others. He advised pupils to put forth a lot of effort, cooperate with one another, ask for assistance when needed, and avoid working alone if possible.

Academic writing challenges

Higher education academic writing is very different from that of a high school. University students are expected to possess advanced reading, writing, and thinking skills that go beyond those of a high school student. The results from the participants showed that the first year is really difficult for them. They stated that the academic climate at UNIZULU is radically different from what they were accustomed to in their high schools. One of them said that the first year was difficult with regards to assessments such as writing assignments and other academic tasks. The academic background of several participants was cited as the cause of their difficulties in academic writing at the university. Participants indicated that university academic pursuits need a lot of reading.

Referencing in academic writing

In academic writing, referencing is crucial for higher education. Prior to entering their new academic environment, first-year students are unfamiliar with reference. Referencing is used in academic writing to show how rich a piece is. Students use a variety of scholarly sources to support their arguments. It is difficult for people who read a lot of things to properly reference. 15 individuals said they had learned about referring for the first time in school. Some claimed that the difficulty with referencing causes them to receive lower grades.

Challenges of teaching and learning with English

According to research findings, it can be particularly challenging for students from rural high schools where their native languages have been employed as a medium of teaching to comprehend the material being taught. Like when they were in high school, they preferred to learn in their own tongues. They indicated that the challenge of being taught in indigenous language, for example isiZulu, was that exams were not written in isiZulu but English. This became a problem because they were unable to respond clearly or adequately during the assessments. One participant said that even at UNIZULU many lecturers mostly Zulus teach in isiZulu but their tests, assignments and examinations are in English. She finds it difficult to think of ways to explain herself clearly in English whether taking tests or taking exams.

Technological challenges

Most rural schools do not have educational technology which makes it difficult for rural students to adapt easily when they find educational technology at UNIZULU. Findings shown that first year students had first experience of touching mouse or using computers at UNIZULU. Participants claimed that the rural schools they attended did not teach them how to use computers. A significant portion of participants lacked access to technology, such as computers and science labs. Another attendee commented on how frustrating it is to use the computers at UNIZULU. He admitted that he doesn't know much about computers. Because computer classes at UNIZULU are only offered once or twice a week, he tries to teach himself. Another problem is that, even in remote schools with educational technology, it is sometimes outdated due to a lack of funding for replacement. Due to a lack of educational technology, rural students are unable to independently research topics and may not be exposed to a wide variety of sources. Participants were asked to list the tools they would need to attend UNIZULU and other tertiary institutions and succeed. The majority of them admitted that they required financial assistance, technological assistance, academic assistance, mentoring, and help with writing skills.

Challenges of academic workload

Findings have shown that the first-year students complained of higher academic workload than that of their high schools. They mentioned that studying at the university is stressful. They must cope with many academic tasks at a shortest period. According to many participants workload in the university is killing, so many assignments with deadline, and early morning lectures as early as 07h00. One participant complained that it was in the university where he had the first lecture of 3 hours at a stretch. They never experienced such at a high school. They disclosed that only few senior students are willing to guide or assist them hence they claim that their have their own workload.

Accommodation

Rural students have indicated that they have trouble with transitioning from their racially and culturally homogenous home environments to the more ethnically and culturally diverse environment that are characteristic of a university. They always find it difficult to live in university residences because of several reasons, for example to share a room with a person who comes from a different background. Students living in dormitories suffer from different adaptation challenges ranging from diverse cultural beliefs, unacceptable behaviours to poor-quality food. One participant revealed that he has a roommate that consumes alcohol and causes disturbances when he is drunk. He said he had asked for a different room, but since there wasn't one available, he had not yet been moved. Another person disagreed, saying she and her flatmate are great because they study and drink together. She is content to share a room with her. Another participant said that most pupils pick up bad social skills at school. Some of them, she said, had never partied before enrolling at UNIZULU, but now they routinely go out with friends, drink, and even smoke.

Coping strategies to deal with challenges

Depending on his or her own maturity, temperament, personal copying resources, social support, and circumstances, each student adjusts in a unique way. The degree to which young people feel they have control over the situation and severe life events both have an impact on how well they adjust. First-year students can use the helpful tips provided by UNIZULU to help them cope with the difficulties brought on by their transition to higher education. There are many supportive programmes available to help first-year students, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds. Students in their first year are taught how to read, write, and reference. UNIZULU provides tutorial courses where senior students coach and instruct first-year students, introducing the new academic modules in their native tongues.

Additionally, UNIZULU has created an orientation programme that introduces new students to their surroundings while emphasising their obligations, expectations, and dedication to extracurricular and academic activities. The researchers have recommended that mentors be matched with new first-year students to help them get acclimated to their new environment based on the analysis and discussion from the study. This will prevent the freshmen from interacting with the improper peer groups, which could interfere with their academic lives. UNIZULU has provided computer labs, however computer training needs to be strengthened, for instance, by adding more hours to first-year students' training. This will help them develop the computer skills and knowledge necessary for their academic work. Additionally, social activities must also be designed to integrate first year students into various social lives in the university.

Discussion

Based to an analysis of the research findings, it is clear that first-year students frequently face a variety of difficulties as they get adjusted to their new academic environment and social life. Results also showed that the participants did come from educationally underprivileged institutions. Even though the majority had access to regular instruction, there were still obstacles and hurdles. Numerous lacked libraries, computer labs, extracurricular activities spaces, and career guidance. For high school students to be fully prepared for higher education, they must have a foundational level of computer literacy and, in the case of science, have had actual, hands-on experience with laboratory work. The majority of participants in the study did not have the necessary resources, and according to Nyuswa, the education department has not provided much help for rural schools to increase their resource capability [26].

Parents' expectations, motivation, and academic assistance were all considered to help learners transfer to higher education study. According to Lynch and O'Riordan, parents' expectations have a significant impact on their kids' academic success. As a result, the lower the parents' expectations are for their kids' academic success, the lower educational level they are likely to reach [27]. According to Fraser and Killen (as reported in Hobden & Hobden), both professors and students saw self-motivation, perseverance, and the capacity for independent learning as essential elements of success in university settings [28]. Thomas, Quinn, Slack, and Casey underline the usefulness of personal tutors who take a disciplined and proactive posture in aiding students academically in keeping with the research findings addressing the need for support. At the educational institutions they visited, Thomas, et al. identified a variety of academic support systems related to peers or mentors, and students who were able to take advantage of these systems said they were better equipped to handle the demands of their academic programmes. By addressing academic competencies such as how to study, manage their time, and become independent learners, mentoring initiatives may help to ease the transition from secondary to university education [29]. For students who might be struggling to live up to the standards of tertiary institutions, tutorials could offer further support.

The use of English as a language of teaching at rural universities has been proven by numerous studies to complicate students' academic progress, particularly in their first year. These students benefit from the use of creative language in the classroom because it helps them understand the numerous modules they are taking, but they have trouble understanding classes offered in non-indigenous languages. Students also discussed how it is difficult for them to express themselves fully or freely when writing assessments in English as opposed to when using their native tongues. To the first-year students at the rural university, such as, the socioeconomic issues, marked by poverty levels, inadequate basic facilities in their high schools, and their poor academic performance, provide a significant academic challenge.

Participants in this study who were first-year students at the rural institution reported having significant difficulties with academic writing. They described their attempts at referencing for academic writing as stressful and deflating. For first-year students, managing the academic workload presents another significant barrier. Participants in this study lamented the stress they felt as they flitted between lecture halls to attend lectures while still completing other academic writing obligations, such as group or individual projects, assessments, and exams. First-year students face a significant challenge due to their high workload, especially when they are not given the support they need to acclimatise to it. According to Carelse, students should have access to competent teachers who are given the proper resources [30]. Students who transferred to rural colleges from high schools where they didn't acquire a decent education often struggle in their new academic setting.

Peer pressure, a lack of application, substance misuse, and a lack of financing were among the things that were said to prevent their move to postsecondary study. The 2015 #FeesMustFall protests, which were partially sparked by the high university tuition structures, prompted the South African government to try and increase the amount of cash available for poor students. Even yet, there isn't enough money to meet all of the demands of the students who are struggling financially. The demands expressed by the study participants, such as the need for language support and knowledge on job options and courses, were closely related to the impeding issues. The requirement for help with writing skills was in line with Du Plessis and Gerber's theories, which maintain that the difficulties of learning a second language in addition to a lack of English proficiency may have an impact on students' academic performance [31].

The lack of appropriate career counselling and development initiatives in the high schools they attended was one of the findings about a lack of information. For instance, with only a few months till they finished their matriculation exams, many of the students were ignorant of and uneducated about admission requirements. Lack of career counselling has the implication that information regarding the prerequisite courses students must take in order to be admitted to particular fields of study at the university may not be given. Because they did not complete the necessary courses in Grade 12, some students might not be allowed to enrol in the course of their choice. According to Paulo Freire, liberating education may reinforce students' independence and ability to shape their own futures [32]. Therefore, from Freire's point of view, exclusion could be seen as a kind of oppression if some students are denied registration for the course of their choice because they did not complete the necessary topics in Grade 12 (matriculation).

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that participants were first-year students from underprivileged communities. These children faced numerous difficulties as they tried to fit into the new academic setting. The participants' challenges were primarily related to their socioeconomic origins and academic disparities from their rural high school experiences. These included a number of difficulties with money, education, and information. A key finding was that if emphasis is not put on the development of crucial language and literacy skills in the early years, even if learners are given high quality guidance, educational facilities, and equipment, this strategy is unlikely to facilitate academic success at the tertiary level. This study demonstrates that South Africa's rural education system has to be improved immediately. While the current study concentrated on the opinions of the students, it would also be beneficial to investigate teachers' impressions of the variables that can help or hinder students' transition from high school to tertiary education.

Acknowledgement

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