

**MANAGING STUDENT DROPOUT RATES AT A TECHNICAL  
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGE IN  
KWAZULU-NATAL**

by

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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**DATE: June 2017**

## DECLARATION

STUDENT NUMBER: 36429015

I declare that **MANAGING STUDENT DROPOUT RATES AT A TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGE IN KWAZULU-NATAL** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



SIGNATURE:

DATE: June 2017

KJ MDLULI

## **KEYWORDS**

Dropout rates; throughput rates; Technical Vocational Education and Training College (TVET); National Student Fund Scheme (NSFAS); attrition; withdrawal; National Certificate Vocational (NCV); certification rates, retention rates; Student Support Service

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late beloved mother, Samaria Mdluli, for the legacy of love, patience, perseverance, excellence, family unity and acknowledging God in everything. My sister-in-law Ntombizodwa (skoni) you rock, Zanele and Sophie Masilela, Busisiwe, Nelisiwe, Nonkululeko, Busisiwe and Angel Mdluli. Thank you all for your support shown during this challenging time. Zankuhle your tenacious jokes and singing kept me going.

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*'For the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.'*

*Hebrews 4:12-13*

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the study was to investigate ways in which student dropout rates could be managed at a Technical Vocational Education and Training College (TVET) in KwaZulu-Natal, Amajuba District. Twenty-eight participants were purposively selected from two campuses in the area representing the Business and Engineering studies. This was done using the non-probability purposive sampling. The researcher focused on determining ways to assist in improving the management of student dropout rates in the above TVET College so as to increase the throughput and the certification rates. The study employed a qualitative design with semi-structured interviews that were conducted with senior managers from the central office, Heads of Departments, lecturers and students who had previously dropped out from the college so as to examine their views and perceptions on the effects of student dropout rates and how the management of student dropout rates could be improved.

Data were analysed thematically whereby information was categorised into themes that emerged from the responses of the participants. The findings revealed that causes of student dropout emanate from the financial challenges experienced by students in this area since most of them are from disadvantaged backgrounds, institutional factors such as poor or lack of career guidance, the curriculum, poor enrolment procedure and poor student support services. The study recommends that well organised and effective career guidance should be conducted, the curriculum should be reviewed, and the selection and enrolment procedures should be transparent and understood by everyone. Recommendations for further study are also provided.

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## **TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS**

DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
FET	Further Education and Training
HOD	Head of Department
HR	Human Resources
HRDC	Human Resources Development Committee
ICASS	Internal Continuous Assessment
NCV	National Certificate Vocational
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSFAS	National Student Fund Scheme
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
US	United States
VET	Vocational Education and Training

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this study was to investigate ways in which student dropout rates could be managed in a TVET in KwaZulu-Natal, Amajuba District. This chapter presents an introduction to an overview of the study under the following key features: the background to the study, the rationale for the study and the problem statement and literature preview. The research question, purpose, aim, objectives, as well as research methodology and design, are defined.

#### **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in South Africa aims at strengthening and expanding the public TVET Colleges so that they become institutions of choice according to the White Paper on Higher Education and Training (2013). The department aims to do this for a significant number of school leavers as the government expects these institutions to become the cornerstone of the country's skills development system. This call was further echoed by the Director-General of the DHET, Mr G Qonde (2015) during the launch of the TVET College lecturer support system. However, the college student drop-out epidemic has been a global concern for years, wherein South Africa is not exempted. Amongst challenges facing TVET Colleges, are the high student drop-out rates which still need to be managed efficiently for the country to benefit from these institutions.

Conceding this in his speech at the conference of the South African Heads of Mission in August 2014, the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, argued that to ensure value for money, it is imperative that the students who enter the TVET system not only enter but successfully conclude their studies. This would be achieved by improving, amongst others, access, throughput rates and management capacity (White Paper, 2013). Dropping out could have different meanings to different people depending on the occurrence and circumstances. Some students enrol but never start the course. Some go through a formal withdrawal procedure where they de-register. Some cease to attend or do the required assignments without formally withdrawing. Some complete the required assignments but fail to reach the required standards and subsequently leave. Some move to another course at the same or another institution (McGivney, 2003).

The statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa (2014) indicate that 15 340 students were registered for NCV level 4, 13 842 wrote the examinations and only 5 248 completed the level4 qualification. The Report 191 N6 states that 44 082 students were enrolled 42 244 wrote, and only 23 411 completed the N6 qualification. This calls for government, institutional, community and student partnership to manage student dropout rates effectively. According to Moxley, Najor-Durack and Dumbrique (2001), it is essential that the institution perceives the need for retention and establishes it as an institutional aim where everybody makes retention a priority and works towards achieving outcomes. However, Lamb, Markussen, Tesse, Sandberg and Polesel (2011) argue that the government has been seeking policies to increase the completion rates and reduce the dropout rates. The challenge in encouraging young people to remain at college is finding ways to deal with student diversity because they are from different backgrounds with different interests and challenges.

The Human Resource Development Council for South Africa (HRDC), in its research on TVET Colleges in South Africa (2015), states that the TVET Colleges' specific challenges are the lack of clarity regarding the existing pathways in respect of entry and exit routes. Whether it is to higher learning, employment or self-employment, this is the challenge they are facing (HRDC:2014). This contributes to the causes of dropping out in these institutions. In support of this, Gewer (2009) argues that the failure of the South African education system to channel students towards courses of study, is one of the reasons for the high dropout rates.

Dropping out will have detrimental effects on the country's economy, the institution as well as the individual student. McGivney (2003) asserts that students who withdraw from courses before completion stand to incur considerable financial, social and personal costs. This could also damage a person's self-confidence and self-esteem. Students who drop out of college add to the already existing problem of the high unemployment rate, which the government is trying to combat through TVET Colleges. Reducing the dropout rate is an effective way of increasing the respective labour supply (Heublein, 2014).

### **1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

This study is of particular interest to this researcher who is a lecturer in one of the TVET Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. This interest emanates from the low throughput and completion

rates, which are later characterised by the high unemployment rate. Field, Musset and Alvarez-Galvan (2014) cite that about one-third of those aged between 15 and 24 (3.4 million) are not formally employed nor in education or training. This provides an awareness that South Africa is faced with a high unemployment rate, especially amongst the youth, yet TVET Colleges were identified as institutions of hope where young people could be provided with skills, knowledge and attitudes that are necessary for employment in the labour market (Human Resource Development Council, 2014).

The researcher has taught at a TVET College for more than 15 years and has realised that student dropout is a concern, yet not much has been done to address this issue. Students are enrolled in numbers at the beginning of the year, however, for various reasons, only a few of them complete their studies. The researcher came to realise that this was a global issue, which needs to be addressed appropriately. The study, therefore, focused on researching on managing student dropout rates at a TVET college in KwaZulu-Natal by also identifying the causes and effects thereof.

#### **1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The concern on high student dropout rates in TVET Colleges has been a significant challenge in South Africa and other countries for years. The dropout rate in TVET Colleges is estimated between 13% and 25% per annum, the highest levels being in level 2 of the NQF (Green Paper, 2012). These figures are a caution to management and lecturers that something is not right in the system or institution. TVET Colleges are, however, expected to play a significant role in addressing the acute shortage of skills (Branson, Hofmeyr & Lan, 2013). The challenge is that the TVET College sector is currently incompetent regarding throughput and retention rates as well as low pass rates. Chweu and Schultz (2010) proclaim that the student throughput rate has become a grave concern for higher education institutions and academic departments are challenged to handle this issue.

According to the Green Paper (2012), the dropout rate in the TVET Colleges is estimated between 13% and 25% per annum, the highest level being in Level 2 of the NQF. The net certification rate of the NATED/Report 191 courses has over the years, remained consistently poor at around 12%. This is evident that the management of dropout rates in the TVET Colleges needs to be improved. Though this is a global concern in countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, China and Germany, the focus of the

research is at a TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal, Amajuba District. According to the researcher, lecturers and management's contributions could assist in improving the management of student dropout rates. The high incidences of student dropout in South Africa, as indicated by the statistics in the above paragraphs, incited the researcher to investigate ways in which this could be managed. The study intended to find answers to the following:

## **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION**

The main research question was:

How could student dropout rates be managed at a TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal?

The sub-questions related to the main research question were:

- What is your understanding of the management of dropout rates in the TVET College?
- How are student dropout rates managed in the TVET College?
- How could lecturers and management at the TVET College assist in improving the management of student dropout rates?

## **1.6 PURPOSE, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

### **1.6.1 Aim**

The overall aim of the research was to investigate ways of managing student dropout rates at a TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal.

### **1.6.2 Objectives**

The following objectives were identified:

- To determine the understanding of the management of drop-out rates at a TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal.
- To determine how the student dropout rates are managed at a TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal and the effects thereof.
- To determine the role of lecturers and management in improving the management of student dropout rates.

## **1.7 LITERATURE PREVIEW**

A literature study was conducted on managing student dropout rates in TVET Colleges. Related literature was reviewed looking at studies from different countries, aiming at providing answers to the study's main question about managing student dropout rates in a TVET College. In some countries, they are still referred to as Further Education and Training colleges (FET), yet in other nations, the VET sector is combined with high school level education. For the sake of this study, both FET and VET are referred to as TVET Colleges. The factors which influence student dropout in TVET Colleges and the effects of dropping out were reviewed. The researcher was of the opinion that it was essential to identify the underlying factors that are influencing the problem so as to be able to develop appropriate and effective measures to manage or address the situation.

Moxley, Najor-Durack and Dumbigue (2001), in their study of retention strategies, maintain that keeping students in higher education is not difficult as some people may think. They state that it requires students to be 'good' students by preparing themselves to meet academic challenges and be mature enough to address their needs. In South Africa, most of the students who enrol at TVET Colleges are from previously disadvantaged communities faced with socio-economic challenges. For that reason, it is hard to identify those who could be mature enough to address their needs. Moxley et al., (ibid) also discuss the strategies for retention by using illustrative examples. One of these strategies is that the institution must first perceive the need for retention and then identify those students who need outreach and support.

Field, Musset and Alvarez-Galvan (2014), in their discussion on supporting completion and transition in the TVET Colleges, also state that dropping out is a pervasive challenge in South Africa and a significant reason why so many young South Africans end up uneducated and unemployed. Amongst factors contributing to high student dropout rates in TVET Colleges is the insufficient focus on helping students to complete their studies and the lack of experience by teaching staff.

During the address by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande on 28 August 2014, he cited that there is a lot that still needs to be done within the Post-School Education and Training system because over 3.4 million youths are not in employment, education or training. The minister also maintained that the South African economy is experiencing, amongst others, a shortage of skills, low levels of access, poor quality of

education, high repetition and dropout rates. The minister stated that the objectives of the National Development Plan in connection with TVET throughput rates were to improve the quality of teaching, including strengthening governance and management.

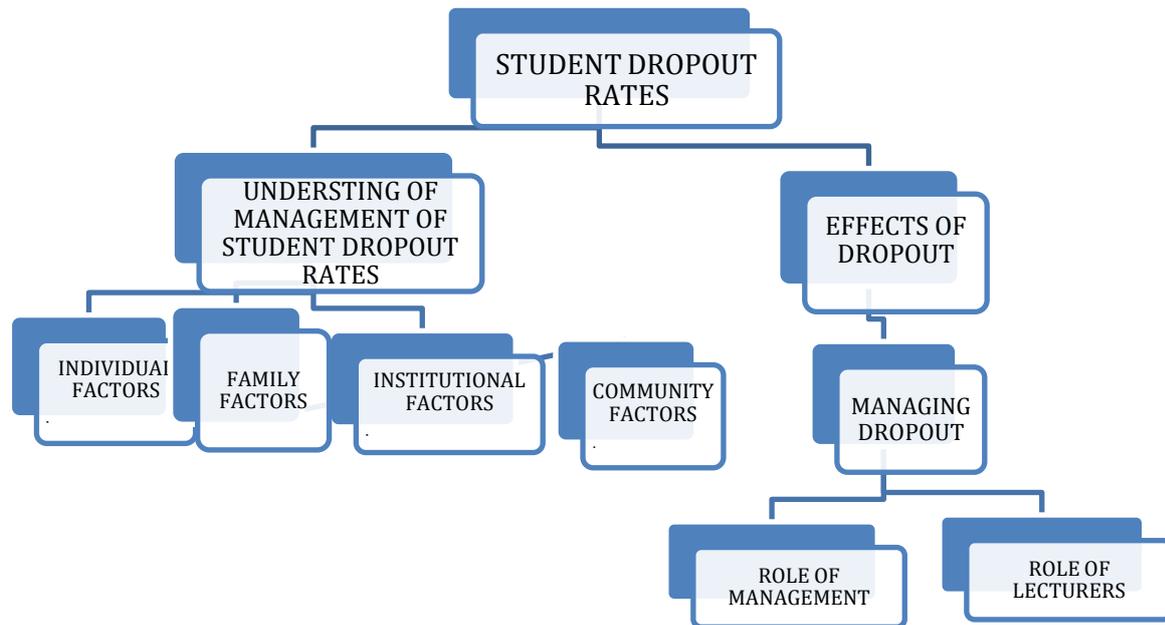
In the light of this, it is essential that TVET Colleges devise policies and strategies to ensure high student retention rates. This could only be possible when identifying the causes of high dropout rates and the need for retention.

It must be stated that most of the literature used was from other developed countries since TVET Colleges are still new in South Africa and literature is thus limited. Most literature that is used by other scholars in connection with dropout rates relates to Higher Education, Post-School Education and FET Colleges. This information was used when comparing the current situation at a TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal.

## **1.8 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

De Vos and Strydom (2011) refer to a conceptual framework as a process which determines which questions are to be answered by the research and how empirical procedures are to be used as tools for finding answers to these questions. Henning (2004) defines it as covering the main features of the research design and their presumed relationships. According to Lamb, Markussen, Tesse, Sandberg and Polesel (2011), causes contributing to student dropout are categorised into individual, family, institutional and community factors. In this study, the researcher conducted a conceptual analysis of the following concepts:

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework for managing student dropout rates**



Sources: Lamb, S., Markussen, E., Tesse, R., Sandberg, N & Polesel, J. 2011

The researcher investigated the causes of student drop-out at a TVET College, in KwaZulu-Natal, categorising them under individual, family, institutional and community factors. The effects of dropping out were investigated and discussed. The primary purpose was to determine ways in which the dropout rate could be managed to ensure that the college is in line with the vision of the DHET to make TVET Colleges institutions of choice.

## **1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

### **1.9.1 Paradigm**

According to Cresswell (2012), a paradigm is a way of looking at or viewing something. In his study on paradigms, he also argues that interpretivists use more open-ended research questions and the primary focus is on qualitative data, for which the researcher will interpret meanings. This approach uses small numbers of participants because the purpose is not to generalise but to explore the meanings, which the participants place on the social situation under study (ibid). In this study, the interpretivist paradigm was used whereby the researcher used open-ended questions during the interviews with the participants to ensure that data were explained according to the views and experiences of the participants.

### **1.9.2 Research design**

According to Mouton (2001), research design is a plan or blueprint of how one intends to conduct the research. In this study, the researcher followed a qualitative research design. Kobus (2007) cites that qualitative research is based on a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand the phenomena in context or real-world settings. Further, the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest. The Head of Departments (HODs), lecturers and managers were interviewed in their natural settings, where they felt comfortable and at a time agreed upon by both parties. The researcher used face-to-face, one on one and focus group interviews. An interview schedule was drafted in consultation with all participants.

Qualitative research processes study people or systems by interacting with and observing participants in their natural environment and focus on their meanings and interpretations (ibid). According to Creswell (2008), qualitative research is an approach of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The researcher interacted with the participants, allowing them to express their views, ideas, experiences and feelings about the study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world, and it consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to self.

The researcher chose the qualitative approach to explore the views, ideas and beliefs of the participants regarding the management of dropout rates at a TVET college in KwaZulu-Natal. Creswell (2014) proclaims that in the entire qualitative research process, the researcher keeps focusing on acquiring the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or that writers express in the literature.

### **1.9.3 Population and sampling**

In their study on sampling, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) state that the quality of research is not only based on the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation but also on the suitability of the sampling strategy. The researcher should first decide on a population, which is a group of potential participants to whom he or she wants to generalise the study results (Van Zyl, 2011).

According to Cohen et al. (2011), various researchers state that there are two general strategies for sampling. The first one is probability sampling in which the selection of participants is determined by chance, and the chances of members of the broader population are known. Secondly, in non-probability sampling, the researcher targets a particular group, in full knowledge that it does not represent the broader population.

Babbie (2014) and many other researchers cite that probability sampling is suitable for large, representative samples whereas, non-probability sampling is recommended for qualitative research. In this study, non-probability, purposive sampling was used.

Non-probability sampling derives from the researcher targeting a particular group in the full knowledge that it does not represent the broader population, it represents merely itself (Cohen, anion & Morrison, 2007). In purposive sampling, a feature of qualitative research, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample based on their judgement of their typicality or possession of their particular characteristics being sought (ibid).

Purposive sampling means that the participants are selected because of some defining features that make them the holders of the data needed for the study (Kobus, 2007). In this study, the researcher chose non-probability purposive sampling to identify participants who were regarded as having knowledge and experience on the phenomenon under study. The participants who were selected and interviewed were HODs from two campuses. There were two HODs from the engineering campus, and two HODs from the business campus. Each HOD represented the National Vocational Education and Training Certificate (NCV), Level 2-4 or Report 191(the National Certificate programme N1-N6). The HODs were chosen because of their management experience and the insight and knowledge they possess about the dropout rate in their divisions and how the college manages it.

Two managers from the Curriculum Department were interviewed to get a broader picture of the whole college concerning this study. Four lecturers per campus, who had been in the TVET sector for at least five years were also selected. Lecturers are managers in their classrooms and are in direct contact with students on a daily basis thus having first-hand information and experience. The experience they have in connection with student dropout assisted in generating views and ideas on how dropout could be managed.

The above sampling was chosen, as supported by Brink, Van der Walt and Van Ransburg (2012) where they state that the advantage of purposive sampling is that it allows the

researcher to select the sample based on knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. The above participants were chosen because they were likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon under study.

#### **1.9.4 Instrumentation and data-collection techniques**

Brink, Van der Walt and Van Ransburg (2012) proclaim that without high-quality data-collection techniques, the accuracy of the research conclusions is easily challenged. The researcher should be familiar with the various data-collection techniques. This includes their advantages and disadvantages to be able to select the most suitable technique for the study purpose, the setting and the proposed study population (ibid). The data-collection process is discussed under the following headings:

##### ***1.9.4.1 Data-collection method***

###### ***1.9.4.1.1 Semi-structured (open-ended) interviews***

Creswell (2014) states that a qualitative interview occurs when a researcher asks one or more participants general, open-ended questions and records their answers. Creswell also maintains that in qualitative research, open-ended questions are asked to ensure that participants can voice out their opinions unconstrained (ibid). The open-ended interview takes the form of a conversation with an intention that the researcher explores the participant views, ideas, beliefs and attitudes about certain events or phenomena (Kobus, 2007).

Individual interviews were held with the HODs and the managers from the Curriculum Department in the comfort of their offices. Questions were drafted and asked in the form of a conversation whereby the participants were allowed to express themselves freely. The researcher recorded all responses on an audio recorder and a notepad. Recording during the interview is necessary for the detailed analysis that is required in qualitative research and to ensure that interviewees' answers are captured (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This was done in consultation with the participants so that their right to privacy was protected.

###### ***1.9.4.1.2 Focus groups interviews***

Focus group interviews are interviews with groups of about six to nine people whose opinions and experiences are requested simultaneously (Brink, Van der Walt & van Rensburg, 2012). This method was used with a group of eight lecturers from the Business Studies and Engineering campuses. Participants shared their experiences and opinions about

managing the dropout rates at a TVET college in KwaZulu-Natal. The researcher used open-ended questions to facilitate the conversation and all responses were audio recorded, and notes were recorded as a backup system.

### **1.9.5 Data analysis**

According to Fourche and de Vos (2013), data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. The collected data were transcribed and analysed by writing down summative notes of key aspects. The data were coded using the comparative method of coding as supported by Babbie (2009) and organised into relevant themes and categories as guided by the interview questions based on the objectives of the study. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), coding implies that the coded data will not be presented in original format but will be interpreted and represented by the researcher.

## **1.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Trustworthiness is a way of ensuring data quality or rigour in qualitative research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Member checking was also used, whereby one or more participants checked the accuracy of the findings. Some of the lectures from the focus groups were asked to check whether the researcher's account was complete and realistic.

### **1.10.1 Transparency**

According to Yin (2011), transparency means that data must be transparent or be publicly accessible. All data needs to be available for inspection and others should be able to scrutinise the researcher's work. In this study, data were kept in a safe place where participants and other interested parties could be able to access in consultation with the researcher. Participants were informed that data would be stored in a secure location for five years.

### **1.10.2 Dependability**

According to Brink, van der Walt and Van Rensburg (2012) dependability refers to the provision of evidence such that if it were to be repeated with the same or similar participants in the same or similar context, its findings would be similar. The researcher attempted to attain this by recording the views of the participants verbatim so that they would be able to confirm that their responses were accurately reflected.

### **1.10.3 Credibility**

Credibility means to demonstrate that the research was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the participants were accurately identified and described (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2011). In this study, participants were selected using a purposive sampling method. They were chosen because they had certain characteristics, experience or insight into the issue of student dropout rates in a TVET college in KwaZulu-Natal, Amajuba District.

### **1.10.4 Conformability**

Conformability guarantees that the findings, conclusions and recommendations are supported by the data and that there is an internal agreement between the researcher's interpretation and the actual evidence (Brink, van der Walt & van Rensburg, 2012). To confirm this, the views of the participants were written verbatim and in italics to separate them from the interpretation and to represent the voice of the participant.

## **1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

It is crucial that researchers always remember that they are dealing with human beings who are serving as active participants in the research and must always be treated with dignity (Van Zyl 2011). Strydom (2005), in his introduction to ethical aspects, states that research should be based on mutual trust, acceptance, cooperation, promises and well-accepted conventions and expectations between all parties involved. Mouton (2001), in his study on ethical considerations, cites that even though researchers have a right to search for the truth, this should not be done at the expense of the rights of other individuals in the society. All participants have the right to privacy (ibid).

In this study, the researcher ensured that the planned research conformed to all acceptable norms and values. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from all participants, Majuba College Management and the University of South Africa. The research was carried out in such a manner that ethical principles such as respect, privacy and anonymity were adhered to. The information provided by the participants in this study was treated with confidentiality, and their identity was protected to ensure that the right to anonymity was also respected. The real names of the participants have not been mentioned anywhere in the study. Instead, pseudonyms were used. Data were processed anonymously by using false names where necessary. During the first stages of the research, the principle of voluntary participation was discussed with the participants so that they partook voluntarily or declined

to participate without fear of victimisation. The purpose of the research was extensively reviewed, and after that, the participants were given a consent letter to read and sign in case they agreed to participate. The principle of beneficence as emphasised by Brink, Van der Walt and Van Rensburg (2012) was also discussed to ensure the well-being of the participants, who had a right to protection from discomfort and harm. Participants were ensured that they were not exposed to any harm, exploitation or any form of coercion during the research study. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions should there be any aspect of the enquiry they did not understand.

## **1.12 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The investigation was conducted at one TVET college in KwaZulu-Natal, and only two campuses were involved in the study out of six campuses. The campuses selected were Business and Engineering; which are the two main divisions of this college. More insight would have been obtained from other colleges about the study in question.

The literature available for TVET Colleges in South Africa relating to the topic is insufficient. The time factor was also a challenge in such a manner that interviews needed to be rescheduled more than twice, sometimes to accommodate the needs and availability of the participants.

The lack of resources and financial constraints regarding obtaining tools such as audio recorders and compatible computers were part of this study's limitations. The researcher used a tablet and a smartphone for audio recordings, which sometimes were not audible. In such cases, the handwritten recordings were a credible substitute.

The delimitations are the boundaries set for this study. No comparison of the findings between campuses was made because this could provoke conflict. The student representatives were not interviewed since this could possibly interfere with the validity and reliability of data. The purpose was to come up with possible solutions on how to reduce student dropout rates.

## **1.13 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

### **1.13.1 Management**

Carpenter, Bauer and Erdogan (2010) define management as the art of getting things done through the efforts of people. Management involves designing and carrying out plans getting

things done and working effectively with people (Botha, 2013). Management is more concerned with the efficient use of resources to plan and coordinate efforts towards achieving predefined goals. In this study, management or managing refers to handling or controlling the issue of dropouts at a TVET College.

### **1.13.2 Dropout**

According to Seidman (2005), dropout refers to any person leaving a school, university or college before graduation. Lamb and Markussen (2011) state that the term dropout in the United States of America and Canada refers to young people who leave school without gaining a high school diploma.

In this study, dropout refers to all students who leave without completing their studies at a TVET College.

### **1.13.3 Withdrawal**

According to McGlvney (2003), withdrawal means to leave a college before completion. In this study, this refers to leaving a college before completion but having officially reported and stated reasons for that.

### **1.13.4 Retention**

Moxley et al. (2001) define retention as the process of keeping students in higher education. In this study, retention refers to managing dropout rates using various strategies.

### **1.13.5 Attrition rate**

Leaner attrition is the reduction in numbers of students attending courses as time goes by (Ascend Learning, LLC, 2012). It is a departure from or delays in successful completion of programme requirements (ibid). In this study, this refers to the number of students who are unable to complete their various courses.

## **1.14 CHAPTER OUTLINE**

### **1.14.1 Chapter 1**

This chapter serves as an introduction to the research project. It is composed of the background and rationale of the study and the problem statement. The research questions and objectives are discussed in this chapter.

### **1.14.2 Chapter 2**

This chapter provides a literature review on managing dropout rates in TVET Colleges. What is exposed by literature about dropout rates in TVET Colleges and the strategies which could be used in managing it are outlined.

### **1.14.3 Chapter 3**

This chapter describes the methodology and research design in detail. Information on how participants were selected, data-collection methods and data analysis procedures are also provided.

### **1.14.4 Chapter 4**

This chapter provides the results and findings of the research and also presents data analysis and interpretation.

### **1.14.5 Chapter 5**

This chapter presents the summary of the findings and recommendations on how student dropout rates could be managed at a TVET College.

## **1.15 CONCLUSION**

This chapter introduced the study's preliminary framework. The background to the study, the objectives, the aims and the research questions were the main focus of this chapter. The TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal, Amajuba District is faced with a significant challenge of learner dropouts, and this study sought to investigate ways in which student dropout rates could be managed. The next chapter reviews the literature related to the study including literature that relates to previous studies on the causes and strategies to manage student dropout rates in TVET Colleges.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **THE MANAGEMENT OF DROPOUT RATES IN THE TVET COLLEGE**

##### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of the study was to investigate the way in which student dropout rates can be managed at a TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal, Amajuba District. Some research studies have been conducted on student dropout rates. The related literature was reviewed based on the sub-questions of the study, which are: the understanding of the management of dropout rates, the management of the student dropout rates and improving the management of student dropout rates.

##### **2.2 UNDERSTANDING THE MANAGEMENT OF STUDENT DROPOUT RATES**

Policy makers in many developing countries, including South Africa, regard TVET as the key element in economic growth (Yao, Yi, Zhang, Wang, Yang, Shi, Chu, Loyalka & Rozelle, 2013). However, this could be difficult to accomplish if problems such as high dropout rates are not adequately managed. To manage a situation, it is imperative that a problem is first acknowledged. In other countries such as the United Kingdom, the issue of dropping out was kept a secret in most Higher Education Institutions for fear of reduced funding (McGiveney, 2003). According to Tas, Selvitopu and Bora (2013) dropping out is seen as a typical severe problem in all countries of the world and causes a significant human and social capital loss. To outline the understanding of the management of student dropout rates in TVET Colleges, the researcher deemed it necessary also to review the causes of student drop-out as described by Lamb, Markussen, Tesse, Sandberg and Polesel (2011).

###### **2.2.1 Family factors**

Students in the TVET sector are mostly from low-income family backgrounds characterised by low levels of education and low-income of parents. According to Heublein (2014), in his study about student dropout rates in German Institutions of Higher Learning, the main cause of the rising students drop-out rates is their financial and occupation aspirations during studies because they receive less financial support from their parents and mostly depend on public funding, which is insufficient. Breier (2010) states that the income level and socio-economic status are related to drop-out rates. It was further revealed that in China, the cost of

attending TVET education is very high and that financial aid is not granted to every student. This causes those who are unable to cope with the high costs to drop out (Yao, Yi, Zhang, Wang, Yang, Shi, Chu, Loyalka & Rozelle, 2013). The TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal that was under study is also characterised by a large number of students who are from poor family backgrounds. Thus they depend entirely on the National Student Fund Scheme (NSFAS) funding which only caters for tuition fees.

Literature reveals that the parents' low level of education sometimes contributes to student dropout because the student lacks motivation and support from parents. Yao et al., (2013) proclaim that in China, students' drop-out occurs more frequently when they are from families with parents who have characteristics associated with placing less value towards education. Similarly, Rumberger (2011) affirms that parental education influences the student's aspirations and educational support. According to Jorgerison (2011), if a student does not receive adequate support and motivation from home, chances of achieving academically are limited because he or she sees no significance in continuing with the studies. In South Africa, it is the opposite because most parents who were previously disadvantaged are keen to see their children progressing and achieving what they could not achieve.

In the TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal, Amajuba District, the primary challenge is financial stability rather than the lack of parental support. The high unemployment rate contributes extensively to limiting financial assistance from parents. Almost 90% of the students depend on NSFAS funding which is insufficient to cater for their accommodation and transport needs. The researcher observed that most parents in this college have a low level of education, yet they are the ones who show great enthusiasm and interest in seeing their children becoming educated. Most students are sponsored by their grandparents to fulfil their education dreams. There are some few cases where students are from families where parents are abusive and are alcoholics. This kind of environment impacts negatively on the self-esteem and eventually the general performance of the student because parents have no time to spend with their children, let alone support them. Most of the students in this college are above eighteen. However, it is important to have people they can trust and rely on as parents and role models.

The marital status of the parents was also cited as one of the family factors influencing student dropout. Jerald (2006) argues that students who are from single-parent families and

have a mother who dropped out from high school are also placed at a higher risk of dropping out of school. On the contrary, some high achievers in our community were raised by single parents who could not finish high school because of some challenges; therefore this argument needs to be reviewed for further insight. Al-mum, Mamum, Hasen and Amin (2012) maintain that the dropout rate in Bangladesh amongst a considerable portion is female students. This could be because Bangladesh has a high demand for skilled technicians and this is not regarded as a female sector; females are not socially encouraged to study Engineering. In South Africa, this has changed as the demand for more artisans is growing; more females are interested in Engineering studies.

Literature reveals that some students are forced to leave their studies and look for jobs in an attempt to take care of their siblings because parents die of illnesses such as HIV and AIDS or because they are HIV positive themselves and have lost interest in their studies (Breier, 2010). It is for this reason that Craig (2006) argues that teenagers who take adult responsibilities by becoming parents, getting married and holding down a job are potential dropouts. The present study endeavoured to determine if the above arguments are also relevant to the studied college in KwaZulu-Natal.

Studies reveal that the migration status of parents in rural China might be associated with student dropout. Parents in rural areas may migrate to cities to work. Unfortunately, migrating parents are less able to care or supervise their children's education, which in turn potentially increases student's chances of dropping out. These parents may also serve as negative role models influencing children to migrate themselves in the hope of increasing the probability of finding a job (Yao et al., 2013). Wang (2013) maintains that the migrants who move from rural to urban areas make it difficult for their children to access education and these children often grow up without parents because many must leave their children behind.

As cited above, the marital status of parents contributes to student dropout to a certain degree. When enrolments are processed in the college under study, it is observed that the majority of students are either from single-parent backgrounds or they do not have parents at all. This affects the students' self-esteem and ego in such a manner that they easily become victims of social influences because they do not have a stable family background. The researcher once witnessed a student who was eventually forced to drop out because the parents were divorced and he had no one to support him financially as the mother was unemployed. The father refused to support him because he accused him of choosing his mother's side. The challenge

is mostly with single parents who are unemployed. Those who are employed do their best to meet the needs of their children so as to bridge the gap. This study also reveals that a certain number of students in this college does not have parents due to illnesses such as HIV and AIDS as cited by the literature that has been quoted. Therefore, they take the responsibility of being parents to take care of their siblings. These students eventually drop out because they cannot cope with their studies as they have to look for jobs so that they can support their families.

By the same token, in South Africa, the migration status from rural to urban areas is also high. Due to unemployment in the country, people move to cities in search of jobs or greener pastures. According to Tabora (2017), the unemployment rate in South Africa went from 26.6% in 2016 to 27.7% in the first quarter of 2017, hence the increased migration status. Though this might have an influence on student dropout rates, they are the ones who migrate by leaving their homes in rural areas and being on their own without parental supervision. It must be mentioned that about 80% of the students are from outside the location of the college. The college under study does not have accommodation facilities. Therefore, students are supposed to look for accommodation on their own where they sometimes end up staying with friends who are from different family backgrounds. This increases their chances of experiencing and succumbing to peer pressure. Most students in this college are above the age of 18. However, it should be noted that it is usually for the first-time that they leave their homes to be alone and become independent. For some students, this is overwhelming in such a manner that they eventually find themselves involved in unethical activities such as alcohol and drug abuse.

### **2.2.2 Individual factors**

Some students drop out of college because they have developed low self-esteem and therefore feel that they are not capable of learning due to their low achievement (Yao, Yi, Zhang, Wang, Yang, Shi, Chu, Loyalka & Rozelle, 2013). In their study about student dropouts in China, Selvitopu and Bora (2013) maintain that students drop out because of low achievement which suggests that they are not capable of learning or it is a sign of unwillingness to learn. Jerald (2006) further confirms that students who struggle in the classroom and fall behind academically, are more likely to drop out. Rumberger (2011) affirms that a dropout is likely to be associated with emotions of personal inadequacy, self-doubt and not belonging. The NCV programme caters for students who passed Grade 11 and

would like to follow a particular career path. What usually happens is that students who do not cope at primary education level, are directed to the TVET College to acquire various skills. Regrettably, the curriculum that is offered by this programme is of a high standard, and most of these students do not cope because they think they will be doing more practical work than theory, which is not the case. As already cited above, they develop low self-esteem and lose hope which results in dropping out of college. Another underlying factor is that eligibility for NSFAS is measured against their performance. If a student fails a subject, he or she is expected to pay, using their funds to repeat the subject. It is unfortunate that the college does not have a remedial system in place where these students could be assisted so that they regain their confidence. The present study attempted to establish Heads of Department (HODs) and lecturers' views on the student performance as a cause of student dropout.

The findings of the study by Al-Mamum, Hasan and Amin (2012) reported that the lack of interest in what the student is doing was another underlying cause. Sometimes students did not get what they desire for their study regarding the subject or the course; They would do whatever was available at that time and later realise that this was not what they desired. The same view is further supported by Polat (2014), who argues that students sometimes have no precise definition of their goals, aims and purpose. They register in a vocational school to acquire a profession within the shortest period, and when they cannot find what they want or hope for, they drop out.

Tinto (2012) affirms that expectations have a powerful effect on student performance. The researcher observed students change from one course to another because they claim that they were registered for courses they did not want. The college enrolments are run according to the strategic plan which indicates the target numbers per course and these figures are not supposed to be exceeded due to a shortage of facilities such as computer rooms. Students are usually advised to enrol for other existing causes if they are interested. However, what happens is that they do it just to avoid staying at home to register for the next block. The present study sought to ascertain the participants' views on the above discussion.

Studies have revealed that students who become disengaged from school and develop disciplinary problems are also more likely to drop out. This includes high rates of absenteeism or truancy, poor classroom behaviour, less participation in extracurricular activities, and bad relationships with teachers and peers (ibid). Similarly, Tas, Selvitopu, Bora and Demirkaya (2013) maintain that personal reasons for dropping out are absenteeism,

grade repetition, intensive curriculum and reluctance. Muzenda (2014) further argues that drug abuse, negative peer pressure and engagement in violent activities lead to low lesson attendance, poor academic achievements and low engagement in class activities. According to Al-Mamun et al. (2012), frequent violence by students after the first semester is considered as the top cause for student drop out. TVET Colleges in South Africa experience the same in the form of labour action for financial aid. The researcher agrees with the comments of students who were disengaged from school attendance for some time. In the investigated TVET College, some students were disengaged from school for five years or above. Those students typically have a disciplinary problem and less cooperation with lecturers and peers. This is perhaps because they have been away from an environment with rules and regulations for a long time and they are used to being independent. This kind of behaviour is often identified with male students.

The rate of absenteeism is very high particularly towards the end of the first term because students report that they do not have money for transport or to pay their landlords. Since most of the students are from rural areas, bad behaviour is not experienced because they have good morals and respect towards other people. However, a very small percentage end up being influenced negatively by their peers and then misbehave. The students are expected to write and pass the first assessment before they receive the first payment from NSFAS. In the first quarter of the semester, the college is usually characterised by strikes because of the delays in payments. It is during this period that some of the students de-register for fear of failing because their funding gets terminated if they fail.

Yao et al. (2014) state that low achievement may suggest that students are not capable of learning, or it may signal an unwillingness to do so. Polat (2014) supports this by arguing that students sometimes have no precise definition of their goals, aims and purpose. They register in a vocational school to acquire a profession within the shortest period, and when they cannot find what they want or hope for, they drop out (ibid). Students enrol for whatever course that is available at that time and later realise that this is not what they want.

Tinto (2012) argues that expectations have a powerful effect on student performance. What students expect of themselves and what they need to do to be successful determines, in part, what they will do (ibid). Studies found that learning that does not provide students with a sense of inventiveness and add value leads to attrition and dissatisfaction, which leads to dropping out (Raviv & Bar-Am, 2014).

Heublein (2014) maintains that in the German Higher Education Institutions, the main causes for student dropout include financial status and occupation during studies. They receive less financial support from their parents and are mostly dependent on public funding, which is insufficient. Students then resort to having jobs during their studies, which in turn affects their academic success since it takes up a great deal of their time. Most of the industrial and labour action experienced by the college in KwaZulu-Natal during the first semester are related to NSFAS funding, whereby students do not receive their funds as expected. As a result, they do not cope with the financial challenges of paying for accommodation and transport. The study sought to determine if the participants in the study concur with the above views.

### **2.2.3 Institutional factors**

Students spend almost 80% of their time at college and, away from home. The college or institution is like a second home to them, and therefore it is imperative that a warm, healthy and welcoming environment be provided. Raviv and Bar-Am (2014) assert that learning does not provide students with a sense of inventiveness and leads to attrition and dissatisfaction, which in turn leads to dropping out. According to Moxley, Najor-Durack and Dumbrique (2011), keeping students is not difficult, but it requires institutions to be confident that its students can meet academic challenges because retention involves academic outcomes and the need for students to achieve these results. This means that institutions should have explicit goal-directed selection and enrolment processes to be able to place students where they can be successful. Jorgensen (2011) maintains that institutional selection processes that include the separation of students in classes at different levels, assessments through tests and examinations categorising and positioning students as right or inattentive are some of the factors contributing to student dropout rates. With regard to the selection and enrolment process in the college under study, the researcher's observations are that it is very frustrating and has proven to be ineffective for both lecturers and students.

When students are enrolled, they first write a pace test which supposedly serves as a selection method. However, the primary concern is that after this has been done, it is never considered when selections or enrolments are conducted. For example, according to this test, a student might be recommended for Office Administration, yet the student will be enrolled in whatever course depending on the availability of space. This turns out to be a fruitless exercise which is also time-consuming adding to the reasons why classes do not usually

commence within the stipulated time. This process contributes to many challenges in the classroom performance as mentioned by Jorgensen (ibid) above. The enrolment process in this college is composed of about 14 stages that are undergone by each student. Students would come to college every day for more than two weeks in some cases, trying to register and during this period they do not have accommodation since the majority of them live far from the college. In some instances, a student would complete up to stage 13 only to be told later on that their desired course is full. This is very frustrating and usually the reason why some students end up doing what they are not interested in because they think of the time they have already wasted and the expectations they had. This number also contributes to the student dropout rate experienced by the college because of lack of direction and insufficient planning. The present study sought to establish if the above applies to the TVET college in KwaZulu-Natal, Amajuba District.

Another concern raised by most studies is about lecturers who do not have an interest in what they are doing or in the success of the students. Tas, Selvitopu, Bora and Demirkaya (2013) proclaim that those lecturers are like factory workers who just come to do their work and return to their homes as soon as they can. These lecturers are likely to present boring and passive lessons. According to Govindaraju and Venlogtesan (2010) in rural India, uncaring lecturer behaviour and negative comments are amongst the highest, and this contribute to the dropout rate. Raviv and Bar-Am (2014) also argue that passive learning methods that do not motivate students to learn, irrelevant curricula that do not let students progress, inappropriate screening and overcrowded classrooms that do not support active participation, contribute to dropping out. As already stated, to the students, college is like their second home. Therefore, they need to feel welcomed by the lecturers. In South Africa, the Green Paper (2012) reports that colleges, in technical fields, have through the years been recruiting from industry.

Lecturers in this field usually possess technical qualifications as well as workplace experience and knowledge but little pedagogical training; as they have limited subject knowledge. Such conditions may influence student engagement which may lead to a student voluntarily withdrawing from college due to boredom, poor attendance or low achievement (Ramberger, 2011). According to Jerald (2006) recent research and experience also conveys that even for students who have difficult home lives, dropping out has much to do with how the college operates and the educational experience students have within them. As already stated, college is like a second home to most of the students. Therefore, they need to feel appreciated. Students in the Amajuba District are from different backgrounds, and some have

been exposed to various challenges in life which make them feel neglected. This could lead to personal or emotional problems such as anxiety or depression. Lecturers, as human beings, have different characters and personalities based on their backgrounds. Some have no interest in the students or the work they are doing as cited by some of the authors in this review. This is also influenced by the high unemployment rate in the country. Some lecturers are employed in the college for the sake of earning a salary.

The researcher's observations are that some of the lecturers were not trained in the education field. However, due to the lack of professional lecturers, they were employed and then given a chance to further their studies to obtain professional qualifications. This contributes a lot to how they present their lessons in class and also how they deal with student challenges. Students are very quick to notice if a lecturer lacks knowledge or confidence and some would decide to leave the college and register elsewhere. Some of the lecturers experience personal problems such as family challenges, financial challenges and illnesses. This would contribute to them being categorised as uncaring and having no interest in their students yet they also struggle to deal with their challenges. Unfortunately, not much is done in this college to cater for the well-being of the lecturers so that they are productive in their duties.

According to Wang (2012), vocational education tends to be a dead end in many countries. Once a student enters the vocational track, he or she may lose the opportunity for any Further Education, regardless of his or her academic improvement or motivation to learn. Education authorities often manage education without the involvement of either employers or qualified teachers with strong technical skills. As a result, it may not prepare young people with the latest skills required by industries, and it may also use obsolete content and equipment (ibid).

Shadreck (2013) maintains that a curriculum that is irrelevant to the world of work does not cater for student interests. Upward mobility and poor job opportunities after college contribute towards student dropout. The Human Resource Development Council for South Africa (HRDC) (2014) also reports that a lack of clarity regarding the existing pathways in respect of entry and exit routes, whether it is to higher learning, employment or self-employment contributes to the causes of dropping out in these institutions. In the investigated TVET College, the researcher had witnessed that the NCV curriculum is vibrant and relevant to the work environment. The problem is that the college does not have the relevant infrastructure and resources to train the students according to what is expected of the curriculum. For example, in this college, there are courses such as Office Administration and

Hospitality, however students simply do theory instead of having more practical work. When the NCV programmes were introduced in 2007, it was stated that the courses offered would provide 70% practical work and 30% theory. This is no longer the case. This is one of the reasons why employers state that the curriculum offered is irrelevant to the work environment because students are inexperienced when they are expected to perform duties. Their major concern is that they would need to give students training on the job which is time-consuming.

The researcher has been with the TVET College for more than eighteen years and has observed that most of the students who were trained in this institution, particularly with the Business Studies qualification, struggle to get employment. If they do, it will not be what they were trained for. Another concern is that even if they wanted to further their studies, higher institutions do not recognise the qualifications from the TVET sector, maybe this was out of ignorance, but it has a significant impact on demotivating students to register in a TVET College. In this case, students drop out before they even register because they do not see any future with the TVET College regarding furthering their studies or getting recognition. To create work exposure for students in this college, management has negotiated with the local industries to place the NCV students so that they gain practical experience in what they are learning through a programme called Work Based Exposure (WBE). Some of the students get employment through this programme depending on their performance during this period. Most organisations are reluctant to give students this opportunity claiming that it delays their regular duties and sometimes jeopardises professionalism with their clients. Students report that in other organisations, they are not given a chance to do what they are trained for, but they end up being cleaning ladies and handymen.

This study attempted to establish if the participants share the above views.

#### **2.2.4 Community factors**

A study conducted by Wang (2012) revealed that until recently, many educational systems, except in Germany, favoured academic study over vocational skills development. Academic standards were regarded as the only way to determine “good” and “poor” students. Students who were academically able were selected for general education, and the rest were to follow the vocational education track or drop out of school altogether. This kind of stigma is not entirely over in South Africa because most students who enrol in TVET Colleges are either school dropouts or have experienced learning difficulties academically.

Essel, Agyrkoh, Sumaila and Yankson (2014) state that negativism towards TVET Colleges has been observed in most African countries including Ghana. Many parents and guardians discourage and prevent their children from pursuing TVET programmes due to its limited academic opportunities in academic progression and lack of prestige that have characterised TVET Colleges on the continent over the years. Al-Mamum, Hasan and Amin (2012) cite that in Germany, the society knows very little about technicians and their education system which is TVET affiliated. As a result, students find themselves unemployed after passing. Tas, Selvitopu and Bora (2013) argue that even if students find jobs, it is hard to find well-paying jobs. The fear of unemployment after passing in TVET Colleges is accentuated by seeing students who passed, yet are still unemployed. The stigma that society has about vocational education is one of the leading factors influencing high dropout rates in TVET Colleges even to date. The college in KwaZulu-Natal is no exception with regard to the stigma received from the community, as mentioned above. Most of the community members lack information about what is happening in this institution; the only thing they know is that if a student is struggling the next option academically is to go to the TVET College. Their understanding is that TVET Colleges offer skills to slow students or underachievers. This has created a situation where a student would feel punished if he is referred to the TVET College.

Another concern is that former students who completed from this college are community members and most of them are unemployed. Therefore students are discouraged because of fear of unemployment. In the area where this college is located, there is a high crime rate because most of the young people are neither attending any school nor working and target the students from this institution. Students are robbed of their money and cell phones. It is unfortunate that the same students' rental accommodation from community members and lots of criminal activities have been reported to college management including cases of rape. The support given to students undergoing this distress is insufficient because they are only referred to the police station or hospital. Emotional healing should be provided by professionals such as psychologists for them to be able to cope with their studies. It has been a trend over the years in this college that enrolments are extended to about two months because students would come after they have been rejected by universities and other institutions of their preference. This is an indication that college education is the last resort to most of the students.

## **2.3 THE EFFECTS OF DROPPING OUT**

Dropping out is a common severe problem for most countries in the world. It causes a significant human and social capital loss in all countries (Tas, Selvitopu & Bora, 2013). In support of this finding, Bloom and Robbins (2011) maintain that dropping out from educational institutions has a high social and institutional price since these individuals are less educated and less professional and the educational institution may lose some of its income. McGiveny (2003) proclaims that in FET Colleges, student numbers and retention rates are used in the distribution of funds. That is the reason why the issue of dropout rates was kept a secret in some of the colleges in the United Kingdom.

In South Africa, TVET Colleges are also funded according to the number of students doing all subjects in one level. The same occurs in this TVET College whereby the issue of student numbers has an influence on how much is going to be contributed by the DHET through NSFAS funds. The management at the college mentioned above implemented a policy stating that if a student has failed more than two subjects, he or she must register with the Open Learning Unit. The student is expected to pay an amount of R680.00 per subject, which is very challenging considering the calibre of students in this institution. These students usually drop out due to lack of funds adding to the existing unemployment rate because they are unqualified.

Studies by Field, Musset and Alveze-Galven (2014) revealed that unemployment is one of the significant effects of student dropout because once these students leave college, they add to the existing number of unemployed people in the country. Field et al., (ibid) argue that dropouts have difficulty in finding jobs and even if they are employed they earn significantly less than those who graduated. Similarly, Lamb, Markussen, Tesse, Sandberg and Polesel (2011) cite that research in different countries shows that dropouts are more likely to become unemployed, stay unemployed for longer, have lower earnings and over accumulate less wealth over their lives. Another finding was that dropouts develop health problems, probably because of engaging in harmful activities such as drug and alcohol abuse. This increases the demand for more social services which is a loss to the government (Tas, Selvitopu & Bora, 2013).

Providing social services and dealing with crime associated with dropouts is costly as Fruedeberg and Ruglis state (2007). Field, Musset and Alvez- Galvan (2014) maintain that adverse outcomes from dropouts generate substantial social costs to citizens and taxpayers.

The government also subsidises poor health, high criminal activities and increased public assistance of dropouts. In the United States of America (USA), it is estimated that in the next ten years, twelve million students will leave school without having a diploma and this will cost the USA about one trillion dollars (Tas et al., 2013). Hupfeld (2010) states that according to the Bureau of Justice statistics report, dropouts are vastly overrepresented in US prisons. Sixty-eight per cent (68%) of the nation's state prison inmates are dropouts. According to Frueberg and Ruglis (2007) and Tas et al., (2007), this increases the demand for more social services which is a loss to the government because providing social services and dealing with crime associated with dropouts is costly.

The researcher observed that some students who drop out tend to engage in illegal jobs or alcohol abuse because they cannot get employment. As mentioned previously, some of these students do not have parents, so they become a burden to their grandparents and demand their pension money. The female students are the ones who suffer the most because they decide to engage in abusive relationships for the sake of money. Pregnancy amongst drop-out students coupled with HIV and AIDS infections has also been identified. Therefore, the researcher agrees with what is cited regarding wasting government funds because providing medication is very expensive. The DHET invested a lot of funds in developing skills through TVET Colleges but only to discover that students did not finish their qualifications. This is an enormous social cost to South African citizens since taxpayers' money is wasted.

## **2.4 MANAGING DROPOUT RATES**

The White Paper (2013) argues for the strengthening and expansion of public TVET Colleges so that they become institutions of choice for a significant proportion of school leavers. This depends on managing dropouts partly because the college system may not be seen as sufficiently attractive if dropout is so pervasive and partly because it may be difficult to justify the substantial public expenditure involved if the return, regarding qualified students, is low.

According to Field et al., (2014) dropping out is a pervasive challenge in South Africa and a significant reason why so many young people end up uneducated, unemployed or untrained. It is of paramount importance that this challenge is appropriately managed by all stakeholders in the TVET sector so that the vision by the DHET to make them institutions of choice and to equip young people with skills and competencies to assist with economic growth, is reached. Education at all levels contributes to the development and a country's competitiveness. Basic

Education provides a solid foundation in reading and writing and successful entry to secondary education. Secondary education, including Vocational and Technical Education (VET), develops specific competencies, skills, behaviours and attitudes together with a sense of cooperation and social responsibility that enable young people to participate in the knowledge economy, contribute decisively to social cohesion and be responsible citizens (Wang, 2012).

Measures to address dropout rates often require additional resources. Colleges should, therefore, have a proportion of their funding attached to student completion rather than just enrolments to provide support for students at risk of dropping out and encourage an institutional focus on final outcomes (Field et al., 2014). Colleges need to ensure that students at risk receive support to help them improve their foundation skills, sometimes by integrating them with practical teaching (ibid).

In China, Yao et al. (2013) recommend that the government should begin focusing on students who are at risk of dropping out and consider programmes that focus on emotional or social needs of students such as counselling programmes encouraging them to persist in college or help them identify their future goals. Among these students, there are those who enrolled in courses without having full information on what to expect, rendering poor performance in the course. Tinto (2012), states that receiving good advice is essential for the many students who either begin college undecided about their major or change their major during college. High expectations and academic, social and financial support go hand in hand (ibid). The White Paper on Post-School Education (2013) highlights that career counselling should be an integral component of the Post-School Education and Training System.

Students in the TVET sector are young people between the age of 17 to 35; most researchers support the idea of involving parents or families to assist with their performance and behaviour at college (Polat, 2014). Silverstein, Yetti, Foster, Welner and Shephard (2003) also recommend home and community connections. In the United States, they observed that schools have more motivated students when they develop deep relationships in all the settings where students spend their time, which include home, places of worship and community organisations. Such relationships help instil a consistent message about the importance of the school and community. The TVET sector is still new in most black communities, and most people still regard them as institutions that cater for slow students or students who are

academically deficient. Involving parents and the community assists in disseminating information about the TVET sector so that they can motivate and guide their children.

Silverstein et al., (2003) recommend relevance and rigour regarding the curriculum to increase student motivation, confidence and achievement. When interviewed about the factors that influence drop-out rates; some students mentioned that the curriculum was not relevant to their needs and those of the employers. The curriculum should be widened and diversified to cater to the students' varied interests, needs and aptitudes (Shadreck, 2013). The students need to cultivate resilience skills (Hupfeld, 2010). Resilience means a set of self-protective characteristics possessed or experienced by those who can adapt to hardships and succeed. Building confidence, making connections, setting goals, managing stress, increasing well-being and understanding motivation are some of the resilience skills suggested by Hupfeld (2010). Resilience skills rely on the availability of caring and supportive adults who provide academic and emotional support to students.

Muzenda (2014) suggests three approaches in dealing with the dropout rates. The first one is the programmatic approach, whereby programmes are created to target a group of students who are more at risk of dropping out or have already done so. Supplementary or remedial services are then provided to students within an existing school programme. This group may be created by using a data system that supports a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who drop out and help in identifying individual students at high risk of dropping out (Wesley, Hoover, Javis & Times, 2013). Early interventions are very vital in dealing with this situation so that actions to avoid dropping out could be implemented timeously; as prevention is better than cure.

Secondly, a comprehensive approach which involves school-wide reforms that attempt to change school environments to improve outcomes for all students has to be established. The quality of information that is disseminated about the environment and courses offered must be accurate, comprehensive, easy to follow and informative if students are to make effective choices (Larsen, Kornbeck, Kristesen, Lasen & Sommers, 2013). There must be the provision of individual or small group support in test-taking, skills or target subjects such as reading, writing or mathematics.

Thirdly is the systematic approach which involves making changes to the entire education system and this can only happen at national level. The issue of changing the curriculum so that it is individualised and focused on understanding to increase student motivation,

confidence and achievement (Silverstein et al., 2003) should be dealt with in consultation with institutions because they know the community they serve. These stakeholders should develop a rigorous, engaging curriculum that is connected to students' lives and futures and should be designed to keep students on grade level and to progress towards graduation (Hupfeld, 2010). According to the Green Paper (2013), The DHET with college staff and other experts will develop the curriculum for foundation learning programmes for students who cannot meet the demands of the college programmes. Field, Musset and Alvez-Galvan (2014) contend that in South Africa many students enter vocational programmes with weak numeracy and literacy skills and have difficulties with the programmes' academic requirements. The researcher concurs with the view that the department, lecturers and all relevant stakeholders should join forces in dealing with the challenges experienced in this sector.

Field et al., (2014) also highlight the importance of Student Support Service, which includes academic and personal support, assistance with financial matters and help in finding work placements and jobs. Target support should be provided to ensure adequate levels of literacy and numeracy among those pursuing vocational programmes (ibid). This is in support of the concern raised by the DHET in connection with insufficient support for students who struggle with their studies (White Paper, 2013). Student support services must be addressed and funded. This service must include academic support, social support, vocational guidance assistance for students to obtain work placements for practical experience during their studies and job placements on the studies' conclusion to allow a smoother transition from college to the workplace (ETDP SETA, 2013).

These could be enhanced by hosting career day and offering opportunities for work-related experience and partnering with local businesses to provide opportunities for work-related experiences such as an internship, job interviews or long-term employment. Appropriate career guidance needs to be provided because many different programmes of the Post-School System make career choices difficult and many students have little understanding of those options. The White Paper (2013) suggests that attention to the complete issue needs to be underpinned by financial incentives to encourage colleges to support the completion of courses. Ensuring adequate incentives in completion for both institutions and students could assist in managing dropout rates.

Hupfeld (2010) also addresses the issue of close mentoring and monitoring of students by teachers. Teachers must be encouraged to serve both as mentors and instructors. They need to provide high-quality instruction by believing in the potential of every student and helping students develop a positive vision for their educational future and encourage them to see the relevance of school and learning in their personal lives and future goals (ibid). Where students have low attendance and performance rate, Simkins (2013) suggests that lecturers should plan meetings with families and those students to try and come to a common understanding and seek a mutual solution to the problem before it is too late.

The department of professional learning and accountability recommends communication links between parents and schools to monitor and regulate student activities effectively, talk to them about their problems, encourage individual decision making, exchange information about school performance, and ensure that these challenges are addressed early and quickly. In the study by Heublein (2014), the following preventive measures were suggested: offering better information to student applicants, reforming the curricula, providing bridging courses to compensate specialist gaps and offering mentors and tutors for new first-year students in the first semester.

The TVET is currently highly ineffective regarding throughput and retention rates, as well as low pass rates. The DHET, (2010) recommends that a well-planned and managed transition be required towards a high-quality TVET College system with expanded access. This requires a lot of planning and identifying areas of concern so that appropriate measures are taken to manage the situation. Managing dropout rates is to be done at a national, provincial, local and institutional level for it to be efficient. The institution (college) may be in a position to develop some plans or programmes to manage drop out and need funding to implement those programmes. In future, it is advisable for colleges to incorporate these programmes into their strategic plan because this is not a once off challenge.

The TVET College under study attempts to reduce the dropout rates by doing a screening and selection process during registrations so that students are placed according to their performance. This has not been effective because students are graded according to their school results, yet the TVET curriculum is entirely different. The college has a 50/80 policy which stipulates that a student should have a minimum pass of 50% and 80% attendance to qualify to write the examination. This does not seem to address the issue of dropping out because; according to the researcher's experience, the 80% attendance part of the policy has

never been implemented due to strikes that are usually experienced by the college. It becomes difficult for lecturers to control registers because students are coerced by their peers to take part in the strikes.

Another method is to phone the student after observing a certain period of being absent, which is not specified. This again has been ineffective because students do not give correct contact details and it is also not clear who should take the responsibility to phone the student since lecturers do not have access to the telephone. In some instances, students are encouraged to de-register if they feel they will not cope with their studies. This term seems to have replaced the word dropout in this institution. Hence it is hard to have accurate figures of student dropout rates. The problem with de-registering students is that lecturers are not notified on time. They would only be aware when submitting the second or third assessment because registers are submitted to the seniors on a weekly basis. Therefore, it is not easy to keep track of the students who are frequently absent. According to the perception of the researcher, the college is failing to manage dropout rates because there are no proper measures in place. In essence, this has never been taken seriously and it needs to be addressed sternly. Controlling attendance registers only serves as a means of ensuring that students are paid their NSFAS funds.

## **2.5 CONCLUSION**

The dropout crisis is existent, and it affects the future of students on a daily basis. From the figures by the DHET on the national dropout rates, it is indisputable that the issue of dropout rates needs to be managed at all levels before it escalates. Studies have revealed that most institutions start dealing with the dropout issue after it has already happened and this does not help those students who are already out of the system. It is vital that lecturers and management develop a system of identifying early warning signs so that assistance is provided as soon as possible

The successful completion of the study is a visible means of study. Non-completion can be seen as an institutional failure, general ill-will and sending negative signals about the quality of teaching or support. On the other hand, completion rates are performance indicators used to assess the success of educational institutions. High dropout rates could make the government suspicious about the performance quality of the college or institution. It must be remembered that government invests a lot of money in the TVET Colleges as an effort of equipping young people with required skills and competencies to develop the economy of the

country. TVET Colleges are managed by educational authorities in the department offices without the involvement of either employers or qualified lecturers with strong technical skills. As a result, they have not prepared young people with the latest skills required by industries. It is recommended that effective career guidance and counselling be provided before and during vocational programmes to equip students with information about what to expect in their chosen field of study.

Parental or family involvement is recommended by most studies to assist with cultivating self-confidence, commitment and self-dependency amongst students. However, this depends on the age of the student because some are already adults. It was also stated that the level of parents' and family members' education plays a significant role in motivating students to study. In this case, monitored student support programmes were recommended. The concern about teacher qualifications is found in most TVET institutions and must be addressed by the DHET.

Most authors concur that it is essential that the issue of dropping out is managed from all levels. Measures of identifying at-risk students should be taken as early as possible so as to minimise the risk. Views from different authors on how to manage dropout rates in TVET Colleges are far-reaching and depend on the culture of each institution, the individual factors, the community and industry. In this chapter, the literature review of related works on the causes of student dropout, the effects of student dropout and managing student dropout were discussed. The next chapter focuses on this study's research methodology and design.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to explore and investigate ways of managing student dropout rates at a TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal. The main research question that the research sought to answer was: How could student dropout rates be managed at a TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal?

The sub-questions were:

- What are the causes of student dropout at TVET Colleges?
- What are the effects of student dropout at TVET Colleges?
- How could lecturers and management in the TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal assist in managing student dropout rates?

This chapter explores the research methodology under the following sub-headings: research design and approach, sampling and sampling procedure, instrumentation, data-collection procedure, data analysis and ethical issues.

#### 3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Mouton (2001) defines a research design as a plan or blueprint of how one intends conducting the research. The research design addresses a question about the type of study that will be undertaken to provide acceptable answers to the research problem or question (ibid). Yin (2011) further pronounces that research designs are logical and serve as logical plans. Research designs are plans and procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to specific methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2008:37). Creswell (2014) cites research designs as types of inquiry within qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches that provide specific directions for procedures in research design.

A qualitative research design was adopted in this study, following an interpretive paradigm, which is the way of looking at or viewing something (Photongsunun, 2010). Creswell (2014) defines qualitative research as an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning of how individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. It involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants' setting, data analysis

inductively building from particulars to the general thesis, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (ibid).

Contrary to that, quantitative research is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship between variables. These variables in return can be measured typically on instruments so that numbered data can be analysed using statistical procedures (ibid). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), qualitative research distinguishes itself from quantitative research in that it is conducted in a natural setting of social actors, focuses on process rather than outcome and its primary aim is in-depth descriptions and understanding of actions and events.

Yin (2011) cites that qualitative research represents the views and perspectives of the people by contributing insights that may help to explain human social behaviours using multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source. Since the study sought to establish how dropout rates could be managed from the viewpoint of managers, HOD, lecturers and students, the qualitative research design was seen as a suitable approach to study the views and perspectives of the people as cited by Yin (ibid). Babbie and Mouton (2001) further state that qualitative research is appropriate to the study of those attitudes and behaviours best understood within their natural setting as opposed to somewhat artificial settings of experiments and surveys emphasised by quantitative research.

The study aimed at interacting with the above-selected persons in their natural settings as Kobus (2007) argues that qualitative research is based on a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand the phenomena in context or real-world settings where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest. The study used focus group unstructured interviews with lecturers and students. Face-to-face interviews were held with HODs and Managers from the Curriculum Department.

The researcher recorded the responses in writing and also used a voice recorder. Open-ended questions were asked during this interaction with very few close-ended questions. During the focus group interviews, some probing questions were sometimes used to facilitate open discussions.

An inductive approach of asking questions was used when interacting with the participants to examine their experiences subjectively by asking questions based on their individual experiences about managing student dropout rates. The purpose of using the qualitative

approach was to explore the context, the settings and participants' background that contributed to the knowledge and experiences of lecturers, students and management in the TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal about managing student dropout rates.

### 3.3 POPULATION

Brink, van der Walt and Van Ransburg (2012) define the population as the entire group of persons or objects that are of interest to the researcher and meets the criteria that the researcher is interested in studying. Eligibility criteria or distinguishing description should be used as the basis for deciding whether an individual or object would or would not be classified as a member of the population in question (ibid). It is a group of the potential participant to whom you want to generalise the results of a study (van Zyl, 2014:95). This study's population consisted of managers from the Curriculum Department of a TVET college in KwaZulu-Natal, HODs from the engineering campus and the business campus, lecturers from each campus and students from each campus. This was composed of both male and female participants of different age groups and various levels of education. The following table illustrates the composition of the sample:

**Table 3.3.1 SAMPLE COMPOSITION**

AGE GROUP	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	STUDENTS	EMPLOYEES	GENDER	
				MALE	FEMALE
18-25	2	2	0	0	2
25-35	12	7	5	4	8
35-45	6	1	5	2	4
45-55	2	0	2	1	1
55-65	2	0	2	1	1
TOTAL	24	10	14	8	16

*N.B.: Employee represents: Head of Department/Lecturer/Manager*

### **3.4 SAMPLING PROCEDURE**

#### **3.4.1 Sampling**

A sample is a part or fraction of a whole or subset of a more extensive set that is selected by the researcher to participate in a research study (Brink, van der Walt & van Rensburg, 2012:131). Sampling is the researcher's process of selecting the sample from a population to obtain information regarding a phenomenon in a way that represents the population of interest (ibid). According to Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006), sampling is the selection of research participants from an entire population and involves decisions about which people, settings, events, behaviours and or social processes to observe. The researcher should be able to select a sample that will be representative of the population about which the researcher aims to draw conclusions (ibid). The study consisted of 24 participants as a sample (eight lecturers, two managers, four HODs and ten students). The study was composed of two male and two female HODs; six female and two male lecturers; six female and four male students, and two male managers. The participants were purposefully selected from two campuses of the Majuba TVET College representing the Engineering and Business Campuses. The two campuses were selected because they were near each other and were readily available to the researcher.

The researcher selected the above participants based on their experience with the dropout pandemic and the access they have to the information about student dropout rates at a TVET College. For example, lecturers were selected on the basis that they had at least lecturing experience of about five years in the TVET sector. This experience gave them exposure to dealing with student dropout directly or indirectly. The HODs are managers in their departments keeping records about student progress and challenges in their departments. They were selected because of their managerial experience and the insight and knowledge they possessed about dropout rates in their divisions. The managers from the Curriculum Department dealt with curriculum matters and students who dropped out and returned to college.

#### **3.4.2 Sampling procedure**

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), there are two primary procedures or methods of sampling; that is probability sampling and non-probability sampling. This study employed non-probability sampling.

### ***3.4.2.1 Non-probability sampling***

A probability sample is used for generalisation because it seeks representativeness of the broader population but non-probability sample deliberately avoids representing the broader population; the researcher targets a particular group, in the full knowledge that it does not represent the broader population (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011:153). The main advantage of this procedure is that it is more convenient and economical, and judgement relies with the researcher (Brink, van der Walt & van Rensburg, 2012:139-40). The examples of non-probability sampling are convenience sampling, purposive or judgemental sampling and quota sampling (Struwig & Stead, 2001). In this study, purposive sampling was used whereby two senior managers, four HODs, eight lecturers and eight students were selected because they were regarded as having knowledge, experience and insight on the dropout phenomenon and could assist in meeting the study's objectives.

### ***3.4.2.2 Purposive sampling***

Brink, van der Walt and Van Rensburg (2012) describe purposive sampling as a technique which is based on the judgement of the researcher regarding participants. It is also explained as objects that are typical or representative of the study phenomenon, or who are knowledgeable about the question at hand. Maree (2014) cites that purposive sampling means that the participants are selected because of some defining characteristic that makes them the holders of the data needed for the study. Sampling decisions are, therefore, made for the explicit purpose of obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions.

Purposive sampling decisions are not only restricted to the selection of participants but also involve the settings, incidents, events and activities to be included in data collection (ibid). In light of the above, all participants in this study were purposefully selected based on their direct or indirect experience and insight about the dropout challenge in the TVET Colleges. They were selected because of some characteristics relating directly or indirectly to the concept of managing dropout rates and therefore were regarded as examples of purposive sampling.

The four HODs were selected purposively because they represented the two campuses under study. Both campuses were represented by the HODs from the National Certificate programme (NATED) and NCV. This was done to obtain extensive information to assist in

answering the research question about how to manage dropout rates in TVET Colleges. This sample was selected to represent all the courses offered by the college; to obtain a bigger picture of the causes and effects of dropout.

Lecturers were selected from two campuses of the college representing each programme. This was done because they were classroom managers and were exposed to most of the challenges encountered by the students. Focus group interviews were held with lectures. Their experience and exposure assisted in collecting a variety of data to answer the research question on how to manage student dropout rates. The two managers from Central Office selected from the Curriculum Department assisted with the general picture of the college as a whole with regard to the dropout phenomenon, the causes and the effects thereof. Their management position in the college organogram made them eligible to respond to most of the questions since their office kept records of all the curriculum matters from different campuses. Students were selected from the database obtained from the Student Representative Council (SRC). They kept records of students who dropped out because of various challenges reported to them. These students were able to deliberate on the causes of student dropout at a TVET College as people who had first-hand experience on the matter.

### **3.5 INSTRUMENTATION**

According to Annum (2016), research instruments are fact-finding strategies serving as tools for data collection. This includes questionnaires, interviews, observations and reading. The following instruments were selected for this study:

#### **3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews (one on one)**

An interview is a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participant questions to collect data and to learn about ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviours of the participants. The aim is always to obtain rich descriptive data that will help one to understand the participants' construction of knowledge and social reality (Professional, 2007:81). Brink, van der Walt and Van Rensburg (2012) define the interview as a method of data collection in which an interviewer obtains responses from a participant in a face-to-face encounter, through a telephone call or by electronic means. Creswell (2014), states that a qualitative interview occurs when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions to ensure that participants can voice their opinions unconstrained.

Maree (2007) cites that the aim of the qualitative interview is to see the world through the eyes of the participant. This is the main reason why the researcher selected to use interviews in the current study so that data could be explored from the participant's perception. Bryman and Bell (2012) argue that in qualitative interviewing, there is more significant interest in the interviewee's point of view, in quantitative research, the interview reflects on the researcher's concerns. In qualitative interviewing, the researcher wants rich, detailed answers, while quantitative interviews are supposed to generate answers that can be coded and processed quickly (ibid).

Qualitative interviews have been categorised into structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Discco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The researcher selected to use the unstructured interview. The open-ended or unstructured interview often takes the form of a conversation with the intention that the researcher explores with the participant her or his views, ideas, beliefs and attitudes about certain events or phenomena (Kobus, 2007). Similarly, de Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2011) pronounce that the unstructured interview is used to determine individual's perceptions, opinions, facts, forecasts, and their reactions to initial findings and potential solutions. It is focused and discursive and allows the researcher and the participant to explore the issue (ibid). Bryman and Bell (2012), state that in the unstructured interview the interviewer typically has a general interview guide or aide-memoire with a list of topics or issues. The questioning style is usually informal, and the phrasing and sequencing of questions vary from interview to interview (ibid). According to Struwig and Stead (2001), the unstructured interview does not proceed with a comprehensive list of pre-determined questions, therefore; the interviewer does not know all the questions in advance as the participant plays a significant role in determining what aspects of the topic are covered.

The current study used face-to-face semi-structured interviews to ensure that participants were free to express their views and opinions about managing dropout rates. The participants were purposefully selected because of their experience, interest and expertise regarding the phenomenon under study. The researcher encouraged the participants to be free to express their ideas in their own words by using open-ended questions and giving clarity where questions were misunderstood (Creswell, 2014).

The HODs and Managers from the Curriculum Department were interviewed using face-to-face interviews. This was done in their offices so as to create a natural setting and an accessible environment.

Open-ended questions were used to enhance a conversational style, with the intention to explore the participants' views, ideas, beliefs and attitudes about student dropout rates, the causes, the effects and how this could be managed (Maree, 2007). The above participants were selected for this method because of their managerial positions, the knowledge, insight and the experience they have on the study's phenomenon.

### **3.5.2 Focus group interviews**

A focus group interview is an interview with a group of about six to nine people whose opinions and experiences are requested simultaneously (Brink, van der Walt & van Rensburg, 2012). It is a qualitative method that is concerned with studying how participants express their views and perspectives on an issue as members of a group (Bryman & Bell, 2012). According to Maree (2007), a focus group interview is a strategy based on the assumption that group interaction will be productive in widening a range of responses, activating forgotten details of experience and releasing inhibitions that may otherwise discourage participants from disclosing information. Yin (2011) further states that the groups are 'focused' because individuals who previously have had some common experience or presumably some common views have been gathered. Bryman and Bell (2012), state that in focus group, individuals will often argue with each other's views, leading to more realistic accounts of what people think and in that way the researcher can study how participants collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings around it.

In this study, focus group interviews were used with the lecturers and students on separate occurrences, where the researcher acted as a facilitator and guided the discussion on managing dropout (Bryman & Bell, 2012). The researcher and the participants had agreed on a suitable venue for this activity before it took place because according to Struwig and Stead (2001), the focus group interview should be held in an environment that is free from noise and must be comfortable. During the discussion, the researcher as a facilitator used probing questions to ensure that all participants felt that their contributions were worthwhile and that they were free to disagree with each other (ibid). All participants were given a fair chance to make their contributions so as to avoid a risk of having one or two outspoken people dominating the discussion (Yin, 2011:142).

Permission was requested from the participants to tape record the discussion so that it could be transcribed accurately for the purpose of data analysis (Maree, 2007). This method was chosen for the above participants because they were interviewed as a group. Therefore, it saved time. This approach allows individuals to argue with each other and challenge each other's views, thus leading to more realistic accounts of what people think (DeVos, Strydom, Fouche' & Delport, 2011). The researcher was able to study how participants collectively made sense of the study about managing drop-out rates. As supported by Maree (2007), this method was selected to widen a range of responses, activating forgotten details of experience and realising inhibitions that may otherwise discourage participants from disclosing information. This approach assisted in providing a secure setting for discussion without fear of criticism thus obtaining an in-depth discussion about managing student dropout rates in the TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal.

### **3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

When qualitative researchers speak of research 'validity and reliability', they are usually referring to research that is credible and trustworthy (Maree, 2007). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), define trustworthiness as the way of ensuring data quality in qualitative research. Credibility or authenticity means to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the participant has been accurately identified and described (DeVos, Strydom & Fouche', 2011). The researcher ensured trustworthiness by using interpretative validity which is an indication of whether the participants' meanings or perspectives are accurately reported (Struwig & Stead, 2001). Emphasis is placed on the perspectives and language of the participants rather than on the interpretations and terminology of the researcher (ibid). Some of the participants from the focus group were asked to check whether the researcher's account was complete and realistic.

#### **3.6.1 Transparency**

According to Yin, (2011), the first objective of building trustworthiness and credibility is that qualitative research is done in a publicly accessible manner. Transparency means that all data needs to be available for inspection and others should be able to scrutinise the researcher's work and evidence used to support his or her findings and conclusions (ibid).

All participants signed a consent form where the issue of transparency was analysed. The data was made available to some of the more experienced colleagues to verify it.

### **3.6.2 Dependability**

Dependability refers to the provision of evidence such that if it were to be repeated with the same or similar context, its findings would be similar (Brink, van der Walt & van Rensburg, 2012). It refers to the stability of data over time. The data collected were documented and transcribed to account for any changes made in the process. Findings were verified with the participants after generating transcripts. During the interview sessions, the researcher also recorded data in writing to assist in reflecting back to what transpired during the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The focus was on the consistency of the results of the data collected rather than with other studies. After the collection of data, participants were asked to confirm whether the transcripts truly reflected their responses during the interview sessions.

### **3.6.3 Credibility**

According to de Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont (2011), credibility means to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the participant has been accurately identified and described. To ensure credibility in this study, participants were selected purposively because of specific characteristics, experience or exposure to the issue of student dropout rates. For example, lecturers with the experience of more than five years in the TVET sector were selected to obtain accurate information about the causes of student dropout at Majuba TVET College and therefore share their views about how this could be managed. The students were selected from the database of students who did not write their final exams and those who de-registered along the process.

### **3.6.4 Conformability**

Brink, van der Walt and Van Rensburg (2012), state that conformability guarantees the data, supports the findings, conclusions and recommendations and that there is an internal agreement between the researcher's interpretation and the actual evidence. It refers to the potential for congruency of data regarding accuracy, relevance or meaning (ibid). The information recorded should represent the voice of the participants, not the researcher.

The researcher incorporated an audit procedure after all the data was transcribed and recorded, to enhance conformability.

### **3.7 DATA-COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

The researcher approached potential participants after obtaining permission from the Rector of the college, the Campus Managers of the two campuses and HOD. A meeting was held to discuss the whole process. During the meeting, it was explained that the interviews would be unstructured and that the researcher would ask open-ended questions whereby all participants would be expected to express themselves freely without any interference from the side of the interviewer.

### **3.8 DATA ANALYSIS**

According to Fourche´ and de Vos (2013), data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. Similarly, Dey (1993) defines data analysis as the course of resolving data into its constituent components to reveal its characteristic elements and structure. Patton (1990) maintains that data analysis methods enable the researcher to organise and bring meaning to the vast amounts of data. The researcher adopted a content (thematic) data analysis approach which is defined as a process of looking at data from different angles with a view to identifying keys in the text that will help to understand and interpret the raw data (Maree, 2007).

The thematic or content analysis was used to provide a thick description of the participants' views, perceptions and experiences about managing student dropout rates at a TVET college in KwaZulu-Natal, Amajuba District. Content or thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting themes or patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting themes or patterns within data (ibid). Similarly, Palyne (2007) defines thematic analysis as a process which involves the identification of patterns of similarity in the text which is relevant to the research question. According to Struwig and Stead (2001), the central idea in content analysis is that the many words of the text are classified into considerably fewer content categories. The themes which were developed were linked or related to a specific research question or questions according to which all participants expressed their views. The questions assisted the researcher in grouping the responses into themes namely, awareness of dropout and measures taken, and causes of student dropout, effects of student dropout and strategies or techniques to be implemented.

To ensure that a thick description of the views of the participants was given, the researcher selected to use the constant comparative analysis of data that is based on grounded theory and allowed a three-part coding approach: open, axial and selective coding (Creswell, 2014). Open coding is when data are examined to develop names and categories. Axial coding relates the initial codes to one another, and selective coding is when choices are made regarding the most relevant codes. The collected data were transcribed and presented in the form of written words as collected during the focus group interviews and one on one interviews. Notes and the recorded information were typed verbatim and then classified according to themes and analysed using coding in term of the participants' categories.

Maree (2007) defines coding as a process of reading carefully through your transcribed data, line by line and dividing it into meaningful analytical units. A code could be linked to a word, phrase, sentence, a paragraph or more significant sections of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In analysing data, the researcher read and reread the transcripts, themes were identified, quotations discussed and an analytical comparison was made to arrive at an interpretation and conclusion. The verbatim views of the participants were recorded in italics so as to ensure accuracy. The researcher then interpreted and analysed data before the final findings were presented.

### **3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

According to Mouton (2001), ethical issues arise from our interaction with other people, other beings such as animals and the environment. The ethics of science concerns what is wrong and what is right in the conduct of research (ibid). What is correct for one person might not be correct for other people. It is important to remember that human beings are serving as participants in the research and they must be treated so that their dignity is maintained despite the research or outcomes (Van Zyl, 2011:85). De Vos, Strydom, Fouche´ and Delport (2011), argue that the investigation should be based on mutual trust, acceptance, cooperation, promises and well-accepted conventions and expectations between all parties involved. The following ethical issues were considered in this study:

#### **3.9.1 Permission**

Permission was requested from the DHET to conduct this research. This was because the study involved lecturers, HODs and students (Appendix A). An application for permission was also sent to the University of South Africa's Ethics Committee via the researcher's

supervisor. The Rector of the college was consulted for permission since the study was conducted in the college premises involving college staff. The Campus Managers of the two campuses involved were also consulted for permission to engage with the staff and students.

### **3.9.2 Informed Consent**

According to Creswell (2014), informed consent means the knowing consent of individuals to participate in an exercise of choice, free from any element of fraud, deceit, duress, or similar unfair inducement or manipulation.

All participants were consulted to inform them about the study and aims of the study were communicated. The time required for participation and the role of the researcher as non-interfering and non-judgmental was discussed with all participants. Written consent was given to the participants by giving a description of how data were to be collected. The researcher informed all those involved that this was voluntary participation and they were asked to sign a non-coercive consent form.

### **3.9.3 Confidentiality**

Babbie (2001), mentions that confidentiality implies that only the researcher and possibly a few members of his or her staff should be aware of the identity of participants and that the staff should also have made a commitment to confidentiality. Babbie and Mouton (2001), state that a researcher can identify a given person's responses but essentially promises not to do so in public. The researcher assured the participants that the information that they provided would be kept confidential.

### **3.9.4 Anonymity**

A participant may be considered anonymous when the researcher cannot identify a given response with a given participant (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The participants' interests and well-being should be protected through the security of their identity and not revealing their responses if it will harm them in any way. For this reason, participants in this study were given code names to ensure that they were unidentifiable.

### **3.9.5 Harm to Participants**

Bryman and Bell (2011), cite that participants can be harmed physically and emotionally. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), harm could be caused by revealing information that

would embarrass the participants and endanger their home life, friendships and jobs. Participants should be informed well beforehand about the potential impact of the investigation to give them the opportunity to withdraw from the inquiry if they so wish (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche´ & Delpont, 2011:115).

In this study, the researcher took an obligation to avoid anything that would humiliate the participants and cause physical or emotional harm or any feeling of discomfort by adhering to the principle of beneficence. According to this principle, the researcher needs to secure the well-being of the participant, who has a right to protection from discomfort and harm, be it physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, economic, social or legal (Brink, van der Walt & van Rensburg, 2012:35). This was communicated to the participants during the first meeting before they signed the consent forms.

### **3.9.6 Privacy**

Privacy is to keep to oneself that which is usually not intended for others to observe or analyse (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche´ & Delpont, 2011:119). Every individual has the right to privacy, and it is his or her right to decide when, where, to whom and to what extent his or her attitudes, beliefs and behaviour will be revealed (ibid). The privacy of the participants can be affected by using hidden apparatus such as video cameras, one-way mirrors and microphones (ibid). The researcher ensured that the right to privacy was protected during this study. No hidden or unauthorised apparatus were used. Everything was communicated to the participants beforehand.

### **3.10 CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this chapter was to present and explain the research methodology employed in this study. The researcher chose to use a qualitative approach which is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem; in this case, managing student dropout rates. HODs, lecturers and students were interviewed in their natural settings to enhance the spirit of openness and comfort in sharing their experiences and views about the study. A phenomenological design was used whereby participants were given an opportunity to describe their own lived experiences about the causes of student dropout, the effects of student dropout and ways in which this could be managed.

The researcher collected data on how individuals make sense out of their experience in this study without any prejudgments. Face-to-face interviews and focus group interviews were used as methods to determine ways in which lecturers and management at a TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal, Amajuba District could assist in managing student dropout rates. Participants were selected because of their experience, insight and knowledge about the student dropout phenomenon in the stated college. This was done using purposive sampling since all participants were selected because of some defining characteristics that made them the holders of the data needed for the study. The next chapter presents the analysis of the data collected and discusses the results of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the methodology and the research design were outlined. A detailed discussion of how data were collected was also provided. This chapter focuses on presenting the findings, analysis and interpretation of data that were gathered from the interviews composed of 24 participants from a TVET college in KwaZulu-Natal. According to Gray (2004), qualitative data analysis is a rigorous and logical process through which data are given meaning. Dey (1993) describes data analysis as the course of resolving data into its constituent components to reveal its characteristic elements and structure.

In this chapter, data were presented considering the research questions as presented in chapter one with an attempt to establish confidence in an accurate interpretation of the meaning of data (Wittemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001). Data were acquired through unstructured interviews, one – on – one interviews and focus group interviews. During data analysis, the following main research question was addressed:

- How could student dropout rates be managed at a TVET college in KwaZulu- Natal?

During the interviews the following sub-questions were posed to all participants:

- What is your understanding of the management of drop-out rates in the TVET College?
- How is the dropout rate managed at the TVET College?
- How could lecturers and management assist in improving the management of student drop-out rates in the TVET College?

To ensure that the overall aim of the study, which was to investigate the ways of managing student dropout rate, was met, the following objectives were also considered:

- To determine the understanding of the management of dropout rates at the TVET College.
- To determine how student drop-out rates are managed at the TVET College and the effects thereof.

- To determine the role of lecturers and management in improving the management of student drop-out rates.

Using the above questions, recorded data were transcribed and presented in the form of written words, as supported by Berg (2001). The written information was later classified according to themes and analysed using coding to describe elements identified from the text. Themes and categories were used to examine data holistically and to find a way to communicate this interpretation to others (Simon, 2011).

**Table: 4.1 Research questions used for data analysis**

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	THEMES	CATEGORIES
What is your understanding of managing student dropout in the TVET College?	Awareness of dropout and measures taken	Senior managers HODs Lecturers Students
How is student dropout rate managed at the TVET College?	Causes of student dropout Effects of student dropout	Senior Managers HODs Lecturers Students
How could lecturers and management assist in managing student dropout rates?	Strategies and techniques to be implemented	Senior Managers HODs Lecturers Students

The researcher developed the above questions which were used during data collection from which themes were formulated. The views of the participants were expressed and later grouped into categories. The responses were grouped into three themes; awareness of dropout and measures taken; procedures or current methods used and strategies or techniques to be implemented. The above questions were used during face-to-face interviews with senior managers, Heads of Departments (HODs) and two focus group interviews with lecturers and students. During this process, open-ended questions were asked to allow participants to express themselves freely and without reservations. Participants were able to give responses from their own experiences and personal views.

As indicated above, data analysis was done according to the questions asked during the interviews. The above illustration also indicates the themes and categories adopted by the researcher for data analysis and interpretation. The themes were formulated from the responses of the participants. The researcher used verbatim quotes that are written in *italics* for the responses of the participants to demonstrate how the findings and interpretations arose from the data.

To promote confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher opted to use the following codes as pseudonyms for participants: The senior managers were coded as SMC1 and SMC2; the Heads of Departments as HODBUS1, HODBUS2, HODENG3 and HODENG4; the lecturers as LECT1 up to LECT8 and the students as LEA1 to LEA8. This arrangement assisted in categorising the information accordingly and being able to identify the owner of the data quickly. As previously stated, data were collected using unstructured and focus group interviews.

The grounded theory approach was employed in this study. Creswell (2009) defines grounded theory as a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the view of the participants. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) further maintain that grounded theory is an interactive process by which the researcher becomes more and more grounded in the data and develops richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied works. This method assisted the researcher to stick to what was happening on the ground, which was the views and experiences of the participants on the main question of this study.

Data analysis was conducted using the constant comparative approach. With this method, newly collected data were compared continuously to existing data to determine commonalities and variations about managing student dropout rates in the TVET College. The findings from the interviews are presented below; verbatim responses by participants are typed in *italics* to promote credibility:

## **4.2 THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE MANAGEMENT OF STUDENT DROPOUT RATES**

### **4.2.1 Question1, Theme 1**

**Question 1:** What is your understanding of the management of student dropout rates?

**THEME 1:** Awareness of dropout and measures taken.

#### **4.2.1.1 Category 1 Senior Managers**

**SMC1:** Worked in the curriculum unit which deals with managing curricula issues. These managers also monitor student and lecturer performance per level and subject. SMC1 had 15 years of working experience in this department. Amongst other responsibilities, they also moderate student and lecturer portfolios on all campuses. When asked the above question, this is how he responded:

*‘student drop out in this college is an.... an issue, but as to how we... managed it we mostly rely on lecturers whether they do their work properly in terms of marking the registers, again in terms of submitting those registers for monitoring to their seniors and the senior will have to go through compiling their own reports and the reports are recorded on our system coltech, that is how the college can pick our dropout rate, whether is good or bad that is... in essence that is how we .... manage our dropout rate.*

When asked if their department keeps records of student dropout rates, he responded by saying that they also relied on information kept by the department called Hetmis which was later consulted by the researcher for verification.

*‘Not our department per se but we also rely on our system called Hetmis each time we need something that has to do with student records we rely on Hetmis, not Curriculum.’*

**SMC2:** mentioned that the college becomes aware that a student is no longer attending after the submission of registers and then it is picks up that he or she has been absent for some time. He also emphasised the point of keeping records of the reports which are submitted by the HOD from each campus.

*‘The Coltech system is also used to track the students who are still enrolled and those who de-registered. However, it is already late by then to find out the reasons why those students decided to drop out. The college also has a Student Support Service for academic intervention and social ills. This department is supposed to liaise with the student representative council and assist in bringing matters about student dropout into our attention or intervene where they can assist’.*

He further confessed that sometimes the records from the campuses are not accurate because of inefficient monitoring from both lecturers and campus management.

*“The college is experiencing some unrests due to NSFAS issues, and this makes it even more difficult to keep proper records based on attendance registers”. However, some students do report to the student representative council and student support services in case they have problems, which then bring this to the attention of the management.*

#### **4.2.1.2 Category 2: HOD**

**HODBUS1** was a senior member of staff at her campus and had twenty-six years of experience in the TVET sector. She raised her concerns about the issue of the dropout rates, pointing out that in the past years, they had not noticed it because it was not as high. HODBUS1 was more experienced than all members of staff and senior management and had been dealing with student challenges directly at the campus level. The insight and expertise mainly boosted her views that she had acquired both as a lecturer and a manager.

*‘ I have also noticed that in the past we never had this high dropout rate, it is only recently that the dropout rate is increasing because even for this year if you look at the class registers, the class average of 3 per group that has dropped out. They came with high expectations to enrol but then halfway through the course they disappear, and that is a concern we cannot keep on turning a blind eye. ’*

The question was asked about identifying if the student had either dropped out or was just absent: How do you know that this student now has dropped out or he is just absent?

*‘When the students are filling in their enrolment forms they must put in their telephone numbers. When I get the register every Friday I look at the students who were absent the whole week then I phone the student. In most cases the numbers do not exist, or it will say the subscriber is not available. We only pick it up on the registers after the student has already left. Most of the students do not de-register; they just leave without reporting it. If you phone to enquire why they are absent, they do not answer. The procedure is that students should write a letter to say that they are going to de-register. This letter must be handed to the staff at student affairs. They will then give the letter to the Chief Administration Officer who de-registers the student on Coltech. I feel this is wrong because by the time we as lecturers and HODs know that this student has deregistered, already they have been absent for a long time. I will only pick it up on the register when it is done on Coltech.*

When asked whether students had a specific period during which they usually de-register or drop out, she commented as follows:

*'Yes, NCV normally de-register in May and June so that they can enrol for Report 191 course in full. They do this to get into the course they want. Both Report 191 and NCV students usually drop out before the final examination, after receiving the final NSFAS payment which is proof that for some they are only here to get NSFAS money'.*

**HODBUS2** managed a department which is in demand during enrolments. She was an acting HOD with nine years of experience. She stated that management was aware of the dropout rate because it was increasing every year. She emphasised the importance of having clear guidance and direction about the careers that students could pursue to prepare themselves for the job market.

*'The management is aware of the dropout rate, and it is increasing year in and year out, if we can look at it, the percentage is growing and when we look at our students, the calibre that we enrol, especially NCV because I am mostly involved with NCV, objectives and goals are not clear. Our Student support service is responsible for career guidance which is usually done during enrolments in January'.*

She further stated that lecturers, as classroom managers, had a responsibility of recording student absenteeism using class registers.

*'A student who has been absent for more than ten days is reported to the Head of Department who should do a follow-up, but the system is ineffective because of lack of resources like access to the telephone, only one person has access to the code'.*

**HODENG3:** with 15 years of experience in the engineering campus responded tactfully by stating his concerns about the fact that there were no proper procedures or policy which states precisely what needed to be done concerning student dropout.

*'In cases where student leaves the college, we are not even aware that he or she has left because it 's hard to trace them. Sometimes we try to phone the student after two or three weeks of being absent but only to find out that the contact number given during registration is for somebody else and we cannot get hold of the student. We have cases where we traced the student, and we discussed why he wanted to leave, he indicated to us that he did not have money because NSFAS was taking too long to give them their allowances for accommodation'.*

When asked if there were any measures in place to manage the dropout rates and the procedures followed to identify student dropout or absenteeism, he responded by saying the following:

*‘There is nothing in place because students come here after one or two months you will see them packing all their things, and they are gone because it is not managed properly. So what is happening is we call the students when we see that they were absent for quite some time now, maybe two to three weeks. What I did last year using my initiative because there is no college policy, I told my senior lecturers to inform those students who have been absent for more than two weeks to come with their parents or guardian because we want to find out why they were absent.’*

**HODENG4:** Had a Master’s Degree in Education Management and was pursuing his doctoral degree with the University of KwaZulu-Natal, with nine years of work experience. He was in charge of the NATED Department. This department offers courses such as Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Chemical Engineering and Instrumentation. Students are enrolled for four subjects, and they are expected to pass all of them.

**HODENG4** responded by stating that no method was used to manage student dropout rates. However, as a Head of Department, he filled in a form indicating the reasons why that student had decided to leave the college. This tallies with what HODENG3 said when he stated that there were no proper procedures or a policy that states precisely what needs to be done.

*‘Eh.. There is no method or procedure that I know of, all we simply do if someone comes and wants to drop out, that person is referred to the HOD who then fills in a form stating a reason why the person is dropping. There are many reasons why person is dropping others because of the reasons stated earlier, but others drop out because of failure by the department to provide like exam time table on time then you find out that one is not able to do all subjects because other subjects are clashing instead someone may end up leaving the other subject and is unable to finish the course on time, and it will sound like a dropout. For the moment we just check, ask for a reason then where possible, give advice. One of the reasons for dropping out is that some of the students are not able to cope with the workload due to various reasons, those would be advised to take a lesser load until they can complete their course.’*

The researcher asked him about his understanding or experience of student dropout at this college, and he responded as follows:

*'Yes, we have worked on those cases where people would say they are leaving because of pregnancy or due to some relocation; other would say they are not coping. Others say they are sick; others is because of some work commitments. Some of our students are working due to financial reasons. So they work night duty and then attendant during the day, so they say they do not cope. Others just fail to cope because the material is difficult for them. With NATED they have four subjects NI-N4 have got maths and science which becomes a challenge because maybe in high school they did maths lit and they come to the TVET college to find out that Maths and Science are compulsory they feel that the content is too much for them. The duration is three months, but after two months or six to eight weeks, they are expected to enter into the exam'.*

#### **4.2.1.3 Category 3: Lecturers**

Lecturers concurred with what the management and HODs reported regarding their understanding of managing student dropout rates in the college. They also stated that it was their responsibility as classroom managers to identify students who are likely to drop out. The lecturers were, however, were concerned about the monitoring process that needs to involve all stakeholders.

**LECT 1** responded by saying:

*'Firstly we have to identify what is the cause of student dropout then it will help the college to manage it. According to my experience, it seems that the college does not know how to manage dropout rate, for example, if the dropout is caused by poverty, for example, it is beyond the college capabilities to help the students who are dropping out due to poverty. So it goes back to family structures, unemployment in the family because if people in the family are employed, eh it will may it easy for the students to continue with their studies because now they are thinking about their kids, some have got kids. Some have got families to look after, so they end up dropping out, so maybe one of the keys is poverty which is beyond the college eh.... capabilities'.*

**LECT2** further stated that lecturers only kept registers for five days and submitted to the senior lecturers by the end of the week. According to him, this makes it difficult for a lecturer to have a record of those students who are frequently absent.

*'I understand that it is our responsibility as lecturers to ensure that registers are marked every day so that we can be able to identify students who are frequently absent or those students who are no longer coming to college, The system used in this college makes it very difficult for us as lecturers to keep track of the students 'attendance because registers are only kept for four days, and before the end of the fifth day they are submitted. Like that you sometimes forget who was absent the previous week. We only pick it up after the first or second assessment was written, when recording marks you then notice that a certain student does not have marks for those assessments then you start asking questions'.*

**LECT6** supported this by stating that registers are supposed to be the tool that is used to monitor the trend of absenteeism, and so if they are submitted every week, it is somehow difficult to monitor the trend accurately.

*'One will usually notice after an assessment or two were written, and that particular student has no marks. By that time the student would have dropped out a long time ago unnoticed. This is because registers are collected at the end of the week and never come back to the lecturer, the following week you start to a new register.'*

She also pointed out that the Student Support Service in the college was non-functional or ineffective.

*'It is amazing that these people have offices at the central office and they are stationed there. Doing what? Nobody knows because, in essence, his or her responsibility is to be the students to give them support whenever there is a need. The only time they are visible at the college campuses is when they are organising sports events. To me this does not make sense because they are the ones who should be dealing with student cases which might eventually lead to dropping out'.*

**LECT2** re-joined by adding that the student sometimes reports to the student affairs and he or she is de-registered by the officials working there. However, the problem is that lecturers are not informed and that students always appear as absent in the register.

*'This is causing many problems in monitoring the situation because at one time a student was absent for more than two weeks without being noticed and only to find out later that she was gang-raped and she is in the hospital. This was after the parents came to visit her and friends told them that she is in hospital'.*

**LECT3:** reported that according to her, the college does not have any policies or measures in place to manage dropout rates. This might be caused by the fact that management does not see a need to do that or else they are not aware that this is a problem which has detrimental effects on the operations of the college in general.

*‘This is not even mentioned as a problem or a challenge in this college. At one time when we were complaining about overcrowding in the classrooms, the manager responded by saying that this will be resolved because some of the students are going to drop out maybe at the end of the first quarter.’*

She raised her concerns about the negligence, and laissez-faire attitude expressed by the college community, namely, lecturers, student support services and management.

*‘This is very painful because these students are from disadvantaged backgrounds and they are entirely depended on us to give them support. Once again, a student was absent for a long time without being noticed, after the second assessment the lecturer asked the other students about her whereabouts only to find out that she was buried a month ago’.*

**LECT7:** Complained about the gap between management and lecturers which contributes to things not being done correctly and in some cases, there is no one to take responsibility for issues such as student dropout rates.

*‘We have Central Office circulating the venue that people are placed. Then management at the campus level, will be less than anything, they will tell you we still have to consult those people and us there, so it means there is a big gap between them and us. So, now, there is a tendency that since there is a gap, the teaching and learning is not properly managed because the person who is supposed to manage it, who is supposed to give supervision is far away, whatever problems lecturers are encountering they will have to wait for someone to come and assist them. This means the assistance is not here, and now while we need it urgently in case there are breakdowns, there are strikes, and there are whatever issues.’*

#### **4.2.1.4 Category 4: Students**

The student participants expressed their concerns about the institution on the issue of managing student dropout rates. According to them, management was doing nothing to prevent the situation, but in essence, the college management was encouraging it. Students

were informed that if they have a problem, they must de-register so as to secure their space with NSFAS.

**LEA1:** stated that during the enrolments, there was stage one where students filled in enrolment forms and then they were told that the college would send them an SMS informing them to register. At times, this does not happen, and students end up waiting indefinitely.

*‘By the time you decide to go to college and find out what is happening, you will be told that enrolments are closed. This is unfair because if you were informed soon enough, you would have tried something else.’*

**LEA1:** Commented that as students they experienced a lot of financial problems because NSFAS funds were not enough to cater for their accommodation and transport needs. Sadly, management seemed not to care.

*‘The only structure that is trying to assist is the Student Representative Counsel, but they also cannot cope without the support of management. They even go to such an extent that they sometimes collect money from willing lecturers to assist students who are hungry and buy them food.’*

**LEA 2:** responded by stating that registers were signed every day, but they were not sure whether they were monitored or not because sometimes a student could be absent for weeks without being noticed.

*‘there was a student who was stabbed by hooligans and was hospitalised for weeks; management was only aware that the student was no longer attending after the parents came and reported his death.’*

**LEA 3:** when asked to comment on how student dropout was managed by the college. He responded as follows:

*‘in our campus sometimes registers are not signed for days, and we are told that a certain senior administration official is not available to print the registers from the college system called Coltech. So there is no consistency, this becomes a problem even for lecturers to identify students who are usually absent.’*

**LEA4:** who was a student from the other campus responded by saying:

*'I have never heard the word 'dropout' in this college, whenever a student is experiencing problems he or she is told to de-register so that he is not affected next time he wants to come back. I think this another way of hiding dropouts for the sake of funds from the government. Another thing, during the induction yes we are told that there is student support service at the college where you can be able to report any challenges affecting your studies, but unfortunately, we do not have access to this unit because it is stationed at Central Office.'*

#### **4.2.1.5 Discussion**

The first objective of the study was to determine the understanding of managing student dropout rates in a TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal. The study revealed that most participants are aware of the student dropout pandemic affecting the college as cited by Tas, Selvitopu and Bora (2013) that this is a common problem in most countries. **SCM1** admitted that it is an issue at this college but senior management relies on lecturers doing their work correctly. **SMC 2** referred to drop out as a challenge because it is not easy to track students who have already dropped out. **HODBUS1** even stated that the rate at which students were dropping out in this institution is something that has never been experienced. According to her, three students per group drop out.

The study revealed that the primary tool used for managing dropout rates is the register controlled by lecturers. However, it was clear that this method is not adequately monitored because there are no policies or procedures in place in case a student has been absent for a long time. **LEA2** indicated that sometimes registers are not marked for days due to strikes and other reasons. Therefore, there is no consistency in monitoring absenteeism. All participants raised a concern about the weekly registers that are used for controlling absenteeism stating that it is not easy to remember who has been absent the previous week because they are collected every Friday. **SMC2** indicated that they are only able to track students after submission to the Coltech, wherein the student would have already left. If a student has been recorded as absent for more than two weeks, those who have access to the telephone try to call the student to find out what the problem may be. The challenge with this, raised by **HODBUS1**, **HODBUS2** and **HODENG3**, is that the students usually give incorrect contact details when registering; therefore it is not easy to trace them.

It was also revealed that management encourages students to de-register in case they have problems. This is done in fear of the NSFAS funding as cited by McGiveny (2003) that in other countries, the issue of dropout was kept a secret for fear of losing funding, because

colleges are funded according to the number of students enrolled. This is done without involving lecturers; they are not even informed. This is only picked up when it is done on Coltech, as **HODBUS 1** stated. **LEA4** said that he had never heard of the word dropout, the only familiar word to them was de-register because they are always told that if they want to secure their funding with NSFAS, they must de-register. Participants indicated that sometimes lecturers would pick it up after the second or third assessment when marks are recorded as stated by **LEC2**. According to **LECT1**, even if management is aware of student dropout it is hard to manage it since some students drop out because of poverty or other reasons.

It is fundamental that management begins to consider the dropout issue as a serious problem which is gradually challenging the success of the TVET Colleges. The situation needs to be managed appropriately so that proper measures to prevent student dropout are implemented by the institutions. This will depend on the identification of the factors that contribute to student dropout. It is, therefore, essential that management is able to monitor the situation and organise methods of even identifying those students who are likely to drop out before they do (Hupfeld, 2010). Prevention measures recommended by different authors and participants in the study should be effected to combat this problem. All stakeholders should work jointly to ensure effective management of the dropout pandemic.

It was evident from the responses of the participants that the issue of student dropout is not something that was seen as a problem by the college management such that there are no effective measures taken to manage or monitor the situation. The study revealed that the procedures followed by the college are dependent on the registers which are submitted weekly to the HODs who are expected to monitor the situation. From the lecturer point of view, monitoring absenteeism with the purpose of identifying student dropouts is not effective since registers are collected every Friday. According to the responses of the participants, even if the student has been identified as absent for many days, nothing effective is done. The senior managers agreed that the student is only identified as a dropout long after he or she has left; which is after the registers have been submitted and recorded into Coltech.

Most participants also mentioned the existence of the Student Support Service (LSS) which seemed to be ineffective because it is stationed at the Central Office. According to **SMC1**, the LSS is supposed to liaise with students to find out about their challenges which eventually are the causes of student dropout. According to Moxley, Najor-Durack and Dumbrigue

(2001), keeping students is not difficult, but it requires institutions to be confident that its students can meet academic challenges because retention involves academic outcomes and the need for students to achieve these results. This could only be accomplished if proper selection procedures are followed, and students are placed where they can be able to cope with the academic challenges.

### **4.3 THE MANAGEMENT OF STUDENT DROPOUT RATES IN A TVET COLLEGE AND THE EFFECTS THEREOF**

#### **4.3.1 Question2, Theme 1**

**Question 2:** How is student drop-out rate managed in the TVET College?

#### **THEME 1: Causes of student dropout**

From the discussions with all participants, it was clear that this question could not be addressed appropriately and efficiently if the causes of student dropout are not first identified. One participant even stated that it is hard sometimes for the college to manage dropout if this is caused by external factors not known by the institution. The following are responses from all participants in the different categories:

##### ***4.3.1.1 Category 1 Senior Managers***

**SMC1:** Pronounced that if they as management listened to what lecturers and students were saying, the worst thing that stands out is the funding. It is difficult for students to attend continuously if they cannot get financing for accommodation and transport. He also commented on the issue of parents, who are unemployed and struggling to make ends meet. According to him, this also affects students because even if NSFAS pay for accommodation and transport, the student still struggles to have money to buy food.

*‘In most cases, you find such students involving themselves in crime or even prostitution, to get money for food’.*

The second thing is the curriculum:

*‘The curriculum that is taught especially to National Certificate Vocational (NCV) students is at a higher level than expected for a person who has just got grade nine from school. The curriculum is more challenging for them which in essence cause them to drop out.’*

**SMC2** agreed with **SMC1** and stated that the NCV curriculum is at a high level thus causing some students to fail. His other concern was the issue of career guidance which he said was not efficiently done to guide students on the courses that are offered by the college.

**SMC2:** Responded by saying:

*‘Students register for courses that they are not interested in, just because they are the ones that are available. Those students, eventually drop out due to poor performance and because of lack of interest.’ This is because they are sometimes misinformed by their peers to register for a particular course, only to find out that. Therefore the student support services that the college have needs to be intensified to ensure that career guidance is done effectively before registrations.*

He further commented on the poor performance:

*‘The NCV curriculum is very challenging for some students, mainly because most of the students are school dropouts who have only obtained grade 9. If the student again does not perform well at the college level, they will lose interest and drop out.’*

#### **4.3.1.2. Category 2: HODs**

**HODBUS1:** echoed this by stating that students could drop out due to lack of academic success. If the student has been repeating the subject or a course for several times and there is no progress, the student drops out. She also stated that sometimes the students gets bored due to boring lessons by the lecturers. They do not see the connection between academic life and real life. According to her, nothing was done to assist the students struggling academically, and that increased the failure rate.

*‘Sometimes the emotional and academic needs of the students are suppressed, and they do not feel accepted by peers and lecturers. Another thing, it is a known fact that you must have a conducive learning environment, which means that classrooms must have proper ventilation. Unfortunately, ours do not. I am sorry to say this, but sadly, some lecturers are giving boring lessons whereby student involvement is not encouraged. Some students even complain that other lecturers are even reading to them.’*

As a person with 26 years of experience in the Further Education sector, she expressed her concern about students who are from out of town stating that most of them, for the first time,

leave their parents behind and live on their own with no family support. This adds to their vulnerability and exposes them to dangers of unsafe sex, pregnancy and drug abuse.

*‘The college does organise awareness programs via the Student Support Services, but this is only for a day, and after that, the student with a problem is all by himself again. They do not identify the challenges and we got numerous cases where we have reported cases to the Student support service, better known as (SSS) but they do not come back to us. I can recall last year we had a student who was reported by his friends that he has disappeared; they do not know his whereabouts. We then decided to let SSS know so that they intervene, but they kept quiet. What if that student was found dead? What were we suppose to say to the parents?’*

She further commented that the female students were the most vulnerable ones when it comes to safety:

*‘We had two cases where our girls that come for the afternoon class got rapped opposite the college on the highway behind the dustbin. What counselling did those kids get? How many cases we as lecturers have taken to social welfare for counselling yet we have a student support service.*

**HODBUS2** responded by saying that some of the lecturers teaching these students lack motivation and they are discouraged. She mentioned amongst others; the fact that the calibre of students that are enrolled in the college has only passed Grade 9 (for NCV) and the curriculum is difficult for them. There is also a trend by schools to refer all the students who do not cope academically to the TVET Colleges. The students are expected to pass all seven subjects, and that is challenging to most of them. She also stated that some students drop out because they have to look after their siblings due to death in the family or sometimes due to poverty. They end up being forced to look for a job to cater for their family needs.

*‘Unfortunately, in that case, there is little that the college can do, but if such a student was able to discuss this with some of the caring lecturers, and advice could be given maybe be to consult the social workers.’*

She further stated that some students are not committed to their studies, and that contributes to the high dropout rate. She explained further that absenteeism is another cause. After winter holidays, most of the college students do not come back for the first two to three weeks of reopening. This means that teaching and learning do not take place and those few students

who attend classes get discouraged, and some end up dropping out. **HODBUS2** also mentioned the issue of lack of resources. *‘The TVET colleges are supposed to be offering both theory and practice. The purpose is to give practical skills to the students, but there are no resources for that, if they are there, they are out-dated. Even if as a HOD you request for the newly updated system you will be told that the college does not have enough funds. We need to be training our students according to the technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century so that they are equipped for job opportunities.’*

**HODBUS2:** further stated that in 2014, the college implemented a policy that a student who has been absent for more than ten days should be reported to the HOD who then makes a follow up by phoning the student. This was ineffective due to lack of resources and the fact that only one person has a code for accessing the telephone.

**HODENG3:** mentioned the concern about the National Students’ Funds (NSFAS) that is offered to students on the basis that they pass all seven subjects, failing which the funds are withdrawn. The students have no choice but to drop out due to lack of funds. **HODENG3** maintained: *‘Students are facing a lot of other challenges which could not be easily identified or managed by the lecturer, the Student Support Service that is offered by the college is not effective since its staff is stationed at Central Office and they are not exposed first hand to what is happening on the ground. I will give you one example, early last year I phoned SSS; there was some problem where we had a student who needed counselling, they told as straight to try and handle it on campus.’*

He further expressed his concern about the lack of interest on the side of the student stating that sometimes a student falls pregnant or ill and becomes absent for one or two months without informing the lecturers. He contributed by bringing up the fact that low self-esteem and sometimes not having friends contribute to dropping out because the student feels rejected and unwanted. He further stated that students sometimes put themselves into relationships with friends or love relationships where it is difficult for them to cope and they end up being stressed or depressed because of what they usually encounter in those relationships.

*‘At one time there was a student in my division who had been absent for more than two weeks. I told the lecturer to call him and tell him to come with the parents we would like to find out why he was staying off. Eventually, the parents came to the college, and the father*

*was shocked to find out that he was absent for the whole month. According to the father he was given money for bus fare every morning and even took money for textbooks’.*

**HODENG4** reiterated what **HODBUS1**, **HODBUS2** and **HODENG3** stated in terms of financial needs and the fact that the curriculum is challenging for some students to cope with. Amongst other factors, he touched mainly on the problem of students who are eventually forced to work night duty and attend college during the day due to financial constraints. These students do not cope with their work and end up dropping out. *‘With Report 191 (NATED) programmes we have four subjects with Mathematics and Science as majors. This becomes a challenge to those students who were not doing Mathematics in High School because here Mathematics and Science are compulsory for all engineering courses.’ ‘for some reasons some students do not want to learn and for cases which are beyond our control we cannot do a thing because we cannot force a student to continue if he does not want to’.*

#### **4.3.1.3 Category 3: Lecturers**

**LECT1** also raised a concern about the fact that the college does not have a support structure that is effective because according to him, the existing LSS better known as SSS, is ineffective and they are only visible when they organise sports and awareness activities. He mentioned that most students are frequently absent due to lack of transport fees. He further stated that NSFAS funds are not managed well in such a manner that transport and accommodation fees are not paid on time. This is usually the cause of strikes which eventually leads to dropouts.

*‘The strikes can influence student dropout, some of these students do not want to be interrupted while they are in class or while they are busy studying, so you will find that eh... I would say... NSFAS is not managed well, eh.. you will find that some of the students depend on NSFAS for transport fees, for accommodation they are not paid on time, they drop out, before they drop out they strike and the strike affects these students who are prepared to study and they will say no, I am wasting my time to come to this college because most of the time we are striking, we are not studying, and they would end up dropping out. Eh... NSFAS some of them are depending on money that is coming from NSFAS because they heard that in colleges we had got money that comes from NSFAS, you receive money for accommodation, you receive money for transport, only to find that that money is nowhere to be found at the colleges... so ... then the student ends up dropping out.’*

He also mentioned that some students are parents with families and kids to look after. And because of poverty, they sometimes drop out and look for jobs to be able to take care of their children.

*'Some have got families to look after, so they end up dropping out, so maybe one of the keys is poverty which is beyond the college eh... Capabilities.'*

According to him, the college enrolment process is one of the causes of student dropout because it is too long and very slow. He stated that the students could even spend a month trying to enrol and during that process, they require accommodation and food.

*'Most students get discouraged during the enrolment process and go back home, which is a very painful thing because you have already spent a lot with the hope that you will register and study. Other students are forced to go back home after they have completed nine stages out of ten and they are told the enrolments were closed yet the delay is caused by the process itself, it is too long and time-consuming.'*

**LECT2:** stated that she thinks the rate of student dropout at the college is high, but there is no one except the students themselves to blame because they should take responsibility for their future and devise ways to deal with the challenges that they face.

*'I think the rate of student dropout at the college at the moment is extremely high. On that point I think there is no one to blame except the students themselves because if you register to study I think you look at all the consequences that may come along, so if you know that along the way there are going to be challenges that may come towards you, I think you need to first look at those challenges and how are you going to overcome those challenges then continue. For you to say now I have to register, I have to study, not unless there are those critical things that may happen along the way that may make you drop out but some of us or some of the students drop out because of the consequences, they encourage themselves to face those consequences because if you are a student you know that you come to the institution to study only to find out that you pregnant, cannot do your work, you cannot cope, come September you drop out, that is your responsibility you have to be careful as a student, that is how the dropout rate at colleges increases so much.'*

She further maintained that some students are pushed by their parents to study only to find out that they are not interested in studying.

*'some of the students are being pushed by their parents to go and study, only to find out that that student is not interested in studying that means along the line that student will drop out because he/she was being pushed by the parents to go to school. I think that is another factor that is increasing the rate of drop out in our colleges'.*

According to **LECT 6**, lack of interest could be one of the factors leading to poor academic performance and drop out.

*'Another thing is the poor academic performances because as a student if you are not performing well it discourage you and you end up dropping out eh... alternatively, during the year or you do not come back the following year to do the second level.'*

She also contributed by saying most students have a perception that college work is easy and when they arrive, they find that it is not what they anticipated. This then makes them fail. This contributes to the lack of self-confidence and the feeling that they cannot cope, resulting in dropping out.

*'So I think the curriculum also has an impact and they find that the curriculum is not easy for them, there are a lots of terms used there which are too difficult for them, because they do not have grade 12, so most of them they expect practical more than theory and so they get discouraged along the way then they end up dropping out.'*

She further revealed that some students write the examination and then their results are rendered as pending and that students are not given a clear explanation as to why the results are pending. They then wait until they are told to re-register the subject.

*'This becomes a challenge because most of the students do not have money to register since they depend on NSFAS funds. Quite some students dropped out because they are stacked by pending results. There are many stories around this issue; sometimes you are told that the Internal Continuous Assessment (ICASS) marks were never submitted or that the student did not qualify to write the examination or they are just pending. This is very discouraging; hence the student would just decide to leave.'*

**LECT3** echoed the point that was mentioned by the other participants earlier on that the students get discouraged because they come to the TVET College with high expectations that they will be exposed to more practical work than theory, only to find that there is a lot of theory and no practicals.

*'For instance Hospitality students how many times do they go to the kitchen? When they enrolled, they were expecting to be in the kitchen more than they are in class but now they are doing much theory.'*

She also emphasised the point of the curriculum. Because most students do not have Grade 12, they find college difficult because of the terminology that is used.

*'So I think the curriculum also has an impact and they find that the curriculum is not easy for them, there are a lots of terms used there which are too difficult for them, because they do not have grade 12, so most of them they expect practical more than theory and so they get discouraged along the way then they end up dropping out.'*

**LECT 3** further stated that students are also not given enough information about the difference between NCV and NATED, such that some of the NCV students get discouraged along the way when they finally find out that they will only get a certificate that is equivalent to Grade 12. They are not well informed about the value of that certificate as compared to Grade 12.

*'some of the students do not have enough information about NCV and NATED, the difference between the two, you will find that some of the NCV students will get discouraged along the way when they hear that at the end you will get a certificate that is equivalent to grade 12, they don't know, they are not well informed that it is the NQF level that is equivalent but you are being a specialist after you have completed your special course, so they think now they are doing matric again or something, so they end up being discouraged and drop out.'*

**LECT4** echoed the responses from **LECT1**, **LECT2** and **LECT3** on the issue of lack of information, which refers to career guidance which is supposed to be done before the student enrolls to avoid a situation where the student drops out due to lack of interest in what he or she has enrolled for.

*'You will find out that our students have got a little information about what is going on in the TVET colleges, they would just register to secure space not being aware of the challenges that they might face later on.'*

Students revealed that some students write the examination and then their results are rendered as pending. He said that students are not given a clear explanation as to why the results are pending, and they wait until they are told to re-register the subject.

*'This becomes a challenge because most of the students do not have money to register, they depend on NSFAS.'*

According to **LECT5**'s experience, students would enrol for any course that is available if their first choice is full and then, later on, lose interest and drop out. She further raised a concern on the method used for enrolments as another cause for dropouts. According to her, the college enrolment process is one of the causes of student dropout because it is too long and very sluggish. She stated that the students could even spend a month trying to enrol and during that process, the students need accommodation and food.

*'Most students get discouraged during the enrolment process and go back home, which is a very painful thing because you have already spent a lot with the hope that you will register and study. Other students are forced to go back home after they have completed nine stages out of ten and they are told the enrolments were closed yet the delay is caused by the process itself, it is too long and time-consuming. With NCV, students with grade 10, 11, 12 are mixed in one class, and most of the time those with grade 12 will lose interest as time goes on.'*

**LECT6** was concerned about the issue of safety. He stated that the college environment is unsafe for students, especially those who come from afar.

*'Another think it is safety, where our colleges are based in an environment which is unsafe for our students, especially those who come from outside the location or outside where the college is stationed or placed, so like some of them they are being robbed or raped, so they end up dropping out because of their safety'. Safety and so forth... uh mm... because our colleges do not have the proper student accommodation. Maybe if the colleges have accommodation the dropouts will be lesser'.*

**LECT7**: his primary concern was the system in general, whether it is viable or not regarding how the TVET system has been structured. He maintained that most of the courses that are offered by the TVET Colleges are no longer viable in such a manner that students would experience challenges of getting employed after completing them.

*'Well I would like to concur with the latter speaker on that question, but my greatest intention is to the system, is the system viable or not? When talking about the system how is the TVET system structured, we have got these two divisions, the report 191 and the NCV, now the challenge is, who qualifies to do report 191 and who qualifies to do NCV. Has it been structured properly? We need to go back to the drawing boards and evaluate is, is NCV*

*necessary in modern times? Is report 191 necessary in modern times? That basically can also address the issue of dropouts. Where am I going with this argument, if you take a closer look, take NCV after you have completed your level 4 how great is the likelihood that you will get opportunities or to be placed. It varies according to the disciplines you are doing, if you are doing new venture creations and others, I am not well versed with such, it is highly impossible to be placed unlike when you are doing tourism, which means, with the NCV component other disciplines can make the system work and other disciplines can make the system not to work. The same as with report 191, the government has just identified that when we are doing HR, we are teaching the wrong target market because the expectation of the student is that soon after I finish this, I am going straight to a management position. Moreover, it is not possible that you can go and manage if you have never been exposed to any work environment, now let me just try and round it up, the whole argument. After these students have completed their studies with us, they do their own research if there is a likelihood that if I finish what I am doing I am going to get a job and if the overall assessment for that particular student says, chances are most people with HR experience are not getting employment for the HR division there is a great possibility that that person might drop out.'*

With the experience from basic schools, **LECT8** agreed with **LECT2** and **LECT3** in that the schools have little information about what is going on in the TVET Colleges. She also supported the notion that the college does not have proper accommodation for students and thus students drop out because they do not have money to pay their landlords.

*'By not giving them information because when we go out we tell them that you know TVET colleges are for practical, even at schools they tell students that now you are not doing well here at High School, go to FET because at FET colleges it will be more of practice than theory, and then when they come here it is more of theory than practical. It is more that at the high school. Here they have to pass seven subjects with 50%.'*

This concurs with what all participants were saying regarding the transport and accommodation issue as a big challenge for college students.

**LEA4** affirmed that it is not only the admin staff that sometimes contributes to student dropout but also the lecturing staff. She stated that some lecturers do not respect the students as human beings. They speak to them the way they like in such a manner that even if the student has a problem, it is hard to share it with the lecturer. *'We must understand that some*

*of the students are from family backgrounds where they were abused, and they hoped that at least at college they would meet people who will be able to treat them as parents. Some of the students with serious problems even commit suicide because they feel useless and that nobody cares.'*

**LEA 5:** contributed by bringing up the fact that low self-esteem and sometimes not having friends contribute to dropping out because the student feels as if no one is willing to accept him or her. She further stated that students sometimes get themselves into relationships with friends or love relationships where it is hard for them to cope. They end up being stressed or depressed because of what they usually encounter in those relationships. She also remarked about female students who are sexually abused by some of the male lecturers. *'Some of the students are having affairs with lecturers and sometimes it is difficult to come to class and face that person as your lecturer now yet he is your boyfriend. This contributes to poor performance which initially leads to the student dropping out.'*

**LEA 6:** stated that some students were diagnosed with certain illnesses before they came to college and they were under particular medication which sometimes affects their concentration and performance in class.

*'Because those students have nobody to speak to they end up leaving the college and go back home, some of them die in the process'.*

## **THEME: 2: The effects of student dropout**

### **4.3.2.1 Category 1: Senior managers**

**SCM1:** stated that dropout has a very adverse effect on all people involved. He mentioned that the success rate of both students and the institution would be affected if more students drop out.

*'Another thing this could result in reduced funding from the department because colleges are funded according to the number of students doing all subjects (FETs)'.*

He also stated that student dropout could contribute to the shortage of skills and increase the unemployment rate. He expressed concern about the high crime rate in the community where these students live. The students become victims of the situation, and some of them eventually find themselves involved in criminal activities because they need money to survive.

**SMC2:** added by saying; *‘ I believe the college is facing a huge challenge when it comes to student dropout because it has a great impact regarding certification rate. The throughput rate is also affected and the attendance of students which will translate back again to funding because NSFAS will use these factors that I have just mentioned to allocate us funding, so this has a very bad effect on the running of the college.’*

He also commented on the conditions where these students are accommodated by landlords. *‘Our students are staying in very bad conditions where in some cases doors to their rooms cannot be locked, and this gives room to burglary and theft. Some female students even get raped by the landlords; we had some few cases of that nature reported to us.’*

#### **4.3.2.2 Category 2: HODs**

**HODBUS 1:** Also commented on the issue of unemployment rate which affects the country’s economic condition. *‘Now also if these kids do not get jobs, they are going to engage themselves in criminal activities the crime rate is also going to increase, and they will end up in jail. Some of them will turn to drugs and alcohol because they will suffer from depression. If you do not have a qualification to find a job then obviously you will suppress disappointment by drinking alcohol or taking drugs’.* She stated that most students come from areas where there is strict discipline and have good values and morals. The problem is when they rent rooms in the community where there is no discipline, and nobody cares about values or morals. She further stated that most of the students are robbed of their cell phones and money on their way to college because of the high crime rate in the community.

*‘Once these kids are robbed, they are traumatised and unfortunately they do not receive any counselling from the college, they decide no, it is better to go back home.’*

As an older adult, she also voiced her concerns about female students who would even turn to prostitution as an easy way of making money, stating that some students would get pregnant just to be awarded the child grant.

*‘And we have seen it in town; I have noticed that some of our kids who were with us in the previous years were involved in that prostitution because it is easy money for them’.*

She also declared that the college budget is wasted because when planning is done, the total number of students is considered.

**HODBUS2:** had to comment about political factors that influence students to drop out. She argued that sometimes students are used for political reasons to disturb learning and teaching. She continued by adding that another concern was the businesses around the area that seem sceptical to accept the students for work-based placements.

*‘Whenever they take them they will use them only to make tea. They do not assign them duties relevant to what they are studying.’*

She further commented on the landlords: *security, where our students are staying, is not good.*

*‘We had cases where students are being raped in their accommodation places; students are being abused by their landlords, eating their food. I will make an example of a student who ended up in the hospital this year because the child of the landlord ate her food which was in the fridge. When asked about that the child boiled cooking oil and threw it over our student and she ended up in the hospital.’*

**HODBUS2:** Was concerned about the fact that dropping out affects the students’ self-esteem and self-image in that they lose direction and focus in connection with their future.

*‘They will lose energy and motivation in becoming somebody in life and start contributing to unemployment rate because they are doing nothing’.*

She also stated that because most of their students are males, and some of them would find themselves involved in drugs and alcohol because the landlord or the neighbours sell drugs or alcohol.

**HODENG3:** stated that students who drop out place themselves at a disadvantage because if it happens that later on they decide to return and study, they would no longer be entitled to NSFAS.

*“NSFAS does not fund a person twice, even if the student decides, later on, to come back and register, records will tell that he/ she owes NSFAS money and will never be funded again.”*

He also commented on the impact of student dropout to staff members; stating that their jobs depend on the number of students enrolled in the college.

*‘Obviously the more dropouts, the less staff would be required. It has a direct impact on staffing, where you needed five lecturers you will need four. I am sure that will have an effect*

*which will also translate to non-academic staff and the name of the college will also be affected because, why dropouts?’*

#### **4.3.2.3 Category 3: Lecturers**

**LECT1:** When asked to comment on the effects of student dropout to the institution, he responded as follows:

*‘Eh.. if more students are dropping out it will affect, or it will tarnish the image of the college, where you will found that the college has a reputation for being the best college in the country but only to find out that the college has got eh... 40% of students who are dropping out. Eh... then it affects the college regarding eh... the funds... the funds that they are receiving from NSFAS, eh... moreover, also it can also affect eh... Regarding lecturers eh... who are supposed to work at that particular college, eh... some of them might end up being eh... retrenched because there are not enough numbers to accommodate them to work there in that particular college.’*

He also argued that the community members who offer accommodation to these students are also affected because they depend on the rent money they receive from the students.

*‘We know that these students depend on NSFAS for accommodation that is offered by the community. Now, when these Students are dropping out, you will find that the people who are giving these students accommodation they are depending now on that money they receive from them. Eh... now when they are dropping out, the community members now, will lose trust about the college that it does have positive impact on the community, eh... the concern here is that the community will no longer receive money from students for accommodation since now they have dropped out, and they are going back home. So it is going to affect the community in that way.’*

**LECT2:** commented on the question of the causes of student dropout emanating from the community factors:

*‘The community can be the reason for the student to drop out. For example, you have accommodation where you have students staying there, but you are selling drugs, you are influencing all those students. You are influencing all those students at the end of the day the student may decide, you know what I am no longer staying here I rather go back home*

*because whatever that is happening here is not good for me so, that means the impact of the community has become the reason for students to drop out from the college.'*

**LECT3:** further commented on the community factors influencing student dropout and stated that:

*'Students would even decide to join them to get easy money from selling drugs.'*

**LECT4:** was concerned about students who come from schools. Even students who are still at school will be demotivated to come to TVET Colleges because they see their neighbours sitting at home doing nothing. Therefore, the college will struggle to make the required numbers to be able to offer the required courses.

*'And most of our students are ill-treated by members of the community because the majority of them are from outside the location. They even call them 'Sdumos', meaning they depend on others because they do not have their own places to stay. The sensitive student will then decide to leave rather than being abused emotionally and physically.'*

The other lecturers did not comment much, but they were in agreement with what the others accentuated.

#### **4.3.2.4 Category 4: Students**

**LEA 1:** responded by saying students who drop out will have no future because they will lack confidence in themselves and develop a low self-esteem.

*'Most of our brothers and sisters end up in jail because they engage themselves in criminal activities'.*

He also pronounced: *'if you are from rural areas you come to the city and have to blend with city life, and you have to do as they do. Sometimes it can be too much for us, and then you decide to go back home rather than involving yourself in bad things.'*

**LEA2:** further stated that the norms and values of the society the students find themselves in contribute a lot to dropping out because it is difficult for them to adapt.

*'Others will start to misbehave and drink alcohol because everybody in the community is doing it.'*

**LEA3:** *‘Students are robbed their monies and cell phones on their way to college by community members. Some students will be afraid to go to college because of that, especially female students because some are raped.’*

**LEA5:** responded by saying that the image of the institution would be affected because no parent would like to send his or her child to such an institution.

*‘When I came here I was from another institution; I regret my decision because here students are all by themselves nobody cares’.*

#### **4.3.2.5 Discussion**

The second objective of this study was to determine how student dropout rates are managed at the TVET College and the effects thereof. The study revealed that some institutional factors contribute to student dropout in the TVET College. This is confirmed by Lamb, Markussen, Tesse, Sandberg and Polesel (2011) where they state that various settings or contexts in which students live contribute to shaping their attitude towards learning. Most participants in all categories commented about the enrolment process which seems to be ineffective and time-consuming thus causing some students to drop out. Another concern was the assessment and exam marks which are sometimes pending or not captured well. In this study, it was revealed that some of the lecturers mentioned the fact that with NCV the students are all combined in one group, yet they have different grades. Jorgensen (2011), states that the institutional selection process that includes the separation of students in classes at various levels, assessment through tests and examinations and categorising and positioning students as right or inattentive are some of the factors contributing to student dropout. **HODBENG3** and most of the lecturers were concerned about the NSFAS process which seems to delay and cause students to strike, or some simply decide to go back home.

Al-Mamun, Hasan and Amin (2012) confirm this in their study on institutional problems by stating that frequent violence by the students was considered as the top cause for the students to drop out after the first semester. This is in line with what most of the lecturers and HODs of the college confirmed. The senior managers and HODs mainly were also concerned about the curriculum which was stated as being challenging for some students in such a manner that they cannot cope. Govindaraju and Venkatesan (2010) cite that if the curriculum is irrelevant to the world of work and does not cater for student interests, this contributes to student dropout.

Some of the factors cited were uncaring lecturer behaviour and negative comments from the lecturers where they end up neglecting students with poor performance and discriminate them (ibid). Fruedeberg and Ruglis (2007) argue that indifferent lecturers who have no interest in the students' success yet like factory workers, come to do their work, limit themselves to teaching and go home as soon as possible. According to Raviv and Bar-Am's (2014) studies on some colleges in Israel, learning does not provide the students with a sense of inventiveness and value thus leading to attrition and dissatisfaction which leads to drop out.

This study revealed that some of the factors influencing student dropout are factors emanating from the students themselves which are referred to as individual factors. Family challenges emerged as one of the major factors influencing the student dropout rate whereby students find themselves in a situation where they need to take care of family problems. All participants in this study confirmed that some of the students look after their siblings and sick parents. Heublein (2014), in his study about student dropouts in German Higher Education institutions, states that the leading cause for students to drop out is their financial and occupation aspirations. He continues to assert that during studies, they receive less financial support from their parents and are mostly dependent on public funding. This is insufficient, and they resort to getting jobs during their studies which affects their academic success. Lecturer 1 supported that by stating that because of family challenges, students sometimes drop out to go and look for jobs to cater to their needs.

It was further discovered that some students lack interest in their studies, as lecturer 6 stated that sometimes they are forced by their parents to do what they are not interested in. Tas, Selvitopu and Bora (2013) cite that in China students drop out because of low achievement which may suggest that they are not capable of learning or it is an indication of unwillingness to learn. Al-mamum, Hasan and Amin (2012) in their investigation on causes of student dropouts from an engineering programme in Bangladesh, reveals that diploma engineering courses are tough and some students do not understand the subject as expected. This corresponds with what one of the HODs from the Engineering division cited about Mathematics and Science, which is a requirement which some students do not meet and that results to dropping out because they do not cope.

The study revealed that the family background contributes to student dropout rates. One of the participants mentioned that the educational background of parents contributes in that the parents do not motivate the child because they do not see any value in education. Yi, Zhang,

Wang, Yang, Shi, Chu, Layalka and Rozelle (2013) affirm that students drop out more frequently when they are from families with parents that have characteristics associated with placing less value towards education. This idea was shut down by most participants stating that most of the uneducated parents would like to see their children progressing; the problem is that they do not have the resources to do that.

The study revealed that there are also community factors influencing student dropout. Al-Mamun, Hasan and Amin (2012) state that in Germany, the society knows very little about technicians and their education system which is TVET. As a result, students find themselves unemployed after passing. This was echoed by **HODBUS1** when she mentioned that local businesses do not give students opportunities to do their practical work. Students also find themselves being victimised by community members because they rent accommodation from the community. Silverstein, Foster, Welner and Shephard (2003) confirm this and argue that home and community connections are critical. They cite that colleges have more students when they develop deep relationships in all the settings where students spend their time.

The study revealed that dropout has adverse effects both socially and institutionally (Blooms & Robinson, 2011). Participants in this study voiced their concerns about some of the effects of student dropout to the institution stating that these could even have an adverse effect on funding because NSFAS funds are provided considering the throughput and certification rate which will drop extensively. **HODBUS1** pronounced that the college will not be able to meet the targets predicted in the strategic plan and that will be the loss of income and waste of educational resources.

McGivney (2003) maintains that in FET Colleges, student numbers and retention rates are now used in the distribution formulae employed by the United Kingdom Councils. If students drop out, they will be less educated which will make it difficult for them to find jobs. One of the participants further stated that if they cannot find employment, this will lead to low self-esteem and unemployment can force them to start robbing people or abusing drugs and alcohol (**HODBUS1**). This is confirmed by Tas, Selvitopu and Bora (2013) stating that even if the students find jobs, it is hard to find well-paying jobs and therefore they then develop tendencies to engage in illegal jobs.

Wang (2015) further maintains that vocational education trends to be a dead end in many countries because once a student enters the vocational track, he or she may lose the opportunity for any further education, regardless of his or her academic improvement or

motivation to learn. This is also true with NCV students; it is challenging for them to continue with their studies after obtaining their level four certificates because most institutions do not recognise this qualification. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics Reports (Hupfeld, 2010), 68% of the nation's state prison inmates in the United States of America are dropouts.

The study further revealed that students would develop low self-esteem because of unemployment and they are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour and be incarcerated over their lifetime. Rumberger (2011) confirmed that a dropout is likely to be associated with emotions of personal inadequacy, self-doubt and not belonging. According to Tas et al. (2013) and Fruedeberg and Ruglis (2007), this will increase the demand for more social services which is a loss to the government because providing social services and dealing with crime associated with dropouts is costly. Having citizens who cannot provide for themselves and who are making no contribution to the economy places an economic burden on the country because the country has to prevent an increase in the crime rate (**HODBUS1**). Lamb, Markussen, Tesse, Sandberg and Polesel (2011) state that research in different countries shows that dropouts are more likely to become unemployed, stay unemployed for longer, have lower earnings and over their life course accumulate less wealth.

#### **4.4 IMPROVING MANAGEMENT OF STUDENT DROPOUT RATES**

##### **4.4.1 Question 3, theme 3**

**Question four:** How could lecturers and management assist in improving the management of student drop-out rates?

**THEME 3:** Measures to be taken to identify and promote good practices for preventing dropout?

##### **4.4.1.1 Category 1: Senior Managers**

**SMC1:** emphasised the importance of career guidance where students could be adequately channelled on the different courses that are offered in the TVET Colleges. He further suggested that this should also involve the explanation of the requirements for each course so that students are aware of what will be expected from them if they do such a course. Though he also agreed that the support system that is available at the college is not as effective as it is

supposed to be, he recommended that this support system (SSS) should be developed and equipped by all means to assist students with challenges.

*'Some students have social and psychological problems; therefore they should have access to psychotherapy. It cannot be expected that a student with problems affecting his or her thinking capabilities could perform well. Something needs to be done; we are aware that some of our students have been victims of abuse like drugs, alcohol and rape. ' The college should employ professional people to deal with this. '*

He also commented on the curriculum issue and suggested that it needs to be revisited, though this could be a long-term goal because it involves the DHET.

**SMC2:** suggested that all stakeholders should come together and work hand in hand to root out the drop out problem.

*'One thing that I believe we should be doing is different stakeholders should come together and work for hand in hand to root out this problem. When I mention different stakeholders, I mean lecturers should work hand in hand with senior management, hand in hand with admin staff and with DHET Staff. I believe if all these people work together they will be in a position to do something that will give us good results now and we will see the dropout rate improving now. In essence, I think this is what should be happening. They should sit down and strategies. '*

He suggested that proper monitoring of registers should be done where accurate recordings of absenteeism should be managed so that it is easy to identify students who are no longer attending for the college to intervene in cases where there is a need.

*'Without proper records, it is difficult for management to estimate the extent of the student dropout rate and be able to have effective planning to manage the situation. Lecturers as people who are hands on are therefore encouraged to do their work and control registers so that they can report any pattern that may lead to student drop out. '*

#### **4.4.1.2 Category 2: HODs**

**HODBUS1:** When commenting on how lecturers and management could assist in improving the management of student dropout rates in the TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal, she made the following recommendations:

- Better selection criteria for enrolments, for example, academic underachievers leave because they do not cope.

*‘Firstly I would say the first step should be to start with correcting our selection process. Definitely, if we want to stop this dropout, our selection criteria has to be soundproof and by that I mean you just don’t let the child come to you and say this is the course I want to do. You have to interview the child to find out what expectations does he have. Remember many students will drop out because we did not meet their expectations.’*

- Better career guidance, make sure that the student is placed in the correct course

*‘The Student support Service should get involved in guiding the students. Previously we use to have a committee composed of lecturers working together with Student Support Services, and it was working very well. I think this should be reviewed.’*

- Trust and respect for each other; lecturers should strive to make lessons interesting and get students involved in the learning process

*We have to establish relationships with those students so that we can know where they are coming from. As a lecturer, you need to know the expectations of the child in front of you. If you see that the child in front of you is not motivated because maybe he was forced to come here, try and encourage the child to be positive. As lecturers we need to be more observant, 80% of your behaviour is nonverbal, so if you walk to the class and greet the students you can immediately see their facial expression and be able to tell the mood the child in. Get those kids to be more involved in your lessons.’*

- More excursions so that students gain background, knowledge and life skills

*‘Where are our excursions, we do not need to only talk about academic things, but we need to let our students do some activities so that they are motivated. Where are our activities like debates or concerts or any extramural activities? Universities have extramural activities but what do we have? Nothing. If we have these activities, it will assist in building mutual trust between the students and us because they will have time to know us better.’*

- Have neat buildings and modern technology to make lessons more presentable.

*‘We have to find a conducive environment where this student could make a place of study feel like home. Let me compare with the early days when we started. We could call those students*

*on a public holiday they will be there, we could call them extra hours they will be there because they had a love for the institution where they were learning, they had a sense of belonging. Our lecturers and students do not have that sense of belonging. The buildings are old and cold in winter, and there is no modern technology we still use those old choke boards. Really, something needs to be done.'*

**HODBUS2:** recommended that students who are registered should have access to free Wi-Fi and the internet so that they can do their research on what they are doing and be exposed to what is happening in the work environment. She also suggested that they should have electronic resources such as computers and internet cafés that function properly.

*'There is much competition out there; therefore our students need to be well prepared because technology is advancing every day. Only people who are competitive will succeed in getting employment. Our students need to have electronic resources like free Wi-Fi and a functioning and effective internet café.'*

She also commented on the library resources stating that the library needs to be managed properly:

*'in as much as we have our library, we need to improve our library systems so that students are motivated to use it. The college should employ library staff to assist with guiding students on how to use the library. You cannot have a library and not have someone to teach students on how to use it. Lastly, our computers need to be upgraded to new systems and programmes so that we can meet the demands of the work environment.'*

**HODENG3:** suggested that senior management should develop policies to be put in place by campuses to assist with student absenteeism. The college needs to have a proper LSS which is functioning correctly. He also recommended that students be paid their NSFAS monies up front rather than having to wait for the whole of the first block for the payment.

*'Like it happens with other DHET institutions where they are given money up front because we also belong to DHET. We hope that the online registration that was implemented this year will help because hopefully, DHET will pay the students on time to avoid unnecessary strikes.'*

**HODENG4:** His primary concern was the enrolment process whereby he stated that though the enrolment has been controlled and monitored, the criteria on enrolments, whether Engineering or Business, must be known.

*'The strict criteria have to be followed, for example with Engineering we require Mathematics and Science, but for campuses like Open Learning where we serve the corporate, we may find someone with grade nine or ten, and then we also allow those people to enrol.'*

He recommended that the college should organise a bridging programme for students without the prerequisites, so that they can have the minimum requirements to help them to cope with the content.

*'There comes our issue there is need for the college to devise or put into place eh.... a programme for the students without the prerequisites to bridge. So that before do these courses then eh...they are able to have the minimum requirement information which will help them to cope with the content because as long as we do not have that bridging course we will always have a problem with dropouts whether we like it or not..'*

#### **4.4.1.3 Category 3: Lecturers**

**LECT1:** suggested that the lecturers should try and create a welcoming and conducive learning environment where students feel free and can vent their problems.

*'We can try and make a home away from home for our students, where the student will feel at home because the environment feels like home. So if we can have that kind of relationship with our students, it can also help because you will find that the student will be able to vent eh... his or her ... problems. Why, what problem is he facing, it would be easy for that particular lecturer to engage with the student and try and solve the problem than finding a student eh... dropping out.'*

He stated that it is the first time for most of the students to be outside of their homes without the protection and guidance of their parents. Thus others find it difficult to cope with that.

*'That is why you will find that others will start going to parties and drinking more because of peer pressure they will not be able to balance college work with that'.*

Another idea was that students who are doing well in class should be given some form of a reward to encourage them.

*'And also having some rewards for those students who are doing well in class, maybe buying them a pen or just a certificate as a reward to encourage them, so if you can encourage such an environment, those students who are not performing well will be encouraged to do better next time. It happened when I was studying in the primary, and it was effective.'*

**LECT6** encouraged that lecturers should monitor absenteeism through the weekly registers.

*'As a lecturer, you have a duty to consult and discipline the student, tell the student that you will even send him to the HOD so that he could see that this is now becoming serious. You can even phone the parents informing them that their child has been absent in class so that you can be able to hear their side of the story.'*

**LECT7** commented on the issue of monitoring by bringing in the DHET. He argued that the government is monitoring Basic Education closely and leaving Higher Education neglected.

*'umm... it is unfortunate that uhmm... the government is monitoring basic education closer and leaving Higher education neglected. The very same persons we were protecting at a basic education level eh... are the very same people that you say next year you are on your own, see your way out. When there is a great failure rate and dropout rate, at basic education level, the government goes to that school with everything they have got, they throw everything there, maybe if the kitchen sink is there they will also throw it, they will dismantle it from the wall and throw it to the principal, the head of school and the teachers, they will even threaten of closing that particular school. The very next year when that student graduates from high school to the university or higher institution of learning, if that student now is learning he is on his or her own because very little protection will be obtained from the government. The very same person you say next year you are on your own, see yourself out.'*

He also suggested that parents need to be involved in the education of their education as it is happening with Basic Education. Parents need to be informed about the progress of the child by sending them progress reports for every assessment done.

*'Now how are they doing it with basic education, parents are a full-time part of the kid's education such that they even have an entire governing body elected, those are parent*

representatives, they make sure that even if the parents are not at school, parents are at school because the governing body is there. Now, why don't you come up with such a system with the TVETs and the Technical Colleges? Moreover, maybe involve eh... parenting to some extent. I am very much concerned that the parents do not receive the progress of a child, we... we give three assessments per semester, just to make an example of report 191, why don't you make a report and send it home? For the first assessment, the second assessment you make another progress report and send it home. Assessment number 3, internal examination, why don't you make another report and send it home. Final year results, final examination results, why don't you make another report and send it home because some of the kids are here, they are dropouts, but they are attending. Parents give them money to go to school, they take it and go knowing very well that they are no longer studying. Because they have been failing the whole year, I believe what management, lecturers, maybe let us throw the government into place though it is not part of what we are talking about. They should involve parents, eh... parental involvement is a very crucial issue in try to address the drop out issue.'

#### **4.4.1.4 Category 4: Students**

**LEA1:** suggested that lecturers must be parents first then teachers after that. This is, so they are able to empathise with the students.

*'Like if the student is struggling, they must try to speak with him or her and not just turn a blind eye. How would they feel if the student who is struggling was their child?'*

**LEA 2:** responded by saying that they need to build a relationship of trust so that students can trust lecturers and speak with them confidently about any problem that they are facing.

*'Some lecturers are bullies; you cannot even report a serious matter to them. It is important that they also learn to listen to us. It is recommended that lecturers should be trained on communication skills and on how to treat other people. To some is because they lack knowledge of the subject content and then they try not to engage with students in case they ask them questions about the subject content.'*

**LEA 6:** Stated the importance of addressing the root problems which are causing the students to drop out because some are social or personal. He also indicated that it is sometimes not easy to speak to the lecturers because of the time spent with them.

*‘ I think with every institution there should be a psychologist where if a lecturer identifies a struggling student then he can speak to the counsellor or psychologist of the college to try and find the root of the problem so that the student is helped instead of letting the student dropout.’*

**LEA 7:** recommended that all administrative staff should undergo training on how to deal with people because most of the students are ill-treated in the administration block especially during enrolments.

*‘Most students do not even reach the classroom; they just decide here and there to leave the institution. Admin personnel should be trained on how to treat people.’*

**LEA8:** was concerned about the issue of unqualified lecturers and suggested that the college should either train them or employ suitably qualified lecturers.

*‘As already stated before, the college curriculum is very challenging and difficult. It requires lecturers who know the subject content and who could be able to teach. It has been discovered that most of the lecturers are not properly qualified but they are teaching in the TVET College. Some have an only N6 diploma; we know them because some of them are our relatives. What do you do if a lecturer reads to you as if he is reading a novel? These lecturers must get proper training or the college should employ suitably qualified lecturers.’*

Most of the participants were concerned about the issue of accommodation. They believed that dropout problems could be minimised if the college could assist in this regard. They also suggested that NSFAS should be managed by an independent body so that funds are distributed on time and reasonably.

**LEA3:** commented on the issue of accommodation by saying:

*‘The college should decide on having student accommodation which is properly maintained’. This will also assist in resolving other issues emanating from this, such as absenteeism, student abuse by community members and safety.’*

**LEA1:** also commented on the issue of NSFAS and stated that the strikes that are experienced by the college every semester are because NSFAS is not managed correctly.

*‘Students are only paid their first payment after they strike, this shows that the NSFAS employees are either not properly trained or they just cause unnecessary delays. I, therefore,*

*recommend that it should be managed by independent people who are not college staff so that funds are distributed fairly and fast.'*

#### **4.4.1.5 Discussion**

The third objective of this study was aimed at determining ways in which dropout rates could be managed at a TVET College. The study revealed that career guidance where students could be adequately guided and informed about different courses that are offered and the requirements thereof is lacking in this institution. Heublei (2014) cites that first-time students should be given better information for them to make informative decisions. According to Kornbeck, Kristensen and Sommerset (2013), the quality of information that is disseminated about the environment and courses offered must be accurate, comprehensive, easy to follow and informative if students are to make effective choices. This was further cited by Tinto (2012) where he emphasised the importance of receiving good advice.

All participants recommended that the LSS should assist in providing career guidance, amongst other things (SMC1). It emerged from the participants that the college has the LSS which is responsible for career guidance. However, it was recommended that it should be developed and equipped to deal with the needs of the students. The problem raised by all participants is that this unit is stationed at Central Office and it is hard to access when needed. The study revealed that there is a need for psychotherapy (SMC2) because most students experience learning problems emanating from the fact that they were abused or they have been victims of drugs, alcohol and rape. In as much as student support occurs, only professional people could be able to deal with such conditions.

Weak guidance was identified by the ETDPSETA (2012) as one of the leading factors behind dropout rates in colleges. As a result, according to the White Paper (DHET, 2013), career guidance should be an integral component of the Post-School Education and Training System. Effective guidance and counselling services help students to make the right educational and career choices and reduce the risk of a wrong pathway that could lead to disappointment and dropout (OECD, 2010).

In this study, it also emerged that the enrolment process needs to be improved by having criteria for admission that is known by everybody concerned. **HODENG3** recommended that there should be policies with clear directions when it comes to enrolments. This was echoed by **HODBUS1** stating that there should be a selection criteria or enrolments indicating all the

requirements for a particular course so that only those students who can cope with that particular subject content are enrolled. In order to assist those students who do not meet the requirements, the participants suggested a bridging course (HODENG4). This was also recommended by the DHET (ETDPSETA, 2013).

The study revealed that the curriculum needs to be revisited by all stakeholders to determine its relevance to the current target of students as suggested by Heublei (2014) that curricula need to be reformed. However, this could be done in consultation with all stakeholders as proposed by SMC2 that all stakeholders should come together and root out the problem. Shadreck (2013) recommends that the dropout rate could be managed by widening and diversifying the curriculum to cater for students' varied interests, needs and aptitudes. Similarly Silverstein, Yetti, Foster, Welner and Shephard (2003) recommend relevance and rigour regarding curriculum to increase student motivation, confidence and achievement. The curriculum should be revised and adopted according to the demands of employers to generate more employment opportunities. In his discussion of preventive measures to student dropout, Heublein (2014) suggests that the curriculum needs to be reformed to suit the needs of the students.

According to the Green Paper (2013), the DHET with college staff and other experts will have to sit down and develop a curriculum for foundation learning programmes for students who cannot meet the demands of the college programmes.

It also emerged from the study that the learning environment needs to be improved so that it is conducive to learning and teaching (HODBUS1). In their study on investigating the causes of student dropout from Diploma in Engineering programmes in Bangladesh, Al-Mamun, Hasan and Amin (2012) recommend that the learning environment should be free from political influence and management must ensure a sound and secure environment for students. Lecturer 1 suggested rewards for best achievers to motivate even those who are not doing well in their studies.

The study also revealed that an atmosphere of trust between students and lecturers is vital towards managing the student dropout rate in the college. One of the student participants (**LEA1**) recommended that lecturers should practice empathy so that students feel free and accepted. According to Hupfeld (2010), lecturers need to provide high-quality instruction by believing in the potential of each student and help them to develop a positive vision for their educational future and encourage them to see the relevance of learning in their personal lives

and future goals. He further states that the relationships available in colleges between lecturers and students provide opportunities for students to plan for and accumulate academic success. Therefore, supportive relationships with lecturers minimise the dropout rate by providing academic and emotional support because lecturers play a significant role in modelling resilient behaviours.

It also emerged that proper monitoring of student absenteeism and their general performance should be maintained by lecturers, senior management and the DHET. **HODENG3** suggested that there needs to be a policy for monitoring absenteeism, so that student dropouts are identified on time or even before they occur. Hupfeld (2010) supported this idea and stated that students who are likely to drop out need to be identified with an early warning data system. Participants complained about the fact that there is no consistency in monitoring absenteeism. Therefore, **SMC2** suggested that the college must have a proper monitoring system with accurate recording. This was supported by Wesley, Hoover, Jarvis and Times (2013) stating that a data system supporting a realistic diagnosis of numbers needs to be used.

The study revealed that parental involvement could play a significant role in addressing student dropout. **LEC7** even quoted the use of governing bodies at the Basic Education level. The importance of informing parents about the progress of the student was emphasised by Polat (2014) and Silverstein, Vetti, Foster, Wlnert and Shepeherd (2003). If parents are involved in the progress of the students, they contribute to motivating them to study. This also would mean that parents would be well informed about what is happening in the college environment so that they also become stakeholders.

#### **4.5 SYNTHESIS**

In presenting the findings of this study, the researcher discussed the theoretical perspective which was adopted in this study. This was aimed at explaining the reasons why the grounded theoretical method was ideal for this study. According to Meriam (2002), grounded theory emphasises discovery with description and verification as secondary concerns dealing with particular real-world situations. The researcher discovers or gathers detailed information from the participants through the inductive process and then from this information into categories of themes which are later developed into broad patterns or theories as cited by Creswell (2009). In this study, the researcher collected the views of management lecturers and students aiming at making meaning from the data on managing student dropout rates at a TVET

College, as recommended by Mason (2002). Managing student dropout rates in this institution is a matter that needs more strategies for it to improve.

#### **4.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented the analysis and discussions of the research findings based on the responses of the participants. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews and focus group interviews, and then the collected data were categorised into themes. The primary focus of data interpretation was to answer the study's primary question and the sub-questions. This was done by comparing the collected data with the relevant literature review.

This study revealed that managing student dropout rates requires all stakeholders to be involved and be willing to make a sound contribution towards improving the current conditions. Through data collected from all participants, the researcher was able to make some relevant recommendations on how to improve the management of student dropout rates in a TVET College.

The next and final chapter presents the discussion of findings interpreted according to responses to the research questions, according to the interview guide. The summary, conclusions, limitations and recommendations for future research are also presented.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter four presented the findings whereby the discussions of the data analysis were made. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings at a different level of interpretation; draw conclusions to indicate that the research question has been addressed applicably; identify the strengths and limitations of the study and afford recommendations for further research. The main research question posed by the study as indicated in chapter one is linked to the findings as referred to in this chapter.

#### **5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

It is imperative to recall that the aim of the study was to investigate ways of managing student dropout rates at a TVET College. This summary of the findings is based on content analysis or literature review as well as the responses received during the data-collection process. The study is focused on effective ways or strategies to manage student dropout rates in the TVET sector to ensure that student challenges are addressed on time. The outline of how the chapters of this study were organised to achieve this goal is indicated hereunder.

Chapter one provided a background to the study to acquaint the reader with the aims of the research. The chapter addressed the rationale for the study, the research question, the purpose, aims and objectives of the study, literature preview, conceptual framework, research methodology, validity and reliability, ethical considerations, the definition of terms and the description of the research plan.

Chapter two is where a literature study was conducted on managing student dropout rates in the TVET College. Literature was reviewed observing different countries with a history of TVET Colleges. The purpose of this chapter was to determine how other ideas and strategies were effective in managing student dropout rates in the TVET sector.

Chapter three explored the research methodology and the methods of data collection used in this study. In-depth information on why specific methods were used was also provided. The researcher used two methods of data collection which were; one -on -one and focus group interviews. The research design, population, sampling and sampling procedures, data-

collection procedure and data analysis were also discussed. The researcher reviewed the importance of trustworthiness in this study by referring to transparency, dependability, credibility and conformability. The ethical issues were also discussed putting emphasis on confidentiality and anonymity.

Chapter four involved the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data wherein the purpose was to present the actual responses of participants. Data were presented and analysed into categories and themes to ensure that the participants' views are well reflected. The researcher used interviews as a data-collection method. The study ensured that data was analysed to present information from the participants' point of view. The interviews were categorised into two which were, face-to-face interviews and focus group interviews. After careful consideration of all factors influencing access to the participants regarding availability and location, the researcher preferred to use face- to face interviews with the views of senior managers and HODs. Two focus group interviews were conducted on the views of lecturers and students.

During the analysis and interpretation of the findings, the researcher was conscious to determine the result implicated by the central question and the sub-questions of the research. This chapter was aimed at describing and providing the primary results and findings of the research concerning the research questions. Chapter five provides the summary of the findings, recommendations and limitations of the study, fulfilment of the objectives of the study and recommendations for further research. A summary of the critical findings are highlighted in the following paragraph.

### **5.3 ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL FINDINGS**

In order to ensure that the principal findings analysed in this chapter are in line with the research question of the study and its sub-questions, a literature preview on student dropout rates, causes of student dropouts, the effects of student dropouts and measures to prevent or manage student dropout rates in a TVET College was carried out.

### **5.4 FULFILMENT OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The three objectives of the study are analysed to indicate whether they were achieved.

#### **5.4.1 Objective one**

*Determine the understanding of the management of dropout rates in a Technical Vocational Education and Training College in KwaZulu-Natal.*

Literature from different authors was used to accomplish this objective in chapters one, two and four. Chapter four provided findings, analysis and discussions on managing student dropout rates in a TVET College. It was evident that TVET Colleges were not managing the issue of student dropouts efficiently and did not have appropriate policies and procedures to accomplish such. The researcher maintains that the primary concern is that lecturers, senior management, the department officials and students work as separate entities with each one of them only worried about his or her scope of work. It is, however, vital that all stakeholders come together to strategise on how management of the student dropout rates could be improved.

All participants in the study were in agreement that student dropout rates in the institution are very high and severe measures need to be taken by both lecturers and management to assist in improving the status quo. The participants further identified causes of student dropout which will need to be addressed for the situation to be improved. These cases were categorised under institutional, individual family and community causes (Section 2.2).

#### **5.4.2 Objective two**

*Determine how the student dropout rate is managed at a Technical Vocational Education and Training College in KwaZulu-Natal and the effects thereof.*

A literature study to meet this objective was conducted in chapters one, two and four in relation to how student dropout rates are managed in other countries. The study revealed that the college procedures and processes used to manage student dropout rates are ineffective. The enrolment process and the criteria used for selecting students for various courses were raised as some of the contributing factors.

The study also revealed that all three aspects are extensively impacted by student dropout as confirmed by that student dropout could have a detrimental effect both institutionally and socially. The concern about the high unemployment rate was amongst the significant effects from which many other challenges and behaviours are rooted. All participants commented

about students involving themselves in dangerous behaviours such as drugs and alcohol abuse.

### **5.4.3 Objective 3**

*Determine the role of lecturers and management in improving the management of student dropout rates.*

This objective was reached by making recommendations from the findings and discussions of the study on managing student dropout rates. The study focused on determining strategies which may be used by lecturers and management to assist in improving the management of student dropout rates at the same time encouraging team effort in achieving this.

## **5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study was aimed at exploring information around one TVET College out of fifty- one in the country. Therefore, the findings of one college cannot be generalised to others. More insight on the study would have been obtained from other TVET Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal.

There were time constraints in data collection and interpretation as the researcher is also a full-time employee in one of the institutions. Only ten days of leave was granted for the research purposes. The researcher had only about two months to collect and interpret data which is very time-consuming; this may affect the outcome of the study.

Financial constraints contributed to the limitations of the study in connection with equipment and study materials needed for this research. The use of standard inappropriate recording equipment caused a delay in data transcription.

## **5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE**

Recommendations for the study are based on the literature and data collected during the research process on the ways of improving the management of student dropout rates. The study revealed the significance of improving the way in which student dropout is currently managed in the colleges so as to try and minimise its effects on the institution, the individual student and the community. The lack of policies and procedures to manage student absenteeism contributes to the problems experienced by the institution.

The financial challenges experienced by the students due to lack of funds and inappropriate management and distribution of NSFAS funds was also seen as a contributing factor to student dropout. Through literature in chapter one, two and four based on managing student dropout rates in TVET Colleges, the researcher was able to provide general recommendations highlighted in the following paragraphs.

### **5.6.1 Strengthen career guidance and information**

It is always said that knowledge is power; therefore it is vital for any person to be able to make an informed and effective decision about matters concerning his or her future career. Colleges offer different programmes, and this makes career choices difficult for many students because of little understanding of the options. The management and lecturers should provide career guidance which is informative. Information provided should be accurate, comprehensive and easy to follow. The following could be considered in providing effective career counselling:

- Lecturers who are experts and have experience in their fields should be part of the career guidance;
- Hosting a career guidance day for the college;
- Inviting parents to the career guidance day;
- Inviting representatives of local businesses to showcase their fields;
- Partnering with businesses to provide opportunities for work-related experiences such as internships, simulated job interviews, or long-term employment;
- Providing detailed information about the courses offered and the requirements for admission; and
- Providing information about what is covered by the curriculum of each course.

### **5.6.2 Student Support Service**

The study revealed that most of the challenges experienced by students in this college could be effectively managed and addressed with the presence of an effective student support system. The Learners Support Service (LSS) should assist in providing direct services for all students especially those experiencing barriers to learning. The LSSs must be funded by the college or the department to cater for all its services. It is advisable that lecturers and part of the LSS, as people who are hands on with students, can identify most of the student challenges on a daily basis. This team should strive to work with all relevant structures to

execute their duties effectively. Moxley, Najor-Durack and Dumbrique (2001) cite that students come to higher institutions with many different needs, and variations in their levels and types of support and as a result, these students can present wide variations in the situations they deal with. The following are some of the responsibilities recommended for SSS:

- Assist students with career guidance;
- Provide students with orientation (induction);
- Provide Student Counselling Services;
- Assist students to acquire NSFAS and other available bursaries;
- Provide trauma units; and
- Academic support for academic performance and enrichment.

### **5.6.3 Provision of a bridging course**

It emerged from the study that there was a need for a bridging course to assist students who do not meet the entry requirements. Lecturers with relevant expertise could meet with management and organise a special curriculum relevant for each course and also discuss the duration of such a programme. This is important to ensure that students enter with the opportunity to acquire the skills needed for academic success. The bridging course is most relevant to the NCV students for both NATED and Engineering programmes because most students have only passed Grade 9 in high school. The TVET College curriculum seems to be more advanced and more challenging to them. Amongst subjects to be catered for by this bridging course could be English, Mathematics and Science. Pre-course counselling is also recommended, to prepare students for the academic demands.

### **5.6.4 Improve teaching and learning**

To address the concern about poor performance, poor attendance and lack of interest and apathy by the students, it is important that the learning environment is equipped with effective learning material and new technology that would assist in reviving the lessons to bring about a sense of reality. Student involvement in the learning and teaching is also essential. The study revealed that students are not given the practical work that they are supposed to be receiving in a training environment where skills need to be equipped. Improving teaching and learning could be effective if the skills and qualifications of the lectures could be considered for each course. Close mentoring and monitoring of students by

both management and lecturers is vital. The college management together with the department should provide opportunities for lecturer development and training so that they can develop their knowledge and skills. Lecturers could also provide extra study time for students who do not cope.

### **5.6.5 Parental involvement**

It has been revealed that parents of students in this institution are not informed about what is happening in the college, let alone the progress of their children. It is recommended that communication links between parents and lecturers be developed so that the advancement of the student could be monitored by both the lecturer and the parent. In this way, it could be easy to monitor student absenteeism. If both parties engage on a regular basis, there would be opportunities for discussing the problems, exchanging information on the students' performance and college performance to ensure that they are identified and addressed as early as possible. An effective lecturer-parent committee is recommended to work together with student representatives in resolving issues. Parents should not only be involved when there are problems or challenges, but they should be part of the team. Unemployed parents with different skills even in sports could be requested to assist in equipping students. The presence of at least one caring and supportive adult could improve the student dropout management (Hupfeld, 2010).

## **5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The researcher recommends that future research on managing student dropout rates be conducted to determine the institutional factors with a negative effect on managing student dropout rates in the TVET Colleges. This study was only based on one TVET college in KwaZulu –Natal; future studies could be expanded to the whole province or district to acquire a bigger scope and insight because the dropout problem is a worldwide concern. Future studies could also use the quantitative approach where statistics could be collected using case studies and questionnaires. This could draw the attention of other stakeholders such as the DHET, to start doing something about the dropout issue in the TVET Colleges.

## **5.8 CONCLUSION**

This study has revealed that managing the dropout rates is still a big challenge in the TVET College sector. Lecturers and management need to put their differences aside and invest in the future of the child. The government declared TVET Colleges as institutions of choice

where students need to be equipped with skills to cater for the demands of the workplace. However, this is far from being achieved because this sector is still characterised by poor throughput and retention rates as well as low pass rates.

This study attempted to determine ways in which student dropout rates could be managed in a TVET college in KwaZulu –Natal. Most participants in the study revealed that the lack of effective policies to monitor absenteeism contributed to inadequate monitoring of the situation by both management and lecturers. The effectiveness of the existing LSSs could be improved by involving lecturers so that they also contribute in moulding the future of the students outside the classroom environment. One participant even commented by saying lecturers should be parents first before they are lecturers, meaning that they should be part of the solution. This is what is declared by the logo of this institution which says: ‘Reaching Greater Heights Together.’

It is hoped that this study will contribute towards strategic ways in which student dropout rates could be managed in the college so as to improve the throughput rates and certification rates. It is also hoped that this study will be of great assistance to the management of the college and other stakeholders in rooting out the challenges faced by the students. An excellent job has already been covered by many researchers in raising the awareness of the high rates of student dropouts. The above recommendations require dedication, interest, enthusiasm and genuine commitment from the DHET, senior management of the college, parents, lecturers and students.

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**DHET 004: APPENDIX 1: APPLICATION FORM FOR STUDENTS TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN PUBLIC COLLEGES****6. DECLARATION BY THE APPLICANT**

I undertake to use the information that I acquire through my research, in a balanced and a responsible manner. I furthermore take note of, and agree to adhere to the following conditions:

- a) I will schedule my research activities in consultation with the said institution and participants. I will not interrupt the said institution's programmes.
- b) I agree that involvement by participants in the research study is voluntary, and that participants have a right to decline to participate in the investigation.
- c) I will therefore provide consent forms to participants to complete prior to the commencement of the research.
- d) I will obtain written parental consent of students under 18 years, if they are expected to participate in the study.
- e) I will honour the right of participants to privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and respect for human dignity at all times. Participants will not be identifiable in any way from the result of the investigation.
- f) I will not include the names of the said institution or research participants in my research report, without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or institutions.
- g) I will not use the resources of the said institution (such as stationery, photocopies, faxes, and telephones) for the research study.
- h) I will inform participants about the use of monitoring devices such as tape-recorders and cameras, and participants will be free to reject them if they wish.
- i) I will include a disclaimer to any report, publication or presentation arising from the investigation, that the findings and recommendations does not represent the views of the said institution.
- j) I will provide a summary of the findings of the research to the Head of the specific institution.

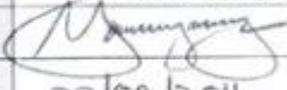
I declare that all statements made in this application are true and accurate. I accept the conditions associated with the granting of approval to conduct research and undertake to abide by them.

SIGNATURE:	
DATE:	18 August 2016

**DHET 004: APPENDIX 1: APPLICATION FORM FOR STUDENTS TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN PUBLIC COLLEGES**

**FOR OFFICIAL USE**

**DECISION BY HEAD OF INSTITUTION**

<i>Please tick relevant decision and provide conditions/reasons where applicable</i>		
Decision		<i>Please tick relevant option</i>
1	Application approved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2	Application approved subject to certain conditions. <i>Specify conditions below.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Application not approved. <i>Provide reasons for non-approval below.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
NAME AND SURNAME:		SANELE J MLOTSHWA
SIGNATURE:		
DATE:		22/08/2016

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE**

16 November 2016

Ref : 2016/11/16/36429105/63/MC  
Student : Ms KJ Mduli  
Student Number : 36429105

Dear Ms Mduli

**Decision: Approved**

**Researcher:** Ms KJ Mduli  
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**Proposal:** Managing dropout rates at a Technical Vocational Education and Training College in KwaZulu Natal

**Qualification:** M Ed in Educational Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted for the duration of the research.

*The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee on 16 November 2016.*

*The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:*

- 1) The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.*
- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the College of Education Ethics Review Committee. An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the*



existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.

- 3) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.

*Note:*

The reference number **2016/11/16/36429105/63/MC** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication (e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters) with the intended research participants, as well as with the College of Education RERC.

Kind regards,



**Dr M Claassens**  
**CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC**  
m.cdtc@netactive.co.za



**Prof VJ McKay**  
**EXECUTIVE DEAN**



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**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION**

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study in managing student dropout rates. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and add any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Participant Name (Please print): .....

Participant Signature: .....

Researcher Name: (Please print) KJ MDLULI

Researcher Signature:



DATE: .....

## **REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW**

Dear Lecturer

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I Koko Mdluli, am conducting as part of my research as a master's student entitled at the University of South Africa. Permission for the study has been given by Department of Education and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA. I have purposefully identified you as a possible participant because of your valuable experience and expertise related to my research topic.

I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you should agree to take part. The importance of managing dropout rates in education is substantial and well documented. In this interview I would like to have your views and opinions on this topic. This information can be used to improve the throughput and certification rate in our college thus ensuring that more learners are equipped with the necessary skills to meet the labour market demand.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 45 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location at a time convenient to you. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences.

With your kind permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of accurate information and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the transcription has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or to clarify any points. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission,

Anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for **5 years** in my locked office. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 0823196853 or by e-mail at mdluliko2@gmail.com.

I look forward to speaking with you very much and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign the consent form which follows on the next page

Yours sincerely



.....

KJ MDLULI

SUPERVISOR: T Zengele

Email: tzengele@unisa.ac.za

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
<p>1. What is the understanding of the management of dropout rates at TVET Colleges?</p>	<p>a. What are your feelings about student dropout rate at this college?</p> <p>b. Are there any measures taken by management to assist in managing student dropout rate?</p> <p>c. What procedures are followed to identify if a student has dropout or he/she is just absent?</p> <p>d. Do students dropout during a specific period of the year?</p>
<p>2. What are the causes of student dropout at TVET Colleges?</p>	<p>a. What factors related to the institution contribute to student dropout?</p> <p>b. What individual factors related to students themselves contribute to the dropout rate?</p> <p>c. How does family background contribute to student dropout?</p> <p>d. Which community factors could influence student dropout?</p>
<p>3. What are the effects of student dropout?</p>	<p>a. What effects does dropping out have to the student?</p> <p>b. What effects does student dropout have to the college and the lecturing staff?</p> <p>c. What effect does student dropout have to the community and the country at large?</p>
<p>4. How could lecturers and management assist in managing student dropout rate?</p>	<p>a. What could be done to survey student dropout and absenteeism?</p> <p>b. What measures could be taken to identify and promote good practices for preventing dropout and absenteeism?</p> <p>c. How could parental involvement assist in managing student dropout?</p> <p>d. How could the college environment be improved in order to assist with managing student dropout rate?</p>

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUPS

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
<p>1. What is the understanding of the management of dropout rates at TVET Colleges?</p>	<p>a. How is student dropout rate managed at TVET Colleges?</p> <p>b. What procedures are there to identify student dropout or absenteeism</p> <p>c. What actions are taken if a student is absent for a long time?</p>
<p>2. What are the causes of student dropout at TVET Colleges?</p>	<p>a. To what extent does the institutional factors influence student dropout?</p> <p>b. Do family factors influence student dropout?</p> <p>c. What individual factors experienced by students could influence student dropout rates?</p> <p>d. How could community environment influence student dropout rates?</p>
<p>3. What are the effects of student dropout?</p>	<p>a. Which challenges could be experienced by the institution due to student dropout rate?</p> <p>b. How could students be affected by dropout?</p> <p>c. How is the community affected by student dropout?</p>
<p>4. How could lecturers and management assist in managing student dropout rate?</p>	<p>a. What strategies could be implemented by management to assist with managing student dropout rate?</p> <p>b. What role could be played by lecturers to assist with managing student dropout rate?</p>