

**Stakeholder management of student absenteeism at a TVET college in Tshwane
North district.**

by

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Student number: 22449842

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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in the

Department of Education Management and Policy Studies

at the

Faculty of Education

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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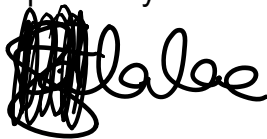
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I, Tinyeko Thelma Ndlalane-Bapela (Student Number: 22449842), hereby declare that this study entitled: **Stakeholder management of student absenteeism at a TVET college in Tshwane North district**, which is submitted for the degree of Master's in Education in the Department of Education Management, Law and Policy Studies at the University of Pretoria has not previously been submitted by me for any other degree or examination at this university or any other university. It is my own work, and information from other sources used are duly acknowledged by appropriate references.

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Stakeholder management of student

absenteeism at a TVET college in Tshwane

North district, Pretoria.

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Ethics Statement

The ethical standards listed above were adhered to in this dissertation. The ethical considerations upheld in the study are discussed in detail in section 3.10.

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COLLEGE IN TSHWANE NORTH DISTRICT, PRETORIA

by

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I declare that I have edited the above master's dissertation, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree MEd Education Management, Law and Policy, ensuring that the work follows the conventions of grammar and syntax, correcting misspelling and incorrect punctuation, changing any misused words and querying if the word used is what is intended, ensuring consistency in terms of spelling, punctuation, capitalisation and other aspects of style, as well as checking referencing style.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my late study friend Lerato Mothibe, my lovely husband (Lesiba April Bapela), my two children (Amokelani Bapela and Nkateko Bapela), my parents (Leah Ndlalane and John Ndlalane) and my little sister (Mary-Jane Molekoa) for their love and support shown from the beginning of my studies. I am very grateful and proud to be part of your lives. May the Almighty protect you and give you strength to live longer. Thank you so much, my family.

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My sincere gratitude to Tshwane North TVET College for granting me permission to conduct my study on one of their campuses.

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To God be the Glory

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate how a TVET college in Pretoria manages absenteeism among students. My rationale for the study was to reduce recurring absenteeism among students which results in lecturers not completing work scheduled for the week. The study adopted a qualitative case study within an Interpretivism paradigm. A sample of 14 participants was purposefully selected and drawn from TVET lecturers, heads of department (HoDs), student support officers and National Certificate Vocational (NCV) students experiencing high rates of absenteeism. The data were analysed thematically and synthesised to form themes which addressed the research questions. The findings of this study revealed factors contributing to student absenteeism to include personal factors, family factors, socioeconomic factors and institutional factors. However, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) was found to be the main contributing factor owing to its late payments to students. The findings of the study further revealed that lecturers are finding it difficult to complete the syllabus on time. It is recommended that the college should have a nurse on campus, lecturers should stick to the syllabus, and the college should have accommodation and arrange transport for those students who live a long way from the college. When students apply to the NSFAS for assistance, this should be facilitated at the beginning of the academic year. It is further recommended that the policy be reviewed to make it mandatory for parents to be involved in their children's education.

Keywords: students, absenteeism, attendance, attendance policy, TVET College, NSFAS, authorised absenteeism, unauthorised absenteeism

Abbreviations

CBD – Central business district

DHET – Department of Higher Education and Training

DoE – Department of Education

FET – Further Education and Training

HoD – Head of department

HRDC – Human Resources Development Council

L – Lecturer

NCV – National Certificate: Vocational

NQF – National Qualification Framework

NSFAS – National Student Financial Aid Scheme

PASS – Personal and Academic Support System

PED – Provincial Education District

PSET – Post-school Education and Training

RSA – Republic of South Africa

SSO – Student support officer

STUD – Student

TVET – Technical and Vocational Education and Training

UNESCO – United National Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisations

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction and background to the study

The South African college sector was developed in the early 20th century to combine theoretical learning with practical training in the apprenticeship system. Before 1994, the colleges were referred to as technical colleges (DoE, 1995). However, in 1994, the government initiated a policy development process for the transformation of the Further Education and Training (FET) college sector by publishing Education White Paper 4 (DoE, 1998a) which resulted in the Further Education and Training (FET) Act 98 of 1998 (DoE, 1998b). According to the White Paper for Post-College Education and Training (DHET, 2013), the purpose of further education and training colleges is to train college leavers by simply providing skills, knowledge and attitudes so that they are employable in the labour market for the development of the state economy.

In 2007, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) implemented the National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) to address the ineffectiveness and shortcomings of the qualifications offered by the old technical colleges. In 2014, the DHET announced that FET colleges, referred to as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, had to define a clear role and character for themselves within the South African education system, while aligning their existence to international practice (DHET, 2014). The curriculum requirement for NCV in, for example, both Business Studies and Engineering Studies is a minimum of Grade 9, but a higher qualification is an advantage. NCV, which consists of Levels 2, 3 and 4, is equivalent to Grade 12 and is a full-year programme that runs for three years. It comprises seven subjects per level with three compulsory fundamental subjects, namely, English First Additional Language, Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy and Life Orientation, as well as four vocational or core subjects. The programme combines both theory and practice (DHET, 2013).

To ensure quality education, the Green Paper on Post College Education and Training (2012) states that the FET Act of 2006 guides TVET colleges on how to discipline students (TVET Colleges South Africa, 2018). Further, the College Attendance and Punctuality Policy of 2013 guides on issues such as student discipline, student absenteeism and student behaviour in TVET colleges.

Through the Punctuality Policy (DHET, 2013) the DHET prescribes that TVET colleges should set and enforce compliance with high levels of attendance and punctuality to improve students' chances of success and to prepare them for the professional culture of the workplace (DHET, 2013, p. 1). The policy emphasises that class attendance should be 100% and that absenteeism should not exceed 20%. It further states that students are authorised to be absent only if they have reported their reasons to their lecturer in advance and this is limited to specific situations. Regardless of the stipulated conditions, absenteeism among NCV students remains a huge challenge, hence I sought to investigate how a TVET college in Tshwane North district manages student absenteeism. It should have borne in mind that the majority of students in TVET colleges come from impoverished households.

1.2 Research problem

Student absenteeism is the leading challenge when it comes to the administration and management of classes (Kasita, 2019). According to Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) student absenteeism is the biggest challenge experienced by colleges in South Africa. This problem has worsened in South African TVET colleges in particular (Sharmin et al., 2017). The Punctuality Policy (DHET, 2013) recognises a positive relationship between class attendance, student retention and achievement. Despite this policy, absenteeism remains a burning issue among students in TVET colleges.

Research suggests that many students miss classes and those who do attend do not attend regularly (Hidayat et al., 2012). It further attests to the fact that students miss assignment deadlines and tests without valid reasons (Khalid & Mehmood, 2017). According to Stanley (2014), a student who misses class loses good learning opportunities and this is likely to affect his/her achievement in a course. Additionally, the government subsidises the college studies of most of students through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) programme. In terms of section 7.2 and

subsection 7.2.1 of the NSFAS regulating policy guideline, a continuing student must obtain at least a 50% pass in all courses to qualify for funding (DHET, 2021, p.15). However, it is impossible for students with high absenteeism rates to obtain such average scores.

According to Khalid and Mehmood's research in 2017, absenteeism has a significant impact on students' academic performance. When students miss classes, they miss out on important curricular topics and content, making it challenging for instructors to conduct classes smoothly. They may have to start previous lessons to make up for absent students, which can be time-consuming. Despite this, lecturers and college administrators promise to provide remediation or makeup time to ensure that students can complete the coursework. However, these plans often fall through due to students' non-attendance at the catch-up programs provided for them. To address this issue, lecturers and college administrators have given up their weekends, afternoons, and holidays to create catch-up programs for students who miss classes. They have even hired outside lecturers to make up for students who fail a subject or receive lower-than-expected grades.

However, some students are discouraged from attending certain classes due to scheduling conflicts, and others simply do not bother to attend catch-up classes that are organised for their benefit. As a result, student absenteeism is seen as a waste of educational resources. The college policy strongly disagrees with absenteeism, as teaching and learning cannot take place in the absence of regulations (Kasita, 2019). Students who do not attend classes are deprived of the social and intellectual opportunities that colleges provide. They often receive lower grades and produce subpar work. Regular attendance is crucial for students to achieve their desired learning outcomes, as missing out on key concepts can hinder their progress (Otto, 2016). Irregular attendance may even lead to dropping out of college. Therefore, schools have a responsibility to emphasise their attendance policy and effectively manage student attendance to ensure a successful learning experience.

Student absenteeism has become a significant and ongoing issue among college students in many countries. Many studies have been conducted to determine why students miss classes (Balkis, 2016). Balkis (2016) has identified various risk factors that contribute to student absenteeism, such as family health, low income, poor school

climate, drug and alcohol use, transportation problems, and community attitudes towards education. Students who rely on NSFAS funding may be impacted by these attendance factors.

This then suggests that unauthorised absence could lead to the termination of the NSFAS payment for the rest of the semester/trimester or the student may be permanently disqualified due to poor performance. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that I deemed it imperative to investigate the way in which TVET colleges manage NCV student absenteeism. In addition, Mahlalela (2019) argues that there has been little attention given to studying student absenteeism compared to other educational topics. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of literature on student absenteeism in South African public and private colleges.

1.3 Statement of purpose

This section consists of the aim and objectives of the study.

1.3.1 Aim of the study

The main aim of this study was to explore how a TVET college in Tshwane North district manages student absenteeism. To achieve this aim, the following objectives formed my guiding steps.

1.3.2 Objectives of the study

- To determine how a TVET college in Tshwane North district interprets and understands the concept of student absenteeism.
- To identify factors contributing to student absenteeism in a TVET college in Tshwane North district.
- To explore the challenges that a TVET college in Tshwane North district experiences with regard to student absenteeism.
- To determine the strategies a TVET college in Tshwane North district uses to reduce student absenteeism.

1.4 Main research questions

The following primary research question and secondary research questions were formulated for this study.

1.4.1 Primary research question

This study will be guided by the primary research question which reads as follows: “How does a TVET college in Tshwane North district manage student absenteeism?”

1.4.2 Secondary questions

The following secondary research questions will help me to answer the main question:

- How does a TVET college in Tshwane North district interpret and understand the concept of student absenteeism?
- What factors contribute to student absenteeism in a TVET college in Tshwane North district?
- What challenges does a TVET college in Tshwane North district experience regarding student absenteeism?
- What strategies does a TVET college in Tshwane North district use to reduce student absenteeism?

1.5 Rationale

In my position as lecturer at a TVET college in Tshwane North district for the past 14 years, I have observed the recurring absenteeism of students. I became aware of the high levels of student absenteeism when I became responsible for ensuring that class registers were signed on a daily basis. Some of our students are repeatedly absent from college for both valid and invalid reasons. I consequently became aware of the fact that the absenteeism negatively affected the progress of my teaching, leaving me unable to complete the work scheduled and being forced to repeat learning material that was taught during students’ absence. This takes time away from my other duties such as, planning, administrative work and giving individual attention to deserving students.

Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) state that when students are absent from class, they miss a lot of valuable information. This results in the lecturer spending class time re-teaching and takes time and attention away from regular class attendees.

Student absenteeism impact badly on teaching and learning (Asante, 2019), hence the need to study the challenges that are brought about by student absenteeism, so that by articulating these problems, we find solutions to improve college attendance and ultimately improve academic performance. Student absenteeism is often overlooked and not tackled. The reality is that attention is focused only on daily attendance, not student absenteeism. Thus, it is important to track student absenteeism not just average daily attendance. I moreover, student absenteeism is a serious problem in South Africa, for lecturers, parents, the community and particularly the students.

Mahlalela (2019) argues that there has been little attention given to studying student absenteeism compared to other educational topics. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of literature on student absenteeism in South African public and private colleges. The study hopes to publish its findings in academic journal articles, books, and conference presentations. The research findings will strengthen the arguments of some scholars and refute those of others. The study provides a deeper understanding of student absenteeism and a more accurate analysis of why some students consistently miss classes.

The literature related to this phenomenon focuses mainly on university, medical students and absenteeism among workers in the workplace (Badubi, 2017; Balkis et al., 2016; Ocaik et al., 2017), whereas in this study I intend to focus on how management, lecturers and students in a TVET college in Tshwane North district manage student absenteeism. Furthermore, while most studies conducted on this phenomenon used quantitative research methods, I have engaged qualitative research methods in this study to gain an in-depth perspective on this phenomenon.

1.6 Preliminary literature review

In this section, I give an overview of what is known about this topic from an international, continental and local perspective by reviewing the relevant literature. In doing so, I have divided this section into five subsections. In the first subsection, I discuss the nature of absenteeism according to research, while I present factors that contribute to student

absenteeism in the second subsection. The third subsection explores the effects of student absenteeism whereas the fourth outlines the challenges it presents. In the fifth subsection I present the management of student absenteeism and conclude this section by pointing out the gaps that I intend to close by conducting this study.

1.6.1 Student absenteeism

Eneza Education (2013) and Rao and Valleswary (2016) describe student absenteeism as the practice of missing college for no reason. Similarly, Abdelrahman and Abdelkader (2017) define student absenteeism as a situation in which a student is missing from college for the entire day. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) agree with the previous scholars but add some justification to this definition. They see student absenteeism as the total number of days missed at college, including both excused and unexcused absences. Based on the above definitions and descriptions of student absenteeism, this study defined student absenteeism as the number of consecutive days the student is absent from college, whether authorised or unauthorised.

From a global perspective, Dubay and Holla (2016) state that absenteeism in elementary institutions is related to achievement in these institutions. A study conducted in Turkey by Balkis et al. (2016) discovered that high absenteeism had an impact on student performance. These authors go on to say that student absenteeism has become a persistent problem among high college students in many nations. According to Al-Shammari (2016), the significance of developing and implementing classroom management approaches to improve university classroom attendance is indicated by associated absenteeism issues. For example, most Kuwaiti colleges, as well as many others throughout the world, do not require students to attend class, allowing them the freedom to do so or not. In college courses, however, class attendance is linked to grades. Furthermore, if class attendance is not required, students will fail to attend classes on a regular basis.

From an African perspective, a study in Ghana argues that the value of education has encouraged the introduction and implementation of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education policy in 1995 which has put useful strategies in place to encourage daily attendance and student retention in all colleges across the country (Asante, 2019). According to Morris (2015), students at Botswana TVET colleges who are living in

isolated areas experience poverty and, as a result, their attendance and performance are affected negatively.

From a South African perspective, absenteeism is a serious issue in higher education in South Africa (DHET, 2013). Simelane (2013) discovered that absenteeism at a nursing campus is higher in the clinical area than in the college area.

As Myataza (2019) puts it, students' absence from college may be caused by various factors, including socioeconomic factors. In this respect the NSFAS payments are sometimes cited as the main source of high absenteeism rates among students in South African colleges. Furthermore, this scholar indicates that owing to significant absenteeism, lecturers are unable to complete the syllabus. According to a study conducted in the North West province of South Africa by Kasita (2019), student absenteeism is commonly discussed and seen as a significant measure that demonstrates the character of schooling and an important predictor of student achievement. According to Manyau (2014), non-attendance is one of the main reasons why students fail to meet college requirements. Furthermore, student wrongdoing disrupts educational objectives at TVET campuses. Students who are absent without good reason demonstrate a lack of interest in the education they are receiving (Manyau, 2014).

According to the extensive literature review, most studies on student absenteeism have focused more on secondary and medical colleges. There is therefore a need to investigate this phenomenon from the TVET college perspective in order to close the existing gap in the literature.

1.6.2 Factors contributing to student absenteeism

Research evidence suggests that a number of factors contribute to student absenteeism. These include personal, family, college and environmental factors, which are discussed below.

1.6.2.1 *Personal factors*

According to a study conducted by Ocak et al. (2017) students do not believe that the cause of absence is related to themselves or the circumstances that affect them. Therefore, Balkis et al. (2016) argue that student absenteeism is negatively associated

with personal aspects such as academic self-perception, attitudes toward instructors, and college. As a result, those who do not define goals are more likely to be absent and have increased rates of absenteeism and dropout from college.

It is observed that students who face difficulties in learning may feel discouraged and avoid college altogether, as per the research conducted by Dubay and Holla (2016). Conversely, students who perform well academically are more likely to attend college. According to Asante (2019), absenteeism among students is triggered by various factors such as laziness, peer pressure, lack of motivation, and commitment to learning. Sometimes, students skip classes because of peer pressure to socialize with friends, as pointed out by Wadesango and Machinganbi (2011). Similarly, Mahlalela (2019) suggests that some students are influenced by their friends to skip college and engage in activities outside of it.

According to Mahlalela's (2019) study, student absenteeism is often caused by health issues. He specifically mentions that illnesses like asthma can lead to students missing school. Similarly, Myataza (2019) states that minor illnesses such as the flu or asthma, as well as injuries, can result in inconsistent college attendance. However, limited access to healthcare facilities, especially in high-poverty areas, can also contribute to student absenteeism.

1.6.2.2 Family factors

Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) argue that family pressure harms students' studies. However, according to Ocak et al. (2017), students' absence is unrelated to their parents. Balkis et al. (2016) found that students whose parents had a high level of education had a lower rate of college absenteeism, while Yildiz and Kula (2011) found that parents' poor level of education contributed to students' college absenteeism. I agree with these findings that parents' educational levels may have a negative impact on their children's education because I believe that if a parent were fully involved in their children's education, they would not allow them to be absent from college for no reason.

According to Mahlalela (2019), there exists a relationship between student absenteeism and parental involvement. The author also notes that parents hardly participate in their children's college activities. Kasita (2019) affirms that children whose parents hold negative perceptions about education are more likely to skip college. Additionally,

Mahlalela (2019) and Kasita (2019) explain that uneducated parents may not necessarily appreciate the value of education.

1.6.2.3 Institutional factors

In researching the causes of absenteeism in college students, Ocaik et al. (2017) discovered that students do not remain absent due to college-related issues, although Gökyer (2012) claims that students agree or partially agree with the causes of absenteeism connected to the college. According to Wadesango and Machingambi (2011), poor teaching practices, a boring learning environment, poor socioeconomic situations and weak student–teacher interaction are among the causes of absenteeism from college. Student absenteeism tends to be associated with strict college management, packed classrooms and tough college rules, according to Suhid et al. (2012). Some students have been observed to be missing from college due to fear of punishment, while others are missing owing to illness (Latif Khan et al., 2019).

According to Wadesango & Machingambi (2011), absenteeism may be caused by lecturers who are harsh and have high expectations of their students, while Hidayat et al. (2012) state that the key influencing elements of absenteeism are the teaching method, teaching style and the teacher's personality. Heinesen (2010) goes on to say that lecturers' ability and competency have improved student performance and that certain teaching styles have improved understanding of the subjects taught. According to Adıgüzel and Karadaş (2013), Suhid et al. (2012) and Gökyer (2012), negative attitudes towards both lecturers and colleges on the part of students play a significant role in college absenteeism.

1.6.2.4 Environmental factors

Resources at educational institutions may be lacking. For example, owing to a shortage of lecture venues these may become overcrowded. Overcrowding in venues, according to Vink and Adejumo (2015), allows wrongdoers to misbehave without being caught. Furthermore, lecturers without enough space to accommodate students, may push students who are free to be idle during lecture time, resulting in laziness or absence. A study on student dropout in KwaZulu-Natal conducted by Mdluli (2017), attests to the fact that students drop out of college as a result of a lack of or insufficient infrastructure and resources. However, Maclean and Fien (2017) argue that a shortage of resources

derives from the over-enrolment of students. Geda (2016) attributes a shortage of resources to the government's lack of funding.

Asante (2019) found that the environment plays a crucial role in enhancing early learning and mental perception. Kelly's (2018) study also demonstrated that students who are exposed to enriched environments with laboratory equipment or are taught using instructional aids and pictures perform better than those without such aids. Asante's (2019) study further revealed that inadequate infrastructure affects the quality of teaching and learning, leading to high rates of student absenteeism. On the other hand, improving the infrastructure with proper equipment promotes quality teaching and learning, which ultimately leads to better academic performance.

1.6.3 Effects of student absenteeism

Students' regular attendance is a key factor in their performance and progress (Kasita, 2019). Furthermore, Kasita states that non-attendance by students has the potential to hamper many areas of the college environment. Additionally, students who do not attend classes regularly risk dropping out of college and becoming impoverished or involved in criminal behaviour (Kasita, 2019). Moreover, students who do not attend class miss out on the knowledge presented during the lesson and, as a result, may find it difficult to cope with their college work (Katanga, 2016). Otto (2016) remarks that students who are absent from college may be subjected to short-term effects such as failure to complete college projects and they may, as a result, not perform as expected. Additionally, Nzembe (2018) argues that there is a small positive relationship between attendance and academic achievement, indicating that a few absences do not lead to poor grades but excessive absenteeism does.

1.6.4 Stakeholder management of student absenteeism

It is critical for a college to preserve attendance register information when dealing with student absences. Attendance registers, according to Thobakgale (2013), are a critical management tool for tracking student attendance. According to the DHET (2013), TVET colleges must provide attendance registers to monitor and manage student attendance, as students with poor attendance may be identified using their attendance records (Kelly, 2018). College management and lecturers must provide a register for students to sign in every period, and an absence form should be used as a tool to monitor student

attendance (DHET, 2013). Katanga (2016) mentions that a disciplinary model could be used to regulate student absenteeism, and an effective strategy is to engage peer academic student leaders to function as peer mentors and provide counselling to students who are having difficulties.

Accordingly, high-achieving pupils can be identified and trained to assist other students (Kasita, 2019). However, Katanga (2016) identified various approaches to student absenteeism, which include psychological, social, criminal and educational. The psychological approach concentrates on the child, college phobia, separation anxiety, college refusal interventions, and different types of therapy and medication. The college should make it mandatory to inform students, especially new students, of the importance of attendance. According to Fayombo et al. (2012), students must have a minimum of 75% attendance to be allowed to write examinations at the University of Ibadan. This policy makes both the monitoring and recording of students' attendance at lectures a required activity, with the goal of using to decide exam admission.

1.6.5 Challenges in management of student absenteeism

Colleges' day-to-day operations are hampered by student absenteeism. Such absenteeism has a significant negative impact on college programmes, as colleges are unable to submit documents on time. According to Mboweni (2014), student absenteeism hampers administrative and disciplinary issues relating to the college. Lecturers and students, on the other hand, frequently do not take absenteeism as a serious matter. Modise (2016) states that discipline should be enforced on those students who do not attend classes. Additionally, this author asserts that students take advantage knowing that corporal punishment will not be applied as it has been abolished. Myataza (2019) agrees with Modise by arguing that discipline may be enforced in order to send a message to other students that absenteeism is not acceptable behaviour. Student absenteeism has an impact on student lack of content knowledge, drop-out and grade failure rate.

1.6.5.1 *Content Knowledge*

Regular attendance in college is essential for students to acquire content knowledge and important information taught. According to Mahlalela (2019), learning is progressive, and lesson plans are created to ensure progress in comprehending concepts and content knowledge. If a student misses several days, they cannot access the notes and presentations taught during their absence, which disrupts the learning process. As a result, students with irregular absences miss out on a lot of information because knowledge builds up on each other. Moreover, regular attendance is crucial for students to master all concepts taught from the beginning to the end of the chapter, thereby acquiring comprehensive content knowledge (Mahlalela, 2019).

1.6.5.2 *Group discussions*

When a student's miss college on days when collaborations are done, they miss out on important points and ideas that were shared during the discussions. According to Gottfried (2014), student absenteeism can lead to poor participation in important classroom discussions. As a result, students with high absenteeism may be unable to make contributions during class presentations due to insufficient preparation, which ultimately leads to poor performance.

1.6.5.3 *Drop out*

Gottfried (2014) state that poor academic performance can lead to students dropping out of college. When students fail to make progress academically, they may feel frustrated and lose hope, ultimately leading them to drop out. Mahlalela (2019) indicate that students with a high rate of absenteeism may lack motivation and interest in their studies, especially if they feel alienated from their classmates, peers, lecturers, or the college in general.

1.7 Systematic theory of management

This study was underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory. Systems theory, according to Greenfield (2011), is a theory that focuses on people and their environments which are connected and interrelated. Furthermore, this environment forms a diverse range of organisational levels.

There is a definite relationship between student absenteeism and the environment in which they live in. Therefore, an ecosystem approach was useful in this study, as it aimed to explore the management of student absenteeism at a TVET college (Mc Guckin and Minton, 2014).

Ecosystem ideologies are important because they link a person's mental development to the environment and acknowledge the impact of the environment on human behaviour (Visser, 2007). Systems theory and ecological systems theory link student mental development to the environment they live in and how this environment can affect their daily attendance. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1994) divides an individual's environment into four spheres, one of which is the individual student's settings. These spheres, which include the student's family and college, may intensify or mitigate absenteeism among students. The four layers of external influence in development contexts are the microsystem, the mesosystem, the ecosystem and the macrosystem.

The microsystem includes all face-to-face contact in the developing person's immediate environment, such as with the family, college, peer group and community. Interactions between numerous settings, linking the child to the teacher, the parent, the church and the neighbourhood, form the mesosystem, which has a structural relationship with the microsystem. The ecosystem refers to a huge social system that does not directly include the child and is external to the child but nevertheless has an impact on the child. The macrosystem is the highest level at which a child's beliefs, attitudes and customs are influenced. Ecological systems theory has thus been utilised to identify concerns and guide this research. The college administration should first identify the issue in order to address it straightforwardly. Colleges are social systems that easily collaborate with other systems.

This theory guided my study because it presents the factors that college management can look at when managing student absenteeism; these include the college environment, family factors, lecturer–student relationships in the institution, as well as student factors. An ecological systems approach to managing student absenteeism was applied in this study to help me understand the relationship between student absentees and other individuals, the absentees' developmental level and the environment (ecology) in which they live as it has to be considered to explore how a TVET college in

Tshwane North district manages student absenteeism. Furthermore, this approach was used to determine issues and give direction for a plan of action after the problem was identified.

1.8. Research methodology and design

In this section the research paradigm, approach and design that guided the study is discussed. The population that participated in the study is defined, and there is a description of the sampling techniques and data collection instruments that were employed for the study. There is a brief preview of how data was collected and analysed, as well as a brief discussion of how trustworthiness was promoted.

1.8.1. Research paradigm

An interpretive paradigm was used in this study since it sought to explain the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind a social action. According to Cohen et al. (2007), an interpretive paradigm is an investigation of collective disciplines and a lens through which a natural phenomenon may be scrutinised. I believe that by applying an interpretive paradigm in this study allowed me to make sense of the meaning of the participants' world and the reality studied consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Accordingly, participants were free to raise views about managing absenteeism among NCV students at the college in the study.

1.8.2 Research approach

In this study, a qualitative approach was employed. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), qualitative research is “exploratory, organic and open-ended, it produces in-depth, rich and detailed data from which to make claims”. In a qualitative study, the aim is to gain in-depth information on how stakeholders manage student absenteeism (Maree, 2016). A qualitative approach was deemed to be appropriate for my study because it studied a phenomenon naturally and allowed me to be fully involved in the study (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The qualitative approach applied in this research project assisted me to explore the way in which stakeholders manage student absenteeism.

1.8.3 Research design

The design for my research involved a case study. According to (Yin, 2011), “a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries of the context and phenomenon are not shown”. I used the case study as my research design because it allowed me to study the management of NCV student absenteeism and assisted me to better understand the management of student absenteeism from participants' lived experiences within a particular context (Maree, 2016). Accordingly, a single case study was used to explore stakeholder management of student absenteeism in a TVET college in Tshwane North district. This study entailed an in-depth investigation of the views of participants regarding NCV student absenteeism (Creswell, 2009).

1.8.4 Sampling technique

A sample is defined as a representative of a selected population in research (Bless et al., 2013). I used a purposive sampling technique to select the sample in this study. The reason for this choice was that NCV students and other stakeholders were sampled specifically based on the poor attendance of students in the college. Purposive sampling is employed in circumstances where sampling is done for a specific reason (Maree, 2016). I purposefully sampled students who were 18 years and older and who were registered for NCV NQF levels 2 and 3, as they are experienced students at a TVET college and were able to provide information for my study. I also sampled four HoDs with five years' managerial experience at the TVET College, two lecturers with three years' teaching experience at the college and two student support officers (SSOs) with five years' experience in the support office. These participants worked on one campus and the criteria helped to avoid biases.

1.8.5 Study sites

In this study, one TVET college in Tshwane North district was used. I sampled this site purposefully as it is the only public TVET College in the Pretoria CBD that offers NCV programmes and thus gave me a wider perspective on the subject as my main focus was on NCV students. According to Merriam (2009), interpretive research allows the researcher to use a small sample or even single cases, which are selected purposefully to allow the researcher to focus in depth on issues important to the study. The focal

point of this study was on stakeholder management of student absenteeism at a TVET college in Tshwane North district. To avoid bias, as I conducted research at the campus where I am employed, I maintained professionalism and adhered to ethical principles throughout.

1.8.6 Participants

Participants in this study included the HoDs and SSOs. As managers, they form part of the college management and they could inform me on how absence is dealt with at the college level. The other participants were lecturers and NCV students. Lecturers are the people who are in contact with students daily and NCV students are students who have dropped out from the mainstream without acquiring Grade 12 and thus ventured into TVET colleges to further their studies. These students were my focus in this study. Fourteen participants were interviewed: four HODs, two lecturers, two SSOs, and six NCV students over the age of 18 (as it could have been challenging to obtain consent from parents). It is my belief that in order for the issue of absenteeism to be fully addressed, students must be part of the solution. Their participation in this study was therefore crucial for two reasons: (1) democratic participation when plans that affect them directly or indirectly are being made; (2) for their buy-in to whatever decisions the school makes in this regard.

1.9 Data collection strategies

The study employed semi-structured individual interviews to collect data. In addition, participants were selected based on their relevance to the study. Lecturers and management staff were subjected to one-on-one semi-structured interview to collect their opinions. Semi-structured interviews were employed to capture participants' perspectives and acquire more detailed information about the research problem (Creswell, 2013). To strengthen and identify the scope of the research problem, official government papers such as public further education and training college attendance policies were reviewed (De Vos et al., 2011).

1.9.1 Semi-structured interviews

The data collection process for this study was the use of semi-structured interviews. An interview is a two-way conversation where the interviewer asks participants questions

as a way of collecting data; that is, to obtain the ideas, beliefs, views and opinions of the participants, as well as to observe their behaviour (Maree, 2016, p. 92). A semi-structured interview consists of a series of open-ended questions which depend on the topics the researcher wants to explore (Mathers et al., 2002). Semi-structured individual interviews were used in this study to collect in-depth data. These allowed participants to give their views and opinions about the management of student absenteeism.

Open-ended questions were applied during the semi-structured interviews as they helped me gather detailed information from participants on the management of student absenteeism (Maree, 2016). Interviews were recorded with permission from the participants and notes were taken during the interview to review answers and to ask additional questions after the interview. The strength of a semi-structured interview is that it makes it easy to compare results and interviews are conducted so as to allow all the participants to be asked the same question (Adams, 2015). Additionally, participants are free to talk about anything in detail and in depth. On the other hand, the weaknesses of semi-structured interviews lie in the fact that they are time-consuming and expensive, it may not be possible to tell if the participants are lying, and lastly, the findings may not be generalised.

1.10 Data analysis

The methodological paradigm employed in this study was qualitative research (Maree, 2016). Qualitative data analysis is typically a continuous and iterative process, suggesting that data gathering, processing, analysis and reporting are all linked and not just a series of processes (Maree, 2016, p. 109). This study used an inductive data analysis because my epistemological paradigm was interpretive. However, inductive data analysis is straightforward and it helped me learn from the participants' experiences. Because such an analysis can be time consuming, a small sample was used in order to overcome the challenges. I interpreted and analysed my data by noticing, collecting and reflecting (Maree, 2016). Specific gaps, for example, were identified as I reflected on the data gathered during the interviews, and if additional data were required, these were gathered. This, in some ways, assisted me in identifying gaps in the data obtained and obtaining further information to develop a conclusion. Data were interpreted and organised into themes and categories in line with the study questions and objectives (Maree, 2016).

1.11 Trustworthiness

This study addressed the problems experienced by many lecturers when dealing with student absenteeism. It is essential to ensure the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. This study aimed to come up with an understanding of why students absent themselves from college; accordingly, the trustworthiness of the data can be determined by comparing them to other perspectives and methodologies derived from the literature describing trends in college student absenteeism. The research procedure and findings were documented using audio-taped data and data on the observations during the interviews. Perceptions, insights and interpretations of students were achieved in this manner. Qualitative research deals with trustworthiness that relates to the following: credibility, confirmability, transferability, dependability and authenticity (Maree, 2016).

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I applied the characteristics of credibility, confirmability, transferability, dependability and authenticity. Credibility relates to the research study's resemblance to reality and the reader's ability to believe that my study is credible (Maree, 2016). I ensured that my study was credible by using previous literature to back my arguments and also to ensure that my research question and research method were in line with each other. Confirmability was applied in that I did not make any biased conclusions and instead participants gave their motivation and interest in the investigation (Maree, 2016). To ensure the consistency of my research, I employed crystallisation, in terms of which the phenomenon under study was examined from all angles, allowing for a thorough and complex understanding.

Transferability enables the researcher to make connections between the study elements and their personal experiences (Maree, 2016). In my research, I looked at the participants and the background to the study, as well as how they relate to one another (Maree, 2016). Dependability was ensured through credibility, which is achieved through research design and data collection (Maree, 2016). In my research, I ensured that my research design was sound, and that my data collection was done correctly. Authenticity refers to the degree to which the research is genuine and accurate (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To ensure the integrity of my research, I was not biased in favour of my findings and was completely transparent.

1.12 Ethics considerations

Ethics when conducting research means to demonstrate particular traits, such as values, morals and civility, when obtaining information for my study (Hester and Killian, 2010). There are various ethical requirements: In this study, I firstly underpinned the importance of pursuing the truth based on evidence; secondly, obtained consent from the University of Pretoria ethics committee and also from HoDs, lecturers, students, and SSOs, and thirdly, ensured confidentiality and anonymity to those participating in the study. I started by applying for ethics approval from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee which provided me with a letter that I used to seek permission to conduct research at the TVET college. Informed consent was obtained from HoDs, lecturers, students, and SSOs before conducting the study. Before the interview, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and its potential benefits. In addition, the principal was first approached to seek permission to gain access to the college.

The following ethical factors were made clear to the participants. Voluntary participation: participants participated without coercion and were told that they could withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Free from harm: I ensured that participants were not harmed in any way possible. Confidentiality: identifying information concerning this study will only be made available to the programme coordinator. Anonymity: this study ensured that the names of the college and the participants were not disclosed.

1.13 Limitations of the study

The findings of this study cannot be generalised as it was limited to one TVET college and a few participants due to resource and time constraints. Despite this limitation, the study has provided valuable insight into how stakeholders manage student absenteeism at a TVET college in the Tshwane North district, Gauteng. The study aimed to investigate factors that affect student absenteeism in a TVET college in Tshwane North district and was conducted at one campus, where six students, two lecturers, two student support service officers, and four Head of departments participated.

1.14 Clarification of key terms

Stakeholders – are direct people involved in the institution such as lectures, students and HoDs, and SSOs.

Absenteeism – is defined as staying away from college.

TVET College – is an institution of higher learning.

Student – refers to a person who attends a higher educational institution (college) or a person who is formally engaged in teaching and learning.

1.1.5 Chapter outline

This dissertation is structured into five chapters:

Chapter 1: Orientation of the study

This chapter lays out the foundation, justification, and issue statement of the research. It also presents a brief summary of the research subject, objectives, and methodology. The text emphasises the effect of policies on student absenteeism. Despite the measures in place, student absenteeism continues to be a problem. Management is facing the challenge of ensuring that students comply with the policy requirements.

Chapter 2: Literature review

In Chapter 2, a comprehensive overview is provided on the high rate of student absenteeism in TVET colleges. The chapter evaluates relevant literature to establish a theoretical framework for the study. It is apparent that there is limited knowledge on student absenteeism in TVET colleges. This chapter identifies the contributing factors, reasons, effects, and strategies to address student absenteeism.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

The chapter thoroughly discusses the steps taken for participant selection, along with the methods used for data collection and analysis. The specific type of case study used, the techniques applied for gathering data, and the proposed methods for data analysis are all given special attention. The chapter also highlights the ethical issues that were

carefully considered, and how trustworthiness and credibility were ensured throughout the study.

Chapter 4: Interpretations and findings

This chapter presents the results obtained from the interpretation of data, leading to the findings of this research. The focus is on how the data was collected, analysed, and interpreted. During the analysis, themes emerged that are related to the research questions, and these were used to answer both the main research question and the sub-question.

Chapter 5: Research conclusion and discussion

In this chapter, the findings of the study were presented and each research question was discussed in detail. The main research question was used as a guide throughout the investigation. A summary of the conclusions was provided, along with recommendations for reducing student absenteeism in TVET colleges and a discussion of the limitations of the study. In conclusion, suggestions for future research were also identified.

1.16 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the organisation of the study is presented. The background, problem statement, rationale, significance, main objectives, and research questions of the study are discussed. The philosophical perspective, research paradigm, data collection and analysis methods are also explained. The study's overview is provided, including its limitations, and key terms are defined. Additionally, the theoretical framework, which serves as a basis for the study, is presented, and key concepts are defined. The next chapter will review the literature related to factors contributing to students' absenteeism, the impacts of absenteeism, and strategies for managing student absenteeism in TVET Colleges.

CHAPTER 2

STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT OF STUDENT ABSENTEEISM AT A TVET COLLEGE

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore factors contributing to student absenteeism and to understand how stakeholders manage this issue. In the previous chapter, I discussed the background and the problem statement of this study. I also presented the research purpose, the rationale for the study, and the research questions and the objectives. Additionally, I summarised the methodology and design that were adopted.

In the current chapter, I discussed the concept of student absenteeism from a global, African and South African perspective. I further discussed factors contributing to student absenteeism; the effects of student absenteeism; stakeholders managing student absenteeism; and challenges in managing student absenteeism; as well as a theoretical framework for exploring the management of student absenteeism in a South African TVET college.

2.2. Student absenteeism

Absenteeism is defined as the total number of days missed at college, which includes excused and unexcused absences (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012). Myataza (2019) defines absenteeism as a student's failure to attend college for the day. Chukwu et al. (2017) regard student absenteeism as a persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from college. Asante (2019) seems to agree with the previous definitions, stating that student absenteeism is a day missed by the student in academic or practical placements.

Based on the definitions and descriptions above, this study defines student absenteeism as the number of consecutive days the student is absent from college, whether authorised or unauthorised. In addition, student absenteeism can be a continuously absent or chronically absent from college; the former being uninterrupted absence whereas the latter refers to being repeatedly absent.

To understand student absenteeism in this study, it is important to look at student absenteeism from an international and a continental perspective and then to narrow it down to a South African perspective.

Viewing student absenteeism from an international perspective, Lukkarinen et al. (2016) indicate that students' class attendance and engagement play an important role in today's education. These researchers found that in Spain, students who attend more classes are likely to earn higher final grades. Absenteeism and school dropout rates among students are discussed as an essential criterion for determining the quality of education in Turkey, as well as a predictor of current and future educational problems, hence class attendance should be made compulsory (Seyma et al., 2016)

Similarly, Shute and Cooper (2015) state that regular college attendance is important for student academic achievement, language development and social development. Students who attend school regularly may succeed in their future careers by developing work-related skills such as persistence, problem-solving and the capacity to collaborate with others to achieve a common objective (Kearney, 2018). A study conducted in California indicates that a lack of constant attendance in classrooms is a significant barrier to learning for students and teachers in today's American schools (Kearney, 2018). Indeed, the United States Department of Education (1994) identified absence as the most important factor associated with student performance gaps, and absenteeism has lately been reported as being of crisis proportions. Student absenteeism happens to be one of the problems faced in African countries as well (Hoffman, 1994).

Viewing student absenteeism from an African perspective, Amukahara Joy and Bivwiere (2021) state that absenteeism in Nigeria is seen as a lack of motivation for studying, which harms students' final grades. As a result, it offers a significant challenge to the proper execution of the tertiary institution curriculum, which is a tool for society's creation of high-level people.

Chukwu et al. (2017) argue that absenteeism appears to be a major problem confronting the school system in Nigeria. Furthermore, they discovered absenteeism to be common in both public and private colleges in developed and developing countries. However, literature reveals that many students are frequently absent but nevertheless pass their

examinations (Mohammed Shamim Khan, 2021). Student absence has become common in many parts of the world (Jacob and Lovett, 2019; Tahir, 2011), but it is more dominant in South African schools.

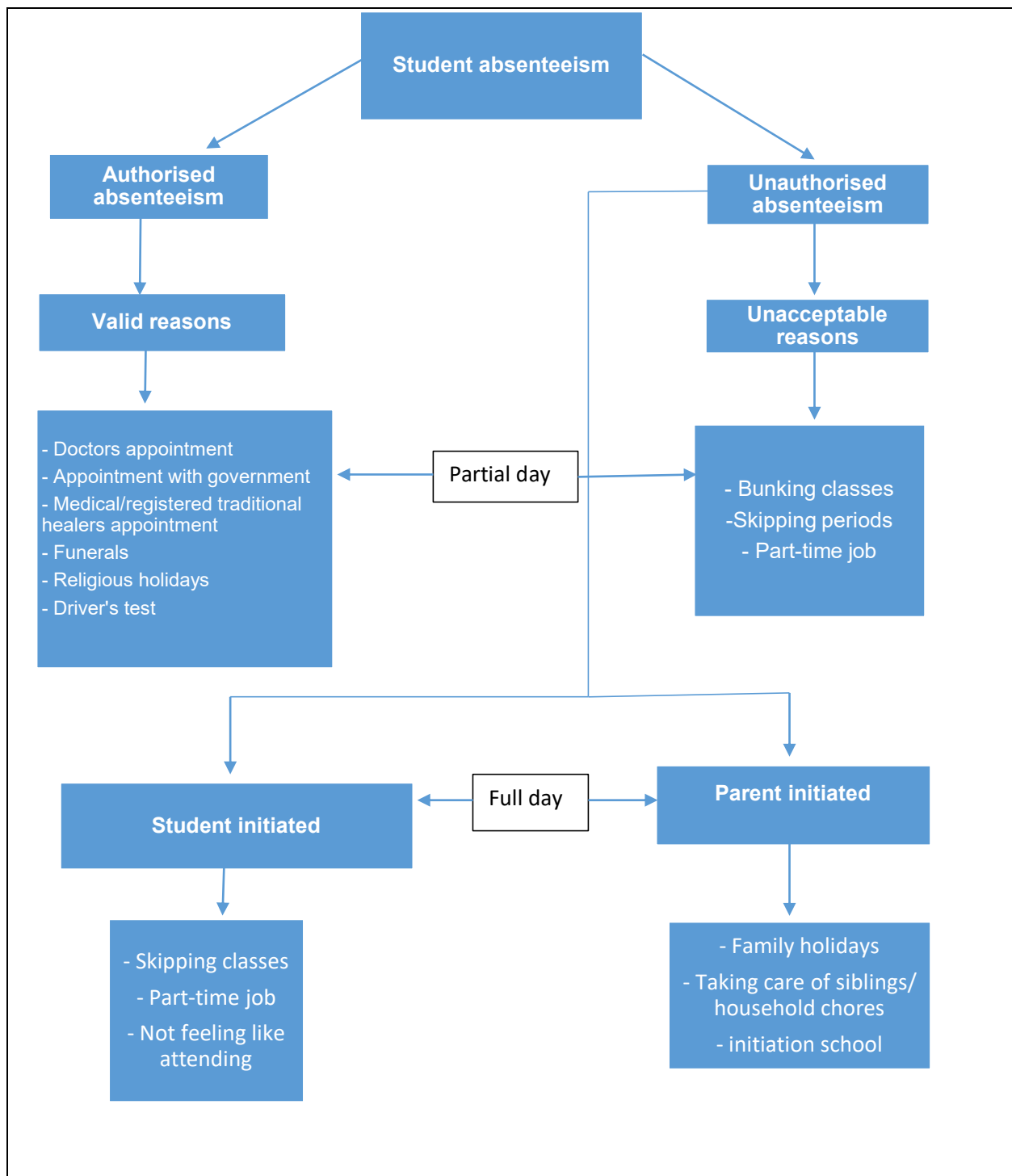
Viewing student absenteeism from a South African perspective, student absenteeism in South African higher education has evolved into a complex educational and social problem that has attracted the interest of educators, academics and policymakers (Asante, 2019; Wadesango and Machingambi, 2011). Researchers have found that student absenteeism and missed courses in higher education have been linked to hate for a subject, dislike of unpleasant and strict professors, dull teaching methods and lecturers' demonstrating favouritism and uneven treatment towards particular students, at the same time allowing favourite students to sign attendance registers in advance.

A study by Otto (2016) reveals that a report on student absenteeism in South Africa indicated that the majority of the schools included in the research maintained daily attendance registers. As a result, each class and grade is expected to keep track of their student attendance and absenteeism; information obtained is then divided into gender categories. In addition, some researchers found that some schools have a register summary and quarterly reports (Black, 2018; Childs and Grooms, 2018; Youngren, 2020). However, only few schools keep track record of their students' attendance and those records are delivered to the provincial education department's (PED) district offices. The importance of the district officer's duty to monitor student attendance and absenteeism is obvious from the study. The issue is that non-attendance and class skipping become habits, and without adequate intervention, a drop in absenteeism rates is unlikely (Myataza, 2019). Hence, I found it important to find out how stakeholders in the TVET colleges manage student absenteeism and to understand the types of student absenteeism involved.

2.2.1 Types of student absenteeism

Figure 2.1 illustrates the types of student absenteeism graphically; these form the basis of this study.

Figure 2.1: Distinction between authorised and unauthorised absenteeism



Source: adapted from Otto (2016) and Myataza (2019)

Figure 2.1 above illustrates the types of student absenteeism. These are divided into two categories, namely, authorised absenteeism and unauthorised absenteeism. Authorised absenteeism occurs when students are absent from college for a valid reason and they may only be absent for a portion of the day, missing just some of the periods. Unauthorised absenteeism, on the other hand, occurs when students absent

themselves from college for reasons that are unacceptable and which take students away from college for a full day. Some of the reasons may be student-initiated and others parent-initiated.

2.2.1.1 *Authorised absenteeism*

Based on DHET's policy from 2013, authorised absenteeism refers to a student's absence from college during college hours, but with the permission of the lecturer. To be considered an authorized absence, the college must approve the student's absence in advance, or accept a reasonable explanation for the absence as stated in section 4 of the South African School Act. Valid reasons for authorised absenteeism include attending doctor's appointments, court appearances, funerals, driver's license appointments, religious holidays, and participating in sports. Additionally, students who fall ill during college hours are also excused from attendance (Otto, 2016).

2.2.1.2 *Unauthorised absenteeism*

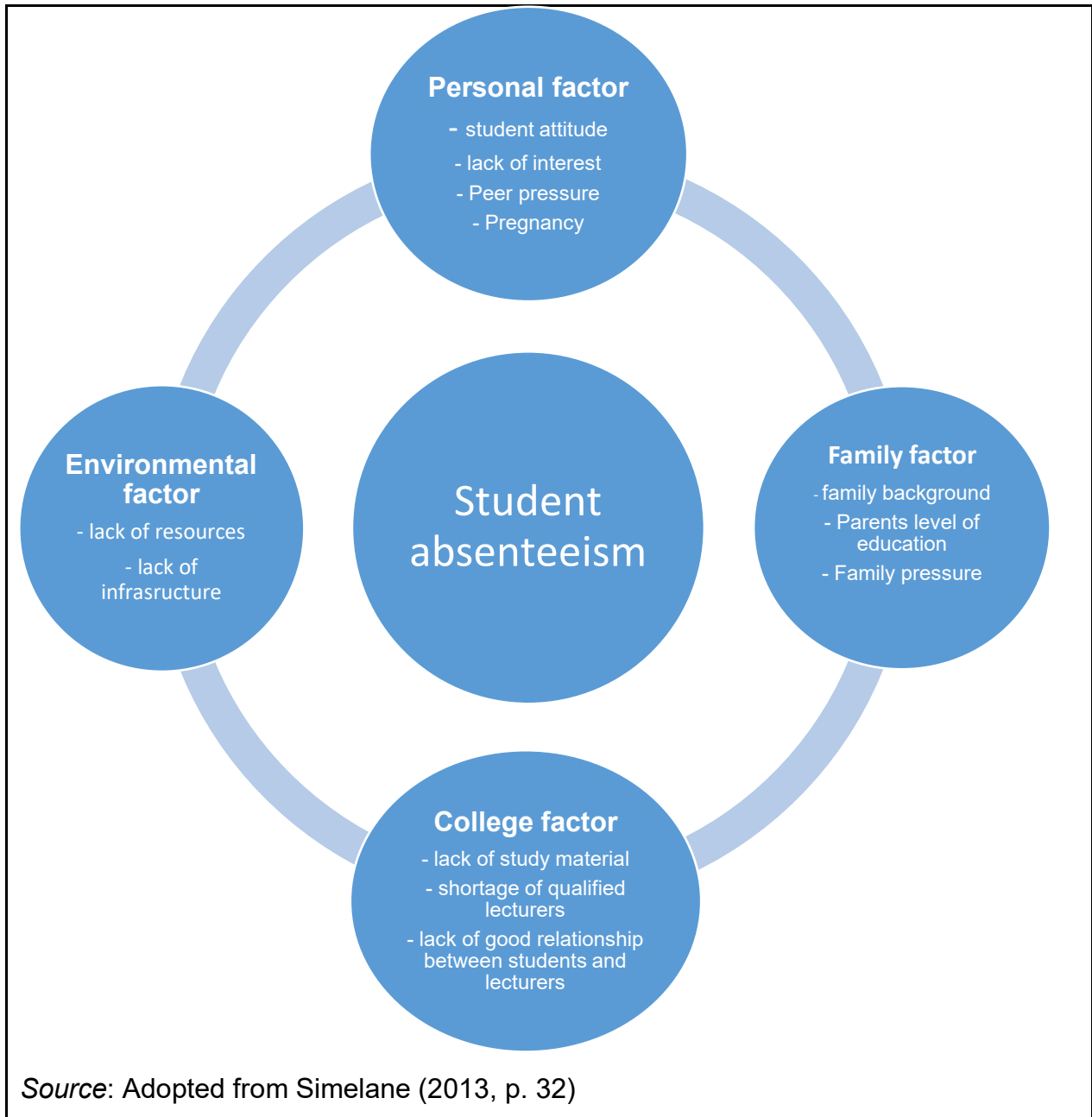
Unauthorised absenteeism is when a student is absent from school for unacceptable reasons, such as skipping classes or specific periods. However, sometimes parents initiate absence when they plan holidays during college terms or send their children to attend ceremonies such as initiation school. By doing so, they promote unauthorised absenteeism, where they expect their children to perform household duties like taking care of other siblings or relatives, or by requiring students to supplement the family income by working or performing domestic duties such as spring cleaning. It's important to note that students cannot be penalised for decisions made by their parents regarding their duties or responsibilities (Myataza, 2019).

Based on previous remarks, absenteeism can be classified as authorised or unauthorised, whether it's for the entire day or part of it, and whether the reason is valid or not. Absenteeism can be initiated by either the student or the parent, but it may still be considered as unauthorised. It's important to note that "partial" refers to an absence for part of the college day, while "full" refers to an absence for the entire college day. I found it important to look at factors contributing to this authorised and unauthorised student absenteeism (Otto, 2016).

2.3. Factors contributing to student absenteeism

Research evidence suggests that several factors contribute to student absenteeism. These include personal factors, family factors, college factors and environmental factors. These are presented in Figure 2.2 and discussed below.

Figure 2.2 Factors that influence TVET students' absenteeism



2.3.1. Personal factors

Students do not think that their circumstances or personal factors are the reason for their absence, according to a study by Ocak et al. (2017). As a result, Balkis et al. (2016) confirm that opinions toward lecturers and colleges and personal characteristics like academic self-perception are negatively correlated with student absenteeism. Consequently, absenteeism and college dropout rates will rise among students who need to take their studies seriously (Mabuza, 2020).

Students' motivation for attending college may drop as a result of personal circumstances and their academic performance may suffer as a result. Personal factors that lead to student absenteeism are lack of interest, an unchallenging curriculum, a negative self-image and lack of self-esteem, a lack of subject interest and personal interest in studies, students' mental capacity does not match the chosen course and poor teaching skills (Abdelrahman and Abdelkader, 2017).

Students have different skills, abilities, personalities, and experiences, which can all affect their attendance patterns. According to Otto (2016), students with low self-esteem and negative self-image are more likely to miss classes than those who have high self-esteem. Furthermore, students who have emotional problems and poor social skills are also likely to have inconsistent attendance.

Peer pressure can be a significant factor in college absenteeism. Students may be influenced by their peers to join gangs and engage in negative behaviour that can lead to non-attendance (Kasita, 2019). When students engage in undesired aggressive behaviour, it becomes challenging to maintain a positive learning environment (Katanga, 2016). The lack of dedication and aggressive attitude towards learning can result in non-attendance. Peer pressure is more prevalent in TVET colleges, especially in poorer urban areas of South Africa (Mnguni, 2014). Students are often manipulated or pushed to stay absent by their peers, which contributes to their non-attendance. The pressure to fit in with peers and the resulting nervousness can also affect students' attendance at college.

Non-attendance is also associated with sexual behaviour and substance abuse, both of which can lead to students dropping out. According to Kasita (2019), once students indulge in alcohol and drug addiction, it can affect their academic performance.

Substance abuse can lead to unprotected sex, which can raise the risk of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Wadesango and Machingambi, 2011). College absence is almost always linked to teenage pregnancy, which is a significant factor contributing to absence (Spaull, 2015). Female students frequently miss school due to pregnancy and the associated challenges.

Nonattendance in South African colleges is influenced by personal factors such as gender. However, there are differing opinions about which gender is more likely to display problematic patterns of college attendance. Some research initially indicated that boys were more prone to missing college compared to their female counterparts (Mahlalela, 2019). Conversely, Kipp (2022) believes that girls are more likely to miss college than boys. Mahlalela (2019) argues that there is no significant difference in college attendance between boys and girls. According to Machingambi and Wadesango (2011), boys from poor backgrounds are likely to miss college to find jobs for family and personal survival. Kelly (2018) suggest that the absence of girls from school is often due to the lack of access to sanitary pads during their menstrual cycles. Additionally, female students may also miss school due to safety and security concerns, particularly those related to sexual assault and violence, as reported by Amukahara and Bivwiere (2021). However, Ocak et al. (2017) argues that students do not believe that the cause of absenteeism is related to themselves or the circumstances that affect them.

These issues can result in inconsistent attendance patterns and negatively impact the academic performance of female students who usually walk long distances to college. Some students believe that it is not only personal factors that cause them to be absent but that they are also affected by family-related issues.

2.3.2. Family factors

Family pressure has a negative impact on students' academic performance (Black, 2018). However, Ocak et al. (2017) have different views on this matter and do not regard students' absences as related to their parents. Balkis et al. (2016) is of the view that students whose parents have a high level of education have a lower rate of college absenteeism, while Childs and Grooms (2018) found that if students' parents had a poor level of education, this contributed to college absenteeism. I agree with these findings that if a parent has a low level of education it may have a negative effect on their child's

education. It is thought that if a parent is fully involved in their child's education, they would not let them miss classes for no reason.

According to Katanga (2016), a few studies have reported a positive correlation between parental or caregiver participation in student education and attendance. Youngren (2020) further adds that failure to introduce useful methods from home and school to reduce student absenteeism may lead to an increase in the absenteeism rate. Moreover, I noted that a positive mind-set can help in fighting absenteeism. In addition, if college rules are not properly implemented, then an effort should be made to reach those students who are not attending regularly. Another factor contributing to student non-attendance is poor communication between the college and parents, which creates a lack of teamwork between the two parties (Kearney, 2018). The family will have to step in because they are a very important part of getting more students to go to college.

It has been observed that students can exploit the poor communication between their parents and college, allowing them to skip college without their parents' knowledge. This lack of communication can also affect the quality of education, with parents becoming less involved in monitoring their children's activities at the college (Katanga, 2016). Although it is the responsibility of the parents or caregivers to monitor their children's homework, attendance and screen time, their involvement in their children's education has been found to be a significant factor that influences their success at school. Children learn from the behaviour and social interactions they observe from their parents or caregivers (Katanga, 2016). Therefore, parents have the ability to either motivate or discourage their children's potential, and their motivational level is affected by the level of motivation they receive from their parents or caregivers (Katanga, 2016).

Demir and Karabeyoğlu (2016) and Ancheta et al. (2021) reveal that family factors might cause student absence for the following reasons: socioeconomic status of the family, the need for the student to work, parenting responsibilities, psychological issues, neglect or lack of support, drugs or alcohol abuse, criminal behaviour, a lack of consistency, divorce, inter-parental conflicts, a single-parent household, lack of parental interest or control over the child's behaviour, parents with low education levels, adverse college experiences in the past, and a lack of participation.

According to Kronholz (2011), parents who have a negative attitude towards schooling are less likely to be committed and fully involved in their children's education.

Additionally, students whose parents are not working or who live with single parents are at risk of being absent from school. Unemployed parents' children tend to miss classes more often than those whose parents have jobs (Kearney, 2018). Families that are broken or constantly changing are a significant factor in student absenteeism. Orphans and children living in homes where there are no adults are more likely to miss school frequently, as they often take on the role of caretaker for their younger siblings. This results in the orphans having to find work to help their families survive (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012).

It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that their children attend school regularly. If they are unable to provide support and monitor their children's attendance, absenteeism will remain high. Therefore, families need to intervene and play a vital role in increasing student attendance at the college.

2.3.3. Institutional factors

Haritha (2016) says that professors play a role, but their quality in different departments is a factor in why students don't show up to class. According to Gershenson (2016), lecturer qualities and attributes are associated with student attendance. Childs and Grooms (2018) discovered that students who are positive toward their lecturers and have positive interactions with them are more likely to attend college regularly and, as a result, gain intellectually, while those who have strained relationships with their lecturers are more likely to be absent (Kasita, 2019). However, student non-attendance may also be caused by boring lecture topics and uninspiring college disciplines and programmes. A student might not show up because he or she is bored with the college or the teachers.

Furthermore, severe disciplinary action may be a factor in student absenteeism. The study by Asante (2019) reveals that lecturers who punish students without considering the repercussions may discourage them from attending college. Youngren (2020) further mentions that lecturers play a substantial role in students' not attending lectures. However, a report by Myataza (2019) indicates that 58% of students did not attend lectures because of lecturer attitudes, uninteresting teaching methods, incompetence to educate, and favouritism shown toward particular students. In addition, the data indicate degrading lecturer attitudes which lead to student absence.

Absence of students from college can be caused by various factors. According to Wadesango (2011), one of the reasons for absenteeism is harsh and demanding lecturers. Hidayat et al. (2012) found that the teaching method, teaching style, and a teacher's personality can also influence absenteeism. In addition, Heinesen (2010) noted that lecturers' competency and teaching style can significantly impact students' performance and understanding of the subjects taught. Negative attitudes towards lecturers and colleges, as highlighted by Adigüzel and Karadas (2013), Suhid et al. (2012), and Gökyer (2012), are also a significant factor in college absenteeism.

Another issue is the poor lecturing habits and lack of concern for students by some lecturers. According to UNESCO (2004, 2009b), incompetent lecturers negatively impact college educational procedures. Baatjes (2014) also noted that TVET colleges in South Africa often experience issues due to incompetent lecturers, who are often referred to as "marginalized educators." Lack of qualifications, training, and expertise in occupational subjects are among the key reasons for this issue, as highlighted by several publications, such as Baatjes (2014) and HRDC (2014). Van der Bijl (2015) also noted that many TVET teachers lack appropriate education experience. This incompetence often leads to students skipping classes and not benefiting from their instructors' teaching.

Kasita (2019) found that students tend to avoid specific courses due to certain lecturers' bad attitudes. This non-attendance becomes a concern when students miss too many days of school, as it often leads to students dropping out. Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) also noted that students are more likely to attend courses if they are exciting and facilitated by good lecturers who know the topic content and involve students in teaching and learning. Therefore, it is crucial to address these issues to reduce absenteeism and improve the overall quality of education in colleges. With that said, I am interested in understanding how the environment affects student attendance.

2.3.4. Environmental factors

Student learning environments are one of the key factors that contribute to student absenteeism (Abdelrahman and Abdelkader, 2017). A positive learning environment refers to students feeling connected to the college, as well as the degree of support received that makes a student feel important regarding their academic, social and other

needs. These may include positive classroom management and participation in extracurricular activities (Maxwell, 2016). Furthermore, students need to feel safe, accepted, valued and respected during their stay on the college premises. Abdelrahman and Abdelkader (2017) remark that a lack of appropriate learning environments such as sufficient classrooms, labs, clinical settings and educational technology resources has an impact on student absenteeism because students may use this as an excuse to be absent from college.

Amukahara Joy and Bivwiere (2021) reveals that, when the environment is not conducive for learning, students will find a peaceful spot, such as a library, a free lecture theatre, or any other calm place, where they can try to finish any outstanding work during their absence from classes.

Following the discussion on environmental factors, the next section outlines the effect of student absenteeism.

2.4. Effects of student absenteeism

A study by Kelly (2018) argues that inadequate college turnout and absence results in higher college dropout rates, a high unemployment rate and higher funding required for imprisonment because dropouts are more likely to be arrested and imprisoned for criminal actions and behaviour. Kearney (2018) goes on to say that students who do not attend college regularly and do not earn a degree are more likely to be jobless in the future and depend on the socioeconomic position of their families.

Student attendance is influenced by socioeconomic factors. Being poor is a condition that is challenging to define and evaluate. However, there is a correlation between poverty and absenteeism, and poverty is a strong predictor of educational achievement (Kasita, 2019). Absenteeism is widespread, particularly in highly impoverished societies. Youngren (2020) suggests that many children from underprivileged backgrounds lack strong moral role models, social communication skills and respect for their mentors. Youngren (2020) further indicates that people who are financially disadvantaged usually lack nourishing food, access to healthcare, suitable clothing and services like power and adequate hygiene.

Kasita (2019) also notes that students find it difficult to concentrate in class since they're not provided with healthy meals or people of personal integrity as role models. Furthermore, students from low-income families frequently face violent gangs and criminal elements in their communities (Kelly, 2018). Teenage pregnancy, household chores and transportation issues are other socioeconomic factors that contribute to student absences (Kasita, 2019). In addition, Mafa (2018) found that students who arrive late to school or don't arrive at all during the day may be experiencing transportation issues. This often leads to partial absence, as students may miss some classes because they were unable to arrive at the college in time. Mafa (2018) goes on to say that many students in rural areas have to travel long distances to get to college, making it difficult for them to attend class every day.

Student absences may be brought on by fractured family systems and unstable family relationships. Lack of transportation and unpredictable transportation are additional issues that may cause students to miss more classes, which may finally result in student dropout (UNESCO, 2009), with many families worrying about their finances because of the high cost of transportation (SAHRC, 2006).

I therefore found it important to understand how stakeholders manage student absenteeism.

2.5. Stakeholders managing student absenteeism

Organisational policy has a beneficial impact on managing institutions since it directs how the institution deals with or manages particular circumstances (Gbadamosi, 2015). Organisational policy is also intended to minimise and eliminate any risks that might be posed to an institution. Regarding the objectives of the attendance policy, the DHET ensures that students adhere to the minimal standards of attendance (DHET, 2013). Monitoring attendance through the attendance policy is a function of the institution's management.

According to Myataza (2019), attendance policies have a significant effect by requiring students to attend classes, and if this is not emphasised, students become relaxed and attend whenever they wish. Researchers suggest that colleges should introduce their attendance policy to students during their first days at the college or during induction (Asante, 2019; Kipp, 2022; Otto, 2016). In addition, it is mandatory for the college to

explain the importance and benefits of attendance, especially to new students. If students adhere to this rule, lecturers' lives will be made easier, thus eliminating the inconsistency that occurs when lecturers deal with absenteeism. Additionally, students will learn what is expected of them, what happens if they do not attend, and that their parents/caregiver will be informed of their behaviour.

Myataza (2019) indicates that when students are absent for three days or more in a week and this is identified as a pattern, then a meeting with parents or caregivers should be planned. This researcher argues that students who do not attend college classes regularly even after a meeting with parents or caregivers they should face discipline. In addition, Modise (2016) emphasises that corporal punishment is not allowed as it has been abolished. Myataza (2019) agrees with Modise, saying that discipline should be enforced to send a message to other students so that they know that absenteeism is not acceptable behaviour.

Disciplinary measures are intended to promote and maintain a peaceful campus atmosphere (Kipp, 2022). However, students who have a high rate of absenteeism should be reprimanded to send the message to other students that absenteeism is not acceptable. The DHET (2013) encourages TVET lecturers and the management team to reprimand students who are absent without permission or whose attendance falls below an average of 80%. With that said, I am interested in understanding the challenges of managing student absenteeism.

2.6. Challenges in managing student absenteeism

Absenteeism from college lectures and seminars is growing more common (Mearman et al., 2014), posing a serious challenge not just for students, but also for their peers, lecturing staff and the college as a whole (Landin and Pérez, 2015).

Student absenteeism may result in failure to obtain the necessary professional abilities for a specific career because crucial non-academic skills may have been missed in classes that were not attended. Rao and Valleswary (2016) argue that academic competence is found to be associated with a student's ability to manage and access study material in the curriculum. Therefore, if learning material is not easily accessible, students will find it challenging to prepare for class or assessment, and lecturers will find it difficult to continue with their teaching and learning.

The study by Otto (2016) indicates that absence among students has an impact on lecturers, who find it difficult to continue with a new topic when students lack prior knowledge. On the other hand, students who are higher performers grow irritated with the practice of redoing work, which lecturers see as inefficient and time-consuming. However, lecturers believe that attendance is a measure for enhancing classroom management and student–lecturer relations (Badubi, 2017).

Grant and Osanloo (2014) argue that lecturers are the cause of students struggling to connect with a lesson as they do not link the current lesson with the previous lesson, and for that reason, students lose interest and direct their energy elsewhere. I believe that if a lesson is well prepared, informative and interesting, students will not want to miss that particular lesson (Otto, 2016). On the same note, Myataza (2019) attests that when students miss classes regularly, they miss out on important short-term educational opportunities and tasks, and college management will find it difficult to give them opportunities make up the work they lost during their absence. Students lose out on essential learning activities and tasks. As a result, they lose focus and struggle to study at the same rate as their peers, and they cannot keep up with their assignments or college work (Kasita, 2019). Lecturers should monitor students' attendance and see that they complete outstanding tasks.

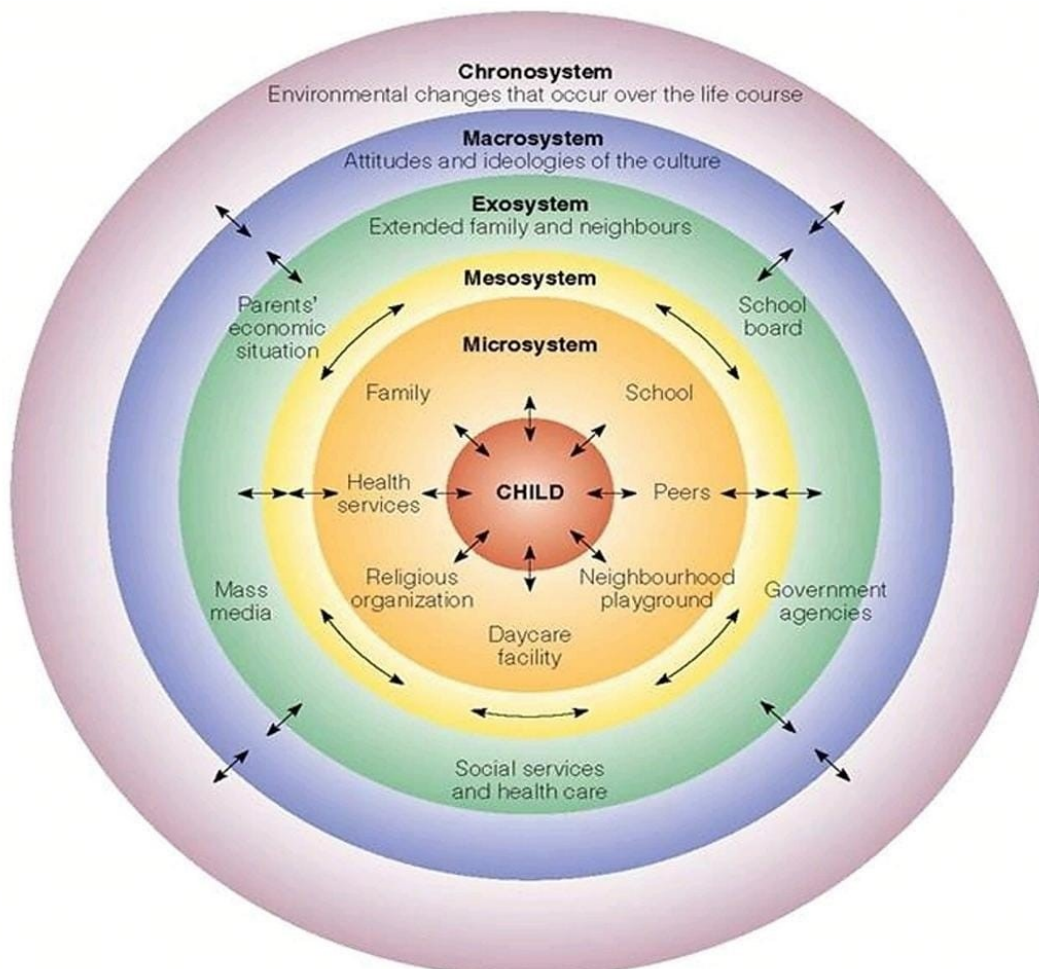
Childs and Grooms (2018) confirm that collecting data on student absence is part of the challenges in the monitoring process. However, lecturers and college administration must discover patterns or trends related to student absenteeism. DHET's (2013) attendance policy encourages college management to check student attendance and tardiness weekly, while college administrators are asked to look for patterns in student attendance, indicating which students are more likely to be absent, especially on Mondays and Fridays. The lecturers are in charge of keeping track of students' absences and punctuality (DHET, 2011).

2.7. Ecological systems theory

This study will be underpinned by ecological systems theory, which was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1977). I find this theory suitable for my study because students and colleges are part of an educational ecosystem that draws attention to students' characteristics and experiences, family circumstances, college factors and out-of-

college conditions that shape both the college's behaviour and student outcomes. Aligning student absenteeism with ecological systems theory suggests that absenteeism is a manifestation of agency influenced by contextual factors that are unique to the students' ecological context. Figure 2.3 indicates the relationship between the individual (child) and the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems using bi-directional arrows.

Figure 2.3 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems of theory of development



Source: adopted from Williams (2019)

In his ecological systems theory of human development, Uri Bronfenbrenner (1977) discusses how individuals develop in relation to one another, asserting that neither child development nor human development takes place in a vacuum. Instead, a child is "nested" in his or her environment, and in interactions within the environment. In addition, those that take place between the child and the environment have an impact on the child's development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory divides an individual's surroundings into four spheres, one of which is the student's context.

Bronfenbrenner classified developmental contexts into four degrees of external influence: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems and macrosystems. All four systems interact with the chronosystem (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). The individual's direct relationships with family, college and peer group are referred to as the "microsystem". This is the system within which students form bonds with lecturers and form friendships with other students and teams. The connections and interactions between the students' microsystems are referred to as the **mesosystem**: everything that occurs at home has the potential to influence the student's attendance and interest in college. Williams (2019) and Kipp (2022) indicate that a student can only grow and develop if their relationships and interactions with microsystems such as the institution, parents, lecturers and peers are appropriate.

The exosystem is an environment in which adolescents are not directly involved but which nonetheless has an impact on them, such as the educational or health systems. As a result, the exosystem includes links with systems that do not directly affect humans. Public policy in the fields of education and healthcare are examples of ecosystems (McWhirter et al., 2007), as the student may be indirectly affected by the health policy. For example, if a student has a long-term illness, he or she will struggle in college if medical services are not adequate.

The macrosystem refers to the cultural feature of a society, such as the values and beliefs, which can influence particular systems such as race relations, cultural beliefs and democratic principles that promote social justice. Accepting the reality that female students may not attend as regularly as male students as a result of an impending pregnancy, for example, is a cultural belief. Finally, the chronosystem is made up of all of an individual's life experiences and occurrences. As a result, Bronfenbrenner's (1992)

theory emphasises the interconnections, interrelationships and interactions between the individual and other systems.

Ecosystem ideologies are important because they link a person's mental development to the environment and acknowledge the impact of the environment on human behaviour (Visser, 2007; Williams, 2019). By considering the student's interactions with the lecture hall, college and college facilities, a clearer knowledge of the student emerges. As a result, the environmental model is critical because it recognises the impact of shared circumstances on individual development. However, it may also be used to predict behaviour, resolve disputes and deal with individuals (Simelane, 2013). When managing student absenteeism, one must first examine the country's Constitution (RSA, 1996a) in order to determine whether it is consistent with the ecological systems theory approach. The causes of student absenteeism need not be addressed in isolation to understand the situation, as several environmental influences have an impact on student behaviour.

This study focused on all the systems in the Bronfenbrenner model because they are linked to one another and all have an impact on student absenteeism whether directly or indirectly. Ecological systems theory helped me to look at students' development within the context of the systems of relationships that form their environment. Bronfenbrenner's theory, which identifies a number of different "layers" of the environment, each of which has an impact on a child's development, was recently renamed "bio-ecological systems theory" to underline that a child's biology is formed by the environment that fuels her development. The combination of variables in the developing biology of the child, his immediate family/community environment, and the societal landscape drives and directs his growth. Changes or disagreements in one layer will have an effect on the other layers. To research a child's development, we have to include not only the child and her local environment but also how the greater environment interacts with the child.

2.8. Chapter summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on the concept of absenteeism from an international, African and South African perspective. Furthermore, factors contributing to student absenteeism, the effects of student absenteeism, stakeholders managing

student absenteeism, challenges in managing student absenteeism, and ecological systems theory were discussed. A literature review indicated that student absenteeism is a major challenge which has to be monitored and investigated. The next chapter discusses the research design and methodology.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore factors contributing to student absenteeism and to understand how stakeholders manage this issue. In the previous chapter, literature on the management of student absenteeism by stakeholders at a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college in the Tshwane South district was discussed, as was the concept of student absenteeism from a global, African and South African perspective. Factors contributing to student absenteeism, the effects of student absenteeism, stakeholders managing student absenteeism and the challenges in managing student absenteeism were also discussed. In addition, a synopsis of the relevant theory of management of student absenteeism was given. In this chapter, the research paradigm, research approach and research design used in the study are provided and discussed. Additionally, data collection methods are outlined. Moreover, the trustworthiness of the results, ethical considerations and limitations of the study are discussed.

3.2 Research paradigm

Paradigms are the philosophies underpinning a study; they provide a foundation or base for the study. A paradigm is a conceptual framework within which scientific and other theories are constructed, with specific practices taking place (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Creswell (2009) explains paradigms as the general orientation to the world and to research that a researcher holds. Additionally, a research paradigm has been described as a set of beliefs that guides the action that is taken and the decisions that are made during the process of doing research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). A research paradigm consists of three components, namely, ontology, epistemology and methodology.

According to Cohen et al. (2018), the research paradigm chosen by each researcher depends on his/her perceptions of what exists in the real world (ontology) and how he/she knows it to be the truth. In this case, this was related to student absenteeism. The methodology specifies how the researcher may go about studying what is believed to be known (Maree, 2016). An interpretive paradigm is the lens through which

researchers observe the conduct of research, rendering such research a social science analysis (Maree, 2010). On the other hand, some researchers define an interpretive paradigm as “rest[ing] in part on a subjectivist, interactionist, socially constructed ontology and an epistemology that recognised multiple realities, agentic behaviours and the importance of understanding a situation through the eyes of the participants” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 175).

According to Riyami (2015), that there is no single truth and there are many ways of exploring the many diverse truths that exist. Each of the sampled participant in this study had distinct experience in managing student absenteeism at a TVET College which were investigated through semi-structured interviews. Equally, I had my own distinct worldviews regarding the management of student absenteeism at a South African TVET College that I had to explore. Both my assumptions and those of the stakeholders could have influenced how the study was carried out. How the interpretive paradigm, influenced the process of collecting data from stakeholders and the presentation of findings are discussed in this chapter.

An interpretive paradigm was deemed most appropriate for this study as it sought to explain the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind a social action (Thomas, 2011). Furthermore, qualitative research focuses on acquiring an understanding of a phenomenon within its natural setting; hence, interpretive was employed to allow participants to freely raise their views about stakeholders managing student absenteeism at a TVET College in the Tshwane South district. I chose an interpretive paradigm to guide this study because of the following advantages it holds: it provided me with the opportunity to interact with participants and view the world through their eyes. Furthermore, it allowed the use of various secondary data from different participants who have their individual interpretations of reality (Thanh and Thanh, 2015).

An interpretive research paradigm similarly seeks an explanation from the participants' points of view rather than from an observer's point of view, and is characterised by the need to comprehend the world as it is from a subjective point of view (Creswell, 2012, 2014). Through the perspectives, backgrounds and experiences of participants, interpretive researchers learn about reality (Yin, 2011). When using an interpretive paradigm, the data are frequently qualitative and gives a detailed picture of the study setting as a particular context (Maree, 2012). The choice of research approach affects

the ontological and epistemological viewpoints (De Vos et al., 2011). The discussion below demonstrates the chosen approach that underpins the study as it aligns with the methodology adopted in this study.

3.3 Research approach

Research can follow different approaches such as qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods. In this study, I made use of a qualitative research approach, which is a method for giving meaning to and interpreting human experience (De Vos et al., 2011). This was deemed suitable for the study because it allowed me to gain in-depth information as well as participants' descriptions of the way how stakeholders manage student absenteeism (Maree, 2016). Furthermore, using a qualitative approach allows for a phenomenon to be studied naturally using interviews and participant observation. Moreover, it involves data in the form of words, pictures, descriptions and narratives, unlike a quantitative research approach that makes use of numbers (Fouché et al., 2021). The qualitative approach applied in this project helped me to explore how absenteeism is managed at a TVET College.

3.3.1 Qualitative research approach

I adopted a qualitative research approach in this study in order to gain an in-depth understanding and description of how student absenteeism is managed at a TVET College (Maree, 2016). The qualitative research approach is distinguished by its representation of the opinions and viewpoints of the participants, which are gained by examining the social and cultural contexts in which they reside. This is done with the intention to offer understandings that may help to explain human social behaviour (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research, which is a naturalistic interpretive methodology, focuses on investigating phenomena from the inside out (Yin, 2011). Furthermore, this approach is described as a plan and a procedure for the study that outlines the steps from general hypotheses to specific methods of data collection, analysis and interpretations (Creswell, 2014; Maree, 2016).

This implies that using a qualitative approach allowed me to switch from making philosophical assumptions to gathering and analysing evidence. A qualitative research approach focuses on rich descriptive data as experienced by people in a natural situation to better grasp the limitations and reality of daily life. Because qualitative

research focuses on rich descriptive data that is experienced by people in their natural setting, as opposed to quantitative research which evaluates objective theories that investigate relationships, I was able to comprehend the limitations and realities of daily life. Additionally, a qualitative research strategy helped me to comprehend a social, human issue by using words to create a complex, comprehensive picture and by relaying the specific perspectives of the informants (De Vos et al., 2011).

Choosing the qualitative approach to guide this study was driven by its strong connection to the interpretivist/constructivism paradigm (Thanh and Thanh, 2015). Qualitative research methods create a channel for the voices of the participants to be heard and give marginalised populations an opportunity to express themselves and add value to the data from their experiences (Ganong and Coleman, 2014). This approach enabled me to hear and interact with the participants, and obtain their perspectives (Yin, 2012). I was able to work with some of the stakeholders, such as by reviewing the research questions and transcripts or involving them in the data analysis and interpretation processes (Creswell, 2014; Thanh and Thanh, 2015; Yin, 2012). Additionally, the qualitative research approach allowed me to use interpretive inquiry, whereby I used my own interpretations of the data as well as those of the stakeholders to explain the study results (Creswell, 2012, 2014). By collaborating with some stakeholders in the data analysis process, I was able to report the study findings from the participants' subjective points of view (Creswell, 2014).

A qualitative approach provides insight into cultural activities that might be missed in organised surveys (Thanh and Thanh, 2015). Accordingly, this approach (Yin, 2011) helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon by interacting with the participants in a natural environment. This method was deemed most suitable for comprehending and gaining insight into how stakeholders managed student absenteeism in TVET colleges. In addition, a qualitative method can make it possible to hear the participants' voices (Creswell, 2014; Maree, 2012). Thus, using this technique, I was able to offer a descriptive explanation of how the stakeholders managed student absenteeism. Additionally, this helped me to produce thick, detailed data that I used to address the study questions. Although it has limitations, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to gather thick, rich descriptive data by asking broad-ranging questions (Ganong and Coleman, 2014). To avoid the limitations, different data collection methods can be used.

3.4 Research design

A research design is a blueprint for conducting research, using either qualitative, quantitative or a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed methods), and offers a clear direction for the research's operations (Creswell, 2014). A research design, according to Yin (2011), is a strategy for moving from one point to another, where the first point may be represented as the collection of initial questions that need to be resolved and the second point as a group of findings related to those questions. The study aim, as evidenced by its emphasis and research questions, as well as philosophical and theoretical perspectives, is also taken into consideration in the research design (Creswell, 2014; Maree, 2016; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2011). In light of the above discussion, this study applied an interpretive/constructivist perspective that primarily employed a qualitative method and favoured a qualitative research design, in this case a case study. A research design is selected based on the nature of the research problem or the issue being addressed, the researcher's personal experience and the audience for the study.

A qualitative approach usually uses a face-to-face research design by collecting data from people in their natural settings using one of the following five interactive designs (defined below) namely: ethnographic, phenomenological, grounded theory, critical studies and case studies (MacMillan and Schumacher, 2001). In this study, a case study was found to be appropriate as a strategy of inquiry to explore a programme, event, activity, process, or more individuals in depth, and thus, a single case study design was adopted (Creswell, 2009). Maree (2016, p. 81) states "that a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context and shows that the boundaries of the context and phenomenon are not shown". I chose a descriptive case study because it helped me to better grasp a complex subject and build on what was already known from previous research.

A case study helped me to crystallise my research so that I could reinforce my findings. Crystallisation is a means of acquiring quality assurance in qualitative data and verifying outcomes utilising a variety of methods for gathering and analysing my data (Maree, 2016). By doing so, my study was more trustworthy. A descriptive case study provides narrative accounts (Cohen et al. 2018) which are applicable to this study as they helped me study the management of National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) student

absenteeism within a context that assisted me to understand the management of student absenteeism from participants' lived experiences (Maree, 2016). In a case study, data collection and analysis focus on one phenomenon, which I chose to understand in-depth in this study (MacMillan and Schumacher, 2001).

The benefit of employing a case study approach is that it gives readers a single example of real people in real situations, helping them to understand the topic being investigated (Ganong and Coleman, 2014). The second benefit of this approach is that the researcher and participants will work closely together, allowing participants to feel comfortable sharing their experiences (Yin, 2011). The promotion of a better understanding of a practice or an issue, as well as the facilitation and contribution to informed decision-making, policy creation, implementation and adjustments, are additional reasons to choose a case study approach. In this regard, my study aimed to explore stakeholders managing student absenteeism at a TVET college.

The use of a case study approach in education research, according to Cohen et al. (2007), enhances teaching and learning in the real-world setting and educational governance; hence, it fosters confidence in the findings. Using a case study I managed to connect the research findings to the study objectives and research questions (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2011). For these reasons, I believed that a case study research methodology was the best choice for my investigation. Additionally, a case study is useful when researching and addressing how and why issues; this study focuses on the how question (Maree, 2016). I managed to respond to the research question by using a case study, which addressed "how" and "why" stakeholders managed students' absenteeism.

A disadvantage of a case study approach is that it is dependent on investigating a particular case, which makes it challenging to draw a conclusion that can be applied generally (Maree, 2012). This constraint was taken into account in this study, as I examined how stakeholders manage student absenteeism. A case study design was chosen since there was limited information available about how student absenteeism is managed at TVET colleges. As a result, I am confident that the case study helped me to fully analyse and comprehend this issue.

3.5 Sampling techniques

Sampling is the process of selecting a small number of individuals who are typical of the overall population to gather data (Cohen et al. 2007). Sampling is described as a selection of a group of people from whom data are collected (MacMillan and Schumacher, 2014). A sample of the population was chosen since doing so would save money on data gathering costs and take less time than using the complete population, which in this case would be all of the college's academics and management. As Maree (2016) says, by choosing a sample, the researcher will consequently save time. The collection of additional rich data is another goal of sampling, according to Gall et al. (2014). This is achievable when a sample, rather than the entire population, is the subject of a rigorous inquiry.

There are two types of sampling: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling comprises convenience sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling and purposeful sampling (Maree, 2016). In this case, the researcher chose purposive sampling. Using purposive sampling, sampling can range from one to 40 or more participants (MacMillan and Schumacher, 2001). The sample of NCV students and other stakeholders was done specifically based on the poor attendance of students at a TVET college in Tshwane North district. The discussion that follows explains why purposive sampling was chosen.

3.5.1 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is the process of choosing participants for a sample based on whether or not they possess the traits that the research is trying to address (MacMillan and Schumacher, 2014). Gay et al. (2009) remark that purposive sampling is a method for choosing a sample that the researcher is familiar with and that represents the complete population to support the aforementioned explanation.

The selection criteria are deliberately chosen by the researcher to answer the main research topic and to be appropriate for the methodology. In this study, participants were purposefully chosen by the researcher based on their background, availability and department.

Purposive sampling, also known as judgemental sampling, enables the researcher to rely on their prior knowledge when choosing a sample (Maree, 2016). I used my expertise as a lecturer to choose a sample that offered reliable and comprehensive information about the phenomenon. Purposive sampling, according to Gall et al. (2014), is the process of selecting a sample that will provide rich information on a phenomenon. As evidence in favour of this approach, Maree (2016) emphasises that purposive sampling is carried out "with a clear objective in mind".

According to MacMillan and Schumacher (2014), purposive sampling has certain advantages, which led the researcher to choose this sampling strategy. These advantages include cost-effectiveness, ease of administration, better participation rates, better and richer data collection, and the assurance of the necessary information. The study was undertaken at the college where the researcher is now employed. In view of this, the participants were reachable and available as needed.

The study, therefore, sampled the heads of department (HoDs) and student support officers (SSOs), as they form part of the college management and they were able to inform me on how absence is dealt with at the college level. The other participants included lecturers and NCV students. Lecturers are the people who are in contact with students daily and the NCV students are those students who dropped out of the mainstream without attaining Grade 12 and subsequently ventured into TVET colleges to further their studies. The NCV students were my focus of this study.

Fourteen participants were selected. Six students over the age of 18 were chosen as it was thought that it might be challenging to obtain consent from parents if they were under 18 years. These students were registered for NCV NQF levels 2 and 3 and were experienced students at the college and thus could provide insight for this study. Further, four HoDs with five years' managerial experience at the TVET College; two lecturers with three years' teaching experience at the college and two SSOs with five years' experience in the support office were selected. These participants were all located on one campus.

I believe that for the issue of absenteeism to be fully addressed, students have to be part of the solution. Their participation in this study was, therefore, crucial for two reasons: (1) democratic participation when plans that affect them directly or indirectly are being made; (2) their buy-in in whatever decisions the college makes in this regard.

3.5.2 Study sites

Athanasou et al. (2012) and Macmillan and Schumacher (2010) indicate that the site is where the research will be carried out. They go on to say that the site must be carefully chosen to satisfy the needs of the research and to be true to the research concept and problem. My current place of employment, a TVET college, served as the site chosen for the study. Because everyone involved worked at this site, it was simple to contact everyone as the need arose. Being an insider researcher has disadvantages, however, including bias and a loss of objectivity (Macmillan, 2010). As a result, I was careful to maintain objectivity and prevent bias (see also the section on trustworthiness). The choice of the study setting was influenced by Macmillan and Schumacher's (2014) recommendation that it be a site where participants are present and able to be studied.

In this study, only one TVET college in Gauteng (Tshwane North) was sampled. To get a wider perspective on the subject, as my main focus was NCV students, I sampled this site purposefully as it is the only public TVET College in Tshwane CBD that offers NCV programmes. According to Merriam (2009), interpretive research allows the researcher to use a small sample or even single cases, selected purposefully to allow the researcher to focus in depth on issues deemed important to the study. The focal point of this study was on stakeholders managing students' absenteeism at a TVET college in Gauteng. To avoid biases, I remained professional and adhered to ethical principles, as the research was conducted at the campus on which I work.

3.6 Data generation strategy

Data gathering, according to Yin (2011), is one of the foundational instruments of a research study. A data collection method is used to acquire data for a research investigation (Polit and Beck, 2004). Furthermore, Corbin and Strauss (2007) state that data could be gathered in a natural setting; in this study, the participants were interviewed on campus. The data collection strategy used in this study comprised semi-structured interviews with structured and open-ended questions. This strategy was used to address the research questions listed in Chapter 1. In this study, only interviews were used. The data collection strategy is discussed below.

3.6.1 Interviews

An interview is described as a two-way discussion between the interviewer and the participants to gather data about the phenomenon under investigation and to comprehend participants' beliefs, perspectives, opinions and behaviours (Fouché et al., 2021). The purpose of employing interviews in this study was to see the world through the participants' eyes (Maree, 2016). Gay et al. (2009) agree to this, stating that an interview is a conversation between two people that is conducted with the express purpose of gleaning information from the participant. The benefit of employing interviews, according to Cohen et al. (2007), is that they can be used successfully in conjunction with other data collection techniques to follow up on ambiguous results and validate other techniques.

I made use of interviews to gather information about student absenteeism at a selected TVET college. The main goal of using interviews in this study was to acquire relevant data on a certain phenomenon. (Cohen et al., 2007). The HoDs, lecturers, SSOs, and students were interviewed individually at the selected site. Participants were asked open-ended and probing questions to gather information. To gather enough information, a digital recorder and a mobile phone were used, and I took notes throughout the interviews. Schedules, formality and structure are identified as characteristics of interviews by Gay et al. (2009). I created schedules beforehand and scheduled meetings with participants.

In qualitative research, various interviewing techniques are employed. First, with regard structured interviews, we are talking about the kind of interview where the methods, questions and content are carefully planned in advance, and the interviewer has minimal flexibility to ask follow-up questions. On the other hand, unstructured interviews give the interviewer more freedom and flexibility because the participant's responses decide the questions (Cohen et al., 2007). In qualitative research, semi-structured interviews combine predetermined questions with participant probing and clarification of answers. Interviews that combine both structured and unstructured questions are referred to as semi-structured interviews (Maree, 2016). In this study, I chose to use semi-structured interviews.

3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews were used to obtain data. An interview, according to Rubin and Rubin (2007), is a procedure in which two or more people exchange a few words, and discuss and agree on a certain issue based on a series of agreed-upon questions. Semi-structured interviews feature predetermined questions, but the order and language of the questions can change or improve during the interview. As the interview develops, more questions may be used to probe. During the individual semi-structured interviews, it was easy for the lecturer participants to discuss their experiences and understandings of how they administer or control a lecture room to reduce student non-attendance in the college.

During the interviews, I recorded the entire conversation and used the audio recording for reference and note-taking. Essential questions were asked during the interview, which were viewed as the main key questions. This allowed me to avoid leaving out important details or queries during the interview. The interview schedule included a variety of open-ended questions that sought to elicit further information from the participants. Semi-structured interviews were advantageous since they are flexible and allowed the interviewer to control the questions that were asked. I was also able to inquire about the participants' thoughts, attitudes and viewpoints on subjects, as well as their motivation (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). Further, the interviewer urged the participant to provide more complete and detailed information.

Participants occasionally supplied personal and prejudiced comments out of a desire to impress the interviewer, which is one of the weaknesses of semi-structured interviews. However, there are disadvantages to using semi-structured interviews: they can be time-consuming, difficult and expensive. Furthermore, participants may be dissatisfied with the interviews and unwilling to disclose their true or accurate opinions and perspectives. Participants were able to speak about, convey, and analyse their personal experiences through semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al. 2007). The interviews took place after college hours on campus. If the participants were not available at the designated time, the interviews were completed virtually.

However, the interviews took a longer time, as did the transcribing and analysing of the interviews. Each participant's interview time was estimated to be between 30 and 40 minutes and I was forced to conduct virtual interviews if situations such as Covid-19 prohibited me from holding face-to-face interviews.

3.7 Data collection procedure

I stayed at the selected research site for almost two weeks. The study participants were made aware of my presence and they received consent letters to read and sign if they agreed to participate before the interviews could commence. To reassure the participants and obtain their permission, the goal and relevance of the study were explained to them.

3.8 Data analysis

Qualitative data collected in this study yielded a large amount of information that needed to be organised into themes and subthemes (Kurma, 2011). To make sense of the voluminous data, a content analysis approach was employed. In following this approach, coding, classifying, writing, and presenting the material into connected themes, content analysis was able to get an understanding of the information to generate an impression (Henning et al. 2004). According to Creswell (2007), the researcher established a way of making sense of the data. The interview's descriptive and the transcription of the digital recordings were evaluated or analysed. Because the researcher wants to understand the lived experiences of student non-attendance, the data were examined through a critical lens.

Data analysis is described as "an inductive process of organizing data into categories and discovering patterns among the categories" by Macmillan and Schumacher (2014, p. 395). Conclusions are drawn from qualitative data after the data have been obtained, not before, therefore I employed inductive analysis. Making sense of data through inductive analysis involves moving from individual facts to broad categories (Maree, 2016). Gay et al. (2009) claim that during data analysis, the researcher examines the themes and analyses the information. Qualitative data analysis captures interpretive conclusions (Welman and Kruger, 2001). Additionally, Macmillan and Schumacher (2014, p. 395) note that data analysis can be done both before and after data collection.

Researchers should analyse the data to highlight the codes according to which they intend to organise the knowledge (Creswell, 2009). Preliminary data processing included transcribing the audio recordings, cleaning the information by deleting all data that led to identifying the participants and the locations where the information was collected, and employing codes to distinguish the participants and the institutions included in the research (Wahyuni, 2012). In his study, data analysis was done in a way that guaranteed the intended qualitative themes (Fouché et al., 2021). To review and aggregate the data, I followed the following procedures and guidelines: arranging data using classification system, as well as an interview guide and study questions; organising data into manageable segments; making sure the theme was relevant to the research questions; using index cards to keep track of important details; making sense of the data and organising it into appropriate categories.

The material gathered from the study was analysed using the research questions and the study goals as a reference (Wahyuni, 2012). In addition, I painstakingly analysed the data by scrutinising the participants' responses to each question.

3.9 Quality criteria

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is used to ensure quality and a common understanding between the participants and the researcher. Mertler and Charles (2011) define trustworthiness as the accuracy and authenticity of the information. In ensuring trustworthiness, four criteria are used, namely, credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability. These are goals which the researcher should pursue. As a result, trustworthiness was established by ensuring the reliability and credibility of the qualitative data. From the participants' perspective, credibility was attained by ensuring that the research findings were believable and convincing. Qualitative research emphasises the use of a variety of methodologies to boost trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009).

Credibility deals with how similar the research study is to reality and how the reader will be able to believe that my study is creditable (Maree, 2016). Gay et al. (2009) refer to credibility as taking into consideration all difficulties encountered in the study. Furthermore, Shenton (2004) adds that credibility helps to check whether findings are in agreement with reality or not. To make sure that my study was credible, I used

previous literature to back up my arguments and make sure my research questions and research methods were aligned with each other.

Confirmability is ensured when the researchers do not produce any findings that are biased and, in addition, state their motivation and interest in the study (Maree, 2016). According to Maree (2016), confirmability is determined by how much the study participants contribute to its validity. I employed a strategy known as crystallisation, which entails using numerous data collection techniques and corroborating methods to obtain a more comprehensive image of the subject being examined (Gay, 2009). In order to achieve confirmability in this study, I used one data collection procedure, that is, semi-structured interviews.

Transferability, according to Maree (2016), is the degree to which the general public can apply the research findings to everyday life. Gay et al. (2009) agree with Maree (2016), stating that readers of the study should be able to relate to the conclusions. To achieve this, the study should provide enough background and information about its findings so that readers can decide whether they can apply them to their own settings. Maree (2016) concurs with this statement, saying that transferability allows the researcher to make connections between the elements of the study and their own experience. This implies that readers will be able to apply the study findings to their own situations. I accomplished this by gathering comprehensive descriptive data.

Dependability is assured by creditability and this is achieved by the research design and data gathering (Maree, 2016). According to Gay et al. (2009, p. 376), dependability refers to the stability of data achieved by applying pertinent research methodologies to the investigation. Before gathering data, I identified the most appropriate study tools. Finally, dependability was assured by making sure that the data analysis process was done correctly and documented so that readers could see how decisions were made and how I arrived at interpretations, as well as by making sure that, during data collection, interviews were conducted in a conducive environment to develop trust with and privacy for the participants (Maree, 2016).

Authenticity refers to how real and true the study is (Longman, 2011). To make sure that my study was authentic, I was not biased toward my study and the findings but was transparent regarding the phenomenon investigated in the study.

3.10 Ethical considerations

In order to begin the research in this project, I first had to obtain permission from the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. Accordingly, a 2021 research ethics application form for ethics review and clearance had to be completed. After receiving ethical clearance, I obtained permission letters from the DHET and the selected TVET College in Pretoria. Once permission was granted to conduct research on the college campus, I asked the participants at the selected college for their informed consent. In addition, I distributed consent forms at the selected TVET College in Pretoria for participants who were interested in participating in the interviews to sign. Individual participants received invitation letters and consent forms, and participants were informed about the interviews schedule in order to ensure their availability.

I discussed the significance of the study, the process, the timeline and the informed consent with all of the participants on the campus I had chosen and then awaited responses from them. In addition, I developed an informed consent letter, which each participant in the research project read and signed. Because the students who took part in the study were frequently absent, it was predicted that they might be absent for the interview. As a result, I had devised a plan, such that if they did not come, the interviews would be held at their homes. Luckily, they were all available for the interviews that were scheduled on the campus.

According to Johnson and Christensen (2006), informed consent occurs when participants agree to participate in a study after being educated about the study goals, protocols, risks, benefits and privacy concerns. During the study, the participants were assured of their right to privacy (Welman et al., 2005).

The study took into account the following ethical issues: protection against harm, informed consent, right to secrecy, and honesty during the study. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and participants were guaranteed that they had the choice to withdraw at any time. Participants could also choose to remain anonymous to protect their identity. Furthermore, before the interviews begin, I created a trusting relationship with the participants.

I ensured that the participants' identities were not revealed. Frequently, betrayal occurs during a research project, as the findings and suggestions are communicated in such a way that the participants feel humiliated, anxious and distressed. I considered this to be one of the most important ethical considerations. According to Welman et al. (2005), part of being ethical is demonstrating a moral code of behaviour with regard to the study. I revealed my identity as well as the background, goal, and procedures of the study. Furthermore, the research was kept as simple and uncomplicated as possible. All agreed-upon outcomes were followed. Furthermore, the participants' dignity, privacy and interests were all protected.

3.11 Chapter summary

In this chapter I discussed how I conducted the study. I started off by briefly discussing the context of the study. I then discussed the interpretive paradigm which informs the study by looking at the research paradigm. The discussion moved to looking at the qualitative research approach and case study design through which I conducted the investigation, given its explorative nature. I then discussed the population that I identified for the study and the sampling technique that I employed in the investigation. This led to a discussion of semi-structured interviews as the instrument that I used to collect data. I then discussed how I analysed the data collected. The discussion then moved to how I guaranteed that the study is trustworthy by ensuring that the results of the study are credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable. I concluded the chapter by briefly discussing the ethics that I adhered to during the investigation, including informed consent, voluntary participation, privacy and confidentiality. The following chapter focuses on data presentation, analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study was to understand how a Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college in Tshwane North district managed student absenteeism. In the previous chapter I discussed the procedures and methods that were followed in conducting this study. In this chapter, I present, analyse and interpret the data that I collected from participants. In doing so, I firstly give my personal declaration where I present who I was at the time that I conducted this study and how my position could have influenced the manner in which I conducted the data collection, analysis and interpretation processes, as well as the conclusions that I made. I then provide a description of the study site and the participants in this study followed by an explanation of the processes followed in identifying themes from the data.

4.2 Personal declaration

Social scientists generally agree that researchers should define their duties, especially those who employ qualitative techniques to support their research (Kelly, 2014). According to Milligan (2016), researchers may approach their studies differently depending on whether they are viewed as insiders or outsiders at the research sites. Insiders are researchers who are part of the community being researched and therefore share some experiences, knowledge and understanding with participants, as opposed to outsiders who are researchers who are not from the community they study, hence, as observers they are impartial and detached (Kerstetter, 2012).

I approached the public TVET College as an insider researcher because I could relate to what they were experiencing. However, I had no personal connections with any of the study participants, as they were from different divisions. This helped me to ensure validity and credibility because I was able to maintain emotional distance and I was subjective in regard to how stakeholders manage student absenteeism (Kerstetter, 2012). To avoid biases as an insider researcher, I adopted a professional stance and adhered to ethical principles.

Being an insider researcher made it easier for me to reach the research location; the only difficulty I had was persuading participants to participate in the study. I was successful in pursuing volunteers after providing the principal's letter of approval and the committee's ethical letter of approval, and after assuring them of anonymity and confidentiality.

4.3. Participants' profile and study

The fourteen participants in this study comprised of the following;

Head of department one (HoD 1)

Head of department one (HoD 1) was a black South African male between 50 and 60 years of age with BEd Honours degrees as the highest qualification with nineteen years of professional experience as the HoD for NCV Marketing division.

Head of department two (HoD 2)

Head of department two (HoD 2) was a black South African male between 40 and 50 years of age with Bachelor degree as the highest qualification with twenty-one years of professional experience as the HoD for NCV Hospitality division.

Head of department three (HoD 3)

Head of department three (HoD 3) was black South African male between 40 and 50 years of age with a Postgraduate diploma as the highest qualification with fiftyteen years of professional experience as the HoD for NCV Fundamental division.

Head of department four (HoD 4)

Head of department four (HoD 4) was a black South African female between 40 and 50 years of age with a BEd Honours degree as the highest qualification with twenty-four years of professional experience as the HoD for NCV Finance, Economics, and Accounting division.

Student Support Officer one (SSO 1)

Student Support Officer One (SSO 1) was a black South African male between 40 and 50 years of age with a diploma as the highest qualification with five years of professional experience as a student liaison officer.

Student Support Officer two (SSO 2)

Student Support Officer two (SSO 2) was a black South African male between 40 and 50 years of age with a diploma as the highest qualification with fifteen years of professional experience as a liaison.

Lecturer one (L1)

Lecturer one (L 1) was a black South African female between 30 and 40 years of age with an Honours degree as the highest qualification with seven years of professional experience as a lecturer for Finance, Economics and Accounting division.

Lecturer two (L2)

Lecturer two (L 2) was a black South African male between 30 and 40 years of age with an Honours degree as the highest qualification with eleven years of professional experience as a lecturer for Marketing division.

Student one (STUD 1)

Student one (STUD 1) was a black South African female student between 20 and 30 years of age doing Finance, Economics, and Accounting which is an NCV program, NQF level L3 and she is doing her second year.

Student two (STUD 2)

Student two (STUD 2) was a black South African male who was one of the SRC members between 20 and 30 years of age doing Finance, Economics, and Accounting which is an NCV program, NQF level L3 and he is doing his second year.

Student three (STUD 3)

Student three (STUD 3) was a black South African female student between 20 and 30 years of age doing Finance, Economics, and Accounting which is an NCV program, NQF level L3 and she is doing her second year.

Student four (STUD 4)

Student four (STUD 4) was a black South African male student between 20 and 30 years of age doing Marketing which is an NCV program, NQF level L3 and he is doing his second year.

Student five (STUD 5)

Student five (STUD 5) was a black South African female student between 20 and 30 years of age doing Marketing which is an NCV program, NQF level L3 and she is doing her second year.

Student six (STUD 6)

Student six (STUD 6) was a black South African female student between 18 and 20 years of age doing Marketing, which is an NCV programme, NQF level L2 and she was doing her first year.

The total number of participants in this study was 14. Of these, four were heads of department (HoDs), two were student support officers (SSOs), another two were lecturers and the last six were student participants with absenteeism problems. All participants were located on one campus. The biographical information about participants is presented in the tables below which contains the profile of managers with their pseudonyms, gender, race, position, age group, qualifications and management experience.

Table 4.1 Profile of HoDs and SSOs

Pseudonyms	Position	Race	Gender	Age group	Qualifications	Management experience
HoD 1	Head of department	Black	Male	51–60	Honours degree	19 years
HoD 2	Head of department	Black	Male	41–50	Bachelor degree	21 years

HoD 3	Head of department	Black	Male	41–50	Postgraduate diploma	15 years
HoD 4	Head of department	Black	Female	41–50	Honours degree	24 years
SSO 1	Student support officer	Black	Male	41–50	Diploma	5 years
SSO 2	Student support officer	Black	Male	41–50	Diploma	15 years

Table 4.2 below presents the lecturers' profile, including pseudonyms, position, race, gender, age group, qualifications and teaching experience.

Table 4.2 Lecturer profile

Pseudonyms	Position	Race	Gender	Age group	Qualifications	Teaching experience
L1	Lecturer	Black	Female	31–40	Honours degree	7 years
L2	Lecturer	Black	Male	31–40	Honours degree	11 years

Table 4.3 below presents the profile of students, including pseudonym, position, gender, race, age group, NCV program, and NQF level.

Table 4.3 Student profile

Pseudonyms	Position	Gender	Race	Age group	NCV Programme	NQF Level
STUD 1	Student	Female	Black	21–30	Finance, Economics, and Accounting	3
STUD 2	Student	Male	Black	21–30	Finance, Economics, and Accounting	3
STUD 3	Student	Female	Black	21–30	Finance, Economics, and Accounting	3
STUD 4	Student	Male	Black	21–30	Marketing	3
STUD 5	Student	Female	Black	21–30	Marketing	3
STUD 6	Student	Female	Black	18–20	Marketing	2

4.3.1 Research site

The study was conducted at a TVET college situated in the Tshwane central business district (CBD). It is the only public college that offers National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) programmes in the CBD although there are a number of private colleges. The institution was an existing college in Pretoria which merged with the Tshwane North TVET College in 2003, with the vision of being an innovative centre of excellence for skills development. Its purpose is to equip students with knowledge and attributes relevant to lead the modern economy (DHET, 2022, p. 10).

The institution offers the following NCV programmes in Business Studies: Finance, Economics and Accounting Levels 2–4, Generic Management Levels 2–4, and Marketing Levels 2–4. In this study, only Finance, Economics and Accounting Levels 2 and 3, and Marketing Levels 2 & 3 programmes were selected as they had the highest rate of student absenteeism. The programmes selected comprised approximately 15 lecturing staff and 240 students for both levels.

4.4 Data collection process

The research data were collected from 14 participants using one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The participants consisted of various stakeholders at a TVET college in Tshwane North district, including management (HoDs), SSOs, lecturers and students (see Tables 4.1–4.3). In order to answer the main question: “*How does a TVET College in Tshwane North district manage student absenteeism?*” The following research sub-questions were asked:

- How does a TVET college in Tshwane North district interpret and understand the concept of student absenteeism?
- What factors contribute to student absenteeism in a TVET college in Tshwane North district?
- What challenges does a TVET college in Tshwane North district experience regarding student absenteeism?
- What strategies does a TVET college in Tshwane North district use to reduce student absenteeism?

Fourteen participants, consisting of six students aged 18 years and older, were selected, as it was thought that it might be challenging to obtain consent from parents if students were under age. These students were all registered for NCV NQF levels 2 and 3 and were therefore experienced students at the college and, thus, could provide insight into this study. Furthermore, participants included four HoDs with five years’ managerial experience at the college, two lecturers with three years’ teaching experience at the college, and two SSOs with five years’ experience in the support office. The participants were all located on the same campus and were sampled using a purposive sampling method. Prospective participants were sent a letter inviting them to participate and those who agreed to participate signed consent forms.

The interviews with all participants were conducted in English. The interviews with HoDs, SSOs and lecturers were conducted in their respective offices and scheduled according to their time preferences. Interviews with students were scheduled after college hours to avoid interrupting their classes. The overall duration of each interview was approximately 30 minutes. I used thematic analysis in this study to allow for new

and existing ideas that might emerge. This strategy was adopted because it provided an overview of the issues raised by the interviewees.

4.5 Data presentation, analysis and interpretation

The themes I identified in this study are presented according to the participants' responses to the interview questions which were related to the research sub-questions that guided this study. Four themes were identified and linked to the research questions, with each theme having several sub-themes. It should be noted that all the participants gave me permission to record their interviews. As result, the information that I gathered from the audio recordings was afterwards transcribed verbatim. The rationale behind this was to ensure that I gave the evidence of participants in their own words. Such participants' opinions are italicised.

The following section reports the data that were generated from participants' responses to the first research question: How does a TVET college in Tshwane North district interpret and understand the concept of student absenteeism?

4.5.1 Interpretation and understanding of student absenteeism.

One of my main interests in this study was the participants' understanding of student absenteeism, which was deemed very important. The HoDs, SSOs and lecturers who responded to this question defined student absenteeism differently, as each participant used their own understanding to answer the question.

Lecturer one (L1) interpreted and understood student absenteeism as *“when you are unable to come, or I will say at college or to come to school more especially if you are dealing with students. If you are unable to report to school due to certain reasons or due to you not wanting to come to school so I can say it is all that not being able to come to school.”* Lecturer two (L2) recalled *“Yoo, yoo, it is a huge concept, I think it is a complex issue, but from face value, when students missed classes or abscond or abscond for different reasons so that is my understanding.”*

From the lecturers' narratives, it is evident that student absenteeism exists in TVET colleges and for them, it is normal. According to them, there are two phases of student absenteeism. While some students give reasons for absenting themselves from college others do it without giving reasons. What is not clear is the reasons students give.

In interpreting student absenteeism, the HoD 3 said *“That would mean a student who would not attend classes, for example. But then we need to view the concept in terms of the magnitude. So, you would say, a student who is absent for a continuous period of time that becomes a problem.”* While HoD 2 said, *“Yes, student absenteeism is when students do not avail themselves for scheduled classes.”* HoD 4 added *“if students do not pitch up with or without a reason while some let you know that they are not coming but, others just do not come to college with no reason”*. On the other hand, HoD 1 said, *“Student absenteeism is being away from the institution of learning or away from work or mm, student absenteeism is bunking of classes.”*

The narratives above indicate that HoDs also admit that student absenteeism exists in TVET colleges. The HoDs, like the lecturers, identify two phases of student absenteeism; that is, those that absent themselves with reasons and those that do so without reasons. However, HoDs further expanded on their understanding by giving the time span of student absenteeism: those absent for a continuous period of time and those that are occasionally absent.

SSO 1 gave his view on the concept: *“Mm, student absenteeism is bunking of classes or absconding.”* Whereas SSO two (SSO 2) understood it as: *“Student absenteeism as students who are not attending classes.”*

The SSOs’ narratives agree with those of the HoDs and lecturers who indicated that student absenteeism does exist in TVET colleges.

In this theme, interpretation and understanding of student absenteeism, TVET college stakeholders cited their different views regarding student absenteeism. Their perception of the “definition of student absenteeism” is based on their experience gained in the years they have spent offering different levels of NCV programmes at the TVET College.

The literature agrees with what has been said by HoDs, lecturers and SSOs. For example, Rao and Valleswary (2016) refer to student absenteeism as the practice of missing college for no reason, while Myataza (2019) regards student absenteeism as students’ failure to attend college for the day. In conclusion, my findings on the understanding of student absenteeism reveal that student absenteeism is when students **abscond classes, bunk classes, or miss classes for no reason**. Overall, the participants of this study concurred with the findings of Chukwu et al. (2017). Case

and Jet (2007) and Kasita (2019) who all define student absenteeism as the act of a student who is not at college for a day.

The majority of the participants in this study understood student absenteeism somewhat superficially, although one participant demonstrated a deeper understanding of it. That is, while others understood this concept as either an authorised or unauthorised absence from college or class for a day, the other participant categorised it as partial absence, meaning absence for a part of the college day, and full absence, meaning absence for the entire day. This participant further indicated that students can be continually or chronically absent from college; the former being uninterrupted absence whereas the latter refers to being repeatedly absent. This therefore implies a lack of understanding of this phenomenon on the part of lecturers, HoD's and SSO's.

In the next section, I present the second sub-research question together with the participants' narratives.

4.5.2 Factors contributing to student absenteeism

During the interviews, the majority of participants mentioned various factors in relation to the second sub-question: "What factors contribute to student absenteeism in a TVET college in Tshwane North district?" Responses were received from the students, lecturers, HoDs and SSOs. These participants thought that family factors, socioeconomic factors and institutional factors are the causes contributing to student absenteeism and these subsequently emerged as the main factors in student absenteeism at the college.

The factors which the participants viewed as contributing to student absenteeism are in line with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which is predicated on the idea that there is no one generative mechanism that can adequately explain human behaviour. A person's environment, for example, consists of numerous interconnected different levels of systems. Ecological systems theory holds that the environment constitutes social groups, and relationships such as the family, college, socioeconomic environment, interpersonal relationships and power relationships, which are intimately related to people's behaviour.

Student five (STUD 5) answered the question by mentioning that *“I have been missing classes and that is because, I have kids, sometimes they get sick and then I absent myself in the class”*. She added: *“The other reason is transport money, sometimes I do not have money to come to school. Hey, some of us, we are provided with the bursary that is NSFAS and then when it comes to money for transport, they do not, uh give us money for transport so that makes us to bunk classes or absent ourselves into the class.”* Student three (STUD 3) supported this, saying *“The reason, firstly is because I have a daughter, so sometimes she becomes sick and I have to stay home.”*

STUD 1 gave a different view *“Uh, we missed three or more days usually, uh I will be told that you have not been attending, is there a problem? I would be asked where the problem is and some of these problems will be personal and some of those problems will just be plain ignorance from me or when I do not want to go to college.”* STUD 2 stated that *“The other reason I miss class is because I wake up late and decide not to come to college as I was feeling lazy”*. STUD 4 added that *“Sometimes you just feel like, I do not want to go to college today”*. STUD 6 further stated that *“I am unable to come to college because I am staying very far from college and I cannot walk to college”*.

Lastly, STUD 5 gave factors contributing to student absenteeism and mentioned that *“Sometimes I find myself in the situation whereby I am having menstruation pains, the terrible pain can make me not to come to college.”* STUD 6, on the other hand, attested that *“I am unable to concentrate in class due to period pains that are very painful and they force me to sleep the whole day and during that time I will bunk my classes”*.

The narratives above reveal that students are absent from college due to socioeconomic factors such as poor health, behavioural problems, poverty, or exposure to crime and transport issues. In support of this, Magobolo and Dube (2019) attest that students are often absent because of illness and, even if the illness is not serious, they still do not attend because they do not feel like attending. In addition, most of the student participants complained about challenges related to a lack of money for transport. They indicated that they are often absent owing to a lack of transport money to come to the college.

In this regard, Mafa (2018) found that students who arrive late to school or don't arrive at all during the day may be experiencing transportation issues. This often leads to partial absence, as students may miss some classes because they were unable to arrive

at the college in time. Mafa (2018) goes on to say that many students in rural areas have to travel long distances to get to college, making it difficult for them to attend class every day.

These findings correlate with the macrosystem environment of ecological systems theory. At this level, the socioeconomic factors stated above, that is, the socioeconomic status, financial status and social position of the child, may influence his/her behaviour (Donald et al., 2010).

Additionally, some students highlighted that family factors contribute to student absenteeism. In support of this, STUD 5 said *“Family problems are, another issue. I am married with kids, sometimes my husband gets sick and also the kids, sometimes we find ourselves having a funeral in the family and they need my special attention that as well will make me not to come to class”*. STUD 6 revealed that *“Sometimes my parents and my grandmother fight in the morning before I go to college and that quarrel will disturb me in class as I could not concentrate the whole day thinking of their argument, and sometimes I would decide not to go to college as I feel disturbed.”*

Students mentioned other factors, saying *“Uhh, lots of friends uh, can influence me to bunk the classes or to absent myself in the class, sometimes we will go to watch movies or go for food and then we do not come back to class”* (STUD 5). In addition, STUD 1 argued that *“I do not allow my friends to influence me on whether I should attend classes or not. If they decide not to attend, I simply tell them that I am going to attend as I need to finish my course on time.”*

In the narratives above, students revealed that family factors and personal factors are some of the factors that contribute to student absenteeism. One student mentioned that her attendance was affected by family problems as she was taking care of a family member (STUD 3). In addition, according to the literature, students' associations with non-students have an adverse impact on their attendance in class (Ocak et al., 2017; Pehlivan, 2011). During college hours, friends who are not students will offer fun things to do, and the students will not want to miss out on them. Wadesango and Machingambi's (2011) study, which supports the findings of the current study, found that students in tertiary education have a high percentage of absenteeism because they hang out with non-students. Once more, college students allege that they influence one another to miss or not to attend classes due to their other obligations in society. A study

by Demir and Karabeyoğlu (2016) found that "family factors" are yet another significant influence in absenteeism. The attendance of students at the college is significantly influenced by their parents.

Demir and Karabeyoğlu (2016) and Ancheta et al. (2021) reveal that family factors might cause student absence for the following reasons: socioeconomic status of the family, the need for the student to work, parenting responsibilities, psychological issues, neglect or lack of support, drugs or alcohol abuse, criminal behaviour, a lack of consistency, divorce, inter-parental conflicts, a single-parent household, lack of parental interest or control over the child's behaviour, parents with low education levels, adverse college experiences in the past, and a lack of participation.

In responding to the factors that contribute to student absenteeism, STUD 5 mentioned that *"The student attitude towards the lecturer or the subject is a problem. Sometimes we are given a presentation in class, then most of the students, uh, do not like to present and that can make most students absent in class."* Furthermore, she stated that *"Some of the lecturers' attitudes in class make me absent, because you come to class prepared for the lesson then you find yourself being alone in that class and some of the lecturers are so lazy to teach and/or to lecture one student, they simply say you can go home and come back tomorrow"*.

STUD 1 reiterated the above-mentioned point when she said *"To be honest, ohm if lecturers would less their arrogance without disrespect and with less judgement, I think most students would like to come and attend. As a student, we do face our problems, but having been judged by a lecturer who may not know us or our background, such kinds affect our attendance."* Continuing, she said, *"The other reason is that we might have voices at the back of our mind telling us that no man, attending classes is not that important as long as you can read, you can do your work at home."* STUD 4 mentioned the following as well: *"Sometimes you just feel like I do not want to go to college today, simply because you had a conflict with a lecturer"*. He continued saying, *"Yeah some of the students do not behave in class, they do not attend classes on time, so sometimes a lecturer will say, no get out of my class. You did not attend my class yesterday, you came late today and you did not submit my work on time, so it shows that you are not consistent"*.

Responding to the same question, STUD 3 stated that *“The biggest reason that we have as students is that we do not have support while other students have deeper problems than I have, some students need to be motivated from college because they have problems from home and that affects their studies.”* Similarly, STUD 4 said that, *“We must be given motivation on daily basis that the future goes to those who believe in it, and the more you come to college the more you will pass”*. While STUD 1 had a different view that *“Students should have a change of mind set because as students, we tend towards being so ignorant about our education. Because at home we were told that you are not a bright student, you are a slow learner and those words do stay at the back of our minds and every time we come and try to put our best at college, all that just put us down.”*

The findings gleaned from the narratives above indicate that student absenteeism is at times influenced by institutional factors such as lecturers’ attitudes towards students and student attitudes towards lecturers and the subject. They revealed that attitude towards the lecturer, student or subject is another factor that contributes to student absenteeism. In addition, I discovered that students feel that they are not motivated and supported at the college and also from home. As a result, that makes them lose interest in the subjects or programmes that they are doing at the college. In support of that, Amukahara Joy and Bivwiere (2021) state that absenteeism is seen as a lack of motivation for studying, which harms students’ final grades.

Myataza (2019) attests that, according to the lecturers interviewed in his study, students’ expectations were not met because they enrolled in the college hoping to experience the practical portion of the programme or course. If their expectations are not met, students lose interest or become bored with the subject matter. It was mentioned that students registered at TVET colleges in hopes of receiving both a practical and theoretical component to their education (Myataza, 2019). In addition, Şahin et al. (2016) elaborates that the relationship between lecturers and students is very important as it may affect student academic performance.

The narratives above indicate that students attest have various reasons for missing classes and these are found to be contributing to their absenteeism. These findings are in line with factors found in the mesosystem of ecological systems theory. In line with the theory relating to mesosystems, the relationship between the lecturer and the student has an influence on how these students behave at the college (Donald et al., 2010).

In answering the same question, SSO 1 indicated that *“We have students, more especially girls who are experiencing menstruations for the first time in tertiary. So sometimes they get frustrated at some point and decide not to come to college when they are on their periods. Because, this has a stigma or maybe they are afraid to come out and talk to their lecturers, they then end up bunking classes.”* In contrast, SSO 2 gave a different view *“Peer pressure remains a serious challenge, because most of the students come into the college where we have students that are studying for diplomas and they are making friends with such students and only to find that they influence them to bunk classes as they have been to the college for a long time.”*

Based on the narratives above, SSOs found similar factors that contribute towards student absenteeism to those identified by the students, including socioeconomic factors and personal factors such as menstruation and peer pressure.

In answering the question about what factors contribute to student absenteeism, L2 said: *“Socioeconomic factors like the issue of financial instability. Many students come from a poor background and they will say, no they do not have money to come to college, money to buy clothes or food and I think socioeconomic factors come to play.”*

L1 indicated that *“Most of students, always reason with the issue of not having money to come to college as NSFAS normally pays out their money late”*. She added that *“Female student usually say my kid was sick and I had to take him to the doctor, because there was no one to look after my kid.”* She further stated: *“The third issue that they also reason with is, the issue of health status because some of them will say, I have to go to the hospital for check-ups.”*

It would appear from the above narratives that lecturers agree with students and SSOs by stating that socioeconomic factor and family factors such as lack of transport money, family responsibilities and illness or health issues are included in the reasons why student are always absent. In support of the above statement, Demir and Karabeyoğlu

(2016) attest that student attendance and punctuality are significantly impacted by the circumstances at home. One of the main causes of college absences may be poor family management and a lack of persistence, although separated families are frequently unconcerned with their children's success or failure; they do not assist in resolving issues at college, and they hardly ever show up to parent–teacher conferences.

In responding to the question above, HoD 4 narrated that, *“if there is nobody who has a degree or diploma from their homes, they might not be encouraged to go to college. While other students work part-time to survive and some may fall pregnant and drop out of college”*. She added that others are *“substance abuse from home, poverty, lack of finance, accommodation even drugs”*.

HoD 1 mentioned that *“most of the students are funded by NSFAS and these allowances are distributed very late and this leads to students absenting themselves due to lack of finance.”* HoD 3 gave a different view *“Lack of interest in the subject because of lecturers who stay away from classes or some students may not find the lecture to be at par with them or they are not giving enough to the students or it could be certain students who simply do not take their studies serious.”*

In contrast, HoD 4 said that *“there is a lot of temptations that are taking place, for example, movies, clubs, parks and flats, there is so much that are enticing. Therefore, as a student you need to be focused and know what you want. If you are going to be influenced by friends as well as what is going on around you, you are not going to get it right.”* Giving a different view, HoD 2 stated that *“students are overburdened with responsibilities, for example taking care of siblings or parents that are sick or sometimes they will say they are not feeling well. While others will give the reason that the bus or transport did not pitch”*.

From the above narratives it would appear that HoDs agree with the students, SSOs and lecturers that socioeconomic factors, family factors and institutional factors such as a low level of education in family members, lack of income that forces students to work while studying, teenage pregnancy, poverty and drugs play a big role in student absenteeism. The study by Mafa (2018) reveals that child labour has been found to be another factor that leads to student absenteeism. Some students are compelled to work part-time jobs to support their families because of the rising poverty in rural areas, which prevents them from attending school. It is often the older students who face this issue

since they are responsible for caring for their younger siblings. This is especially true in households where one or both parents may have died from HIV/AIDS and the older children have no choice but to work to support the family (Mafa, 2018). It was reported that one of the main reasons students fail to go to school in South Africa, especially in rural regions, is because their families depend on them for income (HSRC, 2005).

Most of the student participants in this study, especially the female students, stated that factors that contribute to their absenteeism include family factors and peer pressure. However, the majority of the participants indicated that NSFAS funds are a number one contributing factor to their absenteeism because they depend on them to be able to come to college and, if they do not receive them, they look for part-time jobs in order to survive. Accordingly, the mesosystem described by ecological systems theory has a number of microsystems that interact with one another; hence, what occurs in the family environment and with teachers affects how children behave at college, and vice versa (Donald et al., 2010).

In conclusion, the following themes emerged from the interviews regarding the factors contributing to student absenteeism: family factors, personal factors, socioeconomic factors and institutional factors. These factors were mentioned by the study participants on the campus as contributing to student absenteeism. Factors stated in this study are in line with the findings of studies by Myataza (2019) and Katanga (2016) which found personal factors, family factors, college factors and transport issues to be the contributing factors. Based on these factors, which were discussed above, it is proper to look at the challenges related to them.

4.5.3 Implications of student absenteeism

This study investigated the implications that stakeholders face during student absenteeism. This section provides the participants' views in response to the question posed, "What challenges does a TVET college in Tshwane North district experience regarding student absenteeism?"

In answering the above question, STUD 1 mentioned that: "*Missing classes affects my performance because I remain behind with most of the content taught*". In a different vein, STUD 5 commented that "*some of the lecturers do not stick to the syllabus during their lesson presentation, and that affect my attendance as I get bored and decide not*

to attend classes". STUD 2 shared the same sentiments, saying, *"most lecturers always comes late to class and their periods end without doing anything, as a result, I do not come to class"*. In support of the above, Myataza (2019) agrees that students will not take lecturers seriously if they stress the importance of attendance and on-time arrival of students when they are not enforcing those guidelines. Lecturers play a crucial role in student life and students look up to them for inspiration.

In a different vein STUD 1 answered the above question as follows: *"If you miss one class, there is a possibility that when you are going to write your exam, that one class that you missed might affect your results"*. She added that *"the policy says that, attendance is the key, you could fail, you could repeat your level because of attendance, and you need mostly 80% of attendance to go to the next level or to qualify to write the exam."* STUD 2 agreed: *"Whatever that was taught, you will be left behind and have no clue of what has been taught and you will fail, and end up not qualifying for the exam."*

In answering the above question, STUD 3 indicated *"that sometimes some of the students drop out of college because their irregular attendance"*. However, students who miss most of college days end up feeling that he/she is not making progress with his/her college work and end up dropping out of college. In support of the above statement, Mahlalela (2019) study discovered that students with a high rate of absenteeism may lack motivation and interest in their studies, especially if they feel alienated from their classmates, peers, lecturers, or the college in general. Gottfried (2014) further attest that poor academic performance can lead to students dropping out of college. When students fail to make progress academically, they may feel frustrated and lose hope, ultimately leading them to drop out.

In the above narratives, students mentioned that they believed the following to be implicated in their absenteeism: late coming by lecturers, not meeting the minimum requirements for exam entry and lecturers not sticking to the syllabus during their lesson presentation, leading to a low output rate.

Responding to the same question, SSO 2 commented that *"NCV student needs to understand the importance of attending their classes because when they are absent they miss all the notes, summaries and discussions that were taught or shared during their absence, as a result they fail assessments."*

This SSO gave a different view compared to that of the students with regard to the implications. They argued that students need to be reminded daily about the importance of attending classes as they will miss important information. Gottfried's (2014) findings support this, indicating that students who are frequently absent only receive a few hours of instruction, thus, may do poorly in tests and in-class quizzes and there is the possibility that they missed the rules or scope that was distributed in class while they were absent. Accordingly, the findings regarding students' performance in assessments and their persistent absences are consistent with earlier studies. Similar results were established by Otto (2016), who makes the argument that absent students may not sufficiently prepare for tests since they may not have notes and may give wrong responses to questions relating to the content knowledge that was taught in the class while they were absent.

As per Mahlalela (2019), learning is a gradual process, where lesson plans are created with the aim of ensuring progress in comprehending concepts and content knowledge. In case a student misses several days of school, they may not be able to access the notes and presentations that were taught during their absence, and this may disrupt the learning process. Consequently, students with irregular attendance are likely to miss out on a lot of information since knowledge builds up on each other. Moreover, attending school regularly is crucial for students to master all concepts taught from the beginning to the end of the chapter, thereby acquiring comprehensive content knowledge (Mahlalela, 2019).

In responding to the above question, L2 indicated that: *"It affects the syllabus, uh, because you cannot really push your syllabus and another issue is that, those who are not in class at that time, they have to consult and that is a challenge with NCV students."* She further mentioned that: *"Students do not consult, as a result, they remain behind with their studies and ultimately we find that they do not qualify to write exams."* L2 continued in this vein, stating that: *"Lecturers need to come early for morning classes as students take advantage of their late coming and not come for class, more especially when they know that lecturer A will not pitch for their morning class."*

In addition, L1 mentioned that: *"Students has a tendency of being absent more especially on Fridays and that has a serious effect in our college because the rate of absenteeism will always be high year in and year out."*

It would appear from the above narratives that lecturers agree with students that late coming on the part of lecturers, and students not meeting the minimum requirements for exam entry, are some of the reasons related to absenteeism in the TVET sector. They further mentioned that student absenteeism affects the work they schedule for a week or two, and thus they cannot complete the syllabus on time. They also indicated that students have a tendency not to attend college on Fridays which pushes up the rate of student absenteeism at the college. In addition, if lecturers are late for class students take advantage of this and decide not to turn up for the class. Mahlalela (2019) also found that lecturers complain about the implications of student absenteeism when it comes to completing the syllabus.

HoD 2 answered the above question saying: *“My reputation is at stake because students end up failing, so that put a dent on my reputation as a lecturer, because my performance is based on students pass rate, when they pass, am doing well, and when they fail, I am performing badly.”* He added that: *“I will be forced to give them sick test if they are not at the college, and that derail my progress because at the time that they come, I am supposed to finish the syllabus, then I have to stop and give attention to them as their lecturer.”*

HoD 4 differed with HoD 2, stating that: *“If we have covered more work at the beginning of the year, even if the students go and come back after few months, at least they will be behind with one task, then you can assist them to pass and do revision with them”*. In addition, HoD 2 stated: *“The most burning issue is that students end up not performing well in the test, some do not even complete the assessment tasks or do not write the test and they end up failing the academic year so that leads to high failure rate. As a result, they end up giving up and drop out of school.”* The study by Demir and Karabeyoğlu (2016) discovered that student absenteeism is linked to a number of risk factors, including academic failure, and is thought to be a predictor of academic failure. If no action is taken, student absenteeism could signal the start of a series of events that could lead to academic failure or college dropout.

Displaying a different view, HoD 4 said that, *“We get demoralized because students are not in class. You want to help them; we are here for them and it affects your pass rate as lecturer, because it is always very low.”* She also added that: *“It also affect the TVET sector in terms of funding, in terms of certification rate, in terms of the perception of what people think about the TVET sector.”*

HoD 3 gave his view of the implications of student absenteeism: *“It affects lecturers as they have to account for the performance of their students and lecturers’ performance will be affected negatively and eventually translate into a low numbers of students who complete their qualifications on time. In other words, the throughput rate will be low and that would affect our certification rate”*. Additionally, he mentioned that: *“It will also affect the Department of Higher Education in terms of their own performance targets and also the performance of the college overall would have a reputation impacts such that the colleges’ ability to accept most students would be constrained and therefore that would affect funding because the college is funded on the basis of numbers.”*

The above narratives indicate that HoDs presented varied implications of absenteeism compared to lecturers, students and SSOs. HoDs mentioned low certification rates, college receiving less funding, limited of student intake, and lecturer’s reputation being affected due to high failure rates and dropout. However, HoDs shared the same sentiments with lecturers in terms of the fact that they could not complete the syllabus on time and that affected their work negatively.

Similar findings on re-teaching and student absenteeism were previously reported in Otto (2016), who claims that lecturers may need to reteach or rewrite prior lessons in order to help absentees make up for lost time. According to Otto (2016), teachers spend time helping absentees and going over their notes, which may be unfair to students who regularly attend college because it consumes their time. In accordance with the existing literature, some researchers demonstrate that students who consistently attend classes may become demotivated as a result of this re-teaching (Şahin et al., 2016). Participants presented their experiences regarding student absenteeism. Chukwu et al. (2017) confirm what was said during the interviews, stating that student absenteeism has major implications for the school system in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Chukwu et al. found that student absenteeism is an epidemic not being only peculiar to the university, but also to both public and private colleges in both developed and developing countries. Students' absence in class has become more common in many parts of the world (Jacob and Lovett, 2019; Tahir, 2011), but is especially prevalent in South Asian schools.

With regard to the findings relating to this question, in the interviews most participants gave their own views regarding the challenges, revealing that lecturers cannot complete the syllabus on time due to the high rate of student absenteeism which forces them to repeat the content taught during the students' absence. The following themes emerged from the interviews: punctuality, low certification rate, high dropout rate, high failure rate, lecturer complaining about low attendance, lecturers not sticking to the syllabus during their lesson presentations, limited funding from the DHET, and lower student intakes in the following academic year. Having discussed the implications of student absenteeism, the next section will discuss the strategies for addressing this issue.

4.5.4 Strategies used to reduce student absenteeism

After exploring the implications encountered as a result of student absenteeism, the next question sought to ascertain the following: "What strategies does a college have to overcome the above implications?"

STUD 2 had the following to say regarding the strategies: "*Management send messages or emails to parents informing them about our attendance and state that if your child does not attend classes he/she will be de-registered for a certain period of time and that strategy do encourage students to attend.*" However, STUD 4 stressed the fact that "*I am not aware of the attendance policy as I have registered late in the college and I could not attend the orientation or induction process*". STUD 1 argued that "*I am aware of the attendance policy and we have been told several times by our lecturers and our principal about the importance of attendance and that we need to acquire 80% of attendance*". In addition, STUD 2 indicated that: "*The College did conduct the induction at the beginning of the semester to inform students about the importance of attendance and also to avoid high rate of student absenteeism.*"

Giving a different view, STUD 6 states that: *“Management is not doing anything when students are absent for number of days, but lecturers are the ones who monitor student attendance registers on daily basis and make follow-ups on students with weak attendance or high absenteeism.”*

The students’ narratives above indicate that the college has a few strategies for reducing student absenteeism: lecturers monitor the daily attendance registers, college conducts inductions at the beginning of each semester to inform students about the importance of attendance and emphasises that, according to the attendance policy, and they must meet the minimum requirement of 80% attendance. Students further mentioned that management informs the parents when students are absent and advises them that their children will be de-registered for a certain period if they do not attend classes. Kasita's (2019) study discovered that the most crucial tool for monitoring and managing student attendance is a class attendance register, which the lecturer must manage successfully. In addition, Simelane (2013) attests that supervision and monitoring of student absenteeism should be assigned to a lecturer who will ensure that all the procedures are properly implemented.

In answering this question, L1 indicated that *“NSFAS is paying students their funds or allowance during their last semester while during registration we usually tell them about NSFAS allowance, so they came to college with the hope of getting NSFAS”*. However, L2 commented that *“the attendance policy is not fully implemented at the college as most lecturers are not aware of it”*. In addition, L1 stated that, *“I motivates my students to attend classes by sharing my personal experiences with them in order to encourage them to attend regularly”*. Giving a different view, L1 mentioned that *“Sometimes I use my resources, for example, I give them money to come to college as I always emphasise the importance of attending classes”*.

Based on the narrative above, lecturers gave a different view to students; that is, NSFAS often pays students their allowances late and the attendance policy is not fully implemented at the college. However, they added that lecturers shared their personal experienced to encourage student attendance and another strategy used is that lecturers give students money to encourage them to attend (Katanga, 2016). They also discussed engaging students in lessons and promoting engagement.

When answering the question about strategies above, HoD 2 shared his views, saying: *“The college is not currently involving parents and it will be a good strategy to reduce student absenteeism.”* Being of the same view, HoD 3 added the following: *“I have contacted one parent because that student was using different patterns to come to college, but after the engagement with the parent, the student behaviour changed positively.”* However, *“the college is de-registering students who are not attending without their consent or their parent’s consent”* (HoD 3).

HoD 4 supported the notion of involving parents in addressing the problem as it can be beneficial and said *“I had a meeting with the parent of a problematic student and we had a good turnaround of student because their parents played a very significant role by encouraging them to attend regularly”*.

Based on the above narrative, it would appear that the HoD’s strategies were different from those of the students and lecturers. The strategy that they used was firstly to engage parents to minimise the rate of student absenteeism, and that involvement played a significant role. Secondly, the college de-registered students who did not attend classes at all. The study by Simelane (2013) found that parents or guardians could participate in the management of students’ absenteeism and other associated behaviour by forming a crisis management committee for students.

Most of the participants in this study indicated that the attendance policy was not an effective tool for managing student absenteeism at the college, and indeed, some of the lecturers were not aware of the attendance policy. As a result, if the guidelines are not fully implemented at the college level it becomes a challenge. However, the student participants mentioned that they were aware of the attendance policy and how it applied to them. They further added that parental involvement is important as it helped in reducing the rate of student absenteeism.

In conclusion, the following themes emerged from the interviews with the participants regarding strategies to reduce student absenteeism: conducting inductions at the beginning of each semester, fully implementing the attendance policy, encouraging students by sharing personal experiences, promoting and engaging students in the lesson, monitoring student attendance registers and parental involvement.

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter presented an analysis of the data collected from the participant interviews. These data were divided into themes and sub-themes, leading to the emergence of the research findings. The findings revealed that factors influencing student attendance include family factors, socioeconomic factors and institutional factors. Student absenteeism poses challenges for the college management and lecturers, and therefore measures to deal with student absenteeism were also discussed, with participants recommending strategies that could be used to increase student attendance. The next chapter presents recommendations arising from the study findings and makes suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, the data gathered from questions asked in the interviews were reported based on the four sub-questions that supported the main research question “How does a TVET college in Tshwane North district manage student absenteeism?”. Four themes emerged from the data from which, in turn, the findings emerged. Each theme was discussed in depth and supported by participants’ verbatim responses. This chapter provides a summary of the findings that emerged from the empirical research conducted to find answers to the research question. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research on the research area.

The main findings that arose from participants’ responses include the following:

- The participants had different interpretations and understandings of student absenteeism.
- The stakeholders identified different factors that contributed to student absenteeism. Lecturers, students, HoDs and SSOs were able to outline all the factors they found to be affecting student absenteeism.
- The participants in this study indicated the implications that student absenteeism have for their work.
- Lecturers and HoDs played a significant role in implementing various strategies for reducing student absenteeism.

The following section discusses the themes that were developed during the data analysis discussed in Chapter 4. I have summarised participants’ experiences in the form of headings. My findings will be discussed in comparison with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and beyond.

5.2 Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to explore how a Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college in Tshwane North district managed student absenteeism. In this discussion, I compare the responses and opinions of participants

with the recent literature of the researched topic. I further present recommendations based on the participants' experiences and the literature pertaining this study.

5.2.1 Interpretations and understandings of student absenteeism

In this study, participants had different interpretations and understandings of student absenteeism, viewing it as “absconding classes”, “bunking classes” or “missing classes for no reason”. Lecturer two (L2) stated that “I think it is a complex issue, but from face value, when students missed classes or abscond or abscond for different reasons so that is my understanding”. Participants in this study interpreted student absenteeism as follows: The Head of Department three (HoD 3) said “*That would mean a student who would not attend classes, for example. But then we need to view the concept in terms of the magnitude. So, you would say, a student who is absent for a continuous period of time that becomes a problem.*” While HoD 2 said, “*Yes, student absenteeism is when students do not avail themselves for scheduled classes.*” HoD 4 added “*if students do not pitch up with or without a reason while some let you know that they are not coming but, others just do not come to college with no reason.*” On the other hand, HoD 1 said, “*Student absenteeism is being away from the institution of learning or away from work or mm, student absenteeism is bunking of classes.*”

The majority of the study participants understood student absenteeism as either an authorised or unauthorised absence. Otto (2016) and Myataza (2019), as discussed in Chapter 2, support this by saying that student absenteeism is divided into two categories, namely, authorised absenteeism and unauthorised absenteeism, where authorised absenteeism occurs when students are absent from college for valid reasons, while unauthorised absenteeism occurs when students absent themselves from college for reasons that are unacceptable. However, other participants viewed student absenteeism as falling into certain categories, with some students attending just some of their classes and others being absent for the entire day.

Student Support officer one (SSO 1) gave his view to the concept “*Mm, student absenteeism is bunking of classes or absconding.*” Whereas Student Support offer two (SSO 2) understand “*Student absenteeism as students who are not attending classes.*”

It has been noted in various studies that student absenteeism is a significant issue. According to relevant literature, student absenteeism refers to the total number of days missed at college, whether the absences are excused or unexcused (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012). Balkis, Arslan and Duru (2016) also define student absenteeism as a major and ongoing problem where students fail to attend college. Additionally, Myataza (2019) defines it as a student not attending college for a day, while Eneza Education (2013) describes it as a persistent, unexplained absence from college. Simelane (2013), on the other hand, refers to student absenteeism as a missed day by a student in academic or practical placements.

For the purpose of this study, a student is considered present when they attend a class or participate in college activities on or off college premises, and their attendance has been marked in the register. Furthermore, the attendance policy considers the average time a student can miss classes to be twenty percent (DHET, 2013). Based on the above definitions, this study defines student absenteeism as the number of consecutive days a student is absent from college, whether authorised or unauthorised. Base on the discussion above, this indicates that there is a lack of understanding of the concept of absenteeism by HoDs, lecturers, and SSOs.

5.2.2 Factors contributing to student absenteeism

The stakeholders in my study differed as regards the factors that contributed to student absenteeism. Based on the participants' experience, the following were the factors that they regarded as contributing to student absenteeism: personal factors, family factors, socio-economic factors and institutional factors. These include transport issues, funding (NSFAS), peer pressure, attitude towards lecturers, students and the subject, lack of motivation, and menstruation.

5.2.2.1 *Personal factors*

Most of the student participants stated that they had missed classes for personal reasons. In addition, I discovered that some absent themselves from the college for the following reasons: they do not feel like attending or feel lazy or wake up late, which I believe to be plain ignorance. Magobolo and Dube (2019) also confirm that students take a leave of absence due to illness even if the illness is not serious or at times is due to their ignorance. Magobolo (2019) states that personal issues, such as physical

illness, family responsibilities (like a death in the family), and problems with transportation to clinical areas are additional factors to consider. However, Ocak et al. (2017) argues that students do not believe that the cause of absenteeism is related to themselves or the circumstances that affect them. In support, Balkis et al. (2016) attest that student absenteeism is negatively associated with personal aspects such as academic self-perception, attitudes toward instructors, and college. As a result, those who do not define their goals are more likely to be absent, and that will increase the rate of absenteeism and dropout in college (Mabuza, 2020).

Some participants felt that peer pressure was one of the factors that leads to the high rate of absenteeism. STUD 5 stated that *“lots of friends can influence you to bunk classes to go and watch movies or go for food and not come back to college”*. In contrast, STUD 1 argued that *“I do not allow friends to influence me as I can simply tell them that I am going to attend so I can finish my course on time”*. In line with this above participant’s view, Ocak et al. (2017) comment that “student association with non-students has an adverse impact on their attendance in class”. Myataza (2019) concurs that student absenteeism will be high if students hang out with friends who are not studying. Accordingly, the study findings confirmed that peer pressure contributes to student absenteeism.

Mnguni (2014) confirms that the adverse effects of peer pressure still dominate, especially in impoverished urban populations in South Africa. Peer pressure is also a significant factor in absenteeism because students are frequently persuaded to skip class by their peers. The student may consequently feel pressure and anxiety due to wanting to fit in with his or her friends, which could have an impact on the student's college attendance (Kasita, 2019).

The statement above coincides with the findings of Omolekan and Ajayi (2023) that, when discussing young people, a common form of peer pressure relates to the fact that most youth spend a significant amount of time in established groups, such as schools and the groups within them, regardless of their personal feelings towards these organisations. Adolescents may also struggle to handle pressure from their peers or "friends" owing to their immaturity. Moreover, teenagers may exhibit disrespectful behaviour towards individuals who are not part of their peer groups. However, it is

important to note that peer pressure among young people can also have an effect on student absenteeism.

A few of the study findings were related to menstruation which affects student absenteeism. STUD 5 mentioned that: *“Sometimes I find myself in the situation whereby I am having menstruation pains, the terrible pain can make me not to come to college.”* STUD 6 also stated that: *“I am unable to concentrate in class due to period pains that are very painful and they force me to sleep the whole day and during that time I will bunk my classes.”* In support of what these student participants said, SSO 1 confirmed that: *“We have students who are experiencing menstruations for the first time in tertiary, and that makes them not to attend classes.”* This statements coincides with the findings of Kasita (2019) that menstruation is one of the personal factors that contribute to students absenteeism as students do not feel comfortable attending classes during their periods.

5.2.2.2 Family factors

This study also revealed that family factors were the cause of student absenteeism in the TVET sector. It found that most of the student participants supported the fact that family responsibilities contributed to their absenteeism. They stated that at times they absent themselves in order to take care of family members or siblings who are ill. They further added that at times they have to attend to family funerals. In support of this, STUD 5 said *“family problems are another issue, because sometimes their husband gets sick and also their kids, sometimes we find ourselves having to attend the funeral in the family and they need my special attention”*. A similar finding was revealed by Simelane (2013) who confirms that students absent themselves from college to take care of family member or for bereavement since they are not allowed to take family responsibility leave.

I further discovered that female students are often absent because their children are ill and they have no one to take care of them on their behalf. These findings are supported by Simelane (2013) who states that female students devote their time to family responsibilities rather than being a full-time student. Similar findings were obtained by Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) and Balkis et al. (2016), who argue that households that are headed by children or single parents tend to miss college because they have to look after their younger siblings. They further state that those children may hunt for jobs in order to support their family members and that may interrupt their attendance of college.

Having discussed this, it is evident from the above findings that family factors contribute to student absenteeism.

5.2.2.3 Socioeconomic factors

The findings of the study indicate that socioeconomic factors that contribute to absenteeism include poverty, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, lack of finance, parents' low-level of education, and low income. These results are supported by Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) who agree that students from impoverished backgrounds are more likely to be absent from college than students who come from more affluent backgrounds. Additionally, the study established that some of the students do not have support from home as there is no one with a degree or a higher qualification who can encourage them to go to college. Moreover, due to the circumstances they find themselves in they end up having to find part-time jobs in order to survive. In support of this finding, HoD 4 commented that "*if there is nobody at home to encourage you to go to school, you end up falling pregnant and drop out of college*".

In addition, they will say ma'am, I am working part-time, some days I will be in and some days I won't be in. Participants also stated that poverty, drug abuse, low levels of education on the part of family members, lack of income that forces students to work while studying, and teenage pregnancy play a bigger role in student absenteeism. The responses and the data discussed above are supported by Balkis et al. (2016), who found that students whose parents had a high level of education had a lower rate of college absenteeism, while Childs and Grooms (2018) found that the fact that students' parents had a poor level of education contributed to college absenteeism. This indicates that having a parent who is educated and working could increase the rate of student attendance at the college and it could also help to support or encourage students to attend more of their classes so that they are not forced to drop out of college in order to go and work.

Stokes (2016) mentions that student absenteeism rates are high in colleges that are situated in low socioeconomic environments. The author further explains that the high rate of student absenteeism also emanates from poverty, a lack of resources and poor healthcare services. The findings of the current study are in line with Otto (2016) who affirms that students living on farms are more likely to be absent from college than those staying in urban areas. One of the participants also attested that "*socio-economic issues*

like, for example, financial instability has an impact on student absenteeism because a lot of students come from poor backgrounds and they will say, no we do not have money to come to college, money to buy clothes or food” (L2).

5.2.2.4 Institutional factors

The data from the interviews revealed that *“transport money is an issue as I do not have money to come to college”* (STUD 5). This student added that: *“Some of us are NSFAS beneficiaries and we rely on it for transport money to college”*. L1, on the other hand, indicated that most students always make allowances for the issue of not having money to get to college, as NSFAS often pays out their money late. This is confirmed by a study by Myataza (2019), who found that NSFAS played a major role in student absenteeism, reporting that late payments by NSFAS influenced student absenteeism as most students are NSFAS beneficiaries. It was pointed out by the study participants that lack of transport money emanates from late payments by NSFAS. As mentioned above, this supports the following statement: *“Student absenteeism was caused by transport related issues as most of the students’ live in townships which are far from the college and that makes them miss their first period or even attending classes late* (STUD 3).

The findings of this study revealed that students are often absent from college as a result of negative attitudes displayed by lecturers and fellow students, as well as the fact that they do not like the subject or the course. Participants in this study acknowledged that if lecturers could be less arrogant and disrespectful and show less judgement, more students would attend classes. The data from the interviews established that: *“Sometimes you just do not feel like going to college simply because you had a conflict with a lecturer”* (STUD 4).

In addition, this student stated that: *“Some of the students do not behave in class, they come late to class and the lecturer will say, you did not attend my class yesterday then today you come late and you also submit my work late.”* I discovered that students feel less motivated and less supported at the college while also feeling not supported at home. As a result, they lose interest in the subjects and programmes they have registered for. The views of researchers relating to this study confirm that absenteeism is seen as a lack of motivation for studying, which harms students’ final grades (Amukahara Joy and Bivwiere, 2021).

In many cases, students are inspired by their teachers who play a vital role in their academic journey. Research suggests that the bond between teachers and students can significantly impact student attendance in class. Unpleasant interactions with teachers can result in students only attending classes when they feel like it. Certain teachers, as per student claims, do not treat them with respect and embarrass them in front of their peers (Şahin et al., 2016). I have discovered that student academic success is greatly impacted by their relationship with their lecturers.

Various researchers such as Omolekan and Ajayi (2023), Ajayi et al. (2018) and Johnson (2017) have investigated the major causes of student poor performance in Social Studies. Prominent among the factors identified include poor teaching methods, poor teachers' classroom practices, shortage of qualified professional teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate teaching equipment and facilities. Ajayi (2017) concluded that teachers' content knowledge, qualifications and experience are also some of the contributing factors to student poor performance.

5.2.3 Implications of student absenteeism

The findings of the study reveal that student absenteeism has serious implications for the college. I found that the implications of such absenteeism for the lecturers and HoDs who participated in this study included having to repeat what they had taught previously. This exercise was considered time-consuming and resulted in students who were present during lessons feeling bored at the repetition and wanting to continue with the syllabus. The findings by Otto (2016) and Myataza (2019) show that student absenteeism has an impact on lecturers as they experience certain difficulties when continuing with the syllabus when students who were absent lack previous knowledge.

This study found that the fact that students did not qualify to write exams owing to missing classes had implications for the overall results of the college. The study by Kasita (2019) affirms that many students who miss classes end up not qualifying to write the exams. Kasita (2019) also established that missing notes, summaries, discussions, and presentations have serious implications for student assessment because many students who are often absent fail their assessments. Gottfried (2014) found that students who tend to miss classes perform poorly on tests. Similarly, Otto (2016) attests that students who do not have notes or summaries may not be sufficiently prepared for tests; as a result, they may give incorrect responses.

This study discovered that there is a correlation between student absenteeism and student academic success. Participants from this study mentioned that it is important for students to attend classes regularly as their lessons build up on what has been taught the previous days. According to Mahlalela (2019), learning is a gradual process and lesson plans are created with the aim of ensuring progress in comprehending concepts and content knowledge. If a student misses several days of school, they may not be able to access the notes and presentations that were taught during their absence, which can disrupt the learning process. This can cause students with irregular attendance to miss out on a lot of information since knowledge builds up on each other. It is crucial for students to attend school regularly to master all concepts taught from the beginning to the end of the chapter, thereby acquiring comprehensive content knowledge (Mahlalela, 2019).

The implications revealed by the lecturers and HoDs in this study include the fact that they are unable to finish the syllabus on time owing to students' absence, leading to having to repeat information and give sick tests to students who were absent. In support of this, L 2 indicated that: *"It affects the syllabus as we cannot push to finish the syllabus."* In addition, L2 mentioned another implication; namely, that it is important to attend morning classes because students tend to take advantage of the late coming of lecturers and thus do not turn up for morning classes. Kasita (2019) asserts that lecturers find it difficult to cover the syllabus due to student patterns of absenteeism.

In this study, it was discovered that poor student performance had implications for lecturers' reputations as well as the fact that their performance is rated on the basis of student performance. HoD 2 mentioned that: *"My reputation is at stake because students end up failing and that put a dent on my reputation as a lecturer"*. HoD 3 added that: *"Students' low certification rate had an impact on both the college and the Department of Higher Education in terms of their projected performance and the college lost funding from DHET"*. The study by Chukwu et al. (2017) confirms that student absenteeism has major implications for the education system.

This study discovered that student absenteeism had a serious implication on student performance and student retention. Participants from this study attest that students with a low attendance percentage end up performing badly in their academic assessment

and resort to dropping out of college. HoD 2 said, *“The most burning issue is that students end up not performing well in the test, some do not even complete the assessment tasks or do not write the test and they end up failing the academic year so that leads to high failure rate. As a result, they end up giving up and drop out of school.”*

STUD 3 indicated “that sometimes some of the students drop out of college because their irregular attendance”. However, students who miss most of college days end up feeling that he/she is not making progress with his/her college work and end up dropping out of college. In support of the above statement, Mahlalela (2019) study identified that students with a high rate of absenteeism may lack motivation and interest in their studies, especially if they feel alienated from their classmates, peers, lecturers, or the college in general. Gottfried (2014) further attest that poor academic performance can lead to students dropping out of college. When students fail to make progress academically, they may feel frustrated and lose hope, ultimately leading them to drop out.

Many participants in the study reported that a significant number of students tend to miss college during their presentation days. This results in them missing out on crucial information. Additionally, some students choose to absent themselves from these presentations simply because they do not wish to present. STUD 5 said “student's attitude towards the lecturer or the subject. Sometimes we are given presentations in class, then most of the students uh don't like to present which can make most students absent from class”. When students miss college on days when collaborations are done, they miss out on important points and ideas that were shared during the discussions. According to Gottfried (2014), student absenteeism can lead to poor participation in important classroom discussions. As a result, students with high absenteeism may be unable to make contributions during class presentations due to insufficient preparation, which ultimately leads to poor performance.

5.2.4 Strategies to reduce student absenteeism

Participants in this study revealed that even though management does nothing about student absenteeism, lecturers monitor the daily attendance registers as one of the strategies to reduce this phenomenon. They further said that the college conducted induction sessions at the beginning of each semester to inform students about the 80% attendance policy and its importance as their strategy to lessen student absenteeism.

STUD 6 mentioned that: *“Management is not doing anything when students are absent for number of days, but lecturers are the once monitoring student attendance registers on daily bases and make follow-ups.”* Kasita (2019) asserts that the crucial tool for monitoring and managing student attendance is the class attendance register, which the lecturer must manage successfully.

Another strategy implemented by stakeholders in this study was to contact the parents of students who have a high rate of absenteeism and inform them that their children will be de-registered if they do not improve their attendance. HoD 4 affirmed that: *“I had a meeting with the parent of a problematic student and we had a good turnaround of student because their parents played a very significant role by encouraging them to attend regularly.”* Participants in this study further indicated that involving parents is another strategy that can help to reduce student absenteeism in the college. Mahlalela (2019), in his studies on strategies to reduce student absenteeism, found that parents and the community played a significant role in promoting a good attendance, especially if a student exhibited problematic attendance at college.

I further discovered that lecturers shared their personal experiences with students as a strategy to encourage and motivate them to attend classes. In addition, some lecturers gave students money to help pay for transport to come to college. In support of this, L1 said: *“Sometimes I use my resources, for example, I give them money to come to college as I always emphasise the importance of attending classes”.* Katanga (2016) stated that some lecturers encourage students to take classes by sharing their own experiences with them, making the lesson more engaging and encouraging student participation by assigning class activities, and giving students other responsibilities that bind them to attending college.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made with regard to stakeholder management of student absenteeism in TVET colleges.

- a) Students recommended that a nurse should be present on campus to assist them when they are ill, or experiencing menstruation pains or any other health issues.
- b) Students recommended that lecturers should stick to the syllabus during their lesson presentation.

- c) Lecturers and HoDs should come up with ways to make lessons interesting so that students look forward to attending college on a daily basis.
- d) The college should review its policies, making it mandatory for parents to be fully involved in their children's education, as this is not stated anywhere in its policies.
- e) Students emphasised that the college should provide accommodation for students and also arrange transport for students who live far from the college, giving them easy access to the college and alleviating money worries concerning transport.
- f) Based on the findings of this study, the participants recommended that NSFAS funds be distributed at the beginning of the academic year to avoid students struggling with transport money.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

This study focused on lecturers', HoDs' and SSOs' experiences concerning student absenteeism; the implications of student absenteeism and the strategies used to reduce student absenteeism. I recommend that future research could focus on campus managers as they were not included in this study. Furthermore, I recommend that a different research methodology be used at a different college and in a different province.

5.5 Limitations

Owing to time restrictions, the study population was restricted to NCV students, lecturers, HoDs and SSOs at the TVET college; otherwise, I would have expanded the study to include the TVET college's other four campuses and somewhat generalised the results. The study was limited to one college in the Tshwane North district, thus while the conclusions may be applied to other colleges there, they cannot be applied to all of South Africa's TVET colleges. Furthermore, my interpretations of the study results may have been influenced by my interest in the study topic, but my supervisor employed her expertise to identify any possible biases.

5.6 Chapter summary

This dissertation outlined the study findings and offered suggestions for reducing student absenteeism on one campus of a college in the Tshwane North district, Pretoria. Participants in the study, including lecturers, HoDs, SSOs, and students, shared their

perspectives on their experiences with student absenteeism. Student absenteeism has a negative effect on learning and teaching as well as student performance. Students who were regularly present in the lecture hall typically performed better than students who were frequently absent and students who were absent from class left the college as a result. This could result in education rates in the communities involved declining. On the basis of the findings, recommendations were made. Several issues arise as a result of student absenteeism. Therefore, colleges should involve all parties involved in the use of practical strategies to reduce student absenteeism.

The goal of the study, namely to offer remedies for the issue, was accomplished. The research study clearly defined the factors that both lecturers and students mentioned as contributing to student absence, as well as the implications that both students and lecturers had to deal with. Finally, the research study identified the measures that were utilised to monitor student absenteeism.

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ANNEXURE A: Ethics Clearance Certificate



FACULTY OF EDUCATION
Ethics Committee

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

CLEARANCE NUMBER: **EDU108/21**

DEGREE AND PROJECT

MEd

Stakeholder management of student
absenteeism at a TVET college in Tshwane
North district, Pretoria.

INVESTIGATOR

Ms Tinyeko Thelma Ndlalane-Bapela

DEPARTMENT

Education Management and Policy Studies

APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY

07 June 2022

DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

15 August 2023

CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE: Prof Funke Omidire

Mr Simon Jiane
Prof Maitumeleng. Nthontho
Dr NF Madonda

This Ethics Clearance Certificate should be read in conjunction with the Integrated Declaration Form (D08) which specifies details regarding:

- Compliance with approved research protocol,
- No significant changes,
- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

ANNEXURE B: Request to conduct a research



P.O. Box 1543

Hammanskraal

0400

06 May 2022

Dear Principal

APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR COLLEGE

I, Tinyeko Thelma Ndlalane, a student at the University of Pretoria, currently studying towards a Master of Education degree, hereby apply for permission to conduct the study titled **“managing absenteeism among students at a technical and vocational Education and Training college in Pretoria” at your college.** The purpose of this study is to explore how a TVET college in Pretoria manages absenteeism among students. In this letter, I would like to relate what will happen if such permission is granted. Once you understand what the study is about, such permission may or may not be granted. If you agree, you will be requested to release a signed letter permitting the study to take place in your college.

The following are the anticipated participants in this study:

- Four heads of department
- Two lecturers
- Two student support officers

- Six students in the college, all of them from one college as only one college will be used. I will ask the administrative officer to identify these students. Only students who are available and willing to participate and whose parents have granted permission in this study.
- Only participants who agreed and signed the informed consent will be legible to participate in this study.

The process of fieldwork will involve:

- Semi-structured interviews where the HoDs, lecturers, and student support officers will be requested to share their experiences on how they manage absenteeism among students in the college, and interviews will be audio recorded.
- Semi-structured interviews, where students in NCV level 2 and level 3 will also be requested to spend some time sharing their experiences of absenteeism in the college.
- If I am granted permission, I anticipate that data collection activities including member checking will last for two months. I estimate the research activities to take at least 45 to 60 minutes and the member checking to last for at least 30 minutes.
- All the research activities will be conducted after formal college hours. “Free period” will not be considered as an incentive.
- The attendance policy of the college will also be analysed should access be granted. It is from this policy that I expect to get the guidelines on what, why, and how the college manages absenteeism among students.
- To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, I will keep the names of the participants and those of the college and contributions to the study anonymous except if it is their wish to be named.
- Participants are free to withdraw their participation at any time should they wish to do so and their decision will not be held against them. In the event participants withdraw from the study, their data will be destroyed or discarded.
- It is unlikely that the participants in this study will be harmed. However, students might feel uncomfortable during the interviews.

- "My role in this study is that of a researcher, not a counsellor". However, if a problem does arise, they can speak to me and I will consult on the issue, and or refer them to someone who is best to help. If there is a serious problem with participants' safety, I am requested to inform the college psychologist/counsellor and University of Pretoria. I, therefore, include contact details for the counsellor and psychologist who are available free of charge:

Psychologist: Ms Alexandra North, Physical Ed S06, Contact number: 061 005 1035

Psychologist: Roël du Toit, Physical Ed S06, Contact number: 082 568 5793

- Participants will receive no incentives for participating in this study.
 - a) Students' possible reflection on their experiences of students' absenteeism should make them feel good about their contribution toward policy reforms, although I cannot guarantee this.
 - b) HoDs possible reflection on their role in promoting student attendance should make them feel good about their contribution toward policy implementation, although I cannot guarantee this.
 - c) Student support officers' reflection on their role in promoting students' attendance should make them feel good about their contribution to the drafting and adoption of the attendance policy of the college, although I cannot guarantee this.
 - d) Lecturers' possible reflection on their role in promoting students' attendance should make them feel good about their contribution toward policy implementation in their classrooms, although I cannot guarantee this.
- Member checking sessions will be conducted to confirm if my understanding and interpretation of the data are consistent with that of the participant. The participants will only have access to their own data and not everyone else's, but my supervisor will have access to all the data.
 - The member checking will be done once the data has been transcribed and after the preliminary report has been written.
 - We (my supervisors and I) also would like to request your permission to use their data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria and, where relevant,

project funders. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies. To comply with covid-19 regulations, I will ensure the safety of my participants by wearing a mask during the interview, keeping a social distance, and sanitizing frequently.

Should you have any questions or concerns about this study, do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or me on the contact details provided below.

Yours sincerely

Researcher: Tinyeko Thelma Ndlalane

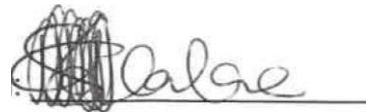
Student number: 22449842

Telephone: 072 612 1338

Supervisor: Prof MA Nthontho

Telephone: 012 420 2499

Sign:



E-mail: joe4thelma@gmail.com

Sign: _____

E-mail: mait _____

ANNEXURE C: Tshwane North TVET College - Approval



higher education
& training
Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



TSHWANE NORTH TVET COLLEGE
Technical and Vocational Education and Training College

P. O. Box 1543
Hammanskraal
0400

Dear Ms TT Ndalane

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT TSHWANE NORTH TVET COLLEGE

Permission is hereby granted to conduct research at Tshwane North TVET College, regarding the research topic: **Managing absenteeism among students at a Technical and Vocational Education and Training College in Pretoria**, as part of your Master's Degree at Pretoria University.

Upon receipt of this permission, you may personally approach any site of TNC and make necessary arrangements to continue with your studies.

It will be appreciated if you would share the findings of your studies with the Institution.

We wish you success with your research study.

Regards

Ms Tsibogo

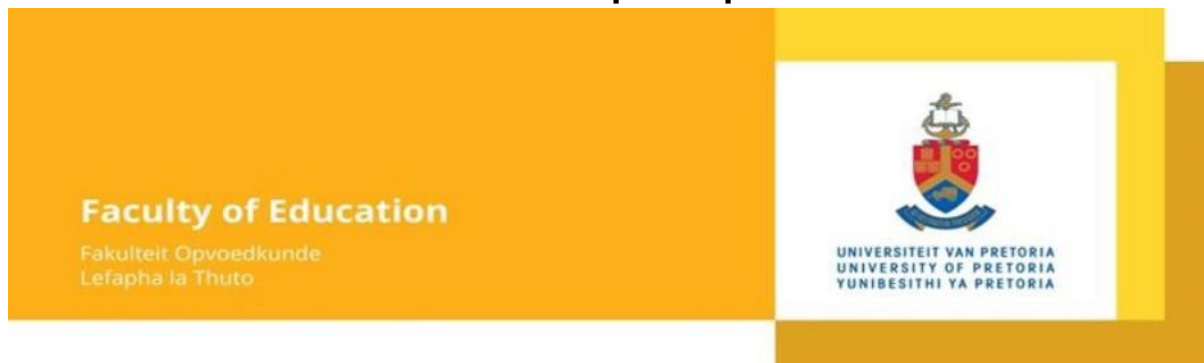
Principal

Date: 23/03/2023

Central Office
Cnr. Kgosi Mampuru (former Potgieter Street) & Pretorius Streets
Tel: (012) 401 1727/1961
Fax: (012) 323 8683

Mamelodi Campus 19403 Serapong Road, Mamelodi East Tel:(012) 801 1010/1/ (012) 401 1840/ (012)80001284 Fax:(012) 801 1179	Pretoria Campus 420 Helen Joseph Street (Sommer Church Street), Pretoria Tel:(012) 401 1660/ (012)401 1630/45 Fax:(012) 326 5298	Sechanguva South Campus College Road, Block L, Sechanguva Tel:(012) 793 2675/ (012) 401 1818/ (012) 0000231/245/238 Fax:(012) 793 1382	Roslyn Campus Ernest Oppenheimer Street, Roslyn Tel:(012) 541 1590/ (012) 401 1928/ (012) 0000274 Fax:(012) 541 1398	Sechanguva North Campus 1973 Phirima Road, Block G, Sechanguva Tel: Tel:(012) 797 2654 (012) 401 1839/ (012) 8000199/198 Fax:(012) 799 1858
Tembo Campus 2477 Jubilee Road, Tembo Tel:(012) 717 2151/2/ (012) 401 1701/2/ (012)0000277 Fax:(012) 717 6754				

ANNEXURE D: Invitation letter to participants



P.O. Box 1543
Hammankraal
0400

06 May 2022

Dear Participants

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I, Tinyeko Thelma Ndlalane, a student at the University of Pretoria, currently studying towards a Master of Education degree, hereby kindly invite you to participate in the study titled “**managing absenteeism among students at a technical and vocational education and training college in Pretoria**” at your college. The purpose of this study is to explore how a TVET college in Pretoria manage absenteeism among students. In this letter, I would like to relate what will happen if you agree to participate in this study. Once you understand what the study is about, you may or may not agree to participate. If you agree, you will be requested to sign the consent form attached to this invitation letter as an indication that you agree to participate in the study.

The process of fieldwork will involve:

- Semi-structured interviews where you will be requested to share your experiences on how you manage absenteeism among students in the college and interviews will be audio recorded.

- If you agree, I anticipate that data collection activities including member checking will last for two months. I estimate the research activities to take at least 45 to 60 minutes and the member checking to last for at least 30 minutes.
- All the research activities will be conducted after formal college hours. "Free period" will not be considered an incentive.
- The attendance policy of the college will also be analysed should access be granted. It is from this policy that I expect to get the guidelines on what, why, and how the college manages absenteeism among students.
- To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, I will keep your names and those of the college and contributions to the study anonymous except if it is your wish to be named.
- You are free to withdraw your participation at any time should you wish to do so and your decision will not be held against you. In the event you withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed or discarded.
- It is unlikely that you will experience any harm as you participate in this study. However, you might feel uncomfortable during the interviews.
- "My role in this study is that of a researcher, not a counsellor". However, if a problem does arise, you can speak to me and I will consult on the issue, and or refer them to someone who is best to help. If there is a serious problem with your safety, I am requested to inform the college psychologist/counsellor and University of Pretoria. I, therefore, include contact details for the counsellor and psychologist and they are available free of charge:

Psychologist: Ms. Alexandra North, Physical Ed S06, Contact number:

061 005 1035

Psychologist: Roël du Toit, Physical Ed S06, Contact number: 082 568 5793

- You will receive no incentives for participating in this study.
- a) Possible reflection on your role as the HoD in promoting students' attendance should make you feel good about your contribution toward policy implementation. Although I cannot guarantee this.
- Member checking sessions will be conducted to confirm if my understanding and interpretation of the data are consistent with yours. You will only have access to

your own data and not everyone else's, but my supervisor will have access to all the data.

- The member checking will be done once the data has been transcribed and after the preliminary report has been written.
- We (my supervisors and I) also would like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria and, where relevant, project funders. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies. To comply with covid-19 regulations, I will ensure the safety of my participants by wearing a mask during the interview, keeping a social distance, and sanitizing frequently.

Should you have any questions or concerns about this study, do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or me on the contact details provided below.

Yours sincerely

Researcher: Tinyeko Thelma Ndlalane

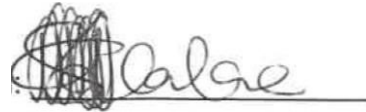
Student number: 22449842

Telephone: 072 612 1338

Supervisor: Prof MA Nthontho

Telephone: 012 420 2499

Sign:



E-mail: joe4thelma@gmail.com

Sign: _____

E-mail: mait

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I _____ (Full names and Surname), agree to participate in the research conducted by Ms Tinyeko Thelma Ndlalane at my college. I am aware that the research has got nothing to do with my college and my participation is voluntarily. I am also aware that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time should I wish to do so, and my decision will not be held against me.

I understand that my daily duties will not be disturbed, and I grant the researcher permission to use some of my off-duty hours.

I understand that my identity, that of my college, and all that I will say in this research activity will remain anonymous and confidential.

I also understand that I will be expected to provide written and oral comments on the draft report of the interviews.

I am aware that permission for me to take part in this study will be secured from the Department of Higher Education and Training and the University of Pretoria.

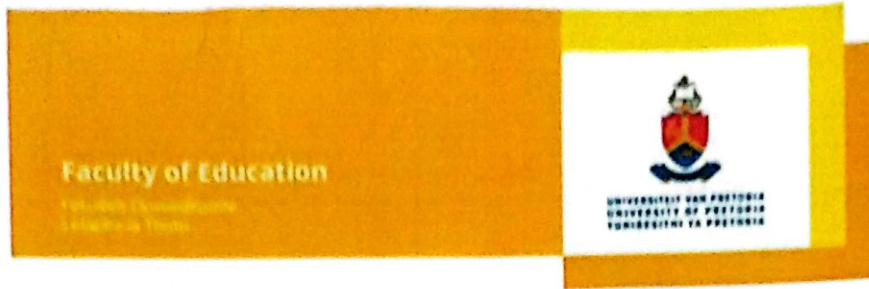
I grant permission that the research activities may be tape-recorded for research purposes and understand that these will be stored safely.

I have received the contact details of the researcher and supervisor should I need to contact them about matters to this research.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

ANNEXURE E: Consent forms of participants



INFORMED CONSENT FORM (HOD)

_____ (Full names and Surname), agree to participate in the research conducted by Ms Tinyeko Thelma Ndlalane at my college. I am aware that the research has got nothing to do with my college and my participation is voluntarily. I am also aware that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time should I wish to do so, and my decision will not be held against me.

I understand that my daily duties will not be disturbed, and I grant the researcher permission to use some of my off-duty hours.

I understand that my identity, that of my college, and all that I will say in this research activity will remain anonymous and confidential.

I also understand that I will be expected to provide written and oral comments on the draft report of the interviews.

I am aware that permission for me to take part in this study will be secured from the Department of Higher Education and Training and the University of Pretoria.

I grant permission that the research activities may be tape-recorded for research purposes and understand that these will be stored safely.

I have received the contact details of the researcher and supervisor should I need to contact them about matters to this research.

Signed: EMD Rthelma Date: 07/10/2022



INFORMED CONSENT FORM (STUDENT SUPPORT OFFICER)

_____ (Full names and Surname), agree to participate in the research conducted by Ms Tinyeko Thelma Ndlalane at my college. I am aware that the research has got nothing to do with my college and my participation is voluntarily. I am also aware that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time should I wish to do so, and my decision will not be held against me.

I understand that my daily duties will not be disturbed, and I grant the researcher permission to use some of my off-duty hours.


I understand that my identity, that of my college, and all that I will say in this research activity will remain anonymous and confidential.

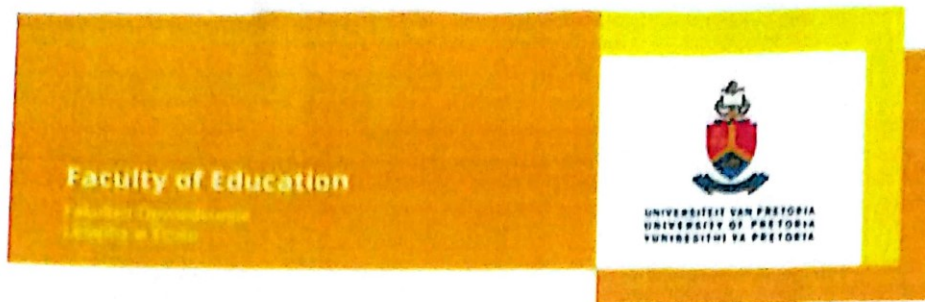
I also understand that I will be expected to provide written and oral comments on the draft report of the interviews.

I am aware that permission for me to take part in this study will be secured from the Department of Higher Education and Training and the University of Pretoria.

I grant permission that the research activities may be tape-recorded for research purposes and understand that these will be stored safely.

I have received the contact details of the researcher and supervisor should I need to contact them about matters to this research.

Signed:  Date: 12/10/2022



INFORMED CONSENT FORM (STUDENT)

I _____ (Full names and Surname), agree to participate in the research conducted by Ms Tinyeko Thelma Ndlalane at my college. I am aware that the research has got nothing to do with me as a person and my participation is voluntarily. I am also aware that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time should I wish to do so and my decision will not be held against me.

I understand that my studies will not be disturbed and I grant the researcher permission to contact me should it be necessary.

I understand that my identity, that of the college and all that I will say in these research activities and tape-recorded interviews will remain anonymous and confidential.

I understand that the information I share in this research will not be shared the third party.

I also understand that I will be expected to provide written or oral comments on the draft report of the interviews.

I grant permission that the research activities may be tape-recorded for research purposes and understand that these will be stored safely.

I am aware that Student Support Service (SSS) division is informed of my participation in this research.

I have received the contact details of the researcher, supervisor, and Student Support Services, should I need to contact them about matters related to this research.

Supervisor: Prof MA Nthontho

Telephone: 012 420 2499

Email: maitumeleng.nthontho@up.ac.za

Student Support

Telephone: 012 401 1727/1961

Email: student.support@tnc.edu.za

Website: <https://www.tnc4fet.co.za/student-support-objectives>

Signed:  _____ Date: 04/10/2022

ANNEXURE F: Interview schedule for lecturers, student support

Officer and HoD



Interview schedule for Lecturers, Student support officer and HoD's

Time of interview: _____ Duration: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee _____ Pseudonym: _____

Male/Female _____

Race: _____

Study title: **Managing absenteeism among students at a technical and vocational education and training college in Pretoria**

Study purpose: To explore how a TVET College in Pretoria manage absenteeism among students.

Interview procedure: The interview will consist of ten questions of which you are not obliged to answer all of them should you feel uncomfortable to do so.

Note: There are neither wrong nor right answers in this interview.

Remember:

1. Everything we share and discuss will be treated as confidential and will not be revealed to a third party. I am interested in your personal understanding and experiences of management of absenteeism among students.

2. You are welcome to seek clarity should the need be
3. Everything we share and discuss will be audio recorded.
4. You can stop participating at any time without giving any reason

Are there any questions that you would like to ask for clarification before we start?

Section A: Biographical questions

1. **Status:** HoD Lecturer Student support officer
2. **Age:** 31–40 41–50 51–60 61–65
3. **Gender:** Male Female Other
4. **Marital Status:** Married Single Divorced Widowed
Separated
5. **Professional qualifications:**
Bachelor degree Masters' degree Doctoral degree
Other (specify): _____
6. **Years of experience:** _____

Section B: Interview questions

1. Would you kindly share your understanding of the concept of absenteeism with me?
2. What is your experience of absenteeism amongst the NCV students in your college?
3. From your experience, what factors have you found to be influencing absenteeism amongst the NCV students in your college?
4. What have you found to be the effect of absenteeism among the NCV students?
5. From your personal perspective, how do you support the NCV students that show signs of absenteeism?
6. How does the college address the element of absenteeism among the NCV students?
7. How do you think student absenteeism can be addressed in TVET colleges?

Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experiences of implementation of the language policy relating to foreign nationals?

Concluding remarks

Thank you for taking your time to share with me this important and valuable information.

I kindly request that you avail yourself for further clarity should I need it

Researcher: Tinyeko Thelma Ndlalane

Signature:

Supervisor: Prof MA Nthontho

Signature:

ANNEXURE G: Interview schedule for students



Interview schedule for students

Time of interview: _____ Duration: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee _____ Pseudonym: _____

Male/Female _____

Race: _____

Study title: **Managing absenteeism among students at a technical and vocational education and training college in Pretoria**

Study purpose: To explore how a TVET College in Pretoria manage absenteeism among students.

Interview procedure: The interview will consist of ten questions of which you are not obliged to answer all of them should you feel uncomfortable to do so.

Note: There are neither wrong nor right answers in this interview.

Remember:

1. Everything we share and discuss will be treated as confidential and will not be revealed to a third party. I am interested in your personal understanding and experiences of management of absenteeism among students.

2. You are welcome to seek clarity should the need be
3. Everything we share and discuss will be audio recorded.
4. You can stop participating at any time without giving any reason

Are there any questions that you would like to ask for clarification before we start?

Section A: Biographical questions

1. **Status:** HoD Lecturer Students
2. **Age:** 18-20 21-30 31-40
3. **Gender:** Male Female Other
4. **Marital Status:** Married Single Divorced
Widowed Separated
5. **NCV Programme:** Marketing Finance, Economics and Accounting
6. **Level:** NCV level 2 NCV level 3
7. **Years in this college:**

Section B: Interview questions

1. Have you ever missed classes?
2. If yes, what could be the reason?
3. If no, how do you manage not to miss classes?
4. Why do you think it is important not to miss classes?
5. What do you think could be done to increase student's attendance?
6. Are you aware of the attendance policy as it is applicable to you as an NCV student?
7. How does the management deal with poor attendance?

Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experiences of implementation of the language policy relating to foreign nationals?

Concluding remarks

Thank you for taking your time to share with me this important and valuable information.

I kindly request that you avail yourself for further clarity should I need it

Researcher: Tinyeko Thelma Ndlalane

Sign: _____

Supervisor: Prof MA Nthontho

Sign: _____