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PhD in Development Studies

ASSESSING THE SUFFICIENCY OF CORPORATE FUNDING FOR UNDERGRADUATE BURSARIES AND THEIR IMPACTS ON STUDENT ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

PERSPECTIVES AND INSIGHTS FROM PAST BURSARY RECIPIENTS AND
CORPORATE SOCIAL INVESTMENT (CSI) PROFESSIONALS IN GAUTENG
PROVINCE

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Date: August 2024

Declaration

I, Alson Maphosa, confirm that the work presented in this thesis “Assessing the sufficiency of Corporate Funding for Undergraduate Bursaries and their Impacts on Student Access and Success in South Africa

Perspectives and insights from past bursary recipients and Corporate Social Investment (CSI) professionals in Gauteng Province” is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis

Signed: 
Alson Maphosa

Date: 7 February 2025

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Abstract

In South Africa, where the high cost of tertiary education often exacerbates existing socio-economic inequalities, corporate bursaries have emerged as a crucial source of funding for disadvantaged students. However, the effectiveness and impact of these bursaries on student success remain under-researched. This qualitative study addresses this gap by examining the adequacy of corporate funding for undergraduate bursaries and its broader implications for student success in Gauteng.

Grounded in the perspectives of social justice, human capital development, and social capital development, this research explores the impact of corporate bursaries on the academic success and well-being of undergraduate students at South African universities, with a focus on Gauteng. Recognising the potential of these bursaries to alleviate financial barriers and foster human capital, the study delves into the lived experiences of past recipients and insights from Corporate Social Investment (CSI) professionals to assess whether corporate funding is sufficient to support student success.

Through in-depth interviews and meticulous document analysis, the study uncovers a complex landscape of experiences. While bursaries provide essential financial support, they often fall short of covering students' full needs, leading to financial strain, compromised academic choices, and the adoption of both adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms to mitigate the adverse impacts of inadequate funding. Students may struggle to balance academic demands with the need to support families, work part-time jobs, or even engage in risky behaviour to make ends meet.

The research further uncovered the nuanced impact of Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) policies on corporate bursary programmes. While well-intentioned in their aim to redress historical inequalities, these policies appear to inadvertently create unintended consequences. The study reveals how the emphasis on B-BBEE points can sometimes lead to a focus on compliance rather than comprehensive student support. This results in the selection of bursary recipients based on demographic criteria, potentially overlooking deserving candidates and perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage. Additionally, the

pressure to meet B-BBEE targets may lead corporations to offer bursaries that are insufficient to cover the full costs of education, leaving students with significant financial burdens. Ultimately, while B-BBEE aims to empower disadvantaged communities, the current implementation creates an environment where corporate bursaries fall short of their intended goals, hindering rather than facilitating the academic success and well-being of students.

The findings challenge the prevailing assumption that corporate bursaries automatically translate into student success. Instead, they underscore the need for a more holistic approach that addresses the broader socio-economic challenges faced by students. This includes providing comprehensive financial support, fostering student autonomy and agency, and offering additional resources such as mental health support, career guidance, mentorship, and work experience.

This study offers valuable insights for stakeholders in higher education by shedding light on the lived experiences of bursary recipients and the perspectives of Corporate Social Investment (CSI) professionals. It calls for a re-evaluation of corporate bursary programmes to ensure they adequately support students' academic journeys and overall well-being. Moreover, it emphasises the importance of collaboration between universities, corporations, and policymakers to create a more equitable and effective funding system that truly empowers students and contributes to their long-term success.

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Acronyms

B

Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment	
(B-BBEE)	199, 237
B-BBEE	v, 74, 75, 94, 149, 165, 199, 258

C

Corporate Social Investment	
(CSI)	ii, 109
CSI	ii, v, vi, 2, 6, 13, 50, 109
corporate social responsibility	
(CSR)	58, 116
CSR	7, 13, 21, 26, 35, 58, 76, 84, 93, 94, 95, 110, 115, 116, 131, 135, 207, 258, 264, 267, 275, 277

D

Department of Higher Education and Training	
(DHET)	85, 121, 143, 268, 269, 281

N

National Development Plan	
(NDP)	234
NDP	viii, 14, 79, 81, 179, 181, 234, 270, 274, 276, 278
National Qualifications Framework	
(NQF)	276, 279
NQF	78, 276, 279

S

Sector Education and Training Authorities	
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SETA	80, 245, 252
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Chapter One

Introduction

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Nelson Mandela

1.1 Introduction

South Africa's post-1994 transformation aimed to dismantle deeply entrenched economic barriers to higher education. The establishment of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) in 1996 and the subsequent expansion of eligibility criteria for free higher education in 2017 were critical milestones. However, equitable access remains an elusive goal, hindered by systemic inequalities and persistent financial challenges faced by disadvantaged students. Corporate bursary programmes have emerged as a significant response to bridge this funding gap, offering financial support to those who fall outside the scope of government-funded schemes. This thesis delves into the complexities of corporate bursary funding within the South African higher education landscape, critically assessing its efficacy in enhancing student success and contributing to broader goals of equity and quality. Exploring the lived experiences of past bursary recipients and the perspectives of Corporate Social Investment (CSI) professionals in Gauteng Province, this study seeks to illuminate the nuanced realities of corporate funding and its impact on access and educational outcomes. The ultimate aim is to inform the development of more effective and equitable strategies for supporting student success in higher education.

1.2 Navigating the Complexities of Corporate Bursary Funding

The post-1994 era in South Africa ushered in a transformative agenda for higher education, prioritising broadened access as a cornerstone for societal transformation. This period witnessed fervent efforts to dismantle the economic barriers that had historically excluded vast segments of the population. The establishment of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) in 1996 embodied this commitment, aiming to democratise access by providing financial aid to those hindered by economic hardship. This initiative was further bolstered in 2017, with President Zuma expanding eligibility criteria in response to the growing demand for free higher education – a sentiment that ignited the #FeesMustFall protests of 2015, 2016, and 2021 (Muller, 2018; Areff & Spies, 2017).

However, despite these efforts, the pursuit of higher education in South Africa remains a significant challenge. Wolpe (1995) highlighted the legacy of a fragmented higher education system inherited from the apartheid era, characterised by inequalities in access, funding, and

institutional structures. This underscored the need for a transformative agenda, as advocated by Badat (2004), prioritising social equity and ensuring equitable access and opportunities for advancement within institutions and wider society.

The ongoing struggle for equitable access is evidenced by the persistent student-led movements like #FeesMustFall. These protests served as powerful platforms to challenge prevailing ideologies and bring critical attention to the issues of accessibility and academic freedom (Areff & Spies, 2017). By demanding access to tertiary education, students firmly placed these concerns on the national agenda, seeking to dismantle systemic barriers that continue to hinder equitable participation.

Over the past two decades, a perfect storm has brewed in higher education across the globe. University enrolment has soared, coinciding with stagnant or declining economic growth, particularly in Africa (Fussy, 2017; World Bank, 2023). This has resulted in a concerning trend: a decline in public funding for universities (Fussy, 2017; Kossey & Ishengoma, 2017). The consequences are stark; escalating tuition fees, deteriorating infrastructure, and a growing financial burden on students and families.

This confluence of rising costs and limited public investment disproportionately impacts students from disadvantaged backgrounds in countries like South Africa. Here, the dream of higher education becomes an unattainable luxury for many due to the exorbitant cost of university fees. Data from the World Bank (2022) paints a grim picture, citing that in 2022, an estimated 18.2 million South Africans lived in extreme poverty, defined as living on less than \$1.90 per day. Projections for 2025 suggest this number will only grow (World Bank, 2022). This pervasive poverty restricts access to education while simultaneously saddling graduates and dropouts with crippling student debt. Universities South Africa (USAF, 2022) reported a staggering R16.5 billion in student debt as of March 2022, with an estimated 120,000 students unable to graduate due to a collective debt of R7 billion. Faced with this financial barrier, many perceive higher education as an unattainable dream.

The economic potential unlocked by tertiary education is undeniable. Data from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) reveals that the majority of the 7.2 million unemployed individuals in

2021 had education levels below matric, highlighting its critical role in fostering economic empowerment and mitigating poverty (Stats SA, 2021). This is not just a social justice issue but an economic imperative. The World Bank (2019) emphasises the importance of equipping South Africa's youth with the skills needed to navigate the labour market, thereby addressing poverty, income disparity, and unemployment.

This belief in education as a key to poverty reduction drives efforts to fund tertiary students (Mandela & Langa, 2017). Various entities, including corporations, political interest groups, and civil society organisations, advocate for funding deserving students in the name of development. In South Africa, prominent corporations aim to support the 'Missing Middle', students who fall between the cracks, not qualifying for NSFAS and struggling to access loans (Jacobs et al., 2019). These corporate bursary programmes serve as a vital stopgap measure, but are they enough?

The quest to widen university access has gained momentum in response to this funding crisis, particularly in the Global South (South Africa and Ghana being prime examples). While South Africa's NSFAS ensures access for the most underprivileged, government funding remains inadequate. Universities, therefore, turn to alternative income sources, including philanthropic contributions from corporations (Koen et al., 2006; Pillay, 2010; Sader & Gabela, 2017).

Leading the charge in South Africa are organisations like the FirstRand Foundation, Anglo American's Chairman's Fund, and the Sasol Inzalo Foundation. The FirstRand Foundation, for instance, reportedly invests over R100 million annually in education at all levels, including significant allocations to tertiary education bursaries and scholarships (FirstRand, 2018). Likewise, Anglo American's Chairman's Fund, boasting a long history of supporting education initiatives, consistently contributes over R150 million annually (Anglo American, 2019). Sasol Inzalo Foundation, focusing on Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, has substantially impacted the sector with bursaries and support programmes, investing around R120 million annually (Sasol Inzalo Foundation, 2020). These significant corporate contributions offer a crucial lifeline to students navigating the funding gap.

These figures, while substantial, underscore the pivotal role of corporate funding in bridging the gap created by insufficient public investment in higher education. However, the effectiveness of these investments in producing quality outcomes and facilitating meaningful access to and success in higher education remains a subject of debate. Given the significant financial commitments, it is imperative to critically assess whether these corporate funds are achieving their intended impact, particularly in terms of enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education in South Africa.

To holistically assess student success within the higher education landscape, it is imperative to move beyond the simplistic metric of enrolment figures and delve into the nuanced dimensions of educational outcomes and quality. This broader perspective is crucial for understanding the multifaceted nature of student success and the role financial aid plays in facilitating this success. The Council on Higher Education in South Africa (CHE, 2016) has highlighted the critical need for a concerted effort to enhance not just access to higher education but also the quality and outcomes of that education, particularly for historically marginalised groups such as Black students. These considerations are pivotal in ensuring that the expansion of student enrolment, facilitated by financial aid, translates into meaningful educational achievements and equips students with the competencies necessary for their future endeavours.

The discourse on the efficacy of financial aid in promoting student success must also consider the socio-economic contexts that influence students' academic journeys. Leibowitz et al. (2017) argue that financial aid, while crucial, is insufficient on its own to overcome the barriers to success faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The intersectionality of socio-economic factors, including prior educational disadvantages, financial instability, and the lack of academic support, compound the challenges these students face, thereby impacting their ability to thrive in higher education settings. This underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach to student support, one that encompasses financial aid, academic mentorship, and psychosocial support to address the diverse needs of students and foster an enabling environment for their success.

Furthermore, the alignment of financial aid programmes with the broader objectives of equity and quality in higher education is essential for realising their full potential impact. As noted by Spaul and Taylor (2015), the aim of financial aid should extend beyond merely enabling access to higher education; it should also facilitate equitable participation and ensure that students are adequately supported to complete their studies successfully and attain high-quality qualifications. This requires a strategic integration of financial aid with institutional policies and practices that are geared towards enhancing the quality of education and support services, thereby ensuring that students are not only able to access higher education but are also equipped to succeed and excel within it.

1.3 Problem statement

Corporate Social Investment (CSI) programmes have emerged as a prominent force in facilitating access to higher education in South Africa (Khan & Samuel, 2017). These initiatives, often channelled through undergraduate bursaries, are lauded for their potential to dismantle financial barriers and enhance educational outcomes for underprivileged students (Moleke, 2016). However, a critical question lingers: are these financial investments translating into tangible academic and professional success for bursary recipients?

While substantial resources are allocated towards bursaries, a growing body of research suggests a disconnect between funding and outcomes. Studies by Letseka and Maile (2008) reveal that financial aid, although necessary, does not guarantee improved academic performance or graduation rates. This disconnect raises concerns about the efficacy of current bursary models and the value derived from corporate funding. Furthermore, Fongwa (2017) critiques the sporadic and uncoordinated nature of CSI in education, questioning the sustainability and long-term impact on bursary recipients' educational and professional trajectories.

The current research landscape lacks a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of those most impacted by these programmes: the students themselves and the professionals managing CSI initiatives. Visser (2018) emphasises the need for qualitative research to explore the perspectives of these key stakeholders. Capturing their experiences and insights allows

us to gain a deeper understanding of the real impact of corporate funding on educational access and success.

This void in knowledge necessitates a deeper examination of how corporate bursary programmes translate into actual advancements for recipients and if these investments fulfil the strategic objectives of corporate social responsibility and human capital development envisioned by donors (Curtis & Sithole, 2022). The problem at hand extends beyond the mere presence or absence of funding; it delves into the effectiveness of translating financial resources into qualitative improvements in educational attainment and career outcomes for bursary recipients. A more comprehensive analysis is required, one that transcends quantitative funding metrics and delves into the substantive impact of bursary programmes on individual and societal progress.

The high dropout rates in South African universities, despite significant corporate contributions, underscore this concern (DHET, 2023). Socio-economic factors and inadequate support structures are cited as key challenges. This begs the critical question of whether the current model of corporate bursary funding in South Africa is achieving optimal results in terms of student success.

Prior research has predominantly focused on the volume of corporate funding allocated to bursary programmes (Baumann & Matzopoulos, 2019). However, a crucial gap exists in understanding the lived experiences of bursary recipients and the impact of programme design on student success beyond financial support. This qualitative study aims to address this gap by exploring the perspectives of both past bursary recipients and CSI professionals. Delving into these narratives provides valuable insights into how corporate bursary programmes can be optimised to deliver transformative educational experiences and empower graduates to thrive in the professional landscape.

1.3.1 Aims

This study focuses on the developmental impact of corporate funding by critically examining its adequacy in enhancing student access and success in higher education. It explores the

intentions of donors, the challenges they encounter, and the intricate dynamics influencing the effectiveness of corporate funding initiatives. Recognising the direct link between the type of education aid provided and the quality of outcomes achieved (Clemens et al., 2012), this research seeks to identify and address ‘thorny issues’ within the impact chain of such funding (ibid), ultimately generating insights that can inform the development of more impactful corporate bursary programmes.

Through a critical analysis of corporate bursary programmes, their underlying assumptions, strategies, and implementation practices, the study aims to expose potential areas for improvement and identify existing shortcomings. It seeks to illuminate the complex interplay between corporate aspirations and the realities of student access and success in higher education. Delving into the challenges faced by donors and the impact of their funding initiatives, the research aims to inform the formulation of more effective and transformative approaches to corporate bursary giving.

The study employs a comprehensive research methodology, incorporating a systematic review of existing literature on corporate funding and its impact on access and success in higher education. Additionally, empirical data was gathered through interviews with corporate entities and past student beneficiaries. This multi-pronged approach enabled a nuanced understanding of the motivations, practices, and outcomes associated with corporate bursary programmes in South Africa’s higher education landscape.

1.3.2 Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the sufficiency and effectiveness of corporate bursary funding, focusing on how well these funds meet the educational needs of recipients and contribute to their academic and professional success. ‘Adequacy of corporate funding’ in this context refers to the extent to which corporate bursary allocations are sufficient, appropriately targeted, and effective in achieving desired educational outcomes. This involves examining whether the financial support provided aligns with the actual costs and needs of students, and if it leads to improved performance, graduation rates, and subsequent career opportunities.

To achieve this, the study will develop a comprehensive framework to guide corporate philanthropy in the education sector, ensuring that investments in bursaries are strategically aligned with the goal of enhancing student success. This entails a critical analysis of existing corporate funding models, which are often driven by internal donor priorities that may not align with the actual requirements for improving educational outcomes.

The objective extends to uncovering the potential limitations and drawbacks inherent in current corporate funding practices, with a view to offering a standardised set of guidelines. These guidelines will be designed to ensure that corporate contributions do more than just provide access to higher education; they should also improve the quality and success rates of the educational journey. By doing so, the study aims to foster a more effective and impactful approach to corporate funding in higher education, ensuring that financial investments translate into tangible benefits for students and the broader educational landscape.

In addition to the overarching objective, the study will also pursue the following subsidiary objectives:

1. To examine the objectives of corporate bursary funding and operational efficiencies of the current model.
2. To evaluate the degree to which corporate funding contributes to higher throughput rates and graduation rates.
3. To assess the targeting efficacy of corporate bursary programs.
4. To establish the socio-economic impacts of corporate bursaries and how students mitigate against unmet financial needs.

1.4 Research questions

The study is premised on the assumption that corporate bursary funding has significant flaws in both intention and implementation, which consequently affects the attainment of perceived outcomes. It follows that the study seeks to analyse the adequacy of such funding programmes in enhancing two fundamental mandates: access and success.

1.4.1 Major Research Question:

To what extent does the existing corporate bursary funding model in South Africa achieve optimal outcomes in terms of student success?

1.4.2 Minor Questions:

1. What are the primary objectives and operational methods of the current corporate bursary funding model in Gauteng, South Africa.
2. To what extent do corporate bursary programs enhance access, success and quality outcomes? Are there mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate their impact on increasing student throughput and graduation rates?
3. How effective are corporate bursary programs in targeting and supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds? What criteria are used to ensure these students are the primary beneficiaries?
4. What are the gaps and resultant socio-economic impacts of corporate bursaries? What coping mechanisms are employed by students in mitigation against inadequate funding?

1.4.3 Significance of the Study:

The socio-economic implications of corporate bursary programmes within South Africa's higher education sector hold tremendous significance and demand immediate attention. Understanding the multifaceted impacts and nuances of these programmes is crucial to equip various stakeholders with the knowledge necessary to formulate more effective and equitable strategies. These strategies aim to enhance student access to higher education and foster academic excellence. Through a comprehensive analysis of corporate bursary funding, this study delves into the current landscape of these initiatives, identifies potential deficiencies, and proposes a holistic framework that strengthens both access and student outcomes.

Ensuring equitable access to higher education remains a persistent challenge in South Africa, particularly for historically marginalised communities. Corporate bursary programmes

emerge as a vital source of financial support, offering the potential to transform lives by unlocking pathways for educational advancement, social mobility, and economic empowerment. However, a critical evaluation of these programmes' impact is essential to assess their effectiveness in addressing the barriers and inequalities that hinder access and success in higher education.

This study delves into the socio-economic influence of corporate bursary programmes, aiming to gauge their contribution to improving the educational attainment and socio-economic standing of recipients. This multi-faceted analysis encompasses an evaluation of various indicators, including student enrolment, retention and progression rates, graduation rates, employability, and broader socio-economic mobility. By meticulously examining the experiences and outcomes of bursary recipients, the study provides a nuanced perspective on the current funding models' efficacy and adequacy.

This inquiry goes beyond simply assessing the financial impact of corporate bursary programmes. It strives to shed light on potential shortcomings or constraints inherent in these schemes. The study critically examines whether the distribution of financial aid aligns with overarching educational objectives and national development goals. Additionally, an analysis of the policies and criteria used by corporations in bursary allocation reveals inherent biases and disparities, particularly concerning specific fields of study. Furthermore, an in-depth assessment of the qualitative aspects and effectiveness of corporate assistance were conducted to identify any lapses in monitoring and evaluative processes. Scrutinising these aspects facilitates a critical reflection on the commitment of corporate bodies to gauge the long-term impact of their contributions and their engagement in addressing the systemic challenges confronting South African higher education.

The outcomes of this research hold significant implications for all stakeholders engaged in corporate bursary initiatives. Policymakers, academic institutions, and corporations will benefit from a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play. The findings will inform the development of more effective, equitable, and sustainable bursary programmes, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and prosperous South Africa.

1.5 Clarification of concepts

This section serves to clarify prominent concepts that form the nucleus of this work, concepts that appear frequently throughout this research project. In the context of South African higher education and corporate involvement, several key terms play a pivotal role in understanding the dynamics and impacts of funding and support mechanisms. These terms, defined within the specific context of South Africa, are crucial for grasping the broader discourse on education, corporate engagement, and national development. It is this section that will help the reader understand the meaning of these terms and their relevance to this work.

Access: Access to higher education in South Africa encompasses the opportunities and mechanisms that enable individuals, particularly those from historically disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, to enrol in and attend tertiary education institutions. Access is a multifaceted concept that includes financial affordability, academic preparedness, and the availability of places in desired programmes (Badat, 2016).

Bursary: In South Africa, a bursary refers to a financial award provided to students to cover the costs of their education, including tuition fees, books, and sometimes accommodation and living expenses. Unlike loans, bursaries do not typically require repayment, making them a vital support mechanism for students facing financial constraints. Bursaries are often awarded based on financial need, academic merit, or specific criteria set by the bursary provider, which can include corporations, government departments, or educational institutions (DHET, 2020).

Corporate: In the South African context, 'corporate' refers to registered business entities, including multinational companies, large national businesses, and medium-sized enterprises, that engage in commercial, industrial, or professional activities within the country. Corporates are significant contributors to the economy and often engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities as part of their business practices (South African Companies Act, 2008).

Corporate Funding: Corporate funding in South Africa entails the financial contributions made by businesses to support various causes, projects, or institutions, including those in the higher education sector. This funding can take the form of bursaries, scholarships, grants, and investment in educational infrastructure or programmes. Corporate funding is a crucial component of CSR strategies and plays a significant role in enhancing access to and success in higher education for disadvantaged students (KPMG, 2013).

Corporate Social Investment (CSI): refers to a company's contributions to the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the communities in which it operates. These contributions extend beyond direct business interests and aim to foster sustainable development and improve quality of life. CSI encompasses various forms of investments, including financial donations, sponsorships, employee volunteer programmes, and partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government agencies. Key components of CSI include financial contributions, in-kind support, employee involvement, and strategic partnerships. Financial contributions involve direct funding for projects or initiatives that support community development, education, health, and environmental sustainability. In-kind support includes donations of goods, services, or expertise to community programmes. Employee involvement is encouraged through volunteer activities and community service. Strategic partnerships with NGOs, government bodies, and other stakeholders maximise the impact of social investment efforts. CSI is essential for fostering sustainable development, enhancing corporate reputation, and building strong relationships with stakeholders. It helps companies address social and environmental challenges, contributing to the overall well-being of society (Visser, 2006; Trialogue, 2019; Bendell, 2005; Fourie, 2012; Carroll, 1999).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): refers to a business model in which companies integrate social and environmental concerns into their operations and interactions with stakeholders. It extends beyond legal compliance and profit generation to encompass voluntary actions that promote social good, environmental sustainability, and ethical conduct (Carroll, 1999). CSR activities include a wide range of initiatives such as philanthropic efforts, community engagement, ethical labour practices, and environmental conservation. The core principle of CSR is that businesses have a duty to contribute positively to society while

conducting their operations responsibly (Visser, 2006). Companies adopting CSR practices often engage in activities like supporting educational programmes, reducing carbon footprints, ensuring fair trade, and improving workplace conditions. By doing so, they aim to create a balance between economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social well-being (Fourie, 2012). CSR helps in building a positive corporate image, fostering consumer trust, and creating long-term value for both the company and the community it serves (Bendell, 2005).

Historic Debt: In the South African higher education context and as utilised in this study, 'historic debt' refers to the outstanding student debt accumulated by students over several academic years (Masutha, 2023). This debt burden disproportionately affects students from low-income households and historically disadvantaged backgrounds, hindering their access to and completion of higher education (Vanek, 2021). Factors contributing to the accumulation of historic debt include high tuition fees, limited financial aid, and inequitable funding models (Maverick, 2023). Despite government efforts to address the issue through partial debt write-offs and debt clearance processes, historic debt remains a significant barrier to educational access and success in South Africa.

National Development Plan (NDP): The National Development Plan is a strategic framework developed by the South African government to address the country's most pressing social, economic, and political issues by 2030. The NDP outlines a vision for promoting inclusive economic growth, creating jobs, improving education and healthcare, and building a capable and developmental state. The plan emphasises the importance of higher education and skills development in achieving these national objectives (National Planning Commission, 2012).

Success: In the South African higher education sector, success is measured by students' academic achievements, including their progression rates, graduation rates, and the quality of their qualifications. Success implies not only gaining access to higher education but also completing programmes of study effectively and efficiently, thereby contributing to personal development and national capacity building (Council on Higher Education, 2013).

Throughput: In the South African higher education context, throughput refers to the rate at which students progress through their academic programmes to successful completion within the stipulated time or an extended period. Throughput rates are critical indicators of the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education institutions in supporting student success and are closely monitored by educational authorities and institutions (Council on Higher Education, 2013).

Unmet Financial Need: This term refers to the gap between the cost of attending a higher education institution, including tuition, fees, books, and living expenses, and the amount of financial aid a student receives from all sources. Unmet financial need is a significant barrier to higher education access and success for many South African students, particularly those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds (Cloete et al., 2017).

1.6 Corporate Social Responsibility and the imperative for bursaries

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) goes beyond mere profit generation. Companies are increasingly expected to operate ethically and contribute positively to society (Carroll, 2016). Bursary programs represent a powerful tool for corporations to fulfill their CSR obligations while simultaneously addressing critical challenges facing South Africa's higher education sector.

Investing in bursaries allows corporations to directly address socio-economic disparities that limit access to quality education, particularly for students from low-income and historically disadvantaged backgrounds (Bawa, 2014). A 2023 report by the National Income Dynamics Study - Wave (NIDS-Wave) revealed that only 10% of youth from the bottom 40% of the income distribution graduate from university, compared to 80% from the top 10% (NIDS-Wave, 2023). Bursaries play a crucial role in narrowing this gap and promoting social mobility, fostering a more equitable society.

Beyond financial support, many bursary programs offer valuable mentorship opportunities. These connect students with experienced professionals who can provide career guidance, industry insights, and soft skills development (Mentorship South Africa, 2023). This not only

enhances student success but also strengthens the talent pipeline for corporations. Mentorship programs can be particularly beneficial for students from underprivileged backgrounds who may lack access to strong social networks.

The skills gap in South Africa remains a significant obstacle to economic growth (Do labour shortages constrain economic growth in South Africa? 2023). Corporate bursary programs can be designed to address this challenge by prioritising fields of study aligned with the country's current and projected labor market needs. This ensures graduates possess the necessary skills and qualifications to secure employment upon graduation. A recent study by the Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) found that companies participating in bursary programs reported a significant reduction in time-to-hire for graduates aligned with their strategic needs (BUSA, 2023).

Investing in a skilled workforce isn't just beneficial for corporations seeking top talent; it's a catalyst for economic growth and national competitiveness. A World Bank (2023) report highlights the positive correlation between higher education enrolment rates and GDP per capita. They found that a 1% increase in tertiary education enrollment leads to a 0.8% increase in GDP per capita over a ten-year period. By supporting higher education through bursary programs, corporations contribute to a more skilled and innovative workforce, ultimately propelling South Africa's economic development.

While corporate bursary programs offer a multitude of benefits, challenges remain. The limited number of bursaries available relative to the national demand necessitates stricter selection processes, which can raise concerns about potential biases. Furthermore, over-reliance on corporate funding can create a situation where universities become beholden to corporate interests.

To address these challenges, ongoing collaboration and evaluation are crucial. Universities, corporations, and government entities need to work together to ensure bursary programs are accessible, transparent, and aligned with national development goals. Regular impact assessments can help determine program effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

Essentially, corporate bursary programs are a vital tool for promoting social equity, developing a skilled workforce, and fostering economic growth in South Africa. By embracing their CSR obligations and collaborating with key stakeholders, corporations can play a pivotal role in building a brighter future for both businesses and the nation as a whole.

However, the issue of corporate bursary funding in South Africa sparks a vital debate about equity, social responsibility, and the private sector's role in higher education. This review delves into the arguments surrounding this topic, examining whether bursaries represent a fundamental right or a bestowed privilege. By dissecting these contrasting viewpoints, we contribute to the ongoing discourse on the ethical and socio-economic implications of corporate bursary programs.

1.6.1 The Case for Bursaries as a Right:

Proponents of bursaries as a right highlight the essential role of access to higher education. They argue that education serves as a social equaliser, breaking the cycle of poverty and promoting social mobility (World Bank, 2023). From this perspective, corporate bursaries act as a means to address historical inequalities by providing financial aid to deserving students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who might otherwise be excluded due to financial constraints (Bawa, 2014). Moreover, initiatives by UNESCO underscore the idea that access to higher education is not merely beneficial but a fundamental right that is part of the broader right to education (UNESCO, 2022). This viewpoint is supported by evidence of significant global advancements in higher education enrolments, which have increased notably over the past two decades. Despite these advancements, challenges such as rising tuition fees continue to disproportionately impact the most vulnerable sections of society, revealing ongoing disparities in access to higher education. UNESCO's proactive stance in defining the responsibilities associated with this right and addressing emerging challenges reflects the evolving nature of higher education rights in the contemporary world (UNESCO, 2022).

Additionally, it is argued that corporations have an ethical obligation to contribute to the well-being of the communities in which they operate (Carroll, 2016). Investing in higher education through bursaries provides a tangible way to fulfil this social responsibility. This approach

aligns with the concept of "shared value" creation, where corporations not only focus on maximising profits but also consider the social and environmental impacts of their operations (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Hessels et al. (2019) contend that corporate bursary funding should be viewed as an investment in the future workforce. By supporting students in acquiring relevant skills and qualifications, corporations contribute to a more skilled and educated workforce, which in turn fosters economic growth and competitiveness for the nation (ibid). A recent study by the World Bank (2023) found a positive correlation between higher education enrolment rates and GDP per capita, with a 1% increase in tertiary education enrolments leading to a 0.8% increase in GDP per capita over a ten-year period.

1.6.2 The Counter-Arguments: Bursaries as a Privilege

Critics of bursaries as a right lament the limited resources available. Given the vast pool of deserving students, these resources cannot possibly cater to everyone (BUSA, 2023). This situation results in bursaries becoming a privilege granted to a select few who meet specific criteria, such as exceptional academic performance or alignment with a company's strategic needs (BUSA, 2023). Additionally, some argue that the decision to provide bursaries should rest solely with corporations. They contend that businesses have the right to determine how they allocate resources, including those dedicated to corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Concerns have been raised about the potential drawbacks of over-reliance on corporate funding. Critics warn of creating a scenario where universities become beholden to corporate interests, potentially compromising academic autonomy and curriculum development (Marginson, 2016). Furthermore, dependence on corporate bursaries might limit career choices for students who feel pressured to pursue specific fields aligned with the sponsoring companies. Additionally, potential biases in the selection process based on race, gender, or socioeconomic background cannot be ignored.

The debate surrounding corporate bursary funding is indeed complex, intertwining ethical considerations with practical limitations. The ideal of higher education as a universal right confronts the reality that bursary resources are finite. This tension necessitates a collaborative approach to ensure that bursary programs effectively address socio-economic disparities without compromising their sustainability.

Scholars such as Marginson (2016) argue that higher education should be accessible to all, highlighting its role in fostering equity and social mobility. However, the scarcity of bursary funds, as noted by Johnstone and Marcucci (2010), underscores the need for strategic allocation and a rethinking of corporate bursary programmes to maximise impact. This situation calls for a synergistic effort among various stakeholders. Partnerships between corporations, educational institutions, and governments can enhance the efficacy and reach of bursary programs (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Such collaborations can ensure that bursary programs address not only immediate financial barriers but also contribute to the broader educational and economic goals of society. Furthermore, engaging with local communities can help tailor bursary programs to meet specific socio-economic needs, increasing their relevance and impact (Crane, Matten, & Spence, 2019).

To navigate these challenges, ongoing dialogue and cooperation among all involved parties are essential. Aligning corporate social responsibility goals with national educational objectives, and incorporating feedback from educational institutions and beneficiaries, can make bursary programs more adaptive and responsive to the evolving educational landscape.

1.6.3 Corporate Bursaries: The current model

Corporate bursaries have emerged as a vital pillar supporting South Africa's higher education landscape (Cloete et al., 2016). These financial grants provide crucial support for students seeking tertiary education, alleviating the burden of tuition fees, books, accommodation, and sometimes even living expenses (Letseka et al., 2010). Often, these bursaries serve a dual purpose: attracting and nurturing future talent while simultaneously fulfilling Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) goals (Letseka et al., 2010).

The design and management of these programmes align with a company's strategic vision (Visser & Tolmay, 2018). Programmes are meticulously crafted to address both talent pipeline development and corporate social responsibility mandates. This involves determining the financial scope, whether full or partial coverage of expenses, the duration of the bursary, and the targeted fields of study critical to the company's operations (BusinessTech, 2023). Managing the programme encompasses application vetting, rigorous candidate selection, fund allocation, and ongoing academic monitoring of beneficiaries' progress (Rossouw, 2019).

Corporate bursaries are broadly categorised into full-cost and partial-cost types. Full-cost bursaries cover all educational and living expenses and are typically awarded to top-performing students pursuing studies in fields critical to the company's operations (SA Bursaries, 2024). Partial-cost bursaries support a broader pool of students demonstrating financial need and academic potential, covering specific educational expenses such as tuition fees or accommodation costs (Kramer & Urwick, 2017).

Eligibility criteria for these bursaries reflect a company's strategic focus on talent acquisition and commitment to fostering an inclusive workforce (Soudien et al., 2015). Criteria often include a student's academic achievements, financial need, and alignment of the chosen field of study with the company's industry focus. The application process usually involves submitting academic transcripts, proof of financial need, and a motivational letter that aligns with the bursary programme's objectives (Career Wise, 2023). Most applications are processed through a university's internal financial need application platform (Pillay, 2018).

The selection process aims to be transparent and equitable, fostering a skilled and diverse workforce. Committees composed of company representatives and academic experts evaluate candidates based on predetermined criteria, including academic merit, leadership potential, and community engagement (SA Bursaries, 2024; Pillay, 2018). Shortlisted candidates may be invited for interviews to further assess their soft skills and cultural fit within the organisation.

Once selected, bursary recipients enter into a formal agreement with the sponsoring company, outlining the terms and conditions of the award. Funds are disbursed directly to

the educational institution to cover tuition fees and living expenses through a predetermined allowance system (Van der Byl & Slabbert, 2017). Effective bursary programmes establish clear administrative procedures for ongoing communication with bursary holders, tracking academic progress, and ensuring adherence to both company and educational institution policies.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are crucial aspects of effective bursary programmes. Structured M&E frameworks track the academic progress of bursary recipients and assess the programme's alignment with strategic goals. This data allows for adjustments to programme design and selection criteria, ensuring optimal outcomes for both students and companies in terms of talent development and societal impact (Botha & Triegaardt, 2016).

Contemporary trends in corporate bursary funding in South Africa reflect a dynamic and evolving landscape. One significant trend is the growing emphasis on inclusivity, with programmes increasingly targeting students from historically marginalised communities. This focus aligns with national objectives of redressing historical inequalities and promoting social and economic transformation (DHET, 2018). Companies are expanding their bursary offerings to reach a more diverse pool of applicants, including those from rural areas, low-income households, and first-generation university students. This contributes to building a more inclusive and equitable higher education system.

Innovation is another key trend, with companies leveraging technology to enhance the accessibility, efficiency, and impact of their bursary programmes. Online platforms and digital tools streamline the application process, monitor student progress, and provide personalised support to bursary recipients. Additionally, companies are exploring innovative financing models, such as social impact bonds, which offer greater flexibility and scalability in funding higher education (World Economic Forum, 2020). These innovations address challenges such as sustainability and scalability, enhancing programme effectiveness.

Strategic alignment with national development goals is also shaping corporate bursary funding. Companies are aligning their programmes with the country's skills development priorities, focusing on sectors critical to economic growth and job creation, such as STEM

fields, health sciences, and engineering (DHET, 2019). This alignment helps address skills gaps and supports broader socio-economic development objectives. Companies are also collaborating with government agencies, educational institutions, and other stakeholders to ensure that bursary programmes align with national education policies and strategies.

Despite these positive trends, several challenges remain. Economic downturns, corporate restructuring, and changes in government policy can impact the availability and sustainability of bursary funding. Greater coordination between corporate bursary providers, educational institutions, and government agencies is needed to ensure alignment with national education and employment priorities. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including the private sector, government, and civil society.

In essence, the trends and shifts in corporate bursary funding in South Africa reflect a dynamic and evolving landscape, characterised by an increasing emphasis on inclusivity, innovation, and strategic alignment with national development goals. Addressing these trends and challenges will enable corporate bursary programmes to broaden access to higher education, promote social and economic transformation, and build a skilled and diverse workforce for the future.

1.7 The Role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a significant driver of corporate engagement in South African higher education, particularly through bursary programmes. It represents a paradigm shift from traditional profit-driven models towards a more holistic approach that integrates social, environmental and economic considerations into business operations (Carroll, 1999). This shift is not merely a matter of altruism but also reflects a growing recognition among corporations of the interconnectedness of business success and societal well-being.

The prominence of CSR in South Africa has been driven by several factors, including the legacy of apartheid, increasing social awareness and pressure from various stakeholders (Visser, 2006). The apartheid regime left a deep scar on the country's socio-economic fabric, resulting

in significant disparities in education and economic opportunities (Ramphela, 2008). As South Africa transitioned to a democratic society, the need for corporate entities to play a role in addressing these disparities became evident (Nkomo, 2011). This has been further reinforced by increasing social awareness and pressure from stakeholders, who expect companies to play an active role in addressing societal challenges (Visser, 2011). The King Reports on Corporate Governance, starting with King I in 1994, have been instrumental in codifying and promoting responsible business practices in South Africa. King IV, in particular, emphasises the importance of integrated thinking and creating shared value for both businesses and society (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2016). This approach encourages companies to move beyond compliance and view CSR as a strategic imperative that can enhance their long-term sustainability and competitiveness.

Corporate bursary programmes are a tangible manifestation of CSR in action. They provide a means for companies to invest in human capital development, address skills shortage and contribute to social upliftment. These programmes often target students from disadvantaged backgrounds, providing them with the financial resources and support needed to access and succeed in higher education (Bawa, 2014). This not only helps to level the playing field but also creates a pipeline of skilled graduates who can contribute to the company's workforce and the broader economy. This investment in education not only benefits the recipients but also contributes to the development of a skilled workforce, which is crucial for the country's economic growth (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

The motivations behind corporate involvement in education through bursary programmes are varied. Some companies are driven by a sense of moral obligation to give back to the communities that support their business (Visser, 2006). Others see it as a strategic investment in their future workforce, ensuring a steady supply of skilled professionals who can contribute to their operations (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Regardless of the underlying motivations, CSR provides a framework for understanding and evaluating these initiatives, ensuring that they align with broader social and economic objectives (Carroll, 1999).

One of the key aspects of CSR-driven bursary programmes is their potential to address social inequalities. South Africa's history of racial segregation has resulted in significant disparities in educational access and quality (Ramphela, 2008). Providing financial support to students

from disadvantaged backgrounds through corporate bursary programmes helps level the playing field, offering these students a chance to compete on equal footing with their more privileged peers (Nkomo, 2011). This not only benefits the individual students but also contributes to social cohesion and stability (Freeman & Liedtka, 1991).

The concept of 'shared value', which emphasises the interconnectedness of social and economic progress, has further reinforced the business case for corporate involvement in education (Porter & Kramer, 2011). By investing in education, companies can create a virtuous cycle where social investments lead to improved business outcomes, which in turn generate resources for further social investment. This approach aligns CSR with core business strategies, making it a more sustainable and impactful endeavour.

The success of CSR-driven bursary programmes depends on several factors, including the commitment of the corporate entities, the design and implementation of the programmes, and the support from other stakeholders such as the government and educational institutions (IoDSA, 2016). Effective bursary programmes require a strategic approach, with clear objectives, well-defined criteria for selection, and robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation (Freeman & Liedtka, 1991). Collaboration between corporate entities and educational institutions is also crucial, ensuring that the programmes are aligned with the needs and priorities of the education sector (Visser, 2006).

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for more comprehensive and integrated approaches to CSR (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Traditional models of CSR, which focused primarily on philanthropy and community investment, are increasingly being replaced by more strategic and systemic approaches (Freeman & Liedtka, 1991). These new models emphasise the importance of integrating CSR into the core business strategy, ensuring that it is aligned with the company's overall objectives and operations (Porter & Kramer, 2011). This shift towards more strategic and integrated approaches to CSR is particularly relevant in the context of corporate bursary programmes (Carroll, 1999).

Government policies, such as the B-BBEE Act, have also played a role in incentivising corporate investment in education. By offering B-BBEE points for contributions to education

and training, the government has created a regulatory framework that encourages companies to view CSR as a strategic business imperative (Department of Trade and Industry, 2003).

However, the effectiveness and impact of CSR initiatives, including bursary programmes, are not without critique. Some scholars argue that CSR is often used as a form of ‘greenwashing’, where companies engage in superficial social initiatives to enhance their reputation without making substantial changes to their business practices (Banerjee, 2008). Others criticise the potential for corporate influence over academic institutions, raising concerns about academic freedom and the prioritisation of corporate interests over broader societal needs (Marginson, 2016).

Despite these criticisms, CSR remains a powerful force for positive change in South Africa. When implemented genuinely and strategically, corporate bursary programmes can make a significant contribution to addressing educational inequalities, fostering skills development, and promoting economic growth. The challenge lies in ensuring that these programmes are designed and implemented in a way that maximises their impact and aligns with the broader goals of social justice and sustainable development.

1.8 Thesis Structure

This thesis explores the impact of corporate bursaries on facilitating access and success in higher education, with a specific focus on Gauteng Province in South Africa.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This opening chapter sets the scene for the research study, providing a comprehensive introduction and background context to the investigation of corporate bursary programmes. It details the complexities of corporate bursary funding in South African higher education. Beginning with a background on the post-1994 transformative agenda, it highlights key initiatives such as the NSFAS and the impact of the #FeesMustFall protests. The chapter articulates the persistent challenges in achieving equitable access to higher education, exacerbated by declining public funding and rising tuition fees. It then delves into the significance of corporate bursary programmes, examining their role in supporting students

from disadvantaged backgrounds who fall into the 'Missing Middle'. The problem statement, significance of the study, and the research questions and objectives that guide this thesis are outlined in this chapter. Key terms used throughout the thesis are also defined to ensure clarity and consistency.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter synthesises existing research, theories, and discussions surrounding corporate bursary programmes, exploring their objectives, implementation, and impact on student access to higher education. Beginning with a global perspective on corporate philanthropy in education, the review then narrows its focus to regional trends and finally delves into the specific context of South Africa. It provides a comprehensive overview of how financial support mechanisms, particularly corporate bursaries, can mitigate educational inequities, enhance student success, and contribute to a more inclusive higher education landscape. This review, moving from the global to the regional and finally the South African context, lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between financial aid and educational outcomes, which will be further explored in subsequent chapters.

The Chapter further delves into the theoretical foundations critical to understanding the impact of corporate bursary funding on student access and success, anchored in three pivotal theories: Human Capital Development Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Social Justice Theory. Through the interplay and intersectionality of these theories, the chapter elucidates how corporate bursaries can be conceptualized, offering a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding the multifaceted impact of corporate bursaries

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter offers a detailed description of the research methodology, elaborating on the qualitative research design, data collection methods, and analytical strategies employed in the study. It explains the rationale behind the use of document analysis and in-depth interviews, the process of purposive and snowball sampling for participant selection, and the ethical considerations adhered to throughout the research process. The chapter also

discusses the approach to data analysis, including coding and thematic analysis, ensuring transparency and reliability of the study.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Corporate Bursary Programs: Exploring the Objectives and Operations

Chapter 4 presents the findings related to the first objective of this study: to examine the objectives of corporate bursary funding and the operational efficiencies of the current model. This chapter delves into the underlying goals that drive corporate involvement in bursary programs. Additionally, the chapter scrutinizes the effectiveness and efficiency of the existing bursary models employed by corporates, assessing how well these programs are structured and managed to achieve their intended outcomes. Through a detailed analysis of qualitative data, Chapter 4 aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind corporate bursary funding and the practicalities of their implementation, highlighting both successes and areas for improvement.

Chapter 5: Impact of Corporate Bursary Programs on Student Success

Chapter 5 delves into the crux of this study's second objective - evaluating the impact of corporate funding on throughput and graduation rates in higher education. Through meticulous analysis of empirical data, this chapter seeks to illuminate the extent to which corporate financial support translates into tangible improvements in student success. It explores the complex relationship between corporate investment, academic achievement, and ultimately, the timely completion of degrees. Examining the findings presented in this chapter provides valuable insights into the efficacy of corporate funding as a catalyst for student retention and academic progression.

Chapter 6: Targeting in Corporate Bursaries

Chapter 6 delves into the targeting efficacy of corporate bursary programmes, presenting findings related to the third objective of this study. This chapter evaluates how well these programmes identify and support students who are most in need of financial assistance,

particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Examining data related to the demographic and socio-economic backgrounds of bursary recipients, along with the criteria and procedures used by corporations, this chapter evaluates how well corporate bursaries align with their intended goals. The results reveal both strengths and weaknesses in the targeting mechanisms.

Chapter 7: Gaps and Socio-Economic Impacts of Corporate Bursaries

Chapter 7 explores the socio-economic impacts of corporate bursaries and investigates how students manage unmet financial needs. This chapter presents findings related to the fourth objective of the study, examining the broader effects of corporate bursary funding on students' lives and well-being. It delves into how receiving bursaries influences students' socio-economic status, academic performance, and overall quality of life. Additionally, the chapter addresses the strategies and coping mechanisms students employ when bursary funds are insufficient to cover all their expenses. Through qualitative analyses, this chapter aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the real-world implications of corporate bursaries and the challenges students face in navigating financial shortfalls.

Chapter 8: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The final chapter synthesises the findings from the data chapters, discussing the implications of the study's results in the context of the existing literature and the theoretical framework. It offers recommendations for policymakers, educational institutions, and corporations on enhancing the effectiveness and impact of corporate bursary programmes. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the study's contributions to the field, its limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

**"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.
Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education."**

Martin Luther King Jr.

2.1 Introduction

Access to higher education in South Africa has been in the spotlight in the past few years. State contributions to university education declined from 49% at the beginning of the century to 40% by 2014, while the burden on students increased from 24% to 31% during the same period (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2018). It is therefore not surprising that each calendar year begins with student protests demanding free education or lower tuition fees. A growth in alternative funding streams such as corporate funding has been realised in the same period, as more and more corporates step in to bridge the gap in funding for tertiary education (Universities South Africa, 2016). However, despite such initiatives from the corporate sector, access to higher education remains unattainable for many. The supply of funding is never enough to match the demand.

The development aid agenda, through corporate social responsibility (CSR) practice, has become part of the global, academic, and corporate debate (Ortenblad, 2016). The private sector is increasingly regarded as an important role player in contributing towards meeting the socio-economic development challenges and, in particular, student needs within the higher education sector.

Education aid generally endeavours to ensure that every person on the planet has the means to exploit their right to an education to the fullest extent of their abilities at a global level, while at sub-levels varied objectives lead the aid objectives depending on who the donors are, who has been given the funds to implement the aid programme, and who the selected beneficiaries are (Riddell, 2014). This weaves an intricate interplay of activities and decisions from various stakeholders which ultimately lead to different education outcomes in different contexts and areas (UNESCO, 2015).

2.2 Global and Regional Perspectives on Corporate Bursaries

Corporate bursaries have increasingly been recognised as vital mechanisms for expanding access to higher education, particularly among underrepresented and marginalised groups. In developed economies, corporate-sponsored scholarships have played a significant role in increasing university enrolment rates for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research in the United States has demonstrated that such initiatives contribute to reducing racial and income-based disparities, particularly benefiting African American and Hispanic students (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). Perna (2018) highlights how corporate-sponsored scholarships facilitate access to higher education for first-generation college students, thereby improving social mobility. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, corporate-funded bursaries have been instrumental in enhancing university enrolment among Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students, as well as those from low-income households (Shafi & Rose, 2022). These bursary schemes have also shown a strong correlation with access to prestigious Russell Group universities, particularly for students from disadvantaged postcodes (Shafi & Rose, 2022). Across these developed contexts, bursary programs are often designed to target ethnic minorities, first-generation university students, and individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, reinforcing their role as tools for educational equity (Perna, 2018).

Beyond widening access, corporate bursary programs in developed economies are increasingly linked to workforce development. In the United States, major corporations such as Boeing, Google, and IBM offer bursary schemes that integrate internship opportunities and post-graduation employment contracts, particularly in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields (Perna, 2018). These initiatives reflect a strategic alignment between higher education funding and industry talent pipelines (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). Similarly, in Canada, corporate bursary schemes are frequently embedded within co-operative education (co-op) programs, where students alternate between academic study and industry placements, gaining professional experience while financing their education (Sweet et al., 2019). However, critics argue that such models may prioritise corporate interests over student autonomy, as bursary recipients may feel compelled to remain in roles that do not necessarily align with their long-term career aspirations (Perkins & Green, 2019).

The effectiveness of corporate bursaries is also influenced by the extent of financial support provided. While full bursaries significantly enhance student retention and completion rates, partial bursaries often fail to alleviate financial burdens comprehensively. Research in Latin America has indicated that students reliant on partial bursaries frequently resort to accumulating debt or working excessive hours, both of which negatively impact academic performance and increase dropout rates (Salmi, 2022). Similar patterns have been observed in China and Southeast Asia, where bursary schemes often fail to account for regional variations in living costs, limiting their overall effectiveness (Li & Chen, 2021). These findings suggest that a more holistic approach to bursary provision—one that ensures financial security across tuition and non-tuition expenses—is necessary to maximise student success.

Globally, corporate bursary schemes are also becoming increasingly tied to labour market needs. In Germany and Switzerland, for instance, bursary programs are integrated within dual-education systems, where students gain practical experience alongside theoretical learning, enhancing their employability (Wolter & Ryan, 2020). Likewise, in Singapore and South Korea, corporations strategically invest in students pursuing STEM and emerging technology disciplines, aligning higher education with national economic priorities and addressing skills shortages in key sectors (Lee & Gopinathan, 2021). However, in contrast to these structured models, developing economies often face significant labour market mismatches. In many cases, graduates—including those supported by bursaries—struggle to secure employment due to misalignment between their degrees and industry demands (Altbach, Reisberg, & de Wit, 2020). These disparities underscore the need for stronger collaborations between industry and higher education institutions to ensure that corporate-funded education remains relevant to labour market demands, facilitating smoother transitions into the workforce and broader economic development.

In many African and South Asian countries, where public financial aid remains limited, corporate bursaries serve as essential lifelines for academically talented but financially disadvantaged students. In Kenya and Nigeria, for example, the expansion of corporate-sponsored bursary programs has provided opportunities for students to enrol in prestigious public and private universities, though demand continues to outstrip supply (Wainaina et al., 2020). In India, corporate bursary initiatives have grown in response to rising tuition fees, with

corporations increasingly aligning their funding strategies with diversity and inclusion goals, particularly targeting women, marginalised castes, and rural students (Tilak, 2020; Agarwal, 2021). Similarly, in Bangladesh and Pakistan, bursaries have been directed towards female students and first-generation university attendees, reflecting broader efforts to promote social mobility and gender equity in higher education (Hossain, 2020).

Despite their role in expanding access, corporate bursaries in these regions do not always address the full spectrum of financial challenges faced by students. Many recipients continue to struggle with hidden costs such as accommodation, transport, food, and learning materials, which remain substantial barriers to retention and degree completion (Altbach & de Wit, 2021). In South Africa and Ghana, studies indicate that even students receiving full-tuition bursaries may drop out due to difficulties covering non-tuition expenses, highlighting the need for more comprehensive funding models (Cloete et al., 2020).

Another defining characteristic of corporate bursary schemes in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia is their strong linkage to corporate workforce development strategies. Many corporate-funded students are expected to work for their sponsoring organisations upon graduation, effectively serving as talent pipelines for specific industries (Oketch, 2019). This model is particularly prevalent in engineering, information technology, finance, and healthcare sectors, where corporations seek to secure future employees through educational investments (Mukundane, 2020). While such schemes offer students clear employment pathways, concerns have been raised regarding their potential impact on career mobility and autonomy. Scholars argue that requiring students to commit to employment with a sponsoring corporation may restrict their ability to explore diverse career opportunities, ultimately limiting their professional growth (Tilak, 2020). Furthermore, corporate bursary models tend to prioritise disciplines that align with business interests, often overlooking fields such as the humanities and social sciences, which receive comparatively less corporate funding despite their broader societal importance (Cloete et al., 2020).

2.3 A South African Perspective - From Apartheid Legacy to Strategic Investment

The evolution of corporate bursary funding in South Africa is a multifaceted narrative intertwined with the country's socio-political changes, economic developments, and educational reforms. This comprehensive examination delves into the historical progression, critical turning points, and the current landscape of corporate bursary funding, supported by available literature, citations, and empirical studies. The discussion is structured to provide a deep understanding of the factors driving changes in corporate bursary initiatives, their impact on South African education and workforce development, and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

The concept of corporate bursary funding in South Africa cannot be adequately understood without acknowledging its historical backdrop marked by apartheid. During this period, educational and economic opportunities were heavily skewed in favour of the white minority, leaving the vast majority of black South Africans with limited access to quality education and employment prospects. Early instances of corporate bursaries were predominantly offered by mining and industrial companies to train white South Africans for technical and managerial roles, with few opportunities available to black individuals and other racial groups (Fiske and Ladd, 2004). The post-apartheid era, however, ushered in a paradigm shift, with the democratic government prioritising educational equity and workforce diversity as cornerstones of national development.

The transition to democracy in 1994 marked a significant turning point for corporate bursary funding, guided by new legislative frameworks and policies aimed at redressing historical injustices and promoting inclusive economic growth. The introduction of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act and subsequent policies, such as the Skills Development Act, provided a regulatory impetus for companies to invest in the education and training of previously disadvantaged South Africans (Department of Trade and Industry, 2003). These legislative measures not only mandated corporate participation in the socio-economic development of the country but also incentivised companies to offer bursaries as a means of earning B-BBEE points, thereby aligning corporate interests with national development objectives.

The evolution of corporate bursary funding in South Africa reflects a broadening of scope and objectives, moving beyond compliance to a more strategic engagement with education and skills development. Modern corporate bursaries are increasingly designed with a dual focus: addressing the skills gap in critical sectors such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and contributing to social upliftment by providing opportunities for disadvantaged students. Companies like Sasol, Anglo American, and the FirstRand Foundation have been at the forefront, offering comprehensive bursary programmes that cover tuition fees, living expenses, and often include mentorship, internships, and employment opportunities upon graduation (Sasol, 2020; Anglo American, 2019; FirstRand, 2018).

The impact of corporate bursary programmes extends beyond individual beneficiaries to influence broader educational and economic outcomes. Studies have shown that corporate bursaries contribute to increased access to higher education, lower dropout rates, and improved academic performance among disadvantaged students (Van der Berg & Burger, 2003). Furthermore, by aligning bursary programmes with sector-specific skills needs, corporations play a crucial role in shaping the talent pipeline, thereby enhancing the employability of graduates and addressing critical skills shortages in the economy.

Corporate funding through CSI initiatives represents an evolving pattern in the financing of higher education in South Africa. By contributing to bursaries and scholarships, corporations play a pivotal role in expanding access to higher education for students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This involvement of the private sector in higher education funding is part of a global trend where corporate entities are increasingly engaging in social investments as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Kraak, 2000; Ajayi, 1996). In the South African context, CSI in higher education not only addresses the financial barriers faced by prospective students but also aligns with broader national goals of redressing past inequalities and promoting economic empowerment. However, while the contributions of corporations are significant, they also raise questions about the sustainability and adequacy of such funding in meeting the growing demand for higher education, as well as the potential influence of corporate interests on academic priorities and agendas.

The collaborative model of higher education funding in South Africa, which includes significant contributions from the corporate sector, reflects a multi-stakeholder approach to addressing the educational needs of a diverse and evolving society. This model underscores the importance of aligning corporate funding with national development goals and educational policies to ensure that investments in higher education yield the desired socio-economic outcomes (Bunting, 1994; Bunting & Cloete, 2010). It is essential to continuously evaluate the impact of corporate funding on access, equity, and quality in higher education to ensure that such investments contribute positively to the transformation of the sector. In doing so, South Africa can leverage corporate funding to not only alleviate financial barriers to higher education but also to drive innovation, research, and development, thereby enhancing the sector's contribution to national development and social cohesion. As the country moves forward, the ongoing collaboration between the state, private sector, and civil society will be crucial in shaping a higher education system that is accessible, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all South Africans.

Despite significant progress, corporate bursary funding in South Africa faces ongoing challenges related to sustainability, scalability, and inclusivity. The economic downturn and corporate restructuring have led to budget constraints for CSR initiatives, including bursary programmes. Additionally, there is a need for greater coordination between corporate bursary providers, educational institutions, and government agencies to ensure that bursary schemes are aligned with national education and employment priorities (Motala & Menon, 2019).

Looking ahead, the future of corporate bursary funding will likely be shaped by several key trends, including the increasing use of technology to enhance programme delivery and impact measurement, a greater focus on holistic student support services, and the exploration of innovative financing models such as social impact bonds. Moreover, as South Africa continues to grapple with issues of inequality and youth unemployment, corporate bursaries will remain an essential tool in the broader strategy to foster inclusive growth and social cohesion.

The evolution of corporate bursary funding in South Africa is a testament to the transformative power of education and the critical role of corporate entities in driving socio-economic development. Through strategic investment in bursary programmes, companies

have the opportunity to contribute to the cultivation of a skilled and diverse workforce, while also addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing the country. As South Africa continues on its path of recovery and development, the need for effective, sustainable, and inclusive corporate bursary programmes has never been more pronounced.

2.3.1 The Transformation Agenda: Impact and effects of B-BBEE

South Africa's transition from apartheid to a democratic state coincided with a global shift towards neoliberal economic policies (Harvey, 2007). This shift pressured the new government to address the historical imbalances created by apartheid's racialised labour market, which McGrath et al. (2004) characterised as a "low skills regime." The challenge lay in redressing these imbalances while integrating the South African economy into the global capitalist system (Motala et al., 2010).

A key expectation was the dismantling of the apartheid-era education and training system, fostering a more equitable landscape (Motala et al., 2010). However, the government faced conflicting pressures: addressing historical imbalances domestically while integrating into the global economy. This led to a mix of policies, some aimed at redress and others focused on economic competitiveness (Ngcukana, 2010).

The discourse on skills development became a battleground for these contrasting ideologies. The adoption of human capital theory principles, evident in Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) reforms and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), arguably contributed to the current skills development crisis (Allais, 2011a). Critics such as Allais (2011a) argue that the qualifications model focuses on narrow, atomised skills for fragmented jobs, neglecting broader competencies needed in a changing economy. Additionally, Ngcangu (2014) suggests that the complexities of the framework make it cumbersome and hinder responsiveness to employer needs.

Challenges in skills development are further compounded by student retention issues in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Tinto, 2002). Understanding why students leave early is crucial for improving retention rates. Jimerson (2001) emphasises that retention is a powerful

predictor of student success, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address the factors influencing early departure.

While B-BBEE has aimed to transform the education sector, concerns remain regarding the effectiveness of scorecard metrics used to measure progress. Critics argue that these metrics often prioritise quantitative targets over qualitative improvements in access, equity, and student success (Badenhorst & Maree, 2016). A shift towards a more holistic approach, which considers the impact of initiatives on student learning outcomes, is necessary.

2.3.2 The National Development Plan and the Importance of Higher Education: Vision 2030

The National Development Plan (NDP) for South Africa recognises higher education as a cornerstone for achieving its ambitious Vision 2030 goals (National Planning Commission, 2013). A skilled postgraduate workforce is crucial for South Africa to compete effectively in a globalised knowledge economy (Frostick & Gault, 2013). Higher education plays a central role in building safer communities, reforming public services, tackling corruption, and transforming society towards greater unity and social cohesion (Bhorat et al., 2017).

The NDP emphasises that education, training, and innovation are central to its development objectives (National Planning Commission, 2013). These areas contribute to economic growth and productivity, although they are not a panacea (World Bank, 2018). Education, training, and innovation are essential for solving complex societal challenges, fostering national competitiveness, eradicating poverty, and reducing inequality (OECD, 2018). Higher education institutions (HEIs) act as key drivers within the knowledge system. They provide high-level skills, produce new knowledge, critically evaluate existing information, and discover novel local and global applications (Marginson, 2016). Additionally, HEIs offer significant opportunities for social mobility, allowing individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their socio-economic status (Bawa, 2014).

While universities play a critical role, other centres of knowledge production and application also exist, including science councils, research institutes, and the private sector (National Planning Commission, 2013). To create a comprehensive and enabling framework, these

entities must be included, and their significance in science, technology, and innovation (STI) recognised (DSTI, 2021). The NDP identifies STI as foundational pillars for development (National Planning Commission, 2013). However, South Africa's National System of Innovation (NSI) is relatively small compared to its population (DSTI, 2021). The country has not seen substantial increases in research and development (R&D) investments, public sector research personnel, PhD graduates, or research outputs (Bhorat et al., 2017). Therefore, all knowledge production centres must collaborate to achieve a more coherent and coordinated NSI with common objectives aligned with national priorities (Fullerton, 2018). Fostering a culture of entrepreneurship will also be crucial for economic development (Hessels et al., 2019).

Education cannot exist in isolation and relies on the support of other government departments and policies (National Planning Commission, 2013). Housing, basic services, and social security are crucial elements that contribute to the success of the education system (Spaull, 2013). The NDP outlines five action themes to achieve its objectives. The first theme focuses on laying a solid foundation for children's well-being, educational achievement, and scientific literacy (National Planning Commission, 2013). This theme particularly targets vulnerable children, such as those living in poverty and those with disabilities, ensuring they have access to high-quality education (Department of Basic Education, 2020). Early Childhood Development (ECD) plays a critical role in ensuring children reach their full potential by addressing health, nutrition, physical fitness, caregiving, stable home environments, and stimulating surroundings (DHET, 2015).

The NDP emphasises the need for a curriculum in schools that is relevant to the South African context, placing strong emphasis on literacy, mathematics, science, and African languages (National Planning Commission, 2013). The quality of teachers is essential, especially in mathematics and science (OECD, 2019). The further education and training (FET) and skills development environment must be expanded to include work-based training, community and youth development programmes, and a more effective role for Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) in producing skills that meet the immediate needs of employers (Doet, 2019). Public colleges need to enrol a higher proportion of learners to meet demand and offer clear pathways for post-matric youth, older individuals seeking skill development, adults with limited prior education, and those who only completed grade 9 (DHET, 2015).

Universities, as a subset of the higher education system, are expected to demonstrate their unique contributions to national development (National Planning Commission, 2013). HEIs should strive for efficiency, characterised by increased throughput of graduates, participation rates, innovation, and research publication output. The NDP sets a target for 75% of academic staff to hold PhDs by 2030, with women and black individuals comprising more than 50% of research and training staff (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2015). However, achieving these ambitious goals requires addressing some key challenges.

Increased Funding: South Africa's public expenditure on higher education has stagnated in recent years, hindering universities' ability to invest in infrastructure, attract and retain qualified staff, and offer adequate financial support to students (Bhorat et al., 2017). Diversifying funding sources beyond government allocation, through public-private partnerships, research grants, and alumni contributions, will be crucial (World Bank, 2018).

Student Success: While increasing access to higher education is important, ensuring student success is equally critical. Retention and graduation rates remain low, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (CHE, 2017). Universities need to implement effective support structures, such as academic advising, tutoring, and financial aid programmes, to help students overcome academic and financial challenges (Bawa, 2014).

Transformation: The South African higher education system continues to grapple with the legacy of apartheid. Black students and staff remain underrepresented, particularly in senior positions (CHE, 2021). Targeted initiatives are required to address these inequalities and promote a more diverse and inclusive university environment (Department of Higher Education and Training, DHET, 2015).

Essentially, the National Development Plan recognises higher education as a critical driver of national development in South Africa. Universities play a vital role in producing a skilled workforce, fostering innovation, and promoting social justice. However, significant challenges must be addressed to achieve the ambitious goals outlined in the NDP. Increasing funding through public-private partnerships and corporations can empower South African universities

to make a substantial contribution to a more prosperous and equitable future for all through improved access and enhanced success.

2.4 Challenges of Student Financial Aid in South Africa

Student financial aid plays a crucial role in facilitating access to higher education for economically disadvantaged students. In South Africa, the provision of financial aid has been primarily driven by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which falls under the Department of Higher Education and Training. While NSFAS historically targeted students from low-income families, the definition of 'poor' was limited to an annual family income of less than R120,000 (about US\$8,287) until the end of 2017, thereby leaving a significant portion of the population known as the 'missing middle' without adequate support (Areff and Spies, 2017). This section outlines the historical development of student financial aid in South Africa, highlights the challenges faced by the education system, and discusses the complex relationship between financial aid and academic success.

South Africa's education system has faced numerous challenges, as identified by Spaul (2013), who ranked it as the worst among middle-income countries participating in cross-national assessments of educational achievement. The lack of quality education and skills mismatches contribute to perpetuating poverty and high levels of youth unemployment (OECD, 2020; Amnesty International, 2020; Perold et al., 2012). Consequently, there is a pressing need to optimise the education system alongside providing financial aid to improve educational outcomes (Glewwe et al., 2015).

Recognising the importance of education for socioeconomic development, the South African government has outlined objectives to expand education and training in scarce skills areas and build a developmental state with a vibrant democracy and a flourishing economy (White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, 2014). However, the growing demand for higher education enrolment and serious infrastructural constraints pose significant challenges (Wilson-Strydom & Fongwa, 2012). The allocation of priorities, such as student accommodation, came under scrutiny during movements like #FeesMustFall and

#RhodesMustFall, where students questioned the resource allocation decisions within the education system.

While the expansion of the school and higher education systems since 1994 has increased access to education, concerns have been raised regarding the lack of quality and relevant learning opportunities, particularly in tertiary education (Pinnock, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to establish a more direct link between the inputs and outcomes of financial aid to ensure quality education (Clemens et al., 2021).

The increased enrolment of students in higher education suggests a positive trend from the perspective of increasing access for students from economically and educationally disadvantaged groups. However, increasing access has not resulted in increasing success. Despite government and other financial assistance, a substantial number of students fail to complete their degrees within the minimum time or drop out entirely (CHE, 2016). Studies by Letseka et al. (2008), Africa (2005), and CHE (2010) have consistently highlighted student poverty and insufficient funding as key factors contributing to reduced student throughput and progression. However, Breier (2010) suggests that academic failure and poor progression persist even with the availability of financial support, indicating that the determinants of academic success are multifaceted and extend beyond financial aid provision.

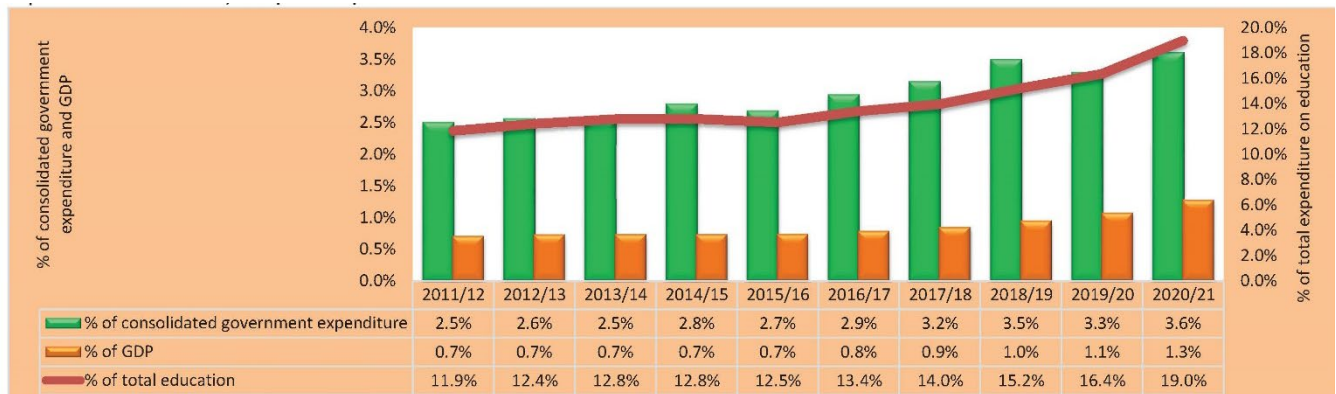
The history of student financial aid in South Africa reflects ongoing efforts to increase access to higher education for economically disadvantaged students. However, the education system faces substantial challenges in terms of quality, skills development, and infrastructural constraints. While financial aid is essential, it is not sufficient alone to ensure good educational outcomes. Therefore, a comprehensive approach that addresses systemic issues, enhances the quality of education, and provides targeted support to students is necessary to bridge the gap between access and success in higher education.

2.4.1 South African Economy and the Higher Education Budget: Justifying the Need for Corporate Bursary Funding

The South African government consistently faces the challenge of allocating limited financial resources among competing social needs, particularly in higher education. With various departments vying for a larger share of the budget, it is crucial to address the root causes of the "triple challenge" of student dropouts, low retention rates, and poor throughput rates (CHE, 2021). Identifying these factors enables the development of effective interventions to reduce student losses and enhance the system's efficiency. This section explores the relationship between the South African economy and the higher education budget, highlighting the need for corporate bursary funding to address socio-economic disparities, promote skills development, and contribute to the country's economic growth. The essay examines the economic landscape, the state of higher education financing, and the role of corporate social responsibility, illustrating the mutual benefits for both the economy and corporations in supporting higher education through bursary programmes.

Over the past decade, education has consistently received the largest share of the South African national budget, reflecting its significance in the country's priorities. Figure 6 below depicts the government's expenditure on tertiary education in relation to consolidated non-interest government expenditure, GDP, and total education expenditure. From the 2011/12 to the 2020/21 period, the proportion of government spending on tertiary education relative to consolidated non-interest government expenditure increased by 1.1 percentage points, rising from 2.5% to 3.6%. Investment in tertiary education as a percentage of GDP grew from 0.7% to 1.3%. Additionally, the share of tertiary education spending within the total government education budget saw a substantial rise of 7.1 percentage points, increasing from 11.9% to 19.0%. A notable increase in public expenditure on tertiary education occurred around the 2017/18 period, likely due to enhanced NSFAS allocations and DHET baseline funding in response to the #FeesMustFall movement.

Figure 1: Government Expenditure on Higher Education



Source: Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET 2022)

Despite increases in expenditure, South Africa's higher education budget has faced significant strain, exacerbated by the dual challenges of expanding access and maintaining quality. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2022), the allocation to higher education as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has remained relatively stagnant, hovering around 0.86% over the past decade (2011–2021). This figure falls short of the 1% threshold recommended by UNESCO for developing countries (UNESCO, 2015). This underfunding becomes more pronounced against the backdrop of rising student enrolments and escalating costs related to technological advancements and infrastructure development (Cloete, 2016). Recent data from Statistics South Africa (2023) reveals a 20% increase in student enrolments over the past five years, further straining available resources.

Inadequate funding for higher education imposes a significant economic burden. A well-resourced system is crucial for fostering a skilled workforce, driving innovation, and promoting economic growth (Bhorat et al., 2014). Conversely, underfunded institutions struggle to maintain quality and adapt to evolving needs, creating a critical skills gap between graduates and the labour market that perpetuates unemployment and underemployment (Bhorat et al., 2014).

South Africa epitomises this paradox, grappling with high youth unemployment rates while simultaneously facing a shortage of skilled professionals in key sectors (Stats SA, 2019). This

situation highlights the urgent need to align higher education outputs with the country's economic and developmental objectives.

Corporate bursary programmes offer a strategic response to this complex economic and educational landscape. They bridge the growing gap between public funding shortfalls and the increasing financial demands of higher education. When strategically designed to align with national skills development priorities, these programmes can significantly contribute to a robust workforce and a more resilient economy (Letseka et al., 2010).

Beyond their economic benefits, corporate bursaries play a crucial role in promoting social mobility and equity. They provide opportunities for historically marginalised individuals to access higher education, thereby fostering upward mobility and improving their socio-economic status (Pillay, 2010). Research indicates that students from disadvantaged backgrounds who receive bursaries are more likely to graduate and secure employment in their chosen fields (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Given the constraints of national budgets and the need for sustainable economic growth, the private sector, particularly through corporate bursary programmes, assumes an increasingly vital role. These initiatives not only alleviate the financial burden on public resources but also enhance the relevance and responsiveness of higher education to the demands of a knowledge-driven economy (CHE, 2016).

A collaborative effort between the state, higher education institutions, and the corporate sector is essential for developing an education system that is both equitable and responsive to the needs of the 21st-century economy. The state establishes overarching national development goals and provides a regulatory framework. Higher education institutions translate these goals into tailored programmes that equip students with essential skills and knowledge. Finally, the corporate sector contributes by providing financial resources and industry expertise, ensuring graduates are prepared to meet the specific demands of the workforce (World Bank, 2018).

2.4.2 Alignment with SDGs: A Catalyst for Sustainable Development in South Africa's Higher Education

Corporate bursary funding plays a pivotal role in propelling South Africa's higher education sector towards the objectives enshrined within the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A growing body of research underscores the positive synergies between these bursary programs and specific SDGs, particularly those focused on quality education (SDG 4), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and fostering partnerships for the goals (SDG 17).

SDG 4: Quality Education and Lifelong Learning Opportunities

A 2021 report by the World Bank (World Bank, 2021) highlights the persistent funding gap in South African higher education. Corporate bursaries bridge this gap, creating pathways to quality education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. A recent study by Deloitte South Africa (2023) found that 87% of bursary recipients come from historically underprivileged communities. These programs not only provide financial support, but also mentorship opportunities and career guidance, aligning with SDG 4's emphasis on lifelong learning.

The above closely resonates with the human capital theory – one of the four theories on which the study is anchored. Psacharopoulos (1994) contends that investments in education and skills development lead to increased individual and national productivity. As such, corporate bursaries, by enabling access to quality education, contribute to the development of a skilled workforce, a key tenet of HCT. Additionally, mentorship programs offered through these bursaries provide valuable social capital, fostering connections and networks that can benefit graduates throughout their careers (Coleman, 1988).

SDG 10: Reducing Inequalities and Fostering Equity

Corporate bursary programmes play a crucial role in advancing Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10), which seeks to reduce inequalities and promote equity both within and among countries. Financial support provided to students from underrepresented and disadvantaged

backgrounds directly addresses the educational disparities prevalent in South Africa and other regions. The 2022 report by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2022) underscores the persistent underrepresentation of black African students in higher education institutions, a gap that corporate bursaries actively aim to bridge.

Targeted bursary programmes are essential in fostering social mobility, offering students from marginalised communities the opportunity to pursue higher education and realise their potential. These initiatives not only address immediate financial barriers but also challenge the systemic issues contributing to educational inequities (DHET, 2017). Corporate bursaries serve as a practical means for companies to fulfil their social responsibility, investing in the nation's human capital and promoting a more equitable societal structure (Kramer & Urwick, 2017).

From a social justice perspective, corporate bursaries transcend mere financial aid; they are transformative tools that tackle longstanding disparities in educational access and success. These programmes are crucial in dismantling structural barriers to education, thereby contributing to a more inclusive higher education system (Young, 2000). They create a level playing field where students, regardless of their socio-economic background, can pursue higher education and enhance their life prospects.

In essence, corporate bursaries align with the broader goals of SDG 10 by supporting sustained, inclusive economic growth and creating employment opportunities. The educational advancement enabled by these bursaries equips students with the skills and knowledge needed to participate effectively in the economy, thereby fostering a more diverse and competent workforce (Bhorat et al., 2014).

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Corporate bursary programs hold immense potential in contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8): Decent Work and Economic Growth (United Nations, 2015). These programs achieve this by fostering a symbiotic relationship between education, skills development, and economic prosperity.

A key aspect of SDG 8 is the promotion of productive employment and decent work for all (United Nations, 2015). Corporate bursary programs directly address this by equipping students with the necessary skills and industry knowledge to thrive in the modern workforce. A 2023 study by the Business Scholars of South Africa (BSSA, 2023) found that a staggering 92% of bursary graduates secure employment within six months of graduation. This highlights the effectiveness of these programs in bridging the gap between theoretical education and practical skills required by employers.

The success of corporate bursary programs extends beyond immediate employment outcomes. Investing in the education of future generations, contributes to a more skilled and adaptable workforce over the long term. This, in turn, fosters sustainable economic growth and empowers individuals to access decent work opportunities, contributing directly to the achievement of SDG 8 (United Nations, 2015).

Therefore, corporate bursary programs play a vital role in advancing SDG 8 by equipping students with relevant skills, fostering a skilled workforce, and driving economic growth. This highlights the importance of fostering partnerships between the corporate sector, educational institutions, and government to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of these programs in achieving a more prosperous and equitable future.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals - A Collaborative Approach

The very essence of corporate bursaries embodies the spirit of SDG 17. These programs forge vital partnerships between corporations, educational institutions, and students, leveraging financial resources, industry expertise, and academic frameworks to create a sustainable model for educational upliftment. A 2022 report by Higher Education South Africa (HESA, 2022) emphasises the importance of ongoing collaboration between stakeholders to enhance the long-term impact and effectiveness of corporate bursaries. These partnerships build social capital by fostering trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility for achieving educational goals.

The alignment between corporate bursary funding and SDGs in South Africa fosters a mutually beneficial ecosystem. Corporations contribute to a skilled workforce, social upliftment, and ultimately, a more sustainable future. For students, bursaries unlock doors to higher education, empowering them to become contributing members of society. This transformative potential demonstrates the power of corporate collaboration in driving positive change within the South African higher education landscape and beyond.

2.5 Impact of student funding on academic performance.

Findings from research conducted by Letseka (2009) provide reliable evidence supporting the assertion that students receiving financial support are more likely to continue their studies than those who do not. Letseka's (2009) research, conducted across several Mexican tertiary institutions, sought to establish whether there was a correlation between student loans and academic performance. The research revealed higher retention rates among students who received financial support compared to those without. The conclusion was that financial assistance significantly increased retention rates among university students, with notably fewer dropouts observed among those receiving assistance. In essence, the study demonstrated that financial support enhances the likelihood of students completing their programmes (ibid).

The literature review revealed abundant evidence of a direct correlation between financial assistance and tertiary completion rates. This was starkly highlighted in the 2010 NSFAS Review, which identified the primary cause of the 48% dropout rate as students' inability to cover additional expenses for accommodation, food, transport, and books. The Rural Education Access Programme's (REAP) 10-year Tracking Report (2011) offers further empirical evidence of the correlation between financial assistance and completion rates. The findings indicated that supplementing the NSFAS bursary with additional funds for accommodation, transport, and food not only added value but also positively impacted completion rates, the development of a strong work ethic, the ambition to succeed, a desire to contribute to society, access to employment, the establishment of social support networks from peers, and a better understanding of mentoring (ibid).

Colborn, Kent, and Leon's (1995) study on the changing medical student population at the University of Cape Town provides additional evidence that the availability of funds is the most critical factor in enabling students to complete their studies. Recognising that many students, particularly African students, often face financial disadvantages, the institution began offering substantial full-cost and near full-cost bursaries to African medical students through the Academic Support Programme. These bursaries were funded by foreign governments and international businesses.

This financial aid had a significant impact, with the number of applicants increasing from 1,229 in 1981 (the first year UCT accepted African students into its Medical School) to 2,330 in 1994. By 1994, African students comprised 24% of those admitted to the MBChB programme, with 30.4% of these students being women. The study concluded that students unable to obtain this financial support often incurred substantial debts during their medical education, which added stress and negatively affected their academic performance and career choices upon graduation (Colborn, Kent & Leon, 1995:260).

This underscores the importance of financial support in higher education, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Without such support, students are more likely to face financial strain that can impede their academic success and limit their career opportunities. This finding is reinforced by the work of the Rural Education Access Programme (REAP), which assists young, rural people regardless of faith or affiliation through partnerships with the National Skills Fund. REAP facilitates full-cost bursaries and offers psychosocial support and mentoring services, further illustrating how comprehensive financial and emotional support can enhance student success and retention.

Overall, these studies highlight the critical role that adequate funding plays in promoting educational equity and success, particularly for students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. They demonstrate that financial aid not only increases access to higher education but also improves academic outcomes and broadens career opportunities, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

In the United Kingdom, a comprehensive body of research has explored the impact of financial constraints, debt, and the necessity of vacation work on the participation and success of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds within the evolving landscape of higher education reforms. These studies consistently reveal that financial issues significantly influence the choices these students make regarding which institution to attend and where to study. Lower-income students often face limited options due to the high costs associated with prestigious universities and the additional expenses of living away from home (Callender & Jackson, 2005).

Furthermore, the necessity to undertake part-time or vacation work to support their studies adds another layer of complexity to their educational journey. While such work provides much-needed financial relief, it can also detract from the time and energy students can dedicate to their studies, potentially affecting their academic performance and overall university experience. The stress of balancing work and study can lead to burnout and decreased engagement with academic and social aspects of university life (Christie, Munro, & Fisher, 2004).

Financial problems are also a primary factor cited by students who decide to drop out of higher education. The burden of accumulating debt, coupled with the immediate need for income, often forces students from disadvantaged backgrounds to leave their studies prematurely. This not only hampers their personal and professional development but also perpetuates the cycle of socio-economic disadvantage (Brennan et al., 2005).

Moreover, the psychological impact of financial strain cannot be overlooked. The constant worry about making ends meet can lead to heightened stress and anxiety, further impeding academic success and well-being. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to report feelings of isolation and helplessness, exacerbated by the financial pressures they face (Jones, 2008).

The above underscores the critical need for comprehensive financial support systems within higher education. Addressing the financial barriers that constrain the choices and success of lower-income students enables policymakers and educational institutions to create a more

inclusive and equitable higher education landscape. This involves providing sufficient bursaries and scholarships, as well as offering flexible payment plans, financial counselling, and support services that address the holistic needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In light of these findings, it is not surprising that large numbers of tertiary students do not succeed in their studies or perform poorly in their exams. Students from poor families often study under difficult conditions, such as using candles for lighting, living in crowded accommodations, and lacking sufficient food. South Africa's graduation rate of 15% is one of the lowest in the world (Letseka & Maile, 2008). According to the Department of Education, 30% of students drop out in their first year (ibid). The bursaries provided by the government and the private sector offer much-needed assistance in this regard.

2.5.1 COVID-19 and the Impact of Corporate Bursaries in South Africa

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted the higher education landscape globally, with South Africa's sector facing significant trials. The Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2023) and various empirical studies highlight these challenges, emphasising the need for innovative responses from corporate bursary programs. These programs, which are vital for student access and success, have had to rapidly adapt to ensure continuity in support amidst the pandemic's uncertainties (Kay Mason Foundation, 2023; CHE, 2023).

The economic repercussions of the pandemic have strained corporate finances, raising concerns about the sustainability of bursary funding (Trading Economics, 2023). Additionally, the abrupt transition to online learning has widened the digital divide, disproportionately affecting indigent students (NIDS-Wave, 2023). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who often lack access to reliable technology and internet connectivity, faced significant hurdles in participating effectively in online learning environments (SA Education Monitor, 2023). This exacerbated pre-existing educational inequalities and jeopardised academic progress. The disruption to practical learning experiences, such as internships and mentorships, has further complicated students' professional development pathways (Bawa &

Dewett, 2022). These programs often provide invaluable industry exposure, practical skills development, and networking opportunities, all vital for graduates entering the workforce.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, corporate bursary programs have exhibited remarkable resilience and adaptability. A range of innovative strategies was implemented to mitigate the pandemic's impact and to ensure the continuation of student support (Marginson, 2016; Letseka & Breier, 2008). These strategies can be broadly categorised as follows:

Enhanced Financial Support: Recognising the additional expenses associated with remote learning, many corporations increased their financial aid to cover essential digital tools such as laptops, tablets, and internet data packages. This enhanced financial support was vital in enabling students to access online learning platforms without the burden of additional costs, which could have otherwise impeded their academic progress (Kraak & Press, 2008; Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2014).

Virtual Mentorship and Support Systems: The transition to online platforms led to the rapid development of virtual mentorship programs and online resources as contended by Crawford et al., (2020). These initiatives provided ongoing support, guidance, and a sense of community for bursary recipients as they navigated the challenges of remote learning. Regular contact with students through virtual means ensured that students received the emotional and academic support needed to succeed in an unfamiliar learning environment (Gelles et al., 2020; Crawford et al., 2020).

Collaborative Problem-Solving: Corporations actively collaborated with educational institutions and government bodies, facilitating the identification of students' specific needs during the pandemic and leading to the development of tailored support mechanisms. This collaborative approach ensures that solutions are relevant and effective, addressing the unique challenges faced by students during this period (Jones & Thomas, 2005; Selwyn & Facer, 2013).

These adaptations underscore the evolving nature of corporate bursary programs and their ongoing commitment to student success, even in the face of unforeseen circumstances. The ability to pivot and adapt to new challenges highlights the critical role of these programs in promoting educational equity and access.

Looking ahead, corporate bursary programs will continue to play a crucial role in ensuring equitable access to higher education. The pandemic has not only exposed existing inequalities within the education system but has also reinforced the essential role that corporate bursaries play in bridging these gaps (McCowan, 2016). As South Africa transitions to a post-pandemic reality, ongoing flexibility, collaboration, and a focus on students' evolving needs will be crucial in sustaining the positive impact of corporate bursaries. Addressing the digital divide and providing tailored support to the unique challenges faced by disadvantaged students will be vital in promoting inclusive access to higher education in South Africa (Warschauer, 2004; Jones & Thomas, 2005).

2.6 Conceptual Framework

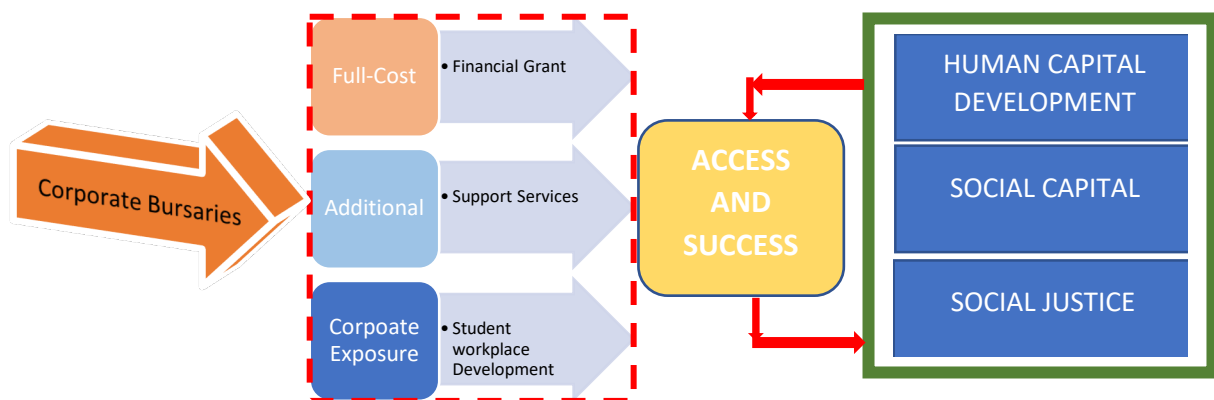


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

The diagram above illustrates the multifaceted nature of Corporate Funding for Undergraduate Bursaries in South Africa and its ripple effects on student access and success. This study centres on a conceptual framework that highlights the transformative power of corporate funding in expanding access to, and ensuring success in, higher education in South Africa. Corporate funding serves as the cornerstone of this framework, acting as the catalyst that fuels an ecosystem fostering student entry and achievement within higher education institutions. This financial support empowers academically qualified yet financially disadvantaged students to pursue higher learning, thereby enhancing access to academic and professional opportunities (Healey et al., 2009).

The framework extends beyond access, emphasising the role of corporate funding in ensuring student success. This success is measured by a combination of graduation rates and post-graduation employment outcomes. Such a holistic approach highlights the broader impact of corporate investment in education, demonstrating its commitment to supporting students' educational journeys and future careers (Marginson, 2016). Several theoretical foundations underpin this framework. First, Human Capital Development Theory emphasises the importance of investing in education to cultivate individual knowledge, skills, and competencies. This, in turn, propels economic growth and societal progress (Psacharopoulos, 1994). Second, the framework acknowledges the significance of Social Capital Theory. It highlights the critical role of networks, relationships, and social structures in fostering collective action and community support, particularly relevant in the context of bursary programmes (Bourdieu, 1986). Finally, the framework integrates the principle of Social Justice, advocating for the dismantling of barriers hindering educational access and success. This strives to create a more inclusive and equitable society (Astin, 1993).

In essence, this conceptual framework provides a comprehensive lens through which to examine the interplay between corporate funding and educational advancement in South Africa. It sheds light on the direct impacts of such funding on both access and success while acknowledging the broader societal ramifications. This synthesis of theoretical and practical dimensions offers valuable insights into the intricate dynamics between educational support systems and corporate social investments. By mapping these pathways, the framework elucidates how corporate funding can reshape the educational landscape and, consequently,

the future prospects of South Africa's youth. The following section elaborates on the theoretical underpinnings of this study.

2.6.1 Human Capital Theory: A Cornerstone of Economic and Educational Development

Human Capital Theory, pioneered in the 1960s by luminaries such as Gary Becker (1964) and Theodore Schultz (1961), posits that investments in education and skill development are critical engines driving individual productivity and by extension, national economic prosperity. This theory elucidates the positive correlation between educational attainment and income levels, advocating for the investment in human capital as a catalyst for economic growth and individual success (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). In the South African context, where the barriers to quality education are often financial, corporate bursaries emerge as a vital mechanism enabling access to higher education. These bursaries are not mere financial aids but investments in the nation's human capital, equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary for economic participation and innovation (Burgess, 2015).

The core of Human Capital Theory lies in the understanding that individuals and societies derive substantial economic returns from investments in education and training. Becker's (1964) seminal work, 'Human Capital', laid the groundwork for this concept by arguing that education increases an individual's productive capabilities. Schultz (1961) further expanded this notion by emphasising the role of education in improving agricultural productivity, thus highlighting its relevance in both industrial and agrarian contexts. These theories were revolutionary at the time because they challenged traditional economic models that focused primarily on physical capital. Instead, they brought to the forefront the idea that investments in people's education and health can significantly enhance economic outputs. This perspective was particularly influential in shaping policies aimed at economic development, especially in developing countries where human capital development was seen as a key strategy for poverty alleviation and economic growth.

In South Africa, the relevance of Human Capital Theory is particularly pronounced given the historical context of apartheid, which systematically denied quality education to the majority of the population. Post-apartheid South Africa has faced significant challenges in redressing

these historical injustices and ensuring equitable access to education for all its citizens (Badat, 2009). The government's commitment to education as a public good is evident in its substantial investments in the sector, as well as in policies aimed at broadening access to education for disadvantaged groups (Wolpe, 1995). Corporate bursaries have emerged as a critical component of this strategy, serving to bridge the financial gap that prevents many students from pursuing higher education. These bursaries not only alleviate the immediate financial burden on students and their families but also contribute to the broader goal of building a skilled and knowledgeable workforce that can drive economic development. Corporate bursaries are investments in the nation's future, equipping students with the skills and knowledge needed to participate effectively in the economy (Burgess, 2015).

The economic rationale for investing in education is well supported by empirical evidence. Fagerlind and Saha (1997) point out that such investments yield significant returns in the form of enhanced productivity and higher earnings. This is particularly relevant in the South African context, where the labour market faces high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Education plays a crucial role in improving employability, enabling individuals to secure better-paying jobs and contribute more effectively to economic growth. Furthermore, it serves as a key driver for fostering job mobility. Lin (2001) argues that education enhances an individual's ability to adapt to changing job market conditions, thereby reducing the risk of long-term unemployment. This is particularly important in an era characterised by rapid technological advancements and shifts in the global economy. For South Africa where economic inequality remains a significant challenge, investments in education can help bridge the gap between the rich and the poor by providing opportunities for upward mobility.

Human Capital Theory also emphasises the importance of aligning educational programmes with labour market demands. This strategic alignment ensures that the skills being developed in educational institutions are those that are in high demand in the job market. Corporate funding plays a crucial role in this regard, as it often supports disciplines that are directly relevant to industry needs. For instance, bursaries provided by companies in the technology sector might focus on fields such as computer science and engineering, thereby helping to address skills shortages in these areas. This alignment between education and labour market needs is critical for reducing unemployment and enhancing economic stability. By ensuring

that graduates have the skills required by employers, corporate bursaries help to create a more dynamic and adaptable workforce. This, in turn, supports economic growth by fostering innovation and productivity.

Recent literature continues to underscore the importance of human capital investment. A report by the World Bank (2020) highlights that countries with higher levels of human capital tend to have higher rates of economic growth and more resilient economies. This is particularly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has underscored the need for a well-educated and adaptable workforce capable of responding to unforeseen challenges. Moreover, contemporary studies have expanded the scope of Human Capital Theory to include not just formal education but also lifelong learning and continuous professional development. This broader perspective recognises that the rapid pace of technological change requires individuals to continually update their skills and knowledge. Corporate bursaries can play a crucial role in supporting this lifelong learning by providing funding for advanced degrees and professional development programmes.

Despite its many strengths, Human Capital Theory is not without its critics. Some scholars argue that it places too much emphasis on the economic returns of education, potentially overlooking its broader social and personal benefits (Bowles & Gintis, 1975). Education, they argue, should be valued not just for its economic utility but also for its role in promoting social cohesion, personal development and democratic participation. Moreover, there are concerns that an overemphasis on alignment with labour market demands could lead to a narrow focus on vocational training at the expense of a more holistic education. This could limit students' opportunities to develop critical thinking and creativity, skills that are increasingly valued in today's complex and rapidly changing world (Nussbaum, 2010).

The integration of technology in education has opened new avenues for human capital development. Online learning platforms and digital tools have made education more accessible, especially in remote and underserved areas. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of these technologies, highlighting their potential to bridge educational gaps. In South Africa, initiatives such as the government's e-Education policy aim to integrate ICT in education to enhance learning outcomes (Department of Basic Education, 2020). Corporate

bursaries can support this transition by funding technology infrastructure and training programmes, thereby ensuring that students have the skills needed for the digital economy.

Looking ahead, the role of corporate bursaries in human capital development is likely to expand. As industries evolve and new sectors emerge, there will be a growing need for specialised skills and knowledge. Corporate funding can help to meet this demand by supporting educational programmes that are aligned with future job market needs. Moreover, as the concept of corporate social responsibility continues to evolve, companies are increasingly recognising the importance of investing in education as a way to support sustainable development. Contributing to the education of future generations enables corporations to help create a more inclusive and prosperous society.

2.6.2 Social Capital Theory: The Power of Networks and Relationships

The exploration of Social Capital Theory, as proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James Coleman (1988), underscores the significant impact of social networks, relationships, and communal resources on educational and economic success. Within the context of corporate bursary programmes, these principles extend beyond mere financial aid, fostering connections that enrich students' academic journeys and future career paths (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Through interactions with corporate entities, students are inducted into professional circles, gaining access to mentorship, industry insights, and networking opportunities instrumental in shaping their careers (Putnam, 2000). This review delves into the multifaceted dimensions of Social Capital Theory, elucidating how corporate bursary programmes leverage social networks and relationships to foster educational and economic success.

Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition laid the foundation for understanding the role of social capital in economic benefits (Bourdieu, 1986). He emphasised that social capital is not merely about connections but also about the quality and depth of these relationships, which can translate into economic benefits. Bourdieu's framework highlighted

that social capital, alongside cultural and economic capital, forms the cornerstone of social stratification and mobility. James Coleman expanded this idea by illustrating how social capital facilitates the creation of human capital. He emphasised the role of social structures in providing the social norms, trust, and networks that facilitate cooperative behaviour and collective action (Coleman, 1988). Coleman posited that social capital resides in relationships among individuals and that these relationships are crucial for developing human capital, particularly in educational settings.

Robert Putnam further distinguished between ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital, with bonding social capital referring to relationships within a homogenous group and bridging social capital pertaining to connections across diverse social groups (Putnam, 2000). He highlighted the importance of bridging social capital in fostering social cohesion and inclusivity, essential for a well-functioning society.

Social capital plays a pivotal role in educational attainment and success. Research shows that students embedded in rich social networks perform better academically and are more likely to pursue higher education (Coleman, 1988). These networks provide students with access to valuable resources such as information, support and opportunities for collaboration. Corporate bursary programmes infuse social capital by connecting students with corporate mentors, industry professionals and peer networks, creating a supportive environment that enhances learning and personal development. Mentorship relationships established through corporate bursaries can provide students with guidance, encouragement and insider knowledge about their chosen fields, significantly enhancing their educational and career prospects (Lin, 2001).

Moreover, corporate bursary programmes often include components such as internships, workshops and networking events that facilitate the development of bridging social capital. These opportunities allow students to interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds and industries, broadening their horizons and fostering a sense of belonging within the broader professional community. Mentorship and professional development opportunities are significant benefits of corporate bursary programmes. Mentorship involves transferring knowledge, skills and networks from experienced professionals to students. Through

mentorship, students gain access to valuable insights and advice that can help them navigate their academic and career paths.

Research indicates that mentorship profoundly impacts students' educational and career outcomes. A study by Crisp and Cruz (2009) found that mentored students were more likely to persist in their studies and achieve higher academic success. Mentorship also plays a crucial role in career development, providing students with the social capital needed to access job opportunities, build professional networks and advance in their careers (Kram, 1985). Some corporate bursary programmes often include structured mentorship components that pair students with industry professionals. These mentorship relationships help students develop critical skills such as communication, problem-solving and leadership, essential for success in the modern workforce. Furthermore, mentors can introduce students to professional networks and industry events, enhancing their social capital and increasing their chances of securing employment after graduation (Chao, 2009).

Social Capital Theory underscores the importance of social integration within educational settings. Corporate bursary programmes promote a more inclusive and diverse academic environment by providing opportunities for students from varied backgrounds to interact and collaborate. This interaction fosters cross-cultural exchanges and helps students develop a broader perspective on the world. Inclusion and diversity are essential for creating a vibrant and dynamic educational community. When students from different backgrounds come together, they bring unique experiences, perspectives and ideas that enrich the learning environment. This diversity can lead to more innovative and creative problem-solving, as students learn to approach challenges from multiple angles (Putnam, 2000).

Corporate bursary programmes that prioritise inclusivity can help break down social barriers and promote a sense of belonging among students. Supporting students from underrepresented groups, these programmes can help create a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape. Additionally, through fostering interactions between students and corporate professionals, bursary programmes can help bridge the gap between academia and industry, creating a more integrated and cohesive society (Bourdieu, 1986).

Social Capital Theory also highlights the importance of non-academic or ‘soft’ skills in professional success. These skills, which include communication, teamwork, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, are critical for navigating the complexities of the modern workforce. Corporate-sponsored programmes aimed at developing these skills can significantly bolster students’ social capital, making them more attractive to potential employers and better prepared for the challenges of the modern workforce (Lin, 2001).

Soft skills are increasingly recognised as essential for career success. Employers value these skills because they are crucial for effective collaboration, leadership and problem-solving in the workplace. Moreover, in an era characterised by rapid technological change and globalisation, the ability to adapt to new situations and work effectively with diverse teams is more important than ever (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Corporate bursary programmes can play a vital role in developing students’ soft skills. For instance, many programmes include workshops and training sessions focused on communication, leadership and teamwork. Additionally, internships and work placements provided through bursary programmes give students hands-on experience in real-world settings, allowing them to apply and refine their soft skills (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008).

The social capital accumulated through corporate bursary programmes can have a lasting impact on students’ career trajectories. Access to professional networks, mentorship, and industry insights through these programmes helps students build a strong foundation for their careers. This foundation is essential for achieving long-term career success and upward mobility. Research has shown that social capital is a significant predictor of career success. For example, a study by Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) found that individuals with higher levels of social capital were more likely to receive promotions and achieve higher levels of career success. This is because social capital provides access to valuable resources such as information, job opportunities, and social support, which are crucial for career advancement.

Corporate bursary programmes that focus on building social capital can help students achieve their career goals by providing them with the resources and networks needed to succeed. For instance, by connecting students with industry professionals, these programmes can help students access job opportunities that may not be available through traditional channels.

Additionally, the mentorship and professional development provided through bursary programmes can help students develop the skills and confidence needed to navigate their career paths successfully (Granovetter, 1973).

The benefits of social capital extend beyond individual students to the broader community and society. Corporate bursary programmes contribute to the creation of a more cohesive and resilient society by fostering social integration, inclusivity, and collaboration. This contribution has positive implications for social and economic development. For instance, social capital can enhance community well-being by promoting trust, cooperation, and social cohesion. When individuals are embedded in rich social networks, they are more likely to engage in pro-social behaviours such as volunteering, civic participation, and collective action. This can lead to stronger, more vibrant communities and a more inclusive society (Putnam, 2000).

Moreover, social capital can contribute to economic development by enhancing productivity and innovation. When individuals have access to diverse networks and resources, they are better able to collaborate and share knowledge, leading to more innovative solutions and higher levels of productivity. This is particularly important in the context of the modern knowledge economy, where the ability to leverage social capital is a key driver of economic growth and competitiveness (Burt, 2005).

While the benefits of social capital are well documented, there are challenges and considerations that need to be addressed. One of the main challenges is ensuring that the benefits of social capital are equitably distributed. Social capital can sometimes reinforce existing inequalities if certain groups have more access to valuable networks and resources than others. Individuals from privileged backgrounds may have more opportunities to build social capital through their family, educational and professional networks. This can create a cycle of advantage, where those who already have high levels of social capital continue to accumulate more, while those from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle to access the same opportunities. Addressing this challenge requires targeted efforts to support the social capital development of underrepresented and marginalised groups (Lin, 2000).

Another consideration is the potential for social capital to be leveraged for negative purposes. While social capital can facilitate positive outcomes such as cooperation and innovation, it can also be used to promote exclusion, discrimination, and other harmful behaviours. For example, tightly-knit networks can sometimes create barriers to entry for outsiders, leading to social fragmentation and division. Ensuring that social capital is used for positive purposes requires fostering inclusive and diverse networks that promote equity and social justice (Portes, 1998).

Social Capital Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the role of corporate bursary programmes in fostering educational and economic success. These programmes help students develop the social capital needed to achieve their academic and career goals through building social networks, relationships and communal resources. The benefits of social capital extend beyond individual students to the broader community and society, contributing to social cohesion, economic development and overall well-being.

To maximise the potential of corporate bursary programs, it is essential to address the challenges and considerations associated with social capital. This includes ensuring equitable access to social capital, promoting inclusivity and diversity and leveraging social capital for positive purposes. In doing so, corporate bursary programs can play a pivotal role in creating a more equitable and inclusive society, where all individuals have the opportunity to succeed and thrive.

2.6.3 Social Justice Theory: Ensuring Equity and Access in Higher Education

Social Justice Theory, with its roots in philosophical and sociological discourse, is critical in advocating for equitable participation in social life. Key proponents such as Nancy Fraser (2008) emphasise ‘participatory parity’, a benchmark for achieving social justice. This theory insists that all individuals should have equal opportunities to participate in social, economic and political life, free from systemic barriers and discrimination. In the context of higher education, Social Justice Theory underscores the necessity of dismantling barriers that impede access for marginalised groups. This perspective is particularly relevant in South Africa, where historical and systemic inequalities have long shaped the educational

landscape, creating substantial disparities in access and success among different demographic groups.

Corporate bursary programmes have emerged as a vital tool in addressing these inequities. By targeting underrepresented students, these initiatives play a crucial role in facilitating a more equitable distribution of educational opportunities (Rawls, 1971). Such programmes are not only a means of financial support but also an ethical imperative to rectify past injustices and foster a fairer society. These initiatives align with the principles of distributive justice, which advocate for resources to be distributed based on need and merit, ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to succeed regardless of their socioeconomic background.

The ethical foundation of Social Justice Theory in education is supported by John Rawls' (1971) seminal work, 'A Theory of Justice', which introduces the concept of the 'veil of ignorance'. This thought experiment argues that societal structures should be designed as if decision-makers were unaware of their own position within society, leading to policies that favour the most disadvantaged. Applying this to higher education, corporate bursary programmes should be structured to ensure that those with the greatest need and potential are given priority. This not only promotes fairness but also helps to break cycles of poverty and inequality, contributing to a more cohesive and prosperous society (Sen, 1999).

In the South African context, where the legacy of apartheid has left deep scars, corporate funding initiatives targeting historically disadvantaged groups are essential. These programmes are crucial for enabling access to higher education for Black students, women, and individuals from low-income backgrounds, who have traditionally been underrepresented in tertiary institutions. By providing financial aid, these bursaries help to level the playing field, allowing students from marginalised communities to pursue higher education and thereby improve their socioeconomic status.

Furthermore, the significance of these programmes extends beyond financial assistance. Comprehensive support systems, including mentorship, career guidance, and leadership development, are integral to fostering long-term success and societal contribution. This holistic approach ensures that students are not only able to access higher education but also

thrive within it. For instance, mentorship programmes help students navigate the academic environment, develop essential skills, and build professional networks that can be invaluable in their future careers (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

The alignment of corporate bursary programmes with the principles of fairness and transparency is critical. Selection processes should be meticulously designed to avoid any form of bias or discrimination. This involves clear criteria based on both merit and need, ensuring that the most deserving students are selected. Transparent processes also build trust in the system, encouraging more students to apply and more corporations to invest in these initiatives.

Moreover, the impact of corporate bursary programmes is not limited to individual beneficiaries. By supporting higher education for disadvantaged groups, these programmes contribute to broader societal goals. Education is a powerful tool for social mobility, enabling individuals to improve their economic circumstances and contribute more effectively to society. In this way, corporate bursaries help to create a more inclusive and dynamic economic landscape, where talent and potential are nurtured across all segments of the population.

The importance of aligning corporate bursary programmes with social justice principles is further highlighted by the ethical responsibility of corporations. As influential entities within society, corporations have a duty to contribute positively to social welfare. This involves not only providing financial resources but also ensuring that their initiatives promote equity and access. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) frameworks often emphasise the importance of addressing social inequalities and supporting education, making bursary programmes a natural fit for many companies' CSR strategies (Carroll, 1999).

The role of corporate bursary programmes in advancing social justice is also supported by recent literature. For example, the World Bank (2023) emphasises the importance of equitable access to education as a means of promoting social mobility and reducing inequality. Studies have shown that higher education significantly improves individuals' employment prospects and earning potential, which in turn contributes to economic

development and social cohesion (Bloom, Hartley, & Rosovsky, 2007). By investing in education, corporations are not only helping individuals but also contributing to the broader societal goal of reducing poverty and inequality.

In the South African context, the importance of these programmes cannot be overstated. The country's history of apartheid has left a legacy of deep-seated inequalities, particularly in education. Many Black South Africans continue to face significant barriers to higher education, including financial constraints, inadequate schooling, and limited access to resources. Corporate bursary programmes targeting these students are essential for addressing these disparities and promoting social justice.

However, to maximise their impact, these programmes must be carefully designed and implemented. This involves not only providing financial support but also addressing the broader challenges faced by disadvantaged students. For example, many students from low-income backgrounds may lack the social and academic support needed to succeed in higher education. Mentorship programmes, academic support services, and career guidance are all critical components of a comprehensive bursary programme that can help students overcome these challenges and achieve their full potential.

Moreover, the selection process for these programmes must be fair and transparent. This involves clear criteria based on both merit and need, as well as processes to ensure that all applicants are treated fairly. Transparency is key to building trust in the system, encouraging more students to apply and more corporations to invest in these initiatives.

The ethical responsibility of corporations to support social justice in education is further underscored by the principles of corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR frameworks often emphasise the importance of addressing social inequalities and supporting education, making bursary programmes a natural fit for many companies' CSR strategies (Carroll, 1999). By aligning their bursary programmes with these principles, corporations can not only fulfil their ethical obligations but also contribute to broader societal goals.

Therefore, Social Justice Theory provides a powerful framework for understanding the importance of equitable access to higher education. Corporate bursary programmes play a critical role in addressing the systemic barriers that have long impeded access for marginalised groups in South Africa. By providing financial support, mentorship, and career guidance, these programmes help to level the playing field and promote social mobility. Furthermore, by aligning their initiatives with the principles of fairness and transparency, corporations can ensure that their bursary programmes are effective and equitable. In this way, corporate bursary programmes not only support individual students but also contribute to the broader societal goal of reducing poverty and inequality. The continued development and expansion of these programmes are essential for building a more inclusive and dynamic economic landscape, where all individuals have the opportunity to succeed and contribute to society.

2.6.4 Theorising Neoliberalism's Impact

In post-apartheid South Africa, the adoption of neoliberal economic policies has triggered a complex interplay of factors that have profoundly influenced the landscape of higher education. Scholars such as Lucacs (2017) argue that neoliberalism, while often touted as a catalyst for economic growth and individual empowerment, can inadvertently dismantle social safety nets and concentrate power in the hands of unaccountable private interests. This viewpoint resonates with Feldman (2019), who observes that neoliberalism tends to individualise poverty, shifting the responsibility for economic well-being onto individuals rather than addressing systemic inequalities.

This individualistic approach to poverty, coupled with a market-oriented focus, often results in the diminishment of the state's role in fostering social mobility and redistributing wealth. This dynamic is evident in South Africa's policy shift from the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) plan. While the RDP adopted in the early years of post-apartheid South Africa aimed to address historical injustices and promote equitable development, the GEAR plan influenced by neoliberal principles, emphasised fiscal austerity and market liberalisation (Wilson, 2012).

This shift has been criticised for exacerbating existing inequalities and prioritising economic growth over social welfare (Fourie, 2021).

The legacy of apartheid has left South Africa with a deeply entrenched racial wealth gap. Kawanu et al. (2017) point out that the free-market system inherently favours those with existing capital, which in South Africa is disproportionately concentrated within the white population. This historical disadvantage continues to manifest in disparities in educational outcomes, with persistent gaps in school achievement between racial groups (Fourie, 2021). High unemployment rates further impede social mobility for marginalised communities, limiting their ability to invest in their children's education (Wilson, 2012).

The application of neoliberal principles to higher education has had far-reaching consequences. A growing body of research (Baatjes, 2005; van der Walt, 2017; Olssen & Peters, 2005) highlights the rise of 'new managerialism' in universities, characterised by the adoption of corporate models to increase efficiency and reduce costs. This approach often leads to a 'vocationalisation' of the curriculum, prioritising skills deemed immediately marketable to employers over a broader, more holistic education (Kawanu et al., 2017). Academics are increasingly viewed as 'service providers' competing for funding and publications, potentially diverting attention from research that addresses social justice issues (Feldman, 2019).

The reduction in public funding for universities under neoliberal policies has created a reliance on external funding sources, often from private corporations. This has led to cost-cutting measures like outsourcing non-academic functions, resulting in job losses and wage cuts for support staff (Kawanu et al., 2017). Additionally, universities are incentivised to raise tuition fees, further limiting access for students from low-income backgrounds. This creates a cycle of debt that can hinder social mobility for graduates.

While corporate bursary programmes can provide much-needed financial support for students, they also raise concerns about equity and access. If these programmes are not designed and implemented with careful consideration of social justice principles, they may

inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities by primarily benefiting students from privileged backgrounds who already have access to resources and networks (Badat, 2010).

Furthermore, the reliance on corporate funding can create a potential conflict of interest for universities. As corporate sponsors increasingly influence research agendas and curriculum development, there is a risk that academic freedom and critical inquiry may be compromised. This can have a chilling effect on research that challenges prevailing power structures and advocates for social change.

The South African case serves as a stark reminder of the potential pitfalls of applying a one-size-fits-all neoliberal approach to education. While economic growth is undoubtedly important, it should not be pursued at the expense of social justice and equitable access to education. Policymakers and stakeholders in higher education must strive for a more nuanced approach that acknowledges historical inequalities and prioritises strategies that bridge the gap in access and opportunity. This may involve exploring alternative funding models, expanding financial aid programmes, and fostering partnerships that support students from disadvantaged backgrounds throughout their academic journeys.

Creating a more inclusive higher education system can harness the full potential of South Africa's diverse population and break the cycle of poverty and inequality. Research on corporate bursary funding should not only examine the immediate financial benefits for students but also critically analyse the broader social and economic implications of these programmes. Advocating for strategies that align with the principles of human capital development, social capital enhancement, and social justice can contribute to a more equitable and sustainable higher education landscape in South Africa.

Neoliberalism, characterised by market-oriented reforms, deregulation, and a reduction in state intervention, has profound implications for social justice and equity, particularly in the realm of higher education. Scholars like Lucacs (2017) argue that neoliberalism dismantles mechanisms for social upliftment and empowers unaccountable private interests, often exacerbating existing inequalities. This market-centric focus often diminishes the role of the state in fostering social mobility and redistributing wealth, as highlighted by the shift in the

ANC's economic policy from the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (Fourie, 2021) towards the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) plan (Wilson, 2012).

Corporate bursary funding plays a crucial role in mitigating some of the adverse effects of neoliberal policies by providing financial support to students from marginalised communities. These bursaries not only alleviate the immediate financial burdens of tuition and living expenses but also contribute to long-term social mobility by enabling access to higher education. However, for these programmes to be truly effective, they must be aligned with the principles of social justice, ensuring that they are accessible to those most in need and designed to address systemic barriers to educational attainment.

The importance of aligning corporate bursary programmes with social justice principles is further underscored by the ethical responsibility of corporations. As influential entities within society, corporations have a duty to contribute positively to social welfare. This involves not only providing financial resources but also ensuring that their initiatives promote equity and access. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) frameworks often emphasise the importance of addressing social inequalities and supporting education, making bursary programmes a natural fit for many companies' CSR strategies (Carroll, 1999).

2.7 Chapter Summary

This section examined both the theoretical and contextual dimensions of corporate bursary funding in South Africa, offering a comprehensive understanding of its evolution, impact, and challenges. The historical and socio-political trajectory of corporate bursaries was explored, tracing their origins from the apartheid era to their expansion in the post-apartheid period. The introduction of B-BBEE legislation played a pivotal role in driving the growth of these programmes, which, while initially compliance-driven, evolved into strategic investments aimed at addressing skills shortages, promoting social mobility, and aligning corporate interests with national development goals. However, persistent underfunding in higher education, rising student enrolments, and escalating costs placed significant pressure on bursary schemes, raising concerns about their sustainability and the extent to which corporate priorities influenced academic agendas.

Despite these challenges, corporate bursaries played a crucial role in broadening access to higher education, improving graduation rates, and enhancing employability. The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored their significance, as many programmes adapted to provide critical support during a period of unprecedented disruption. Additionally, their alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demonstrated their broader contributions to social and economic development, particularly in promoting quality education, reducing inequalities, and fostering economic growth.

The theoretical foundation of the study was anchored in Human Capital Development, Social Capital, and Social Justice theories. Human Capital Development Theory framed corporate bursaries as investments that enhanced students' skills and employability, contributing to national economic growth. Social Capital Theory illustrated how these bursaries extended beyond financial aid, facilitating mentorship, professional networking, and social mobility. Meanwhile, Social Justice Theory provided a critical perspective on the equitable distribution of educational resources, highlighting how bursaries addressed systemic disparities and promoted inclusivity. The intersection of these theories offered a holistic framework for understanding the multifaceted impact of corporate bursary funding on student access and success.

As South Africa navigated a shifting socio-economic landscape, the sustainability and effectiveness of corporate bursaries depended on ongoing collaboration between government, educational institutions, and the corporate sector. A more strategic and research-driven approach was necessary to ensure that these programmes remained impactful and equitable. The following chapters further investigated their effectiveness, identified key gaps, and proposed essential reforms to enhance their contribution to student success and broader societal development.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

"Research is formalised curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose."

Zora Neale Hurston

"It is not the quantity of research that matters, but the quality."

Unknown

3.1 Introduction

This chapter embarks on a methodological journey to uncover the lived realities surrounding corporate bursary programmes in South Africa. Recognising the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon and the importance of understanding it within its specific context, a qualitative research approach was adopted. Guided by the principles of depth, context, and rich description, this methodology allowed for an exploration of the nuanced experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders: corporate representatives and past bursary recipients.

My exploration drew on a diverse range of data sources, including in-depth interviews, document analysis, and my own experiences working within this field. Triangulating these sources aimed to achieve a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the motivations, challenges, and impacts of corporate bursary programmes. In-depth interviews provided a platform for participants to share their personal narratives, allowing for insights into their motivations, decision-making processes and the perceived impact of bursaries on their lives and careers. Document analysis shed light on the formal structures, policies and guidelines that govern corporate bursary programmes, while also providing a historical context for their evolution. The researcher's own experiences offered an insider perspective, adding a layer of contextual richness to the findings.

This chapter outlines the specific methods employed in the research, including the sampling strategy, data collection techniques and data analysis procedures. It also addresses ethical considerations and discusses strategies for ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Transparently outlining the methodological approach aims to provide a solid foundation for the subsequent chapters, which will delve into the rich and nuanced findings that emerged from the qualitative exploration.

3.2 A Qualitative Approach – Exploring lived experiences

The research journey embarked on a qualitative path, inspired by Creswell's (2007) emphasis on the richness and depth of context-specific insights. This approach acknowledged the inherent complexity of real-world situations and embraced the exploration of diverse

experiences and perceptions surrounding corporate bursary programs. It aimed not only to identify challenges and limitations but also to understand the multifaceted realities of these initiatives, ultimately informing more impactful corporate giving practices.

Delving into the lived experiences of participants, the study sought to capture the subjective interpretations and nuanced realities associated with corporate bursary programs. This exploration aimed to uncover underlying motivations, challenges and potential avenues for improvement in corporate giving within the educational sector. Through this lens, the research aspired to contribute meaningfully to the discourse on corporate bursary programs, with the ultimate goal of informing the development of a more effective and impactful framework for such initiatives.

The qualitative approach, characterised by its focus on generating rich, descriptive data, proved instrumental in achieving these goals. This methodology, as highlighted by Snape and Spencer (2003), is not rigid but adapts to various factors, including the researcher's perspective, research objectives and participant characteristics. This flexibility allowed for a tailored approach to investigating the intricate dynamics at play within corporate bursary programs.

Echoing Nieuwenhuis (2007), the research strived to collect rich, descriptive data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the observed phenomena. This aligns with Patton and Cochran's (2002) definition, which emphasises qualitative research's focus on understanding social life through textual rather than numerical data. This approach was particularly relevant to this study, given its focus on the societal implications and challenges related to corporate bursary programs.

Furthermore, Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge (2009) emphasise the capacity of qualitative research to deepen our understanding of social realities. This resonates with the study's goals, as prioritising "how" and "why" questions facilitates an in-depth examination of participants' experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them, as highlighted by Denzin and Lincoln (2000). This interpretive approach situates the researcher within the lived realities of the participants, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of the phenomena under study.

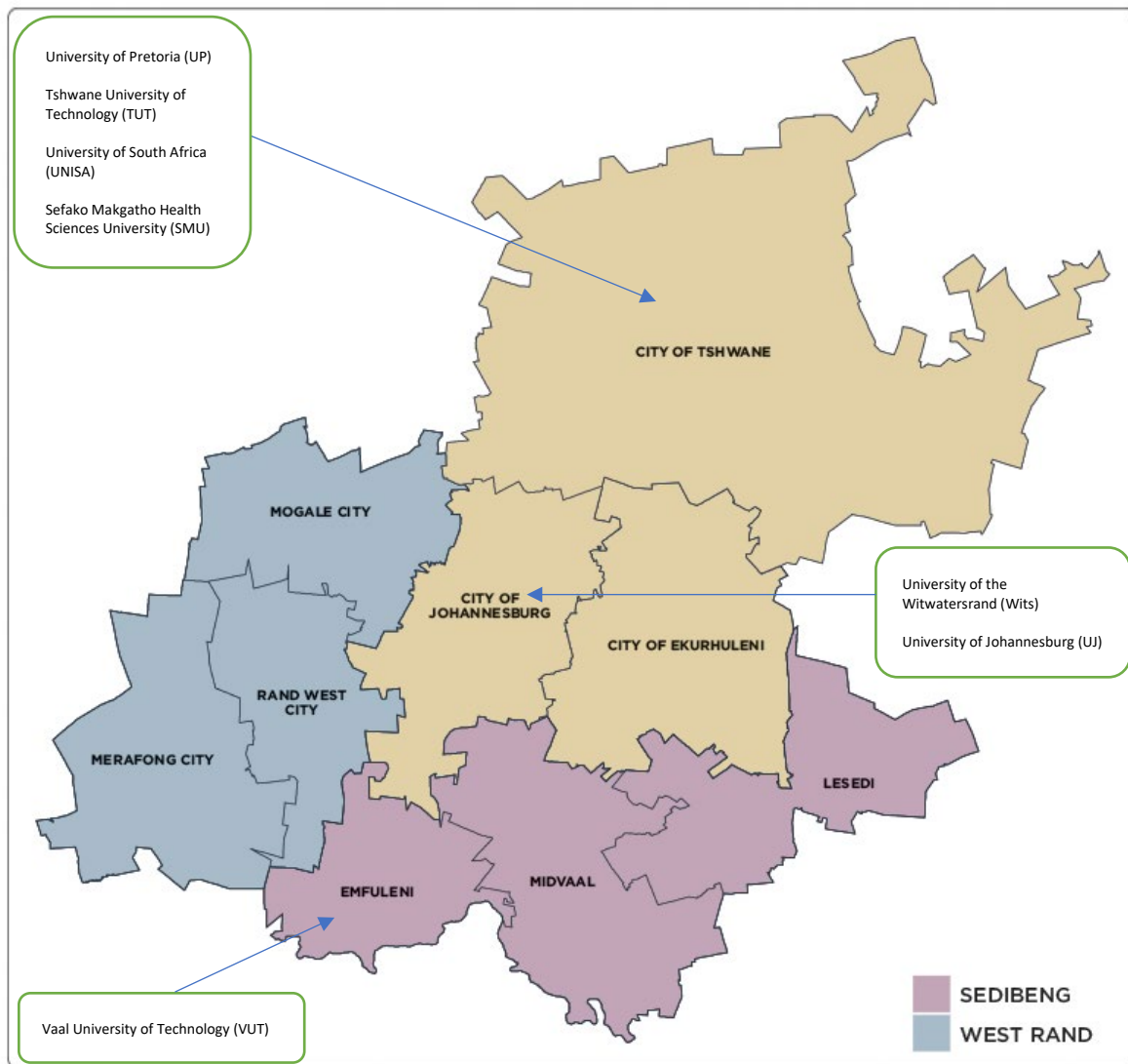
The open and flexible nature of qualitative research, as underscored by Kumar (2014), was instrumental in capturing the diversity of experiences and perceptions among participants. This methodological choice allowed for an unhindered exploration of participants' perspectives, providing a rich and detailed narrative to inform the development of more effective corporate bursary programs.

Essentially, the qualitative research methodology employed in this study served as the foundation for achieving a detailed and nuanced understanding of corporate bursary programs and their impact. In prioritising the collection of rich, descriptive data and embracing the inherent flexibility of qualitative inquiry, the research was able to venture into the complex interplay of factors shaping these programs, ultimately aiming to contribute to the enhancement of corporate giving practices in the educational domain.

3.2.1 Locating the study

This qualitative study is geographically anchored in Gauteng, South Africa's economic powerhouse. Gauteng's unique confluence of corporate headquarters and prominent educational institutions makes it an ideal location to investigate the interplay between corporate funding and student success in higher education. Despite its small size, Gauteng booms with economic activity, housing over a quarter of the national population and contributing a significant portion (over 34%) to the country's GDP (Stats SA, 2023). Johannesburg, the heart of Gauteng's commercial and industrial sectors, serves as the financial services capital of Africa, attracting major national and international banks, insurance companies, and mining giants.

Figure 3: Map of Gauteng



The focus of this study is exclusively on public universities within Gauteng, despite the presence of numerous private institutions. The University of Johannesburg (UJ) is spread across multiple campuses in Johannesburg, including Auckland Park Kingsway, Auckland Park Bunting Road, Doornfontein, and Soweto. Known for its commitment to inclusivity, research excellence, and innovation, UJ's campuses are well integrated into the urban fabric of Johannesburg, providing students with access to a range of cultural, economic, and social opportunities.

Primarily situated in Pretoria, the University of Pretoria (UP) has its main Hatfield campus as the largest, with additional campuses in Groenkloof, Mamelodi, Onderstepoort, and Prinshof.

UP is renowned for its high research output and a wide array of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Its central location in Pretoria places it close to governmental, diplomatic, and business hubs, enriching the academic environment with practical engagement opportunities.

Located in Braamfontein and Parktown, Johannesburg, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) is celebrated for its strong focus on research, particularly in the sciences, engineering, and health sciences. Wits' proximity to Johannesburg's commercial heart offers students and faculty unparalleled access to industry partnerships and urban development projects.

The Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) has its main campus in Pretoria, with satellite campuses in Ga-Rankuwa, Soshanguve, eMalahleni, Mbombela, Polokwane, and the Pretoria West campus. TUT is distinguished by its focus on technology and vocational education. Its multiple campuses across Gauteng and neighbouring provinces provide a wide reach, facilitating access to higher education for a broad demographic.

Situated in Vanderbijlpark, the Vaal University of Technology (VUT) has satellite campuses in Ekurhuleni (Kempton Park), Secunda, and Uppington. VUT specialises in technology and applied sciences, and its location in Vanderbijlpark positions it close to industrial zones, fostering strong links with the engineering and manufacturing sectors.

The Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) is located in Ga-Rankuwa, Pretoria, focusing on health sciences education. SMU offers a range of programmes in medicine, nursing, dentistry, pharmacy, and public health. Its strategic location in Pretoria enables close collaboration with healthcare facilities and government health departments, enhancing the practical training and research opportunities for students.

Strategically positioned in Gauteng, these universities create an environment ripe for collaboration with corporate entities (DHET, 2023). The close proximity between academia and the corporate world in this region facilitates the establishment of partnerships, internship programmes, and a seamless talent pipeline (Dlamini & Meyer, 2018). This intentional alignment aims to ensure that bursary programmes play an active role in enhancing student

access and success within the higher education landscape of Gauteng (Khumalo & Nkomo, 2021).

Gauteng, encompassing Johannesburg and Pretoria, is known for its dense networks of multinational corporations and prestigious universities, fostering a vibrant ecosystem conducive to robust Corporate Social Investment (CSI) initiatives, with a focus on undergraduate bursaries (Jones & van Wyk, 2020). Companies in Gauteng, ranging from local enterprises to global conglomerates, strategically address educational needs within their operational environment, often aligning their CSI efforts with nearby universities to cultivate talent development pipelines (Dlamini & Meyer, 2018).

The economic and educational landscape of Gauteng mirrors national trends in South Africa, offering a rich perspective on corporate bursary funding. The concentration of universities and corporations in Gauteng provides researchers with insights into the intricate interactions between these entities and the impact of bursary programmes on student outcomes in a bustling economic setting (Bhorat et al., 2014). By examining the experiences of bursary recipients and CSI professionals in Gauteng, the research illuminates the effectiveness of these programmes in bridging the gap between public funding limitations and student financial needs.

In summary, Gauteng serves as a dynamic and interconnected backdrop for exploring the adequacy and influence of corporate funding on undergraduate bursaries. The collaborative relationship between corporations and educational institutions in this province positions it as a pivotal reference point for understanding this phenomenon on a national scale (Smith & Ndlovu, 2019; Jones & van Wyk, 2020).

3.3 A map to the empirical research ahead.

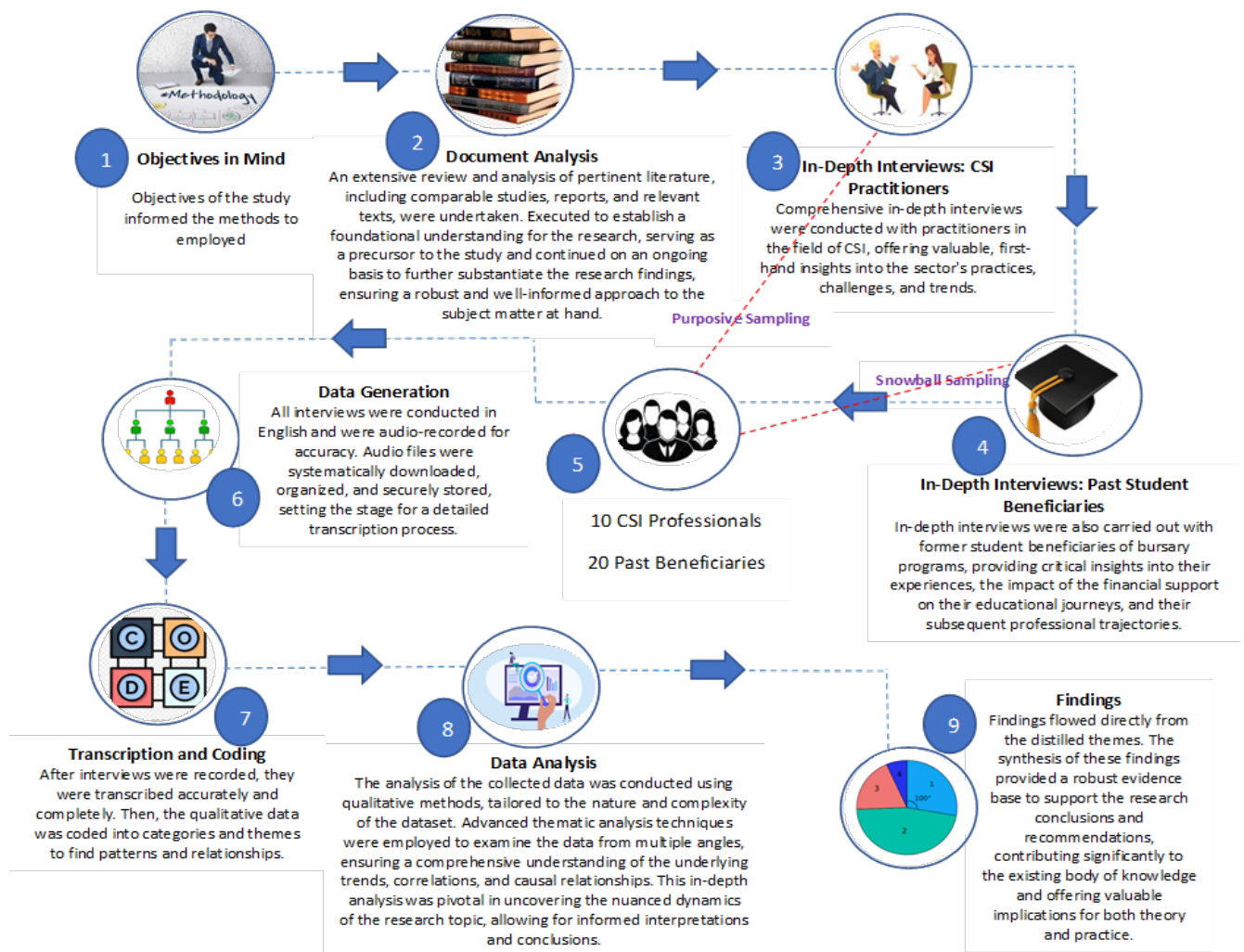


Figure 4: Methodological Road Map

3.4 Methodological Framework

As suggested in the previous section, the methodology of this study is anchored in qualitative research, utilising in-depth interviews and document analysis to explore the objectives and impacts of corporate bursary programmes. The selection of this qualitative approach was informed by a robust body of literature that emphasises the importance of understanding the nuanced and context-specific experiences of individuals within educational settings.

Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for studies aiming to capture the depth and complexity of human experiences, as highlighted by Creswell (2013), who advocates for

qualitative methods when research goals include exploring processes, meanings, and relationships. In the context of this study, qualitative methods allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the perspectives of both bursary recipients and corporate representatives, providing rich, detailed insights into the efficacy and impact of bursary programmes.

Merriam (2009) underscores the value of in-depth interviews in qualitative research, noting that they enable researchers to gather detailed, first-hand accounts of participants' experiences and viewpoints. This method was deemed appropriate for this study as it facilitates a deeper understanding of how bursary recipients perceive the support they receive and how corporate stakeholders assess the outcomes of their funding initiatives.

Additionally, the use of document analysis was informed by Bowen (2009), who describes this method as a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) material. Document analysis complements in-depth interviews by providing contextual and historical insights that help to triangulate data and validate findings. This approach is particularly useful in understanding the policy frameworks, operational guidelines, and strategic objectives of corporate bursary programmes.

The decision to combine these qualitative methods aligns with the principles outlined by Patton (2015), who advocates for methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility and reliability of qualitative research. Integrating in-depth interviews and document analysis, this study leverages the strengths of both methods to provide a holistic and robust examination of corporate bursary programmes.

The selection of qualitative research methods for this study is grounded in a rich tradition of scholarly work that highlights the importance of capturing the complexity and richness of human experiences. This methodological approach, informed by the works of Creswell (2013), Merriam (2009), Bowen (2009), and Patton (2015), ensures a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the objectives and impacts of corporate bursary funding.

3.4.1 Triangulation

In qualitative research, triangulation is a pivotal methodological strategy used to enhance the credibility and validity of research findings. Scholars like Bowen (2009) and Creswell & Miller (2009) emphasise that employing multiple data collection methods bolsters the scholarly worth of a study by ensuring the reliability and validity of the data. Triangulation, as defined by Cohen and Manion (2000), involves using various research methods to map out and explain the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from multiple standpoints. This approach is particularly valuable in exploring the adequacy of corporate funding and its impact in enhancing student success in higher education.

Triangulation involves the application and combination of various research methods to study a particular phenomenon. Cohen and Manion (2000) define triangulation as the ‘attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint’. According to O’Donoghue and Punch (2003), triangulation is a ‘method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data’. This method can involve both primary and secondary data sources, used simultaneously to enhance understanding.

Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) identify four types of triangulation used in social research: methodological triangulation, data triangulation, investigator triangulation, and theoretical triangulation. In the context of this study, methodological triangulation was employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the adequacy and impact of corporate bursaries in higher education. Consequently, the study utilised document analysis, in-depth interviews, and participant observation, drawing on the researcher’s extensive experience in the field, as detailed below.

3.4.1.1 Document Analysis: Laying the Groundwork

The study commenced with a rigorous document analysis, meticulously following the systematic approach outlined by Fischer (2006). This qualitative research method involves a deep examination and interpretation of various documents to extract meaning, enhance understanding, and contribute to the development of empirical knowledge. Grounded

theory, as defined by Martin & Turner (1986) and elaborated upon by Johnson & Christensen (2008), served as the guiding principle for this analysis. This approach allows researchers to directly link a research question to data gathered from the field, ultimately leading to the development of a theory grounded in the lived experiences of participants.

A diverse range of documents were meticulously scrutinised, each offering a unique perspective on the research topic:

- **Corporate social investment journals:** These journals provided valuable insights into the practices and approaches adopted by corporations in their social investment endeavours, offering a glimpse into the industry landscape.
- **Reports by other donors:** Reports commissioned by other donors on related fields provided vital perspectives from alternative funding sources, furthering the understanding of the broader context surrounding corporate bursary initiatives.
- **Documentation on the broader context of giving:** Materials highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of philanthropic endeavours in general offered crucial insights, enabling a critical and nuanced assessment of corporate bursary funding programs within the larger sphere of giving.
- **Official statistics:** Statistics gleaned from official reports produced by government entities, universities, and other stakeholders provided quantitative data on the overall impact and outcomes of corporate bursary programs, complementing the qualitative analysis with a layer of objective data.
- **Donor expenditure and programming reports:** These reports offered valuable insights into the financial allocation and utilisation of funds by donors, revealing patterns and trends in their funding priorities.
- **Conference transcripts and recordings:** Transcripts or recordings of presentations and speeches from relevant conferences provided first-hand accounts and perspectives on corporate bursary funding practices and their implications, enriching the understanding of the field and its key stakeholders.

This diverse range of documents facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors influencing the research participants. Document analysis enriched the data collected

through interviews, offering a deeper and more nuanced perspective on the phenomena under investigation. As Yin (1994) emphasised, documents serve as valuable sources of evidence, corroborating and complementing data from other sources. They also helped to verify interview findings and provided inferences for further exploration. However, the research acknowledged the potential limitations of documents, recognising that they may not always be accurate or unbiased representations of reality. It was essential to consider the purpose and intended audience of specific documents to ensure a balanced interpretation.

Through this thorough and comprehensive document analysis, the research aimed to gain valuable insights into the effectiveness and limitations of corporate bursary funding programmes. Ultimately, this contributed to the existing body of knowledge on corporate social investment and its impact on access and success in higher education.

3.4.1.2 The Next Steps: In-depth Interviews and Building the Puzzle

Following the comprehensive document analysis, the research progressed into the crucial phase of in-depth interviews. As outlined by Owl Resource (2006), these interviews are one-on-one interactions designed to elicit targeted and specific information through a guided question-and-answer format. This method holds immense value in acquiring specialised expertise and well-informed opinions on specific topics. In this research, in-depth interviews targeted individuals holding distinct roles within the corporate bursary funding landscape.

A. Selecting the Participants

To ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and capture a holistic understanding of corporate bursary funding practices, a purposive sampling approach was adopted (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This method allowed for the intentional selection of participants possessing specific knowledge and expertise relevant to the research objectives. The participants were chosen based on their experience and involvement in corporate bursary funding, as well as their role in managing bursary programs within organisations.

B. Building a Diverse Pool of Participants: Reflecting on Gauteng's Corporate Landscape

To ensure a comprehensive and representative sample, the initial stage of participant recruitment involved constructing a meticulously curated list. This list was compiled through an extensive review of various resources, including relevant literature, industry reports, and organizational websites. The objective was to target individuals holding senior positions within corporations in Gauteng Province known for their established bursary programs.

With the goal of fostering diverse perspectives and capturing the multifaceted nature of corporate bursary funding practices, a conscious effort was made to select participants from a variety of sectors, relevant to Gauteng's economic landscape. This included corporations operating in:

- **Mining:** Gauteng Province is a significant hub for the mining industry in South Africa, was represented by senior officials who had navigated the complex interplay between the industry's economic cycles and its commitment to social responsibility through education funding. Including representatives from this sector provided insights into bursary program design and implementation within a resource-intensive industry.
- **Financial Services:** As a major financial centre, Gauteng Province houses numerous financial institutions and corporations. Participants from this sector offered valuable perspectives on the role of bursary programs in fostering talent pipelines within the financial services industry.
- **Human Resources (HR):** HR departments within corporations play a crucial role in managing and overseeing bursary programs. Including representatives from HR departments provided insights into the internal processes, challenges, and successes associated with bursary program administration.
- **Motor Industry:** The motor industry is a significant contributor to Gauteng's economy. Participants from this sector offered insights into how bursary programs are tailored to address specific skill requirements within the manufacturing and automotive sectors.
- **Engineering:** Gauteng Province is a centre for engineering expertise, housing numerous engineering firms and consultancies. Including representatives from this sector provided

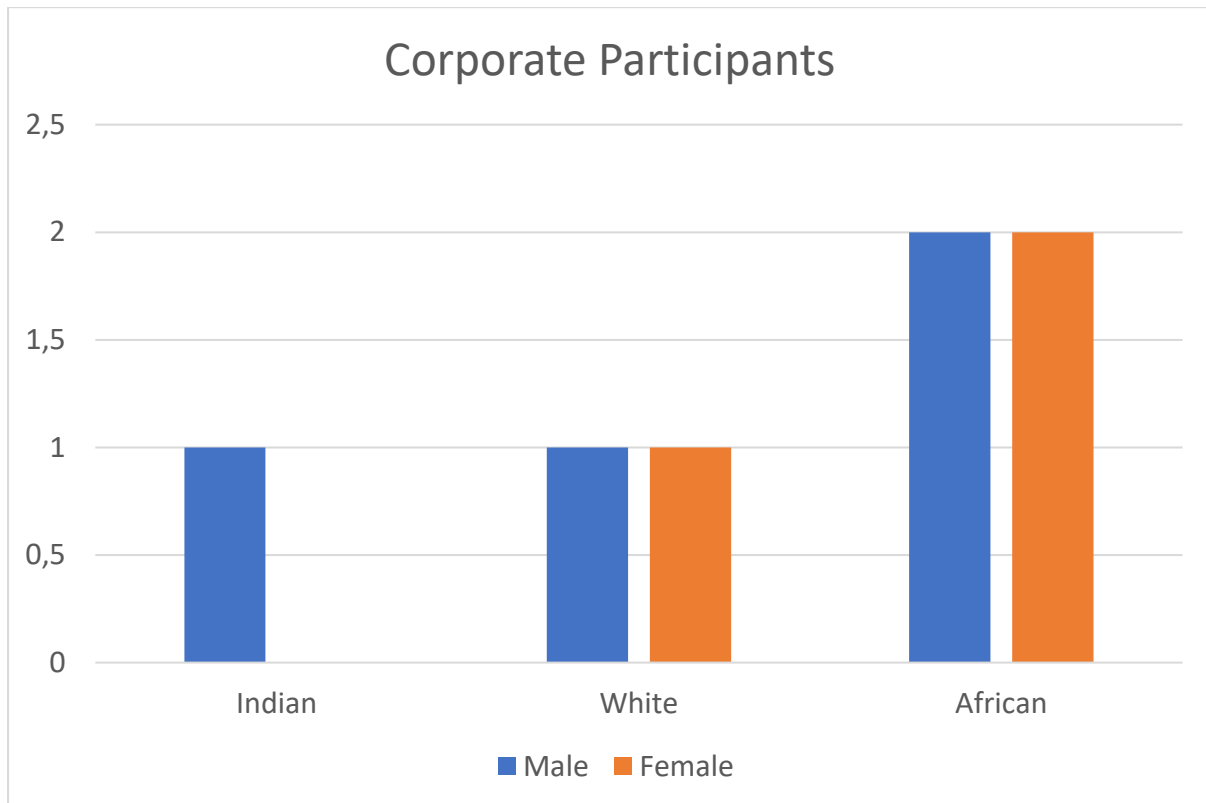
insights into how bursary programs support the development of a skilled engineering workforce and address the needs of this specialised industry.

- **Logistics and Supply Chain:** The logistics and supply chain sector plays a vital role in Gauteng's economy. Participants from this sector offered insights into how bursary programs contribute to talent development within this critical and ever-evolving field.

Furthermore, to ensure in-depth knowledge and experience, the selection process specifically targeted senior representatives within these corporations who had directly overseen bursary programs for a minimum of five years. This criterion ensured that the participants possessed a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of bursary program design, implementation, and evaluation, fostering insightful and nuanced perspectives during the interview process.

Employing a deliberate and diverse selection strategy, the research aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of corporate bursary funding practices across Gauteng Province and the various industries contributing to its economic landscape. This multi-sectoral approach was crucial in providing a rich and multifaceted portrayal of the diverse approaches, challenges, and successes within the scope of corporate bursary programs.

Figure 5 CSI Participants



A total of seven corporate representatives participated in the study. The majority of participants were female (4 out of 7), and there was representation across multiple racial categories, with four participants identifying as African, one as Indian, and two as white. The corporate representatives came from diverse sectors, including mining, financial services, the motor industry, HR, engineering and logistics and supply chain. This diversity in sectors reflects a broad range of perspectives on corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, focusing on bursary programs.

C. Expanding the Scope: Incorporating the Voices of Former Bursary Recipients

To gain a deeper understanding of the long-term impact of corporate bursary programs, the study also employed purposive sampling to select former bursary recipients. Rather than relying on participant referrals, this approach directly targeted individuals who had previously received corporate bursaries and had since transitioned into the workforce.

Corporations were requested to identify and facilitate contact with two former bursary recipients who had benefitted from their funding initiatives. This ensured that the study engaged with individuals who could offer critical reflections on both the benefits and challenges of corporate-funded bursaries. Given that former recipients were no longer directly affiliated with universities, corporate records were leveraged to facilitate contact while ensuring compliance with Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) regulations.

Initial contact with former recipients was initiated through their respective corporate sponsors, who introduced the research study and sought their consent to participate. Once participation was confirmed, the researcher formally engaged with each individual and scheduled interviews at their convenience.

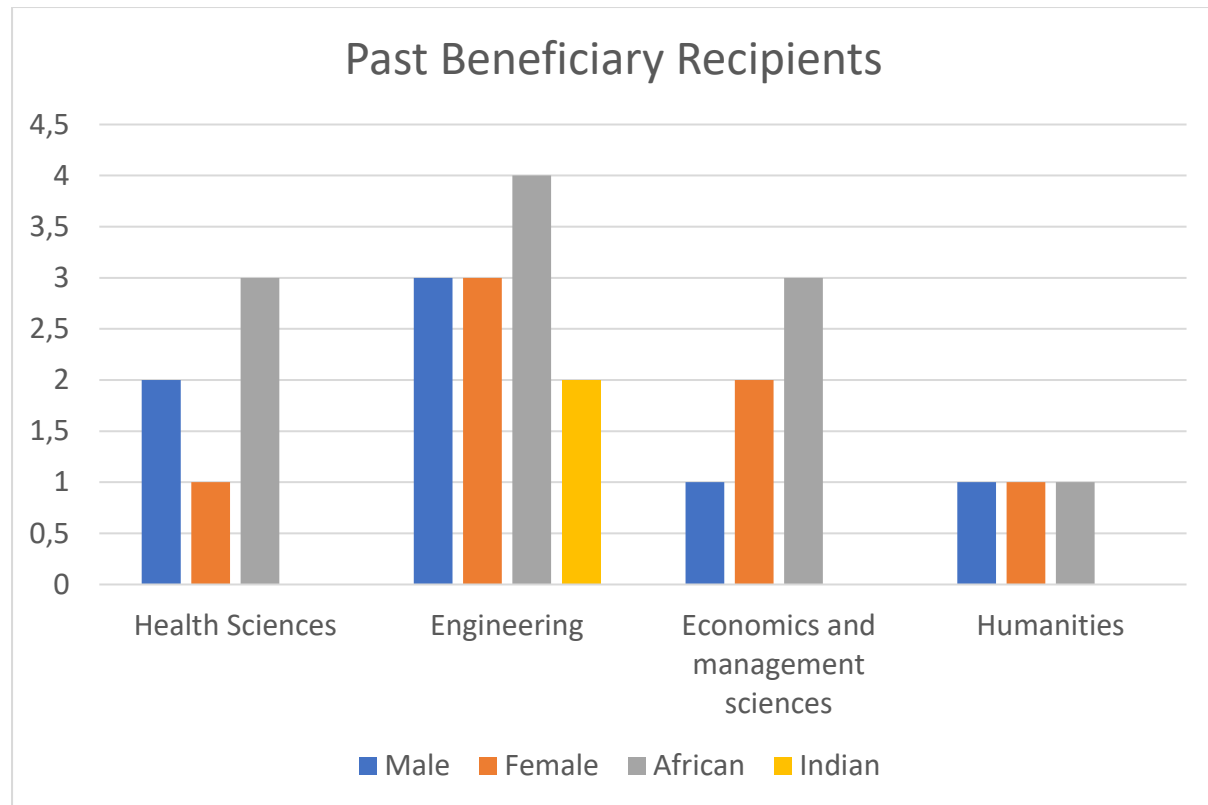
The inclusion of former bursary recipients from diverse backgrounds was crucial for several reasons:

- **Varied Experiences:** Incorporating former students who had attended various universities across South Africa, the research gained insights into the diverse experiences and perspectives shaped by different institutional cultures, academic programmes, and geographical locations. This enriched the understanding of how bursary programmes function and their varying impacts on recipients in different contexts.
- **Broadened Scope:** The inclusion of former recipients from different fields of study provided a broader perspective on the impact of bursary programs on career pathways. This allowed the research to explore how these programs contribute to skill development and career opportunities across various sectors within the South African economy.
- **Richer Narratives:** Engaging with former recipients from diverse backgrounds allowed the research to capture a richer tapestry of narratives – individual stories that illuminate the personal journeys, challenges, and triumphs experienced by bursary recipients. These lived experiences provided a deeper understanding of the human element within the realm of corporate bursary funding and its impact on individual lives.

By purposively selecting former recipients from diverse backgrounds, this research ensured a comprehensive and multi-dimensional analysis of corporate bursary programs in South Africa.

The inclusion of these voices enriched the study by capturing the human impact of bursary funding, beyond the perspectives of corporate administrators.

Figure 6: Past Bursary Recipients



Thirteen past student beneficiaries participated in the study. The majority were male (7 out of 13) and most identified as African (11 out of 13). The beneficiaries had pursued various fields of study, including health sciences, engineering, economics and management sciences, and humanities. This diversity in academic backgrounds suggests that corporate bursaries are supporting students across a wide range of disciplines, however, Engineering had the highest number of participants, indicating a strong interest in this field among corporates.

3.4.1.3 Insider Perspective

Through years of direct engagement with both students and corporate stakeholders in the administration of bursary programmes, the researcher gained first-hand experience of the intricate realities shaping bursary funding. This insider perspective was not merely observational but deeply experiential, shaped by active participation in funding negotiations,

student support mechanisms, and corporate decision-making processes. Such immersion provided an intimate understanding of the challenges faced by both beneficiaries and funders, allowing for a more nuanced and contextually informed analysis of the research phenomenon. As noted by Bourdieu (1990), an insider's perspective enables a researcher to engage with the social world in a way that goes beyond surface-level observation, capturing the implicit structures and lived realities that shape institutional practices.

Drawing on this extensive professional background, the researcher was able to capture not only explicit policies and frameworks but also the implicit power dynamics, unspoken expectations and lived experiences that define the bursary landscape. Unlike detached observation, this perspective was grounded in practical engagement; assisting students navigating financial shortfalls, liaising with corporates on funding criteria; and witnessing first-hand the unintended consequences of funding gaps. This depth of involvement aligns with the argument made by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), who suggest that qualitative researchers who are embedded in their field of study gain access to "thick descriptions" that provide a more holistic understanding of social phenomena.

Furthermore, the researcher's direct interactions with key stakeholders allowed for a critical evaluation of the alignment between corporate bursary objectives and their actual impact. Observing and participating in stakeholder engagements helped assess whether stated corporate intentions translated into meaningful support for students. This aligns with the principle of triangulation in qualitative research, where multiple sources of data, such as interviews, document analysis and field experience; enhance the validity and credibility of findings (Patton, 2015). By embedding these professional encounters within the research framework, the study moves beyond theoretical analysis to reflect a lived, practice-based understanding of the complexities of bursary funding in South Africa.

3.4.2 Reaching Saturation: Quality over Quantity

In pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of corporate bursary programmes and their impacts, the research initially aimed for a sample size of 30 participants, including 10 senior representatives from various corporations and 20 former bursary recipients. This ambitious

target was intended to capture a broad and diverse range of perspectives and experiences. The ultimate goal, however, was not merely to reach a numerical target but to ensure that the collected data provided deep and thorough insight into the subject matter, guided by the principle of data saturation. This principle, as articulated by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), marks the point at which additional data no longer contributes new insights or themes, indicating that the collected data is sufficiently comprehensive to meet the research objectives.

During the course of the research, interviews were successfully conducted with seven senior representatives from the targeted corporations and 13 former bursary recipients. Although this fell short of the initial target, the richness and depth of the conversations exceeded expectations. Data saturation was achieved with these 20 participants, as interviews began yielding repetitive information, signalling that a thorough understanding of the phenomenon had been reached. This outcome underscored the notion that in qualitative research, the quality of data is paramount over mere quantity (Morse, 1995). The detailed narratives and insights provided by the participants painted a vivid picture of the intricacies involved in corporate bursary funding and management, as well as the transformative impact these programmes have on individuals and the broader educational landscape.

A purposive sampling approach was instrumental in reaching this point of saturation. This method ensured that the selected corporate representatives had direct and substantial involvement with bursary programmes, offering invaluable insider perspectives on their design, implementation, and outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Likewise, purposive sampling was used to identify and recruit former bursary recipients, ensuring that participants with firsthand experience of these programmes could provide critical insights into their effectiveness and impact. This deliberate selection strategy allowed for a comprehensive understanding of bursary programmes from both administrative and beneficiary perspectives.

3.4.3 A Step-by-Step Approach to Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Croatia (2012), served as the cornerstone of the data analysis process in this study. This method, recognised by Larkin (2009) as a fundamental qualitative analysis tool, involves identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. Descombe (2010) notably highlights the flexibility of thematic analysis, emphasising its compatibility with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms. While Giorgi (2009) suggests discourse analysis for social constructionist frameworks, thematic analysis aligns well with this study's focus on participants' lived experiences and perceptions of bursary assistance programmes.

A rigorous and systematic approach was ensured through the adoption of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide for conducting thematic analysis. This framework provided a valuable structure for analysing the data, allowing for both an examination of code frequency and an in-depth exploration of meaning within the context.

Phase 1: Familiarisation and Immersion

The initial phase involved a deep familiarisation with the data, laying the groundwork for the subsequent analysis. As emphasised by Braun and Clarke (2006), this immersion forms the "bedrock" for the remainder of the process. To achieve this, I employed a two-pronged approach:

1. **Data Collection and Early Awareness:** The act of collecting the data myself provided an initial understanding of the content and potential themes, as reflected in my field notes and reflections.
2. **Refining Initial Impressions:** This involved a process of thoroughly reading and re-reading the transcribed interviews, allowing for a deeper grasp of the data's breadth and depth. Each transcript and audio recording were revisited multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

The second phase centered around generating initial codes. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations, I systematically examined the data, identifying and marking interesting aspects based on recurring patterns. Adhering to the principle of erring on the side of inclusivity, I opted to generate a comprehensive set of codes, acknowledging that not all might be essential at a later stage.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

With the data coded, the focus shifted towards identifying broader themes from the generated codes. As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, the initial phase of theme identification may reveal sub-themes rather than overarching themes. This iterative process allows for the gradual refinement of themes, as some codes might be elevated to themes, while others might be reclassified as sub-themes. Through this process, several codes were revised, resulting in the initial identification of eight themes. Some of these themes were later combined due to their close alignment with similar aspects of the data.

Phase 4: Examining and Reviewing Themes

Following the generation of a preliminary list of themes, phase four involved a rigorous examination as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). This critical review process entailed a close examination of each theme, identifying potential overlaps and redundancies. The validity of each theme was also carefully assessed. At this stage, challenges arose in clearly categorising the themes due to some level of overlap. However, through ongoing supervision, the process was clarified, leading to a more coherent understanding of the thematic structure.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

In this phase, the essence of each theme was captured by identifying the core features of the data it represented. This analysis informed the naming of each theme, ensuring that the assigned labels accurately reflected their key characteristics. The themes were then reviewed

and discussed with my supervisor, leading to further refinement as some themes were reclassified as codes due to their alignment with broader thematic categories. This process ultimately resulted in the identification of seven distinct themes, categorised within two overarching domains.

Phase 6: Production of the Report

The culmination of these steps led to the final stage – the production of the research findings. These findings, specifically Chapters Four to Seven and Eight (Results & Discussion), presents the identified themes and their nuanced interpretations within the context of the research objectives.

3.4.4 Establishing the Credibility of the Research

Ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings is paramount, as it establishes the confidence readers can place in the study's conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike quantitative research with its emphasis on internal validity and generalisability, trustworthiness in qualitative research focuses on establishing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility, in particular, refers to the believability of the findings and the degree to which they accurately reflect the participants' experiences (Merriam, 2009).

This study employed several strategies to enhance the credibility of the findings. Firstly, a meticulous interview process was conducted. Ample time was allocated for each interview, allowing participants to delve deeper into their experiences and perspectives (Kahn & Wang, 2008). Probing questions were strategically employed to elicit rich and detailed data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the participants' narratives (Creswell, 2014). Secondly, member checking, a technique where participants are given the opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of their transcribed interviews, was utilised. This iterative process not only fosters participant validation but also allows the researcher to address any potential misinterpretations or inconsistencies (Tracy, 2013). Any edits or clarifications suggested by participants were carefully considered and incorporated into the final data analysis, further solidifying the credibility of the research (Merriam, 2009).

Through these meticulous procedures, the study aimed to establish a strong foundation for the trustworthiness of its findings, ultimately strengthening the research's overall contribution to the field.

3.4.4.1 Ethical considerations

Ethics are norms and standards distinguishing between right and wrong behaviour (Khan, 2016). There are several ethical issues that have been considered and were adhered to before commencement of the study, during the study and after the study is concluded. The following details all ethical considerations that will be adhered to throughout the study.

Informed consent

According to Holzemer (2010), informed consent is the cornerstone of ethically sound research. It gives the participants the opportunity to make decisions without compulsion based on complete information. All participants identified through purposive and snowball sampling were contacted via email or phone. Informed consent was obtained prior to their inclusion in the study, ensuring they were fully informed about the research objectives, data collection methods, and their rights as participants. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses and were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any point.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in the study was purely voluntary. All participants were advised of the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any point, without any negative consequences or prejudice.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality involved safeguarding data and personal information gathered during the research, and this was adhered to in compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act. The data will be kept confidential and secure on the University of Pretoria servers, in a password-protected folder. Physical interview notes, recordings, and transcripts will be

locked away in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology. The anonymity of participants was upheld by assigning unique identifiers. The names and locations of participants were not made public, and only de-identified data was shared if requested.

Prevention of harm

In an effort to enhance the safety of both the researcher and participants, all interviews were conducted in private at a location both the interviewer and participants were comfortable with. Participants had the choice between in-person or virtual interviews. Privacy was strictly maintained to prevent third parties from hearing any sensitive information that may have been revealed by the participant during the interview.

Debriefing

At the end of the interviews, participants were debriefed. This provided an opportunity to address any issues that may have arisen during the interview and to answer any questions the participants had regarding the interviews. It was also used to inform the participants of the next steps in the study.

Data storage and usage

The interview scripts and data collected will be stored as hard and electronic copies which will be stored at the University of Pretoria for a minimum period of 15 years. The researcher and supervisor will have access to the data which other scholars could also access only through the department. This ensures the controlled access and usage of the data collected in the future, as reference for other studies.

3.4.4.2 Ensuring Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research

While qualitative research offers a valuable lens to explore the lived experiences surrounding corporate bursary programs, it is not without its inherent challenges. Recognising these limitations allows for a more critical and nuanced interpretation of the research findings.

- **Time-Consuming Nature:** Unlike quantitative research with its standardised methods, qualitative research like this study relies on in-depth interviews. These interviews can

be time-consuming due to the open-ended nature of the questioning and the need to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences (Kahn & Wang, 2008). Following up with probing questions for clarification and deeper insights can further extend the interview duration. While this allows for rich and detailed data, it necessitates careful time management and scheduling on the researcher's part.

Mitigation: To mitigate the time-consuming nature of the in-depth interviews, a scheduling protocol was established prior to commencement. This protocol ensured efficient time management during the interviews while still allowing participants ample opportunity to elaborate on their experiences. The use of a semi-structured interview guide with key questions helped to maintain focus while allowing for flexibility to explore unexpected insights offered by participants.

- **Limited Generalisability:** Qualitative research findings cannot be easily generalised to the entire population, as is possible with quantitative studies (Merriam, 2009). This study, for instance, captured the experiences of a specific set of participants. Their experiences and perspectives, while valuable, may not necessarily reflect the experiences of all bursary recipients or stakeholders. The findings can, however, provide insights that can be explored further in future research with larger and more diverse samples.

Mitigation: Acknowledging the limitations of generalisability, the study focused on recruiting a purposive sample encompassing a diverse range of participants within the corporate bursary landscape. This included bursary recipients from different academic backgrounds and universities, and bursary administrators from various corporations with varying bursary programs. While the findings may not be universally applicable, the diversity of the sample offered a broader and more nuanced understanding of the experiences surrounding corporate bursary programs.

- **Data Management and Interpretation Challenges:** Qualitative research often involves a significant amount of data from interviews and document analysis. Bringing this data together and making sense of it can be a complex task (Creswell, 2014). Thematic analysis, the chosen method for this study, requires careful organisation and coding of the data to identify recurring themes and patterns. However, reconciling potentially

differing or contrasting participant experiences can be challenging. Researchers must be mindful of their own biases and employ strategies like member checking to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the interpretations drawn from the data (Tracy, 2013).

Mitigation: Data analysis was carried out with the utmost level of care, detail orientation and diligence. It was carried out in a methodical manner, with steps carefully outlined beforehand to speed up the process and at the same time maintaining a high standard of rigour and accuracy.

- **Ensuring Credibility of Findings**

Qualitative research findings can sometimes be subjective and raise questions about how accurately they represent participants' experiences (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This can be a challenge in the bursary study, where ensuring the findings truly reflect the lived experiences of participants is crucial.

Mitigation: To address credibility concerns, the study employed member checking. This technique involves sharing interview transcripts with participants for review and confirmation of accuracy (Simon, 2011). This allows participants to correct any misunderstandings and ensures the researcher's interpretations align with their perspectives, ultimately enhancing the credibility of the findings.

- **Researcher Bias:** A potential pitfall in qualitative research, especially with techniques like interviewing, is the possibility of researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers may unconsciously be influenced by their own preconceived notions and prior research experiences. To mitigate this, reflexivity, where researchers critically examine their own assumptions and how they might shape the research process, is crucial (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Techniques like member checking, mentioned earlier, where participants review their transcribed interviews, can also help to identify and address any potential misinterpretations stemming from researcher bias.

Mitigation: To minimise the potential for researcher bias, a reflexive journal was maintained throughout the research process. This journal prompted critical reflection on the researcher's own assumptions and how they might shape the interpretation of the data. Additionally, during the analysis stage, peer debriefing sessions were conducted with other researchers

familiar with qualitative research methods. These sessions provided an opportunity to discuss emerging themes and interpretations, ensuring alignment with the data and mitigating the influence of the researcher's preconceived notions.

- **Limited Scope of Participants:** This research encountered a limitation in the scope of participants, focusing on a select group of corporate representatives and former bursary recipients primarily within Gauteng Province. This constrained sample might limit the study's ability to extend its findings broadly across different regions and corporate sectors.

Mitigation: To address this, the study deliberately sought participants from a diverse array of sectors, including mining, financial services, and engineering, among others, to ensure a varied representation within the confines of Gauteng Province. Recognising this limitation, the study calls for future research to expand beyond this geographical and sectoral scope to enhance the generalisability of findings.

- **Potential for Participant Bias:** The reliance on in-depth interviews and self-reported experiences introduces the potential for participant bias, where responses could be influenced by personal views, experiences, or the desire to present oneself or one's organization in a favourable light.

Mitigation: To mitigate this, the study employed techniques such as ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality, which aimed to foster an environment where participants felt comfortable sharing honest insights. Additionally, data gathered from both interviews and document analysis served to cross-verify information, reducing the impact of individual biases.

- **Dependence on Self-Reported Data:** The study's reliance on self-reported data from interviews and documents raises concerns about the accuracy and reliability of such data, which could be subject to personal interpretation or recall bias.

Mitigation: The research design incorporated a methodological approach, comparing and contrasting data from various sources, including corporate documents, bursary reports, and personal narratives. This approach aimed to validate the data through multiple lenses, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

- **Constrained Time Horizon:** The research was conducted within a limited time frame, potentially overlooking the longitudinal impacts and sustainability of corporate bursary programs on beneficiaries and broader educational outcomes.

Mitigation: Acknowledging this limitation, the study provides a "snapshot" of current practices and outcomes associated with corporate bursaries. It lays the groundwork for future longitudinal studies that could track the long-term effectiveness and evolution of these programs, offering insights into sustainable practices and enduring impacts on educational access and success.

Acknowledging these challenges and employing strategies to address them can significantly enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the study's findings. Although generalisability may be limited, the rich, in-depth data collected offers valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of those involved in corporate bursary programs. This contributes to a deeper understanding of their impact on higher education success in South Africa.

3.5 Chapter Summary

In concluding the methodology section of this research on corporate bursary programmes, it is essential to reflect on the comprehensive approach that guided this investigation. The qualitative research methodology, with its emphasis on depth, context, and the richness of data, proved to be a suitable choice for investigating the multifaceted nature of corporate bursaries. Document analysis and in-depth interviews combined to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences, offering valuable insights into the intricacies of corporate bursary programmes.

The research design was carefully crafted to address the study's objectives, balancing the need for detailed, descriptive data with the practicalities of research execution. Document analysis allowed for an examination of the formal structures and policies governing corporate bursary programmes, while in-depth interviews provided a platform for stakeholders to share their personal experiences and perceptions. This dual approach enriched the study's findings,

enabling a nuanced understanding of the impact and challenges associated with corporate bursaries.

Despite the strengths of the qualitative methodology, the research also navigated inherent challenges such as time constraints and the potential for bias. These challenges were acknowledged and addressed through careful planning and a reflective research practice, ensuring the credibility and reliability of the findings.

Overall, the methodology section underscores the thoughtful and systematic approach taken in this study to explore corporate bursary programmes. The qualitative research framework, with its emphasis on understanding complex social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, provided a solid foundation for this inquiry. As the paper moves forward from methodology to findings, the insights gained through this rigorous methodological approach undoubtedly contribute to a richer and more comprehensive understanding of corporate bursaries and their role in supporting education and development.

Chapter Four

Analysis of Corporate Bursary Programs: Exploring the Objectives and Operations

"The true measure of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. Education is the key to unlocking potential, and the way we fund it reflects our commitment to the future."

Nelson Mandela

"Investment in knowledge pays the best interest, but the dividends are measured not just in degrees conferred, but in lives transformed."

Benjamin Franklin

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 marks the first data chapter, delving into the core of corporate bursary provision within the South African higher education landscape. Building on the theoretical foundations and policy context established in previous chapters, this chapter presents key findings through emerging themes that capture the complexities of corporate bursary programs. The Chapter provides a structured exploration of the motivations behind corporate investment in bursaries, uncovering the strategic, philanthropic and developmental drivers that shape these funding initiatives. Additionally, the chapter examines the determinants influencing the scale and scope of corporate bursary investments, offering insights into sectoral variations and the factors that dictate financial commitments.

A central focus of this chapter is the extent to which student perspectives and needs are considered in the design and implementation of corporate bursaries. The findings highlight prevailing gaps in student inclusion and illustrate the consequences of limited student participation in shaping these financial support mechanisms. Furthermore, by exploring the discrepancies between corporate funding practices and the evolving needs of students, the analysis underscores the potential misalignment between the intended impact of bursary programs and their actual outcomes.

Through these emerging themes, Chapter 4 lays the foundation for a deeper understanding of the corporate bursary ecosystem in South Africa, critically assessing its role in promoting access and student success.

4.2 Motivations

4.2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives

In the study, CSR featured prominently as motivation for corporate bursary initiatives, reflecting a deep-seated corporate commitment to contributing positively to societal development and educational equity. The study revealed that, CSR activities are not just peripheral corporate engagements but are central to the ethos of many companies, aiming

to give back to the communities in which they operate and to support the broader educational landscape of South Africa.

A CSI professional of a leading Mining company (CSR 1), reflected on this commitment, pointing out that;

"We see our bursary program as a way to give back to the communities we operate in and invest in the future of South Africa. We believe education is the key to unlocking opportunity, and we want to play a role in making that possible for deserving students, particularly, in the areas where most of our operations are located." (CSR1).

In my document analysis, Boulton & Murray (2013), emphasise the significant focus on education within CSR initiatives in South Africa, underscoring the transformative potential of education for societal advancement. Their research reveals that education is a primary area of investment for many corporations, reflecting a recognition of its critical role in driving social and economic progress (ibid).

CSR 3, a financial service company further provided a compelling example of this commitment in the approach they take in CSR. As part of its comprehensive CSR strategy, CSR 3 has developed a multifaceted educational support program that includes bursaries, scholarships, mentorship, and practical work opportunities. The company collaborates closely with universities to identify and assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly those in fields critical to the financial services industry such, such as Accounting, Finance and Investment. They target students from areas they operate, and fund them in Universities across South Africa. Beyond financial aid, CSR3 integrates internships, practical training, and potential employment opportunities into its bursary program, thereby creating a seamless transition from education to employment and ensuring that students are not only supported academically but are also prepared for the workforce.

This integrative approach by CSR 3, and similar initiatives by other corporations, exemplify how CSR-driven bursary programs can serve as powerful tools for social investment, empowering individuals and contributing to the national development agenda. Through these

initiatives, corporations are able to align their business objectives with societal needs, fostering an educated, skilled workforce that benefits both the individual beneficiaries and the broader South African society.

4.2.2 Strategic investment in human capital development

The study further revealed that corporates initiate bursary programmes as strategic investments in human capital development. This speaks to a multifaceted approach to fostering a skilled workforce that aligns with industry-specific demands. 50% of Corporations interviewed, identified investment in human capital development as part but not the only reason for engaging in bursary programmes. They alluded to the fact that such strategies not only enhance corporate productivity and innovation but also contribute to broader economic advancement by elevating the workforce's overall skill level. The meticulous design aligns with the sectors', crucial to the company's operational success. Such an alignment ensures a continuous supply of graduates who are not only highly skilled but also possess specialised knowledge pertinent to the company's industry, thereby maximising the return on educational investment. The profound impact of these investments is captured in the words of a bursary recipient who highlighted the life-changing nature of educational support:

"The investment in my education has not just changed my life; it has equipped me with skills that are essential to the industry."

This personal account highlights the significant, life-altering effects of educational investments on individuals, which, in turn, benefit industries reliant on specialised skills.

This finding is substantiated by scholars such as Badenhorst & Robison (2017). Through their study on "The impact of corporate social investment on human capital development in South Africa" assert that educational investments are instrumental in driving economic growth and fostering innovation, aligning with the broader consensus within economic and educational spheres regarding the critical nature of human capital investments. They go on to note a positive correlation between corporate educational investments and the cultivation of a more skilled and productive workforce (ibid).

Further illustrating this approach, the Sasol Bursary Programme strategically supports students in science, engineering, and technology fields, reflecting the company's recognition of these disciplines' critical importance to its business operations. Investing in the education of students in these areas, Sasol is effectively building a talent pool equipped with the advanced skills and knowledge needed to sustain innovation and maintain a competitive edge in the energy and chemicals sectors.

Analysing documents, another compelling case of strategic investment in human capital emerged through IBM's revamped bursary program, which now focuses on students pursuing degrees in computer science, data analytics, and related fields. This focus reflects IBM's anticipation of the growing significance of data science and AI across various sectors. This strategic investment by IBM not only serves the corporation by ensuring a steady influx of graduates with requisite skills but also contributes to the national economy by enhancing the workforce's capability to tackle the technological challenges of the 21st century. This approach heralds a more innovative and competitive future, underscoring the symbiotic relationship between strategic corporate investments in education and the development of a skilled, industry-ready workforce.

4.2.3 Brand reputation and public image.

The study identified a significant link between bursary programs and a company's public image, revealing that certain corporations distribute bursaries primarily to enhance their social reputation and profile. This approach appears to be driven less by a genuine commitment to education or social welfare and more by a strategic desire to cultivate a positive public image. An interview with a Corporate Social Investment (CSI) professional from an engineering firm provided a candid admission that their giving serves primarily to polish the company's image. He lamented that the act of giving is often turned into a media show, leveraging social media for maximum exposure and potentially exaggerating the perception of their generosity. He elaborated that by offering partial bursaries to a larger number of students, the company could present these efforts as having a broader impact, prioritizing quantity over the depth of support. Thus, bursary programs implemented on this basis

become a form of "brand washing," a marketing ploy to enhance a company's social image without a genuine commitment to empowering students.

The study indicates that such practices, while contributing to some extent to educational funding, may not fully address the students' financial needs or academic support requirements. Dispersing resources across numerous partial bursaries allows corporations to project a broad philanthropic presence and demonstrate active community involvement. This strategy bolsters their social reputation and appeal to consumers and potential employees who prioritise corporate social responsibility (CSR).

The notion of strategic philanthropy, where corporations leverage charitable giving for public relations benefits rather than a genuine commitment to social good, is well-documented in existing literature. Crane, Matten, and Spence (2008) explore this concept, aligning with the research finding on the potential misuse of bursary programs for 'brand washing'. Additionally, Kearney and Peattie (2002) identified different approaches to CSR, including 'instrumental CSR', which emphasises using social initiatives like bursary programs to improve a company's image and reputation. An analysis by Bashir and Thomson (2018) also suggests a positive correlation between CSR activities and corporate reputation, reinforcing the notion that companies might utilise bursaries as a tool to enhance their public image, potentially overshadowing the programme's true purpose of supporting student education.

However, this study diverges from some existing research by highlighting the nuanced implications of such practices. While many scholars have acknowledged the reputational benefits of CSR activities, this finding emphasises the potential negative consequences of prioritising image over genuine support. The superficial allocation of partial bursaries may create a facade of extensive philanthropic activity, but it falls short in providing substantial support that can meaningfully impact students' educational outcomes and financial stability. This finding challenges the predominantly positive view of CSR's impact on corporate reputation and underscores the importance of scrutinising the authenticity and effectiveness of such initiatives.

Furthermore, this study underscores the potential of bursary programmes to create a win-win situation for both corporations and society when implemented thoughtfully and authentically. Bursary programmes, when genuinely aimed at bridging the financial gap for indigent students, nurturing a more inclusive and skilled workforce, and strengthening the bond between corporations and the communities they serve, hold immense value. However, a focus on mere public relations stunts undermines the true potential of these programmes. It reinforces the notion that companies might utilise bursaries as a tool to enhance public image, potentially overshadowing the programme's true purpose of supporting student education. To foster real and lasting positive change, corporations should prioritise genuine empowerment and long-term support within bursary programmes rather than solely focusing on brand reputation.

4.2.4 ESG as a Motivator for Corporate Bursaries

A growing number of corporate bursaries are motivated by Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations. Rather than solely driven by philanthropic impulses, corporations are increasingly integrating bursary programs into their broader ESG strategies. As one CSR manager from a Mining company expressed,

"Our bursary program is more than just charity; it's a strategic investment in our future workforce and a reflection of our commitment to social responsibility."

This finding suggests a shift towards a more purpose-driven approach to corporate philanthropy, where bursaries are viewed as a tangible means of contributing to sustainable development goals.

Furthermore, the research indicates a strong correlation between a company's ESG performance and its involvement in bursary programs as evidenced by 60% of companies interviewed, pointing that bursaries constitute a huge part of their ESG strategies. It was also noticed that such companies with robust ESG frameworks, offered comprehensive bursaries that encompass full financial support as standard including mentorship, and vacation work opportunities. As stated by a CSR executive at a multinational corporation,

"the bursary program is an integral part of our ESG strategy. It allows us to address social inequality, develop future talent, and enhance our brand reputation, all at once."

This alignment of bursary programs with ESG objectives has several implications. First, it suggests that corporations are increasingly aware of the potential for bursaries to contribute to their overall business strategy. Investing in education and skills development enables companies to mitigate talent shortages, enhance their reputation, and build stronger relationships with communities. Second, it highlights the importance of measuring the social impact of bursary programs. To demonstrate the effectiveness of their ESG initiatives, corporations need to track key performance indicators such as graduation rates, employment outcomes, and community engagement among bursary recipients.

However, it is essential to note that while ESG considerations are gaining prominence, traditional philanthropic motives still play a role in driving corporate bursary programs. Some companies continue to view bursaries primarily as a means of giving back to the community, without explicitly linking them to broader ESG objectives

4.2.5 Compliance with regulatory frameworks

The research suggests that fulfilling B-BBEE requirements is one of the biggest motivators for some corporations when establishing bursary programs. Bursaries serve as a significant mechanism for meeting B-BBEE requirements. Companies earn points towards their B-BBEE scorecard through various initiatives, with skills development being a key area. This incentivises corporations to invest in programs like bursaries, which provide financial support for students pursuing higher education. A representative from a Motor Company, CSR 4, exemplified this approach. She pointed out that their bursary program is specifically designed to address B-BBEE requirements by focusing on supporting black, historically disadvantaged students. In doing so, CSR 4 suggested that the company contributes to the educational advancement of these students but also contributes to the broader goal of economic inclusivity and transformation envisioned by the B-BBEE framework. The bursary program,

therefore, serves a dual purpose of fulfilling a regulatory requirement while making a positive social impact.

CSR 4, exclaimed that;

"Our bursary program helps us contribute to our B-BBEE goals by supporting black students. It's one way we can demonstrate our commitment to transformation."

The above sentiment is championed by Khumalo & Miruka (2020), who discuss how businesses can leverage bursary programs to address both social and regulatory imperatives. They confirm that, the alignment of such programs with B-BBEE mandates not only facilitates compliance but also enhances the corporations' societal impact, particularly in the education sector (ibid).

While fulfilling B-BBEE mandates might not be the primary driver for all bursary programs, the research suggests that it does play a role for some corporations. This alignment of corporate funding with national priorities emphasises the role of regulatory frameworks in guiding corporate investments towards meaningful social impact as alluded to by Van der Merwe, (2015); DTI, (2013). In essence, legislative frameworks, encourage investments towards social development. However, it is worth noting that some corporations went on to specify that more often than not, their contributions towards bursaries is limited to the bare minimum, required for them to achieve maximum points for a specific B-BBEE indicator. The above therefore casts a dark cloud on the impact of bursaries awarded in this manner as some contributions are significantly smaller, hardly accounting for a single registered module, let alone the full tuition.

4.3 Determinants of Corporate Bursary Investment

In the South African context, bursary allocation by corporations extends beyond pure financial means. The following set of findings highlight the unique interplay of factors that influence a company's commitment to educational investment, revealing the specific dynamics underpinning their decisions.

4.3.1 Economic Influences:

The financial health of corporations is a key determinant in their capacity to allocate resources towards social initiatives. An executive from a leading mining corporation noted:

"Our commitment to social development, including educational bursaries, is directly influenced by our financial performance and the broader economic environment."

This sentiment underscores the idea that while companies are eager to invest in philanthropy, their ability to do so is contingent upon their economic stability and favourable market conditions. Additionally, corporations increasingly recognise the value of investing in social goodwill and brand loyalty as part of their return on investment (ROI), which, although intangible, contributes to long-term profitability and sustainability (Smith & Cronje, 2012; Global CSR Trends, 2020).

This relationship between economic health and social investment extends beyond mere fiscal capability. The study highlights the evolving corporate understanding of ROI, as they acknowledge the significant, albeit less tangible, benefits derived from fostering social goodwill and nurturing brand loyalty. These intangible assets, while not immediately quantifiable on balance sheets, are increasingly viewed as crucial for building long-term corporate profitability and sustainability. This expanded perspective on ROI reflects a deeper appreciation of how corporate success and societal welfare are interconnected. Investments in social initiatives, such as bursaries, are not merely acts of charity but strategic moves that enhance a corporation's standing, reputation, and relationship with its community and consumer base.

This corporate paradigm shift resonates with global observations, as evidenced by reports on Global CSR Trends (2020), which document the growing corporate awareness and valuation of social investment's role in sustainable business practices. These insights confirm that the economic influences on corporate philanthropy are multifaceted, encompassing immediate financial health and broader strategic considerations that recognise the integral role of social responsibility in building a resilient, profitable, and socially engaged corporate entity. As such,

the economic dimensions of corporate funding allocation for bursaries offer a fascinating lens through which the future trajectories of CSR might be determined, suggesting a continued, if not increasing, alignment between corporate success and societal advancement through bursaries.

More often than not, research presents a binary view of corporate philanthropy, either as purely altruistic or entirely strategic. However, the findings of this study reveal a more complex reality where economic conditions shape but do not wholly determine social investment decisions.

4.3.2 Strategic Orientation and Corporate Values:

Findings indicated that a company's strategic orientation and core values play a pivotal role in shaping its commitment to bursary funding, as well as the directionality of that investment. Companies with a strong focus on long-term sustainability, ethical business practices, and social impact are more likely to view bursary programs as strategic investments aligned with a larger vision. As one participant directly pointed out that,

"Our sustainability ethos drives us to support education as a pillar of community development." (CSR1)

This shift in perspective aligns with the growing emphasis on responsible business practices and corporate social responsibility in South Africa (Dlamini & Saunders, 2019; Corporate Ethics in South Africa, 2020). The study reflects an increasing need by companies to move beyond traditional profit-driven models and considering the broader implications of their operations on society and the environment. Within this framework, bursary programs serve several interrelated functions. The findings suggest that by focusing on education, corporations actively work to address a major challenge facing South Africa, contributing to long-term poverty alleviation and the creation of a more equitable society. This kind of investment in human capital aligns with national development goals and the idea of fostering a future where all citizens can be productive participants in the economy.

This strategic orientation also means some bursaries might be targeted towards fields directly linked to a company's industry. This allows for building a future pool of skilled employees aligned with the organisation's needs. However, even bursaries outside of a company's core area of business contribute to a stronger, more educated workforce overall, indirectly benefiting the wider economic context.

4.3.3 Stakeholder Expectations:

Stakeholder expectations play a pivotal role in shaping corporate bursary funding decisions, reflecting a broader shift towards socially responsible investing and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. The study highlights how stakeholders, including investors, employees and customers, exert pressure on corporations to invest in education as a means of fulfilling their social and environmental obligations. A respondent from the Financial services sector, highlighted,

"Stakeholder pressure", especially from socially conscious investors and shareholders, as the driver of investments in education. The influence of stakeholder expectations on corporate bursary funding is supported by Freeman & Hasnaoui (2011) who allude to the concept of stakeholder theory, which posits that organisations should consider the interests of all stakeholders, not just shareholders, in their decision-making processes. This perspective aligns with the finding which in essence speaks to corporate actions, including investments in education through bursary programs, forming a huge part of stakeholder interest. One respondent noted that;

"our shareholders are actively involved in shaping our corporate and CSI initiatives"(CSR2).

This pressure aligns with the rising demand for corporate accountability, transparency, and tangible evidence of positive social and environmental impact. Bursary programmes, are therefore becoming essential for attracting socially conscious investors, retaining engaged employees, and fostering customer loyalty. This dynamic is reinforced by works like Freeman & Hasnaoui (2011) and a growing body of research on stakeholder engagement in CSR (2020). Investing in education thus becomes not only an act of goodwill but also a strategic move that

strengthens reputation, builds stakeholder trust, and offers a competitive advantage in an increasingly value-driven marketplace.

4.3.4 Technological Advancements:

The study further suggests that the rapid technological evolution, has become of strategic importance as corporates align bursary programs with the need for enhanced digital literacy. The study revealed a keen corporate awareness of the necessity to foster a workforce proficient in navigating the intricacies of the digital age. This awareness is not just a reflection of corporate philanthropy but a strategic imperative to remain at the forefront of industry innovation and maintain a competitive edge in a rapidly changing business landscape. A corporate executive noted that,

"Supporting IT students is a deliberate response to the changing nature of our business, where in the past operations were largely manual, there has been a shift to almost 100% digital."

This statement captures the essence of transition from traditional business models to ones that are digitally enabled, requiring a fundamentally different skill set from the workforce. It speaks to a strategic realignment of CSR investments towards technology-focused education and training programs which is a testament to corporations' foresightedness in preparing for future challenges. Investing in the digital proficiency of tomorrow's workforce, companies are not merely responding to current trends but are actively shaping the future of the industry and societal progress. The emphasis on funding technology-related education is a dual-faceted strategy. On one hand, it contributes to the eradication of the digital divide, thereby fostering a more inclusive society where individuals are empowered with the digital skills necessary to thrive in the 21st century. On the other hand, it ensures that companies have access to a talent pool that is well-versed in the latest technological advancements, ready to drive businesses into the future.

The above is supported publications such as Tech for Good (2019) and Bridging the Digital Skills Gap (2021) which highlight the critical role of corporate investment in technology

education as a catalyst for societal advancement and economic prosperity. These investments are recognised for their long-term benefits in driving innovation, productivity, and sustainable development. The strategic focus on IT and digital skills development through corporate bursary programs is a clear indicator of the shifting priorities in CSR investments. It emphasises a broader commitment to human capital development that is congruent to the demands of a changing world, where digital competency is not just an asset but a necessity.

4.4 Student Input, Needs Assessment and feedback gap.

In examining the extent to which bursary programs involve students in their design and needs assessment processes, it became evident that student participation is severely limited. The processes are often described as opaque and bureaucratic, with many students feeling marginalised and reduced to mere numbers within a system that does not actively seek their input or adequately explain the rationale behind funding allocations. A prevalent sentiment among past students is that their specific needs and circumstances are not genuinely considered in the formulation of bursary programs. This perception is captured in the words of a past beneficiary who stated,

"It always felt like we were just numbers in a system; they don't explain how they decide who gets what and why," (PBR5)

highlighting a profound gap in communication and transparency between bursary providers and recipients.

This lack of engagement fosters a sense of powerlessness and fuels a perception that individual circumstances are not meaningfully considered in program design. The fear of jeopardising their precarious financial situation further silences students' voices. As another student emotionally stated,

"We couldn't question the bursary conditions or amounts because we have nothing else to fall back on" (PBR12).

This highlights the desperation many students face, forcing them to accept inadequate support for fear of losing any financial lifeline.

Findings revealed a profound discrepancy between the expectations held by bursary providers and the lived realities of student recipients. Without meaningful channels for student input, corporate bursary providers rely heavily on assumptions of student needs (Primarily from staff). This results in support packages that, while well-intentioned, often miss the mark in addressing the full range of financial and non-financial challenges faced by students. Tuition coverage, which is often the centrepiece of bursaries, proves sadly insufficient. Students expressed frustration and confusion, with testimonials like;

“They covered tuition, but I had no idea how I was supposed to eat or pay for transport to even get to campus” (PBR11), becoming common.

This discrepancy undermines the true potential of corporate bursaries. Rather than a source of significant relief and empowerment, bursaries became associated with disappointment. All past beneficiaries indicated that lack of consultation on development of bursary programmes made them feel like trophies and misunderstood, growing the perception that bursary programs were more focused on fulfilling corporate social responsibility goals than holistically supporting student success. This disconnect severely damages the sponsor-recipient relationship, making students hesitant even to report challenges and reducing their overall sense of support.

The mismatch has further consequences for academic outcomes. Bursaries meant to alleviate financial stress ironically became a source of additional distress. Past beneficiaries testified that, the burden of securing supplementary income, the mental toll of constant worry about basic needs, and the feeling of being unheard creates significant barriers to focusing on studies. This reveals a need for bursary programs to re-evaluate their understanding of student needs and open channels for sustained dialogue to ensure that the support they provide is genuinely impactful.

These findings advocate for a fundamental shift in bursary program design and implementation. Incorporating student voices through direct feedback and conducting genuine needs assessments are essential steps towards ensuring programs provide meaningful and adequate support. Aligning bursary packages with the lived experiences of students can enhance the effectiveness of financial aid programs, ultimately contributing to improved academic outcomes and a more equitable higher education landscape for institutions and funding bodies.

Furthermore, a concerning trend emerged in the data, pointing towards a deficiency in feedback mechanisms. While some programs utilise surveys to gather student input as part of their M&E efforts, many lack a systematic and ongoing approach to capturing the experiences and perspectives of bursary recipients. This absence of a structured feedback loop creates a significant gap in programme understanding, hindering corporations' ability to fully comprehend the impact of bursary support on students' academic journeys.

The research identified a reliance on erratic surveys as the primary method for student feedback in several programmes. These surveys, often conducted at infrequent intervals, provide a limited snapshot of student experiences and may not adequately capture the evolving challenges and needs encountered throughout the academic year. Asked about monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, a bursary manager acknowledged this limitation, stating,

"We conduct surveys at the beginning and end of the year, but this doesn't give us a clear picture of how the bursary is actually impacting students throughout their studies" (CSR4)

highlighting the inadequacy of infrequent surveys in providing a nuanced understanding of the student experience.

The lack of regular feedback mechanisms poses a significant barrier to program improvement. Without ongoing student input, bursary programs struggle to identify areas where support

can be enhanced or tailored to better meet student needs. A past bursary recipient emphasised this noting that,

"It would be helpful to have regular check-ins where we can share our experiences and challenges. Right now, it feels like our voices aren't really heard" (PBR14).

This sentiment confirms the importance of creating a space for ongoing dialogue between students and program administrators, through well-crafted M&E mechanisms. Students are experts on their own lived experiences. Their input is essential for ensuring that bursary programs are truly responsive to their evolving needs. Without consultations, students might feel like anonymous recipients of aid rather than active participants whose voices are valued. Furthermore, this disconnection risks limiting corporates' understanding of the real-world challenges faced by students and how their support is contributing to overcoming those obstacles. The absence of student feedback hinders efforts to assess the holistic impact of bursary support on academic success. While financial aid undoubtedly alleviates financial pressure, a student's academic journey encompasses a broader range of challenges. Structured feedback mechanisms could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of bursary programs in addressing these broader needs, such as academic support services, access to mental health resources, or mentorship opportunities.

Incorporating structured, ongoing feedback mechanisms into bursary program design has a profound impact. It empowers students to take ownership of their educational journeys, contributing to the development of more responsive and impactful support systems. This accentuates the principle of student agency, emphasising the importance of recognising the expertise of learners and amplifying their voices in decisions that impact them.

Corporates must also recognise the value of feedback-driven improvements in their bursary programs. Through active solicitation and acting upon student feedback, companies can demonstrate a commitment to enhancing the overall impact and effectiveness of their educational initiatives. Moreover, transparent communication about feedback mechanisms and their outcomes can foster trust and engagement among bursary recipients, encouraging active participation in feedback processes, to enhance bursary programme effectiveness.

4.5 Non-Alignment with National Development Goals

4.5.1 Limited Focus on Skills Shortages in Critical Areas

A core finding of the study highlights a profound disconnect between corporate bursary allocations and the critical skills shortages outlined in South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP). While some bursary programs demonstrate alignment with high-demand sectors like engineering or healthcare, the overwhelming pattern reveals a limited focus on fields facing chronic skills shortages. This is particularly evident in programmes such as Education, Veterinary Sciences, Social Work and Agriculture, where demand for funding consistently exceeds supply. Of all the interviewed past beneficiary recipients, only 30% were not part of STEM. As a human resources manager from the energy sector openly admitted,

"Honestly, our bursaries are driven by our sector needs. We don't always consider the bigger picture of what the country needs most."

This statement illustrates the narrowness of the prevailing approach, where corporate interests, rather than overarching national priorities, drive bursary funding decisions.

The consequences of this mismatch are multi-faceted and threaten to undermine South Africa's long-term economic development goals. Bhorat, Mayet, & Visser (2017) highlight that the failure to produce adequately skilled graduates significantly hampers growth and innovation. The persistent lack of qualified veterinarians, educators, social workers, and agricultural specialists has a profound impact on the South African economy. In rural areas, insufficient animal health professionals lead to livestock losses and a lack of preventative care, whilst the shortage of qualified teachers perpetuates educational inequalities, hindering the development of particularly those in dire need (Bhorat, Mayet, & Visser, 2017). Understaffed social services struggle to address mental health concerns, trauma, and lack of support systems. The scarcity of agricultural experts with knowledge of sustainable practices and local conditions limits food production and economic growth in rural communities, which has a direct correlation with lack of food security. These shortages not only impact individuals but ripple through the entire economy, creating a cycle of disadvantage and lost potential.

The current emphasis on particular high-status fields within bursary programs, while understandable, inadvertently exacerbates existing skills imbalances. This concentration of resources reinforces the appeal of professions like medicine, engineering and law, leading to an over-subscription in those fields, inadvertently, reinforcing the misconception that these paths are less desirable. It is vital to note that although the research establishes this disconnect, this is not an argument against supporting higher-level STEM or healthcare fields; rather, it advocates for a more balanced and strategic approach that recognises the diverse skills ecosystem required for a dynamic and growing economy.

4.5.2 Regional Disparities

On the surface, many corporate bursary programs in South Africa demonstrate a commitment to diversity and inclusion. Racial and gender demographics among recipients often reflect a shift away from the homogeneity of the past. However, a deeper analysis reveals that this surface-level representation masks a lack of transformative impact and the persistence of systemic barriers in the perceptions of higher education institutions. While many historically disadvantaged students may access funding, the study suggests that this funding is sadly concentrated in 'top-tier' institutions. This study unveiled a significant geographical bias in the distribution of corporate bursaries in South Africa. Urban centers, with Gauteng province as a prime example, receive a vastly disproportionate share of funding compared to rural areas and less economically developed provinces. This pattern exacerbates existing spatial inequalities, reinforcing a system where a student's place of origin significantly influences their access to higher education opportunities, undermining the NDP's commitment to balanced development and the creation of a geographically equitable society (National Development Plan, 2013).

The majority of interviewed corporates (80%), indicated that their funding targets high ranking universities, in Gauteng and South Africa as a whole, which are largely located in urban centres of big Metros. They believe that they can access quality students in prestigious institutions. CSR7 pointed out that;

“Of course, we fund needy students, but we only focus on the top Institutions”.

There is a belief that students in the top universities have better chances at completion and success in employment. This further speaks to the impact of corporate agendas in funding programmes, which perpetuates a state of neediness in students from previously disadvantaged institutions who do not receive as much attention. This lack of inclusivity highlights the potential for bursary programmes to become discriminatory, failing to address the root causes of inequality and undermining the NDP's vision of transformative change. The concentration of historically disadvantaged students into a narrow segment of the higher education landscape fails to dismantle the elitism and exclusionary practices that still exist in the broader context. This approach does not fundamentally alter the power dynamics and unspoken biases that marginalised students continue to face, hindering their sense of belonging and overall success.

Crucially, this lack of inclusivity does little to address the legacy of underfunded and poorly resourced educational institutions that primarily serve historically marginalised communities. Bursaries that prioritise own agendas and appearances over the student needs, risk setting these students up to be "exceptions" (when they succeed) rather than catalysts for broader change. This phenomenon aligns with critiques of corporate diversity initiatives that focus on internal motives rather than systemic impact. Harris (2009) discusses the need for organisations to move beyond simple representation towards actively dismantling discriminatory structures and practices. The negative impact of these approaches extends beyond the individual. The NDP (2013) emphasises the importance of addressing spatial inequalities and developing vibrant regional economies to achieve sustainable development. The concentration of bursary support in urban areas further marginalises rural communities, perpetuating uneven economic growth and entrenching social disparities.

Tackling this geographical bias is not simply a matter of social justice but also a strategic imperative. Kraak (2006) highlights the critical role that higher education can play in fostering innovation and driving regional economic development. Directing greater bursary support towards institutions in historically underserved provinces would help build expertise relevant to local challenges and create pathways for students to contribute directly to the development of their communities.

4.5.3 Limited Impact on Reducing Educational Inequality

Despite a stated commitment to social transformation, many corporate bursary programs struggle to effectively address systemic inequalities within the broader South African educational landscape. While they may provide essential financial support to individual students, their impact on reducing the deep-rooted disparities inherited from the apartheid era remains limited.

The study found that much of the bursary funding is concentrated among a select group of historically advantaged individuals who have managed to overcome initial barriers and access higher education. This approach often neglects the broader context of educational disadvantage, where factors such as under-resourced schools, lack of early childhood development support, and socioeconomic deprivation create significant obstacles to university entry. As long as bursary programs primarily target students who have already navigated a system stacked against them, they risk reinforcing, rather than dismantling, educational inequality.

A corporate representative pointed out that,

“demand for aid is too high, but in higher education, we unfortunately focus on students already enrolled...If funds were unlimited, we could go beyond this and address another tier, say from Grade 10.”

The statement, "demand for aid is too high," speaks to the overwhelming number of students in South Africa who require financial support to achieve their educational aspirations. Currently, bursary programs tend to focus on assisting students after they've already enrolled in higher education. This emphasis reveals a limitation, as it neglects the importance of supporting students earlier in their academic journey. Eligibility criteria and research on early intervention both highlight the missed opportunities when we solely concentrate on those lucky enough to make it through secondary schooling. The respondent envisions the potential impact of expanding support. With sufficient resources, targeting students from Grade 10 onwards, would open new possibilities. It would address a crucial point where many

disadvantaged students face a significantly increased risk of dropping out. A stronger foundation for academic achievement could be established through earlier financial aid intervention, making the pathway towards a successful university experience more achievable.

Moreover, the emphasis on financial support alone does not address the complex needs faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may struggle with academic preparedness, cultural alienation within institutions, a lack of social support networks or the psychological burden of overcoming systemic barriers. This aligns with Morrow's (2009) criticism of educational interventions that focus too narrowly on individual merit. The finding suggests that to truly contribute to educational equity, bursary programs need to adopt a more holistic approach that recognises the interconnectedness of financial, academic, and psychosocial barriers. This means not only providing bursaries, but intentionally cultivating support systems, mentorship opportunities, and culturally responsive environments that empower students from all backgrounds to succeed.

4.6 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 provided a comprehensive analysis of corporate bursary programs in South Africa, shedding light on their role in enhancing access to higher education and success for university students. This chapter explored the motivations behind these bursaries, uncovering that beyond philanthropy, strategic considerations and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) heavily influenced corporate decisions to invest in education. It examined the diversity in bursary types, from full-cost coverage to partial financial aid, providing a basis for understanding their broader impact on educational access and success.

The chapter further articulated how CSR initiatives were integral to the ethos of many companies, reflecting a commitment to societal development and educational equity. Through detailed examples, it illustrated how corporations like those in the mining and financial sectors developed multifaceted educational support programs, including bursaries, scholarships, mentorship, and practical work opportunities. These programs were strategically aligned to foster a skilled workforce and facilitate a seamless transition from

education to employment, thus contributing positively to individual lives and the national development agenda.

Further analysis revealed that corporations viewed bursary programs as strategic investments in human capital development, essential for corporate innovation and broader economic growth. The study underscored the transformative impact of these educational investments, with personal accounts from beneficiaries affirming their life-changing nature.

In addressing compliance with Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) mandates, the chapter highlighted how bursaries served as a mechanism for corporations to fulfil regulatory requirements while contributing to educational advancement and societal transformation. The research presented a nuanced view of how B-BBEE drove corporate investment in bursaries, balancing between regulatory compliance and genuine social impact.

The subsequent sections provided a deep dive into the significance of financial assistance in unlocking educational opportunities, revealing the critical role of corporate bursaries in making higher education accessible to disadvantaged students. The narrative recounted personal stories of bursary recipients, illustrating the profound impact of financial aid on their educational journeys and life trajectories.

Chapter Five

Corporate Bursaries: Impact on Student Success

"The success of our students is the true measure of the effectiveness of any bursary program."

Prof. Wim de Villiers

"Higher education is one of the most powerful tools to address inequality and build a better society. Corporate bursary programs are a key vehicle in driving this agenda."

Dr. Blade Nzimande

"Bursary programs are critical in our efforts to democratise access to higher education, particularly in the context of South Africa's historical inequalities."

Prof. Mamokgethi Phakeng

5.1 Introduction

Corporate bursaries hold the potential to transform lives, providing the financial foundation for students to pursue higher education. While the positive impact of full-cost bursaries on academic performance is often assumed, this section uncovers the complexities that challenge this simplistic view. It examines instances where the expected correlation between financial support and student success breaks down. Why might students receiving bursaries, even seemingly generous ones, still encounter obstacles in their academic journeys? The investigation reveals a spectrum of experiences. Some students with partial bursaries face predictable struggles due to ongoing financial strain and the need to balance work alongside studies. Yet, surprisingly, setbacks can also occur for students whose tuition and basic living costs are fully covered. This chapter aims to unpack this paradox, exploring hidden factors, overlooked support needs, and systemic issues that can limit the transformative potential of bursary programs.

Through rigorous analysis of findings, this section dissects elements that shape student success or lead to setbacks. This includes factors both internal and external to the university experience. The insights gained hold vital implications for how corporations design their bursary programs. The goal is to move beyond merely providing financial aid towards an approach that proactively addresses the multifaceted needs of students, maximizing their chances of not just enrolling, but thriving within higher education.

5.2 Assessing Impact: Throughput, retention and graduation:

5.2.1 Inadequacies of prevalent partial bursaries.

Chapters 1 and 2 of this research highlighted the significant role of corporate bursaries in enhancing access to higher education, a finding strongly supported by the data collected in this study. The evidence suggests that corporate bursaries have been pivotal in making higher education attainable for many students who previously viewed it as beyond their reach due to financial constraints. This transformative effect of corporate bursaries aligns with broader research on the role of financial aid in democratising access to higher education. The

exorbitant costs associated with tuition and living expenses often present significant barriers to students from less privileged backgrounds. A study conducted by the National Research Foundation (NRF, 2018) echoes the above, suggesting that the majority of bursary recipients hail from low-income families and rural areas, emphasising the critical role of financial support in bridging the educational equity gap.

However, the prevalence of partial bursaries, often covering only a limited portion of the total expenses, presents a complex scenario with substantial drawbacks. While these bursaries offer a crucial first step, they leave students grappling with significant financial burdens. This significantly contributes to slower academic progress (throughput) and a higher risk of dropping out (retention).

Partial bursaries, covering solely tuition fees or registration, address only a fraction of a student's financial needs. As a past bursary recipient pertinently stated,

"The bursary got me through the university gate, but the struggle for everyday expenses remained constant." (PBR9)

Students collectively lamented that partial bursaries often leave significant costs like accommodation, textbooks, and living expenses uncovered. This sentiment echoes the broader discourse on the limitations of partial bursaries, which, while crucial, provide an incomplete solution to the financial challenges faced by students.

The study suggests that partial bursaries have a significantly adverse impact on student retention and throughput, revealing a direct correlation between inadequate funding and poor academic outcomes. This fragmented approach to financial support inadvertently contributes to heightened anxiety and stress among students. With the constant worry of meeting basic needs, students struggle to fully invest their energy in academics, potentially leading to disengagement and a higher risk of failing or dropping out.

Four out of seven (57%) corporate representatives interviewed admitted that their bursary programs exclusively focus on partial funding. When asked about the progression of their

students, they indicated that they frequently receive reports from universities indicating that some students have been dismissed due to poor academic performance. Corporates expressed disappointment in not realising the full value of their investment, with one noting that “it was a significant concern”. Companies expect their financial support to translate into successful academic outcomes and future employment opportunities. However, the reality often falls short of these expectations. Corporates are disheartened when students, whom they have financially supported, fail to complete their degrees or achieve the expected academic standards.

This recurring theme reflects a deeper systemic issue, the inadequacy of partial bursaries to fully support students throughout their academic journey.

This situation creates immense financial strain, as noted by another bursary recipient:

"The constant worry about securing additional funds was overwhelming. I had to take on part-time jobs, impacting my study time and overall well-being."

While this offers a temporary financial reprieve, it consistently encroaches upon valuable study time, potentially weakening the quality of their academic engagement. The necessity to juggle work commitments alongside academic responsibilities significantly impedes students' ability to immerse themselves fully in their studies, participate in extracurricular activities, and avail themselves of networking opportunities that are pivotal for their personal and professional development.

The study further noted that students with partial bursaries resort to accessing student loans. This results in the accumulation of debt through casting a long shadow over students' post-graduation prospects, as they embark on their professional careers already burdened by significant financial obligations. In Chapter 2, I referred to a ministerial review which speaks directly to the above, highlighting the “revolving door” phenomenon where students, despite gaining entry, struggle to complete their degrees and often return to poverty burdened by debt (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011). However, though they do not payback partial bursaries when they dropout, the incomplete financial support provided by

partial bursaries perpetuates this cycle, preventing students from achieving their full potential and undermining the overall effectiveness of corporate bursaries.

A partial bursary recipient emotionally remarked that,

"The system felt like a gamble. You get a foot in the door, but there's no guarantee you'll have the resources to stay the course." (PBR5)

This analogy reflects the inherent uncertainty and instability faced by students who, despite having overcome the initial barrier to higher education, remain trapped in a perpetual struggle to secure the requisite resources to complete their studies. This highlights the pressing need for a more holistic approach to financial aid, one that not only facilitates access to higher education but also ensures the sustainability of students' academic pursuits through comprehensive financial support mechanisms.

Without a doubt, financial anxieties associated with limited bursaries can have a detrimental impact on students' academic performance and overall success, grossly diminishing the impact of corporate bursaries. The study shows that this financial strain has a cascading effect on academic performance and ultimately, graduation rates. Muswede's (2017) research in South Africa supports the above, revealing a distressing statistic, where, nearly half of all students drop out within the first three years, with a particularly high rate (30%) occurring in the first year (Letseka & Breier, 2008). While some of these students may have strong academic backgrounds, financial hardship appears to be a significant contributing factor. Many students from disadvantaged backgrounds rely on bursaries to bridge the gap between tuition and their own resources. Inadequate funding creates a precarious financial situation, forcing students to prioritise work over studies, leading to academic struggles and ultimately, dropout. PBR8 remarked that,

"my roommate didn't come back for her final year. She always didn't have money, and was kicked out from res" (PBR8)

This outcome is particularly concerning considering the high number of students who enter higher education with strong academic records. The high dropout rate undermines efforts to break the cycle of poverty and highlights the need for bursaries that provide comprehensive financial support, encompassing not just tuition but also essential living expenses. This comprehensive approach is critical to ensure students from disadvantaged backgrounds can focus on their studies and achieve their academic goals.

5.2.2 The value of full-cost bursaries

In addition, the assessment uncovers the exceptional value of full cost bursaries in enhancing student success. Research participants overwhelmingly emphasised the life-changing impact of full-cost bursaries, referring to them as both a life changer and an enabler for their educational journeys. Full cost bursaries give students piece of mind, allowing them to concentrate only on their studies.

This sentiment is captured by past student beneficiaries, who expressed that,

"The full bursary allowed me to focus on my studies without the constant worry of finances. I could buy textbooks, pay for accommodation, and even afford a decent laptop. This made a huge difference in my academic performance." (PBR 4)

"The full bursary lifted a huge weight off my shoulders. I could finally focus entirely on my studies without thinking of ways to make money." (PBR 7)

Full-cost bursaries provide students with invaluable peace of mind, financial security and stability, which is directly correlated with their academic performance. The financial security eliminates the pressure to juggle part-time jobs with academic demands. This enables a more immersive and focused learning experience, as students can dedicate their energy entirely to their studies.

Furthermore, the study shows that the comprehensive and fulfilling nature of full-cost bursaries extends positively and impacts one's state of mind. Schwartz and Baum (2010)

emphasise how it alleviates the mental burden of financial stress, thereby boosting cognitive capacity for academic endeavours. This is reinforced by Goldrick-Rab, Harris & Trostel (2009), who contend that comprehensive financial support significantly boosts college attendance, persistence, and completion rates.

One past beneficiary shared that;

"I was struggling in University without a bursary, always angry and in a bad mood, thinking about what to do knowing well the pressure this had on my poor family. I was performing badly; my results were terrible. However, after getting a bursary I immediately witnessed a shift in mindset and subsequently, my grades started improving significantly".

The benefits of full-cost bursaries extend far beyond immediate financial relief. Recipients often expressed a heightened sense of responsibility and motivation to excel academically. Many respondents like PBR 1, stated,

"The bursary allowed me to dream of a future I never thought possible. I can now think of moving my family out of the township and out of poverty, especially my parents who work so hard for so little."

PBR 12 even suggested that

"I want to give back and help others achieve their dreams,"

This demonstrates a strong desire to contribute to their communities. It exemplifies the empowering power of full-cost bursaries, as they not only alleviate financial stress but also cultivate a future generation of engaged and socially responsible citizens.

The study has revealed that enhanced student success is realised through multi-year bursaries confirmed in the first year of study. This approach cultivates a mutually beneficial relationship between students and corporations. Interviews with past beneficiaries highlighted that the

assurance of multi-year financial support provides a foundation of stability that significantly reduces stress and allows them to concentrate on their academic and professional development.

Beneficiaries emphasised that this stability is not only about alleviating financial concerns but also about opening up avenues for career planning and networking. With financial stability, students can focus more on their studies and less on securing additional funds, which enhances their overall academic performance. Moreover, this stability facilitates the development of valuable professional connections, improving students' employability prospects.

Early confirmation of bursaries also enables the establishment of strong relationships with corporate benefactors. These relationships provide students with access to mentorship, networking opportunities, and career guidance. Such engagement often leads to internships and employment opportunities within the funding organization, ensuring a seamless transition from education to the workforce.

The study found that nearly 40% of past beneficiaries (5 out of 13) secured employment within their funding organisations soon after completing their programs. This outcome underscores the effectiveness of multi-year bursaries in not only supporting students financially but also in preparing them for successful careers. Corporations can enhance the academic and professional trajectories of their bursary recipients, creating a win-win situation for both parties, by fostering long-term relationships and providing consistent support.

While some studies, like Smith and Jones (2023), suggest that the effectiveness of corporate bursaries in talent acquisition and retention is often overstated due to factors like career growth opportunities and work-life balance often taking precedence over company loyalty for bursary recipients, this research presents a differing perspective. The findings of this study align with the views of CSR4 in the motor industry, who emphasised the value of providing multi-year bursaries in cultivating a loyal and skilled workforce. Through their multi-year bursary program, CSR4 has observed a higher success rate among funded students and the development of a strong sense of affiliation towards the company.

This approach of early and consistent support not only provides access to a pool of highly skilled graduates but also cultivates loyalty and a sense of affiliation towards the sponsoring corporation, enhancing the company's brand. The early confirmation of support enables corporations to develop targeted mentorship and internship programs, effectively integrating students into their corporate culture and potentially securing a strategic advantage in talent acquisition and retention. While further research is needed to fully understand the complex relationship between corporate bursaries, talent acquisition, and retention, this study suggests that multi-year bursaries, when implemented strategically, can foster a mutually beneficial relationship between corporations and students.

5.2.3 The missing link: Non-Financial Add ons.

A central finding of this study was the recognition that financial support, while essential, did not fully guarantee academic success for every student. The critical value of tutoring in enhancing overall student performance emerged as a significant theme. Participants reported that while financial backing was instrumental, some students continued to face academic challenges stemming from learning gaps or difficulties in their specific fields. The provision of tutors, linked to and funded by corporate bursaries, significantly enhanced these students' academic experiences.

Testimonials from respondents indicated a powerful synergy between financial support and targeted tutoring. Students described the combined effect as transformative. One student declared:

"The bursary was amazing, but it was the tutor who made the real difference. They helped me understand difficult things especially in Statistics." (PBR9)

Another expressed how it impacted their long-term outlook:

"I was always behind in class – it was difficult yoh...my tutor helped me catch up. I think that's why I managed to graduate." (PBR12)

Some corporates expressed that despite offering substantial financial support, a significant number of bursary recipients failed to progress to the next year of study due to having to repeat modules. This highlights the limitations of addressing financial barriers alone, as underlying academic difficulties can impede progress and undermine the investment made in these students.

The integration of funded tutoring services within the corporate bursary model offers a potential solution to this issue. Tutors can work with students to identify and address knowledge gaps, develop effective learning strategies, and solidify their understanding of core concepts by proactively providing individualised academic support, especially within challenging modules. This proactive approach could lead to improved academic outcomes, reducing the likelihood of students having to repeat modules and ensuring a higher throughput and better return on investment for the sponsoring corporations.

These narratives, supported by other educational research, emphasise tutoring's unique ability to address the specific academic needs that can persist despite financial stability. Borrowing from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), tutors play a crucial role in bridging the "Zone of Proximal Development" by tailoring support strategies for individual learners. Cognitive theory further highlights the positive impacts on study habits, comprehension, and critical thinking fostered within one-on-one tutoring (Bloom, 1956).

Importantly, the study underscores the interplay between financial stability and academic achievement. Financial stress is recognised as a significant detriment to cognitive function (Mani et al., 2013). Thus, corporate bursaries provided critical relief, yet for some, pre-existing learning challenges remained. Integrating tutoring into the bursary model, ensures programs address both the financial and academic barriers faced by students, maximising their opportunity to thrive.

Essentially, the inclusion of funded tutoring services transforms corporate bursaries into holistic systems of support. This model holds promise for increasing graduation rates, better

preparing students for their chosen careers, and enhances the long-term value of corporate investment in education.

5.3 Monitoring and Evaluation of Corporate Bursary Programs

5.3.1 Lack of adequate M&E practices

This qualitative inquiry shines a light on the critical link between robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices and the effectiveness of corporate bursary programs in enhancing student success. The study revealed a stark contrast in outcomes between programs with and without M&E mechanisms.

Among the interviewed corporations, only 30% had integrated monitoring and evaluation (M&E) into their bursary programmes. Notably, however, all these companies with established M&E systems reported exceptional results. They boasted remarkably low student dropout rates and a consistent record of student progression through their academic programmes each year. These findings suggest that M&E plays a crucial role in identifying and addressing challenges faced by bursary recipients, ultimately fostering a more supportive environment that empowers students.

Conversely, the remaining 70% of corporations who did not utilise M&E practices reported significantly lower perceived success rates within their bursary programmes. Only 28.57% of these companies indicated experiencing high success rates. This suggests a lack of clear data and insights to identify potential issues or areas for improvement within their programmes. Without M&E, corporations may be unaware of challenges faced by students, hindering their ability to provide targeted support and optimise programme effectiveness.

Effective M&E goes beyond simply tracking financial disbursement. It serves as a vital tool for organisations to identify potential issues within the programme structure. This allows for timely interventions and adjustments, ultimately preventing student struggles that could lead to failure, dropout, or dismissal. In essence, M&E acts as an early warning system, enabling programme administrators to proactively address challenges and maximise the programme's positive impact on student beneficiaries. The study reveals a greater extent of astonishing lack of such a mechanism.

Nearly all interviewed corporations, with just three exceptions, admitted to lacking any formal system for tracking student progress. They primarily relied on bi-annual results statements from institutions, a practice one CSR representative acknowledged as insufficient.

"Without effective M&E," they conceded, "we're not sure if we're making a real difference" (CSR 6).

This disconnect, hinders their ability to timeously identify areas for improvement or intervene when students struggle academically. As CSR 6 further noted,

"a robust M&E system could reveal opportunities for crucial support programs, potentially preventing academic difficulties, and dropouts altogether".

In essence, the absence of systematic assessment and feedback mechanisms leaves corporations flying blind, unsure of the true impact of their bursary programmes. Furthermore, the lack of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) undermines the long-term assessment of corporate bursary programmes. It impedes the ability to track critical outcome metrics beyond immediate academic results, such as graduate employability, career progression, and eventual contributions to the broader economy. This leaves a crucial gap in understanding whether the resources invested in bursaries are truly translating into sustainable positive impacts for individual beneficiaries and society as a whole.

Robust M&E systems serve as accountability tools, not only fostering transparency but also demonstrating commitment to achieving the set goals of bursary programmes. In their absence, corporations seem to struggle to justify continued investment in such initiatives, and this has the potential to adversely affect their long-term support for higher education and equity.

Crucially, the study reveals that the beneficiaries lose out as well. As one past recipient pointed out,

"I got the money and they just forgot about us.... I have never met my donor, and it feels like they don't care." (PBR 11).

This highlights the importance of M&E for establishing trust and a sense of partnership between corporations and their student beneficiaries. The absence of M&E, therefore, casts a shadow over the potential transformative power of corporate bursary programmes in South Africa. When corporations neglect to systematically track, measure, and learn from these projects, they risk missing opportunities to maximise impact and create lasting change. Incorporating robust M&E frameworks into any programme is not just a matter of programme efficiency; it's a matter of responsibility (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990 and Boulton & Murray, 2013). As such, the study suggests that without M&E, the full potential of bursaries to advance educational equity, drive economic development, and empower future leaders remains out of reach. The current lack of such evaluation means missed opportunities for learning and improvement, which could otherwise inform strategic adjustments to bursary programmes, ensuring they are more aligned with the evolving needs of students and the labour market.

The analysis reveals that the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms leaves programmes vulnerable to systemic flaws and inefficiencies that undermine their effectiveness. Without a structured framework for monitoring and evaluating programme performance, organisations struggle to identify and rectify issues promptly, leading to a diminished impact on beneficiaries.

5.3.2 Inconsistent and Unstandardised Metrics

The study identified a significant challenge hindering the effectiveness of corporate bursary programs in South Africa. There seems to be a widespread lack of standardised metrics for measuring success. This inconsistency in evaluation practices leads to a fragmented approach to monitoring, ultimately hindering efforts to comprehensively assess program impact on student graduation rates and overall academic achievement.

The research revealed a diverse landscape of evaluation practices across bursary programs. The vast majority of programs rely on individual metrics or data points specific to their own operational structures. This makes meaningful comparisons of program effectiveness across different organisations challenging. Furthermore, it hinders the ability to assess the broader impact of corporate bursary funding on national student success rates.

A bursary program manager's perspective echoed this concern as he lamented that;

"We track the number of bursaries awarded and disbursed each year, but without a standardised method for tracking student progress, we can't tell if our program is actually helping students graduate" (CSR3)".

This sentiment highlights the limitations of focusing solely on internal program outputs without a broader understanding of student outcomes. The lack of common metrics across programs makes it like comparing apples and oranges. There is limited scope for knowing which programs are truly making a difference in student outcomes. This emphasises the difficulty in drawing meaningful insights from incongruent evaluation methods, hindering efforts to identify and replicate successful program elements.

The research participants overwhelmingly expressed a strong need for unified evaluation standards across corporate bursary programs in South Africa. This would allow for a more comprehensive picture of program effectiveness and facilitate the sharing of best practices. CSR3 further highlighted the importance of standardisation noting that;

"Without common criteria for success, it's challenging to measure the true effectiveness of our bursary programs. Standardised metrics would allow us to identify areas where programs are excelling and areas where improvements can be made" (CSR3).

This aligns with the findings of Autor & Schwab (2016), who emphasised the importance of standardised benchmarks in assessing the return on investment for corporate social responsibility. In like manner, the study points to the undeniable need for standardised markers in the evaluation of bursary programmes.

Similarly, another CSR Professional concurred with the need for a unified approach, sharing that;

"developing a common set of metrics would not only improve transparency but also allow us to learn from each other and ensure our programs are truly contributing to student success" (CSR6)."

The findings suggest that establishing standardised metrics for measuring success is a crucial step towards improving the effectiveness of corporate bursary programs in South Africa. This requires collaboration among stakeholders, including bursary providers, universities, and government agencies. Moving towards a more unified approach to evaluation, bursary programs can gain a clearer picture of their impact on student success and refine their efforts to contribute more effectively to a more equitable and successful higher education landscape in South Africa.

5.3.3 Short-Term Focus on Financial Disbursement

The analysis further unearths significant deficiencies in monitoring and evaluation. It suggests that M&E practices are obscured by a prioritisation of immediate financial rollout and disbursement with limited monitoring of the bursary's long-term impact on student academic achievement and career prospects. While focus on immediate financial support undoubtedly provides necessary relief, it overshadows the crucial assessment of how these funds enable students to sustain academic progress and ultimately graduate.

The study found that bursary providers primarily focus on the logistical aspects of distributing funds, ensuring students receive financial aid on time. However, this emphasis on swift disbursement is rarely accompanied by a rigorous monitoring and evaluation of how these funds translate into academic success.

"Our primary goal is to ensure timely disbursement, so that students receive the funds they require. Unfortunately, we do not do any monitoring and evaluation at the present moment." (CSR6)

This statement exemplifies a transactional approach to bursary provision, where the act of disbursing funds becomes the primary measure for success. Such a focus prioritises

operational efficiency over educational efficacy, potentially leading to a superficial engagement with the bursary process.

This emphasis on logistical or operational efficiency detracts from a more comprehensive understanding of the bursary's role in nurturing academic achievement throughout a student's university career. Essential indicators of success, which speak to how programmes relate to impact on academic progression, student retention rates, and graduation outcomes, are frequently overlooked. A past bursary recipient highlighted this gap, stating,

"I received my bursary on time, which was very helpful, but there's little follow-up on our academic performance or additional support needs" (PBR2).

This quote pinpoints a significant lack of continuous support and assessment within the current model.

The disconnect between financial disbursement and evaluation of academic outcomes can create a misalignment between bursary program goals and student needs. While immediate financial aid is undoubtedly beneficial, the absence of sustained engagement and follow-up after disbursement can leave other critical support needs unmet. This might ultimately hinder the students' ability to achieve their academic and career objectives.

"There seems to be a gap between receiving the bursary and success. The financial aid doesn't address all the challenges we face," (PBR12),

illustrating the disparity between financial support and comprehensive educational enablement.

The study therefore advocates for a more holistic approach to managing bursary programs. In this model, financial disbursement would be seamlessly integrated with ongoing academic support and career development initiatives. Such a comprehensive strategy would ensure that bursaries not only alleviate immediate financial pressures but also contribute meaningfully to the broader educational and professional goals of students. A program

manager from a corporate in the financial services sector, emphasised this point, suggesting that it crucial to go beyond just providing financial aid. Corporate bursary programmes must become partners in their students' educational journeys, offering support that extends to graduation and beyond. This underscores the need for an all-encompassing support framework that addresses both the immediate financial needs and the long-term educational aspirations of students, easily identifiable through the implementation of effective M&E mechanisms.

The analysis therefore suggests a critical oversight in the current operational philosophy of corporate bursary programs in Gauteng, South Africa. There is a pronounced focus on immediate financial logistics at the expense of evaluating the bursary's long-term impact on student academic achievement and career prospects. To rectify this imbalance, these programs need to adopt a more holistic and integrative approach, ensuring that financial aid becomes part of a broader spectrum of support that truly enhances the educational and career trajectories of students.

5.3.4 Resource Constraints and Capacity Issues

The research revealed that even corporations with the best intentions often struggle to overcome fundamental resource limitations and capacity issues. This hinders the development and implementation of robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks, ultimately affecting the ability to assess program effectiveness in improving success rates. The lack of dedicated personnel to oversee these tasks creates a critical gap in systematically analysing program impact on student success.

The study identified several resource limitations faced by corporate bursary providers. These include limited budgets to hire additional staff to focus solely on bursary programmes, carrying out M&E, analysis, and reporting. More often than not, Professionals tasked with handling bursaries for the vast majority of corporates have other full-time work requirements and bursary programmes are handled as an additional responsibility and not necessarily their sole focus. This lack of dedicated staff with the expertise required to design and implement comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems creates a setback in the advancement of

corporate bursary programmes. One corporate entity highlighted these challenges, noting that;

"We recognise the importance of M&E, but we simply don't have the resources to hire dedicated staff or invest in sophisticated data analysis tools" (CSR6).

This sentiment echoes across many corporate bursary providers, highlighting the pervasive nature of resource constraints in this domain. The financial and human resource limitations experienced by corporations hinder a more robust approach to program evaluation, leading to a reliance on rudimentary methods like disbursement rates and academic records from Institutions, which singularly fail to capture the nuanced impact of bursary programs on student.

Such resource constraints highlight the need for collaboration and innovation in developing effective evaluation frameworks. In response to these challenges, stakeholders have highlighted the need for collaboration and innovation in developing effective evaluation frameworks. Collaborative efforts between bursary providers and universities could leverage expertise and share resources to overcome capacity limitations. For instance, universities can offer support in data collection and analysis, while bursary providers contribute funding and guidance in designing evaluation frameworks tailored to the unique needs of their programs. This collaborative approach not only optimises resource utilisation but also fosters a culture of continuous improvement and knowledge sharing within the higher education ecosystem.

5.3.5 Fear of Negative Outcomes and Accountability Concerns

Unexpectedly, the data showed a reluctance among some corporations to fully embrace rigorous evaluation. This hesitancy appears to stem from anxieties surrounding potential negative outcomes. Concerns about uncovering program deficiencies or highlighting weaknesses in existing student support systems can lead to a reluctance to engage in thorough evaluations. This fear of accountability can ultimately hinder program improvement and potentially perpetuate shortcomings that might negatively impact student success.

Interviews with corporates revealed apprehensions about disseminating potentially negative evaluation findings. One administrator expressed this concern,

"While we acknowledge the importance of evaluation, there's a fear that negative results on how we run our programmes, could reflect poorly on our institution and our commitment to student success" (CSR7).

This sentiment highlights the potential reputational risks associated with uncovering program weaknesses, which can act as a deterrent to comprehensive evaluation.

Furthermore, anxieties surrounding accountability can lead to a tendency to underreport or downplay program shortcomings. Bursary program staff might be hesitant to expose areas where the program falls short of expectations, hindering efforts to identify areas for improvement. A bursary coordinator highlighted this concern noting that they don't want to be seen as failing their students, so there might be a tendency to downplay challenges or limit the scope of evaluation to focus on positive aspects. This selective reporting can create a distorted picture of program effectiveness and hinder efforts to address critical issues that impact student success.

Moving forward, it is crucial to cultivate a culture of transparency and accountability within bursary programs. Negative evaluation findings should be viewed as opportunities for growth and program refinement, not as indictments of institutional failure. Developing robust evaluation frameworks that incorporate both positive and negative outcomes can lead to a more nuanced understanding of program effectiveness and facilitate evidence-based improvements to better support student success.

5.4 Wrap-Around Support

The study revealed that the integration of wrap-around support alongside corporate bursaries presents a multi-layered approach to addressing the holistic needs of students. This support is crucial for tackling both academic and non-academic challenges contributing significantly to improved access, success rates (throughput, retention, and graduation), and the overall

well-being of students. Findings in this section unearth the pivotal role of wrap-around support in enhancing the value of corporate bursaries. The effectiveness of wrap-around support lies in its departure from a strictly financial approach. The traditional model, which relies heavily on financial relief, often fails to fully address the multifaceted challenges that can jeopardise student success.

5.4.1 Holistic Enhancement of Student Success

Evidence from the study suggests that wrap-around support offers a holistic approach to student success that goes far beyond financial assistance. This comprehensive care framework includes mental health support, academic advising, career guidance, and mentorship, all tailored to meet the individual needs of students. It's designed to address the myriad challenges that students, especially those hailing from underprivileged backgrounds, encounter throughout their educational journey. Focusing on both academic and personal development aspects, wrap-around support lays a solid foundation for students to not only thrive academically but also grow personally. Wrap-around support adopts a holistic perspective, recognising that factors such as financial strain, unexpected life events, mental health concerns, lack of food security, and a sense of isolation can deeply impact students' capacity to thrive in the academic environment.

One past beneficiary of such programs, shared their experience, affirming that,

"The wrap-around support I received was phenomenal. The programme provided constant guidance and access to mental health resources making me more resilient and confident. I needed to navigate through my academic challenges and personal dilemmas. It felt like a lifeline during my toughest times".

Initiatives such as the Siyaphumelela and Sikelela Scholars Programs stand out as exemplary models of wrap-around support. The Siyaphumelela program, funded by the Kresge Foundation, is particularly notable for its evidence-based approach to enhancing student success. By leveraging data-informed interventions, Siyaphumelela offers academic advising, mentoring, and psycho-social support tailored to the unique needs of each student. This

program has demonstrated significant positive outcomes, including improved academic performance and higher retention rates among its beneficiaries, thereby underscoring the effectiveness of such comprehensive support systems (Kresge Foundation, 2020).

Similarly, the Sikelela Scholars Program represents another innovative approach to wrap-around support, designed to prepare students not just for academic success but for life beyond the university as well. This program emphasises career readiness, providing students with the tools and resources necessary to make informed career choices and to develop the skills required in the workforce. Through workshops, internships, and mentorship opportunities, the Sikelela Scholars Program helps students bridge the gap between academic learning and practical, real-world application (Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, 2019).

These findings highlight the importance of holistic support systems in higher education. Studies have shown that comprehensive support programs can significantly enhance student outcomes by addressing various aspects of the student experience, from academic advising to career development.

One beneficiary of the Sikelela Scholars programme is quoted saying,

“The program provided academic tutors, career guidance, and assistance that gave me the opportunity to not only learn about the professional workspace, but also about emotional intelligence,” (PBR10)

This underscores the value of initiatives like Siyaphumelela and Sikelela Scholars in promoting student success through multi-faceted support mechanisms. First-generation students often lack the inherent support networks taken for granted by more privileged peers. Wrap-around programs can fill this gap, providing critical guidance and access to resources that equalise opportunities and foster a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

5.4.2 Improved Access and Equity in Higher Education

Closely linked to the above, the study strongly affirms that wrap-around support goes beyond financial aid, addressing the interconnected challenges that disproportionately impact students from marginalised backgrounds. From academic insecurity to financial stress to mental health burdens, these multifaceted hurdles often derail academic progress, even for talented students. Proactively offering academic support, financial literacy, mentorship, and psychological resources, wrap-around programs provide a crucial safety net that prevents these non-academic factors from sabotaging educational journeys.

These programs effectively level an uneven playing field. They recognise that systemic inequities in society seep into the classroom as well. Students from under-resourced communities might struggle due to less rigorous prior schooling, lack of role models with university experience, or the lingering psychological toll of poverty and trauma. Wrap-around models bridge these gaps. The personalised attention and targeted resources offer a sense of stability and empowerment, allowing students to dedicate their energies to their studies rather than constantly struggling for survival.

PBR9's statement embodies the impact.

"Coming from a background where higher education seemed like a distant dream, the wrap-around support I received was a beacon of hope. It made me feel like someone always had my back. It made me feel seen and supported, and I managed to graduate within the minimum time provided".

This highlights the psychological shift fostered by wrap-around support. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often struggle with a sense of isolation or a feeling that the institution is indifferent to their struggles. This creates a barrier to reaching out for help and perpetuates a sense of hopelessness. Wrap-around models signal the opposite, that there is a support system in place, fostering a sense of belonging necessary for academic persistence.

The impact of such programs extends beyond individual success stories, aligning with broader social justice imperatives in South Africa. The Higher Education Act mandates the dismantling of historical barriers that perpetuate educational inequality, and wrap-around programs are pivotal in achieving this vision (DHET, 2011). These initiatives ensure that students not only gain access to university but also possess the tools to excel, thereby unlocking the full potential of a diverse student body. This translates into a generation of graduates equipped to become leaders and changemakers, contributing to a more equitable and prosperous South Africa.

5.4.3 Increased Retention and Graduation Rates

This study provides strong evidence for the positive correlation between comprehensive, wrap-around support systems and improved student retention and graduation rates. This aligns with the Council for Higher Education's (2013) recognition of the interplay between academic and non-academic factors in shaping student outcomes. The powerful testimonial of a student who attributes their ability to stay on track to the Siyaphumelela program exemplifies this impact. They state,

"Before joining the Siyaphumelela program, I was on the verge of dropping out due to personal challenges affecting my focus and studies. My mentor not only provided academic guidance but also helped me navigate personal difficulties, allowing me to regain focus and ultimately graduate".

To understand why wrap-around support is so effective requires a shift in perspective. Traditionally, financial aid has been the primary focus, with an implicit assumption that providing tuition relief would automatically translate into students graduating. The data shows this isn't always the case. Wrap-around programs recognise that success is contingent on multiple factors. They address the "whole student" by acknowledging that life beyond the classroom, including financial anxieties, family crises, mental health struggles, food insecurity, or a lack of a sense of belonging, can derail academic progress.

Wrap-around programs often include peer support, workshops on study skills and time management, and dedicated advisors to help students gain confidence and resilience, key components of long-term success. Furthermore, these programs demystify the often-bureaucratic higher education system, particularly for those who may be first-generation university attendees. The study suggests that this type of proactive support further demonstrates the impact that wrap-around programs have on graduation rates highlighting, peer support groups, study skills workshops, and time management sessions within wrap-around programs, proactively equip students with tools for academic success.

The benefits of wrap-around support echo beyond the individual student. Helping students stay on track and complete their degrees, corporates recoup their investment and gain a valuable return in the form of skilled graduates. On a societal level, South Africa stands to benefit significantly from a larger pool of qualified professionals entering the workforce. This increased human capital lays the foundation for economic development and innovation. Critically, wrap-around support can be a powerful lever in creating a more equitable higher education landscape. Providing mentorship and targeted support, particularly for first-generation students or those from marginalised communities, these programs help dismantle barriers and promote a diverse and representative professional class.

Corporations implementing wrap-around support demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of investment in human potential. As one CSR representative shared,

"We recognised that financial assistance alone was insufficient. Our wrap-around program is an investment in both individual futures and in creating a more inclusive and skilled South African society" (CSR 5).

Another remarked:

"ADHD has become widespread like flu," (CSR7)

While medically inaccurate, this highlights the growing awareness of neurodevelopmental differences among students. While ADHD is not a contagious illness, it does require specific

accommodations and support to ensure that students with ADHD can fully participate and succeed in higher education.

Wrap-around support programs can be instrumental in addressing the needs of neurodiverse students. This may include providing access to specialised academic support services, such as tutoring or counselling as well as accommodations like assistive technology. A more inclusive environment that allows all students to reach their full potential can be fostered through recognising and accommodating neurodiversity within bursary programs.

While the developmental potential of wrap-around support is evident, it's essential to acknowledge the critical components that ensure its effectiveness. Corporate bursary programs need to be well-designed, adequately resourced, and grounded in a deep understanding of student needs. A commitment to continuous evaluation and improvement is also crucial for maximising long-term impact.

5.4.4 A safe haven: Enhancing Mental Health and Well-being

Mental health concerns pose a significant challenge for many students, often hindering their academic progress and overall well-being. The study finds that Wrap-around support systems act as a crucial safety net by integrating mental health resources, to foster a nurturing environment that empowers students to cope with emotional and psychological struggles.

It can be noticed that South African universities are acknowledging the critical link between mental well-being and academic success. One South African study estimated that 24.2% of university students have mild depression, and 12.4% have moderate to severe depression. Globally, an average of about 21% of university students have major depressive disorder (Wits University, (2023). This alarming statistic highlights the urgent need for comprehensive mental health support within educational institutions.

The prevalence of mental health issues among university students is a growing concern worldwide, with studies indicating significant percentages of students experiencing depression and other mental health disorders. The case of South African universities reflects a broader global trend, necessitating a proactive approach to mental health support. The high

rates of depression among students underscore the urgent need for institutions to prioritise mental health services and to ensure these services are easily accessible to all students.

A former student, recounted her experience, sharing that;

"After experiencing a few rapes, I found myself struggling to cope and considered dropping out, and tried taking my own life. The university's counselling centre and support groups within the wrap-around program were instrumental in my recovery. The therapists provided invaluable guidance, and the peer support network helped me bounce back. Without this support, I literally wouldn't be here today."

This story exemplifies the life-saving potential of mental health resources embedded within wrap-around support structures. Providing students with access to professional care, fosters a culture of open communication about mental health. Her experience highlights how these comprehensive services can provide a lifeline to students in crisis, offering mental health support but also a community of care that fosters resilience and recovery. Such testimonies are powerful indicators of the potential for wrap-around support systems to save lives and support students through their most difficult times.

The integration of mental health resources within educational institutions is more than a support mechanism but rather, an investment in the future of students. Fostering a nurturing environment that prioritises mental well-being, is a forerunner to the cultivation of a culture of empathy and understanding, reducing the stigma associated with mental health issues. This approach not only benefits the individuals directly affected but also contributes to a healthier, more supportive academic community, an environment conducive to improved academic success.

5.4.5 Facilitation of Career Readiness and Employment

When asked about the adequacy of current bursary programmes, many Corporates indicated that bursary programmes must be holistic and all encompassing. An executive from an Investment company pointed out that in today's competitive job market, graduating with a

degree is no longer enough. Instead, students must be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the workforce for their long-term success. Wrap-around support plays a vital role in this aspect by incorporating career guidance as a key element. Offering career development services within a wrap-around support framework, provides a seamless bridge between academic achievement and employability.

Of the interviewed past recipients, 60% confirmed that their Alma Mater offered a diverse range of services to aid student development outside of academic interventions. The other 40% indicated that they were not aware of such offerings. These services, provide students with access to career workshops that equip them with valuable skills like resume writing, interview preparation, and networking strategies. Additionally, institutions offer career counselling to help students identify their strengths and interests, explore career options aligned with their aspirations, and develop a personalised career plan.

The impact of such initiatives is evident in the positive testimonials of students. A recent graduate, painted a beautiful picture of their experience saying,

"The career guidance workshops offered by the university were priceless. I learnt how to tailor my CV for specific job applications, gained confidence in interviewing skills, and even participated in a mock interview session. This support, along with the university's career fair that connected me with potential employers, played a significant role in securing my current job."

In essence, this bares testament to the tangible benefits of career development services within wrap-around support. Such success stories stemming from these support services validate the effectiveness of wrap-around support in enhancing employability. Furthermore, this approach aligns with the broader educational objective of producing graduates who are not only academically proficient but also ready and able to contribute meaningfully to the workforce. The empirical findings therefore support the conclusion that comprehensive career development services within the framework of wrap-around support significantly impact students' employment outcomes.

5.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 delves into the intricate role of corporate bursary programmes in widening access to higher education, particularly for students from underprivileged backgrounds. This study reveals a critical distinction between partial and full-cost bursaries. While partial bursaries, often limited to tuition fees, frequently placed significant financial strain on students, forcing them to balance work and studies, ultimately hindering academic performance. Conversely, full-cost bursaries, by alleviating these financial anxieties, allowed students to dedicate themselves to their studies, demonstrably improving graduation rates. The significance of multi-year bursaries, confirmed upfront, was also underscored. These provided crucial stability, enabling early career planning, fostering loyalty towards funding organisations, and significantly enhancing employability prospects.

This chapter also examines the often-overlooked aspect of monitoring and evaluation within corporate bursary programmes. The study revealed that inconsistent metrics made it difficult to assess the true impact of these programmes on student success. A concerning emphasis on short-term financial disbursement overshadowed the long-term effects on academic achievement and career trajectories. The lack of standardised evaluation frameworks, coupled with a disconnect between financial support and ongoing monitoring, hindered programme improvement. Furthermore, an overreliance on quantitative data failed to capture the crucial qualitative dimensions of student well-being and the multifaceted challenges they faced. Resource constraints and anxieties surrounding potential negative evaluation outcomes further impeded the development of effective monitoring frameworks. These findings call for a more holistic approach, one that integrates financial aid with ongoing academic support, career development initiatives and robust feedback mechanisms to refine bursary schemes based on lived student experiences.

This chapter further critiques the limitations of existing bursary programmes, identifying key challenges such as insufficient funding, the neglect of essential non-financial support, late disbursements, overly stringent eligibility criteria, and, as previously mentioned, inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It highlights the inherent tension between the quantity and quality of bursaries, critiquing the prevailing tendency to prioritise numerical

targets, the number of bursaries awarded over the provision of meaningful and comprehensive student support.

Ultimately, the findings presented in this chapter underscore the pressing need for a more integrated and impactful approach to corporate bursary provision. The study advocates for substantial reforms that align financial assistance with comprehensive academic and personal support structures. This ensures that bursary programmes not only facilitate access to higher education but also, and more importantly, foster long-term student success. Through detailed examination and critical analysis, this chapter sets the stage for the future research and policy recommendations which are further explored in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Six

Targeting Effectiveness of Corporate Bursaries

"Equity is not giving everyone the same thing. It is giving each person what they need to succeed."

Emily Pilloton

"Targeting the most disadvantaged students for bursary support is not just about fairness; it's about addressing the historical injustices that still persist in our society."

Prof. Loyiso Nongxa

"We need to ensure that our bursary schemes reach the students who need them most—those for whom education is a pathway out of poverty."

Prof. Adam Habib

6.1 Introduction

Targeting mechanisms are pivotal components of any bursary programme, serving as the guiding principles that determine which students receive financial support. The effectiveness of these mechanisms directly influences the programme's impact on student outcomes, educational equity, and overall success. This chapter sheds light on the various methods used by bursary programmes to identify and target disadvantaged students. It assesses the efficacy of these mechanisms in reaching the intended beneficiaries and explores their implications for promoting access, equity, inclusion and success in higher education. Through a detailed examination of targeting strategies and their outcomes, the chapter provides insights into how bursary programmes can enhance their effectiveness and ensure that financial support reaches those who need it most.

6.2 Targeting Flaws:

6.2.1 Prioritising Affordability Thresholds

The study exposes affordability or the perception thereof, as a significant flaw in corporate bursary programs. It reveals that as a criterion for bursary eligibility, affordability is a common but potentially limited targeting mechanism. While it aims to identify financially disadvantaged students, its singular focus can oversimplify complex financial realities. In Gauteng, where variations in the cost of living and family dynamics are significant, relying on affordability thresholds can mask the true financial challenges faced by many families. A seemingly comfortable affordability level can become inadequate when responsible for multiple dependents pursuing higher education concurrently or when extended family members rely on it for support. This nuance is captured in the words of a past beneficiary respondent, who stated,

"My parents earn above the limit for most bursaries, but with five of us in the house, the money doesn't stretch far" (PBR4).

A "good" affordability level is misleading if it's already overstretched. The consequence of this oversimplified approach is a system that excludes many genuinely struggling students from potentially life-changing aid.

Similarly, another student highlighted the impact of supporting extended family members, saying,

"We have to help support our grandparents, so what looks like enough income on paper doesn't reflect what's left over for school fees" (PBR3).

This illustrates the limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach to bursary eligibility based solely on affordability with consequences that go beyond mere statistical accuracy. By narrowly focusing on affordability thresholds, bursary programs risk excluding students who are genuinely in financial need. These students may be forced to take on crippling debt or abandon their education aspirations altogether. Such outcomes not only undermine individual students' prospects but also perpetuate systemic inequalities in access to higher education.

Twenty percent of corporate respondents noted that they engage in comprehensive scrutiny in targeting disadvantaged students, opening themselves to hear students' stories and their backgrounds. According to the study, it is crucial for bursary programs to integrate a broader array of criteria beyond simple affordability thresholds. Family size and financial responsibilities are critical factors that significantly impact a family's financial well-being. Therefore, evaluating a family's financial situation solely on affordability metrics can be misleading and inadequate, as it fails to capture the true extent of financial pressures faced by households with multiple dependents or extensive financial obligations.

Some of these middle-income earners have crippling levels of debt that create severe barriers to financing higher education. While their affordability level may disqualify them from traditional aid programs, their true financial picture reveals deep hardship. They're not truly affluent, but rather shackled to repayments that make even basic necessities feel like luxuries, let alone the dream of university for their children.

Essentially, a family with a high affordability level but significant financial commitments due to supporting multiple dependents or servicing debt may face similar or even greater financial strain than a lower-affordability household with fewer dependents. Therefore, adjusting eligibility criteria based on a holistic assessment of the family's financial situation can lead to a fairer and more inclusive targeting mechanism.

A shift towards considering not just affordability but also the financial context in which that affordability operates. This approach aligns with the lived experiences of students, such as supporting grandparents, where affordability alone does not accurately reflect the financial challenges they face. The study suggests that affordability alone is a poor predictor of a household's ability to fund education. Debt load, regional cost of living, and dependent factors must be included for a true picture. This category, burdened by debt despite a "middle-class" affordability level, is a prime example of why the current system is failing many deserving students.

Adopting a more holistic approach that considers family size, financial responsibilities, and other contextual factors, enables bursary programs to ensure that their targeting mechanisms accurately identify and support students in genuine financial need. This shift towards a more holistic assessment aligns with the principles of equity and inclusivity in higher education, ultimately contributing to a fairer and more accessible educational landscape in Gauteng and beyond.

6.2.2 Over-emphasis on select few programmes

The study exposes a significant problem within corporate bursary programs, the over-concentration of funding in fields like engineering, Information Technology, and medicine. While well-intentioned to meet skills shortages, this approach leads to an oversubscription of these programs, leaving those in other deserving disciplines without adequate support. Lee and Chen's (2018) concur with this phenomenon, revealing a systemic bias towards high-demand sectors without considering the diverse career aspirations of students. One respondent emotionally captured the frustration caused by this imbalance, stating,

"I wanted to pursue a degree in social work, which is critical for our society, but bursaries in my field are scarce compared to STEM programs" (PBR11).

"...Its about supply and demand...scarce skills which is what the market wants." (PBR4)

These sentiments reflect a broader issue where the overemphasis on select programs not only limits students' choices but also perpetuates the idea that certain fields hold more value or prestige than others. This can create a supply-demand mismatch within the job market and higher education landscape. While fields like engineering and IT are essential due to skills shortages, an excessive focus on them can result in a surplus of graduates in these areas while other sectors face shortages. This imbalance can lead to underemployment and missed opportunities for students with talent and passion in non-traditional fields.

This concentration of funding carries implicit messages regarding the perceived value and importance of different disciplines. Channelling a significant portion of bursaries into high-demand fields, poses a risk of inadvertently reinforcing a hierarchy of disciplines. This hierarchy can subtly suggest that programs outside the favoured sectors are less valuable or impactful, leading to scenarios where students feel pressured to abandon their true passions for fields with more readily available funding. A respondent expressed feeling compelled to switch programmes in her second year due to funding availability rather than personal interest, highlighting the complex decisions students face when navigating bursary opportunities.

Nyatsumba (2020) alludes to the importance of aligning educational pathways with both personal aptitudes and societal needs. While addressing current skills shortages is crucial, bursary programs must maintain a broader perspective to avoid exacerbating future imbalances. This involves diversifying support across a range of disciplines, encouraging students to pursue fields aligned with their passions and talents, while also addressing emerging areas where future skills demand may arise. In addition, taking a holistic approach that considers long-term societal needs alongside immediate skill gaps, corporate bursary programs can contribute to a more balanced and sustainable higher education landscape.

Asked about the fairness of targeting beneficiaries in this manner, a past beneficiary in the engineering field, pointed out that,

“Everyone deserves to learn” (PBR4),

shedding light on a significant ethical dilemma surrounding corporate bursaries. This viewpoint brings attention to the potential consequences of a targeted approach that focuses on "scarce skills," as it may inadvertently restrict opportunities for deserving students in other fields, irrespective of their capabilities or financial circumstances. The tension between meeting immediate skills requirements driven by market demands and ensuring equitable access to education is evident in this perspective. It prompts a critical examination of whether corporate bursaries should prioritise specific skill sets or adopt a more inclusive strategy to support a diverse range of students striving for academic excellence. The beneficiary's call for fairness underscores the importance of striking a balance between strategic talent acquisition and a broader commitment to fostering educational opportunities based on merit, thereby unlocking individual potential for the greater benefit of society. This insight highlights the potential limitations of a narrowly focused bursary approach and raises important considerations about the societal implications and unintended consequences of such targeted initiatives.

Essentially, students are increasingly recognising the consequences of targeting flaws on their peers in the corporate bursaries space. The solution does not lie in forsaking support for in-demand fields but rather in striving for a more balanced and equitable approach. Past beneficiaries advocated for the significance of offering a diverse array of bursaries, empowering students to venture into broader career paths. They pointed out that this inclusive strategy not only benefits individual students by expanding their horizons but also contributes to the societal fabric at large, fostering a more inclusive and representative higher education landscape. Moreover, this approach addresses skills needs comprehensively, ensuring a holistic development of the workforce. Corporate bursary programs can play a pivotal role in nurturing a diverse workforce essential for propelling a multifaceted and sustainable economy by transitioning towards endorsing a spectrum of disciplines.

6.2.3 Stringent Conditions and Use of previous GPA in selection

The study uncovered how stringent conditions attached to corporate bursaries created a complex dynamic, attracting some applicants while deterring others. The obligation to maintain high academic thresholds and the potential for repayment or dismissal significantly impacted students' decision-making processes. One past beneficiary expressed frustration and anxiety, noting that,

"Honestly, that contract scared me big time. I'm gonna try my hardest, but what if stuff happens? What if I had a bad semester, or something unexpected happened?" (PBR 11).

This highlights the significant pressure these conditions place on students and showcases the perception of limited flexibility within the bursary system.

Respondents described a common scenario. Students, desperate for financial support, reluctantly accept bursaries with demanding conditions, only to abandon them when other opportunities arose.

"I felt dishonest signing the contract," confessed one student, "But as soon as I got a less demanding offer, I quit the bursary. I couldn't live with that constant worry" (PBR 7).

These accounts illustrate the potential short-term nature of such bursary commitments, undermining the intended positive impact on long-term educational attainment.

Corporations defended these stringent conditions, arguing they were a necessary tool to identify highly motivated and capable students. A representative noted,

"We target students who realise the bursary is an investment, not a handout. Those who push back on the terms usually haven't thought about the responsibility they're taking on" (CSR4).

This perspective emphasises the company's desire for accountability and to avoid allocating resources to students perceived as lacking commitment. However, the study identified a pattern of students who voiced legitimate concerns or sought clarification about the terms of the bursary being summarily dismissed from consideration. One respondent recounted that she,

"...asked what the process was if I needed a break due to illness or family issues. The interviewer got pretty defensive and said I wasn't the right fit" (PBR 6).

This experience suggests inflexible application of these conditions, leading to the exclusion of students who demonstrate conscientiousness and proactive planning, rather than a lack of commitment. This issue raises a critical concern that whilst stringent bursary conditions effectively identify the most deserving students, they inadvertently create barriers for those who are both capable and committed but also mindful of the realities and potential challenges of student life. The findings suggest companies risk overlooking qualified and motivated students due to the intimidating prospect of these rigid requirements.

The study further highlighted the psychological impact of stringent bursary conditions. Constant pressure to maintain exceptional academic performance, coupled with the fear of financial repercussions if those standards were not met, has a toll on students' mental well-being.

"My stress levels were insane," shared one respondent, "I wasn't really thinking about my marks, but always worried that a single mistake could ruin everything" (PBR13).

These accounts illustrate how such conditions contribute to excessive anxiety, potentially hindering students' ability to perform at their best. This finding aligns with the work of Cassady & Johnson (2002), who specifically investigated the cognitive dimension of test anxiety. Their research demonstrates how the overwhelming fear of failure and its ramifications can create a mental block, interfering with a student's ability to recall information and process questions effectively, even when they possess the knowledge needed to succeed.

However, while the study found some agreement among corporate representatives that rigorous conditions help maintain a high standard for bursary recipients, there was also a degree of variance in interpretations and application. A few respondents expressed a need for greater flexibility within the terms. One HR manager noted,

"Obviously we want students to succeed, but there should be room for extenuating circumstances. Life happens" (CSR4).

This perspective reflects an openness to adopting more streamlined approaches in managing bursary programs. It recognises that while accountability is crucial, rigid conditions may not always be conducive to supporting students through the challenges they may face during their academic journey. As such, acknowledging the potential complexities of student life, including personal and family-related issues, health challenges, and other unforeseen circumstances, ensures corporations create a more inclusive and supportive environment for bursary recipients, which begins with flexibility of conditions to enhance targeting and identification of recipients.

In addition, the study highlights the prevalent practice among bursary programs of utilising students' previous Grade Point Average (GPA) as a key criterion for selection, even when bursaries are awarded midway through the academic year. This approach, while intending to assess academic performance, can inadvertently disadvantage students who have shown significant improvement and growth in the current funding year. This reliance on past GPA fails to account for the dynamic nature of academic performance, overlooking students' evolving potential and current capabilities.

One past beneficiary shared their experience, noting that,

"I struggled in my first year but worked hard to improve my grades. However, when applying for bursaries later on, my past GPA was still used and as a result, I failed to secure a bursary for my 2nd year" (PBR5).

This narrative reflects the frustration felt by many students who have demonstrated resilience and determination to succeed but find themselves judged primarily on past academic performance, which at times was a result of issues out of their control. Students may encounter difficulties due to various reasons such as adjusting to university life, personal challenges, or health issues. However, their ability to bounce back, learn from setbacks, and improve their academic performance should be recognised and rewarded.

Through emphasising the importance of continuous improvement and recognising students' efforts throughout their academic journey, bursary programs can create a more supportive and motivating environment. This approach, while encouraging students to strive for excellence, also acknowledges the value of persistence, determination, and resilience in achieving academic success. It sends a positive message that academic growth and progress are valued and celebrated, ultimately fostering a culture of learning and development within educational institutions.

Furthermore, the reliance on previous GPA as a static benchmark raises questions about the fairness and accuracy of the selection process. Students who experienced initial academic challenges but have since shown significant growth may be unfairly excluded from bursary opportunities. Conversely, those who flourished on early success might continue to receive support despite a decline in performance. This dichotomy creates a situation where deserving candidates demonstrating academic improvement are overlooked, while others may not face the same level of scrutiny regarding their ongoing progress.

Asked about possible remedies, 60% of interviewed corporates agreed that, bursary programs could benefit from adopting a more dynamic and holistic assessment approach. They advocate for considering not only past GPA but also students' overall academic trajectory, extracurricular achievements, and personal growth. Considering a broader range of factors, ensures bursary committees gain a more delicate understanding of each student's potential and readiness to succeed. This approach aligns with the principle of fairness and inclusivity, ensuring that late bloomers and students demonstrating resilience are not unfairly excluded from valuable bursary opportunities.

Moreover, the static reliance on previous GPA sends a message that academic trajectory doesn't matter as much as initial performance, potentially discouraging students who have worked hard to overcome early challenges. As one respondent expressed,

"After a rough first semester, I worked so hard to turn it around, but failed to get a bursary" (PBR9).

This sentiment reflects a broader concern about the need to recognise and reward students' efforts and progress throughout their academic journey, rather than basing decisions solely on past achievements. This highlights the need for bursary programs and academic institutions alike, to adopt a more holistic view of student performance, one that considers not just past achievements but also the growth and development demonstrated over time. This approach aligns with contemporary educational philosophies that emphasise the value of growth mindset and the belief that individuals can improve through effort and perseverance.

6.2.4 Socioeconomic Background and Academic Considerations:

Corporate bursary programs face a complex dilemma of balancing their commitment to supporting financially disadvantaged students with the desire to nurture high-achieving graduates who are potential future employees. While most programs emphasise financial need, there's a strong suggestion favouring academic performance. The danger is that this can exclude students with significant financial hardship but who also have the drive and potential to succeed, simply because their current grades may not be stellar. This tension highlights the dual nature of bursaries as both a tool for social upliftment and an investment in human capital. Finding the right balance between these goals is essential for maximising both individual opportunity and the broader impact of these programs.

This tension reflects an understandable concern for return on investment. Some corporates openly stated that while they support the financially needy, their broader goal;

"...is to create a pool of potential employees".

Therefore, there's a natural inclination to prioritise students already demonstrating academic excellence. However, this creates an inherent risk of overlooking those for whom the bursary could be truly transformative (Haskins & Loeb, 2017).

The ethical implications are significant. A too-rigid focus on GPAs as uncovered in the previous section, reinforces existing inequalities. Students from impoverished backgrounds often lack the support systems that help wealthier peers excel - quiet study spaces, tutors, even reliable internet access for research. Bursaries are meant to address these imbalances, not replicate them.

Moreover, an exclusive focus on academic track records can hinder identifying students with high potential who've faced adversity, who can otherwise be cushioned to succeed. Illness, family responsibilities, or unstable housing can cause disruptions in schooling, impacting academic performance. Yet, a student showing resilience and drive despite these challenges may be precisely the kind of person who will flourish with the right support.

To address this, bursary programs need to move beyond simple metrics. They must develop multi-pronged selection criteria that holistically assess both demonstrated academic ability and future potential. This may mean giving weight to overcoming adversity, looking at patterns of improvement in grades over time, and incorporating qualitative elements like essays or interviews to gain a fuller picture of applicants.

However, the solution is unlikely a simple "either/or" choice, but rather finding ways to acknowledge both need and potential. Companies could structure bursaries with different levels of support based on a combination of financial hardship and academic performance. They must consider the broader context in which academic results are achieved, recognising a resilient student with lower grades might have greater potential than one with top marks from a privileged background. Short-term grants could ease the transition to university, with continued support dependent on success. Ultimately, pairing funding with mentorship, tutoring, and other support helps disadvantaged students thrive and addresses non-academic barriers.

6.2.5 Targeting Bias Based on Perceived Quality of Qualifications

The study further uncovered a troubling pattern in corporate bursary targeting, pointing to a distinct preference for particular historically privileged institutions fuelled by the belief that they produce graduates of superior quality. This finding highlights a complex relationship between deeply-rooted inequities, corporate goals, and the continuation of educational disparities in South Africa.

One corporate respondent highlighted this trend, stating,

"We tend to target students from universities like UCT, Stellenbosch, and UP... these Universities provide quality, reputable qualifications..." (CSR1).

This quotation underscores the role of institutional reputation and historical prestige in shaping targeting decisions, indicating a bias towards institutions associated with privilege and excellence. Many corporate respondents explained their preference for these institutions, emphasising their rigorous curriculum and reputation for preparing industry-ready graduates. They further attributed their preference to the perception that graduates from these institutions are critical thinkers and highly professional. However, it is important to critically assess the assumptions within these narratives, as they contribute to funding imbalances with far-reaching consequences.

Understanding this finding demands acknowledging South Africa's apartheid past and its ongoing effects on higher education. Historically privileged institutions primarily served white students and often benefited from significant state funding, superior resources, and a long-standing reputation (Badat, 2009). Conversely, historically disadvantaged institutions, primarily served black students, endured systematic resource limitations and harmful policies (Jansen, 2004). Decades later, this inequality continues to shape perceptions and outcomes. It's crucial to note the strong link between institutional prestige, historical privilege, and the relative socioeconomic standing of those with access.

Corporates participating in the study, emphasised the higher perceived employability of graduates from specific institutions. While this notion may hold some truth due to factors

like strong alumni connections, relying on this alone perpetuates inequity (Moleke, 2005). The idea that talent and employability are uniquely concentrated within a few select institutions harms many bright, capable students from historically disadvantaged universities. It also risks overlooking systemic obstacles that might hinder the career trajectories of graduates from different backgrounds.

A respondent from a corporate entity elaborated on this perspective, stating,

"We've noticed that graduates from certain universities tend to have smoother transitions into employment. This is partly due to the perception that these institutions produce top-tier graduates with quality qualifications" (CSR6).

This statement reflects a common sentiment among corporates regarding the employment prospects of graduates based on the institutions they attend, further solidifying the targeting bias towards select institutions.

The implications of this targeting bias are multifaceted. On one hand, students from historically privileged institutions may benefit from increased access to bursaries, better academic outcomes and, subsequently, enhanced employment opportunities. However, this raises concerns about equity and inclusivity, as students from institutions with less perceived prestige may face barriers in accessing similar opportunities despite their qualifications and potential. These practices further reinforce the idea that "quality" is bound to particular institutions, discouraging the broader talent search that would benefit companies themselves.

6.3 A focus on B-BBEE: Flaws in targeting.

6.3.1 Over-emphasis on black students

The study reveals a complex and pressing issue arising from well-meaning B-BBEE (Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment) initiatives within corporate bursary allocations. The unintended consequence of overemphasising Black students sometimes leads to the direct

exclusion or limited support for White students who are equally facing dire financial hardship. This finding shed light on a multifaceted challenge with significant implications for educational equity and social cohesion.

At the heart of this issue lies a distortion of the concept of "deserving." B-BBEE initiatives rightly prioritise historical redress, aiming to address past inequalities. However, the unintended consequence is the perception among some that White students are inherently less deserving of financial support, solely based on their racial background. This perception creates resentment and a sense of injustice among White students who are genuinely struggling to access higher education despite facing true poverty. The systemic factors at play here undermine the merit-based principle that normally guides educational opportunities for all students, regardless of race. One past student, noted that in their 1st year,

"...one of my friends received a bursary from The bursary was withdrawn and when he asked, he was told by the administrators ...that it was awarded in error as the donor is only focusing on black students" (PBR2)

The withdrawal of the bursary based on the donor's exclusive focus on Black students raises questions about fairness and inclusivity in educational funding. Such incidents not only impact individual students but also contribute to broader issues of equity and access in higher education. When bursaries are awarded or withdrawn based solely on race, it can lead to feelings of injustice and exclusion among students who do not fit the specified racial criteria.

It was further observed that while numerous criteria are considered by corporates when awarding bursaries, five main factors stand out as particularly emphasised; Race, Academic Performance, Socio-Economic background, Host University, and study programme. When participants were asked to rank these criteria based on their experiences, Race emerged as the top priority, followed by socio-economic background and the study programme. A respondent expressed a sentiment of being chosen primarily due to their race, stating,

"I felt I was selected primarily because I am Black" (PBR3).

This finding sheds light on a potential over-emphasis on race in the selection process for corporate bursaries, raising questions about the balance between diversity considerations and merit-based selection criteria.

Moreover, this sheds light on the challenges faced by administrators in managing bursary programs that have rigid racial criteria. It reveals a disconnect between the intentions of donors and the impact of their criteria on students. Administrators may find themselves in difficult positions, having to explain or justify decisions that may not align with principles of fairness and equal opportunity.

Another layer to this issue is the misconception that meeting B-BBEE targets requires exclusively funding Black students. This rigid interpretation perpetuates an "us vs. them" mentality, pitting racial groups against each other in the competition for limited resources. It also limits the scope of B-BBEE initiatives, preventing a more holistic model of economic empowerment that considers individual circumstances and needs beyond race. Govender and Naidoo's (2019) insights highlight the necessity for B-BBEE to evolve into a more comprehensive framework that addresses economic empowerment in a nuanced and inclusive manner.

Corporations involved in bursary programs face a dilemma highlighted by a Human Resources representative's confession. While they strive for B-BBEE compliance, the reality of turning away poor and deserving White students due to racial criteria can be demoralising. This suggests a disconnect between the intentions behind B-BBEE initiatives and their practical implementation, raising questions about the effectiveness and fairness of current strategies. B-BBEE seeks to broaden economic participation, but an overly rigid interpretation risks creating new barriers rather than simply dismantling old ones.

The consequences of this overemphasis on race-based criteria extend beyond missed opportunities for White students. It leads to aid being perceived as racially determined rather than need-based, which in turn fosters division within the student body. This division undermines the social cohesion that universities aim to nurture, creating an environment of tension and resentment among students. Furthermore, this cycle perpetuates economic

disadvantage for White students, trapping them in the very inequality that B-BBEE aims to address. If the goal is to create a more just and equitable society where race doesn't predetermine economic success, rigid interpretations actually hinder this.

The study's findings highlight the intricate challenges and unintended consequences of overemphasising Black students in bursary allocations under B-BBEE initiatives. The need for a more nuanced and inclusive approach that considers individual circumstances, economic need, and merit beyond race is evident. This approach would not only address the immediate issue of exclusion but also contribute to fostering a more cohesive and equitable educational environment for all students.

6.3.2 Overemphasis on Students with disabilities

The study exposes a concerning trend regarding the overemphasis on supporting disabled students. This focus, seems to be primarily driven by the desire to maximise B-BBEE points rather than a genuine commitment to inclusivity which leads to distortions in resource allocation, raising questions about equitable access to education for all deserving students.

Respondents from past bursary beneficiaries and corporates shed light on this issue. One past student recounted,

"I received about 3 bursaries...they each had different amounts. I then realised that I had lot of money at the end of the year...something like R280000. When I inquired about this, I was told that it will roll over to cover the following academic year" (PBR14).

This highlights several critical dangers associated with overfunding students in bursary programs. This speaks to potential inefficiencies in resource allocation.

Firstly, the overfunding of some students can leave others without the necessary financial support they require. This imbalance in resource allocation can create disparities within the student body, where some individuals may struggle to cover basic educational expenses while

others have surplus funds. This situation not only undermines the principle of equitable access to education but also perpetuates economic inequalities among students.

Moreover, the risk intensifies when bursaries are awarded for multiple years without considering potential changes in students' circumstances. As highlighted by the respondent's case, when funds are rolled over to cover the following academic year, there is a lack of accountability and foresight regarding what happens if a student drops out or experiences a change in financial need. This lack of planning can lead to funds being misallocated or misappropriated, resulting in inefficiencies and potential wastage of resources.

Additionally, the possibility of students claiming payouts for the excess credit further complicates the issue. This opens up avenues for mismanagement and fraud within the bursary program, as students may exploit loopholes to access funds that they are not entitled to, leading to a misappropriation of funds and undermining the integrity of the program.

Furthermore, the revelation that some corporations prioritise certain specific disabilities following guidance of B-BBEE agencies is particularly concerning. This suggests the system can be exploited for compliance rather than genuine empowerment. It casts a shadow over programs meant to uplift marginalised groups, turning them into a dreadful points game. This has far-reaching consequences, fostering potential resentment from those whose struggles are overlooked, inefficiently utilising limited resources, and even potentially harming the disabled students it aims to help by creating undue dependency or unfair singling out.

This isn't about denying students with disabilities vital support. However, it's more about questioning how B-BBEE mechanisms can be refined to better achieve their goals. Smith et al. (2020) advocate for a shift towards equity for all. Integrating disability-specific needs into a broader model of need-based allocation would better serve those with disabilities while ensuring fairness across the board. Solutions could include linking support levels directly to the costs of each student's disability, imposing caps to prevent excessive funding for a select few, and broadening the criteria for bursary eligibility to consider a wider range of socioeconomic disadvantages. This approach would ensure B-BBEE's commitment to

inclusivity translates into genuine opportunity without inadvertently creating new forms of inequity.

6.3.3 Gender Representation Concerns in B-BBEE Compliance

The study uncovers a significant gender bias or insensitivity embedded within B-BBEE mandates and reporting requirements. This bias emerges in the conventional classification of gender, which adheres strictly to traditional male and female categories, thereby excluding non-binary and other gender non-conforming students. The implications of this exclusion are profound, as deserving students find themselves side-lined from funding opportunities despite meeting qualifications and demonstrating genuine financial need. This has severe consequences. Non-binary and gender non-conforming students may be forced to drop out, abandoning their dreams due to financial barriers. This perpetuates economic inequality along gender lines. Furthermore, the feeling of being excluded or erased from systems supposedly designed to help, erodes trust in institutions and can have significant mental health impacts on these young people.

One past beneficiary shared their frustration, through the experiences of their peers, stating,

"LGBT students, feel excluded from bursary opportunities because all bursary requires male or female. If you don't tick this when applying they you don't make it to the lists. (PBR10).

This first-hand experience underscores the real impact of gender insensitivity in bursary programs, where individuals are denied access to crucial financial support based solely on their gender identity. It advocates for inclusive policies that acknowledge and cater to diverse gender identities in educational funding allocations, emphasising the intersectionality of disadvantage. Factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, race, and other characteristics all interact. Bursary programs that view students through a narrow lens miss this complexity, leading to unintended exclusions and perpetuating systemic inequalities.

This issue highlights the necessity for educational institutions and funding bodies to adopt more inclusive practices that recognise and accommodate the diverse identities of all students. Ensuring that application processes and eligibility criteria are inclusive can help mitigate these exclusions and support a broader spectrum of students in accessing higher education.

The study's findings uncover a significant limitation within the current framework which points to the rigid adherence to a traditional gender binary that overlooks the nuances of gender diversity. This exclusionary practice is exemplified by a respondent's account, highlighting the pressure to conform to binary gender options despite their identity not aligning with these choices. The informant remarked that they are forced to pick 'male' or 'female' on the bursary form, but neither representing their identity (PBR1). Such experiences underscore the urgent need for B-BBEE to evolve and embrace inclusivity, recognising and accommodating the full spectrum of gender identities.

Research conducted by Johnson et al. (2021) emphasises the critical importance of equitable access to higher education for all students. The current scenario, where non-binary and gender non-conforming students face systemic barriers in accessing bursary opportunities, highlights a glaring gap in policy and practice. Bursary programs, often intended to empower and support students, inadvertently perpetuate discrimination and exclusion when they fail to adapt to evolving societal norms and values.

Corporates, as key stakeholders in bursary programs, play a pivotal role in shaping inclusive policies and practices. Insights from corporate respondents shed light on the challenges and opportunities in addressing gender bias and insensitivity. One corporate representative acknowledged the need for change, stating,

"Our bursary programs must reflect the diversity of our student population " (CSR2).

This recognition signals a shift towards inclusivity within corporate bursary initiatives, but still a gap exists within B-BBEE which remains static.

Though they subscribed to the phenomena of B-BBEE, all interviewed corporates challenged it, suggesting that a multifaceted approach is necessary. They advocated for B-BBEE in general to revise their targeting mandates to accommodate diverse gender identities, moving beyond binary classifications. This requires collaboration between corporates, regulatory bodies, and advocacy groups to develop inclusive policies and guidelines. Incorporating feedback from non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals in the design and implementation of bursary programs is crucial to ensuring meaningful change.

Furthermore, ongoing education and awareness initiatives are essential to foster a culture of inclusivity and sensitivity towards gender diversity. Training programs for bursary administrators and decision-makers can help them navigate complexities related to gender identity and ensure fair and equitable treatment for all applicants. Integrating gender diversity considerations into the evaluation criteria for bursary eligibility can also promote transparency and accountability in resource allocation.

6.3.4 A disregard for Historic Debt

The study uncovers that corporate bursaries driven primarily by B-BBEE often neglect outstanding student debt, targeting only students in need of financial assistance for the academic year in question. This represents a missed opportunity with wide-ranging consequences. As discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis, I pointed out that in 2022, Universities South Africa (USAF, 2022) reported a staggering R16.5 billion in student debt, with an estimated 120,000 students unable to graduate due to a collective debt of R7 billion, and this is exacerbated by the omission of historic debt in the vast majority of corporate funding programmes. However, a closer examination illuminates the potential benefits for all stakeholders and the barriers that may be preventing a more inclusive targeting approach to corporate funding.

"My debt was very big. Even with part-time work, I couldn't keep up. I was ready to drop out, then the bursary arrived, but it only covered fees for that year. I still owe for the past two years" expresses a recent graduate burdened by historic debt (PBR9).

The sentiment expressed above sheds light on the significant challenges faced by students burdened with historic debt. This individual's experience reflects a common struggle among many students who find themselves in a similar financial predicament. The burden of past years' debt can be overwhelming, often leading to serious consequences such as contemplating dropping out of education due to the inability to keep up with financial obligations.

The emotional weight conveyed in the statement underscores the real impact of historic debt on students' lives. Despite working part-time to mitigate the financial strain, the debt remained a looming obstacle, threatening the student's educational journey and future prospects. The arrival of a bursary brought temporary relief by covering fees for the current year. Still, the underlying issue of accumulated debt from previous years remained unresolved.

This narrative highlights the urgent need for bursary programs, especially those driven by B-BBEE, to consider and address historic debt among students. Neglecting this aspect not only hinders individual students' progress but also perpetuates cycles of financial hardship and limited opportunities. Resolving historic debt through targeted support can be transformative, offering students a chance to graduate, obtain their certificates, and enter the workforce with a clean slate.

The focus on current-year funding reveals well-intentioned, but short-sighted, strategies. Universities operate on a complex system of delayed payments, where fees from previous years often remain unpaid as students struggle to stay afloat. This creates a financial bottleneck. Historic student debt is a major part of cash flow challenges within Universities. Clearing even a portion would improve liquidity.

The advantages of incorporating historic debt into corporate bursary strategies are extensive and multifaceted. Addressing historic debt provides institutions with an infusion of essential funds, which alleviates financial pressure and allows for more effective resource distribution. This approach can result in increased support for incoming students, fostering a more sustainable and equitable educational environment. Students, on the other hand, benefit by

achieving graduation and avoiding the psychological and credit score challenges associated with unmanageable debt.

Corporates themselves benefit from this as well. Clearing that final hurdle ensures a speedier and more direct path for their investment to translate into economic contribution, when students join the job market. Moreover, the goodwill generated by such an act could have a ripple effect, demonstrating genuine commitment to social transformation and attracting other bright, but debt-burdened students.

However, why hasn't this approach gained more traction? Some corporates cite the need for quantifiable returns on their B-BBEE investment.

"We track progress. When a student graduates and we can hire them, there's a clear metric for success. Targeting past debt is less tangible, making it harder to justify," reveals a transformation manager (CSR2).

This signals a need to shift how ROI for socially conscious investment is defined and measured.

In addressing these hurdles, it's crucial to reconfigure how success is measured within B-BBEE frameworks, which will improve targeting. Beyond simply funding students, impact metrics could include the overall improvement in graduation rates within institutions that receive support, or tracking the percentage of graduates who secure employment within a certain timeframe. This aligns with the broader goals of skills development and transformation (Nzimande, 2019).

Further, tiered models could be explored, where partial coverage of historic debt is tied to student performance or a contractually agreed upon period of employment at the funding company. Collaboration is key and open dialogue between universities, corporations, and relevant government departments must establish clear frameworks that encourage debt relief strategies while ensuring accountability.

This study reveals a clear opportunity for corporations to deepen their impact through bursary programs. Expanding the scope to include historic debt could be the catalyst for a

win-win-win scenario, benefiting educational institutions, empowering indebted students, and accelerating corporations' investment in the South African workforce.

6.3.5 Misrecognition: Implications for Social Justice

A deeply concerning theme identified within this study is the inherent bias present in the interview process for many corporate bursary programs. This bias manifests in the focus placed on eloquence and the perception of intelligence, often tied to English fluency and accent. The study revealed a pattern of misjudging students based on linguistic abilities, overlooking their genuine potential and intellectual capabilities. Respondent accounts illustrate this prejudice, with one student sharing the demoralising experience of being perceived as less intelligent due to her accent.

"I felt like every answer was being questioned ...continuously asked to repeat what I said because they didn't understand me" (PBR8).

Targeting biases within the bursary selection process carries profound implications for candidates' experiences and access to opportunities. These discriminatory practices undermine the fundamental principles of equal opportunity in education and social justice, perpetuating inequality within the system. As Fraser (2005) eloquently states, equitable participation necessitates "arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life" (p. 73). When biases infiltrate the selection process, the ability to create such equitable arrangements is severely compromised.

The conflation of eloquence and accent with intelligence, as observed in biased interview practices, further exacerbates the issue. Deserving students are unfairly denied the chance to fully demonstrate their capabilities and potential contributions when judged based on these superficial factors. Such practices perpetuate a narrow and discriminatory understanding of intelligence, overlooking the diverse ways in which individuals can excel and contribute to academic and professional fields. The impact of these biased practices extends beyond the individual level, hindering the broader goal of fostering a truly inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

The study also uncovers the harmful practice of labelling students as "underprepared" or "disadvantaged." While well-intentioned, such labels can have unintended negative consequences. The psychological impact of this labelling is significant, impacting students' confidence and self-belief. Authentic and equal participation is compromised when a student harbours a perceived disadvantage. Moreover, the "underprepared" label risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, potentially leading to lowered expectations and limited support." This misrecognition not only impacts individual students' experiences but also hampers their sense of belonging and agency within educational institutions. It extends to broader societal perceptions, such as the misrecognition of women's capabilities in leadership roles. This misrecognition further diminishes students' parity of participation, as Shay (2016) aptly suggests. The societal biases and stereotypes attached to certain identities create barriers that impede equal access to opportunities and undermine the principles of social justice and equity.

It's crucial to recognise that linguistic bias often intersects with other forms of discrimination based on socio-economic background, race, and ethnicity. Students from marginalised communities, particularly those who speak English as a second language, are disproportionately affected. This intersectionality of disadvantages compounds the barriers they face. The findings compel us to examine the ways linguistic bias is embedded within bursary programmes and the broader society. From negative stereotypes in media representations to discriminatory hiring practices, the way we value certain language forms over others has real-world consequences. Addressing this issue requires a shift in attitudes and the dismantling of systems that uphold linguistic hierarchies. It requires a multifaceted approach that acknowledges and confronts underlying biases while promoting inclusivity and fairness. Strategies such as diversity training for interviewers, implementing standardised evaluation criteria that focus on merit and potential rather than superficial attributes, and fostering inclusive environments that value diverse perspectives and experiences can mitigate the impact of targeting biases and promote a more just and equitable bursary selection process.

6.4 Shaping the Ideal Employee: How Bursaries Target Future Workforces

The study identified a significant disconnect between the frequently stated intentions of corporate bursary programs and the underlying motivations that shape their targeting practices. While the rhetoric often focuses on aiding disadvantaged students and promoting educational equity, the findings suggest a strong prioritisation of identifying and securing potential future employees. This underlying objective significantly influences the way these companies target beneficiaries and formulate their eligibility criteria.

Respondents from the corporate sector frequently emphasised the desire to invest in students who displayed alignment with the company's mission and held the potential to become valuable assets within the organisation. A corporate HR representative stated:

"our bursaries are mostly about building a pipeline for future talent...students who understand our industry and where they could fit in long-term" (CSR7),

highlighting the strategic nature of such bursary programs, which extend beyond a simple donation. Bursaries serve as a way to attract, cultivate, and ultimately recruit high-performing individuals who fit the company's specific needs.

The study found that corporate bursaries often favoured students pursuing fields of study directly relevant to the company's industry. Moreover, criteria sometimes encompassed factors such as personality traits, communication styles, and demonstrated alignment with the company's brand and values. This emphasis is reflected in the prevalent involvement of HR or Training & Development departments in the execution of these bursary programs. A corporate representative noted,

"Obviously, academic achievement matters, but we're also looking for that...spark. Someone who embodies what we stand for as a company" (CSR6).

This reveals how targeting extends beyond just identifying intellectual ability. It seeks to mould future employees who will seamlessly integrate into the corporate culture.

The fact that HR and Training & Development departments have significant influence over the design and implementation of bursary programs speaks volumes. These departments focus on identifying, attracting, and developing talent aligned with the company's specific needs and workplace culture. Their involvement signals that bursaries operate not just as charitable endeavours but as an extension of the company's long-term recruitment and succession planning strategy. With HR and Training & Development departments at the helm, it becomes unsurprising that bursary criteria prioritise fit and long-term potential for integration into the company. This approach further exacerbates the disconnect between the selfless rhetoric of promoting educational opportunity and the underlying reality of targeting future employees. However, this emphasis on recruiting potential employees creates a tension with the stated goal of aiding those most in need. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds who possess raw talent and a drive to succeed often find themselves overlooked if they lack prior exposure to specific fields or the polished presentation skills associated with more privileged upbringings.

"the interview was a disaster...really felt out of place. The way I dressed as well, oh God...I never stood a chance" (PBR5).

This sheds light on how the selection process inadvertently reinforces existing socioeconomic disparities and hinders upward mobility for those outside the traditional talent pipeline.

Furthermore, the study revealed how the long-term commitments often attached to these bursaries solidified the focus on recruitment. Terms requiring students to work for the company for a specified period after graduation or to reimburse funds if they pursued other opportunities effectively locked students into a predefined trajectory. PBR13 reflected on this described the decision process as,

"It wasn't just about getting through university; it was about choosing where I'd be working years in advance" (PBR13),

no doubt placing emphasis on securing a return on investment, which further underscores the business-oriented approach to targeting within many corporate bursary programs.

Analysis of corporate materials, such as program descriptions and promotional messaging, supported these findings. The language frequently emphasised phrases like "leadership potential," "future innovators," and "culture fit". Framing in this manner implicitly suggests that those deemed a good investment are not just academically capable students but individuals who embody the ideal employee model.

Prioritization of future employees has significant implications for the scope and effectiveness of corporate bursary initiatives. Programs become less about addressing the broad issue of educational inequality and more about targeted recruitment under the guise of social responsibility. This approach risks overlooking a large pool of deserving students with diverse backgrounds and career aspirations, who may not immediately align with a specific company's needs.

The tension also highlights the importance of transparency. Bursary programs would benefit from more forthright communication of their objectives. This would allow students to make informed choices about whether such programs align with their own career aspirations and circumstances. It is important to acknowledge that this model of corporate bursaries can hold value, offering significant opportunities to students who fit the target profile. However, it is crucial to recognise its limitations in addressing the broader social justice goals often associated with educational support.

6.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 6, focussed on the complexities surrounding the targeting mechanisms employed by corporate bursary programs. It began by emphasising the crucial role that targeting played in determining recipient selection and how effectively these programs achieved their goals related to student success, equity, and inclusivity. The research uncovered a common but flawed reliance on household income as the primary determinant of financial need. This oversimplified approach failed to account for the complex financial realities faced by families

in areas like Gauteng, where factors such as cost of living and the number of dependents significantly impacted their financial situation. The study found that students from seemingly comfortable households often experienced substantial hardship when considering extended family support or multiple siblings pursuing higher education simultaneously. Bursary programs that exclude these students risk missing those in genuine need, perpetuating educational inequality. The solution lay in a more nuanced approach that considered family size, financial obligations, and contextual factors alongside basic income thresholds.

The study also revealed concerning patterns, including an over-concentration of funding within select programs like engineering, IT, and medicine. While well-intentioned to address skill shortages, this trend disadvantaged students pursuing other fields, limiting their options. This imbalance had implications for both individual students and the broader workforce, risking mismatches in supply and demand. The study called for a more balanced and equitable approach, encouraging support across disciplines to ensure individuals pursue their passions while addressing a wider range of workforce needs.

Furthermore, the chapter explored the widespread reliance on previous GPA as a key selection criterion, even for bursaries awarded mid-year. This approach disadvantaged students who demonstrated significant growth and improvement. To address this, bursary programs could benefit from dynamic assessments that consider academic trajectories, extracurricular involvement, and personal development, ensuring that 'late bloomers' and resilient students were included.

The chapter further considered the impact of stringent bursary conditions, such as obligations to maintain high academic thresholds and the potential for repayment or dismissal. These conditions heavily influenced student decision-making, with respondents describing instances of reluctantly accepting bursaries with demanding terms, only to abandon them when other opportunities arose. While corporations defended these measures as necessary to identify highly motivated and capable students, the study found that students voicing legitimate concerns about the terms were often summarily dismissed. This highlighted a critical concern that stringent conditions, while potentially effective in identifying the most committed

students, inadvertently created barriers for those mindful of the challenges of student life. Companies risked overlooking qualified students due to the rigidity of such requirements.

The psychological impact of stringent bursary conditions was evident, with excessive anxiety fuelled by constant pressure and fear of financial repercussions potentially hindering students' academic performance, aligning with the work of Cassady & Johnson (2002) surrounding test anxiety. While some corporate representatives agreed upon the need for rigorous standards, a degree of variance existed in the interpretation and application of terms. Some HR managers expressed openness to greater flexibility, acknowledging the complexities and potential unforeseen circumstances inherent in student life.

In addition, the chapter uncovered a significant disconnect between corporate bursary rhetoric focusing on aiding the disadvantaged and the underlying priority of identifying future employees. Respondents from the corporate sector emphasised the desire to invest in students aligned with the company's mission and held the potential to become valuable assets. This shaped targeting practices and eligibility criteria, with bursaries often favouring students pursuing fields directly relevant to the company's industry and considering personality traits, communication styles, and alignment with brand values. The prevalent involvement of HR and Training & Development departments reflected this shift from pure charity toward a long-term recruitment strategy. This emphasis on finding a perfect 'fit' exacerbated the disconnect between the altruistic rhetoric of promoting educational opportunity and the underlying reality of targeting future employees.

This approach brought specific challenges, as students from disadvantaged backgrounds, even those with talent and drive, were often overlooked if they lacked prior exposure to specific fields or polished presentation skills. The selection process inadvertently reinforces existing socioeconomic disparities. The Chapter also highlighted how long-term commitments attached to bursaries, such as work contracts after graduation, solidified the recruitment focus. Analysis of corporate materials supported these findings, with language frequently emphasising phrases like "leadership potential," "future innovators," and "culture fit." Such targeting approaches undeniably risked overlooking a large pool of deserving students whose goals didn't immediately align with a specific company's needs. Greater transparency about

program objectives was recommended, allowing students to make informed choices. It was acknowledged that this corporate model could hold value for students fitting the target profile, but broader social justice goals around educational support needed careful consideration to avoid unintended limitations.

Chapter Seven

Gaps and Socio-Economic Impacts of Corporate Bursaries.

"Poverty is not just a lack of money; it is not having the capability to realise one's full potential. The real question is, how do we empower the disempowered?"

Amartya Sen

"The socio-economic challenges faced by our students are significant. Where bursaries fall short, we see students resorting to extreme measures just to make ends meet."

Prof. Mamokgethi Phakeng

"The real impact of inadequate bursary funding is seen in the high dropout rates and the mental health struggles of our students."

Prof. Thuli Madonsela

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the often-overlooked gaps and unintended consequences of corporate bursary programs are examined through the voices of beneficiaries. The focus lies on the financial challenges that persist despite corporate funding, revealing how these programs fall short in addressing the full spectrum of student needs. Psychosocial burdens faced by students are explored, shedding light on the mental and emotional toll of navigating higher education with insufficient support.

The complex interplay of factors shaping students' academic journeys and career aspirations is analysed, highlighting how financial inadequacies can hinder progress and limit opportunities. Vulnerabilities within the current system are further exposed, aiming to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic impact of corporate bursaries. This chapter seeks to identify potential avenues for improvement, emphasising the need for a more holistic approach to student support that goes beyond financial aid to encompass mentorship, career guidance, and psychological support.

Through these insights, the chapter aspires to contribute to the development of more effective and equitable bursary programs that truly empower students and foster their success in higher education.

7.2 GAPS in corporate funding

Corporate bursaries hold immense potential to empower deserving students and transform the higher education landscape. They can dismantle financial barriers, promote equity, and contribute to a skilled workforce. However, this study reveals significant shortcomings in the way many corporate bursary programs are currently designed and implemented. These gaps in corporate funding create missed opportunities, undermining the potential to create lasting systemic change and address deep-rooted inequalities within the South African higher education system.

Limitations in the ability of corporate funding to reach its full potential are uncovered by examining these gaps. This includes potential issues such as inconsistent renewal of funding, a lack of holistic student support, or misalignment between bursary offerings and national skill needs. These shortcomings prevent corporate bursaries from being truly transformative and fail to sustain academic success. Reimagining corporate bursary models to achieve maximum impact and create a more equitable and sustainable higher education system for all is only possible by understanding these limitations.

7.2.1 Insufficient Funding:

Throughout the study, the inadequacy of corporate bursary funding has been a prominent issue, with a notable disconnect between the financial support provided and the actual expenses incurred by students. This gap is evident in several areas, where bursaries often fail to accommodate additional costs tied to specific courses, such as specialised equipment, registrations and fees for professional body examinations. Accommodation and living expenses also present a significant challenge, particularly in urban centres where the cost of living is high. Students frequently find that bursary allocations for housing, food, transportation, and personal care are insufficient, leading to financial strain.

Moreover, the cost of academic materials, including textbooks is not always fully covered by bursaries. One past bursary recipient shared that, she always received a book allowance adequate only for the first semester books. This shortfall can impede students' ability to engage effectively with their coursework. Additionally, students are often faced with unexpected financial burdens, such as emergency medical costs or the need to replace lost or stolen items, which further exacerbate their financial challenges.

Another past beneficiary expressed disappointment, noting,

"The bursary covered only a fraction of my expenses, leaving me to struggle with the rest."

This sentiment echoes a common concern among students dependent on corporate bursaries, highlighting the inadequacy of the current funding model to fully cover the comprehensive costs of education and living. This situation underscores the need for corporations to gain a deeper understanding of these costs to improve the bursary system's effectiveness. A nuanced approach, involving closer collaboration with educational institutions and students, is essential to accurately assess and meet the financial needs of higher education, thus fostering a more supportive bursary system.

During the research, it was revealed that while corporations often obtain cost information directly from educational institutions, they impose their own funding limits. Consequently, even when a corporation aims to fund the total costs, students can still find themselves at a disadvantage due to the fee breakdowns provided by the institutions. It was also discovered that universities often align these breakdowns with the allocations and limits set by NSFAS, which can lead to a misrepresentation of the actual costs faced by students. This practice further complicates the financial challenges for bursary recipients, pointing to a critical need for a more accurate and transparent representation of student expenses to ensure that bursary funding is both adequate and effective.

7.2.2 Neglect of Non-Financial Support:

The study further reveals that the focus on financial assistance has overshadowed the need for other forms of support. A past beneficiary stated,

"Financial aid is vital, but without mentorship and professional exposure, it's like giving tools without instruction."

This analogy underscores the notion that while financial resources are necessary, they are insufficient on their own to ensure the comprehensive success and development of students. It highlights a significant gap in corporate bursaries in South Africa - the neglect of non-financial support. Most corporates don't integrate additional non-monetary assistance, focussing solely on the financial aspects. From the corporates interviewed, 40% provide

additional support and have alluded to the positive impact this has on performance and more importantly how students fit in to the working space once employed.

According to the study in addition to finance, mentorship is vital for personal and professional guidance; internship and vacation work opportunities are crucial for gaining practical experience and understanding the work environment; networking opportunities, will help students build professional relationships and access job opportunities; and career counselling, aids in guiding students towards viable and fulfilling career paths.

Essentially, the absence of these support services can lead to students feeling underprepared for the workplace and uncertain about their career choices, potentially affecting their long-term job satisfaction and career progression. The research suggests that integrating these forms of support into bursary programs can significantly enhance the overall effectiveness of the financial aid provided, leading to better educational and career outcomes for beneficiaries.

7.2.3 Late Disbursements:

The investigation further demonstrates that delayed disbursement of funds constitutes a source of stress for students. This sentiment suggests that delayed payments extend beyond financial inconvenience, exerting a considerable psychological toll on students. One former student voiced their experience, stating,

"Late bursary payments affected me a lot, especially with accommodation. I was always fearing being evicted which affected me mentally". (PBR9)

This testimony highlights the dual burden of financial uncertainty and psychological distress that students face when bursary funds are not disbursed promptly. It transcends financial hardship, becoming a source of deep-seated anxiety stemming from the constant threat to basic needs. According to Richardson et al. (2017), a psychological burden is substantial, potentially leading to stress, sleep disturbances, and impaired concentration, all of which have adverse effects on academic performance.

Further examination revealed that the timing of bursary disbursements is critical to students' ability to manage their educational expenses effectively. Delays can lead to missed payment deadlines for particularly, accommodation, which can result in additional late fees or even temporary suspension of services, throwing students into turmoil. The uncertainty and inconsistency in receiving funds can disrupt students' focus and commitment to their studies, as they grapple with the immediate concern of meeting basic needs and financial obligations. This, as depicted in the research is often compounded by a lack of communication and transparency between bursary providers and recipients. Students reported feeling left in the dark about the status of their funding, with minimal updates or explanations provided regarding the causes of delays and expected resolution times. This informational gap creates further anxiety, leaving students to worry about finances rather than coursework. It erodes trust and fuels a sense of powerlessness, potentially compromising a student's motivation and sense of agency.

7.2.4 Stringent Eligibility Criteria:

The research has uncovered that the stringent eligibility criteria, particularly the heavy emphasis on academic performance, represents a significant gap in the structure of corporate bursaries in South Africa. This approach has been criticised for its narrow focus, which often fails to account for the broader context of students' lives and their potential for success. An emotional statement from a past student affected by these criteria encapsulates this issue:

"Last year's grades don't define my ability or my determination. I was performing badly as I had to deal with multiple deaths in the family"

This student shared that she was given a bursary after a bursary administrator motivated for her. This young lady went on to shine and eventually employed by the funding corporate. This scenario underscores the sentiment that current selection processes may overlook students who, despite facing adversities, possess the resilience and potential to succeed if given the opportunity. The consequences of such rigid criteria, reveal that bursary programmes can exclude talented and capable students who may have experienced temporary setbacks or

challenging circumstances affecting their academic performance. These blinkered criteria do not accommodate the socio-economic factors, personal challenges, or environmental conditions that might impact a student's academic record. As a result, students with immense potential but less-than-stellar grades might be unjustly disqualified from receiving financial support, potentially hindering diversity and inclusivity within the higher education sector.

This therefore corroborates, the need for a more holistic approach to bursary eligibility, which could better identify and support students who, despite not meeting traditional academic benchmarks, show promise and aptitude in other significant ways. This could include assessments of leadership qualities, community involvement, extracurricular achievements, and the ability to overcome personal or financial challenges. This therefore advocates for a re-evaluation of the eligibility criteria used in corporate bursary programs. A more comprehensive and inclusive selection process enables these programs to better identify and nurture the talents of a broader range of students. This approach aligns more closely with the objectives of promoting equitable access to education and fostering a diverse and capable future workforce.

7.2.5 Quantity vs. Quality:

The research reveals a core challenge as corporate bursary programs struggle to complement the demand for quantity spurred by B-BBEE dictates with the need for quality support essential for individual student success. This pressure to prioritise numeric targets as expressed by one corporate leader;

"It's become more about meeting B-BBEE numbers..."

often leads to an emphasis on the sheer volume of bursaries awarded. As a result, crucial elements like academic support, mentorship, and professional development, may be sidelined. Funding students without providing a robust support structure risks leaving them ill-equipped to navigate the rigors of higher education and successfully transition to the workplace.

However, the study presents a more complex picture. Some corporations, aware of the limitations inherent in B-BBEE-driven initiatives, are actively working to reconfigure their programs. As noted by CSR7,

"...out of frustration with B-BBEE...we redesigned our bursary program... aiming for a more impactful and holistic approach." (CSR7).

This shift acknowledges the importance of striking a balance between B-BBEE compliance and the qualitative aspects essential for transforming students' lives.

Notwithstanding the above shift in mindset, a recurring theme is that many corporations strategically adjust their contributions to meet the minimum requirements for maximising B-BBEE points, raising concerns about the true depth of their investment in education.

"for instance, this year (2024), our B-BBEE agent informed us that we do not need to spend the usual R4m on bursaries. Just R800000 would be enough for us to achieve maximum points. So why would we spend more?" (CSR3).

This approach underscores a fundamental tension between mere compliance and social commitment. While B-BBEE guidelines promote corporate responsibility as emphatically suggested by DTI (2018), a focus on minimum thresholds risks creating superficial rather than transformative programs. Some corporations, blatantly admitted that their financial support, while satisfying regulations, may be inadequate full tuition, which illustrates a severe detachment between impact and compliance.

The restricted scope of bursaries tied purely to B-BBEE points limits both the long-term efficacy and sustainability of such initiatives. Focusing solely on quotas, without strategic integration with broader educational and skills development objectives, undermines their potential to address skill shortages, promote social mobility, or drive economic empowerment. B-BBEE initiatives provide an important framework for inclusion, but true transformation demands alignment with a strategic and impactful approach to educational funding. Corporations must navigate this tension, moving toward sustainable models focused

on the holistic development of students and contributing to the communities in which they operate.

7.2.6 Lack of Communication:

The research further reveals a significant gap in corporate funding for educational institutions, primarily attributed to communication challenges. The current system relies heavily on students proactively applying for internal financial aid, a process that is not universally understood or utilised across the student body. Discussions with participants revealed that a considerable number of students were unaware of corporate bursary funding opportunities. This was illustrated by the statement,

"if the student didn't apply for funding, then they are not going to be on the list,"
(PBR4),

highlighting a disconnect between the students in need and the financial resources available to them.

Further compounding the issue, past beneficiary respondents described the financial aid application process itself as cumbersome and needlessly complex. The lengthy nature of the process, excessive documentation requirements, and frequent back-and-forth communication due to inadequate initial submissions were all cited as key obstacles. This frustrating experience could deter even well-informed students from pursuing desperately needed financial assistance.

The limited awareness among potential beneficiaries about financial aid processes presents a multi-faceted problem. It reflects a lack of widely disseminated information about available funding channels within universities. It became evident from the study, that students might also possess preconceived notions about eligibility criteria, assuming financial aid programs are only for those with exceptional academic records, thus discouraging applications.

The complexity of application processes further acts as a barrier. Demanding documentation requirements, intricate steps, and unclear instructions disproportionately affect students who lack guidance or experience in handling formal processes. This complexity, which emerged to primarily emanate from the University administration side, creates confusion and frustration, contributing to a sense of discouragement and increasing the likelihood of students abandoning the application process altogether.

To address these shortcomings, participants proposed a fundamental change, integrating financial aid applications directly into the standard academic admissions process. Automating this step would ensure that every student applying to a university is simultaneously considered for financial assistance. This proactive approach could significantly broaden the reach of corporate funding programs and maximise the positive impact these resources can have.

Additionally, the research found that a segment of students refrained from applying for financial aid due to misconceptions about its nature, particularly confusing it with loans that necessitate repayment. This misunderstanding further emphasises the need for clear communication and education about the various types of financial aid available. Most needy students come from a position of underprivilege, and therefore do not apply for loans as there is no way to repay. Enhancing awareness and understanding of these opportunities can bridge the informational divide and facilitate greater access to corporate funding for eligible students.

The confusion detailed above acts as a powerful deterrent, as the research confirms that many needy students opt out entirely, fearing insurmountable debt, even when they have no realistic pathway to funding their education otherwise. The issue of debt aversion is particularly acute among under-privileged students, where experiences of financial hardship and predatory lending practices foster deep-seated distrust of credit systems as alluded to by Lusardi & Tufano (2015). The study revealed that these students often see loans as a trap rather than an opportunity, a mindset that unfortunately prevents them from seeking the support they desperately need. This misunderstanding effectively closes the door on higher education even for academically capable students.

To counter this, targeted financial education campaigns become imperative. The study shows that interventions aimed at improving financial literacy, particularly those tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable populations, can significantly increase knowledge and alter negative perceptions surrounding student aid.

Clear, accessible, and culturally sensitive communication from both corporations and educational institutions is crucial. Explicitly defining terms, demystifying the application process, and highlighting success stories of students who have benefited from non-loan financial aid can all contribute to greater understanding.

Furthermore, closely linked to the above, the investigation further unearthed a potential blind spot in corporate bursary programming, the overreliance on quantitative data at the expense of qualitative insights. While program evaluations typically focus on quantifiable metrics like graduation rates and throughput, the study revealed a significant gap in capturing the lived experiences and nuanced perspectives of bursary recipients. This lack of qualitative data hinders a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact on student success.

The research identified a strong focus on quantitative measures in program evaluations. Metrics such as bursary disbursement rates, student throughput, and graduation statistics were frequently prioritised. While these quantitative indicators provide valuable insights into program efficiency and overall outcomes, they often fail to capture the complexities of the student experience.

"We don't always understand how the bursary is actually affecting students on a personal level" remarked CSR3.

This statement sheds light on the limitations of solely relying on quantitative data and the need for a more encompassing approach to program assessment. Qualitative data, gathered through in-depth interviews, focus groups, or narrative accounts from students, has the potential to reveal rich and nuanced information about the program's impact. These qualitative insights can shed light on both the tangible and intangible benefits of bursary

support such as how bursary programs help students navigate academic challenges, manage financial stress, or integrate into university life. A bursary recipient emphasised this point suggesting that;

"Numbers don't tell the whole story. It would be beneficial to hear from students directly about how the bursary has impacted their studies and overall well-being"
(PBR2)

Undoubtedly, this speaks to the importance of capturing student voices and lived experiences to gain a richer understanding of program effectiveness. Incorporating qualitative data alongside quantitative measurements, will enable bursary programs to develop a more comprehensive picture of their impact. This combined approach can inform program refinement, ensure support services are tailored to address student needs, and ultimately contribute to enhanced student success.

7.2.7 Inflexibility:

The research findings shed light on a lack of flexibility in affordability criteria as a significant gap in corporate funding. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic triggered unprecedented economic disruption. Numerous families experienced income shocks due to sudden job loss, salary reductions, or business closures. This abruptly changed the financial landscape for countless students. Individuals who were once comfortably above income thresholds for bursary eligibility, found themselves genuinely in need of financial assistance.

The study points to an inflexibility of systems as a problem. Many corporate bursary programs rely on historical household income data or outdated financial assessments conducted prior to the pandemic through the respective higher education institutions. These fixed eligibility criteria fail to capture the sudden downward shift in economic status experienced by many families. As a result, students who once did not qualify based on household income may now have an acute need for financial support, but remain ineligible because systems don't yet reflect their changing circumstances.

This creates a heart-breaking conundrum, where students who were once financially secure enough to navigate the costs of university now face potential financial ruin and possibly, disruptions in schooling, due to circumstances beyond their control. The pandemic rendered existing income thresholds obsolete for many, leaving them without support despite their new and dire need.

Furthermore, the research revealed that the rigidity in funding criteria unreasonably affects certain demographics, including white students facing genuine financial hardship. Despite their need, these students often remain ineligible for bursaries that are designed to adhere strictly to Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) principles. The findings indicate that such policies, while aiming to redress historical inequities, may inadvertently exclude other needy groups based on ethnicity, thus limiting the scope of their impact. A corporate representative in the financial services sector, noted that;

“We receive a lot of direct requests from white students. We all know the impact of Covid 19, but these students still don’t qualify for our bursaries because of B-BBEE”.
(CSR5)

This sentiment suggests that there is a pressing need for corporate bursary schemes to reassess and possibly broaden their eligibility criteria to encompass a wider array of economically disadvantaged students. This approach would not only align with the principles of inclusivity and equity but also respond effectively to the dynamic financial realities faced by students in the post-COVID-19 era. The research advocates for a more holistic and flexible funding model that accommodates the diverse and evolving financial needs of the student population, ensuring that no deserving student is left behind due to rigid funding structures or unforeseen economic downturns.

A lack of flexibility in adapting to the evolving needs of student beneficiaries also emerged as a recurring theme among past beneficiaries. It can be noted that many corporate bursary programs operate with rigid structures, resulting in financial aid packages that often fail to align with the students' actual financial and academic experiences. This inflexibility significantly diminishes the intended impact of bursary support.

The research identified a mismatch between the static nature of bursary awards and the dynamic realities of student journeys. Students reported instances where changes in their academic requirements, such as module changes or the need to retake modules, were not met with corresponding adjustments in their bursary support. One student's experience exemplifies this challenge:

"I had to change 2 of my modules in the second semester and my bursary was not adjusted which left me, financially vulnerable and stressed about how to manage the increased costs" (PBR13).

Limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach are highlighted here, with an inherent failure to account for the individual circumstances and evolving needs of students. The rigid structure of many bursary programs does not accommodate mid-year changes in course selection, which can often lead to increased costs. The lack of adaptability in the bursary allocation process puts undue pressure on students, who must either find supplementary financial resources or face academic compromises.

The inflexibility extends to changes in living situations, such as moving to a different residence or encountering unforeseen living expenses, can create significant financial strain. Past beneficiaries indicated that at times students change programmes, and consequently move to different campuses. This means they would also have to change their accommodations which might cost significantly higher than the previous accommodation. The rigid structure of many bursary programs often fails to accommodate these financial shifts, placing an additional burden on students. Research by Callender & Jackson (2019) on "Financial stress and academic performance among college students" highlights the detrimental impact of financial stress on student well-being and academic performance. This reinforces the urgency for bursary programs to enhance flexibility and adapt to unforeseen financial challenges that students may encounter. Understanding student needs is the forerunner to the provision of impactful aid.

Data from interviews, particularly with past bursary recipients revealed that flexible and responsive bursary structures are essential for fostering student success. Participants emphasised the importance of bursaries that adapt to their changing needs and circumstances. This adaptability would undoubtedly allow bursary programs to provide tailored support, alleviate financial pressures, and create a more conducive learning environment.

Based on these insights, a significant shift in bursary program design within the South African higher education sector is necessary. Corporations should move away from rigid structures and embrace a more flexible and responsive approach. Bursary programs can effectively alleviate financial pressures, foster a supportive learning environment, and ultimately enhance their effectiveness in supporting student success by tailoring support to the evolving needs of beneficiaries.

7.3 Socio-Economic Impacts

Corporate bursaries are a vital component in ensuring access to higher education for many students in South Africa. These financial aids are essential in bridging the gap between academic potential and economic limitations. However, the effects of these bursaries, particularly partial bursaries, present a host of unintended realities for students. The majority of recipients of corporate bursaries come from backgrounds marked by significant financial hardship. For these students, bursaries are more than just financial aid; they represent hope and the promise of a better future. However, when bursaries only partially cover educational expenses, students are left to contend with substantial financial gaps. These gaps manifest in various forms, such as insufficient funds for textbooks, accommodation, transportation, and even basic necessities like food and clothing. As a result, students are compelled to employ a range of coping mechanisms to manage their limited resources and meet their academic and personal needs. This section explores the socio-economic repercussions of corporate bursaries, revealing how students, in receipt of funding from corporates, are left worse off as they navigate ways of mitigating against the effects of inadequate funding.

7.3.1 Cultivating Dependency

The research findings shed light on an unintended consequence of corporate bursaries, the emergence of dependency and a resultant loss of autonomy among students. The study reveals that an overreliance on corporate funding can foster a power imbalance, placing students in a position where they feel obliged to stick with corporations providing their bursaries.

Such funding often comes with stringent eligibility criteria and stipulations that necessitate adherence to predetermined career paths, which can significantly limit students' freedom to choose their academic and professional journeys. This constrained choice can lead to a sense of obligation towards the funding corporation, compelling students to align their academic pursuits and career aspirations with the corporation's expectations and requirements.

The research further elaborates that this dynamic may not only restrict students' exploration of a wide range of academic fields but also impede their personal and intellectual growth. Students may find themselves pressured to pursue specific disciplines or career paths that align with the corporation's goals, rather than following their interests and passions. This scenario can ultimately hinder their ability to fully engage with the educational experience and explore the diversity of academic opportunities available to them, impacting their long-term career satisfaction and personal fulfillment.

"I felt like my educational was more about fulfilling the corporation's agenda than my own interests and potential. The bursary came with so many conditions... often felt like I was losing control over my own academic and career choices. I wanted to change the field of study, but I would have lost the bursary and had to payback what I had already received through the bursary."(PBR7)

This detachment between students and corporate agendas raises a critical concern. The increasing influence of corporations in higher education can have unintended consequences for student experiences, particularly when bursary restrictions limit student mobility and career choices. Corporate bursaries, intended to support students, often become a form of

"constrained choice," where students feel obligated to pursue specific career paths aligned with the corporation's goals, rather than their own aspirations. The sentiment of "losing control over my own academic and career choices" underscores the potential for bursary programs to undermine student autonomy and stifle personal and intellectual growth. This dynamic, highlights the need for more flexible bursary programs that respect and support students' evolving academic and career interests.

Moreover, this type of constrained choice has ramifications beyond the classroom. When a student feels their future is predetermined by a corporation, this can impact their self-confidence and sense of agency. Past beneficiary respondents reflected on the importance of autonomy for intrinsic motivation, engagement, and overall well-being. Bursaries that diminish autonomy lead to students feeling like cogs in a machine rather than active participants in shaping their own destinies, as detailed in the above students' experience.

7.3.2 The Weight of Familial Responsibility

A complex interplay exists between financial aid, familial obligations, and academic achievement for university students in Gauteng. Partial bursaries, while offering a lifeline for many, often fail to fully cover the multifaceted financial needs of students from low-income households. This inadequacy is amplified by the cultural and economic realities of many South African families, where interdependence and the expectation of financial contribution from earning members are deeply ingrained.

The research uncovered that some students receiving corporate bursaries, frequently allocate a portion of their funds to assist their families financially. This act of remitting money home, although well-intentioned, leads to a shortfall in their available resources, directly impacting their academic life. Students often find themselves unable to afford essential academic materials, such as textbooks, and in some cases, are compelled to seek part-time employment to bridge the financial gap.

This dual burden of financial support and academic responsibility can lead to suboptimal academic performance, as students struggle to balance the demands of work, family

obligations, and their studies. The research findings suggest that the pressure to contribute financially to their household diverts attention and resources away from their educational pursuits, thereby affecting their academic performance and, in some instances, resulting in dismissal from the bursary program due to poor grades. Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) and Nettles & Millett (2006) highlight the concept of "filial piety" – a cultural value emphasising the obligation of children to support their parents financially which came out quite strongly in this study. The study revealed that students receiving bursaries often face a difficult choice of allocating funds towards their own academic needs or sending money home to assist their families with basic necessities.

The act of remitting money home, although a noble gesture, creates a financial shortfall that directly impacts academic life. Students in this situation struggle to afford essential academic materials, forcing them to seek part-time employment to bridge the gap. One past beneficiary shared;

"I was constantly torn between supporting my family with the bursary funds and using them for my academic needs. It felt like no matter how hard I tried, I was always coming up short in both areas. The stress of working part-time jobs to make ends meet, on top of my studies, eventually took a toll on my grades, and I found myself on the verge of losing the bursary that meant everything to us."

Another past beneficiary also noted that,

"I had to lookout for my siblings, at the very least, give them money to buy food for school."

This testimony highlights the intense pressure faced by students to contribute to their family's well-being, even at the expense of their own academic success. The financial assistance provided by bursaries becomes diluted, with funds intended for educational expenses being diverted to cover basic living costs for family members. This situation exacerbates the financial instability of students, making it difficult for them to concentrate fully on their studies.

The need to take on part-time employment adds another layer of complexity. Balancing work and study schedules often leads to time management challenges, reducing the amount of time students can dedicate to their coursework. The resultant fatigue and lack of focus can negatively impact academic performance, leading to lower grades and, in some cases, the risk of losing the bursary altogether due to not meeting academic requirements.

Furthermore, this financial strain can create a ripple effect, affecting students' long-term educational goals and career prospects. When students are forced to prioritise immediate financial needs over academic excellence, they may miss out on opportunities for internships, research projects, and other extracurricular activities that are crucial for building a strong professional profile. This diminishes their competitiveness in the job market, perpetuating the cycle of economic disadvantage.

The situation also sheds light on the broader socio-economic disparities that exist within the educational system. Students from low-income families are disproportionately affected, as they lack the financial safety net that would allow them to focus solely on their studies.

7.3.3 Exploiting Loopholes in Bursary Funds

The research has uncovered a disturbing pattern of system manipulation among some bursary recipients, where funds intended for academic and living expenses are converted into cash for unintended purposes. This practice involves a calculated exploitation of loopholes in the disbursement system, undermining the very essence and intent of bursary programs. Specifically, students have been found to utilise their bursary-loaded cards, designated for educational and essential living costs, to pay for other individuals' groceries in exchange for cash. This illicit practice highlights a concerning trend of financial misconduct.

The motivations behind this behaviour are multifaceted. As one student admitted,

"My friends would wait at the front of the till points looking for shoppers who are paying for their groceries in cash. At times they would buy vouchers, for example, on Takealot, and sell them for cash."

This candid confession reveals a calculated approach to circumventing the restrictions placed on the use of bursary funds. Further inquiry into the use of this cash revealed that it was predominantly spent on non-essential items such as alcohol, clubbing, dining out, and purchasing electronics.

This misappropriation of funds constitutes a clear breach of trust, contravening the intended purpose of bursary programs, which is to support students' academic pursuits and ensure their basic needs are met. Redirecting these funds not only deprives students of essential resources for their studies and daily living but also creates a misleading picture of their financial situation.

The consequences of this behaviour extend beyond individual students. When students underperform academically due to a lack of resources, it may be incorrectly attributed to the inadequacy of the bursary program rather than their own financial mismanagement. This can erode the credibility of the program, potentially leading to reduced funding and support for deserving students in the future.

Furthermore, this misappropriation creates a false sense of unmet financial need within the student community. When students who are, in fact, receiving adequate financial support appear to be struggling, it can lead to an inaccurate assessment of the overall financial needs of the student body. This, in turn, can skew the allocation of resources and disadvantage those who are genuinely in need.

The long-term implications of this behaviour are equally concerning. When students prioritise immediate gratification over their educational goals, it can lead to a cycle of underachievement and missed opportunities. Evidently, financial support is crucial for educational attainment, and when these funds are diverted, it can directly impact a student's ability to complete their studies.

7.3.4 Fostering a Sense of Entitlement

The research findings reveal a complex and concerning phenomenon among some recipients of full-cost bursaries, the emergence of a sense of entitlement that can inadvertently undermine academic motivation and performance. While full bursaries effectively alleviate the financial burden of higher education, they can, in some instances, foster a mindset where students perceive the funds as an inherent right rather than a privilege. This entitlement can manifest in various ways, including a decreased work ethic, unrealistic expectations, and a sense of detachment from the responsibilities that accompany the privilege of receiving financial aid.

This sense of entitlement among bursary recipients can lead to a passive approach to their studies, where the guaranteed financial security diminishes their internal drive to excel academically. Students may exhibit a reduced effort in their academic pursuits, relying heavily on the financial support without fully engaging in their educational responsibilities. This lack of intrinsic motivation can result in lower academic performance and a diminished commitment to their studies, ultimately affecting their overall success and potential career outcomes.

The sense of entitlement was particularly evident in the interactions between some bursary recipients and corporate sponsors. Instances were documented where students, frustrated by delays in disbursement, bypassed established channels of communication and directly contacted senior executives, including CEOs, with demands for "their" money. This behaviour, while perhaps understandable in the context of financial anxiety, reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the bursary. As one corporate social responsibility representative aptly observed,

"...Students sometimes act as if the bursary is an entitlement, not a privilege. We've had students emailing our CEO directly, asking, 'When am I getting my money?' as if it's a salary owed to them, not a generous support for their education." (CSR5)

This entitlement mindset can have detrimental effects on students' academic performance and overall development. When students believe that their financial needs are unconditionally met, they may be less inclined to put in the effort required to excel academically. This can lead to complacency, lower grades, and a missed opportunity for personal growth. Furthermore, the expectation of immediate gratification and a lack of appreciation for the privilege of receiving financial aid can hinder the development of essential life skills such as patience, resilience, and gratitude.

The findings underscore the importance of fostering a culture of responsibility and accountability among bursary recipients. While financial support is crucial, it is equally important to instil in students an understanding of the reciprocal nature of the relationship between sponsors and beneficiaries. This involves educating students about the intent and purpose of the bursary, emphasising that it is a privilege earned through merit and hard work, not an automatic entitlement. Cultivating a sense of gratitude and responsibility encourages students to approach their studies with greater diligence and commitment. This mindset helps them to maximise the benefits of the bursary and to achieve their full academic potential.

7.3.5 Food Insecurity and Social Stigma

Inadequate corporate bursary funding can significantly impact students' nutrition and overall well-being, leading to a cascade of negative effects on their academic performance and social experiences. One of the most immediate and tangible impacts of inadequate bursary funding is on students' dietary choices. Financial constraints often force students to opt for the cheapest available food options, which are typically low in nutritional value. A student shared their experience, highlighting the stark reality,

“You end up eating unhealthy foods such as ‘amagwinya’ (fat cakes) because that is the only thing you can afford.” (PBR9)

Fat cakes, along with other inexpensive, high-calorie, and low-nutrient foods, become a staple in the diets of financially struggling students. This reliance on unhealthy food can lead to

numerous health problems, including obesity, malnutrition, and chronic illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension. The long-term health consequences can be severe, affecting students' physical well-being well beyond their university years.

Poor nutrition directly affects cognitive function and academic performance. Studies have shown that inadequate nutrition impairs concentration, memory, and problem-solving abilities (Florence et al., 2008; Taras, 2005), all of which are crucial for academic success. A diet lacking essential nutrients can lead to fatigue and decreased mental alertness (Sorhaindo & Feinstein, 2006). According to the study, poor nutrition makes it difficult for students to engage fully in their studies

The student's lament about being unable to afford new clothes and feeling uncomfortable attending classes in the same pair of jeans highlights another dimension of the social impact of inadequate bursary funding. Clothing, while often overlooked, plays a crucial role in self-esteem and social integration. When students cannot afford to dress in a way that aligns with their peers, it can lead to feelings of inadequacy and exclusion. This can manifest in a reluctance to participate in social activities, attend classes, or even seek help from professors or classmates. One student noted,

“On top of that, you can’t even afford to buy clothes, since there is no uniform at varsity, so this makes it difficult for me to attend classes with the same pair of jeans. This makes me feel uncomfortable.” (PBR13)

Wearing the same clothes repeatedly can lead to bullying and social exclusion, which significantly impacts a student's self-esteem and mental health. The psychological stress of not fitting in or being perceived as different can lead to anxiety, depression, and a sense of hopelessness, further hindering academic performance and personal development. The social stigma associated with poverty and financial hardship can have a profound psychological impact on students. They may internalise negative stereotypes about themselves and their abilities, leading to a loss of confidence and self-worth. This can create a barrier to academic success and limit their future prospects.

7.4 Mitigating the impacts

This section focusses on the adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms employed by students. Adaptive mechanisms refer to positive strategies that students use, which according to the study, include seeking part-time employment, leveraging social support and squatting. Such strategies, while resourceful, often place additional stress on students, potentially affecting their academic performance and overall well-being.

On the other hand, maladaptive mechanisms entail strategies that provide short-term relief but have detrimental long-term consequences. These include unhealthy eating habits due to the inability to afford nutritious food, leading to poor health outcomes; and, in extreme cases, engaging in risky behaviours to secure additional income. These maladaptive responses not only jeopardise students' health and safety but also hinder their academic success, undermining the very purpose of the bursaries.

7.4.1 Adaptive Coping Mechanisms

7.4.1.1 Seeking Social Support

In the face of financial adversity, university students in Gauteng exhibit remarkable resilience by actively seeking and utilising social support networks to navigate their challenges. This finding underscores the profound impact of social connections on students' well-being and ability to cope with financial strain. Turning to friends, family, mentors, or university counselling services allows students to access a vital resource that mitigates the negative effects of financial stress and fosters a sense of belonging during challenging times.

The qualitative data gathered from student interviews reveal a recurring theme of seeking solace and support within their social circles. Students openly express their struggles with financial hardship to trusted individuals, often finding comfort in sharing their burdens and receiving empathetic understanding.

"Talking to my friends about my financial problems was like taking a weight off my shoulders. They understood what I was going through and always offered an ear and words of encouragement."

This sentiment echoes the critical role social support plays in buffering against stress and promoting psychological well-being. The study suggests that having a network of supportive relationships can significantly reduce the impact of stressors, providing individuals with emotional reassurance and practical assistance that enhances their overall mental health and resilience.

Beyond emotional support, social networks also provide practical assistance to students facing financial difficulties. Friends and family members may offer small financial contributions, share meals, or provide temporary accommodation. These acts of kindness, while seemingly small, can significantly alleviate immediate financial pressures and allow students to focus on their academic pursuits. One past beneficiary shared their experience before receiving a full cost bursary,

".... My friends were lifesavers. They often invited me over for dinner or help me out with groceries when I'm running low on cash. It's these small gestures that make me feel supported and less alone in my struggles."

The importance of social support extends beyond individual interactions. Students actively involved in campus organisations, clubs, or sports teams often benefit from a strong sense of community and belonging. These groups provide opportunities for social interaction, emotional support, and practical assistance. As one student previously involved in a campus organisation explained,

"Being part of a group gives me a sense of purpose and belonging. I know I can always count on my teammates for support, whether it's financial advice, a shoulder to cry on, or just a fun night out to forget about my worries."

The research findings also highlight the role of university counselling services as a crucial source of support for students facing financial hardship. Counsellors provide a safe and confidential space for students to discuss their challenges, receive guidance, and develop coping strategies. They can also help students access additional resources, such as financial aid, scholarships, or emergency funds. One student who sought help from a university counsellor shared,

"Talking to a counsellor helped me understand that I wasn't alone in my struggles and that there were resources available to help me. It gave me the confidence to face my financial problems head-on and find solutions."

While social support is a powerful coping mechanism, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. Friends and family may not always have the resources or expertise to provide comprehensive financial assistance. Additionally, relying solely on social support can create a sense of indebtedness and burden for students, potentially straining relationships. One student expressed this sentiment,

"I felt bad constantly asking my friends and family for help. I didn't want to be a burden, but I had no other choice."

This highlights the need for additional systemic support, such as increased financial aid and resources from educational institutions, to complement the social support students receive.

Universities play a crucial role in facilitating access to social support resources (Kuh et al., 2008). Many institutions offer counselling services, peer support groups, and financial aid offices that can provide students with the support they need. However, according to the research, Universities do not seem to have nearly enough capacity to handle this. The sampled students alluded to the fact that the waiting period for receiving such services on campuses that offer it are always too long. This on its own acts as a deterrent as students turn back without assistance. Promoting and encouraging the use of available resources can significantly alleviate the financial stress many students face. Additionally, creating a campus culture that emphasises community and mutual support enhances the effectiveness of social

support networks. This approach fosters a more inclusive and supportive environment, helping students navigate their financial and academic challenges more effectively.

In addition to institutional resources, peer support programs can be particularly effective in helping students cope with financial stress. These programs often involve trained student volunteers who provide emotional and practical support to their peers. For example, peer mentors can offer advice on managing finances, finding part-time work, and accessing financial aid. They can also serve as a source of emotional support, helping students feel less isolated and more connected to their community. One participant in a peer support program shared,

"Having someone who had been through similar financial struggles and could offer practical advice made a huge difference. It was comforting to know I wasn't the only one facing these challenges."

Another important aspect of social support is the role of student organisations and clubs. These groups often provide a sense of community and belonging, which can be particularly valuable for students experiencing financial stress. Participation in student organisations and clubs offers a valuable avenue for students to build friendships, access resources, and discover opportunities for personal and professional growth. These organisations often provide a sense of community and belonging, which can be particularly crucial for students experiencing financial strain. Some student organisations go further by offering scholarships, financial literacy workshops, and networking events, equipping students with the knowledge and connections to better manage their finances. As one student reflected,

"Being part of the finance club not only enhanced my financial literacy but also connected me with a supportive network of individuals who understood my challenges."

This highlights the multifaceted benefits of student organisations in fostering a sense of community while also providing practical resources to address financial concerns.

Family support also plays a critical role in helping students cope with financial stress. While not all students have access to supportive family environments, those who do often find that their extended families provide crucial emotional and practical assistance. This support can take many forms, from cousins, aunts and uncles pooling together financial help to providing encouragement and advice. Strong family support can buffer against the negative effects of financial stress, promoting resilience and academic success.

"My parents couldn't always help financially, but their emotional support and encouragement kept me going. They always reminded me that education was worth the struggle and I had to persevere."

Despite the numerous benefits of social support, it is important to acknowledge that not all students have equal access to these resources. Students with strained family relationships find it more challenging to access social support. Universities must recognise these disparities and work to provide targeted support for these students. This could include offering specialised counselling services, creating support groups for marginalised students, and ensuring that all students are aware of the resources available to them.

Seeking social support is a vital coping mechanism for university students facing financial strain. Reaching out to friends, family, mentors, and university resources allows students to combat feelings of isolation and gain practical advice and emotional support. This social support acts as a buffer, mitigating the adverse effects of financial stress and fostering mental health, academic success, and overall well-being. However, while this support is essential, it does not replace the need for systemic solutions to address the financial challenges students face.

7.4.1.2 Squatting

The study further uncovered that a prevalent coping mechanism among students to mitigate the impacts of inadequate funding is squatting. Squatting, in this context, refers to students living temporarily with friends or acquaintances without formal rental agreements, often in

overcrowded conditions. This strategy, while providing immediate relief from the financial burden of accommodation costs, carries significant social and academic implications.

Students often resort to squatting due to the prohibitive costs of accommodation and the lack of sufficient financial support from bursaries. One respondent shared,

"I couldn't afford the rent for a place near campus, so I ended up staying with a friend. There were four of us in a tiny room, but it was better than nothing" (PBR4).

This testimony highlights the immediate practical benefit of squatting. It provides a roof over the students' heads and saves them money that can be redirected towards other necessities, such as food and academic materials.

However, the living conditions associated with squatting are often far from ideal. Overcrowding can lead to a lack of personal space and privacy, which are crucial for studying and relaxation. The same respondent continued,

"It was always noisy and cramped. I had no space to study properly, and it was hard to get enough sleep with so many people in one room" (PBR4).

Such lived experiences of past beneficiaries confirm that inadequate living conditions negatively impact students' academic performance and well-being. When students do not have a conducive environment for studying, their academic progress is likely to suffer.

Moreover, the study uncovered that, though worthwhile, squatting can lead to strained relationships with those providing the temporary accommodation. It can be noted that the initial willingness of friends or acquaintances to help can diminish over time as the burden of additional occupants becomes more apparent. This dynamic can cause friction and discomfort, further exacerbating the stress experienced by students. Another past beneficiary student noted,

"At first, I was okay with my friend staying with me, but it became unbearable... I couldn't concentrate...I told her I need space, and she just said sorry for imposing and our relationship was never the same..." (PBR6).

Such experiences can lead to feelings of guilt and anxiety, compounding the psychological stress associated with financial hardship.

The lack of stable accommodation also affects students' sense of security and belonging. Without a permanent place to call home, students may feel transient and disconnected from their academic community. This insecurity undermines their academic engagement and participation in campus activities. One participant explained,

"Not having a stable place to live made me feel like I was always on edge. I couldn't join any clubs or groups because I never knew if I'd have to move again. It made me feel like I didn't really belong anywhere" (PBR4).

This sense of displacement can detract from the overall university experience, affecting students' social integration and academic success.

The reliance on squatting also highlights systemic issues within the higher education and housing sectors in South Africa. The insufficient provision of affordable student accommodation and the inadequacy of financial support mechanisms leave many students with limited options. The study clearly reveals that the gap between student financial aid and the actual cost of living has widened, forcing students to seek alternative housing arrangements like squatting. This disparity points to a need for policy reforms that address the real costs of higher education and living expenses. Corporates have a role to play in mitigating these challenges by expanding access to affordable student accommodation by providing more comprehensive bursary packages. This can help reduce the reliance on squatting as a coping mechanism.

The study's findings on squatting as a coping mechanism underscore the urgent need for a multifaceted approach to student financial support and housing. While squatting offers a

temporary solution, it is fraught with challenges that can hinder students' academic and personal development. Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts from universities, policymakers, and communities to provide comprehensive support systems that ensure students can focus on their studies without the added burden of housing insecurity. Squatting emerges as a prevalent coping mechanism among students facing inadequate funding, providing immediate relief from housing costs but introducing significant social and academic challenges. The testimonies of respondents illustrate the complex dynamics of this arrangement, highlighting both the practical benefits and the psychological and academic toll it takes. Undoubtedly, inadequate living conditions and housing instability negatively impact students' well-being and academic performance, which, according to the study, is a direct consequence of inadequate funding. Students, though in receipt of partial bursaries, suffer poor academic performance as a result of inappropriate living conditions.

7.4.1.3 Part-time employment

The necessity for part-time employment among university students in Gauteng emerges as a pervasive coping mechanism to address financial inadequacies. This study reveals that while juggling a job and academic responsibilities can be overwhelming, it provides essential income that helps students cover funding shortfalls, mitigating some of the financial stress. The challenge lies in finding a balance where the work schedule does not significantly interfere with academic responsibilities, which is crucial for maintaining both mental health and academic performance.

The majority of past beneficiaries interviewed (80%), indicated that they have engaged in part-time employment during on average a 4-year period at University. They pointed out that they worked between 4 and 6 hours for an average of 4 days a week. They all generally applauded the skills they gained but mostly lamented the reduced time for studies. Balancing work and academics proved challenging due to the conflicting time demands. The data suggests that excessive work hours, particularly over 20 per week, pose a higher risk of academic difficulties. Conversely, those who worked fewer hours developed better time management skills, positively impacting their academic performance. This finding

underscores the importance of flexible employment opportunities that do not overly burden students, allowing them to balance their academic and work commitments effectively.

Students' testimonies underscore the mixed impacts of part-time employment. Some respondents noted,

"Working part-time was a necessity for me. ... I wouldn't have been able to afford my rent or buy textbooks as the bursary covered tuition only. But it was tough timewise between work and studies" (PBR6).

"It's been challenging, but the long-term benefits have been worth the effort." (PBR2)

Students' experiences highlight the dual impacts of part-time employment. While financial necessity drives many to seek jobs, balancing work and study remains a constant challenge. Nevertheless, the long-term benefits of skill development and financial support are evident, with effective management being crucial to maintaining academic engagement and persistence.

Flexible job opportunities, such as on-campus positions, emerged as particularly beneficial. One past beneficiary shared,

"I found a job at the campus library, which was ideal because I could study during quiet periods. It made a huge difference to my schedule and my grades" (PBR2).

On-campus jobs often align better with students' academic schedules and reduce commuting time, which can be particularly valuable in maintaining a balance between work and study.

Moreover, part-time employment provides more than just financial relief as it also offers valuable work experience and professional skills that enhance students' CVs and future job prospects. This dual benefit was emphasised by another respondent:

"Working at a restaurant, taught me customer service and problem-solving skills. I think this came in handy in my current employment" (PBR4).

Such experiences can be crucial for students who need to build their professional profiles while still in university.

The South African context adds another layer of complexity to the issue of student employment. Economic disparities usually mean that many students do not have the luxury of choosing whether to work or not. It becomes a necessity when faced with financial inadequacies. Respondents' suggested that a significant percentage of South African university students work part-time jobs to support themselves and their families. This economic pressure often leads to increased stress and potential burnout, especially when students cannot find flexible or adequately compensated work, which constitutes a significant pitfall of engaging in part-time work.

Furthermore, the lived experiences of past beneficiaries suggest that the psychological impact of part-time employment cannot be overlooked. The pressure to maintain both work and academic performance can lead to significant stress. A respondent recounted,

"There were times when I felt completely overwhelmed. I had deadlines piling up, and my job demanded more hours. It felt like I was constantly running out of time" (PBR9).

This highlights the importance of mental health support for students who are balancing these dual responsibilities.

The benefits of part-time employment are clear, but they must be balanced with adequate support and resources. Part-time employment emerges as a critical coping mechanism for students facing financial strain, providing both immediate financial relief and long-term career benefits. However, the balancing act required to manage work and academic responsibilities can be overwhelming, necessitating institutional support and flexible employment options. As the testimonies of students illustrate, while the experience of

working part-time can be challenging, it is also a vital strategy for many to sustain their education and build their futures.

7.4.2 Maladaptive Coping Mechanisms

7.4.2.1 Neglecting Self-Care

The evidence gathered indicates that the financial pressures faced by university students have a profound impact on their self-care practices, extending beyond immediate concerns of tuition and living expenses. Under significant financial strain, realised through partial corporate bursaries, students often neglect essential activities such as proper sleep and exercise, leading to a host of physical and mental health problems that diminish their ability to cope with stress effectively. This neglect creates a vicious cycle where poor health further impairs academic and social functioning, exacerbating the already considerable challenges faced by financially struggling students.

Interviews with students reveal the tangible effects of financial stress on their daily lives and self-care routines. For instance, one respondent recounted,

"I didn't get any sleep because I had to work late shifts to supplement my bursary. By the time I got home it's like way past midnight, and I still had a mountain of assignments staring me in the face." (PBR10).

This lack of sleep not only affects their physical health but also diminishes their ability to cope with stress, exacerbating feelings of anxiety and depression. Sleep is a critical component of self-care that is often compromised under financial pressure. Students frequently juggle multiple responsibilities, including part-time jobs, academic commitments, and household duties, leaving little time for adequate rest. Chronic sleep deprivation can lead to a range of health problems, including impaired cognitive function, mood disturbances, and increased risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. Documents reviewed in the study, such as the research by Okoli et al. (2020), concur with the above finding, suggesting

that sleep deprivation is prevalent among South African university students, significantly impacting their academic performance and overall well-being.

The study further notes that exercise, an important activity for maintaining physical health and managing stress, is often neglected by students facing financial difficulties. The time constraints imposed by work and study leave little room for physical activity, making it virtually impossible to exercise. Physical inactivity emerged to be prevalent among the sampled past beneficiaries, with financial barriers being a significant contributing factor. One respondent noted,

"I used to love playing social soccer...I couldn't play as I had to find ways of raising additional funds for my studies" (PBR4).

The absence of regular exercise can lead to weight gain, decreased fitness levels, and increased risk of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

The neglect of self-care due to financial pressure creates a vicious cycle, where poor health further diminishes academic and social functioning. Students struggling with their health found it difficult to attend classes regularly, participate in academic activities, or engage socially with peers. This isolation and disengagement exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression, further impairing their ability to succeed academically. One respondent shared,

"I felt so alone because I was always tired and sick. I stopped going out with friends and missed a lot of classes, which made me feel even worse" (PBR11).

The psychological impact of neglecting self-care is significant, contributing to heightened stress levels and a sense of hopelessness. Financial stress is a well-documented risk factor for mental health issues, including anxiety and depression. Eisenberg et al. (2007) compliments the above noting that students with financial stress were more likely to report symptoms of depression and anxiety. This correlation is evident in the experiences of students who neglect self-care due to financial pressure. PBR11 continue, remarking that,

"The constant worry about money made me so anxious. I couldn't sleep or take care of myself properly, and I felt like I was spiralling out of control" (PBR11).

The neglect of self-care under financial pressure is a significant issue for university students, with far-reaching implications for their physical and mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. The testimonies of students highlight the severe impact of financial strain on essential self-care practices such as sleep and exercise. This neglect creates a vicious cycle, where poor health further impairs academic and social functioning, exacerbating the challenges faced by financially struggling students.

7.4.2.2 Risky Behaviour

In the face of severe financial constraints, my data uncovered that food insecurity increased the odds of students engaging in transactional sex for “money” or “to meet basic material needs. Some students with inadequate funding resort to engaging in risky behaviours such as gambling to alleviate their economic burdens. This phenomenon has been particularly highlighted by the rise of gambling platforms like SupaBet, Top Bet, and Betway. The ease of accessibility and proliferation of these platforms have made gambling a central coping mechanism for students grappling with financial struggles. While these behaviours might provide short-term relief, they often result in long-term negative consequences that further exacerbate students' financial and psychological stress.

However, the reality is that many students end up losing more than they gain, leading to a cycle of debt and dependency. A respondent shared his experiences of struggles to supplement his bursary. He was nearly addicted to gambling, which seemed to help initially, before he soon started losing and borrowing more.

"I started using SupaBet because I needed money for rent and food. Initially, I won a few bets, which made me feel hopeful. But soon, I started losing more often, and found myself owing money to several friends ..." (PBR5).

The findings reveal the compelling yet detrimental impact of gambling on students, which often starts with initial success but quickly devolves into continuous losses and mounting debts. This behaviour leads to severe financial instability, compromising students' academic performance and overall well-being. The financial strain caused by gambling results in a lack of basic necessities, pressuring students to continue gambling in the hope of a significant win that seldom materialises. This vicious cycle underscores the urgent need for intervention and support mechanisms to address gambling addiction among students.

Another respondent remarked,

"I thought betting was an easy way to make extra cash seeing students around me talk about their winnings, ...as time went, some became addicted, and we would hear of so and so not attending classes or leaving University" (PBR1).

This testimony underscores the addictive nature of gambling and the deceptive lure of quick money. The financial instability resulting from gambling losses can push students further into debt. This financial burden often leads to students dropping out of university, unable to cope with the dual pressures of academic and financial demands. The loss of educational opportunities not only affects the individual students but also has long-term implications for their families and communities.

Transactional sex also emerged as another risky behaviour that some students turn to in order to manage their financial needs. Asked to rank the reasons for this indulgence (as per their own experiences or those they knew off in University), all interviewed students pointed to food insecurity and financial hardship as the leading drivers of transactional sex as a means of survival. A respondent recounted,

"...I was too embarrassed to ask for help. A friend introduced me to someone willing to pay for my expenses in exchange for sleeping with me. ... but I needed the money, and it was just sex" (PBR1).

"I never thought I would end up doing this, but I had no choice. The money was a quick fix, but it left me feeling empty and ashamed" (PBR6).

The testimonies of students who engage in transactional sex due to financial necessity underscore the desperation and vulnerability that drives them to such risky behaviours. This practice not only puts students at risk of physical harm and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) but also has profound psychological effects. The stigma and emotional toll associated with transactional sex can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and low self-esteem, further exacerbating the students' mental health challenges. Evidently, the intersection of food insecurity and financial need creates a breeding ground for risky sexual behaviours. Students who are unable to meet their basic needs are more likely to engage in transactional sex, which, while providing immediate financial relief, often results in long-term negative outcomes, including health risks and psychological trauma.

These lived experiences vividly capture the internal conflict and emotional burden carried by students who engage in transactional sex out of financial necessity. The immediate relief provided by the money cannot fully alleviate the deeper emotional and psychological costs associated with such actions. The student's experience reflects a common theme of desperation and the feeling of being trapped by circumstances beyond their control. The initial sense of financial relief quickly gives way to feelings of guilt, shame, and a diminished sense of self-worth. These emotions can have long-lasting impacts on a student's mental health, leading to issues such as depression, anxiety, and a pervasive sense of isolation.

The internal conflict arises from the clash between the need to survive and the personal values that are compromised in the process, creating a profound sense of dissonance and regret. This testimony is a poignant reminder of the heavy psychological toll that financial desperation can exact on students, pushing them to make choices that undermine their well-being and sense of self.

Engaging in risky behaviours such as gambling and transactional sex has broader implications for students' academic and social lives. These activities can lead to significant distractions, causing students to neglect their studies and perform poorly academically. Additionally, the

social stigma attached to these behaviours can lead to isolation from peers and support networks, further exacerbating the students' challenges, consequently creating a vicious cycle of academic failure, social isolation, and psychological distress.

The broader impact of these behaviours on students' lives cannot be overstated. Beyond the immediate financial relief, the long-term consequences of gambling and transactional sex include not only financial ruin but also severe psychological and physical health issues. The emotional toll of these behaviours, as reflected in the feelings of guilt, shame, and isolation experienced by the respondents, adds another layer of complexity to the challenges faced by these students. Document analysis, along with the first-hand accounts from students, paints a bleak picture of the reality faced by many university students in South Africa who are caught in the cycle of poverty and risky behaviours.

Engagement in such risky behaviours is a critical issue driven by severe financial constraints and food insecurity, partially perpetuated by inadequate corporate bursaries. The testimonies of students reveal the desperation and vulnerability that lead them to these behaviours, while also highlighting the long-term negative consequences that further exacerbate their financial and psychological stress. These insights underscore the importance of addressing the root causes of financial instability among students to prevent the cycle of risky behaviours and support their academic and personal well-being.

7.5 Chapter Summary

The chapter highlighted the complex socio-economic impacts of corporate bursaries on university students in Gauteng. While these bursaries are intended to alleviate financial burdens and promote educational opportunities, they often create unforeseen challenges that can impede students' academic success and well-being. It unveiled the multi-dimensional socio-economic impacts of corporate bursaries in South Africa, revealing both their potential benefits and unintended consequences. Corporate bursaries provide crucial financial support, yet the research uncovers significant gaps in funding adequacy, particularly for essential living expenses and academic resources. These shortfalls often force students to adopt coping mechanisms such as seeking part-time employment, relying on social support, and even

resorting to squatting. Such measures negatively impact academic performance and overall well-being.

Additionally, the chapter highlights a lack of holistic support in many bursary programs, where the focus on financial aid overshadows the need for mentorship, career guidance, and psychological support. This neglect of non-financial needs leaves students feeling isolated, unprepared for the workforce, and uncertain about their career paths. The chapter also delves into the negative impacts of stringent eligibility criteria, inflexible funding structures, and late disbursement of funds, which exacerbate existing inequalities and create additional stress for students. Instances of financial mismanagement and a sense of entitlement among some bursary recipients further highlight the need for ethical and responsible use of funds. The chapter shed light on the detrimental effects of inadequate funding on students' health and well-being, with financial strain contributing to the neglect of self-care practices and leading to physical and mental health problems. In extreme cases, students resort to risky behaviours such as gambling and transactional sex to cope with financial hardship.

All in all, this chapter paints a complex picture of the socio-economic impact of corporate bursaries. While these programs offer a lifeline to many students, they also present challenges and unintended consequences that must be addressed through a more holistic and responsive approach to bursary design and implementation. This approach should consider the multifaceted needs of students, provide adequate financial and non-financial support, and promote responsible financial behaviour to ensure that bursaries truly empower students and foster their success in higher education.

Chapter Eight

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams, but it is sustained by those who invest in the dreams of others."

Eleanor Roosevelt

"The measure of any society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. The future of our nation depends on the success of our young people, particularly those who have been historically marginalised."

Nelson Mandela

8.1 Introduction

As this study draws to a close, it is essential to revisit the journey that began with a critical inquiry into the role of corporate bursary funding in South Africa's higher education landscape. The research was initiated against the backdrop of South Africa's post-1994 transformation efforts, which aimed to address the deeply rooted economic barriers that continue to impede equitable access to higher education. Despite significant milestones like the establishment of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and the expansion of eligibility for free higher education, systemic inequalities persist, leaving many students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, on the periphery of educational opportunity. This study set out to explore whether corporate bursary programmes effectively bridge this gap and contribute to broader goals of equity and quality in higher education.

Grounded in a theoretical framework that intertwines Human Capital Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Social Justice Theory, the research sought to interrogate the adequacy and impact of corporate funding on student access and success. The study adopted a qualitative approach, drawing on insights from lived experiences of past bursary recipients and CSI professionals. This approach was designed to capture the multifaceted realities of corporate bursary funding, offering a comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness in fostering student success and addressing the broader socio-economic challenges within South Africa's higher education system.

The research questions guiding this study were meticulously crafted to unravel the complexities of corporate bursary funding, critically assessing the existing funding model and questioning its adequacy in achieving optimal outcomes in terms of student success. I embarked on this inquiry with a set of key research questions, notably:

- 1 What are the primary objectives and operational methods of the current corporate bursary funding model in Gauteng, South Africa?
- 2 To what extent do corporate bursary programmes enhance success and quality outcomes? Are there mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate their impact on increasing student throughput and graduation rates?

- 3 How effective are corporate bursary programmes in targeting and supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds? What criteria are used to ensure these students are the primary beneficiaries?
- 4 What are the gaps and resultant socio-economic impacts of corporate bursaries? What coping mechanisms are employed by students in mitigation against inadequate funding?

The inquiry began with an examination of the primary objectives and operational methods of these funding models, followed by an evaluation of their impact on student success, throughput, and graduation rates. The study further delved into the effectiveness of these programmes in targeting and supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds, scrutinising the criteria used to ensure these students are the primary beneficiaries. Finally, the research explored the socio-economic impacts of corporate bursaries, investigating the gaps in funding and the coping mechanisms employed by students when financial support falls short. These questions were integral in driving the research towards its ultimate goal: to provide actionable insights and recommendations that could enhance the design and implementation of corporate bursary programmes, ensuring they fulfil their potential as instruments of social justice and educational equity.

8.2 Discussion

8.2.1 Overview

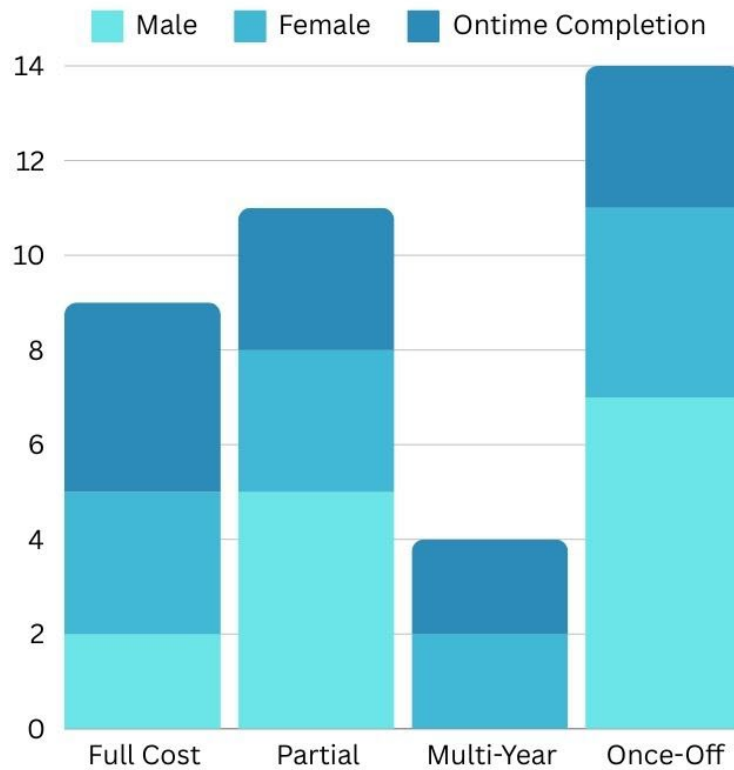


Figure 7: Impact

The study involved a diverse group of respondents, each providing valuable insights into the impact and operational efficiency of corporate bursary programs. The respondents were classified based on the type of bursary received and their completion status. The chart categorises these into full-cost, partial, multi-year, and once-off bursaries, further segmented by gender (male and female) and the on-time completion of their studies. This classification helped in analysing the influence of different types of bursaries on academic outcomes and the completion rates among different demographics.

For full-cost bursaries, both male and female participants were represented, with a notable number of them completing their studies on time. This suggested that full-cost bursaries provide substantial financial support, enabling students to focus on their studies without the distraction of financial worries, thereby improving their chances of on-time completion.

Partial bursaries also showed a good mix of male and female beneficiaries, though with a slightly lower on-time completion rate compared to full-cost bursaries. This indicates that while partial bursaries offer significant assistance, the remaining financial gaps still pose challenges for some students.

The study further analysed multi-year and once-off bursaries. Multi-year bursaries had fewer participants but showed a high on-time completion rate, underscoring the benefits of sustained financial support over the duration of the academic program. On the other hand, once-off bursaries, despite being the most common, had a mixed outcome regarding on-time completion. This variability could be attributed to the sporadic nature of the support, which might not fully alleviate the financial pressures faced by students throughout their studies. These findings highlight the importance of both the type and duration of bursary support in influencing educational outcomes.

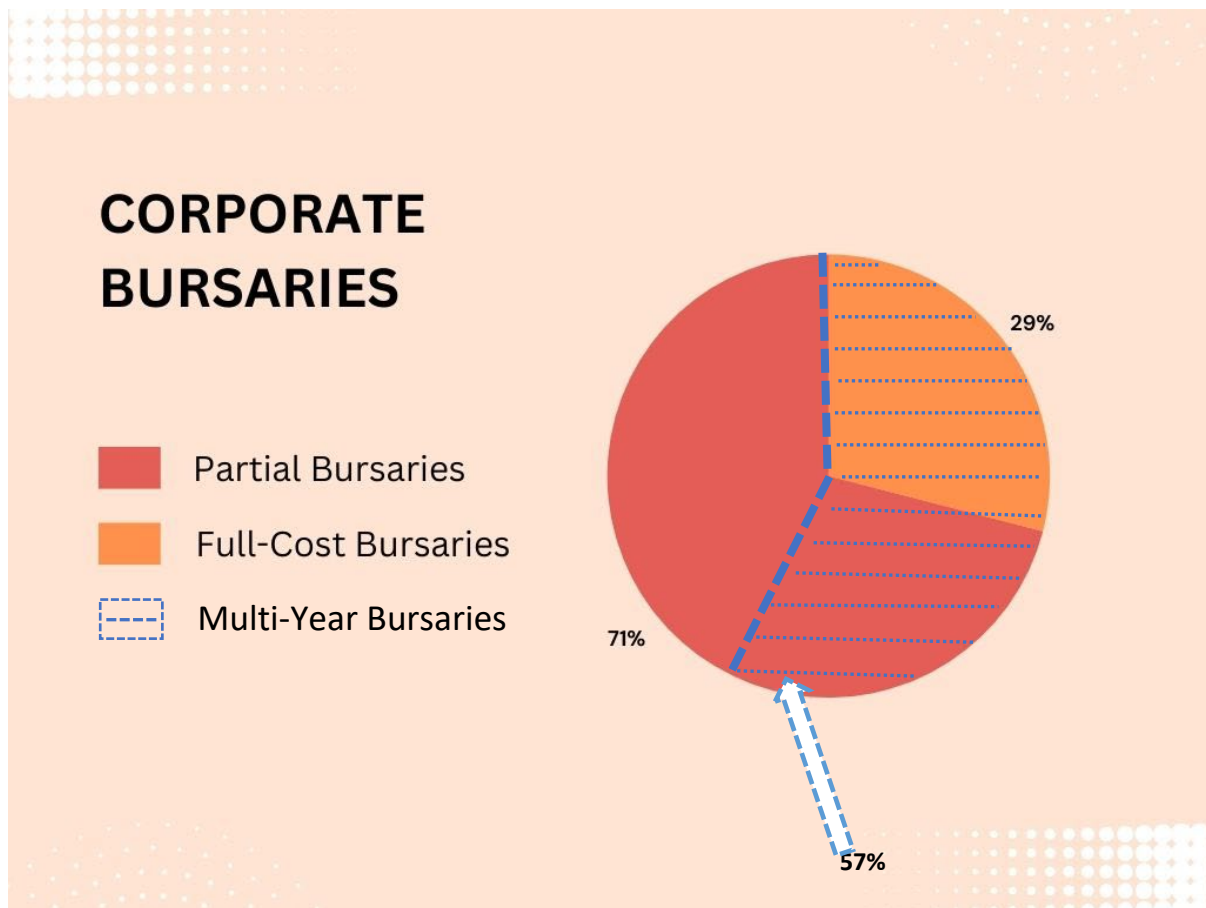


Figure 8: Popularity of Corporate Bursaries

Furthermore, the study involved a diverse range of corporate entities engaged in bursary funding, aiming to capture a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing practices and their underlying motivations. Out of the companies interviewed, 29% indicated that they offer full-cost bursaries, covering the entire range of expenses related to students' education. These full-cost bursaries are particularly significant as they alleviate the financial burden on students, allowing them to focus entirely on their academic pursuits without the distraction of financial constraints.

However, a substantial 71% of the participating companies reported that they offer partial bursaries. This prevalent practice of providing partial financial support suggests a strategic approach by corporates to extend their resources to a larger number of beneficiaries. By covering only a portion of the educational expenses, these companies can assist more students, albeit with the expectation that students will secure additional funding sources to

cover the remaining costs. This approach reflects a broader trend within the corporate sector to maximise their social impact by distributing available funds across a wider student base.

Notably, 57% of the companies interviewed offer multi-year bursaries, which include both full and partial funding options. This commitment to multi-year support underscores the corporates' recognition of the importance of sustained financial assistance in ensuring student success. Multi-year bursaries provide students with a stable financial foundation throughout their academic journey, fostering better academic outcomes and higher retention rates. The data reveals that while partial bursaries are more common, the inclusion of multi-year funding reflects a balanced strategy aimed at promoting both access and success in higher education.

8.2.2 Examining the Goals and Mechanisms of Corporate Bursary Programs

In Gauteng, South Africa, the landscape of corporate bursary funding is a complex, multifaceted system driven by a variety of motivations and shaped by numerous influences. The research illuminates this intricate web, revealing how CSR initiatives, strategic human capital development, brand enhancement, and compliance with B-BBEE mandates serve as key drivers behind corporate involvement in education funding.

Picture a company that, on the surface, seems dedicated to CSR. However, dig a little deeper, and you'll find that strategic alignment with industry needs and business goals often takes precedence in designing bursary programs. This approach helps develop a skilled workforce tailored to specific sectors, but it also inadvertently neglects critical skills shortages in other areas essential for national development. It's a delicate balancing act where the immediate business needs overshadow broader societal requirements.

The influence of stakeholder expectations, economic conditions, and technological advancements cannot be underestimated. Socially conscious investors, employees, and customers increasingly pressure corporations to invest in education as part of their social responsibility, reflecting a broader shift towards ethical business practices. Yet, our study uncovers instances of 'brand washing,' where bursaries serve more as tools for image

enhancement rather than genuine social impact. It's a scenario where the noble facade of CSR masks a more self-serving agenda.

Consider the students, the supposed beneficiaries of these programs. The research reveals a troubling disconnect between their needs and the design and implementation of bursary programs. Limited student involvement in the process often leads to inadequate financial support and overlooks crucial non-financial needs like mentorship and career guidance. This mismatch between expectations and realities hinders the effectiveness of bursaries in fostering holistic student development and success.

Further complicating the picture is a significant gap between corporate funding priorities and national development goals. Bursary allocations frequently fail to align with the critical skills shortages outlined in the National Development Plan (NDP), particularly in sectors such as education, veterinary sciences, social work, and agriculture. Regional disparities in funding distribution exacerbate existing inequalities, with urban centres receiving a disproportionate share of resources compared to rural areas.

Moreover, the study uncovers several limitations within the current funding model. These include insufficient financial support, late disbursements, stringent eligibility criteria, and an overemphasis on quantity over quality due to B-BBEE compliance pressures. These challenges, along with communication gaps and a lack of flexibility in adapting to students' evolving needs, raise concerns about the long-term efficacy and sustainability of corporate bursary programs.

The findings offer valuable insights into the complexities and contradictions inherent in the corporate bursary funding model in Gauteng. They underscore the need for a more strategic, inclusive, and student-centric approach that aligns with national development priorities, addresses regional disparities, and genuinely empowers students from all backgrounds. Corporate bursary programs can become more impactful and contribute meaningfully to educational equity and social transformation in South Africa by incorporating student voices, broadening eligibility criteria, enhancing flexibility, and prioritising holistic support.

8.2.3 Assessing the Influence of Corporate Bursary Programs on Academic Achievement

The relationship between corporate bursaries and student success is far more complex than the simple equation of financial support equating to improved throughput and graduation rates. The research uncovers a multifaceted landscape that challenges this assumption, revealing how financial aid, while crucial, is just one piece of the puzzle in determining student outcomes.

Imagine two students, both recipients of corporate bursaries, but with differing experiences. The first, who receives a partial bursary, faces a daily battle to balance academic responsibilities with the looming pressure of financial insecurity. Despite the aid, they struggle to cover basic living expenses, purchase necessary academic materials, and manage unforeseen costs. This constant financial strain diverts their focus from studies, resulting in lower academic performance and, tragically, often leads to dropping out. In stark contrast, the second student benefits from a full-cost bursary. This comprehensive support provides them with a sense of security and stability, allowing them to devote their full attention to their studies. The result? Higher throughput and graduation rates.

Moreover, the story of multi-year bursaries emerges as a beacon of hope. When students receive bursaries confirmed for the duration of their study from the first year, it fosters a strong sense of commitment and loyalty between the students and the sponsoring corporations. This bond not only enhances academic performance but also opens doors to robust career prospects and increases retention within the sponsoring organisations.

However, the narrative does not end with financial support. My research uncovered the critical need for non-financial support, such as tutoring, mentorship, and career guidance. Without these, even the most financially supported students can find themselves lost, struggling to navigate academic challenges and transition successfully into the workforce. Comprehensive wrap-around support services prove indispensable, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These programs address a spectrum of needs; academic, financial, and personal; creating a supportive environment that nurtures retention, graduation, and overall well-being.

The findings also challenge the prevalent focus on quantitative metrics in evaluating bursary programs. While it's essential to track financial disbursement and graduation rates, this approach often overlooks the qualitative aspects of student experiences. Integrating student feedback and qualitative insights into the evaluation process is crucial for understanding the holistic impact of bursaries on students' academic journeys and well-being.

A significant gap in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices among corporate bursary programs also comes to light. The absence of standardised metrics and robust M&E frameworks impedes the accurate assessment of program effectiveness and the identification of areas for improvement. This lack of accountability and transparency raises concerns about the sustainability and long-term impact of corporate funding on student success.

As such, while corporate bursaries are indispensable for increasing access to higher education, their impact on throughput and graduation rates hinges on various factors. Full-cost bursaries, complemented by comprehensive wrap-around support and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, are essential for maximising student success. A holistic, student-centric approach can transform corporate bursary programs into effective tools for educational equity, empowering students to achieve their academic goals, and ultimately driving South Africa's socio-economic development forward.

8.2.4 Strategies and Effectiveness in Corporate Bursary Recipient Selection

The research findings illuminate critical gaps and biases in the targeting efficacy of corporate bursary programs in South Africa. While these programs aim to support disadvantaged students and promote educational equity, the study paints a picture of a complex and often flawed landscape where the intended beneficiaries are not always effectively reached.

One considers a student from Gauteng, where the criterion for bursary eligibility often hinges solely on affordability. This simplistic approach fails to account for the nuanced financial realities faced by many households. A family with a higher than threshold income but with substantial financial obligations, such as multiple children in higher education or caring for

extended family members, despite their financial strain, may be excluded from receiving aid. This mismatch between perceived and actual financial need highlights a significant flaw in the system.

The research also uncovers biases in targeting practices. Corporations often prioritise fields of study linked to perceived skills shortages, which limits opportunities for students with diverse interests and aspirations. This narrow focus can leave out talented individuals who could contribute significantly to other vital sectors. Additionally, the preference for students from historically privileged institutions perpetuates educational inequalities and reinforces existing socioeconomic disparities. It's a scenario where the intended support system inadvertently excludes those who need it most.

The study also uncovers a troubling trend, where, a student is judged not by their potential but by superficial factors like eloquence and accent during interviews. This troubling trend of misrecognition, where students are assessed on these superficial characteristics rather than their true abilities, further skews the fairness of bursary allocation. It's a stark reminder of the biases that can seep into well-meaning programs.

B-BBEE policies also play a crucial role in this narrative. While B-BBEE aims to redress historical inequities, its rigid implementation sometimes leads to unintended consequences. For instance, white students facing genuine financial hardship might be excluded due to racial criteria, while an overemphasis on funding students with disabilities for B-BBEE points can create resource allocation disparities. The traditional gender binary in B-BBEE reporting also overlooks non-binary and gender non-conforming students, denying them access to much-needed financial support.

The issue of historic student debt adds another layer of complexity. Corporate bursary programs often focus on current-year funding, neglecting the burden of past debt that many students carry. This short-sighted approach hinders students' ability to complete their education and impacts universities' financial stability and the overall effectiveness of B-BBEE initiatives.

Moreover, the study highlights the detrimental impact of stringent bursary conditions on student well-being and decision-making. The pressure to maintain high academic standards and the fear of financial repercussions create significant stress and anxiety, often leading students to abandon bursaries when alternative, less demanding options become available. This undermines the program's intended long-term impact on educational attainment.

These findings reveal that while corporate bursary programs are well-intentioned, they often fall short in their targeting efficacy. Oversimplified criteria, inherent biases, and a disconnect between stated intentions and actual practices are major hurdles. To improve their effectiveness, corporations need to adopt a more holistic approach that considers individual circumstances, academic potential, and a broader range of socioeconomic factors. Moving beyond traditional metrics, challenging biases, and ensuring that bursary programs genuinely serve the needs of all deserving students, regardless of their background or field of study, is crucial. Prioritising equity, inclusivity, and comprehensive support can transform corporate bursary programs into effective tools for social mobility and educational transformation in South Africa.

8.2.5 Understanding the Broader Socio-Economic Consequences of Corporate Bursaries

The research reveals that corporate bursaries, intended to alleviate financial burdens for university students in Gauteng, create unintended socio-economic consequences, particularly for those receiving partial bursaries. The findings highlight the complex interplay between financial aid, familial obligations, academic performance, and personal well-being.

The cultivation of dependency among students due to the conditional nature of many bursaries is a significant finding. This dependence can limit students' autonomy in choosing their academic and career paths, potentially hindering personal and intellectual growth. Additionally, the pressure to meet stringent academic requirements while fulfilling familial financial obligations can create significant stress and anxiety, leading to suboptimal academic performance.

The research also exposes the inadequacy of partial bursaries in covering the full spectrum of student needs. Students often resort to allocating a portion of their bursary funds to support their families, leaving them with insufficient resources for essential academic materials and living expenses. This financial strain can lead to detrimental coping mechanisms, including neglecting self-care practices, engaging in risky behaviours such as gambling or transactional sex, and manipulating the bursary system for personal gain.

The study reveals the complex issue of food insecurity and social stigma faced by students with inadequate funding. The inability to afford nutritious meals and appropriate clothing can lead to health problems, social exclusion, and psychological distress, further hindering academic success.

To mitigate these challenges, students employ various coping mechanisms. Some seek social support from friends, family, and university resources, while others take on part-time employment to supplement their income. However, these strategies often come with additional burdens, such as time constraints and increased stress.

The findings underscore the need for a more comprehensive approach to corporate bursary programs in Gauteng. This includes providing full-cost bursaries that adequately cover students' financial needs, including living expenses and academic materials. Additionally, incorporating wrap-around support services like mentorship, counselling, and financial literacy workshops can empower students to navigate the challenges of university life and make informed decisions about their futures.

8.3 Conclusions

The study underscores the necessity for a standardised framework to guide corporate bursary programs, illuminating the significant divergence in perspectives between some corporate stakeholders and bursary recipients. This divergence highlights the importance of incorporating the lived experiences of bursary recipients into the design and implementation of such frameworks. While some corporate stakeholders resist a standardised approach, citing concerns about flexibility and autonomy, the overwhelming support from bursary

recipients underscores the pressing need for structured and consistent guidelines to ensure fairness and transparency in corporate giving.

Corporate stakeholders' resistance is primarily rooted in their desire for autonomy in their giving practices. Approximately 20% of corporate respondents explicitly rejected the idea of a standardised framework, emphasising the need for flexibility to tailor bursaries to specific company needs and priorities. They argue that standardised guidelines could stifle their ability to adapt their giving strategies to align with business goals and values, reflecting a concern that a one-size-fits-all approach could limit a company's ability to respond to unique circumstances or emerging needs within their industry or community. Furthermore, some companies expressed concerns that meeting the standards set by a comprehensive framework might strain their resources, potentially leading to a decrease in their overall philanthropic contributions.

Despite these concerns, the study found compelling arguments in favour of a standardised framework. A significant 80% of companies noted that a standardised framework could lead to the development of more holistic and impactful bursary programs. The most compelling evidence for the necessity of a standardised framework came from the recipients themselves. All interviewed past beneficiaries applauded the idea of a standardised framework, citing numerous benefits based on their lived experiences. They emphasised the need for transparency and consistency in eligibility criteria, selection processes, and funding allocations. A standardised framework would ensure that all students have a clear understanding of what is expected and how decisions are made, promoting fairness and reducing perceptions of bias. This sentiment underscores the perceived inequities in the current landscape, where bursary experiences can vary widely depending on the sponsoring company's resources and priorities. Inconsistent criteria and support levels can create uncertainty and stress for students, highlighting the gaps in current bursary programs.

Beneficiaries also stressed the importance of a holistic approach that considers the diverse needs of students. A framework that encompasses not just financial aid but also academic guidance, mentorship, mental health support, and career development opportunities would provide comprehensive support and enhance the overall impact of bursary programs. This

holistic approach aligns with the principles of social impact, which emphasise the importance of creating programs that address systemic inequalities and contribute to positive social change.

Moreover, incorporating feedback from recipients can lead to more innovative solutions and adaptations that make bursary programs more inclusive and equitable. This participatory approach ensures that the voices of those directly affected by the programs are heard and considered in decision-making processes, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and acceptance of the initiatives. It also fosters a sense of trust, transparency, and accountability among stakeholders, which is crucial for building strong relationships between the companies and the communities they aim to support.

The broader societal benefits of a standardised framework are also significant. Standardising bursary programs ensures greater equity, consistency, and inclusivity in support for students from diverse backgrounds. This aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasises ensuring "inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all." The study revealed that significant disparities persist in access to educational opportunities and outcomes, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Achieving SDG 4 requires a multi-pronged approach, including increased government investment and a more significant role for the private sector in supporting educational initiatives through CSR programs. Standardised bursary frameworks, designed collaboratively by corporations, offer a promising solution for aligning CSR initiatives with SDG 4, ensuring efficient use of resources and creating a more equitable system for allocating bursaries to students who need them most.

8.3.1 Consistent Funding Allocations

Corporate bursary funding allocations currently exhibit significant variation across different companies, resulting in a landscape where the level of support provided to students is highly unequal. This inconsistency is largely due to the absence of standardised guidelines for determining the amounts allocated to bursaries. Without a fixed formula, CSI professionals often make funding decisions based on annual budgets and shifting priorities, leading to

disparities in the financial support students receive. These disparities can have far-reaching implications for the recipients, particularly as they frequently compare the support they receive with that of their peers. Some bursaries might only cover basic needs such as tuition fees, accommodation, and essential living expenses, while others provide higher allowances and additional allocations for academic equipment like laptops. This discrepancy creates feelings of inequity among students, leading to dissatisfaction, demotivation, and potential academic underperformance.

The primary objective of corporate bursary programs is to level the playing field for all students, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds. However, the current inconsistencies in funding allocations undermine this goal. To address this issue, the development of a standardised framework for corporate bursary allocation emerges as a critical imperative. Such a framework would establish transparent and equitable criteria for determining bursary amounts, ensuring that all students receive adequate support to cover their educational expenses, regardless of the sponsoring corporation. This approach highlights the detrimental impact of financial instability on student performance and well-being. A standardised framework could address these issues by establishing transparent and equitable criteria for funding allocations, ensuring that all students receive adequate support to cover their educational expenses, regardless of the sponsoring corporation.

The proposed framework could draw inspiration from successful models like the National Bursary Framework used in some European countries, which utilises a structured approach to determine bursary amounts based on financial need and academic merit. Such a framework would not only promote fairness but also encourage academic excellence by rewarding high-achieving students while ensuring that those from disadvantaged backgrounds are not left behind due to financial constraints. Moreover, consistent funding allocations would promote transparency and accountability in the administration of bursary funds. Transparent criteria for funding allocations would make it clear to all stakeholders, including students, corporate sponsors, and educational institutions, how decisions are made and what to expect. This transparency would reduce perceptions of bias and favouritism, fostering trust and confidence in the bursary programs.

8.3.2 Holistic Approach to Bursary Program Formulation

A core principle that should be addressed within a framework guiding corporate giving towards undergraduate bursaries is the need for a paradigm shift in corporate bursary programs towards a holistic approach, recognising that students' needs extend beyond financial assistance. A successful bursary program must encompass academic, social, emotional, and career development support in addition to monetary aid. As evidenced by the experiences of bursary recipients, the integration of these diverse aspects can have a life-changing impact on their educational journey and overall well-being.

An integral aspect of this holistic approach is the provision of standard full-cost bursaries. These bursaries should cover all educational expenses, including tuition, books, accommodation, and living costs. Ensuring that students' financial needs are fully met eliminates the financial barriers that often impede academic success and personal development. This comprehensive financial support allows students to focus entirely on their studies without the stress of financial insecurity. It also addresses other costs of higher education, such as transportation, food, and other essential living expenses, which can otherwise undermine students' ability to fully engage in their academic pursuits. In essence, the framework must encourage corporates to focus more on social impact. The default setting and mindset should be that of rather providing fewer full cost bursaries as opposed the many partial bursaries – hence, championing quality of quantity.

Mentorship is a critical component of this holistic approach, significantly enhancing the educational experience by providing students with guidance and support from experienced professionals. This is crucial in helping students understand their fields of study, develop professional skills, and build networks that can be invaluable for future career opportunities. Integrating mentorship into bursary programs allows corporate sponsors to help build a more connected and resilient society. However, the integration of mentorship must be approached with practicality, considering the potential workload and responsibilities of mentors. Alternative models, such as pairing students with senior professionals or providing access to online resources and workshops, can offer flexible and effective mentorship solutions without placing an undue burden on mentors.

Academic guidance also emerged as a crucial aspect of the holistic approach. Many students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds or under-resourced schools, face significant challenges transitioning to university-level studies. These challenges include developing study skills, managing time effectively, and understanding the academic culture. Providing academic support services, such as tutoring, workshops, and counselling, can help students overcome these challenges and succeed academically. This support is essential for ensuring that bursary programs do not merely provide financial aid but also foster an environment where students can thrive academically. Higher education institutions provide these services, however at a small scale. Partnering with corporates to fund these initiatives at part of bursary programmes will see to the expansion of reach, ensuring the improved student well-being, and consequently enhanced academic outcomes.

In addition to academic guidance, the study revealed the importance of mental health resources in ensuring student success. The pressures of academic life, coupled with financial concerns and the challenges of adjusting to university environments, can take a toll on students' mental well-being. Integrating mental health services into bursary programs ensures that students have access to the support they need to manage stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues. This support is crucial for promoting overall well-being and ensuring that students can focus on their studies and personal development without being hindered by mental health challenges.

Finally, career development opportunities emerged as a significant component of the holistic approach. Many students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, may lack the connections and resources needed to secure internships, part-time jobs, or other career development opportunities. Providing access to these opportunities helps students build the skills, experience, and networks needed to succeed in the job market after graduation. This support not only enhances students' employability but also contributes to their overall personal and professional development.

8.3.3 Collaboration and Partnership

The critical role that collaboration and partnership play in enhancing the effectiveness and impact of corporate bursary programs is undeniable. The data reveals a strong desire among both past beneficiaries and corporate stakeholders for a more integrated and collaborative approach to bursary provision. This collaborative ethos, when embedded within a standardised framework, can leverage the resources, expertise, and networks of various stakeholders, leading to more comprehensive and sustainable support systems for students. The current fragmented landscape of corporate bursary programs often results in inefficiencies, missed opportunities, and an inability to address the multifaceted needs of students comprehensively. Respondents consistently highlighted the importance of collaboration in tackling these challenges, particularly in the provision of vacation work and internship opportunities. The limited availability of such placements within individual companies creates a significant barrier for students seeking to apply their knowledge and gain practical skills. This underscores the need for a collaborative approach that connects students with a wider range of companies and industries, thereby expanding their access to valuable work experience.

Collaborative efforts can also bridge the gap between academic knowledge and the practical demands of the workplace. Partnering with universities and government institutions, such as Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), corporations can co-create tailored workplace training programs that align academic curricula with industry needs. This not only enhances the employability of bursary recipients but also contributes to broader human capital development and economic growth.

The integration of practical experience into the bursary framework as a mandatory component is another crucial aspect of the collaborative approach. Corporations can demonstrate their commitment to holistic student development and contribute to the cultivation of a skilled and adaptable workforce by mandating practical experience as part of bursary programs.

Furthermore, collaboration can facilitate the provision of wrap-around support services, including social and emotional guidance, to address the diverse needs of students. This holistic approach recognises that academic success is not solely determined by financial support but is also influenced by social, emotional, and psychological factors. A comprehensive support system that empowers students to overcome challenges and thrive academically and personally can be created through the collaboration of corporations, universities, and government institutions.

The findings of this study align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasises the importance of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. The collaboration and partnership advocated for in this research are crucial for achieving this goal, as they enable the pooling of resources, expertise, and networks to create a more effective and equitable system of higher education funding (United Nations, 2015).

The incorporation of collaboration and partnership as a core principle within a standardised framework for corporate bursaries can lead to transformative outcomes for students, corporations, and society as a whole. Stakeholders working together can create a more holistic, inclusive, and impactful approach to bursary provision, ensuring that students are not only financially supported but also equipped with the skills, knowledge, and networks necessary to succeed in their academic pursuits and future careers. This collaborative approach aligns with global development goals and contributes to the broader mission of creating a more equitable and prosperous society.

8.3.4 Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation

A critical finding of this study focused on the pivotal role of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms in shaping equitable and effective corporate bursary programs. The research underscores the imperative to integrate ongoing M&E in corporate bursary frameworks, suggesting that M&E extends far beyond mere data collection, serving as a powerful tool for understanding the lived experiences of recipients and ultimately enhancing academic outcomes. Incorporating thorough M&E mechanisms within bursary frameworks

can address systemic barriers and enhance equity and inclusion, ultimately leading to more effective support systems for students.

The study reveals a pressing need for comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms within bursary frameworks to address systemic barriers and enhance equity and inclusion. Despite the commitment to diversity and social impact, many programs have fallen short in catering to the diverse needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This gap is evident in the experiences shared by respondents, highlighting feelings of exclusion and the need for bursaries to be more inclusive. Implementing robust monitoring and evaluation processes allows bursary programs to better understand the challenges faced by recipients and tailor their support to meet individual needs.

Incorporating the lived experiences of recipients is fundamental to the M&E process. Their first-hand accounts provide invaluable insights into the effectiveness of program components, such as mentoring, academic support, and financial aid. The lived experiences of recipients offer valuable perspectives on what works and what needs improvement in bursary programs, highlighting the need for feedback loops that inform program refinement and continuous improvement. Integrating these insights ensures that bursary programs can ensure that their support structures are responsive to the evolving needs of students, thereby enhancing their overall effectiveness.

M&E can also shed light on the program's broader impact on social mobility, human capital development, and equity. Tracking students' academic progress, career trajectories, and contributions to their communities allows bursary programs to better understand their long-term effects and make data-driven decisions to maximise social impact. Furthermore, effective monitoring and evaluation can lead to improved identification of deviations and swift implementation of remedial action and interventions. This will improve performance, enhance competencies, and accountability, resulting in improved bursary programming.

The study also revealed a need for ongoing feedback mechanisms from stakeholders, including students, educators, and program managers, as integral components of an efficient and effective corporate bursary framework. This iterative process of feedback and improvement fosters a culture of learning and innovation within bursary programs, ensuring

they remain responsive to the evolving needs of recipients. Effective bursary management involves listening to feedback, learning from experiences, and continuously improving program delivery to better support students.

As such, monitoring and evaluation are not merely administrative tasks; they are integral components of a holistic approach to bursary provision. Actively engaging with recipients, tracking progress, and evaluating outcomes enables bursary programs to create a cycle of continuous improvement that empowers students, promotes equity, and fosters a more inclusive and effective educational landscape. This approach ultimately supports the goals of social justice, human capital development, and social mobility, creating a positive ripple effect that benefits both individuals and society as a whole.

The establishment of a standardised framework for corporate bursary programs is essential for addressing the challenges and disparities in the current system. Such a framework should be grounded in the core principles of consistent funding allocations, a holistic approach to bursary program formulation, incorporation of beneficiary feedback, and transparency and accountability. Corporate sponsors can create more effective, equitable, and impactful bursary programs that support the academic success and personal development of students, contributing to social impact and social mobility by adhering to these principles. The study's findings emphasise the importance of focusing on the needs and perspectives of bursary recipients, ensuring their voices are heard and their experiences shape the design and implementation of bursary initiatives. Fairness, transparency, and accountability in corporate giving practices can be fostered through the adoption of a standardised framework, creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students.

8.3.5 A Possible Framework.

The landscape of corporate bursary programs in Gauteng, South Africa, is characterised by a mosaic of diverse approaches and varying degrees of effectiveness. While these programs undoubtedly contribute to educational funding, the study reveals a pressing need for a more cohesive and impactful framework to guide their design and implementation. This following section addresses this need by outlining core principles and elements that should underpin

such a framework, as highlighted in the previous section, premised on lived experiences of both corporate representatives and past bursary recipients.

A comprehensive framework is essential to ensure that bursaries transcend their traditional role as mere financial aid and evolve into instruments of holistic student support, equitable opportunity, and long-term social impact. This necessitates a shift from fragmented, ad hoc approaches towards a standardised model that aligns with the diverse needs of students, the strategic goals of corporations, and the broader developmental objectives of the nation.

Four key principles emerge from the study's findings as foundational pillars for an effective bursary framework: a holistic approach to student support, a steadfast commitment to equity and inclusion, transparent and accountable processes, and a collaborative approach that leverages the strengths of various stakeholders. Corporate bursaries can become catalysts for positive change, empowering students from all backgrounds to achieve their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society through the embrace of these principles.

A rigorous analysis of the data collected throughout this study culminates in the following proposed framework, designed to serve as a comprehensive guide for the development and implementation of equitable, impactful, and sustainable corporate bursary programs. This framework encapsulates the multifaceted insights gleaned from both corporate stakeholders and past bursary recipients, addressing the critical need for a standardised approach that fosters student success while aligning with broader societal goals. Corporations can maximise the effectiveness of their bursary initiatives and contribute meaningfully to educational equity and socioeconomic development by incorporating the core principles outlined below.

A. Partnering with the Right Institution:

The foundation of a successful bursary program lies in the strategic alignment of values and goals between the corporation and the educational institution. Corporations should proactively seek out universities, colleges, or vocational schools that share their commitment to social impact, educational equity, and the development of a skilled workforce. This alignment ensures a cohesive partnership where both parties are invested in the success of the bursary recipients. It also fosters

a collaborative environment where the corporation and institution can work together to tailor the program to meet the specific needs of both students and the industry.

A. Eligibility Criteria

- **Financial Need:** Assess household income relative to local living costs, considering family size, dependents, debt, and other financial obligations. Implement a tiered system to offer varied support levels based on demonstrated need.
- **Academic Potential:** Evaluate academic history, standardised test scores (if applicable), and qualitative indicators like essays and motivations. Look for resilience, a growth mindset, and a demonstrated commitment to overcoming challenges.
- **Field of Study:** Prioritise alignment with national skills shortages while supporting a diverse range of disciplines. Consider both current and emerging industry needs, as well as fields that contribute to broader societal development.
- **Diversity & Inclusion:** Proactively recruit students from underrepresented groups through targeted outreach. Use data-driven approaches to assess and adjust criteria for equitable representation in the recipient pool.

B. Selection Process

- **Transparent Application:** Create an accessible online application with clear instructions and deadlines. Offer informational workshops and one-on-one support for students needing assistance. This can be routed via institutions who can be capacitated to handle these requirements.
- **Holistic Review:** Assemble a diverse selection committee with members from various backgrounds and expertise. Use a combination of quantitative assessments (GPA) and qualitative assessments (essays, interviews) to gain a comprehensive understanding of each applicant.
- **Bias Mitigation:** Conduct unconscious bias training for all selection committee members. Implement blind review processes where personal identifiers are removed during initial application screenings. Continuously analyse selection data to identify and address any potential biases.

C. Bursary Structure

- **Financial Support:** Cover all essential costs, including tuition, fees, textbooks, accommodation, meals, transportation, and technology. Tailor support levels to individual financial needs.
- **Academic Support:** Offer tutoring in core modules, academic advising, access to learning resources, and workshops on study skills and time management.
- **Mentorship & Career Development:** Assign each recipient a dedicated mentor from the sponsoring company or partner organisation. Provide opportunities for internships, job shadowing, and career counselling. Offer workshops on resume writing, interview skills, and professional development.
- **Mental Health Support:** Provide access to confidential counselling services and mental health resources. Organise workshops and awareness campaigns to destigmatise seeking help for mental health concerns.

D. Monitoring & Evaluation

- **Data Collection:** Track application and selection data, student demographics, academic performance, graduation rates, employment outcomes, and feedback from recipients and mentors. This can be done through the meticulous use of software packages optimised for tracking beneficiary data.
- **Impact Assessment:** Analyse data to identify trends, areas for improvement, and the program's overall impact on student success, equity, and social mobility.
- **Transparency & Communication:** Regularly publish reports summarising program outcomes and key learnings. Engage with students, universities, and the wider community through open forums and feedback mechanisms.

E. Collaboration & Partnership

- **Inter-Company Collaboration:** Establish partnerships with other companies to share internship and work placement opportunities. Collaborate on mentorship programs and training initiatives to share resources and expertise.

- **Government & SETA Partnerships:** Work with government departments and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) to align bursary offerings with national skills priorities and leverage government resources for program enhancement.
- **Community Engagement:** Partner with community organisations to reach underserved populations, provide culturally relevant support, and foster a sense of shared responsibility for student success.

This framework, meticulously crafted based on the study's findings, offers a comprehensive guide for corporations to design and implement bursary programs that go beyond financial aid. Corporations can create transformative opportunities that empower students from all backgrounds, contributing to a more equitable and prosperous society by embracing holistic support, equity, transparency, collaboration, and ongoing evaluation. This approach transcends mere financial assistance, focusing instead on nurturing well-rounded individuals equipped with the skills, knowledge, and support systems necessary to thrive in their academic journeys and beyond.

8.3.6 Systems Approach

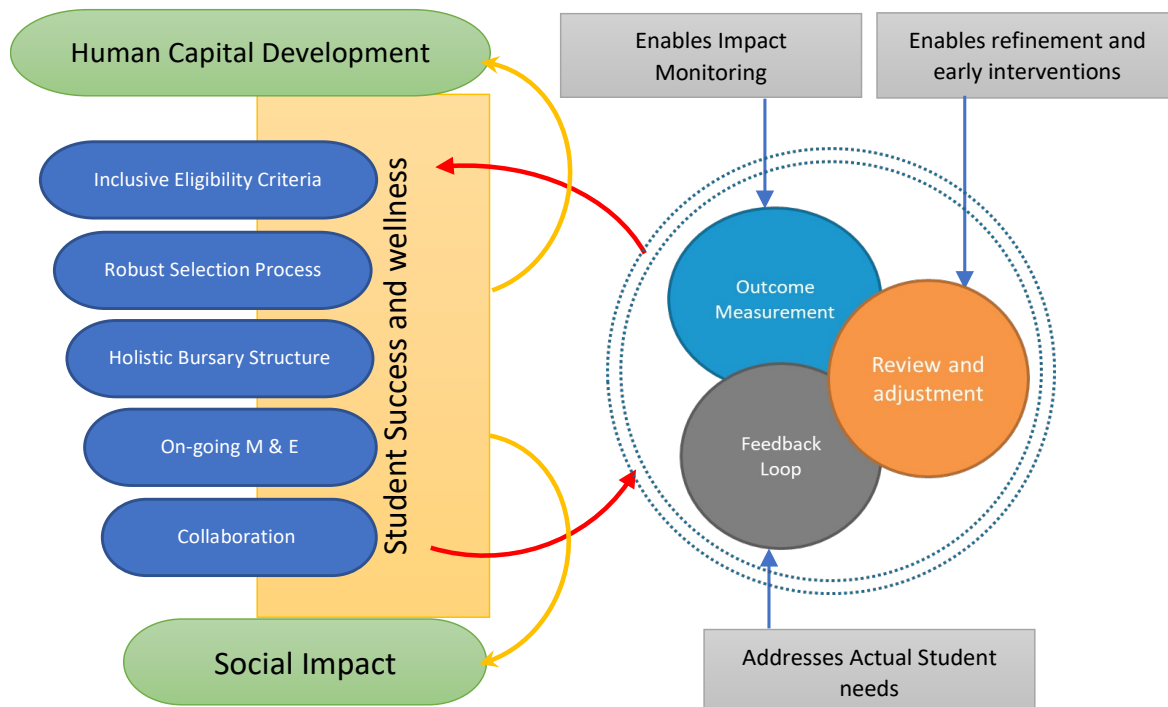


Figure 9: Systems Approach to Bursary Provision

The above framework represents a holistic and interconnected approach to corporate bursary programs, aimed at maximising their impact and fostering student success. This framework is grounded in the systems thinking principle that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (Ackoff, 1971), emphasising the interconnectedness and interdependence of various components within the system.

Each stage of the framework, from eligibility criteria to collaboration and partnership, plays a crucial role in the overall functioning and effectiveness of the bursary program.

Input stage - Eligibility Criteria: This stage acts as a critical filter to ensure that the bursary program targets the most deserving and suitable candidates. Rather than blindly following conventional criteria, the recommendation is to adopt a more flexible and comprehensive approach, considering the specific circumstances of each student. This approach ensures that the program is inclusive and truly targets those who will benefit most. Implementing such nuanced and flexible eligibility criteria ensures that the bursary program is not only fair and equitable but also strategically targeted to support students who are most likely to benefit and succeed. This approach helps create a more inclusive program that addresses the diverse needs and challenges faced by potential bursary recipients, ultimately leading to a more effective and impactful distribution of resources.

Process stage - Selection Process: This is where the input is transformed into output. The holistic review, bias mitigation strategies, and transparent application process ensure that the selection is fair, objective, and free from discrimination. This stage is crucial in identifying students who not only have the potential to succeed but also align with the strategic goals of the corporation and the broader needs of the country.

Output stage - Bursary Structure: It provides the necessary resources and support systems to ensure that students can thrive academically and personally. The comprehensive financial support, academic assistance, vacation work, mentorship, career development opportunities, and mental health resources collectively create a nurturing environment that enables students to reach their full potential.

Feedback stage – Tracking Progress: This stage involves continuous tracking and assessment of the program's effectiveness, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring accountability. A robust feedback loop allows for timely adjustments and refinements based on real-world data and outcomes, enhancing the program's responsiveness and impact over time. To achieve this, it is recommended that companies invest in comprehensive software solutions designed to bolster their monitoring and evaluation (M&E) efforts.

These software packages should enable students to upload academic information weekly, such as test scores, assignments, and other relevant metrics. For instance, students can upload weekly test results, which provide a more immediate snapshot of their academic performance compared to waiting for end-of-semester marks. Additionally, the platform can include features where students respond to periodic questions about their academic and personal well-being. The software can then automatically assign scores based on these responses, using predefined algorithms to identify potential areas of concern.

When the software detects anomalies or scores that raise red flags, it triggers an automatic notification to the program administrators and donors. This real-time alert system ensures that any issues are identified promptly, allowing for timely interventions and support. Such proactive measures help address challenges before they escalate, ensuring that students receive the necessary assistance to stay on track academically and personally.

In this way, the program can continuously monitor progress, quickly respond to emerging needs, and make data-driven decisions to enhance the overall effectiveness and impact of the bursary program by incorporating these advanced tracking and feedback mechanisms.

Network stage - Collaboration & Partnership: This represents the part of the system, where the bursary program connects with external entities to create a broader ecosystem of support. Collaborations with companies, government agencies, and community organisations enhance the program's reach and effectiveness by pooling resources, expertise, and opportunities, ultimately contributing to the broader goals of social and economic development.

Viewing the framework as a system allows for an appreciation of the interconnectedness of these stages and their collective impact on student outcomes. The diagram illustrates how these components interact to create a cyclical process of continuous improvement. The feedback loop from the monitoring and evaluation stage informs the refinement of eligibility criteria, selection processes, and the bursary structure itself. This iterative process ensures that the program remains responsive to the evolving needs of students and the changing landscape of higher education. The ultimate goal of this framework is to create a sustainable system that whilst supporting individual student success, also contributes to broader societal goals of human capital development and enhanced social impact. This understanding is crucial for designing and implementing effective bursary programs, as it emphasises the need for a holistic approach that considers the interdependencies and synergies between different components.

8.3.7 Possible Scenarios

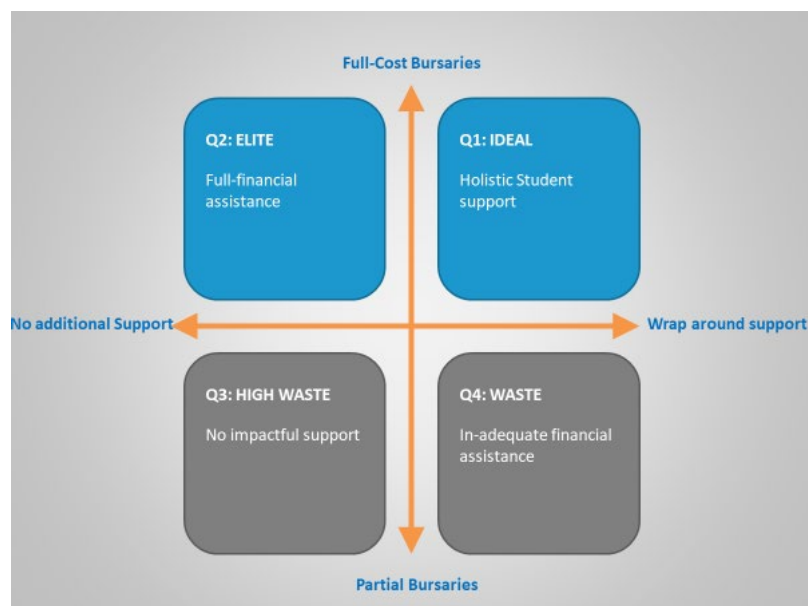


Figure 10: Corporate funding scenarios

Q1: IDEAL

The "IDEAL" quadrant features scenarios with full-cost bursaries and wrap-around support. This approach is highly recommended as it combines substantial financial assistance with comprehensive support services, ensuring students have both the funds and the guidance

they need to succeed. Full-cost bursaries eliminate the financial barriers that might prevent students from enrolling or continuing their education. The additional wrap-around support addresses other potential obstacles, such as academic challenges, mental health issues, and other personal problems, creating an environment where students can thrive. Therefore, adopting this scenario could lead to significantly better outcomes in terms of student retention and success rates.

Q2: ELITE

The "ELITE" quadrant provides full-cost bursaries without additional support. While this approach does offer significant financial assistance, it lacks the supplementary support services that are crucial for student success. Full-cost bursaries reduce financial barriers, making education more accessible, but without additional support, students may still struggle with other non-financial challenges. This approach may work well for highly self-sufficient students who do not require much external assistance, thus making it "ELITE" in terms of the financial aid provided. However, it might not cater to the needs of all students, particularly those who benefit from a more holistic support system.

Q3: WASTE

The "WASTE" quadrant combines partial bursaries with wrap-around support. This scenario is somewhat contradictory as it provides extensive support services but insufficient financial aid. While the wrap-around support can help students deal with various challenges, the partial bursaries do not alleviate the financial burden enough, potentially causing stress and distraction from academic pursuits. This mismatch between the level of financial aid and the support services can lead to underutilization of the provided support, as financial stress remains a significant barrier. Therefore, despite the good intentions behind providing wrap-around support, the limited financial assistance makes this scenario less effective and potentially a "WASTE" of resources.

Q4: HIGH WASTE

The "HIGH WASTE" quadrant involves partial bursaries with no additional support. This scenario is least favourable as it offers minimal financial aid and lacks any supportive services, making it ineffective in addressing the comprehensive needs of students. Partial bursaries

might not cover enough of the educational costs, leaving significant financial gaps that students still need to fill, potentially through loans or part-time work. The absence of additional support services further exacerbates the situation, as students who may need academic or personal help have no resources to turn to. Consequently, this approach does not improve student outcomes significantly and becomes an inefficient use of resources.

8.4 Policy Implications and recommendations

8.4.1 For Corporates (Focused on Enhancing Academic Outcomes)

Corporate bursary programs should evolve to offer more than just financial aid, embracing a holistic support model that includes academic assistance, mentorship, and career development initiatives. This comprehensive approach ensures students are well-equipped to succeed academically and transition smoothly into the professional world. Fostering both immediate academic success and long-term professional growth, such programs contribute to a more skilled and capable workforce.

Meeting Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) targets is important, but the quality of support provided to bursary recipients must not be compromised. Programs should strike a balance between achieving numerical goals and delivering substantial, impactful support that promotes students' holistic development. Quality assurance mechanisms are essential in evaluating bursary program outcomes and ensuring alignment with B-BBEE objectives. These mechanisms should involve regular monitoring and evaluation of student progress, as well as feedback loops that enable continuous improvement.

Extending bursary coverage to address historic debt is another critical aspect, as it can significantly alleviate students' financial burdens and improve graduation rates. This approach enhances the overall impact of corporate investments in education. Reassessing bursary eligibility criteria to include socio-economic factors alongside race ensures that all financially disadvantaged students, regardless of racial background, have equal access to bursary opportunities. Broadening the scope of eligibility makes bursary programs more inclusive, thereby extending their reach and impact in fostering a diverse and well-rounded future

workforce. Through these measures, corporate bursary programs can be refined to better serve the needs of students and fulfil the broader goals of corporate social responsibility.

8.4.2 For Universities

Universities should work closely with corporates to ensure that bursary recipients receive comprehensive support services, including academic tutoring, counselling, and career guidance. This collaboration is vital in enabling students to excel both academically and professionally, ensuring that the bursary programs have a meaningful and lasting impact on their futures.

Streamlining and standardising bursary application and administration processes are essential to reducing barriers for students. Simplified processes make it easier for students to access the financial support they need, ensuring efficient and transparent allocation of funds. Integrating financial aid applications directly into the standard academic admissions process is another step towards enhancing the accessibility and effectiveness of corporate bursary programs. This integration would ensure that all students applying to the university are simultaneously considered for financial assistance, significantly broadening the reach of corporate funding programs and maximising their positive impact on educational equity and student success. Furthermore, universities should adopt a proactive approach to identifying vulnerable students by utilising the data already available in their repositories. Rather than waiting for students to apply for financial aid, institutions can analyse key indicators such as household income, single-parent households, or students whose guardians are grandparents or extended family, to identify those most in need of support, and push them forward to donors for selection, with or without financial aid applications. This ensures that no deserving student is overlooked and that financial resources are effectively directed towards those who need them the most. Such an approach enhances the reach and impact of financial aid programmes, ensuring that funding fulfils its purpose by reaching the intended beneficiaries.

Addressing historic student debt is crucial in enhancing student retention and graduation rates. Universities should work alongside corporates and government bodies to develop strategies that target historic debt, providing students with the financial relief necessary to

complete their education. This approach not only supports individual students but also contributes to the overall success and reputation of the institution. By adopting these measures, universities can ensure that their partnership with corporate bursary programs is as effective and far-reaching as possible, ultimately benefiting both students and the broader educational landscape.

8.4.3 For Policy Makers

Policymakers should consider reviewing and updating B-BBEE policies to ensure a balance between compliance and meaningful social impact, promoting holistic support for students within bursary programs. This involves creating frameworks that not only encourage corporates to meet legislative requirements but also inspire them to invest in initiatives that lead to significant educational and socio-economic outcomes.

It is also essential to ensure that B-BBEE guidelines are inclusive, addressing broader equity concerns such as socio-economic disparities, historic debt, and gender diversity in bursary allocation. Promoting inclusivity and fairness within these guidelines will help address various forms of inequality, ensuring that financial assistance reaches those most in need, regardless of their racial background or other factors.

Encouraging partnerships between corporates, educational institutions, and government bodies can lead to the creation of comprehensive support systems for students. These collaborations would enable the sharing of resources, best practices, and coordinated efforts, maximising the impact of bursary programs. Such an approach ensures that the support provided to students extends beyond financial aid, fostering environments where students can thrive academically and professionally.

To further enhance the effectiveness of bursary programs, it is crucial to develop clear, measurable outcomes that go beyond mere compliance. Establishing metrics such as graduation rates, employment rates, and the long-term socio-economic impact on beneficiaries would provide a more accurate assessment of a bursary program's success and its contribution to societal development.

Additionally, introducing a graduated penalty system for non-impactful B-BBEE bursary spending could serve as a strong incentive for corporates to go beyond minimum compliance. This system could assess the effectiveness of bursary programs based on educational outcomes, with penalties increasing in severity for companies that fail to demonstrate meaningful impact. For instance, a tiered penalty structure might impose moderate financial penalties on companies that meet minimum spending requirements but show minimal impact, with more severe penalties or exclusion from government tenders for those consistently failing to improve educational outcomes.

Alongside these penalties, incentives for impactful investment should be introduced. For example, companies with a proven track record of effective bursary programs could be granted preferential treatment in government procurement processes. This dual approach of penalties and incentives would encourage corporates to prioritise real social impact over mere compliance, leading to improved educational outcomes for bursary recipients and contributing to a more equitable society.

8.5 Significant contributions to the broader field

This study makes several significant contributions to the field of corporate bursary programs, extending current knowledge and practice.

Firstly, it identifies a previously unrecognised category of financial need, falling between the "missing middle" and high-income earners. This finding, challenges existing financial need categorisations and offers a more nuanced understanding of the diverse financial circumstances faced by students, enabling bursary programs to target support more effectively.

Secondly, the study's rigorous examination of the impact of corporate bursary funding on throughput, retention, and graduation rates, identifying key strengths and limitations of current bursary models provides invaluable empirical evidence to the discourse on financial aid's role in academic success. This evidence-based approach underscores the importance of

sustained and comprehensive bursary programs in promoting throughput and completion, thereby contributing to a more informed and effective approach to bursary design and implementation.

Thirdly, this study proposes a comprehensive framework for corporate bursary programs, which integrates various components that are individually essential and collectively impactful. This framework represents a significant departure from existing models that often treat these components as discrete entities, failing to recognise their interconnectedness and potential for combined benefits. This framework, grounded in systems thinking, emphasises the interconnectedness of these components and highlights the importance of a holistic approach to maximising program impact. This study provides a valuable resource for corporate stakeholders, educational institutions, and policymakers by offering a practical roadmap for designing and implementing effective bursary programs.

Finally, this study uniquely enhances the understanding of B-BBEE's impact on corporate bursary programs in South Africa by revealing how the necessity to meet B-BBEE thresholds inadvertently diminishes social impact. These findings are crucial for businesses looking to optimise their CSR initiatives and for policymakers aiming to refine B-BBEE legislation for greater social impact. Addressing these issues can help policymakers create a more equitable and inclusive bursary landscape that genuinely empowers disadvantaged students and fosters meaningful transformation in South Africa.

The study's strong contextual relevance to the South African higher education landscape makes its findings particularly pertinent for stakeholders seeking to address the unique challenges and opportunities within the country. The study offers insights and recommendations that are directly applicable to the local context by grounding its research in the specific context of South Africa, contributing to a more informed and effective approach to bursary provision in the country.

In sum, this study's contributions extend beyond theoretical insights, offering practical implications for the design and implementation of corporate bursary programs. The research has the potential to significantly enhance the effectiveness and impact of bursary programs in South Africa, contributing to the broader goals of educational equity, social mobility, and

economic development, by challenging existing assumptions, providing empirical evidence, and proposing a comprehensive framework.

8.6 Implications for future research

To maximise the strategic impact of corporate bursary programmes in South Africa, future research must adopt a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that addresses the complex dynamics influencing these initiatives. A critical area for investigation is the intricate relationship between B-BBEE policies and bursary allocation. The influence of B-BBEE quotas on access to bursaries for students from marginalised backgrounds requires rigorous analysis. Particularly, the role of B-BBEE consultants in assessing compliance and their potential to disadvantage certain groups of students must be scrutinised. Research should quantify the extent to which these quotas might inadvertently restrict access for some students and propose alternative compliance mechanisms that prioritise educational equity and student outcomes over bureaucratic requirements. This could offer valuable insights into how B-BBEE policies can be better aligned with the principles of social justice and educational inclusivity.

Moreover, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive analysis of existing bursary policies and regulations to identify opportunities for enhancing equity, transparency, and accountability within these programmes. This should include a critical examination of the criteria used by corporations in selecting bursary recipients and how these criteria may either reinforce or mitigate systemic inequalities. Developing standardised frameworks that ensure consistency in bursary allocation while allowing for flexibility to address the diverse needs of students is essential. Such research could significantly contribute to the creation of more inclusive bursary programmes that better serve all students, particularly those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, and align with broader national objectives of redressing inequality.

Fostering stronger collaboration between government and corporations is another strategic area that requires focused research. Investigating shared responsibility models, where both public and private sectors contribute to funding and managing bursary programmes, could lead to more sustainable and impactful initiatives. Additionally, there is a need to develop

impact measurement frameworks that assess not only the immediate outcomes of bursary programmes but also their long-term effects on students' educational and career trajectories. Research should explore how these collaborative models can be effectively implemented, ensuring that both government and corporate partners are held accountable for the success of bursary recipients. Such an approach could enhance the alignment of bursary programmes with national development goals, ultimately contributing to a more skilled and equitable workforce.

Understanding the long-term outcomes of bursary programmes is crucial for assessing their true value and impact, not only for the recipients but also for the corporations and the broader society. The assessment of these programmes goes beyond immediate educational attainment and extends into the long-term professional and personal development of the beneficiaries. Longitudinal studies, which track the career trajectories of bursary recipients over an extended period, can provide a wealth of data on the real return on investment for corporations. These insights are essential for understanding how bursary programmes contribute to corporate goals, such as talent development, workforce diversity, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) commitments. Such research can delve into whether bursary recipients secure sustainable employment in their chosen fields and how their professional progress compares to their peers who did not receive similar support. This comparison could reveal the extent to which bursary programmes equip students with the necessary skills, networks, and confidence to thrive in competitive job markets. Furthermore, these studies could explore the role of bursary programmes in facilitating social mobility, examining how recipients may contribute to their communities, both economically and socially. This includes assessing whether they are able to break cycles of poverty within their families and communities, thereby contributing to broader societal goals such as reducing inequality and fostering inclusive economic growth.

Another important area for future research is the availability and impact of corporate bursaries within private higher education institutions. Private institutions are often perceived as catering primarily to affluent students, which raises questions about the extent to which corporate bursaries are available to support underprivileged students in these settings. This perception of affluence may deter corporations from allocating bursary funds to students at

private institutions, under the assumption that they do not require financial assistance. However, with the growing demand for higher education and the limited capacity of public institutions, private institutions are increasingly serving a more diverse student population, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research should investigate whether this perception of affluence is hindering the distribution of corporate bursaries to students who need them most. Are underprivileged students at private institutions receiving adequate support through corporate bursaries, or are they overlooked in favour of students at public institutions? Understanding the availability and distribution of these bursaries is crucial for ensuring that all students, regardless of the type of institution they attend, have access to the financial resources they need to succeed.

Moreover, the research should explore the impact of corporate bursaries on student outcomes within private institutions. Do these bursaries contribute to improved academic performance, retention, and graduation rates among underprivileged students? Or does the perception of affluence lead to a mismatch between the needs of the student population and the availability of corporate support?

Finally, the sustainability of corporate bursary programs in private institutions warrants examination. Are these bursaries sustainable in the long term, and how do they compare to those offered at public institutions? Future research should focus on how corporate bursary programs can be more effectively aligned with the realities of students at both public and private higher education institutions, ensuring that financial aid reaches those who need it most, regardless of the type of higher education institution.

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Annexures

28 February 2024

Dear Mr A Maphosa

Project Title: Assessing the sufficiency of Corporate Funding for Undergraduate Bursaries and their Impacts on Student Access and Success in South Africa Perspectives and insights from past bursary recipients and Corporate Social Investment (CSI) professionals

Researcher: Mr A Maphosa

Supervisor(s): Prof V Thebe

Department: Anthropology, Archaeology and Development Studies

Reference number: 17218234 (HUM012/1222)

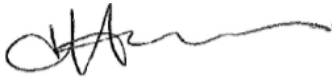
Degree: Doctoral

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 28 February 2024. Please note that before research can commence all other approvals must have been received.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely,



Prof Karen Harris
Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: tracey.andrew@up.ac.za



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UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
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Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to take part in a research study by Mr Alson Maphosa, a PhD in Development Studies student, in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Pretoria. Please read the following information carefully and ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

This study is expected to collect information on the role of Corporate Bursary programmes in Universities. It seeks to assess the impact and adequacy of funding received from corporates in enhancing student access and success. Hundreds of millions of Rand are channeled towards student bursaries from Corporations annually. However, with so much money channeled towards bursaries, the fundamental question, pivotal to this study – is this funding impactful resulting in significant changes in one's life or are there pitfalls to the funding which render it significantly inadequate with diminished impact? The study will therefore assess the impact and adequacy of corporate funding in an effort to unearth flaws in programming towards the singular most fundamental objective of creating a guiding framework for corporate giving towards bursaries to enhance both access and success.

Research study title

Assessing the sufficiency of Corporate Funding for Undergraduate Bursaries and their Impacts on Student Access and Success in South Africa. Perspectives and insights from past bursary recipients and CSI professionals.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and the data collected will be discarded.

What will happen in the study?

The study will involve interviews with you at a time and place of your convenience. The interview will take approximately one hour and with your permission, may be voice recorded so that I do not miss any important information that you may share.

Risks and discomforts

There will be no danger/harm to you. It may however be difficult for you to share some information, and you will be free not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. If you experience some level of discomfort after joining the study, and you would like to stop participating, please feel free to let me know. You will be allowed to stop participating at any time without prejudice and the data already collected will be discarded.

Are there any benefits for joining the study?

Your participation in this research does not carry any reward in cash or kind. Your contributions will assist me in developing a dissertation for my qualification, but it may also benefit the community and other organisations indirectly through findings that may assist in finding better ways of doing things.

Confidentiality

While every effort will be made to ensure that the information you share is not linked to you, it may be difficult in some cases due to the position you hold in the organisation or in the community. However, other methods will be employed such as pseudonyms and codes to enhance anonymity.

The data/information you provide will be shared with my supervisor at the University of Pretoria, but the data will be stored in a password protected computer, accessed only by the researcher. After the study the data will be stored in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Pretoria for at least 15 years.

The results will be produced in the form of a dissertation and scientific article, and may be disseminated at local and international forums, like conferences and symposiums. The voice recordings of the interviews will not be broadcasted on radio, television, internet or on social media but will be utilised to make findings for the study.

Any questions?

If you have any questions or require further clarification, you are welcome to phone or text me on +27814116335. You can also send me an email on the following address: alson.maphosa@up.ac.za

CONSENT DECLARATION

Please sign the form to indicate that:

- You have read and understand the information provided above.
- You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.

Participant's signature

Date

Faculty of Humanities
Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomo

Interview Guide for Past Bursary Recipients

1. **How did the corporate bursary programme impact your access to undergraduate studies?**
 - *Probing:* Without the bursary, do you think you would have been able to pursue your studies? If not, what alternatives would you have considered?
2. **What specific challenges did you face related to funding, and how did the bursary programme address them?**
 - *Probing:* Were there any financial needs that the bursary did not cover? How did you manage those gaps?
3. **In your opinion, were the terms and conditions of the bursary programme fair and manageable?**
 - *Probing:* Were there any specific conditions that you found particularly challenging? How did these affect your academic or personal life?
4. **Did the bursary programme offer any additional support beyond financial assistance (e.g., mentorship, career guidance)?**
 - *Probing:* How did this additional support influence your academic performance and career trajectory? Would you have benefitted from more or different types of support?
5. **How did receiving the bursary impact your academic performance and overall university experience?**
 - *Probing:* Did the financial security provided by the bursary allow you to focus more on your studies? How did it affect your participation in extracurricular activities?
6. **Can you share your personal experience as a past bursary recipient, highlighting the impact it had on your access to higher education and subsequent success?**
 - *Probing:* What specific opportunities did the bursary open up for you? How has it influenced your career since graduation?
7. **How did corporate funding for undergraduate bursaries influence your academic journey, and what specific challenges or opportunities did it present?**

- *Probing:* Were there any academic pressures linked to maintaining the bursary? How did you cope with them?
8. **As a past bursary recipient, can you discuss any non-monetary support or mentorship you received from the corporate sponsor and its impact on your overall success?**
- *Probing:* Did you form any lasting relationships or networks through the mentorship? How did these relationships help in your academic or professional life?
9. **How did the corporate-funded bursary align with your academic and career goals, and did it contribute to your professional development in any specific way?**
- *Probing:* Did the bursary influence your choice of field or career path? If so, how?
10. **How can corporate-funded bursaries be adapted or improved to enhance their impact on student success?**
- *Probing:* What specific changes would you suggest to make the programme more effective for future recipients? How do you think these changes could be implemented?
11. **Was the bursary adequate? If not, what was missing?**
- *Probing:* In what areas did you feel under-supported? How did this affect your studies or daily life?
12. **How did you or any other student you know of mitigate against any shortfalls?**
- *Probing:* Did you seek additional funding or support from other sources? What strategies did you employ to manage any financial gaps?
13. **As a past bursary recipient, were there any specific challenges or gaps in support that you encountered during your academic journey, and how do you believe these challenges could be addressed to enhance future bursary programmes?**
- *Probing:* Were there any support structures that you felt were missing? How could the programme better cater to students in similar situations?
14. **How did the corporate-funded bursary impact your sense of belonging and integration within the academic community, and what role did on-campus mentorship or support play in this regard?**

- *Probing:* Did the bursary influence your involvement in student activities or societies? How did this involvement affect your university experience?

15. How do you perceive the long-term impact of corporate-funded bursaries on workforce diversity and inclusivity within South Africa, and what improvements could be made in this regard?

- *Probing:* In your opinion, how can bursaries better prepare students for diverse and inclusive work environments? What role should corporations play in this process?

Interview Guide for CSI Professionals

1. **What are the key factors considered by your company when designing and implementing undergraduate bursary programmes?**
 - *Probing:* How do these factors align with your company's broader Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals? Are there any specific challenges you face in this process?
2. **How do you assess the effectiveness of your company's bursary programmes in achieving their intended goals?**
 - *Probing:* What metrics or indicators do you use to measure success? How do you incorporate feedback from past recipients into programme evaluations?
3. **What are the biggest challenges your company faces in providing adequate funding for undergraduate bursaries?**
 - *Probing:* How do you prioritise funding allocation? What strategies do you employ to overcome financial limitations?
4. **In your opinion, are current levels of corporate funding for bursaries sufficient to meet the needs of disadvantaged students in South Africa?**
 - *Probing:* What gaps still exist, and how could they be addressed? Do you think there is a need for increased collaboration with government or other stakeholders?
5. **What are some innovative approaches or best practices that your company or other organisations utilise to maximise the impact of bursary programmes?**
 - *Probing:* Can you provide examples of successful initiatives? How have these practices been received by students and educational institutions?
6. **In your opinion, what are the key criteria or considerations that should be assessed when determining the sufficiency of corporate funding for undergraduate bursaries?**
 - *Probing:* How do you ensure that the bursaries reach those who need them most? Are there any particular demographic or socio-economic factors that are prioritised?
7. **What factors are crucial when designing and evaluating corporate-funded bursary programmes to ensure their effectiveness?**

- *Probing:* How do you balance the need for financial support with the provision of non-monetary benefits, such as mentorship or career development?
- 8. **Can you provide insights into the challenges faced by corporations in balancing financial support and non-monetary interventions (mentorship, networking, etc.) in their bursary programmes?**
 - *Probing:* How do you measure the impact of these non-monetary interventions? Are there any specific areas where you see a need for improvement?
- 9. **How do corporate-funded bursaries contribute to addressing broader societal issues, such as diversity, inclusion, and social upliftment, according to your experiences and observations?**
 - *Probing:* What role do these bursaries play in your company's overall strategy for social responsibility? How do you ensure that they contribute to meaningful change?
- 10. **How can corporate-funded bursaries be adapted or improved to enhance their impact on student success?**
 - *Probing:* What specific changes would you recommend to make the programmes more effective? How do you see these changes being implemented in practice?
- 11. **Can you share any specific success stories or positive outcomes resulting from corporate-funded bursaries, and how do these stories reflect the effectiveness of such programmes in South Africa?**
 - *Probing:* What elements of the programme contributed most to these successes? How do you plan to build on these successes in the future?
- 12. **What evaluation methods or key performance indicators are most effective in gauging the success and impact of corporate-funded bursary programmes on student access and success?**
 - *Probing:* How do you collect and analyse data on these indicators? How is this information used to inform programme improvements?
- 13. **Can you provide examples of how corporate sponsors have collaborated with educational institutions or other stakeholders to maximise the impact of their bursary programmes on the broader education ecosystem in South Africa?**

- *Probing:* What challenges have you encountered in these collaborations? How have you addressed them to ensure successful partnerships?
- 14. From your experiences, what recommendations would you offer to corporations aiming to align their bursary programmes with Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) goals and contribute meaningfully to social transformation in South Africa?**
- *Probing:* How do you balance the need for compliance with B-BBEE regulations and the goal of social upliftment? What lessons have you learned in this process?
- 15. How do you perceive the long-term impact of corporate-funded bursaries on workforce diversity and inclusivity within South Africa, and what improvements could be made in this regard?**
- *Probing:* What role do you see bursaries playing in shaping the future workforce? How can corporations ensure that these programmes contribute to lasting change?
- 16. How can we better bridge the gap between the supply and demand of financial aid for undergraduate studies?**
- *Probing:* What role should corporations play in this effort? How can collaboration with other stakeholders be improved?
- 17. How can we incentivise greater corporate participation in funding bursary programmes?**
- *Probing:* What challenges do companies face in committing to these programmes? What incentives might encourage more active participation?