

A STUDENT SUPPORT GUIDING FRAMEWORK TOWARDS IMPROVING GRADUATION RATES FOR A NURSING COLLEGE IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY DESIGN.

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ABSTRACT.

Background:

Student attrition poses a significant challenge to nursing education institutions, leading to health worker shortages in South Africa and globally. This occurs despite implementing student support interventions that appear not to be well-implemented, not escalated, and need organizational structures that enable it. Hence, the purpose of the study was to develop an intentional student support framework that could assist improve student outcomes.

Methods:

The process was informed by a prior mixed-method research approach that involved the participation of students and staff in the completion of questionnaires and interviews as stakeholders in a selected nursing college, employing a case study design.

Results:

The quantitative results showed poor pre-enrolment support, in particular participants from disadvantaged communities. Both quantitative and qualitative studies revealed good academic support. However, the qualitative studies highlighted organizational conditions, processes, and practices that hindered the provision of comprehensive support.

Conclusions:

Therefore, a well-coordinated, comprehensive, intentional, and policy-aligned student support guiding framework is presented in this article.

Recommendations:

The College should implement this comprehensive student support guiding framework across all its campuses to address the diverse needs of its student body and promote their success and well-being.

Keywords: *Academic success, Comprehensive student support, Policy-aligned program, Nursing education institutions, Student support guiding framework*

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INTRODUCTION.

Student attrition is one of the challenges resulting in nurse shortages in South Africa and globally (Challinor et al., 2020; Maré et al., 2019). This necessitates mitigating measures to improve student outcomes and the supply of nurses. Widening access to higher education institutions (HEIs) enables underprepared students from disadvantaged backgrounds to be given access not only to enroll but also to be provided with support to succeed (Guo et al., 2022, Gabriel, 2022, Lavhelani et al., 2020, Mokher et al., 2023). These students are disadvantaged as they compete with those from socio-economic and linguistically privileged backgrounds in the context where English second language is the medium of instruction for the majority of African citizens in South Africa (Khumalo and Alhassan, 2021, Mavuru and Ramnarain, 2020, Ngcobo and Makumane, 2023, Steyn et

al., 2014, Thomas and Maree, 2022, Zulu and Ngcobo, 2023). Recruiting and selecting students from disadvantaged communities and bolstering support services could avert the shortage of nurses (Africa, 2020). Hopefully, on completion of training, they will go back to serve their communities, thus balancing the skewed supply of nurses (Griffiths et al., 2019, Speckman and Mandew, 2014). However, in the last decade, there has been an up to 50% attrition rate in nursing programs reported worldwide (Education, 2016, Ramkilowan, 2014, Roos et al., 2016, Sibiya and Mahlanze, 2018, Ten Hoeve et al., 2017). This happens despite the availability of student support (SS) interventions that have been made mandatory for program accreditation by the Council for Higher Education (CHE) since 2014 (Britto and Rush, 2013, Mudaly and Mtshali, 2018, Ngubane, 2018).

The shift of nursing education institutions (NEIs) to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), as per the provisions of the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997, compels nursing colleges to strengthen student support. Similarly, since the nursing college that forms the context of this study (hereafter the College) admits students who fall below the minimum requirements for undergraduate programs, through the recognition of prior learning (RPL) program, it is expected to provide students with support services. However, prior research conducted in the College produced less than satisfactory results. Skakane-Masango et al. (2022) initially used the academic monitoring and support (AMS) framework to investigate the provision of student support services in the College. The authors established that despite monitoring being an essential part of academic support, monitoring awareness was lacking at different levels of the College. This was attributed by participants to the absence of individuals dedicated to the provision of monitoring. Under these circumstances, it is recommended that efforts should be made to improve awareness that is coupled with programs directed at improving the utilization of student support services (Bostwick, 2014, Masino and Niño-Zarazúa, 2016). For these to be effective, there should be policy formulation that would guide the implementation of student support programs so that they would be impactful (Rajabalee and Santally, 2021).

The previous quantitative study's findings that indicated less than satisfactory utilization and awareness of available student support services propelled Skakane-Masango et al. (2023) to seek the perspectives of lecturers and students on organizational conditions that possibly influence the utilization of available student support services. The authors sought to establish, through a qualitative study that involved interviews, whether interactions between students and lecturers found support in the organizational structures for the utilization of services. Skakane-Masango et al.'s (2023) study produced conflicting results among both students and lecturers where the research participants indicated the positives and negatives on similar issues. It was, however, encouraging to find that in some instances the views expressed by lecturers and students would correlate. These areas of convergence included concerns with organizational conditions that both students and lecturers found not to be enabling. These findings suggest the importance of an intentional, structured, and coherent set of policies that would be adopted as a framework to coordinate student support services in the College (Bryant and Walker, 2024, Peurach et al., 2020, Tinto, 2014).

Against this background, this article presents a proposed student support guiding framework (SSGF) that would seek to address the identified shortcomings in the current system at the College.

Purpose.

The purpose of this article is to present a critical analysis of student support provision in the NEI and share a student support guiding framework for bolstering student support

and improving the academic success of student nurses in South Africa.

The objectives of the research were to:

- a. Describe the available student support services in the KZN Public Nursing Education Institutions
- b. Explore the utilization of the available student support services.
- c. Analyze the processes and practices in the provision of student support services.
- d. Explore the intervening conditions to student support services utilization.
- e. Explore the students' experience of support services.
- f. Develop a guiding framework to enhance student support in the KZN Public Nursing Education Institutions.

METHODS.

Research design.

This study assimilated a case study design, as an empirical investigation delving into a contemporary phenomenon and unclear contexts through multiple sources of evidence facilitating a multiple-faceted analysis. Within the scope of case study designs, various options exist, including single-case holistic designs, single-case embedded studies, multiple-case holistic studies, and multiple-case embedded studies (Polit and Beck, 2020, Yin, 2018). In this research endeavor, a single case embedded design was adopted, with the College adopted as a single case and its three campuses treated as units of analysis nested within the overarching College framework (Yin, 2018). A case study was utilized because it offers an in-depth description of a small number of cases, for example, individuals, groups of individuals, or organizations (Brink et al., 2018, Mouton, 2013).

Research setting.

The study was conducted in the eThekweni district of KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa, within the KwaZulu-Natal College of Nursing, a public College of the Department of Health (DoH). The College was accredited by the South African Nursing Council (SANC) to offer a four-year Diploma in Nursing and Midwifery plus post-graduate programs. Following its move to DHET, the College was also accredited by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) to offer new programs which are the three-year Diploma in General Nursing, and Advanced Diploma in Midwifery. Data collection: The researcher employed mixed methods research (MMR) strategies, employing various data collection techniques to comprehensively understand the phenomenon under study. Following approval from the Department of Health (DoH) and the University of

KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) research ethics committees, the researcher obtained gatekeeper consent from the College to conduct data collection across three research sites, labeled Campus A, B, and C to ensure anonymity.

Participants.

The researcher purposely sampled academic staff and students due to their suitability to give valuable insights and information addressing the research question. To be included, the participants had to be second to fourth-year undergraduate students and postgraduate students in training for six or more months. The exclusion criteria were first-year undergraduate students and postgraduate students who were less than six months in training.

Bias.

Both the content and construct validity of the study were evaluated. Potential biases in assessing content validity could arise if the instrument failed to capture the student support construct comprehensively and accurately. To mitigate this bias, the researcher enlisted academic staff to review and assess the instrument for content validity. For construct validity, there may be a lack of empirical evidence supporting the inference that the instrument's scores and other variables accurately represent the intended construct. To prevent this issue, the researcher involved the supervisor and academic staff to evaluate the instrument's appropriateness in accurately representing the construct and to ensure that the items were aligned with the research objectives. Moreover, the external validity of the study was ensured.

Study size.

The researcher employed both probability and non-probability sampling methods by the MMR approach. For the quantitative sample, the RAOSOFT Sample Size Calculator was used to determine the minimum sample size. A specific formula was applied to calculate this minimum, setting the margin of error at 5%, the confidence level at 91%, and the minimum response rate at 50%. Although the recommended sample size was 170, the researcher sampled 172 participants to account for potential attrition. With 118 participants responding, the response rate was 65%. This high response rate minimizes bias, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the research results to other Nursing Education Institutions (NEIs). For the qualitative sample, a non-random sampling method was deliberately chosen to select participants with an in-depth understanding of the study phenomenon (Polit and Beck, 2020). Consequently, 45 participants were selected, including students, lecturers, clinical preceptors, and campus managers.

Statistical methods.

The researcher sampled students for a quantitative study. Non-probability sampling was employed due to the impracticality of accessing the entire population. The researcher utilized descriptive analysis such as standard deviation, mean, median, and mode to summarize data. With the qualitative method, purposive sampling was utilized to select students, management, and academic staff for qualitative data collection. Data triangulation was achieved using multiple data sources and diverse data collection methods. Both qualitative data types were integrated during the interpretation stage, as outlined in Table 1.

Research paradigm.

The complete project adopted a pragmatic stance because of its applicability to mixed-method research (MMR). Using multi-data sources enhanced understanding of how the existing support impacts student retention and success, and therefore informed the development of the envisaged student support framework. The pragmatics are favored because they do not see the world as an absolute reality (Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020, Creswell and Creswell, 2017) but through observation, experience, and experiments, find useful ways to gain an understanding of the people and the world (Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020). Hence, the Student Support Guiding Framework (SSGF) is informed by the findings of the MMR that emerged from this entire doctoral study.

Research approach.

The study adopted a convergent MMR and a Corbin and Strauss framework for data analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2015) to guide SSGF development. With MMR, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed to get more value regarding the state of student support services in the College. On the one hand, the quantitative approach relied on a developed questionnaire to collect data for investigating the availability and utilization of SSS in the College. On the other hand, the qualitative approach involved in-depth interviews with stakeholders. The purpose was to explore the organizational conditions influencing the utilization of SSS and investigate procedures and practices applied in providing support. The advantage is that the study draws from the benefits of both approaches to develop a well-informed framework that could assist in addressing the identified challenges.

Quantitative data collection process.

After explaining the study and data collection process, the researcher distributed information sheets, consent forms, and pre-coded questionnaires to those who were willing to participate. The researcher first collected signed

consent forms to keep them separate from completed questionnaires, which were collected within an hour.

Data collection process for qualitative studies.

Face-to-face interviews: The researcher met with the participants who agreed to be interviewed on their Campuses, and explained the study and procedure for data collection. Thereafter, the participants signed consent forms and allowed audio-recording of interviews, which lasted for 60 to 90 minutes.

Document analysis: The researcher utilized the data analysis template to extract data from records of students who were excluded from training in the last 10 years to get more information about the student support phenomenon.

Ethical consideration.

In adherence to the Helsinki principles, it is incumbent upon the researcher to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of the personal data provided by research participants. Stringent measures were implemented to uphold these principles throughout the study (Association, 2013, Brink et al., 2018). Confidential information, collected solely for research purposes, was securely stored in a locked cabinet, with stringent restrictions on unauthorized access. Interview guides and questionnaires were meticulously coded to guarantee the complete anonymity of all participants. Consent forms were collected separately from SAQs.

In this study, the researcher diligently followed ethical procedures, starting with the acquisition of ethical clearance (Annexure 10) from the UKZN's ethics research committee (Ref: HSSREC00000707/2019).

RESULTS OF THE STUDY.

It emerged from the interviews on organizational conditions that influence their utilization of SSS, that although academic support was available, a comprehensive support program was unavailable. One participant responded, *'I don't recall there being a formal structure whereby they have support for students. Only when there has been a classroom disturbance then a lecturer comes, we can see them between specific times'*. Another participant alluded to poor psychosocial support, *'Students go through a lot, but the counseling door is never opened unless a student goes to a teacher that they can talk to'*. Such sentiments from participants and findings by Skakane-Masango et al (Skakane-Masango et al., 2023, Skakane-Masango et al., 2022) that are outlined in the introductory section of this article, a necessity to develop a comprehensive, holistic, and intentional student support model emerged. To demonstrate, Table 2 shows the integration of the results from Skakane-Masango et al. (2022 & 2023) during the interpretation stage of integration through a narrative joint display.

Overarching themes	Categories	Quantitative findings	Qualitative findings
Institutional conditions	Availability and awareness of student support services	Only 35.1% (N=41/118) attended academic counselling	I do not believe we were made aware of any services; maybe we are not aware of them... (student no. 4).
		50.5% (N=59/118) reported that tutorials were available.	In my opinion, we should have someone tutoring the students if we are lacking somewhere besides the lecturers (student no. 6).
		77% (N=90/118) agreed there was support for poor-performing students.	After hours they give us a lot of work and homework; in classes, they ask us questions and for us to discuss on our own; they are very helpful, and we even have remedial classes if you do not understand (Student no.3).
		80.5% (N=94/118) a vast number of participants agreed that lecturers offered remedial assistance to poor-performing students.	I do not remember such a policy being available (Student No. 5). There is an academic support policy that guides us to look after any student struggling academically (Lecturer no.4).
		66.7% (N=78/118) disagreed that a dedicated support person was available	Not that I know of (Lecturer No. 6, referring to the policy)

Table 1: Narrative joint display in the Student Support Guiding Framework.

Source: Authors

DISCUSSION.

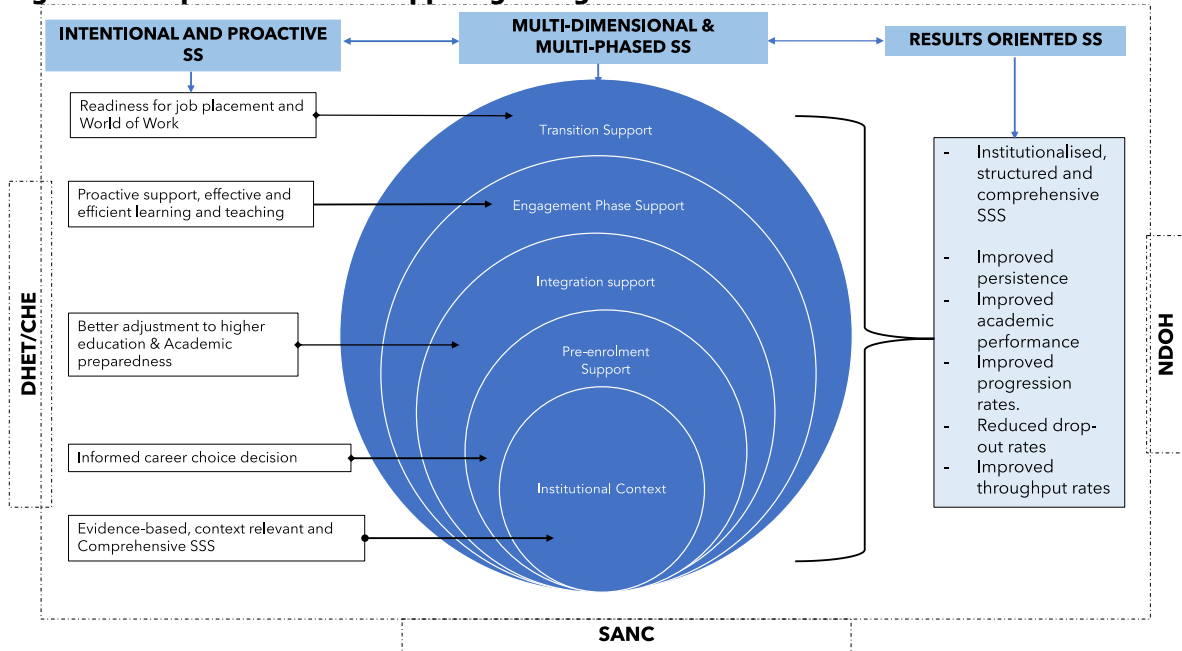
A middle-range theory of student support guiding framework.

A middle-range theory is characterized as a theory that categorizes concepts, relationships, and purposes within limited aspects of broader phenomena. The concepts in the middle-range theory can readily connect to observable events and situations (Chinn and Kramer, 2011). Middle-range theories are more basic and narrower in scope, employing relatively concrete concepts and propositions. These theories can serve descriptive, explanatory, or predictive purposes (Fawcett, 2006). In this study, the theory is explanatory. The proposed framework is

underpinned by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN, 2009) Academic Monitoring and Support (AMS) model, developed from a middle-range theory, and delineates pre-enrolment, engagement, integration, and transition phases of support. The study focuses on the first three phases of support in contextualizing the student support provision in the College. This enabled the principal investigator (PI), the first author, to conceptualize the existing support and identify areas that could be strengthened.

The middle-range theory from which this study is based, attempts to explain the relationships between concepts in the student support phenomenon and how the change in one concept may affect the change in the other or the outcome of support within a theory. The proposed SSGF framework is displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Proposed student support guiding framework.



Source: Authors

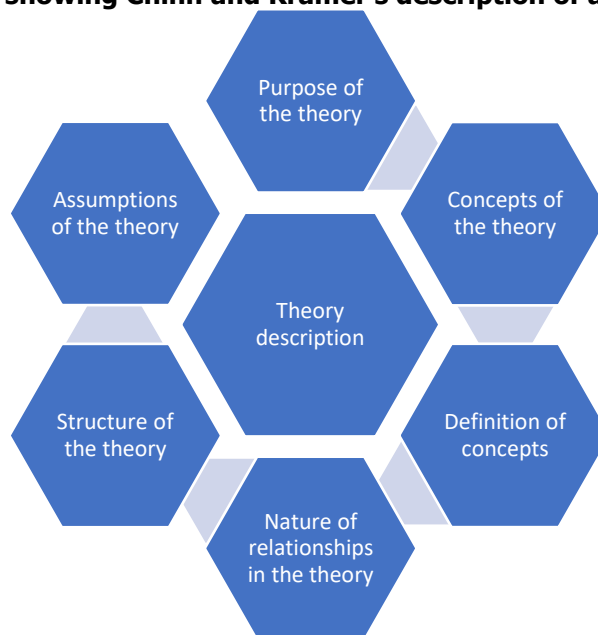
Development of the student support guiding framework.

The student support guiding framework was developed to improve the provision of student support in the College with the hope that it would assist in boosting student academic performance and success. This should ultimately improve society’s health and social status.

Academic and non-academic challenges should be focal areas as both may result in poor academic outcomes (Ertem and Gokalp, 2022, Garcia, 2022, Quinn et al., 2019).

Congruous with the AMS model, the student support guiding framework adopted Chinn and Kramer’s description of a theory (Chinn and Kramer, 2011) depicted in Figure 2

Figure 2: A diagram showing Chinn and Kramer’s description of a theory.



Source: (Chinn and Kramer, 2011)

Basic assumptions of the student support guiding framework.

Congruent with the AMS middle-range theory, the basic assumptions of the student support guiding framework are as follows:

- (i) The student support guiding framework (SSGF) is an instrument to facilitate change.
- (ii) SSGF is process and outcomes-oriented.
- (iii) Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, once equipped with academic skills, can persist, and succeed in higher education.
- (iv) Academic and social integration influence student retention and success
- (v) Student involvement in SSGF is a contributory factor to persistence and success.
- (vi) Comprehensive, holistic, and intentional student support is a determinant of student success; and
- (vii) Effective SSGF depends on strategic collaborative partnerships (Mudaly and Mtshali, 2018).

Definitions of the main concepts in the student support guiding framework.

The concepts that are linked to the SSGF concept are (i) education for social justice, (ii) leadership for social justice, (iii) SSGF as a systemic, comprehensive, coordinated, holistic, and intentional support, (iv) SSGF pillars, (v) SSGF architects, (vi) SSGF process and goal-oriented consequences. The concepts are discussed about the concerning findings that the framework seeks to address.

(i) Education for social justice.

Since 1994, transformation has widened access to HE in South Africa. Yet, African students from rural areas face massive challenges in adjusting to a different environment, having experienced unfavorable educational and economic backgrounds. This is besides their academic and social challenges (Otu and Mkhize, Mudaly and Mtshali, 2018) and having to deal with education presented in a language that is neither theirs nor of their lecturers (Ndawo, 2016, Ngcobo et al., 2021). It emerged from the previous study that most students from underprivileged communities were not exposed to career guidance (Skakane-Masango et al., 2022). This suggests that students from disadvantaged communities are not prepared for HE. To correct this injustice; the College through the framework, should prioritize and support these students to bring about social change and equality; failing which, they may be set up for failure. Guided by the revised SANC RPL policy, the College through the RPL program has facilitated access to training for students who do not meet minimum requirements (Council, 2013), thus ensuring social justice.

(ii) Leadership for social justice.

According to the AMS framework, leadership for justice 'is transformative in nature' and 'focuses on addressing and eliminating marginalization in HE (Mudaly and Mtshali, 2018). In the NEI's strategic plan, student support is prioritized, and the teaching and learning policies are considerate of disadvantaged students with psycho-social challenges. The selection process prioritizes remote and rural communities, ensuring equity target policies are adhered to. The recent introduction of the student information management system (SIMS) in the College will intensify tracking systems for student performance (KZNCCN, 2019).

(iii) SSGF pillars.

The SSGF pillars are principles that augment the effective implementation of the proposed framework. These are responsiveness, commitment, shared vision, collaboration, and continuity.

Responsiveness is about how the SSGF responds to the extramural environment which impacts its implementation. These imperatives are DHET, SANC, and the National Department of Health (NDoH). They play a critical role in ongoing transformation in higher education, nursing education and practice, and health care. DHET in formulating policies that enforce for example inclusive admission and student support in HEIs, to ensure student success. The SANC's education and training standards (Council, 2020), and RPL policy guidelines (Council, 2013) guide training and enable access to programs. The NDoH aims to increase the health workforce by for instance improving student support through curricula transformations (Africa, 2020). The framework's response to the external environment influences the provision of support.

Commitment speaks of stakeholder devotion to the implementation of the SSS, meaning opening access, providing funding, student and faculty commitment, and policy development. Students, academic staff, and the institution as stakeholders must be committed to the implementation of the model. The lecturers support students, the institution by supplying necessary resources, and students through the utilization of the SSGF.

Shared vision means the institution and stakeholders have a common stance/vision of a student-centered approach and aim for improved student outcomes. Stakeholders comply with the vision-aligned policies, believe in the vision, and support the strategic plan.

Strategic collaboration is when the key partners are in concert with the objectives of the framework through synchronizing activities, monitoring progress, giving feedback, and collaboratively achieving objectives. The SSGF is a coordinated framework.

Continuity refers to the series of sequenced SS strategies. SSGF forms a continuum of support from before training to the end of training. There is also continuity in that the

framework incorporates monitoring, following up, and tracking student progress until completion of training.

(iv) **SSGF architects.**

The original meaning of an architect is to construct. In the SSGF context, the architects are the intervening variables that may influence SS facilitation, these factors may enhance or hinder student support provision and are (i)political will and support, (ii)availability of resources, (iii)strategic collaborative partnerships, and (iv)student engagement with SSGF.

Political will and support the functioning of the College as a government institution depends on the provincial leadership to endorse financial support. So, College policies should align with the provincial strategic objectives while facilitating student support implementation to ensure a return on investment.

Availability of resources-political will is linked to providing resources, the funding should ensure adequate human and material resources. Resource availability will boost student service utilization and therefore student performance. In this study, participants reported limited access to critical resources.

In strategic collaborative partnerships mentioned under SSGF pillars, students and faculty must work together for a common goal. For instance, extra effort is required from academic staff and students regarding RPL candidates.

Student engagement with SSGF -All college students should fully exploit the available support to excel in their performance. Moreso, RPL students should put in extra effort and commit to engaging with services. Authors argue that student persistence and commitment, despite challenges, lead to success (Tinto and Pusser, 2006, Tinto, 2017).

(v) **SSGF process and results-oriented outcomes.**

The SSGF is designed to optimize the educational and developmental outcomes of students, during training and in their future professional lives. This comprehensive framework encompasses process-oriented and results-oriented outcomes, all of which are intricately linked to the overarching objective of SSGF, which is to provide effective support.

Process-oriented outcomes.

Process-oriented outcomes reflect favorable transformations observed during students' learning journey. They center on the various stages and methods intrinsic to learning and growth, rather than the ultimate achievements. As they progress, students undergo personal and academic development, fostering increased self-reliance and self-confidence, thereby fortifying resilience to persist throughout the training.

Academic resilience and persistence increase the chances for students to progress. SSGF provides tracking and

monitoring of progress through the SIMS to identify and manage areas requiring additional support. Resilient students persist to completion, despite their challenges (Du Plessis and Benecke (2011). Through supplemental instruction, extra tutorials, and other academic supports they persist.

Peer learning interactions are beyond subject content, they may be study skills, planning personal timetables, reading skills, and note-taking. When these are utilized, students become more resilient, *empowered, and confident* with personal and academic competencies to cope with the demands of studying.

Results-oriented outcomes.

The intended outcomes resulting from the implementation of SSGF within the College are centered on specific goals, ensuring the holistic development of students both personally and academically. The results-oriented outcomes denote the successful results attained at the culmination of the program and are quantified as a return on investment. The resulting achievements encompass several key aspects:

Promotion of Educational Equity: SSGF endeavors to establish educational equity by exposing all students to the best educational practices. It directly addresses limited educational achievements and gives particular attention to students who, for diverse reasons, maybe underprepared for higher education. This approach aligns with principles of fairness and inclusivity in pursuit of educational potential and academic success. Students are equally and fairly exposed to fundamental academic skills.

Enhanced Pass Rates: The program is designed to meet the national minimum pass rate standards of 80%, encouraging successful completion of training for students, from all social or academic backgrounds.

(vi) **SSGF is comprehensive, coordinated, holistic, and intentional support.**

The SSGF comprises a sequence of four interconnected support phases. These phases are pre-enrolment, integration, engagement, and transition. In sync with SANC standards for nursing education and training, the SSGF incorporates a holistic approach that encompasses academic and non-academic support. The SSGF is a multi-phased framework with concepts and interrelated sub-concepts.

CONCLUSION.

The PI's concerns with severe shortages of nurses and midwives inspired the overall project. Shortages are due to a mismatch between nurse education outputs and health and service demands for nurses. The high attrition rates compounded this abnormality because of either delayed or non-completion of training due to academic challenges experienced by many of the students. The matter concerned the PI because of her role at the time as the

principal of Campus A. This prompted the PI to investigate the matter from the perspective of the stakeholders as to whether the student support services were available, whether was there an awareness, and were the organizational structures enabled the implementation of student support services. The findings of the study in progress produced less than satisfactory and contradictory results. This necessitated the development of a framework that could assist address shortcomings in the College's student support programs and organizational setups. The framework presented in this article is comprehensive, holistic, and intentional, it emerged from the results of a mixed method research which enabled the PI to gain a deep understanding of the investigated issues. It is therefore envisaged that the framework will bolster student support to improve the academic success of struggling students to assist them realize their potential. Consequently, the study achieved its objectives.

LIMITATION.

The reported study was limited to one College in KZN.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

A comparative study in the KZN province to understand how different nursing colleges have tackled student support services could be interesting. Conducting further research on additional Public Nursing Colleges nationwide to investigate their implementation of student support services since transitioning to higher education would be valuable.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS.

Skakane: Lead Researcher, conception of the research idea, collected and analyzed data, and drafted the manuscript. Mtshali: supervised research. Ngcobo restructured and edited the manuscript.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

AMS:	Academic Monitoring and Support
CHE:	Council on Higher Education
DHET:	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoH:	Department of Health
HEI:	Higher Education Institution
KZN:	KwaZulu-Natal
KZNCN:	KwaZulu-Natal College of Nursing
MMR:	Mixed Method Research
NDoH:	National Department of Health
NEI:	Nursing Education Institution
RPL:	Recognition of Prior Learning
SANC:	South African Nursing Council
SAQ:	Self-administered Questionnaire
SIMS:	Student Information Management System
SSGF:	Student Support Guiding Framework
SSS:	Student Support Services

UHERB: uMgungundlovu Health and Ethics Research Board

UKZN: University of KwaZulu-Natal

CONFLICT OF INTEREST.

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.

Thembekile P. Skakane is a doctoral student registered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. At the commencement of the study, she was the principal at a nursing college in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa but has since taken employment in the Department of Health in Mpumalanga province. She has co-authored several research papers and hopes for more as a single author in the future.

Ntombifikile G. Mtshali is a distinguished individual in nursing, renowned for her leadership, academic contributions, and research expertise, with a PhD from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She is currently an Adjunct Professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Nursing and Public Health after she left this institution to take another leadership role. She has supervised numerous postgraduate students and her list of publications is very long. Her research interests are aimed at strengthening the nursing and midwifery workforce in the AFRO region.

Sandiso Ngcobo is an associate professor and head of department in the Department of Communication at Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT). He holds a PhD in Linguistics from the University of KwaZulu-Natal obtained in 2011. He is a recipient of the MUT 2023 Research Silver Award, the MUT 2019 Best Established Gold Teacher Award, and the 2016 Teaching Advancement at University (TAU) Award. Sandiso has throughout the years supervised postgraduate students and published several journal articles, chapters in books, and conference proceedings.

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