The Trajectories of Arts and Culture Students Transitioning from Rural Secondary Contexts to Higher Education: A Self-Study of Practice

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ABSTRACT

This is a self-study of practice investigating the trajectories of Arts and Culture students transitioning from rural secondary contexts to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The main objective of this paper was to propose support strategies for first-year university students majoring in Arts and Culture at a specific HEI. First-time entering students (FTENs) struggle to transition from secondary to postsecondary education for a variety of reasons. The paper was based on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory, which states that individuals are still influenced by their environment but become important through interactions with other influencers in each system. This research inquiry utilized an interpretive paradigm and a qualitative approach through a self-study of practice, and data was gathered using a qualitative questionnaire, observations, and document analysis. The data was thematically analyzed concurrently with data collection. Participants were selected from several ethnic groups, such as Xhosas, Zulus, Sothos, and others. They were selected purposefully, but Xhosas and females predominated. The findings revealed insufficient exposure to advanced and modern cultural activities; a lack of enthusiasm and passion for arts subjects; and the negative impact of transitioning on students' learning. These hiccups have a detrimental effect on students' transitions to HEIs. The paper recommended these support strategies: capacity building of students with proficient skills to transition effectively; use of teaching and learning strategies that cater for students' different learning styles; and consideration of students' backgrounds and indigenous knowledge. These variables may help first-year Arts and Culture students transition smoothly into higher education.

Keywords: Transition, Arts and Culture, Rural students, teaching and learning, support strategies

INTRODUCTION

The transition from secondary to tertiary education is challenging for first-time entering students (FTENs) for a variety of reasons. According to Ajani and Gamede, these students experience "personal stress and emotional maladjustment in their new surroundings"[1] as a result of these reasons. Numerous academics have done transition studies from various angles; nevertheless, the author borrowed concepts from a few experts. Mgqwashu et al. explored how rural students handle the transition to university, as well as how earlier cultural and educational experiences influence their higher education trajectories.[2] They argued that university practices,

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[1] Oluwatoyin Ayodele Ajani and Bongani T Gamede, "Challenges of High School Learners' Transition into Universities: A Case of a South African Rural University," *Gender and Behaviour* 18, no. 2 (2020): 15803–12.
[2] Emmanuel M Mgqwashu et al., "Transitions from Rural Contexts to and through Higher Education in South Africa: Negotiating Misrecognition," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 50, no. 7 (2020): 943–60.

values, and norms must identify and include all students' prior experiences and histories, as well as recognize their significant contribution to the advancement of decolonial higher education.[3]

Green et al. investigated the impact of a rapid transition for both educators and students into a fully online teaching mode in the middle of a teaching semester during COVID-19.[4] They examined the implications for educational design, describing how equipment, social situations, and tasks might be properly orchestrated to enhance learning activity in emergency remote education. They concluded that "a sudden shift to a digital teaching experience can be mentally taxing due to inequality in access, connectivity, and literacy amidst the anxiety of the unknown," but "there is much to be gained from working with others in a team-teaching collaborative environment, for both students and teachers."[5]

On the other hand, Morrison, and Evans compare Cantonese-speaking students from Hong Kong's Chinese and English-medium schools' transitions to English-medium degree programs.[6] Their results revealed that school teaching medium affected students' speed and ease of adaption to university academics. They believe that Chinese-stream students began university with less English proficiency and confidence than English-medium students and had more trouble with essential study and language abilities. Hence, first-semester Chinese-stream students had very difficult adjustments. Yet, by the end of the year, they had begun to overcome the difficulties of university study through a combination of strong achievement motivation, relentless practice, effective learning approaches, and supportive peer networks. In contrast to the previous scholars, Volstad, et al conducted research on how young people transition from high school to university.[7] They didn't consider how their social and emotional life deteriorated throughout this period. They wanted to learn about the elements that support flourishing throughout this academic and developmental transition, as well as how first-year students describe and experience flourishing, as well as the personal, contextual, temporal, and dialect aspects of flourishing.

In its simplest terms, the transition could be a psychological, physical, or geographical transformation in one's life.[8] The first-year rural students at the university are in transition as they progress from stage to stage. For the preceding twelve years, these children had relied on their teachers for emotional, academic, and other support. This paper expounds the above scholars' assertions because it looks at the support strategies for transitioning students from rural contexts to university life. However, the focus is on the strategies to ease the transition so that students can cope with the teaching and learning business. The arguments advanced by these experts successfully complement the goal of the paper. Understanding students in their cultural context, how they adjust to rapid changes, what role language use plays, and focusing on the positive consequences of their transition can help in discovering a solution to the problem. In a study conducted by Mbeshu on the evaluation of the implementation of the Arts and Culture learning area in the senior phase of the GET Band in rural schools, findings revealed deficiencies in the implementation of the curriculum because of inadequate content knowledge among the teachers who taught the subject matter.[9]

Arts and Culture, as a subject in rural schools, emerged at the beginning of the democratic era in 1994. The post-apartheid South African educational system included Arts and Culture (a combination of music, dance, drama, and visual arts) as a formal and examinable subject in the new curriculum.[10] After several curriculum amendments, the National Department of Education required that each school in the senior phase of the General Education and Training (GET) band choose two art forms from a list of four based on which art forms they believe are capable of being implemented in their schools. In their redress of the imbalances of the past, the primary objective of teaching arts subjects in the GET band is to prepare students to the level necessary for them

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[3] Mgqwashu et al., "Transitions from Rural Contexts to and through Higher Education in South Africa: Negotiating Misrecognition."

[4] Jennifer K Green, Marla S Burrow, and Lucila Carvalho, "Designing for Transition: Supporting Teachers and Students Cope with Emergency Remote Education," *Postdigital Science and Education* 2, no. 3 (2020): 906–22.

[5] Green, Burrow, and Carvalho, "Designing for Transition: Supporting Teachers and Students Cope with Emergency Remote Education."

[6] Stephen Evans and Bruce Morrison, "Adjusting to Higher Education in Hong Kong: The Influence of School Medium of Instruction," *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 21, no. 8 (November 17, 2018): 1016–29, https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2016.1228600.

[7] Christina Volstad et al., "'You Have to Be Okay with Okay': Experiences of Flourishing among University Students Transitioning Directly from High School," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being* 15, no. 1 (2020): 1834259.

[8] Roy David Samuel, Gershon Tenenbaum, and Yair Galily, "The 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic as a Change-Event in Sport Performers' Careers: Conceptual and Applied Practice Considerations," *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020): 567966.

[9] Nonceba Cynthia Mbeshu, "An Evaluation into the Implementation of the Arts and Culture Learning Area in Bizana Schools of the Eastern Cape Province" (2010).

[10] Department of Basic Education, "Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS): Creative Arts Final," 2011, https://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/CurriculumAssessmentPolicyStatements(CAPS).aspx.

to be successful in the arts should they choose to continue their education in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase of the Department of Basic Education.[11]

The author is currently teaching first-year Arts and Culture students at the institution. The program focusing on Arts and Culture at this institution was relaunched two years ago. That is, in 2021, as a brand-new initiative. Most of the prospective students for admission into the program come from rural schools.[12] Sadly, most South African rural schools do not include subjects related to the arts in their FET programs; some of them that do include a few of these subjects are in the process of phasing them out of their curricula for a variety of reasons known to them.[13] As a result of the elimination of arts subjects from the FET Band, there is a knowledge gap between the content covered in the GET phase and the material covered in the FET Band itself. This puts the quality of the requirements for entering universities at risk. Because of this, most students coming from these rural schools are accepted into Arts and Culture programs based on auditions and interviews rather than on the content that they would have learned in the FET phase.

Some of the students who had participated in one or more art subjects in school were not passionate about continuing with them but were primarily motivated by the need to earn good grades in grade twelve to be admitted to the university. As learners in school, they were almost entirely dependent on their teachers for the knowledge and direction that they required throughout their education. Following the receipt of their school endorsement, they were turned down in the programs they applied for to pursue their studies and opted for acceptance into the Arts and Culture program, which they last studied in the senior phase of the GET Band. As a result of the difficulties caused by the pandemic in 2020, in the following years, the newly admitted students went through a period of abrupt changes in the methods of teaching and learning. They were first exposed to a fully online mode of learning, which required them to make a significant shift in their learning methods.[14]

Some of these students do not know much about technology, so any problems they have with it are hard for them to understand.[15] Because they are in the process of becoming educators (researchers and lesson developers) who will pass on knowledge and skills to empower their students, this sudden change caught them off guard.[16] They are moving away from the idea of learning by rote and recalling information to the idea of becoming information providers who must use their creative skills to share what they know. Because of these changes, the author was able to see that her first-year students in the Arts and Culture class had a hard time accepting new ways to learn with technology at the time. The study thus sought to answer the following question: What strategies should be used to support FTENs Arts and Culture students transitioning from rural contexts to HEIs?

LITERATURE REVIEW
Theoretical Background
The paper is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which was later changed to bioecology.[17] This theory states that individuals are still influenced by their environment while their personal characteristics become important, particularly through interactions between the individual and other influencers in each of the systems. Human development, according to his theory, is a lifelong process that reflects an individual's understanding of the environment and his or her relationship to it. According to Bronfenbrenner, to determine the developmental influences of the environment on the individual, one must closely observe the individual.[18] Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner states that 'there are environments in which individuals participate in activities, and each of them has a role in that environment.'[19] He defines roles as an individual's actions, the expected

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[11] Department of Basic Education, "Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS): Creative Arts Final."

[12] Rushiella N Songca, Clever Ndebele, and Munienge Mbodila, "Mitigating the Implications of Covid-19 on the Academic Project at Walter Sisulu University in South Africa: A Proposed Framework for Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning," *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* 9, no. 1 (2021): 41–60.

[13] Elizabeth Oehrle, "Music Education in South Africa," *Visions of Research in Music Education* 16, no. 1 (2021): 38.

[14] Kelli A Bird, Benjamin L Castleman, and Gabrielle Lohner, "Negative Impacts from the Shift to Online Learning during the COVID-19 Crisis: Evidence from a Statewide Community College System," *Aera Open* 8 (2022): 23328584221081220; Deborah Cockerham et al., "Voices of the Students: Adolescent Well-Being and Social Interactions during the Emergent Shift to Online Learning Environments," *Education and Information Technologies* 26, no. 6 (2021): 7523–41; Shivangi Dhawan, "Online Learning: A Panacea in the Time of COVID-19 Crisis," *Journal of Educational Technology Systems* 49, no. 1 (2020): 5–22; Ruth McQuirter, "Lessons on Change: Shifting to Online Learning during COVID-19.," *Brock Education: A Journal of Educational Research and Practice* 29, no. 2 (2020): 47–51.

[15] Obert Matarirano et al., "Factors Impacting Academic Performance of First-Year Accountancy Students at Walter Sisulu University," *Africa Education Review* 17, no. 1 (2020): 83–99.

[16] McQuirter, "Lessons on Change: Shifting to Online Learning during COVID-19."

[17] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Harvard university press, 1979).

[18] Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design.*

[19] Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design.*

actions of society on the individual, and the relationship of other people's actions to the individual. In his assertions, he explained that individuals' roles may shift over time, resulting in role transitions and ecological shifts.[20]

On the other hand, Maree, in his explanation of Erikson's psychosocial development theory, states that the importance of gaining insight into core aspects of people's identity development, particularly during their early years, promotes counselors' understanding of how clients experienced their early years and successfully or unsuccessfully navigated their transition to adulthood.[21] According to Maree, such understanding also enhances counselors' capacities to assist clients in effectively adapting to new circumstances and finally entering the world of work.[22]

Because lecturing student teachers is a unique form of education, the above theories supplement the goal of this text. They help people develop not only academically but also intellectually, psychologically, emotionally, and so on. Teaching is a lifelong learning process that involves the continuous delivery of knowledge to future generations. It is critical in the sense that if the foundations are weak, the consequences will be disastrous for many people. As a lecturer, these close interactions with students provide a suitable platform for observing activities in the relationship between teacher, student, and subject for optimal development. With continuous engagement, development occurs gradually, resulting in transitory alterations. During this interaction, demonstrated conduct and attitudes have a significant part in attaining the goal of transition in the educational setting.

Empirical Review

Transitioning affects students differently depending on whether they live in rural or urban communities but this paper focuses on rural students.[23] Academics define rurality differently based on the geographical location of South African schools and the benefits they receive. Ganss investigated how students from rural communities define the transition to higher education by examining their common lived experiences in the first term of university and the difficulties they face upon entering university.[24] Timmis and Muhuro investigated students contextualized digital practices before, during, and after joining the university, based on Southern African Rurality in Higher Education, a longitudinal study of rural students' negotiating of transitions to and through HE in South Africa (SARiHE).[25] They contend that students from rural communities suffer significant obstacles when confronted with technical systems, procedures, and practices that they have little or no prior experience with because of 'ongoing coloniality.'[26] This is a significant barrier because many students in rural areas do not have access to such facilities due to a lack of resources and connectivity challenges in their remote locations. Although some students had access to cell phones before entering university, the requirement to be technologically proficient presents significant difficulties in transitioning to university digital tools, making them feel marginalized.

On the other hand, Timmis et al., focus on the students who have faced unique disadvantages because of colonialism and the ongoing effects of apartheid.[27] In their claims, they talk about problems that students face when applying to, getting into, and being a part of the university. For example, students from rural areas are not given enough credit for their ability to change higher education, universities are not ready for students from rural areas, and ideas like decoloniality and cognitive justice are not talked about enough. They also talk about how universities could meet the needs of rural students by recognizing their cultural practices and bringing them into conversations about the curriculum as key agents in university change. In a nutshell, effective student transitioning entails not only exposing students to newly introduced avenues but also identifying and incorporating their earlier experiences.

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[20] Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*.

[21] Jacobus G. Maree, "The Psychosocial Development Theory of Erik Erikson: Critical Overview," *Early Child Development and Care* 191, no. 7–8 (July 2, 2021): 1107–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1845163; Erik H Erikson, *Identity Youth and Crisis* (WW Norton & company, 1968).

[22] Maree, "The Psychosocial Development Theory of Erik Erikson: Critical Overview."

[23] Sue Timmis and Patricia Muhuro, "De-Coding or de-Colonising the Technocratic University? Rural Students' Digital Transitions to South African Higher Education," *Learning, Media and Technology* 44, no. 3 (2019): 252–66.

[24] Karen M Ganss, "The College Transition for First-Year Students from Rural Oregon Communities," *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 53, no. 3 (2016): 269–80.

[25] Sue Timmis et al., "Encounters with Coloniality Students' Experiences of Transitions from Rural Contexts into Higher Education in South Africa," *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning* 7, no. 2 (2019): 76–101.

[26] Achille Joseph Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University: New Directions," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (2016): 29–45.

[27] Timmis et al., "Encounters with Coloniality Students' Experiences of Transitions from Rural Contexts into Higher Education in South Africa."

If transition is not handled properly, it can have a variety of negative repercussions on a person's life, including psychological, emotional, and physical effects. Bowles et al., identify variables that should be examined as first-year students transition to the university as both intrinsic (what students bring with them) and extrinsic (what the university provides).[28] This demonstrates that, while students require assistance, both students and university agents have roles to play in ensuring an effective transition. Students must be willing to seek help and show dedication to their studies as well as the university culture. Furthermore, universities must implement techniques to help students acquire study skills, time management skills, research skills, and assignment writing skills in their first year by providing learning support services that are open to all students. Bowles et al., conclude their research by stating that universities should focus not only on encouraging key intrinsic measures, such as student effort towards their studies and transition by seeking the assistance of academic staff but also on the key extrinsic variable of "LEARNING@UNI's web-based resources, which appear to be a viable and useful tool provided for successful learning."[29]

Geter investigated how social workers perceive the impact of social support strategies in the Midwestern United States by examining the complexities of shared decision making, reliance on self-determination, and common goal setting when implementing resources for youth transitioning from foster care to independent living.[30] He defines social support as both verbal and nonverbal communication. But, on the other hand, individual developmental training is suggested by Nolan et al.[31]

This researcher agrees with these researchers that individual attention is essential, although group work is crucial in the teaching and learning setting since it enhances presentation skills and the effectiveness of imparting knowledge. Before demonstrating competency in subject matter mastery, students require counselling, physical aid, emotional and constructive criticism, as well as cognitive or behavioural feedback within a social group. According to Geter, subject matter mastery includes frequency of contact, access to resources and services, quality of support that develops resiliency, and fostering self-determination, decision-making, and goal achievement.[32] As a result, students require multiple but distinct forms of assistance to develop holistically and handle transitions maturely. Even though what the students used for the study transition focuses on teaching and learning, the support strategies they require are consistent with other scholars' research. This means that any type of transition requires some kind of assistance.

Support from facilitators is essential for first-year university students to help them cope with unexpected anomalies that contradict their earlier experiences. Ajani and Gamede recommend that all stakeholders should provide adequate and necessary support services for the students to integrate them appropriately into the system and make a significant effort to adjust to their new environment.[33] The competence of lecturers stimulates students' academic advancement, so they must produce learning materials that allow them to display appropriate capabilities in their teaching and learning sessions and to "foster students' dynamic beliefs."[34] This effective, flexible learning encourages lecturers to create an innovative learning environment that meets the demands of the community. Lecturers should be able to adjust current information to "offer on-demand learning content that supports repetition and flexibility while providing for individual student preferences."[35]

"In any language program, social interaction is a powerful tool to improve communicative competence."[36] Evans and Morrison, concur with these scholars, adding that "lecturers must design opportunities that provide collaborative support for students in the assessment writing process to fulfil their role in transition support," implying that language is an important element of any interaction.[37] In addition to the claims above, the role of lecturers in the well-being of undergraduates should encompass not just academic

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[28] Angela Bowles et al., "Staying the Distance: Students' Perceptions of Enablers of Transition to Higher Education," *Higher Education Research & Development* 33, no. 2 (2014): 212–25.

[29] Bowles et al., "Staying the Distance: Students' Perceptions of Enablers of Transition to Higher Education."

[30] LaKeita Rochelle Geter, "Exploring Social Support Strategies for Foster Care Youth Transitioning into the Community" (Grand Canyon University, 2022).

[31] Samantha Nolan, Kathleen Baird, and Rhona J McInnes, "What Strategies Facilitate & Support the Successful Transition of Newly Qualified Midwives into Practice: An Integrative Literature Review," *Nurse Education Today*, 2022, 105497.

[32] Geter, "Exploring Social Support Strategies for Foster Care Youth Transitioning into the Community."

[33] Ajani and Gamede, "Challenges of High School Learners' Transition into Universities: A Case of a South African Rural University."

[34] Sebastian Geisler and Katrin Rolka, "'That Wasn't the Math I Wanted to Do!'—Students' Beliefs during the Transition from School to University Mathematics," *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education* 19 (2021): 599–618.

[35] Green, Burrow, and Carvalho, "Designing for Transition: Supporting Teachers and Students Cope with Emergency Remote Education."

[36] Nomasomi Hilda Matiso and Bulelwa Makena, "Rethinking Social Interaction in English First Additional Language Classrooms during the Post Covid-19 Era," *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147-4478)* 11, no. 8 (2022): 312–20.

[37] Evans and Morrison, "Adjusting to Higher Education in Hong Kong: The Influence of School Medium of Instruction."

work, but also psychological aspects.[38] They define the role as lecturer support, benevolence, lecturer competency, lecturer availability, interaction, and the lecturer's attitude toward their work. As a result, the role of the academic as a subject matter expert (content facilitator, assessor, resource provider) has expanded to include the roles of designer, metacognition facilitator, process facilitator, advisor, and co-learner, Othman affirms.[39]

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology is a research strategy and action plan (research design that shapes chosen research methods) that translates ontological and epistemological principles into guidelines that show how research is to be conducted as well as principles, procedures, and practices that govern research.[40]

The interpretive paradigm and the qualitative approach go well together and were used in this research paper. The paradigm "includes interconnected components such as ontology, which seeks an answer to reality; epistemology, which is concerned with how researchers seek to discover this reality by observing the world; and methodology, which is a design process for conducting the study, identifying methods to be used that define means of data collection."[41] The strength of the interpretive paradigm stems from its naturalistic approach, which is based on natural modalities of human communication. So, the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods would let researchers dig deeper by looking into experiences and perceptions of a specific social situation, and interpretivists would use these experiences to build and interpret their understanding based on the data they collected.[42] This research was carried out through self-study and practice. Self-study is the investigation of one's own practice with the goal of improving it, articulating, and confirming one's professional expertise, and contributing to the body of knowledge of teacher education.[43]

Population and Sampling

The raw and original information was drawn from the researcher's 2022 first-year students' experiences, with whom she interacts daily. Moser and Korstjens define purposeful sampling as "the selection of participants based on the researchers' judgment of which possible participants will be most informative."[44] Each participant completed a consent form stating that they were participating voluntarily and that they had the right to withdraw at any time. Participants are from several ethnic groups, such as Xhosas, Zulus, Sothos, and others, but Xhosas and females predominated the lot.

Research Instruments

To collect data, open-ended qualitative questionnaires, document analysis and participant observation were used. "Participant observation is a method for collecting data through the involvement in and observation of a group or individuals over an extended period of time."[45] Adejimi, Oyediran, & Ogunsanmi state that "further qualitative data capture can be included in the questionnaire to give the research richer and more meaningful results, particularly when such research involves personal opinions."[46] Document analysis is a methodological process for assessing and evaluating printed and electronic documents (computer-based and Internet-transmitted).[47]

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[38] Irma Eloff, S O'Neil, and Herbert Kanengoni, "Students' Well-Being in Tertiary Environments: Insights into the (Unrecognised) Role of Lecturers," *Teaching in Higher Education*, 2021, 1–21.

[39] Radiah Othman, "Managing Student and Faculty Expectations and the Unexpected during the COVID-19 Lockdown: Role Transformation," *Accounting Research Journal* 34, no. 2 (2021): 217–28.

[40] Mukhles M Al-Ababneh, "Linking Ontology,Epistemology and Research Methodology," *Science & Philosophy* 8,no.1(2020):75–91.

[41] Husam Helmi Alharahsheh and Abraham Pius, "A Review of Key Paradigms: Positivism VS Interpretivism," *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2020): 39–43.

[42] Alharahsheh and Pius, "A Review of Key Paradigms: Positivism VS Interpretivism"; Sureepong Phothongsunan, "Teachers' Conceptions of the CLT Approach in English Language Education," *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 10, no. 4 (2020): 121–27; Haradhan Kumar Mohajan, "Qualitative Research Methodology in Social Sciences and Related Subjects," *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People* 7, no. 1 (2018): 23–48; Nguyen Cao Thanh and T T Thanh, "The Interconnection between Interpretivist Paradigm and Qualitative Methods in Education," *American Journal of Educational Science* 1, no. 2 (2015): 24–27.

[43] Eline Vanassche and Geert Kelchtermans, "The State of the Art in Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices: A Systematic Literature Review," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 47, no. 4 (2015): 508–28.

[44] Albine Moser and Irene Korstjens, "Series: Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research. Part 3: Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis," *European Journal of General Practice* 24, no. 1 (2018): 9–18.

[45] Moser and Korstjens, "Series: Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research. Part 3: Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis."

[46] A Adejimi, O S Oyediran, and E B Ogunsanmi, "Employing Qualitatively Enriched Semi Structured Questionnaire in Evaluating ICT Impact on Nigerian 'Construction Chain Integration,'" *The Built & Human Environment Review* 3, no. 1 (2010): 49–62.

[47] Glenn A Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40.

Data Collection Procedure

A Google Forms link was used to disseminate an open-ended questionnaire to first-year Arts and Culture students from diverse linguistic backgrounds enrolled in 2022. The use of Google Forms to deliver electronic survey questions allows for data collection from any platform and access to respondent systems at any time and from any location.[48] The cultural diversity of the participants indicates that the difficulties of transitioning are not restricted to a specific cultural group but may have a negative impact on any individual. Consequently, the dominance of Xhosa participants in the group does not imply that Xhosa people are the most affected by transitioning; rather, the majority of Xhosa students are inhabitants of the affected community. Dake & Gyimah state that an open-ended questionnaire is administered to elicit students' genuine emotions, perspectives, and grievances because it permits students to provide valuable free-form responses with frequent and consistent identification of relevant keywords for simpler interpretation.[49] Furthermore, they assert that an open-ended questionnaire approach to qualitative feedback allows learners to provide insightful free-form responses without a predetermined list of responses. A desire to eliminate bias led to the use of a Google Forms link. Therefore, respondents were kept anonymous to encourage students' participation and reduce the possibility of bias since the author is also their lecturer. Despite the author's efforts to engage students, only 17 out of 100 Arts and Culture students who were given questionnaires responded. The respondents included five Zulus, two Sotho students, and ten Xhosas. Since most students are from rural areas, technological illiteracy may account for the lowest number of respondents. The alternative possibilities could be a delay in response due to network issues caused by electricity load shedding or the liberty to participate voluntarily. Data were also gathered from observation reports on interactions during teaching and learning activities and from the analysis of student scripts during the assessment period.

Data Analysis

In self-study, the data-generation and data-analysis processes are typically mutually reliant and might even occur concurrently.[50] Data was analyzed concurrently with data collection as the teacher education practice continued. In most qualitative techniques, coding (the process of data reduction) is an element of data organization.[51] Based on these arguments, thematic analysis was deemed the most appropriate for any study attempting to find meaning through interpretations.[52] The data was classified into themes and examined.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the sections that follow, the findings are presented and the themes that came out of the data analysis are discussed.

Insufficient Exposure to Advanced and Modern Cultural Activities

Students in rural schools do not get enough experience with advanced and modern art activities, and as a result, they are insufficiently prepared for university education. Due to their diverse cultural backgrounds, the students' exposure differs. Some were not exposed at all, while others gained elementary knowledge from tour visits. Mak and Fancourt advocate that "arts and cultural participation include performing arts (dancing, singing), visual and literary arts (textiles, painting, writing stories), and culture (visiting museums, galleries, the theater, heritage sites)."[53] Music and dance, for example, are vital for both entertainment and religious purposes in family events or rituals. Rural school students may not be exposed to galleries, museums, or theater sites, or they may have barely visited them, but they participate in cultural activities in their communities. Numerous students are exposed to community cultural activities as participants and viewers.

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[48] C Moises Jr, "Online Data Collection as Adaptation in Conducting Quantitative and Qualitative Research during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *European Journal of Education Studies* 7, no. 11 (2020).

[49] Delali Kwasi Dake and Esther Gyimah, "Using Sentiment Analysis to Evaluate Qualitative Students' Responses," *Education and Information Technologies* 28, no. 4 (April 20, 2023): 4629–47, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11349-1.

[50] Deborah Tidwell, Melissa Heston, and Linda Fitzgerald, *Research Methods for the Self-Study of Practice*, vol. 9 (Springer Science & Business Media, 2009).

[51] Mojtaba Vaismoradi et al., "Theme Development in Qualitative Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis," 2016.

[52] Mohammed Ibrahim Alhojailan, "Thematic Analysis: A Critical Review Ofits Process and Evaluation," in *WEI International European Academic Conference Proceedings, Zagreb, Croatia* (Citeseer, 2012).

[53] Hei Wan Mak and Daisy Fancourt, "Do Socio-Demographic Factors Predict Children's Engagement in Arts and Culture? Comparisons of in-School and out-of-School Participation in the Taking Part Survey," *PloS One* 16, no. 2 (2021): e0246936.

"I participate in reed dance with other kids in my community. (Participant 6)

As participants, students volunteer for local community activities, but most students attend cultural family activities as well as adhere to religious values, beliefs, and norms.
We keep that aid in developing a familiarity or understanding of the norms, values, and beliefs. (Participant 10)

Therefore, students learn about cultural values through art activities such as dance, music, poetry, painting, traditional clothing, and so on.
Community members like our culture when we are performing a ritual they will participate too. (Participant 17)

Participants' responses demonstrate limited exposure to cultural events that emerge as entertainment and artifacts that are exchanged as presents among family members for customary purposes.

Lack of Enthusiasm and Passion for Arts Subjects
All first-year Arts and Culture students learned any two of these art forms in the General Education and Training (GET) band. They enjoyed arts topics as students during their school years since some teachers were enthusiastic about teaching them; however, some teachers lacked enthusiasm and passion. The learners were carrying out exercises on their own, without the assistance of the teacher.
We were practicing by ourselves, we were in groups. (Participant 3)
As a result, practical activities took precedence over theoretical ones. (Participant 1)
I devote more time to practice. (Participant 17)

On the positive side, teachers would allow students to bring their cultural knowledge and share it with other students through practical tasks.Some of these students felt motivated by their school experiences to pursue careers in the arts. Choral singing and other cultural events at school expose students to art knowledge.
I have experience of singing and dancing. (Participant 12)
The teacher or the choir conduct was always present in the practice. (Participant 4)

In most FET schools these activities were the only sources of arts knowledge. Sadly, some students highlighted that they were unable to continue with art activities after passing grade nine because many rural schools do not offer arts subjects in the FET band. There are only a few students who indicated that they did one of the art courses in the FET band. Because of this several students did not choose arts and culture as their first choice for pursuing their studies but chose it because they were not admitted to their preferred courses. Some students applied for the degree out of passion, although they did not take arts subjects in the FET schools.
It affected me because I didn't study music at my high school, and I don't know Music in Arts and Culture. (Participant 10)
It was my second option; I was interviewed for auditions of music. (Participant 8)

Students face difficulties while transitioning to university after this three-year break without exposure to these arts subjects. They struggle not only with emotional, psychological, and technical adjustment to the new context but also with content knowledge gaps of these subjects.
I lost the background of arts and culture or the basics. (Participant 11)

Students suggest that arts subjects should be compulsory in the FET schools to prepare students for their further education.
Arts and culture should be taught in high school as a subject from grades 10 to 12, and it should be in all classes to instill learners' interests and abilities because some choose what they do not even have any ideas about and fail or drop out. (Participant 5)
I would change arts and culture to be a major subject in every school because many people love and enjoy this subject except me. (Participant 7)

Despite participants' concerns about the enthusiasm and passion of teachers who teach arts subjects in schools, they demonstrate a strong desire to learn arts subjects in an appropriate and effective manner.

Impact of Transitioning on Students' Learning
The transition from secondary to university negatively impacted students' learning on all levels—emotionally, psychologically, physically, and intellectually, as a result of virtual fatigue. The change in environment was not bad at all, but the methods of teaching and learning changed drastically.[54]
Not bad but change of environment and new people in life. (Participant 16)

According to Herkulaas and Oosthuizen, "Good content design is at the heart of student transition, but other aspects such as access to resources help with the transition into university."[55] Unfortunately, these students were the victims of the 2020 COVID pandemic, yet they transitioned to university amidst the challenges that came with the pandemic. The change in the mode of delivery negatively affected a vast number of students. The shift to online learning brings issues such as technological faults and incompetence in online services.[56] It was difficult to run a classroom successfully because you could not identify reality. Students would complain about "the inability to access or use online learning and teaching tools."[57] Several students would log in and go about their personal business instead of listening to the lesson presentation. Although you would want to interact with students personally as a lecturer, the enormous number of students connected at the same time makes it difficult to keep your students' attention.[58]
Online learning was a challenge to me because I would miss some of the classes and sometimes the lesson would end without understanding. (Participant 2)

The reliance on online teaching had severe implications due to the non-accessibility of proper monitoring devices, owing to ignorance, irresponsibility, and peer pressure, and many students ignored their studies and opted for plagiarism. As a result, students copy and paste information from websites and then share it as a group during online assessments. Similarly, Nwosu and Chukwuere assert that "attitudes of students towards plagiarism are influenced by factors such as trying to do quick work, influences from peers and family, availability of online information, a lack of understanding of plagiarism, poor learning, reading ability, and performance goals."[59] Such actions compromise the quality of content knowledge acquired by students, who subsequently lack creative thinking and academic writing skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The findings presented and discussed above clearly demonstrate that difficulties in transitioning to university exist because of unresolved recurring challenges in the preceding years. This study recommends that the Department of Education require all schools to offer any of the arts disciplines to minimize the three-year gap for students who do not study arts subjects in the FET. The support strategies do not suggest the necessity for intervention solely when students begin their studies at the university but also their readiness prior to university entrance. Proper selection of subjects for FET admissions will mitigate the number of students who choose Arts and Culture as their last alternative after being denied their intended courses. Such gaps demonstrate the critical necessity of assisting students in selecting subjects that will allow them to pursue their professional goals once they complete ninth grade. Students must be guided in terms of their previous grade-level ability in those specific areas. Parents must also monitor their children's abilities beginning in grade 10 so that they can be led to subjects in which they excel. Also, aptitude exams for grade ten admissions could establish the authenticity of grade nine results as well as the learners' competency in the courses they want to study further. The above-mentioned strategies may help determine the degree of competency for students advancing to grade twelve.

For students entering university from various backgrounds with different abilities, the university Directorate of Learning and Teaching provides many support services that assist the teaching and learning processes. Lecturers should work effectively with the center to gain access to any information that would enhance learners' progress. There are tracking systems that give information about students' profiles obtained at

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[54] Bird, Castleman, and Lohner, "Negative Impacts from the Shift to Online Learning during the COVID-19 Crisis: Evidence from a Statewide Community College System."
[55] MvE Herkulaas and Lauren L Oosthuizen, "First-Year Student Transition at the University of the Free State during Covid-19: Challenges and Insights," *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* 8, no. 2 (2020): 31–44.
[56] Dhawan, "Online Learning: A Panacea in the Time of COVID-19 Crisis."
[57] Zethembe Mseleku, "A Literature Review of E-Learning and E-Teaching in the Era of Covid-19 Pandemic" (Sage Los Angeles, CA, USA:, 2020).
[58] Cockerham et al., "Voices of the Students: Adolescent Well-Being and Social Interactions during the Emergent Shift to Online Learning Environments."
[59] Lilian Ifunanya Nwosu and Joshua Ebere Chukwuere, "The Attitude of Students towards Plagiarism in Online Learning: A Narrative Literature Review," *Gender and Behaviour* 18, no. 1 (2020): 14675–88.

the beginning of the year through services. Lecturers should acquire this information ahead of time to develop their learning materials and identify the types of students they are teaching. These lecturers should base their teaching on this understanding. Even their teaching approaches should be relevant and customized to the students they have.

During the teaching and learning process, lecturers must use methods that consider the different ways that students learn. Students' support needs differ depending on their talents and skills. Lecturers should send students to writing centers to be trained in computer skills, reading, and writing abilities, presentation skills, time management skills, and so on. The lecturer should monitor the students' development on an ongoing basis. It is also vital to obtain feedback from the support team after each intervention and to report to the team on the progress noticed by the lecturer for further intervention, if necessary.

Baseline assessments prior to lesson presentation help track development and decide on new teaching and learning strategies. Groupwork is widely recognized as the most effective way to help students improve their presentation skills. It allows students to learn from their peers at their own pace and level of comprehension in a conducive environment, but the lecturer is essential as a facilitator who advises and provides advice when necessary. These sessions also help lecturers identify students with insufficient skills so that they can seek intervention as soon as feasible, as well as support them individually.

Lecturers, on the other hand, should encourage students to use library services. Lecturers should assign students projects that require them to read articles and draw their own conclusions. These assignments should be academically focused, with students conducting research, reading, and writing to publish articles when they finish their studies. Finally, communication between schools and universities for career counseling is required even before students apply for admissions to assist them in selecting appropriate courses for themselves.

CONCLUSION

This was a study of the researcher's practice that investigated the trajectories of Arts and Culture students transitioning from rural secondary contexts to higher education. The paper sought strategies that the researcher can employ to assist Arts and Culture first-year students to mitigate the negative impact on students transitioning to HEIs. To assist students in successfully transitioning from secondary to higher education, a collaboration between students, lecturers, and support team services at the university, with lecturers being mindful of the different types of students they have, can provide students with the necessary abilities to adapt to their new environment. In teacher education, group work is an effective method to impart teaching skills, but individualization allows the lecturer to assess students' strengths and limitations and support them based on their abilities and preferences. The question is: Can individualization only be effective in assisting students transition to the first-year level at the university? This motivated the researcher to undertake research on teaching methodologies that can be used to prepare students in arts subjects in the FET phase for the transition from secondary to higher education.

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