



Results from
**A Process Evaluation of the Academic Component of the
Hope Scholars Programme (HSP)**

Implemented by
The South African Education and Environment Project (SAEP)

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Evaluation based on a request for such research by SAEP

**The UCT Knowledge Co-op facilitated this collaborative project
between SAEP and UCT.**

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Overview

- Evaluation objective
- Evaluation design
- Conceptualisation of the evaluation
- Evaluation findings and implications
- Suggestions for HSP improvement
- Evaluation limitations

Evaluation objective

- To assess the implementation fidelity of the academic component of the HSP
- The evaluation aimed to gain an understanding of how well the academic component was implemented as planned during the period 2017–2018

Evaluation design

- The evaluation utilised a qualitative exploratory evaluation design, and its focus was formative
- The evaluation was conducted for programme quality and effectiveness improvement purposes

1. Data Sources

Primary data sources

- HSP staff
- Volunteer tutors
- HSP learners (2017 & 2018 cohorts)

Secondary data sources

- Review of programme documents

2. Sample size

40 participants (35 learners, 4 HSP staff members and 1 volunteer tutor)

3. Sampling method

A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was employed to select evaluation participants

4. Selection criteria

HSP staff and volunteer tutor participants

- Staff responsible for guiding the HSP implementation
- Was available during the study, volunteered and consented to participate in the interview
- Had tutored for at least six months by the time of the evaluation

Learner participants

- Grade 8 or Grade 9 learner enrolled on the programme
- Had participated in the HSP sessions
- Attended HSP sessions during data collection
- Had obtained consent from parents and volunteered to participate in the focus group interview

5. Why this design and these participants and not others?

- Process (implementation fidelity) evaluations involve detailed description of programme operation from the perspective of programme staff, service administrators and beneficiaries
- The study design required more than one perspective and participants that had experienced the implementation of the academic component of the HSP (i.e. Staff, volunteer tutors and the learners)

6. Data collection methods

- One-on-one interviews with HSP staff members and the volunteer tutor
- Focus group discussions with the learners
- Review of programme documents

7. Data analysis

The inductive content analysis approach was used to analyse the data from the interviews, and the review of programme documents was employed to extract relevant data from programme documents

Conceptualisation of the evaluation

Using the logic model for the programme, the evaluation focused on examining whether the HSP sessions were implemented with the intended process mechanisms through which the programme was designed to lead to its desired academic outcomes.

1. Assessed process mechanisms

- The learner recruitment criteria
- The tutor-to-learner ratio
- The programme curriculum
- The instruction language
- The frequency and duration of sessions
- Volunteer tutors' curriculum content knowledge
- Volunteer tutor availability
- Level of learner attendance

2. Other elements, non-process mechanisms of the academic component assessed were:

- Staff and volunteer tutor training
- Programme funding
- Learner perceptions of the benefits of the HSP on academic performance
- Learner dropout from the HSP

Evaluation findings and implications according to process mechanisms examined

1. The learner recruitment criteria

- The stipulated recruitment criteria for interested learners into the HSP require the learners to fill the HSP application form and write a standardised mathematics test
- The findings indicated that only the 2017 cohort at school A was recruited using the criteria
- The rest of the learners completed the HSP application form, but did not write the mathematics test, while others self-selected themselves into the programme

Implication

These results show deviations from the HSP set recruitment criteria. The deviations demonstrate bias in the recruitment process of the HSP learners and that the HSP was not serving the learners for whom the programme was planned

2. The tutor-to-learner ratio

The programme documents and staff interviews showed contradictory results on whether the HSP sessions were administered to the learners in compliance with the planned tutor-to-learner ratio of 1:15

Programme documents

- The findings from the analysis of programme documents revealed that HSP sessions were implemented with the average tutor-to-learner ratio ranging from 1:6 to 1:13, indicating that the ratio was adhered to
- However, this was due to irregular learner attendance

Staff interviews

- The results from the analysis of staff interviews data demonstrated that HSP staff members perceived that the intended tutor-to-learner ratio was not adhered to in conducting HSP sessions due to: (a) over-enrolment; (b) inadequate staffing; and (c) volunteer tutor incompetency
- Over-enrolment, inadequate staffing and volunteer tutor incompetency led to the mixture of Grade 8 and Grade 9 HSP sessions which resulted in having larger than planned groups of learners per tutor, when learner attendance was good

Implication

The quality with which the HSP sessions were delivered to the learners was compromised in terms of content to achieve the desired academic outcomes

3. The programme curriculum

- The HSP was designed to align its curriculum to classroom learning and CAPS to support the learners with the work being done in the classroom
- The results showed that HSP lessons were aligned to classroom learning and CAPS, but were often behind or ahead of the classroom schedules in terms of content

Implication

- The finding about the content of HSP sessions being either ahead or behind classroom learning content was indicative of a weak alignment to the daily classroom syllabus schedules
- Weak alignment of HSP lesson content to daily classroom learning content was associated with irregular learner participation in HSP sessions

4. Quarterly planning meetings

- The results further revealed that the quarterly planning meetings with partner subjects' school teachers and volunteer tutors that were intended to facilitate aligning the HSP curriculum to classroom learning and CAPS were not conducted in 2017 and 2018
- In lieu of the quarterly planning meetings, the HSP staff: (a) initiated informal relationships with subject teachers at the schools; and (b) used the schools' syllabus plans for the term to align the HSP sessions to classroom learning and CAPS

Implication

The finding of the non-implementation of the meetings was indicative of poor collaboration between the HSP and the target schools. This was evident in the poor communication to the programme by the schools reported to have negatively affected the planned frequency of sessions by staff participants

5. The instruction language

- Instruction for HSP lessons was designed to be in English to enhance the understanding of English for the learners
- The results showed no evidence of adherence to the planned instruction language. Across all the schools, it was reported that HSP sessions were instructed using a mixture of English and Isixhosa to help the learners understand the lesson content better
- The learners reported that they understood better when the HSP sessions were conducted in Isixhosa, which is their mother tongue or using a mixture of English and Isixhosa

Implication

These findings demonstrate the lack of learner confidence in understanding English and this compromised their improvement in academic performance in the HSP target subjects as tests and examinations are set in English

6. The frequency and duration of sessions

Frequency

- The planned frequency of HSP sessions was one per week per subject, whilst the intended duration of each session was one hour per cohort of learners at each school
- The results indicated that out of the intended 48 sessions per subject (mathematics, natural science and English literacy) annually, the number of sessions delivered to each cohort per school ranged from 11 to 23 sessions per subject in 2018
- This was less than 50% of the planned yearly number of sessions
- The factors that contributed to frequency infidelity were: (a) poor communication by the schools; (b) site disturbances; (c) irregular volunteer tutor attendance; and (d) inadequate transport

Duration

- The findings revealed that the estimated duration at school A was one hour, whereas at schools B and C it was one and a half hour
- The results demonstrated that the perceived duration at all the schools was not consistent. For instance, staff and learner participants reported that sessions would normally be lengthened when learning an interesting topic and the duration was dependent on the time the schools released the students from school day learning

Implication of the results on the frequency and duration of sessions

These results mean that the HSP learners were underserved and that the programme had a limited opportunity to achieve anticipated outcomes

7. Volunteer tutors' curriculum content knowledge

- The HSP worked with the assumption that improved learner academic performance would be achieved by recruiting volunteer tutors with curriculum content knowledge
- The results demonstrated that HSP worked with experienced and inexperienced volunteer tutors. Experienced volunteer tutors had the required knowledge, while inexperienced volunteer tutors had limited knowledge in the subject areas
- The results showed that recruitment of experienced volunteer tutors was only evident in mathematics. These included one professional teacher and two college student volunteer tutors
- Although the volunteer tutors worked under direct supervision of the subjects' head tutors (HSP staff), who were qualified teachers, there were only three HSP staff members, of which only one worked full-time

Implication

These findings were indicative that the HSP relied on inexperienced volunteer tutors to conduct the tutorial session

8. Volunteer tutor availability

- One of the process mechanisms through which HSP was intended to lead to academic improvement is regular tutor attendance
- The results showed that volunteer tutors were irregularly available to administer sessions and that the volunteer tutors were inadequate
- Inadequacy of volunteer tutors was associated with the volunteer tutors' irregular attendance

Factors that contributed to the irregular availability of the volunteer tutors

- Competing commitments
- Voluntary (voluntarism) attendance
- Lack of encouraging incentives

Implication

Lack of enough service delivery staff and their irregular availability transform into negligent service delivery while programme services administered by demotivated staff are likely to be ineffective in achieving outcomes

9. Level of learner attendance

- The findings from this evaluation indicated that against the programme target of 75% learner participation in the sessions per subject, through which the HSP was projected to improve academic performance, learner participation in the sessions across the schools was poor and below the target
- Learner average session attendance ranged from 58% to 74% across all the subjects in 2017
- Natural science recorded the best attendance, followed by mathematics, while English literacy was the least attended subject
- The average regular HSP sessions attendees of 15% to 20% of the enrolled learners were reported by staff participants
- The HSP recorded a gradual decrease in learner attendance per term which moderately and drastically declined in term two and three to as low as 8% for natural science, 12% for English literacy and 17% for mathematics

Causes of irregular learner attendance

- **Boredom:** Learners expressed that they found English literacy sessions boring and that they normally covered the same topic
- **Subject preference:** It was revealed that some learners only attended sessions for the subjects in which they required assistance, such as mathematics
- **Weak alignment of HSP lessons to classroom learning:** Learners reported that English literacy sessions were not aligned to classroom learning and that the HSP sessions generally covered topics from the lower grade (grade R).
- **Language barrier:** Learners reported that they infrequently attended natural science sessions because they could not clearly understand some tutors

Implications

The results of poor learner attendance in the sessions prevented HSP from achieving positive results

10. Staff and volunteer tutor training

HSP staff training

The findings indicated that HSP staff neither received any startup training nor routine staff development training on how to implement the programme

Volunteer tutor training

- The results showed that volunteer tutors received routine training in the form of quarterly tutor workshops and regular meetings with HSP staff members
- However, the volunteer tutor workshops were perceived as inadequate and ineffective

Implications

The lack of staff training, and ineffective volunteer tutor training entail that both the HSP staff and volunteer tutors were not provided with adequate training to effectively implement the programme as initially designed

11. Programme funding

- The results revealed that HSP had inadequate funding during the period 2017–2018
- The shortcomings that arose due to inadequate funding included:
 - (a) Reduction of the volunteer tutor stipend from R200 per session to R50 per day
 - (b) Insufficient teaching equipment
 - (c) Two HSP staff working part-time

Implication

The lack of adequate funding and associated consequences compromised successful quality of service delivery and the effectiveness of HSP

12. Learner perceptions of the benefits of the HSP on academic performance

- Improved academic performance is one of the key desired HSP outcomes by which the effectiveness of the programme can be judged
- The findings showed that the learners perceived the HSP to have improved their academic performance
- Learners from schools A and C reported improvement in all the subjects, whilst a few learners from school B reported that they had minimal improvement in mathematics and English literacy
- It was established that although a considerable number of learners recorded improved academic performance, the majority failed in 2018

Implication

These results are indicative of poor improvement in academic performance among the HSP target learners

13. Learner dropout from the HSP

- The findings indicated that approximately 20% of the enrolled learners dropped out of the programme in 2018
- In 2017, learner dropout rates from the HSP across the schools ranged from 13.0 –44.3%

Implication

Learner dropout findings signified learner dissatisfaction with HSP sessions or services, as demonstrated by the reasons that caused learner dropout from the HSP reported in the next slides

Causes of learner dropout from HSP

a) Lack of food

- Lack of food was a major reason why the learners withdrew from the HSP
- It was established that the fruit the programme provided to each learner during the sessions was not filling and learners withdrew from HSP to join alternative programmes that gave more filling food

b) **Lack of learner commitment:** Staff participants perceived that students being adolescents were less likely to commit to an academic programme than to extracurricular activities such as sports or anything fun

c) **Sweeping of classrooms :** The learners explained that after HSP sessions they were expected to clean the classrooms, and this made some learners leave the programme

d) Transport:

- Learners expressed that some of their friends stopped attending HSP sessions because of transport, as they would walk home after sessions
- Some of the learners that dropped out because of lack of transport joined alternative programmes that offered transport to the learners

e) **Favoritism:** Learners indicated unfair selection for camps and hikes. For instance, they reported that the same learners would attend camps and hikes even though they (the interviewees) were also attending the sessions

f) **Home responsibilities:** The evaluation found that some of the learners stopped attending HSP sessions because they had responsibilities at home, such as washing dishes, cooking and fetching children from school

- g) **Mistrust at home:** It was established that parents showed a lack of trust in the learners when HSP sessions were being used as an explanation for reaching home late and this made some learners leave HSP
- h) **Negative HSP staff/tutor attitude:** It was reported that some learners stopped attending HSP sessions because they were saddened by the behaviour of some volunteer tutors or staff members
- i) **Lack of improvement in academic performance:**
 - This finding was explained in relation to the HSP's instructional method
 - Learners indicated that some of their friends stopped attending HSP sessions and joined alternative programmes due to a lack of performance improvement in all the subjects as they expressed lack of concentration in larger group instruction
- j) **Lengthy sessions:** Learners explained that some of their friends stopped attending the sessions because HSP lessons took long to end

Suggestions for HSP improvement

Based on the findings from this evaluation and evidence from evaluation literature and evaluation studies of global education programmes, the following suggestions for programme improvement are provided. Detailed information to be obtained from the dissertation once externalised by the University.

1. HSP management should put mechanisms in place to ensure adherence to the prescribed HSP recruitment criteria. This will reduce selection bias and enable the programme to enrol the learners for whom the programme was intended
2. There is a need to ensure strict adherence to the planned tutor-to-learner ratio. This will enhance positive learner engagement and lead to significant improvement in academic performance
3. The quarterly planning meetings with partner subjects' school teachers should be implemented as initially planned to foster strong collaborative relationships with the implementing schools and enhance the effectiveness of the programme
4. The HSP should provide adequate training to both volunteer tutors and staff members equivalent to their expected roles and the planned level of change in programme outcomes. This will enable the programme to achieve its goal and objectives
5. HSP management should ensure that the sessions are conducted with strict adherence to the intended frequency and duration (dosage). This will contribute to improved academic performance of the target learners
6. HSP management should pursue alternative sources of funding to ensure that adequate programme operational resources are in place to sustain and improve the quality of service delivery. This will enable the programme to achieve its intended outcome

7. There is a need to foster collaborative participation of learner parents or guardians to establish an understanding of programme schedules and activities. This will decrease mistrust between the learners and their parents and motivate parent diligence in encouraging their children to regularly participate in the HSP sessions

Evaluation limitations

1. **This evaluation was cross-sectional.** It was conducted as a once-off activity and covered a short evaluation time frame of 2017–2018. The study participants' experiences and perceptions of the implementation of the academic component of the evaluand can change depending on events or changes in programme operation
 - A longitudinal evaluation is required to capture changes in experiences and perceptions over time
2. **Timing of the evaluation:** the evaluation was conducted in term four during the 2018 end of year examinations. Many of the learners were inaccessible, as they had either been released early by the schools or preferred to study on their own away from the schools.
3. **Language** in conducting learner focus group interviews. Some learners occasionally explained in Isixhosa which the evaluator was unable to speak