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# Reflecting on why transformation students in a comprehensive bursary programme may be academically unsuccessful

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## ABSTRACT

*It is imperative that higher education institutions reflect on the success of transformation initiatives aimed at providing students with academic, financial, and other support. Programmes such as the Thuthuka Bursary Fund aim to provide students with a comprehensive bursary programme that offers multi-faceted support. By conducting interviews with 11 students who were previously in the Thuthuka bursary programme between 2017 and 2021, and lost their bursary at various stages of their undergraduate degree programme due to poor academic performance, this study qualitatively examined the effectiveness of multi-faceted bursary programmes in an attempt to determine, based on student reflections, what factors were the most prevalent in contributing to their poor academic performance. These students received a comprehensive bursary for student fees, accommodation, and other living expenses. The findings of this study suggest that various factors led to these students losing their bursaries, with the overarching factors including inadequately tailored mental health-focused support and mentoring based on the students' specific needs. The interview participants noted that many of these support services were offered; however, the students opted not to make use of these. The findings suggest that academic success and the enhancing of wellbeing are interwoven; the specific context of bursary holders should be considered in programme design considerations. Of vital importance is the understanding of students' backgrounds, as these present unique challenges to their integration into higher education institutions. The stigma of asking for help should be eradicated as far as possible through specific design choices in the support offered to these students. The findings provide insight that can be used by various bursary programme planners to design their programmes better and to consider the effect of students losing their bursaries in the higher education environment system.*

**Keywords:** *accounting, attribution theory, bursary, student success, Thuthuka, transformation*

## 1. Introduction

The topic of access to higher education has been highlighted since the #Feesmustfall protests in 2015. Funding of studies for students of previously disadvantaged backgrounds and

lower household incomes was a significant grievance of students participating in the protests (Davids & Waghid, 2016; De Jager & Bitzer, 2018). A bursary to fund tuition, accommodation, and other living expenses is one of the only ways for many students, especially those from previously disadvantaged and low-income households, to enter higher education. Students from working-class and low-income families, according to Ntshoe and De Villiers (2008), are unable to take advantage of educational opportunities, including bursaries and loans, because they lack the necessary cultural and social outlooks. The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) introduced a bursary scheme in 2005 that aims to provide students from designated previously disadvantaged groups with financial aid during their studies towards qualifying as chartered accountants (South Africa) (CA[SA]) (Accountancy SA, 2017). The Thuthuka bursary programme provides funding as well as a comprehensive support programme for qualifying African and Coloured students to study BCom (Accounting) (or equivalent) at a SAICA-accredited university (De Jager, 2014; Barac, 2015). One of the main objectives of the Thuthuka bursary programme is to promote transformation in the chartered accountancy profession in South Africa. To be a recipient of the Thuthuka Bursary Fund (TBF), students must meet the formal admission requirements of the Bachelor of Accounting (BAcc) degree, as well as go through a bursary application and selection process. Various incentives, such as paid-for tuition, paid-for accommodation in the hostels, and various additional support structures such as mentoring, workshops, and additional academic interventions such as extra classes.

The Thuthuka bursary programme has various conditions for the benefits provided to students; one of which is that students must pass all their modules in each academic year in order to receive funding for the subsequent year. Students lose their bursaries through academic performance that does not meet this requirement. Although the success rate in terms of academic performance is high, many TBF students lose their bursaries each year due to not meeting the mark obligations of the programme. The research objectives of this study were to understand the specific group of students earmarked as contributors to the transformation of the profession, why they stumble on their academic path, and why they lost their bursary. The study examined what these students thought were the main reasons for them losing their Thuthuka bursaries, and subsequently what effect losing their bursary had on their academic plans of becoming chartered accountants.

For the purposes of this study, the interview schedule was based on understanding the students' experiences as both a TBF holder and with the university. The participants were asked to reflect on why they thought they lost their bursaries, with a specific focus on their academic performance as the key metric to continue in the bursary programme. Following this understanding, the interview schedule concluded by questioning what effect the loss of the bursary had on the students' career in terms of whether or not they continued with their accounting studies. Finally, the participants were asked to reflect on the Thuthuka bursary programme in terms of aspects that could potentially be improved and what they would advise existing students.

The remaining article is structured as follows: a review of existing literature on the Thuthuka bursary funds and their success in South Africa, the study's research methodology, the study's findings, and finally the conclusion.

## 2. Literature review

To describe the many aspects of evaluation and what it measures, training evaluation literature has employed a variety of definitions (Alsalamah & Callinan, 2021). If evaluation is defined in terms of effectiveness, it can be viewed as the method to assess the effectiveness of an institution's programme. When training programmes are evaluated based on their ability to provide feedback, this evaluation can be characterised as an effort to compile data on the training programme's outcomes and an evaluation of the training's value that considers the compiled data. Evaluation is utilised in a broad range of contexts, has a broad range of effects, and occurs on a broad range of scales (Alsalamah & Callinan, 2021).

According to Kleeman (1994), student success is impacted by higher education institutions having academic support structures available and accessible to their students. Research by Newman-Ford, Lloyd and Thomas (2010) indicates that first- or foundation-year students are the most likely to drop out, along with those from "non-traditional" backgrounds. Their findings show that first-year students remain prone to low attainment and attrition. However, efficient attendance monitoring and additional financial assistance can enhance undergraduates' chances of success; thus, supporting students in achieving their optimum academic potential. With specific reference to the Thuthuka bursary programme, Barac (2015) notes that socio-economically disadvantaged students, such as those on the programme may require specific considerations in the support that they are offered at higher education institutions. Ontong, De Waal and Wentzel (2020) find that providing additional academic support to Thuthuka bursary programme students may require specific tailoring. They note students prefer smaller support classes that are not after hours and are presented by facilitators in their chosen educational language (Ontong *et al.*, 2020). Frans and Rabie (2022), through an evaluative study, note that the Thuthuka bursary programme makes an invaluable contribution to grant students the opportunity to complete their studies.

Hatt *et al.* (2005) note that bursary students are more likely to continue with their studies one year after entry than students from low-income backgrounds who did not receive financial assistance. The findings of Hatt *et al.* (2005) suggest that bursary students are generally more motivated and determined to succeed. However, what is unclear is whether this is due only to the additional financial support or due to other factors that may be attached to a bursary such as additional support. The literature is limited to interviews with students who lost their bursaries due to not meeting academic performance obligations as required by their bursary. This study therefore contributes to the literature by evaluating why students who receive financial and additional support may still be unsuccessful in achieving the outcome of graduation at a higher education institution.

### 2.1 Background on the Thuthuka Bursary Fund (TBF) programme

The TBF programme is a comprehensive programme that offers more than just financial assistance. The TBF is a comprehensive bursary programme that considers students' needs and way of life (Frans, 2022). The TBF pays for bursary holder's housing, meals, books, and tuition fees. In addition, additional benefits are made available to bursary holders, such as receiving a monetary allowance (to cover incidentals such as toiletries and other costs), mentorship, attendance of additional classes such as tutorials and tutoring sessions, and finally training in study skills, life skills and mental health support, when needed, to help them succeed. The TBF holders in attendance are provided with various additional academic support (De Jager, 2014), such as structured tutorials, which have the core objective of

encouraging the development of consistent study and seeking assistance when any problems are experienced by students, as well as to practise examination techniques (Ontong *et al.*, 2020; Frans, 2022). Additionally, all graduates are given the chance to finish their internships at respectable businesses. The purpose of the Thuthuka bursary programme is to encourage workplace readiness while also providing students with all the non-academic support they may need to become a CA(SA) (Barac, 2015).

### 3. Methodology and method

#### 3.1 Overview and theoretical underpinning

This study followed a qualitative approach based on the interpretivist paradigm, using deductive reasoning. Interpretivism is grounded in the understanding of different participants' realities and experiences through their personal views in order to understand a social construct and the individuals' historical or social perspective better. The study utilises attribution theory, as proposed by Heider (1958), through designing specific questions in the interview guide with the aim of exploring and making sense, from the perspective of former bursary holders, of the factors which contributed to them being academically unsuccessful in obtaining their undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. Malle (2011) notes that behaviour can be explained through using attribution theory to understand and explain certain behaviour through asking "why"-based questions and then making inferences or ascriptions as to who or what was to blame for the outcome as a direct result of the behaviour. This study aims to understand both why students have lost their bursaries as well as to make recommendations for a bursary problem on specific and practical changes that could be made to potentially reduce future students' chances of being academically unsuccessful in a programme. The participants' perceptions were obtained through the use of semi-structured interviews, which were analysed to identify patterns and trends. The study employed Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper's (2001) reflective model to better address the research questions. Rolfe *et al.* (2001) created the reflective model in which they propose that formalisation through voicing of experiences is critical in the reflective process, as it provides a focus, helps to order the participants' thoughts, serves as a permanent record, and enables connections between ideas. Rolfe *et al.*'s (2001) reflective model is based on three simple questions: What? So what? Now what? This is achieved in the study by asking questions in the interview guide (refer to Table 2 below) that require participants to reflect on their personal experiences from the perspective of the three questions, namely the What? (Questions 1,2,3), the So What? (Question 4) and the Now what? (Questions 5 & 6 as well as the development of recommendations).

#### 3.2 Population and sample

The research population consisted of students who lost their Thuthuka bursaries at first-year, second-year, third-year and postgraduate level, and were invited to participate in interviews with the researcher. The list of students who lost their bursaries for the period 2017 to 2021 was obtained from the Thuthuka project manager all 101 former students were invited to take part in interviews. Eleven out of 101 students participated in the interviews conducted in total across the various academic years. The participants were provided with access to student support and counselling, should they have required this during/after the interview. Analysis of the interview transcripts reveals that data saturation was achieved after the fifth interview out of a total of eleven interviews. The majority of the participants had similar reflections and experiences as reported below. Refer to Table 1 below regarding the former student characteristics.

**Table 1:** Sample and population characteristics

Total population	101 students
Total sample	11 participants
Calendar year that the participant lost their bursary and highest academic year the interviewee completed as part of their BAcc degree.	Participant 1: 2017, 3 <sup>rd</sup> year Participant 2: 2017, 2 <sup>nd</sup> year Participant 3: 2019, 1 <sup>st</sup> year Participant 4: 2018, 2 <sup>nd</sup> year Participant 5: 2021, 1 <sup>st</sup> year Participant 6: 2021, 2 <sup>nd</sup> year Participant 7: 2019, 1 <sup>st</sup> year Participant 8: 2020, 2 <sup>nd</sup> year Participant 9: 2019, 3 <sup>rd</sup> year Participant 10: 2018, 1 <sup>st</sup> year Participant 11: 2021, 2 <sup>nd</sup> year

### 3.3 Ethical clearance

Ethical clearance and institutional permission for this study were obtained from the relevant university. All participants provided informed consent to participate in the study, as well as allow the researchers to include their personal opinions as part of the research output of the study. Participants were informed that they would not be identified as part of the research output. Transcriptions are available on request from the correspondence author.

### 3.4 Interview method and data analysis

The interviews were conducted by means of 30 to 45-minute Microsoft Teams interviews with former accountancy TBF holders. The potential participants were asked to sign up voluntarily to participate in the research after completing an informed consent form. Interviews were held individually with the participants where the research team interviewed each participant. One member of the research team acted as the lead interviewer for all 11 interviews. Both research team members were present at all 11 interviews. The secondary interviewer followed up with additional prompts, if deemed necessary. The lead interviewer asked all the main interview questions to all interviewees.

As part of the interview process, the participants were asked various questions to gain insight into their experiences as former TBF holders (these were included in the interview guide, see Table 2). The questions were largely open ended so that participants could give their perspectives without being guided into a response. Various prompts, if needed, were also developed and included as part of the interview schedule. Semi-structured interviews were employed to gain rich and in-depth information (Polkinghorne, 2005). All interviews took place in English and participants were allowed to ask questions, should they not understand the question/prompt posed to them. The interviews were transcribed by the research team. Both research team members listened to the recordings and edited the transcriptions in Microsoft Word for all interviews. The transcripts were then thematically analysed based on the interview questions and the responses from the interview participants. Common themes in responses were grouped together in order to identify themes and patterns in the responses. It was noted

that the responses of participants were similar to one another on an overall basis. The results of the thematic analysis were then summarised as part of the findings below and used by the research team in order to identify recommendations for such bursary programmes.

**Table 2:** Interview guide

No.	Question and prompt(s)
1	What was your experience as a former TBF holder?  Prompts: How did you adapt to the rules of being a Thuthuka student? Did you make use of all opportunities? Was there sufficient mentoring in the Thuthuka programme?
2	What was your experience as a university student (excluding Thuthuka involvement)?  Prompts: Did you make new friends in your residence who supported you? How did your residence and friends influence your adaptation to university life and your focus on your studies?
3	Upon reflection, what do you think are the reasons you lost your Thuthuka bursary?  Prompts: Were there undue pressures from your family/friends? Was there any support from your family/friends? Were you able to adapt to university life? [For students who lost their Thuthuka bursaries at second-year, third-year, or Postgraduate Diploma in Accounting (PGDA)/BAcc Hons level: What do you think were the reasons for your academic performance in the year you lost the Thuthuka bursary, compared to previous years?]
4	What effect did the loss of your Thuthuka bursary have on your (post-Thuthuka bursary) studies?  Prompts: Have you left higher education? Did you continue/are you still studying to be a CA(SA), and if so, where? Did you change your degree programme, and if so, to what? Did you find another bursary?
5	What advice do you have for current Thuthuka bursary students?  Prompt: What should a student do to prevent losing their Thuthuka bursary?
6	What changes (if any) would you suggest to the project managers of the Thuthuka bursary?  Prompt: What should the university do differently for Thuthuka bursary students? What did you wish there were more (or less) of for Thuthuka bursary students?

## 4. Findings and discussion

The findings and discussion, using attribution theory as a basis for interview question development, aimed to make sense as to why former Thuthuka bursary students may be academically unsuccessful in obtaining their degrees or entering postgraduate studies. The interview transcriptions were coded using thematic analysis and analysed under the various themes identified as part of the interview questions. As part of Rolfe *et al.*'s (2001) reflective model, the discussion of findings is presented in firstly understanding the perceptions of participants (the what? – question 1, 2 & 3), followed by critically reflecting on the participants perceptions (so what? – question 4) and finally concluded by recommendations (now what? – question 5 & 6 and recommendations). This section is concluded with practical limitations and areas for future research.

### 4.1 Question 1: What was your experience as a former TBF holder?

Because the interviewed students lost their bursaries, it would be expected that their experiences as former TBF holders would be negative. However, the majority of the participants reported a positive experience as TBF holders. This positive experience was attributed to the

TBF and the additional academic support offered to these students that helped them to ease into university life and to make new friends. Adapting to university life is often a hurdle for first-year students to overcome.

The participants thought they would have more freedom as students and experienced the requirements of the bursary as “overwhelming” and “exhausting and draining”, which added to their stress levels.

*I remember it to be quite draining, we had a full day of classes and then in the late afternoon you have this compulsory structured tutorial that you have to attend and you are already drained and can't really focus because you are literally still adapting – Participant 7.*

However, some of the participants understood that the additional academic support was meant to help them, and they tried to use it effectively. Although the participants in retrospect realised the value of the additional academic support offered, they found it tiresome, especially during their first year of study. The participants did not fully utilise the support as they attended “just to sign the register” when they were tired.

With specific reference to the provision of academic mentoring, there was mixed feedback on the lecturer mentors. Some participants felt that their lecturer mentors were not approachable and relatable. When asked to explain what they meant with this, they reported that they did not feel comfortable to speak to someone from a different historical background, home language, and culture, and that their lecturer mentor “just didn’t get it”, as they did not understand the issues the students faced.

*Like uh, I just feel like they just didn't understand what I was going through – Participant 1.*

*I quite like my lecturer [mentor] a lot. She was very, very lovely, but it did also feel like something that you had to do because the sessions were very timed, was very structured. So that made it feel like some more something you have to do. – Participant 10.*

They felt that the meetings with their lecturer mentors were very formal, focusing only on academics, and added pressure on the student to perform better. The participants only met with their lecturer mentor to be able to “tick the box”. Other participants experienced their lecturer mentors as “wonderful” and had open relationships with them. They could talk freely, felt safe, and trusted their lecturer mentor. These participants all indicated that their lecturer mentor also spoke about themselves, which made it easier to get to know them and build a relationship. This, however, did not guarantee that the students were completely honest about their mental health with their lecturer mentors.

#### 4.2 Question 2: What was your experience as a student (excluding Thuthuka involvement)?

Although most participants reported a positive experience as a recipient of the Thuthuka bursary programme, their experiences as university students were negative. One participant reported that they had a “horrible” experience as a student. This could be attributed to personal issues, but the participant also did not feel at home in their residence due to a language and culture barrier and being far from home. The adjustment from high school to university was noted as difficult for most participants. A general feeling of being inferior to other students was identified as a recurring theme. Students who were part of the Thuthuka bursary programme were often identified as a separate group of students. Many participants noted a feeling that

they came from small public schools versus the “good” or more affluent schools in the area near the university, which made the participants feel that they were starting with a disadvantage, although they had met the same entry requirements as all other students.

Most participants noted that they worked very independently at school and noted that pressure from parents or others was low, as most stakeholders in their lives were unaware of the implications of them being successful in high school. The high workload and pace of university study were noted as points that required them to adapt to an environment with which they were not familiar; they struggled to prioritise and to keep up. It should be noted that the Thuthuka bursary programme compels students to participate in additional academic classes and support; this made the students feel micro-managed in a way with which they were not familiar. The participants felt lost on campus and in class, and one participant noted that they eventually gave up trying.

Support from family and friends was also noted as an area of potential concern for the Thuthuka students’ adaptation to university life. One participant stated that they had no support from their family, as the family wanted the participant to get a job and contribute to the family instead of studying full time at university. Other participants in general had the support of their families, even though their families did not truly understand what they were experiencing in terms of stress, workload, and lower marks at university, compared to their school marks. The context of families not understanding and simply expecting these students to continue with similar performance as in high school led to an extremely stressful situation for most participants, where they had a feeling of being alone with their problems.

*I think it is like part of me doesn't want to disappoint my mom – Participant 3.*

*my family is my number one support system. Like they go with everything that I want to do – Participant 8.*

*they [my family] would have rather me go and work – Participant 4.*

*my mom used to hold me, like, accountable for my marks. She checked my marks all the time, everything. So, this time [at university] I was able to lose focus and get away with it – Participant 1.*

Some participants acknowledged that they did not make new friends, although the majority of the participants made new friends in their residence, also in the Thuthuka bursary programme, and with other BAAcc students. Some participants said that they were very private persons and did not want to get close to anyone. In general, the participants were involved in their residences, although two participants noted that they had never felt at home in their residences.

### 4.3 Question 3: Upon reflection, what do you think are the reasons you lost your Thuthuka bursary?

The majority of the participants said they had lost their bursary due to mental health issues. These participants knew that help was available, but chose to not make use thereof. The participants all thought they would be able to recover from poor marks on their own and did not want to seek help (academic help or mental health support). One participant said they had lost focus on their studies and the purpose thereof, while another said that they had only worked during lectures and before tests. Another participant said that they had been unsure about

becoming a CA(SA) and lacked self-confidence. Two participants said they had had personal issues but refrained from confiding in someone and chose not to use the support available. Some participants reflected on their study methods and noted that these were lacking in terms of what they had thought was required and that they had struggled to adjust to university compared to school. They had underestimated the amount of work and wanted to do it on their own and refrained from asking for help.

*I definitely underestimated the amount of work that you needed to put in. I also feel like I never really made use of the lectures and going to see lecturers – Participant 10.*

*I think maybe being displaced from home and seeing that things don't necessarily come easy. Having been in high school, I got to assuming it was very different – Participant 9.*

All the participants said that they chose to not ask for help even though they knew that help was available, which suggests that making available additional resources may not be the best approach to address these concerns. Instead, active management of the utilisation of existing programmes/projects/opportunities should be measured and reflected on as to why students do not make use of such interventions. Bursary fund administrators should also consider the potential embarrassment and/or stigma of utilising of such interventions, so that students are able to cross the mental barrier of seeking support, when needed.

#### 4.4 Question 4: What does your current job or studies entail and specifically whether you continued to pursue an accounting degree outside of the Thuthuka bursary fund programme?

One participant completed his/her studies through the University of South Africa (UNISA) and was in the second year of articles. Five participants were still (or again) studying BAcc with National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) funding.

Two participants were studying BCom Financial Accounting and still dreamed of becoming a CA(SA). One participant was studying law at another university (law was initially the participant's first choice). Another participant was working as a certified accountant at a medium audit firm, compiling financial statements. Only one participant was at home without a job. This participant changed to engineering but gave up after two years. The participant did not have funding for further studies and was looking for work.

*Now I'm at home. I'm not doing anything. I'm struggling to find work – Participant 4.*

Even though the participants had lost their bursaries, all but one was in a better position than they would have been if they had not had the opportunity to study, which suggests that even though they did not complete their undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, they still obtained certain skills, acumen, and knowledge that could be used later in their careers.

#### 4.5 Question 5: What advice do you have for current Thuthuka bursary holders?

When asked what advice the participants would give to current students in similar situations, the following was stated (from these responses, improvements and suggestions to the Thuthuka bursary programme were requested, as discussed in the next section of the findings):

*TBF is a great opportunity; there is no better than this. The alternative is not what you want, run with the opportunity, make the best of it and use the resources. Block other noises and follow the rules. TBF is structured for success, use it – Participant 1.*

*Try to not work alone all the time; get a study buddy. Make friends with students studying the same thing, so that you do not feel discouraged when you have to work more than your friends – Participant 2.*

*You must want to be a CA for the right reasons. I chose CA for the money, but money is not that important to me. Be sure it is what you want to do. There will be obstacles; see it as steppingstones to help you. Do not stop until you achieve your dream – Participant 3.*

*Try to open up to everyone who offers help; don't try to do it alone – Participant 4.*

*Use the support, consultations, ILP [Individual Learning and Assistance Programme], structured tutorials. But decide if you are serious about BAcc. It is difficult; if you are serious, you will realise the value of the programme and the support – Participant 5.*

*Ask for help if you are struggling. You might not be the only one; it sounds weird, but it helps to know that you are not the only one. You are not alone – Participant 6.*

*Speak up and get help when you need it. Do not be ashamed and afraid of what others might think of you – Participant 7.*

*Use the resources. Rest is important; it also helps you to handle anxiety – Participant 8.*

*Speak to someone in TBF, your lecturer mentor or a project manager, so that they know what you are going through and understand. Someone you are comfortable with, even if you do not discuss it in depth – Participant 9.*

#### 4.6 Question 6: What changes (if any) would you suggest to the project managers of the Thuthuka bursary?

When asked for suggestions for improvement, two suggestions stood out. One suggestion made by all the participants was to have someone professional involved in the programme in terms of mental health, such as a psychiatrist or social worker, to meet with students. These meetings should be early in their studies, and on both a group and individual level. The suggestion for a group to meet is for students to realise that they are not the only ones facing problems. Individual meetings are meant to assess each student, and if they had one session, it would be easier to ask for another when they need it.

The other suggestion relates to the mentor system. The participants agreed that it was necessary, but that the process needed adjustment. Allocation to a lecturer mentor should not be random, and lecturer mentors need training as they are not equipped to deal with students' mental health issues. The focus should not only be academic, but on a personal level as well. Students who do not come for consultations of their own accord must be called in, as it is daunting for students to email a lecturer and ask someone who is older who is not their parent for help and advice. It helps to build a relationship with the project managers before a problem arises, as it is easier to speak up if a relationship is already established and not only when a problem arises.

Other suggestions were to explain the purpose of each type of support and additional requirements to help students understand the value of and to gain their “buy-in” to the programme. It remains difficult to “force” students to utilise the available support. Lecturers should consider asking for questions to be handed in from time to time, with the goal being to obligate students to really participate, and for the lecturer to determine if a student really understands the work. The students also suggested revising the purpose of forcing students to attend additional academic sessions and to evaluate whether it is really helping the students or adding stress.

### 4.7 Recommendations

After completing the reflective process of identifying the “what?” and “so what?”, the final stage of reflection involves understanding the “now what?”, as part of this process reflecting on potential considerations that may be key to the design of a bursary programme were identified. It should be noted that these recommendations are often based on the premise that support either on the academic, emotional wellbeing or other fronts was provided in some form, improvements or modifications to the design of these are important. The recommendations therefore firstly suggest providing such academic, emotional wellbeing and other support, and then suggest deeper critical reflection on the support offered. The following recommendations as shown in Table 3 were identified to be key considerations for a bursary programme.

**Table 3:** Summary of recommendations

Support tool	Key design considerations
Academic monitoring.	Although monitoring of attendance of academic sessions may contribute to academic success, compulsory sessions may lead to attendance without any value obtained from the student. Instead of signing a register, students should be encouraged to participate through handing in their attempts for marking and/or discussing their attempts of questions/studying with fellow students.
Additional academic specific support sessions.	Although additional support on face value should contribute to academic success, timing of these sessions is critical to student engagement. Students with full programmes often tend to be tired at the end of the day when additional support sessions are held.
Academic skills training, such as time management, dealing with stress.	Academic skills training is noted as something that students are aware of in terms of availability but however, seem not to be attended by students. It is noted that although academic success is a key metric for bursary programmes, project managers should consider the incorporation of academic skills training within the design of the programme.
Funding and allowances provided to students for incidentals.	Providing funds to students for incidentals is important for students to demonstrate and learn skills such as budgeting and gain a level of independence. The external pressures from family, friends and others on the bursary holder may, however, create complex issues for the bursary holder to deal with in terms of using the funds on themselves or giving those funds instead to who they perceive are more in need. The suggestion is that, instead of providing bursary holders with funding, to provide them with an opportunity to get items they require for incidentals from within the bursary programme. An additional consideration is to provide bursary holders with training on skills such as budgeting when these students are provided with allowances.

Support tool	Key design considerations
Mental healthcare support (both group and individual support).	Mental health concerns were noted to be a key concern for the majority of participants in this study. Participants noted the availability of resources such as counselling and other support. However, participants identified a stigma attached to making use of these. Participants were noted to believe that they would solve problems themselves instead of making use of professional support. This could potentially be addressed by group sessions where the stigma of getting mental healthcare support is discussed in a group context. It is also suggested that individual one-on-one support sessions are held at least annually with each bursary holder, should resources allow it.
Mentoring	The value of mentoring in terms of academics was noted by the majority of participants. The research, however, notes two clear streams in the mentor/mentee relationship; one stream where the mentor and mentee have a two-way open relationship which was suggested to be beneficial to participants, versus the other stream where the mentee either through a choice or through the nature of the relationship felt they were not able to share their experiences with the mentor. This suggests that simply pairing mentors and mentees are not an appropriate allocation measure. Bursary programme managers should require regular reports from both the mentee and mentor, not only focusing on the mentee, but on the mentor/mentee relationship as well.

#### 4.8 Practical limitations and opportunities for future research

The study was performed at one university and therefore the results may vary in a different demographical context. Reflecting on academic performance by students who lost their bursaries at other universities or institutions of higher education remains unexplored in the literature. As funding models differ for bursary programmes, another area for further research includes understanding the effect of students on government-funded support programmes' reasons for being unsuccessful academically.

### 5. Conclusion

This study aimed to obtain an understanding of former students' reflections as to why they were unsuccessful in a fully comprehensive bursary programme. In terms of the student's experience of the programme, it was expected, given the structured nature of the programme, that the additional workload caused by interventions such as extra classes and pressure as a result of bursary requirements would be noted as potential reasons for the unsuccessful completion of their degree programme. However, many students noted that, in retrospect, they saw the value of the structure offered by the Thuthuka bursary programme. Contradicting feedback on the value added by mentors was received. In certain circumstances, the lecturer mentor programme may also need modification to meet the needs of students, as a key requirement for a successful mentor programme is two-way communication between the mentor and mentee. This two-way communication barrier is often created by personality clashes or general incompatibility between mentors and mentees.

All the participants agreed that awareness of mental health issues and more specialised support for mental health are needed. The mental health support of the programme could be improved and must be expanded to include specialised support where students are invited to individual and group mental health sessions in order to encourage them to make use of such

facilities. The majority of the participants were in a better position than before they were part of the TBF programme. Overall, this study concludes that although the participants had lost their bursary, the TBF programme is important to promote transformation in the accountancy profession and continues to be noted as a value-add to students' studies.

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