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First year student success and dropout: an investigation into full and part-time students' experience at the Namibia University of Science and Technology

De Waldt, Indepentia

2024
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/37344

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ABSTRACT

First-year student success is a concern globally and has become a prominent feature of the higher education landscape. This study used Tinto's longitudinal model of student departure as an analytical framework to investigate the internal and external factors affecting first-year full and part-time student success in the Faculty of Management Sciences (FMS) at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). This study contributes to existing research on the first-year student dropout phenomena and provides empirical evidence in the Namibian context.

In this mixed-method approach, data were collected through an online survey containing close and open-ended questions from first-year full and part-time students in the FMS. The results highlight the complexity of the first year at university. The results further show the impact of finances and online teaching and learning on students' dropout decisions. Using Pearson's chi-square test, the pre-entry attributes of age, gender, high school results, type of high school, regional presentation, source of finance and living arrangements were found to affect the academic performance of first-year students. The thematic analysis used for the open-ended questions shows the factors of online teaching and learning (lack of technical devices and stable network); under-preparedness (time management, heavy academic workload, adjusting to the lecturing style, prior content knowledge); and psychological (motivation and isolation) as challenges first-year students experience.

The findings of this study show the complexity of the first year at university and require NUST to reimagine first-year student success. The findings allow for several recommendations to inform national and institutional practices and policies. This dissertation proposes implementing a First-Year Experience programme in the FMS.

Keywords: student success; first-year experience, persistence, self-efficacy, resilience, academic and social integration