

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

How do Holistic Afterschool Programs Improve the Readiness of Poor Black Learners in Urban

Namibia and South Africa to Enter Tertiary Education?

Case Studies Examining Two Successful Afterschool Programs

Operating in the Post-Apartheid Context

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Black learners in urban townships in South Africa and Namibia face significant challenges to entering tertiary education, including due to poverty, inadequate schools, and other lingering effects of apartheid, which continue to perpetuate inequalities. This study investigates how holistic afterschool programs can substantially mitigate these challenges by improving the readiness of such learners to enter tertiary education. Employing a mixed-methods design, it presents a comparative case study of two particularly successful programs: IkamvaYouth in Nyanga, Cape Town, and the Physically Active Youth Programme (PAY) in Katutura, Windhoek. Combining quantitative and qualitative data, including 124 semi-structured interviews of program participants, staff, leadership, alumni, parents, and other stakeholders, 84 surveys of participants and instructors, and observational data, this dissertation centers student voices to provide a comprehensive understanding of the programs' significant impact in preparing disadvantaged learners for tertiary education, and how these programs do so. Not only do these programs substantially improve academic outcomes but also participants' socio-emotional development (and computer literacy), well preparing them for college and university.

Driving such success is their holistic approach integrating robust life skills training with academic support using deeper learning techniques, within a dignity-affirming educational framework. Logistic regression revealed a statistically significant relationship between frequency of life skills attendance and passing high school with qualification for tertiary education. Mentorship and exposure to diverse environments, people, experiences, technology, and skills were also found to play a key role in the holistic development of learners, as well as increasing their social capital. The study underscores the importance of providing a dignified, supportive environment that fosters personal growth and resilience among learners who face socio-economic challenges. Policy implications include that education systems should incorporate more life skills and teach using deeper learning methods within a culture of dignity. Also, it would behoove policymakers to support the proliferation of holistic afterschool programs to close the economic gap for marginalized communities, as such programs not only address educational disparities but also contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty by equipping learners with the necessary competencies to succeed in higher education and beyond. Moreover, these programs align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting quality education, reducing inequalities, and fostering upward social mobility.

Keywords: holistic afterschool programs, tertiary readiness, dignity-affirming education, life skills, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), post-apartheid

