Assessing the Potential of Student Engagement with Student Support Services at the

School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved October 2023 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2023

ABSTRACT

The School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation (SEBI) student's engagement with SEBI support services has been a matter of concern since the establishment of the School in 2017. Of the fifteen hundred (1500) students registered at the School, approximately 40% of them use the student support services offered to increase retention, enhance performance, reduce uncertainties, and guide students to success. The literature showed that student engagement is important for the greater achievement of student outcomes, maintaining retention, as well as to offset any ambiguity and challenges within the learning environments. The practitioner used Astin's Theory of Student Involvement and Tinto's Student Integration Theory to discuss the phenomenon of infrequent engagements of students with student support services SEBI. The research used a mixed-method approach to investigate the current framework of student support services at SEBI and student's engagement with these services. The findings suggest that the students' perception of the support services offered by SEBI is that the services are inadequate, and that their success is as a result of peer support and their individual persistence. The practitioner proposes a student support strategy prototype that will involve a collaboration between students and faculty members for a more effective and efficient student support service.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my son, and the School Entrepreneurship and Business

Innovation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

SEBI — School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation

FACULTY — Lecturers and Academic Advisors attached to SEBI
STUDENT SUPPORT

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As I begin to write this dissertation, I reflect on my years as a developmental

economist working on projects that seek to enhance economic development, while

directly impacting the development of Guyanese society. Thus, I drew synergy between

economic growth, human capital development, and education. My training and

experience as an economist did not allow me to ignore the relevance of education to the

sustainable development of human capital. Since, an educated society has the potential to

increases the probability of full employment, economic efficiency, and improved earning

capacity of the nation (Son, 2010; Adedeji & Campbell, 2013). It is against this

background, that national educational institutions strive for the development of the

populace in accordance with global standards and national strategies. Adapting initiatives

to conform to the status quo and creating innovative services and, teaching, and learning

policies.

Innovations in education policies shifted the focus to include the psychological

foundations of the student and the student's role as a consumer in the global market for

education to their engagements in the learning environment (Raaper, 2021). These

engagements as discussed by Vincent Tinto and Alexander Astin, as the psychosocial

element of educational development, are critical to the student's journey to success (Tinto

1993; Astin 1984). A journey to successfully achieving higher education goals is a

journey that takes them through various procedures and engagements with various

systems within the learning environment (Alexander et al, 2009).

This journey begins with the expectations and actions of the student, as the student enters the institution with preconceived knowledge of the institution, personal goals, attributes, and limited experience (Tinto, 1993). Especially experiences in navigating a less complex environment, with traditional teaching and learning. The transition into a higher education institution such as the University of Guyana, creates some misgivings, as students try to adjust to the new environment (Yorke, 2000). The main concerns are the transition to a new learning method, to an autonomous learning environment, with strange policies and procedures (Yorke & London, 2008), and having to perform autonomously as self-regulated learners (Fazey & Fazey, 2001). Therefore, adjusting successfully depends to a great extent on the institution as well as the student's experiences in secondary school, their educational achievement, level of maturity, and how prepared they are for the next level.

Students' expectations create a great challenge for the institution, as they try to serve a student body made up of diverse students with heterogeneous needs. The University is therefore challenged to meet the expectations of the students, to mitigate against negative impacts, and to maintain viability and relevance. They provide student support services that will aid in the effective transition to higher education while assisting the students in achieving their goals.

Student support services at the University of Guyana have become even more relevant as the learning environments have evolved and have been somewhat disrupted due to technological advances and global health concerns among other relevant dynamics (Chen, 2016; Richardson, 2017). Disruption such as the Global Pandemic has shifted the

learning online. Adapting to this new online environment was challenging, for the University of Guyana, as well as the students. Classes have remained online but are slowly returning to face-to-face. Students have continually expressed their frustration of being isolated and confused, due to being at home with limited interactions with peers and lecturers. The University is mindful of the effect of online classes on students, and the challenges to both students and lecturers and the possibility of reduced student persistence and retention. However, engaging the students and providing adequate support in the online environment proved even more challenging for support staff such as academic advisors who work in an unstructured system, having to provide a service with limited technological support. Important to note, is that even though these misgivings exist, the retention of students is very high (90% range) according to the University of Guyana records, and the enrolment has remained relatively stable.

Figure 1

SEBI Enrolment by Gender and Academic Years
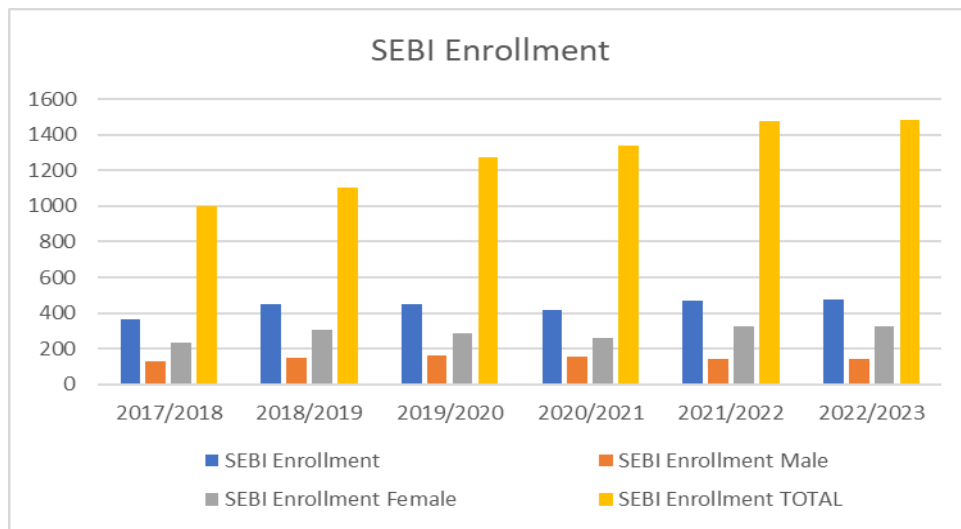
Source: SRMS database

Prior to the year 2020, the year of the Global Pandemic the School of

Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation (SEBI) average annual increase in student

enrolment was 2%. Although the University shifted classes online, SEBI's level of

enrolment remained positive as shown in Figure 1. The enrolment for the academic year

2020/2021 declined slightly from an enrolment of five hundred and forty-four (544)

students in 2019/2020 to 466 in 2020/2021. The enrolment of students increased from

four hundred and sixty-six (466) in the academic year 2020/2021 to five hundred and

eighty-seven (587) in the academic year 2021/2022.

Of the fifteen hundred (1500) students enrolled at SEBI, approximately 40 % of

them use the student support services offered, to help them stay enrolled, enhance their

performance, reduce their ambiguity, and guide them in their academic success. Students

exhibit ambiguity in their behaviour and have turned to their peers for information and

guidance. In this arrangement between students, the dissemination of misinformation has

led to scepticism of the institution. Some students have presented information that they

received from peers as facts, while some present them for clarification. For instance,

information on class schedules and posting of grades, are in particular peddled as truth by

students. The school believes that the support services offered will reduce these

ambiguities and consequent misinformation.

This research set out to investigate the framework of SEBI student support

services and students' engagement with these services. The research focused on first and

second-year students. This group of students is important to the study because they are

more vulnerable, and are more likely to withdraw from the university. Likewise,

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evaluating the impact of student support on this group of students can serve as a guide for retention strategies and policies at the University of Guyana (Bartram, 2009), because they have time to complete their program.

Dissertation Structure

A monograph is presented in Chapter 2 to organize and enrich the practitioner's taught process during the research. The monograph story is one of experience thinking and planning, it gives the freedom for the practitioner to develop interconnected, complex arguments, within the scope of the research. In this story, the context of SEBI is explored to give readers insight into the problem of the practice. The practitioner used a mixed-method approach to collect data that allowed the practitioner to draw conclusions on the student's perspective of student support.

The research commenced with a review of the literature associated with student support services, its impact on performance, and its relevance in the learning environment. The findings will be used to develop a prototype for support services at the University of Guyana. This prototype will be designed and structured for use in all 8 faculties and colleges and 7 schools and institutes faculties and schools at the University of Guyana. The practitioner anticipates that every faculty, or school, will modify the support services plan that is compatible with the structure and characteristics of their unit and students.

Chapter three is written to position me in the world of scholarly publications. My thought process has begun to evolve to incorporate meeting the needs of academia, as my

interactions with academia and social networks will have different weightings. I now have to position myself outside of the University of Guyana to be recognized within the wider stream of scholarly publications "The landscape of creative sharing" (Henriksen et al, 2016). In all this, support from my community of practice within the University of Guyana, as well as establish networks of like-minded people is critical to my success.

Chapter four concludes the three chapters and gives insight into my academic and personal journey to my doctorate in Education Leadership- EdD. In this chapter, I will reflect on key processes and new insights discovered during my journey.

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CHAPTER 2

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE STUDENT SUPPORT AT SEBI

Providing support for students in higher education, and creating student-faculty integration, mimics the kind of environment we see in preschool. In preschool, nurturing is critical to providing some kind of comfort for the students, by guiding the students to the next steps and evaluating the progress. As I write this monograph, I thought of the literature that had informed the methodology and methods of investigating the issue of students' engagement with support services and their perspective of the support services offered by the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation (SEBI). I seek answers to questions that try to understand the perspective of student support services, student engagement, institutional engagement, and the rationale for these engagements. Based on my experience engaging with students, I have concluded that student engagement is the action of the student to use their time and effort to ensure their success. The reciprocal is the University engaging its students through the establishment of policies and procedures designed to better communicate with the students to stimulate academic output, increase student retention and satisfaction, and academic excellence.

A summary of the literature that informs my research is presented with a focus on student support, student engagement, student persistence, and peer support. My readings took me to Astin's theory of student involvement and Tinto's Integration Framework both models explain the role of the student in the learning environment.

The Problem of Practice

The moral obligation to grasp the opportunity to advocate for student needs and welfare is a professional responsibility, required by educational institutions professionals (Lane et al., 2022). As an advocate, I motivate and coach a group of people who are like empty vessels waiting to be filled. I am privileged to be in this environment that promotes excellence through the provision of a satisfactory curriculum and a student-friendly environment. This environment is even more important to me given my experiences interacting with students who were enrolled at the University during the Global Pandemic and were forced to adjust to an online or remote environment. Being enrolled during the Pandemic resulted in much confusion for students, although the School had provided student support services to ease the ambiguity.

This is the main reason for me choosing this topic for my research. As I sit at my desk contemplating the possibilities that can arise from my research journey and findings, I pay close attention to how my topic will directly influence policymakers at the University of Guyana, as well as other higher education institutions regionally. I thought about the students that I was unable to save, the ones that were caught in the system, and all the chaos of the overcrowded environment prior to the Pandemic. The ones who are introverts and unwilling to speak out, but stayed in a cocoon until it is over.

The academic advisement component of student support was introduced to assist students in meeting their full potential at the university and beyond, and the role of the advisors was to help students navigate their new environment while guiding them toward success. A review found that approximately 35-40% of students use the academic advice

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service. Of this number only approximately 15% of students use the services for academic guidance, 5% for career development, and 50% use the services after being referred by the Heads of Departments and Dean.

The Research Context

A layman would describe a business school as a place to learn business. Though this is true, the purpose of the business school goes deeper as it seeks to strengthen the link between academia, entrepreneurship and corporations, by developing and training leaders, managers, directors, and entrepreneurs (Onzono, 2011). There are currently 10 Business schools in Guyana and Latin America. The University of Southern Caribbean established its School of Business and Entrepreneurship (SOBE) to provide students with a global business perspective, that equips them to face the challenging, competitive, and dynamic business world[1]. The Artur Lok Jack Business School, one of the University of Guyana's closest competitors pledges to prepare individuals to be innovative leaders who will reshape business and society. The University of Guyana, School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation (SEBI) was established as a Business School. The goal was to resolve the macro issue of the mismatch between University of Guyana graduates, society's expectations, and the economy's needs, while "producing innovative and creative minds" (SEBI, 2017). Although these institutions promise to mould creative minds similar to the promises of SEBI, the one factor that can give them an advantage is the inadequate student support at SEBI. I used "Inadequate"

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[1] https://usc.edu.tt/about-us-sobe/

to describe the support services, due to limited technological infrastructure and a student-to-faculty ratio being very high (1:500).

The context of this research is critical. SEBI is overwhelmed by overcrowded physical and online classrooms, and limited facilities to accommodate the large annual enrolment and high retention of students. In addition to these challenges, the institution has to deal with issues of misperception of its students and misinformation among students. These issues in particular was further exaggerated during the Global Pandemic and continue today as the university remains 75% online. However, notwithstanding these issues among the students, student persistence has bounced back to pre-pandemic levels similar to what is reported globally (Lederman, 2023). One of the main factors for the fast recovery is the fast development of Guyana's economy, which has been attracting many foreign nationals. Foreign nationals have been competing with Guyana's skilled labour force, triggering more Guyanese to invest their time and money in education.

The large volume of students in the institution makes the already inefficient student support system more challenging since the large number of students makes it problematic to have effective student-faculty interactions. Many students, mainly first-year students, who have not had the opportunity to physically interact with faculty members and other representatives of the university, have become discouraged and felt isolated. Nevertheless, the retention rate has remained stable at 98 % as shown in Table 1.

The University maintains a record of active students, students who are on leave of absence, students who have withdrawn from a program, students who have withdrawn completely, students who are deemed withdrawn, those who abandoned the program, and those who are suspended.

Table 1

SEBI Retention Rates Academic Years 2017/2018 - 2022/2023

Academic Years	First Year	No. withdrawn	Retention rate
2017/2018	368	33	0.91
2018/2019	451	38	0.92
2019/2020	451	56	0.88
2020/2021	416	28	0.93
2021/2022	469	48	0.90
2022/2023	474	56	0.88
Academic Years	Continuing students	No. withdrawn	Retention rate
2017/2018	631	9	0.99
2018/2019	650	8	0.99
2019/2020	826	16	0.98
2020/2021	924	15	0.98
2021/2022	1006	13	0.99
2022/2023	1006	7	0.99

Source: SRMS database

The data in Table 1, was sourced from the Student Records Management System (SRMS), the reliability of this information may be questionable given that my observations within SEBI varied slightly. SRMS is the University of Guyana records database. It maintains a record of active students (enrolled students), students who are on

leave of absence, students who have withdrawn from a program, students who have withdrawn completely from the University, students who are deemed withdrawn, or abandoned the program, and those who are suspended. Students who are considered withdrawn or have abandoned the program, are those students who have been inactive for more than 2 years or enrolled in a program past the prescribed program time. Students on leave of absence refers to the students who have applied to the University for a leave of absence for up to 4 semesters or two years. This data along with the enrolled students' data have been used to calculate the retention rate.

In addition to the maintenance of records on retention, a major component of the database is the records on student performance that can be used to track student persistence and identify student academic needs. Tracking students' performance is critical for managing the institution, as well as planning for student support services. The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) investigation found that Student support services at the tertiary level are generally limited to guidance counseling and financial support. There is a need for more learning support, special needs support, after-school programs, and student counseling, and trained counselors and support staff (Knight & Robinson, 2018). Higher education institutions globally and regionally, provide student support services and have a unit that is responsible for student support, unlike the SEBI and the University of Guyana. These units are established to be proactive, especially for first-year students, as they plan strategically with student needs in mind.

In the context of countries that has universities with large student population and local and foreign students, student support can be even more complex given that national universities try to provide a service to students with a multiplicity of cultures, identities, and needs. As in the case of the University of Guyana, we are not as renowned globally, and therefore our student population consists mainly (approx. 90%) of local Guyanese students, as such student support is not as complex. The University of Guyana constituted student representatives who were duly elected to serve as a representative for the students. In addition to the general student representative, each faculty or school also has representatives. SEBI currently has 30 representatives, who represents each program and each year of study. However, cohesive and inclusive planning, based on feedback from students and in collaboration with students is lacking.

The University of Guyana introduced a free counselling component that provides counselling to students, faculty, and staff. The service provides support for physical and mental disabilities and domestic challenges. In addition, the Government of Guyana provides financial support in the form of a subsidy for student fees through a student loan program. In terms of assistance with transition to the university, SEBI implemented initiatives to assist students in the transition from secondary to higher education by introducing students' academic advisement, and an Orientation course. These student support services were introduced and designed to address injustices, uncertainties, retention, and dropouts, and enhance performance while addressing student needs. Although this service is available many students and faculty are not aware of its existence, mainly because it was not properly introduced to either students or lecturers nor is it technically linked to the registration process. In addition to the academic

advisement services, SEBI also provides support to its students by introducing its compulsory "orientation" course for all Bachelor of Science first-year students.

The orientation course was designed to assist students with the transition to a higher education environment and to promote the development of skills essential to student success. These include skills to develop intellectual confidence and competencies that target critical, creative, and practical thinking in students. The class is taught by the three-academic advisor. The rationale for having an academic advisor lecture the course, was to identify early signs of competencies and attitudes of our new students.

Literature that Informs the Study

My research is considered within the broad theories of students' development. The theoretical perspectives that guide and influence my thinking are behavioural and constructive, which emphasize the interactions that take place in the learning environment. These environments are discussed within the student environment theories and have been modeled by Vincent Tinto and Alexander Astin.

The theoretical framework for student engagement emphasizes the positive effects of all forms of engagement by students in the learning environments and the interplay between factors that lead to desired outcomes (Kahu, 2013; Ebede, 2018). In this scenario, the student's desired outcome is directly related to the value and extent of their involvement and the effectiveness of the institution's policies, practices, or programs developed to increase student involvement (Astin, 1984). Alexander Astin views student involvement as a behavioural concept, that goes beyond a "psychological state" to a

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cognitive and emotional, manifestation of the student's thinking and feelings (Christenson, 2012; Astin, 1984, p.52). "It is not what the student thinks or feels, but what he/she does or behaves that identifies involvement" (Astin, 1984, pg 518). It is these behaviours and other factors that facilitate student development and desired outcomes. The theory posits that frequent interactions with faculty are positively related to outputs, as students become involved in the institutional experience, and intellectual environment, whereas a sluggish attitude and behaviour to interactions can have an opposite effect on output (Astin,1984; Tinto,1993).

Vincent Tinto's integration framework complements Astin's theory of involvement as it highlights the importance of the relationship between the student and the institution, and how this relationship can lead to increased student persistence, academic success and student retention. His model illustrates student's pre-university attributes, predetermined goals and intentions, and expectations of the university. In Tinto's model, the university is expected to provide a nurturing environment to support students' expectations. A nurturing comes in the form of support for students. (Bartram, 2009) defined this support for students as social support, financial support, academic support, personal counselling and career guidance all of which are embedded in humanistic values and interpretations, mentorship and counselling, and direct support (Bartram, 2009: Wang, 2006).

As I explore the concept of support services, I reflect on my role as an academic adviser, a role designed to assist students by monitoring academic progress and giving better insight into course content and career planning, while assisting students to navigate

the institution's complex policies and procedures. The institutional policies and procedures for student support services are critical to ensuring successful support services, as the success of these tend to positively affect student retention and academic outcome (Tinto, 1993; Astin, 1984; Bartram, 2009; Johnson et al, 2022; Britto, 2013).

In all this, it is necessary that students engage with the institution and the support personnel to benefit from the services. In this context, Hu and Kuh (2002), refer to student engagement as "the quality of effort students themselves devote to activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes" (Hu and Kuh, 2002; p. 555). This behaviour is triggered by the psychological function and support network of the student (Tan & Carney, 2002). Therefore, the responsibility of the university is to accentuate the psychological attributes of the student, and the physical contribution of the institution (Tan & Carney, 2002).

The Importance of Students' Persistence towards Academic Success

While the university is stimulating the psychological function of the student, student persistence is important for action. Action that will likely lead to positive learning outcomes. According to the literature, student persistence is the "activity and engagement" within the learning environment, that allows students to persevere towards their goals (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Persistence is part of the personal attributes of students, and it first appears when the student makes that first step of applying to the University, even though their success depends on their perseverance (Lim, Kim, & Stewart, 2015). As the student transition from secondary to university, difficulties can affect their persistence. How they mitigate these challenges determines whether they

become successful. Some studies have found that students' interactions with peers and faculty have influence student persistence (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993).

Peer Support for Academic Success

Another important factor that influences student success is peer support. Peer support can be defined as the social and emotional care offered by an individual in like standing (Suresh et al, 2021). This support is initiated by respect, and mutual agreement. The genuineness found in peer relationships can lead to greater understanding as against student-faculty relationship. Student helping students to achieve, have contributed to positive student outcomes and motivation (Altermatt, 2019). The culture of peer support stems from factors within the learning environment that stimulate cohesion and collaboration that develop into long-lasting friendships. These relationships can motivate students to participate in extracurricular, academic activities, and engage with the institution. (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991)

Previous Cycles of this Research

As I contemplated my area of research for my EdD, I wanted to examine student's engagement within the institution. It became increasingly important for me to discuss my research area with my community of practice which included my close colleagues in my unit. During our discussions, we noted the challenges we face with some student's ability to reach out to us or their reluctance to do so. This is a great concern because we know of the importance and benefits of engagement with the institution. This research topic thus, highlights a global issue that have affected many students pursuing higher education.

Issues are more common among new students who have to deal with personal adjustment to a new diverse environment.

As I plan my research and its relevance to the University of Guyana and how stakeholders will view the findings, I consider the dissemination of the information. I looked a little deeper into (Henriksen & Mishra, 2019) concept of knowledge mobilization and the dissemination of my research at the University of Guyana. During cycle 0 my topic under consideration was students' attitudes towards learning at the SEBI. I used a mixed-method research design to collect data on faculty members and students' perceptions on students' attitudes toward learning. The sample participants were attached to SEBI, and consisted of two faculty members and three students. The faculty members were chosen based on time at the school, the three students were randomly chosen based on GPA, and years of study.

The results showed that the participants felt that the school was on the right path as it pushed a student-focused initiative. They highlighted the use of the program structure which was created to ensure a rounded graduate, who will have the critical skills and self-confidence to pursue any goal they have set for themselves. They also believed that our lectures are fully on board to aid our students in this process, by providing the necessary guidance and that the relationship between faculty and students are positive. They however differed in relation to the University's general policies in relation to student focus initiatives.

Student participants, responses differed in terms of what motivates them at SEBI, however, they all felt that the learning environment is not conducive to learning. Two of

the three believes that the School is fulfilling its mandate, while they all agreed that there is need for improvement in the facilities and the quality of lecturers. The School's learning environment and its pedagogy are two areas of concern identified by the students. The data collected showed that the students are not satisfied with the current disposition.

Based on the analysis of the interviews, there is a disconnect between the realities that exist at SEBI. The faculty participants are of the view that the School has a student focus environment, while the students' feelings are mostly negative. Although the study was limited by accessibility to the participants and the number of participants (3/1500), the results suggest that the students at SEBI are not motivated to get involved in activities at SEBI.

During this cycle 1, the focus was on student participation, specifically, and data was collected to give insight into the participants' perception of student participation in class. The participants were 3 lecturers and 10 students. The 10 students who were selected for the survey, were systematically selected from the first year MNG1103 – orientation class of 456 students and the final year MNG 4201 Business Policy class of 89 students.

The main findings of the research indicate that student's participation was dependent on teaching style, institutional and class environment, and support for students. The participants reported having little interest in participating in class activities, even though the lecture made them feel comfortable, and they were contented with the activities. The results also indicate that most students prefer to sit quietly in

class rather than be involved in the discussions, and students generally do not participate in class. Participation in class activities is correlated with teacher style and learning style. Although the data showed that students participate based on the teacher style, the course content, the environment and culture, the institutional support are also important. If students feel that the institution do not consider their interest, they tend to not get involved in general activities within the learning environment. Their behaviour adjusts to the physical and emotional environment that the institution nurture.

Cycle 1 set the stage for this dissertation, as the process was enlightening and thought provoking. This cycle introduced new tools and methods of data collection and analysis, which will continue to be useful in this research. The tools reduced time and process, increase efficiency and reduce biases. In this cycle the participants were larger and much more diverse, and represented two human elements within SEBI that are important to this research. However, going forward, I intend to include observation in my data collection, as I anticipate observing students in their natural class environment. Additionally, I will include very useful quantitative data to available through the student's database, to get information on students' academic and personal characteristics.

The innovation I implemented was an activity called "Relax and Discuss" or "R&D". This activity was scheduled to occur during the class break or the mid-point of the class. The lecturer asked open-ended questions on topical issues, such as Covid vaccine, climate change, sports, etc, where there were various answers and points of view in this discussion. The session was informal as students felt free to chat about these

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issues. It was expected to produce a general change in attitude through: the development of critical thinking skills, creative skills, collaboration, exciting conversations, and new ideas. Although the innovation was readily accepted by the lecturers, it was partially successful. The reason was that I took too long to conceptualize my innovation, and by the time it was implemented, students had begun to prepare for their final exams, and the classes had dwindled. It was, however, implemented in one class, with somewhat positive results. The students were sceptical as to what was happening. I did not inform them of the exercise and I did not attend the class. The reason being that I wanted to have them be as natural as possible and not to question my presence.

Summary of the Research and Findings

This research was intended to be a systematic process that involves the simultaneous investigation and resolution of the issues. As a practitioner, this investigation will help the University of Guyana to fix issues related to the University in a timely matter. This research process permits a "critical reflection" (Craig, 2021,p1), as I move through the process of engaging in critical thinking, planning, and action, at the various stages of the research.

Despite my previous cycles that focus on students' attitudes, and participation in class, this study went further to investigate student engagement with student support services. The study implemented a mixed methods research which collected, analysed, and integrated both quantitative and qualitative data into this study. The quantitative data was collected to investigate students' and lecturers' perspectives of student support at

SEBI through a survey, while the qualitative data consisted of interviews, and was designed to give greater insight into participants' experiences and perspectives.

The Sample for this study was nine (9) lecturers – Lecturers n=9, three (3) academic advisors- AA n=3, 4 SEBI student representatives- SR n=4, and SEBI first- and second-year students- n=118. The use of first year students was justified by the literature, which showed that first-year and second-year students are more likely to withdraw from the university (Yorke & London, 2008). I have found that this group of students is less motivated and persistent due to ambiguity and lack of proper guidance, but they do not necessarily withdraw. However, with this group, I can implement an innovation and test its effectiveness on students, given that they will be at the University for a minimum of 2 and 3 years. As mentioned, in the context, students are expected to complete their program within 4 to 8 years. Therefore, students who completed their first year have a minimum 3 more years, and those who completed their second year have a minimum 2 more years. The group that was sampled had completed their first and second years.

I had chosen the surveys and interviews to collect the data from students and faculty. The Survey was the best method as it allowed me to reach the large population and for me to explore the perspectives of these participants from a remote setting. The Survey helped me to quickly gain general details about the participants and thus the population while it illustrated the data for easy analysis and access. The survey questions were designed to capture demographic data as well as categorical data and quantitative data. The survey was distributed during the Summer period for the academic year 2022/2023 and the interviews were done after the surveys were completed. The first

email to solicit participation in the student survey was sent to all the students who

registered for the first and second-year degree programs at SEBI, and the second email

for participation in the faculty/ lecturers, and academic advisors survey was emailed to

the prospected participants.

The survey was created in Google Forms. This instrument was cheaper and gave

me an opportunity to learn something new. I emailed the student survey to 386 students

enrolled in the MNG1103 class for the academic year 2021/2022, and the 394 students

enrolled in the MNG1103 class for the academic year 2022/2023. In total, the survey was

sent to 780 students. I had anticipated a more than 260 responses, but this was not so. the

response was very slow, the first day 34 persons responded, but then the response began

to slow. I was worried at the rate of response as I needed to reach 260 responses (my

sample size). I resent the survey to first-year students and the responses was 11, I then

resend to the second-year students and the responses were 22. after that the responses

ceased. I was forced to send the survey to the third-year students who responded and

added an additional 28 responses. The survey remained open as I began my interviews.

Participants for the interviews were invited to the interview through a consent letter

attached to the survey. I received positive responses from the 4 main students'

representatives, 3 academic advisors and 9 faculty members. These participants were

interviewed through zoom, in person, and telephone.

The surveyed data collected was tabulated and presented below as descriptive

statistics. The descriptive data presented aggregated data on age, gender, ethnicity, year

of study, program of study, and enrolment status. The Survey also captured ordinal data

based on a 5-point Likert Scale and presented them as variables for students' and lecturers' perceptions and experiences on support services. In terms of the interviews, an inductive coding method and process were used to to assess and identify themes based on responses to the interview questions (Appendix C), and these were coded for analysis. This process was a bit confusing but necessary for me as I allowed the theory or narrative to emerge from the raw data.

Figure 2

Sampled Students Categorical Data
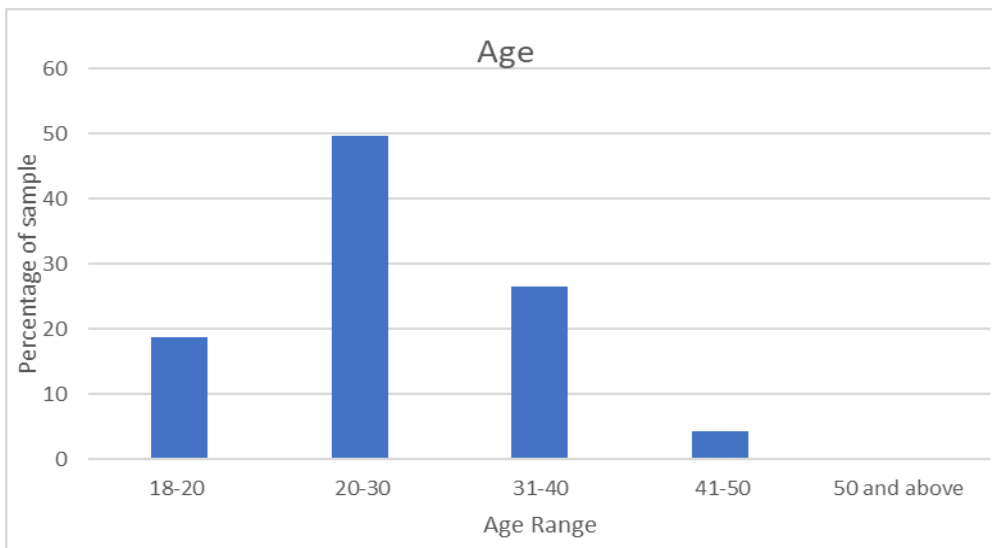
Source: SRMS database

According to Figure 2, the highest number of respondents were within the age range of 20 to 30 and represented 50% of students, and the respondents representing the age range 31 to 40 represented 26% of respondents. No responded indicated that they are 50 or above. The respondents who identified as below 18, were omitted from the results

because of the IRB protocol which requires persons under the age of 18 to have parental

consent.

Table 2

Demographic Descriptive Data for Student Participants

Variable	Percentage	Variable	Percentage
Gender			
Male	30.5	**Year of Study**	
Female	69.5	First	43
		Second	45
Ethnicity		**First Time Student**	
Black/ African	44.4	Yes	46.6
Indian	24.5	No	53.4
Amerindian		**First Generation Level 1 student**	
	1.7		
Chinese	0.8	Yes	39
Mixed	28.8	No	44.9
		Family Education Levels	
GPA			
3.5 to 4	38.8	Primary	0.9
3 to 3.4	29.3	Secondary	26.5
2.5 to 3	25	Tertiary/ Training	19.7
2 to 2.4	5.2	University	48.7
Less than 2	1.7	Masters Degree	2.6
Enrolment Status		PHD	1.7
Part-Time Student	82.2		
Full-Time Student	17.8		

Source: Researcher's Survey

The aggregated descriptive statistics presented in Table 2, were created to provide

data on key categorical, continuous, and ordinal variables. These variables were

collected through the survey responses. Of the total respondents 36.8% identified as first-

year students while 38.6% identified as second-year students. Of the total respondents from the survey, 69.5 % were females, and 30.5% were male. This percentage by gender cannot be analyzed in relation to the total number of students at SEBI or the entire University of Guyana due to the lack of available data for gender. Observations have shown that females dominate all classes at SEBI, other social sciences programs, while faculties, such as technology, males dominate. The data also illustrated that 44.4 % of the respondents were Afro Guyanese, while 24.5 % were Indo Guyanese, and 28.8 % identified as mixed race.

The variable Grade Point Average (GPA), provided information on student academic performance, and the results reflect information similar to students' GPA reports generated by the University of Guyana Student Records Management System (SRMS), which guides student performance and advice is given. The results of the research show that 38.8 % of the students noted that their GPA is within the range of 3.5 to 4, while 2 students reported that they were failing with a GPA of less than 2. The average GPA was 3 to 3.4 with a standard deviation of 0.99, and a standard error of 0.09. The GPA variables were listed within a range. In order to acquire the mean descriptive statistics, the GPA range was coded between 1 and 5. 1 representing a GPA less than 2, 2 representing a GPA 3 to 3.4, and 5 representing a GPA 3.5 to 4. The codes were added to calculate the mean, and the mean was used to get the standard deviation and standard error.

Table 2 also presented aggregate data on the program of study, enrolment status, and family education. 82.2 percent of the respondents reported that they were part-time

students, indicating that they are employed and take evening and weekend classes. 53.4 percent of the respondents indicated that they are not a first-time student. This implies that they would have completed a program at the University of Guyana, and have decided to pursue another program of study for professional development. 39 percent of the respondents indicated that they are the first in their family to pursue higher education, while 48.7 indicated that the highest level of education in their family is university.

Figure 3

Total Enrolled First- and Second-Year Students by Major
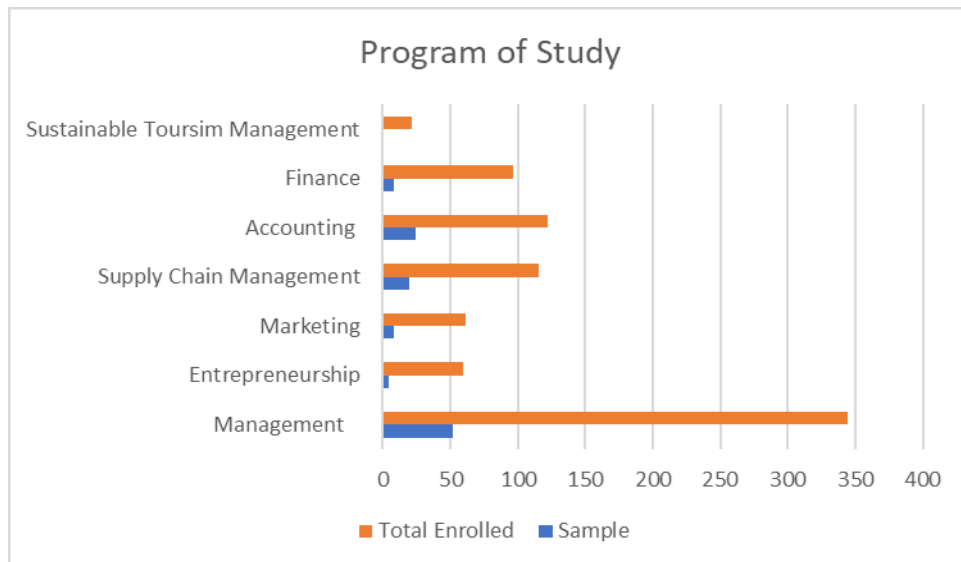
Source: SRMS database

Figure 3 illustrates the student's contribution to the survey by major. The largest enrolment of students at SEBI are pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Management. Of the surveyed students, 44 % were from the Management program, 20% were from the accounting program, and 17 % were from the supply chain management program. Note

that Management represents 42 % of the total students enrolled in the degree programs at

SEBI. Supply Chain Management and Accountancy represents 14 % and 15 %,

respectively. In terms of response to the survey, 19 % of the respondents were from the

accounting program, 17 % from the supply chain program, and 15 % from the

management program. This shows that Accountancy students were more willing to

participate in the survey. 25 % of the surveyed respondents did not indicate their year of

study.

Figure 4

Reasons for Academic Advisement
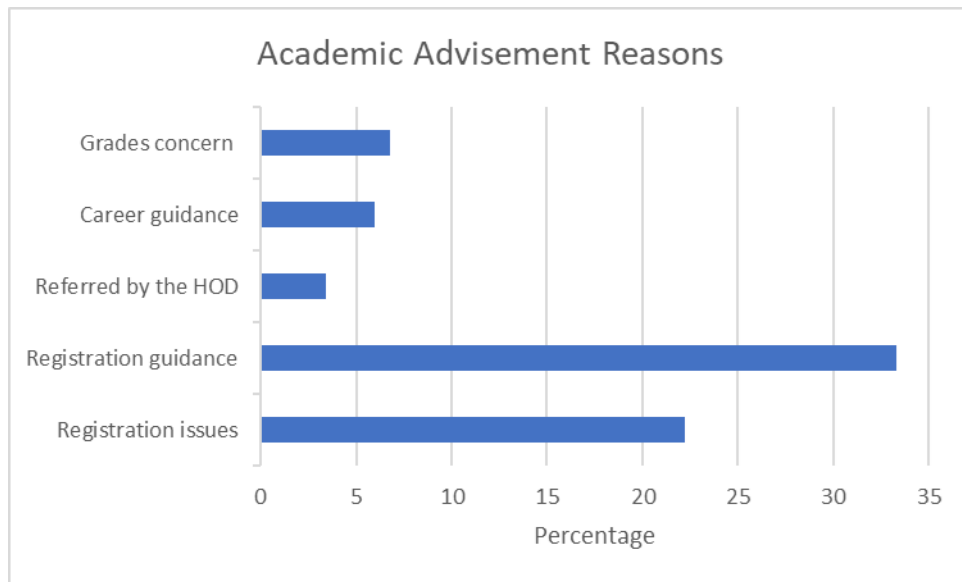
Source: SRMS database

The participants were asked in the survey questions about academic advice, and

other student support services. 60.7 % of the respondents reported that they are aware of

the academic advice services, however only 54 % noted that they actually use the

service. Figure 4, illustrate the results of questions on reasons for seeking support. The results indicated that 55.5 % of students who seek support do so for guidance on registration and other registration issues, while a mere 6 percent and 7 percent seek assistance for career guidance and grades improvement. 51 % of them reported that they use emails to seek support. Figure 5 illustrates the how often students used the support services. Of the respondents who are aware of the advice services, 37.6 % noted that they never contacted the advisor, 31.6 % noted that they made contact less than 5 times, and 19.7 % made contact between 5 and 10 times.

Figure 5

Use of the Support Services
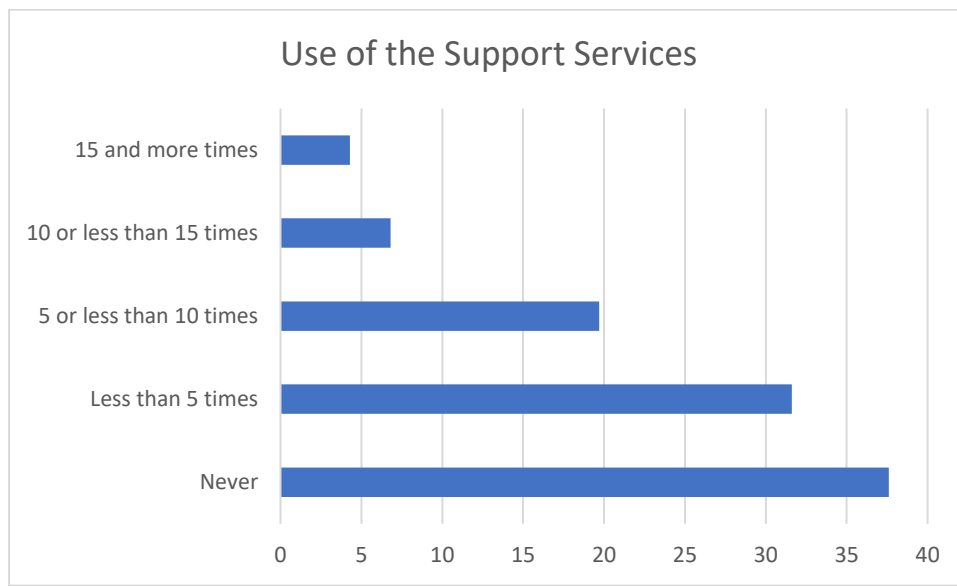
Source: SRMS database

In the survey, I asked 28 questions on student support, peer support, and academic performance. Respondents were required to respond through a Likert Scale of Never,

Rarely, Sometimes, Often, and Always. The responses to these questions were used to determine the variables; level of student engagement, level of student's peer support, students' academic performance, level of student persistence, and students' perceptions of SEBI student support services. I calculated the average response of each question which was then tabulated for each question and each scale. For example: Peer Support = Average (SUM Q17: Q21)

The literature discussed the interconnection between students and the institution, students' psychosocial attributes, and their interactions in the environment. These variables are defined for the purpose of this research as:

- *Student Engagement*- The time and effort students devote to purposeful activities within the learning environment. The variable student engagement entails student willingness to engage, and the number of contact time students spent with faculty or the institution.

- *Students' Academic Performance*- Student performance measured by the aggregate GPA.

- *Student persistence* looks at the personal characteristics of the student. This includes their behaviour (activities and engagements) within the learning environment at SEBI.

- *Student peer support* looks at the student's engagement with their peers. In particular, how peer relationships have helped students to succeed.

- *Student support services* the university's provision of services that will aid students' success. These are financial support, academic support, counseling and

guidance. The variable student support services include the perceptions of

students and faculty of the quality, relevance, and development of the support

services offered by the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation, and

access to these services.

Table 3

Perspectives of Support Services

	Positive	Satisfactory	Negative
SEBI Student Support	38.1	24.2	3.9
Academic Advisement	33.3	24.8	9.5
Faculty Support	16.5	21.2	26.1
Students Peer Support	29.3	27.7	5.6
Students Persistence	35.2	19.8	4.7

Table 3 illustrates the support services as regarded by the respondents. The

researcher places the percentage of response opinions and experiences under categories of

positive, satisfactory, and negative. I chose these categories to show the perception of the

respondents to student support services, peer support, and faculty support. 38% of the

respondents view SEBI support in a positive way. 33.3% believe that SEBI Academic

advisement is relevant and has been effective for them, while 16.5% respondents believe

that faculty support is helpful, and 26 % view faculty support negatively, in particular,

they believe faculty is out of touch with their needs. However, 30.6% of the respondents

do not believe that the support services directly impact their academic performance, but

somehow assist them towards their academic goals. 35.2% of them are persistent and

have spent extra time engaging in academic materials, and believe this is responsible for

their success. In terms of students' experience with support from their peers, 29.3%

believe that peer support positively contributes to their success, while a mere 5.6% feels

differently.

Table 4

Levels of Perspectives of Support Services

Indicators	Variables defined	No.	Level
Student Motivation/ Engagement	1. Willingness to invest time and effort in interacting with Support Services.	20.8	low
Students Persistence	2. Personal characteristics- goals values, competence, relatedness, and autonomy.	19.9	low
Students Peer Support	3. Engagement with peers.	20.8	low
Support services	1. Quality of Support Services	20.4	low
	2. Access to Support Services.	20.1	low
	Development of Support Services.	20.1	low

The variables that represent students' perceptions were further disaggregated

into 3 (three) levels: high, medium, low. The levels were determined by dividing 100 %

by 3. High representing mean response percentages of above 66.6, medium 33.3 and

below 66.6, and low below 33.3. These are presented in Table 4. This was necessary to

determine the general perspective of each student on each indicator. The results indicate

that student's willingness to engage with support services at SEBI is low. Their

engagement with peers is also low, which indicates a general perception of engagement.

On the other hand, faculty motivation is high. This is determined by faculty responses to

questions about their willingness to go beyond the call of duty to provide support. Faculty are motivated by their students more than the University.

Table 5

Pearson Correlation Coefficient Results

Variable 1	Variable 2	"r" Value	Degree of Relationship
Student Persistence (SP)	Perspective on Student Support (PSS)	0.5	Strong
Student Persistence (SP)	Peer Support (PS)	0.39	Moderate
Peer Support (PS)	Perspective on Student Support (PSS)	0.4	Moderate
Year of Study	PSS, SP, PS	0.3	Small
GPA	PSS, SP, PS	0.1	Small
Age	PSS, SP, PS	0.04	Small
Gender	PSS, SP, PS	0.017	Small

The tool used for the study was correlation analysis. The variables were prepared by first listing all the survey questions and the individual responses on an Excel sheet. The non-value responses were coded by replacing them with values. Yes and No answers were coded as 1 for Yes and 2 for No. Students' status at the SEBI was transferred from employed, unemployed and full time, to part-time and full-time. Part-time represents students who are employed, while full time represents students who are unemployed and those that indicated that they are full time students. The codes 1 represented employed, 2 unemployed, and 3 full-time. Gender was coded as Female = 1 and Male =2. Program of study was coded from 1 to 7 representing each program.

The results of the Pearson Chi-square analysis provided information regarding the significance of the correlation between each variable as shown in Table 5. The results show that there is no relationship between the variables Age and the perspective on student support services. Age is not a key factor in whether students engage with the institution or not. The results also showed that students' perspective of the SEBI student support services is related to the level of student persistence and peer support. In evaluating the variables student persistence and peer support I found that there exists a moderate correlation between the two variables. The data also showed that there is a small correlation between student years of study and perspectives on student support and student persistence, but zero relationship between years of study and peer support. Noteworthy that the data shows that academic performance or GPA has a very small correlation.

Table 6

Interviews Qualitative Data

Perceptions of SEBI Learning Environment	
Faculty	
Reason for Students' communication/ participation in class.	
Clarity on course content -1	20%
Clarity on Course assignment-2	70%
General advisement- 3	10%
Reason Students communicate out of class.	
Clarity on course content -1	10%
Clarity on course assignment -2	30%
General advisement -3	70%
Perception of Support Services	
Keep office hours	0%
Willingness to go beyond	80%
Motivated	70%

Students Representatives

Learning Environment Reach Expectations	No
Perception of University of Guyana Support Services	Positive
Reason for being a peer representative	
Advocacy -1	50
Personal Development- 2	50
Number of Complaints -3	100

The results of the interviews were desegregated by faculty[2] and student representative's questions, as presented in Appendix C. The questions were further divided by reasons for interviewee perceptions. Each reason was coded from 1 to 3 and the average of each reason was presented in Table 6. The results indicated that the students' representatives shared positive perspectives about the support services offered at SEBI. Their concerns center on the administrative departments at the University of Guyana. The students reported that there are many issues with the Bursary department (finance), and Administration department. These issues centers on the non-response from the staff to emails and phone calls. This they see as a major inefficiency that is being corrected by the staff at SEBI. They also give insight into the reasons for being a student representative. The consensus was that they were overwhelmed by complaints from their peers and wanted to make a change. Some of them reported that in addition to change, they see their role as a student representative as a personal development opportunity for them.

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[2] Academic advisors are also lecturers and were questioned in relation to their experiences as lecturers.

The data collected from faculty which includes the academic advisors, showed that students are generally passive in terms of their behaviour but are persistent. The faculty interviewees give their perspectives on student's behaviour and their motivation as a member of SEBI. 80 % of them noted that they sometimes receive questions from students in class mainly for clarity on an assignment given, while 30% reported that they receive questions after class on assignments given. Approximately 20% of students ask questions on course content in class, while 10% ask questions on courses content after class. Of the total interviews, 40 % noted that students participate in class only when asked a direct question. 70 % noted that they provide academic advisement to their students on a out of class, and they believe that their support has helped the students to be successful. When asked about feedback from the management of SEBI 20 % reported that they get feedback often, while 40 % reported that they do not receive feedback on performance, however, 40 % feel appreciated by the institution. In terms of motivation, 40 % of the interviewees feel motivated by the students and not the institution.

Conclusions

My research is considered within the broad theories of students' development. The theoretical framework for student involvement underlines the positive effects of all forms of involvement by students in the learning environments. Students' desired outcome is directly related to their involvement in the learning environment as well as the institution's policies, practices, or programs developed to increase student involvement (Astin, 1984). According to the model developed by Vincent Tinto, the institution is expected to provide a nurturing environment to support students' involvement and

successful outcomes. Therefore, while the institution is motivating the psychological

function of the student, student persistence and peer support are important for action.

Table 7

Implications of the Findings

Research Questions	Results	Implications	Next Steps
Identify and examine the perspectives of first and second year SEBI students about the opportunities, barriers, and strategies used by support services to increase engagement.	Positive Hopeful	Students are eager and willing play a part in the establishment and sustainability of student support.	Create a program that allows students to lead the support for their peers
Identify and examine the perspectives of SEBI's lecturers about the opportunities, barriers, and strategies used by support services to increase engagement.	Satisfactory But hopeful.	SEBI can create an enabling environment that will enhance and nurture the relationships between SEBI and the students.	Create a program for support. Faculty to play a major role. Managed by AAs.
Explore to what extent students who engage with SEBI's support services show any significant differences in their academic performance	No results	Need for longitudinal study. Over 2 semesters or 2 years	Future research

Table 17 shows an overview of the views in relation to the research questions and

the implications and next steps. The findings of the research show that students'

perceptions of SEBI are positive, even though students seldom engage in academic

38

activities. These positive reviews are as a result of SEBI faculty's willingness to support students in their endeavors, in and out of class. The levels of students' persistence and student peer support are relatively low within the environment mainly due to a mismatch of needs of the students, and the environment is 70% online. However, students believe that their persistence and peer support can increase with the support of the SEBI faculty. Student representatives play a major role in motivating students towards academic success, but they need to be included in the planning initiatives for students. The perceptions of the student representatives are high and they have indicated their willingness to assist SEBI faculty to provide support to students. Therefore the researcher has envisioned a dual student support program that will focus on the social and academic interactions of students in the learning environment. The program will have a peer support component which will be managed by the student representatives in collaboration with the academic advisors. This component will be responsible for academic and social mentoring of the students. The second component will be the student support program which will be managed by faculty and academic advisors. This component will consist of three sections; an advisement component, a career guidance component, and the establishment of a database for tracing students.

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CHAPTER 3

THE FRAMEWORK OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AT THE SCHOOL OF

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND BUSINESS INNOVATION

This chapter presents an article for publishing in the Journal of Student Affairs Research

and Practice. **Journal Information-** According to the website **"**The Journal of Student

Affairs Research and Practice is an international, peer-reviewed journal publishing high-

quality, original research"

The Article

The framework of student support services at SEBI

Abstract

Effective student support services are critical to increasing student retention and

aiding successful student outcomes. This article reports on the current framework of

student support services at the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation

(SEBI). A sample of 118 student participants (including 4 student representatives), 3

academic advisors, and 9 lecturers took part in an online survey and one-on-one

interviews. Astin's Theory of Student Involvement and Tinto's Student Integration

Theory were used to guide the study. The data analysis involved descriptive statistics and

thematic analysis, and the findings suggest that the student's perception of the support

services offered by SEBI is that the services are inadequate, and that their success is as a

result of peer support and their individual persistence. They recommend a greater

involvement of students in student affairs at SEBI.

Introduction

The University of Guyana was established in 1963 and is the only national higher education institution in Guyana. It has an active enrolment of more than eight thousand students, all of whom occupy the existing 8 faculties and colleges, and 7 schools and institutions[3]. The Institution has produced over twenty thousand graduates, who have moved on to successful careers. The University of Guyana is continually evolving and expanding as the country progresses economically on the backbone of oil discovery and the subsequent influx of foreign migrants[4]. There has also been the development of programs within faculties, colleges, schools, and institutions that seek to support the new emerging sectors in the country.

The fast development of Guyana is encouraging competition from local and foreign corporations, industries and institutions. As a result, Guyana is witnessing a rise in private higher educational institutions, which include universities from developed countries such as Canada and the UK. The competition between higher education institutions (local and foreign), has placed the University of Guyana at a competitive disadvantage, mainly because the University of Guyana lacks the technological advancement and the necessary accreditation that gives other institutions an advantage. Despite the competitive disadvantage, the University of Guyana the education landscape in Guyana (Bernard, 2002), by serving its society as a national, economic, and social obligation.

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[3] https://www.uog.edu.gy/about
[4] https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guyana/overview

In this competitive environment, the University of Guyana recognized a need to increase its competitive advantage and introduced a school that specializes in business development. The School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation (SEBI) was established in 2017, with the purpose of "producing innovative and creative minds" and to fill the gap that existed between business graduates' skills and the industry's needs in Guyana (SEBI, 2017). Since its establishment, the School has been instrumental in creating a student-focused environment (Perry, 2010), and has implemented initiatives that continue to aid students in reaching their goals. These initiatives are the introduction of academic advisors, lecture office hours, and an orientation program designed for its first-year students. These programs form the basis of student support services at SEBI and were designed to assist students in transitioning to higher education and reduce the early dropout rate, while aiding in the achievement of desired outcomes for both the institution and the student.

A review of the student support services program found that of the fifteen hundred (1500) students enrolled at SEBI, approximately 40% of them use the services. This research thus used a mixed-method approach to investigate the current framework of student support services at SEBI, and the level of students' engagement with these services. The researcher is guided by the following research questions are;

1. Identify and examine the perspectives of first- and second-year SEBI students about the opportunities, barriers, and strategies used by support services to increase engagement

2.   Identify and examine the perspectives of SEBI's lecturers about the opportunities, barriers, and strategies used by support services to increase engagement.

3.   Explore to what extent students who engage with SEBI's support services show any significant differences in their academic performance.

A review of the literature on Student Support in Higher Education Institutions

According to (Barnett, 2021) higher education institutions feature an ecosystem of autonomous procedures and a large number of staff and students. These features of higher education institutions create a challenge for education leaders to provide adequate support services for all its students (Johnson, 2022). In the context of higher education institutions with a diverse student population, the challenge can be direr. The provision of services to a group with diverse cultures, ethnicities, economic standings, and learning abilities, requires the transformation of systems (kezar, 2019), to address inequalities, inequities, and other non-academic barriers to student success (Wasser, 2019). Therefore, the strategy for student support is critical to student survival and should be integrated to ensure that each group is represented.

Johnson et al, highlighted the role of the institution in providing student support services that will relieve academic and social challenges, while other researchers discussed the psychological and physical contribution of both the student and the institution toward achieving successful outcomes (Tan & Carney, 2002). Therefore, the function of student support services is important as it aids "the intellectual, physical, moral and social development of the students" (Mahmood, 2020: p.2). Wang's survey on

the effectiveness of student support services found that there can be discrepancies in the quality of learning if students do not have access to adequate efficient services (Wang, 2006). Simpson (2002) in discussing student support in a distance learning environment, give insight to the positive relationship between high dropout rates and inadequate support services.

In order to test the adequacy and efficiency of the student support services, institutions can use an evaluation method established by the institution. (Nsamba & Makoe, 2017) highlighted the relevance of feedback from the user (students) to evaluate the service provided to them, while other researchers measure the number of engagements between the student and the institution, as an evaluation of the support service. Thus, evaluating the impact of institutional support generates a framework for sound student support, as feedback can lead to better allocation of resources, monitoring of student and faculty development, and data collection for future research and provision of better services (Sedlacek, 1987).

Policies and Procedures for Student Support Services

The literature has exemplified that student support services are important for retention and academic success (Nsamba & Makoe, 2017), which have implications for national social and economic progress. Johnson (2022) in examining the relationship between, what they termed "student help-seeking behavior" and student support services, "student help-seeking behaviour" and student success, found a positive relationship between both sets of variables. Given the critical nature of student support services, student support policies are designed based on students and institutional needs, as

students' successful academic performance has been linked with the development and use of the support system (Kaur, 2016; Britto, 2013; Devito, 2016). The institutions' policies are therefore critical to meeting the needs of the students, the development of the student, and the development of a relationship between the student and the institution.

Approaches to student support policies deliberate the complex nature of student support to meet both individual and institutional needs since students' needs are diverse and range from financial to academic and personal counselling and career guidance (Wang, 2006). Thus, providing the correct support services to students is often key to greater output and retention (Mahmood, 2020). However, the provision of adequate services can face some challenges. Williams (2018) suggest that institutions may face setbacks in designing policies for student support due to a variety of exogenous challenges. For instance, the quality and the extension of support services will require broader institutional support, budgetary allocation, and resources embedded in academic departments, employee expectation, student's motivation and expectations, and technological advancement. The literature suggests a careful design of policies and procedures for the adequate use of the service, and the encouragement of a nurturing relationship between the student and the institution. The use of the support services as determined by the student engagement with the institution services is discussed in the following section.

Student Engagement with the Education Institution Services

Researchers discussed student engagement in three broad areas of student cognitive, emotional, and behavioral attributes within learning environments

(Trowler,2010; Astin,1984; Darr, 2012). Darr (2012) in examining student engagement within these three broad areas, highlighted the analogy between the types of engagement, and concluded that they are somehow "dynamically interrelated" as they influence each other (pg709). In this context, how a student behaves is usually influenced by their cognitive and emotional state of mind or actions. As they conscientiously invest their effort and time in the pursuit of academic success, and their investment in this pursuit is measured by time spent in the act of engaging (Trowler,2010; Christenson,2012; Ebede,2018).

Students' engagement with the institution relies on the psychological function and support network of the student (Eggens, 2008; Beharu, 2018). Therefore, student engagement with support services depends to a great extent on the mental and emotional state of the student. The responsibility of the institution is to accentuate the psychological and intellectual attributes of the student and create a physical and non-physical environment to stimulate engagements (Tan & Carney, 2002). In this scenario, the institution engages its students through practical activities and support services designed through an inclusive thoughtful and purposeful process, strategically aligned to support the institution's objectives and student needs (Leach, 2016).

The relationship that develops between the student and the institution can lead to early detection of issues that can affect both parties (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). This relationship can also lead to a mutual responsibility between both parties and avoid a mismatch between needs and provision of services (Bolliger, 2018; Harris, 2011). An

important outcome of this relationship is that the institution will be able to evaluate the prospects of meeting needs, even to a point.

A successful mutual relationship between the two parties, require a cohesive, consistent and organized plan (Sodhi & Kumar, 2013). Planning will allow the institution and the students to reach successful goals as they engage with each other. According to Chickering and Gamson (1987), these engagements stimulates student motivation and further involvement, but students often needs to be motivated to engage (continue to engage) with the institution on matters beneficial to them.

How Motivation enhances Engagement?

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is seen as a psychological construct and is characterized as a key component of student engagement (Pitzer, 2012). The source of the student's motivation determines their persistence. Motivation based on intrinsic factors is more consistent and effortless than those based on extrinsic factors, which require effort to achieve (Wigfield, 2014). Blumenfield et al in examining motivation to engage found that classroom context and instructional practices, and collaboration with peers are key extrinsic motivators that influence students' willingness to participate and invest time in academic activities, while personal values and goals act as intrinsic motivators (Blumenfeld, 2012). The level of motivation can change as students' goal orientation changes as they traverse the learning environment interacting with peers and the institution. Motivation thus depends to a great extent on the personal characteristics, values, goals, and capabilities of the students (Blumenfeld, 2012) as well as the contextual affordances and challenges. Additionally, gender plays a great role in

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motivation. A study by Grebennikov & Skaines found that females more motivated to

pursue higher education than males (Grebennikov & Skaines, 2009)

Educational institutions are also motivated, but this is a more complex scenario,

as this motivation depends on its vision, mission, goals, and numerous faculty members

that function to provide practical action. Faculty members or academics act as the key

mechanisms to drive the vision and mission by engaging students, in addition to

contributing to knowledge generation. However, faculty members themselves need to be

motivated and this depends to a great extent on and professional development, attainable

goals, satisfaction, compensation, and appreciation. (Lens, 2005). A research done by

Watt and Richardson found that faculty were demotivated by inadequate funding and the

lack of support for professional development (Watt & Richardson, 2020).

Student Persistence in Higher Education Institution

In addition to being motivated, students need to be persistent towards achieving

their goals. According to the literature, student persistence is the resilience of the student

to challenges that occurs during their time of study (Roland, Frenay, & Boudrenghien,

2016). Persistence is part of the personal attributes of students, and is important to their

journey towards achieving their goal. Tinto identified persistence as the successful

integration of the student into the institution (Tinto, 1975), as he believes it is critical for

first-year students. Studies have actually shown that first-year student's persistence is

critical for them remaining in higher education institutions (Lim, Kim, & Stewart, 2015).

As students transition from secondary to university, they face many difficulties that can affect their persistence. How they navigate the environment and mitigate these challenges determines whether they achieve their goals. Student support services therefore, play a fundamental role in enabling student persistence and positively impacting student success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Some studies have shown that economic situations, and interactions (faculty and peer) can positively impact student persistence (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993).

The Relationship between Academic Performance and Student Engagement

The literature on the effects of student support services on academic performance has produced positive results. Students use of the support services leads to enhanced learning outcomes (Carney-Crompton, 2002; Harris, 2011). In a study on student engagement with support services, Kuh, Carini, & Klein, (2006) analyzed the levels of student engagement in learning environments and its impact on various test scores. The results showed a small statistically significant correlation between student engagement and the various test scores (Kuh, Carini, & Klein, 2006). It is important to also note that the results also showed that poor performers benefit more from engagement than higher performing classmates and that first-year and seniors adapt different to engagement into academic achievement (Kuh, Carini, & Klein, 2006).

Another relevant study done by Stanley Ebede, (2018) found that students engaged more with faculty members in their senior year as against their freshmen year (Ebede, 2018; p. 67). Another study by Dr. Armando Delfino examined the relationship

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between students' engagement and academic performance and found that all forms of engagement with faculty resulted in better academic performance (Armando, 2019).

The Relevance of Peers Support for Student Success

Peer support and peer relationships within the learning environment are also critical to student success. Student helping students to achieve, have contributed to positive student outcomes, through cohesion and collaboration between students (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Peer support has positively impacted student persistence and educational achievement. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) noted that ongoing interactions between peers often creates long-lasting friendships, stimulate participation in academic activities, and engagement with the institution (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). The ultimate goal is student and institution success.

Support among students and the lasting relationships that develop have been regarded as an important element of the student education journey. This is so because peer interactions occur on a daily basis, inside the classroom through discourse and various academic activities and outside the classroom in the social setting of extracurricular activities. Peer support includes psychological and academic support, and the main benefit of peer support is the provision of a comfortable environment for the student seeking support" (Shaikh, 2012). Ruegg et al, (2017), found that tutoring among peers, benefit each other through the development of independent learning skills, and studying methods (Ruegg, 2017).

In these arrangements, students learn from each other through collaborative initiatives such as discussing course content, and participating in study groups. Treisman & Fullilove (1990) conducted a study of math majors in college and found that students who studied by themselves achieved lower levels of academic success than students who worked in groups, and supported each other (Treisman & Fullilove, 1990). Albert Bandura identified this setting as social cognition, where students formed relationships mainly to deal with uncertainties, and to understand context (Bandura, 2012). It is through interactions that relationships are formed and knowledge sharing takes place, through shared expectations regarding the program and the shared environment. Winston and Zimmerman (2003) noted that these kinds of behaviors influence other students' behaviours. This goes on to influence students' development (Astin,1977; Chickering, 1969).

Theoretical Framework

The researcher considers the following theories for the investigation.

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement was developed by Alexander Astin and focused on the role of students in higher education institutions. The theory posits that students' involvement in the learning environment has a direct impact on outcomes. In other words, the quality of their involvement determines their success. The theory further suggest that the more students are actively engaged, the more they can benefit academically and personally (Kuh, Carini, & Klein, 2006). Astin views engagement as a behavioral concept, that goes beyond a "psychological state" (p. p52) to a cognitive and

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emotional, manifestation of the student's thinking and feelings (Christenson,2012; Astin, 1984). "It is not what the student thinks or feels, but what he/she does or behaves that identifies involvement" (Astin, 1984, pg 518).

Figure 6

Astin Theory of Involvement

Inputs- Demographics, Background, and previous Experiences	
Core Concepts of Astin's Theory	Environment-Experiences during College
	Outcomes- New/ improved; Characteristics, Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values.
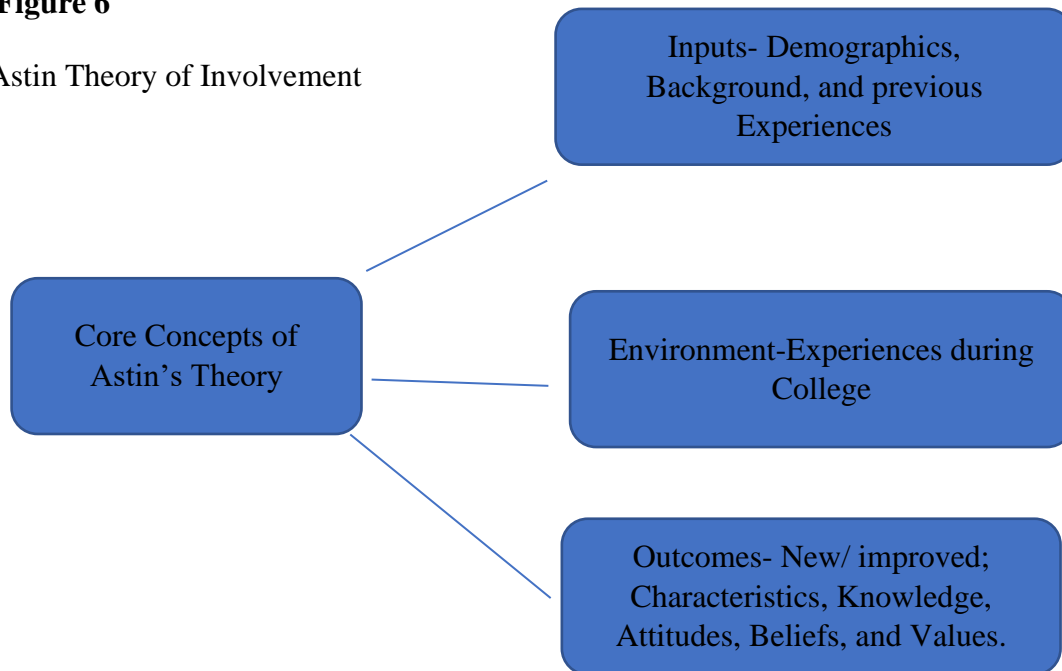
Source: Prof. Dr. Rosna Awang Hashim

Figure 6 as illustrated by Prof. Dr. Rosna Awang Hashim and cited by (Anuar, 2018), explains the importance of the students experiences in the learning environment and its impact on outcomes. Student experiences are acquired through involvement with academic, faculty, and peers. These involvements can lead to desirable outcomes as students change and develop. These involvements can be from minimal or passive engagement in activities, faculty or peers, to collaborative involvement and lead involvement such as student representatives.

Vincent Tinto's Integration framework and model of student persistence, focus on understanding the factors that influence student persistence and success in higher education. According to the theory, the relationship between the students and the institution is critical for academic success and student retention. His model for student integration illustrated in Figure 7, shows student's pre-university attributes, predetermined goals and skills, and expectations of the institution, interacting with the learning environment. In this model, constructivist learning (Bandura, 2012) takes place, where students are shaped by modeled behaviours from peers and the institution. The interactions and relationships in the learning environment form a normal and essential part of the learning process. Therefore, informal and formal interactions with the academic system and social systems, are critical to meeting those goals and expectations of the students.

Figure 7

Tinto Integration Framework
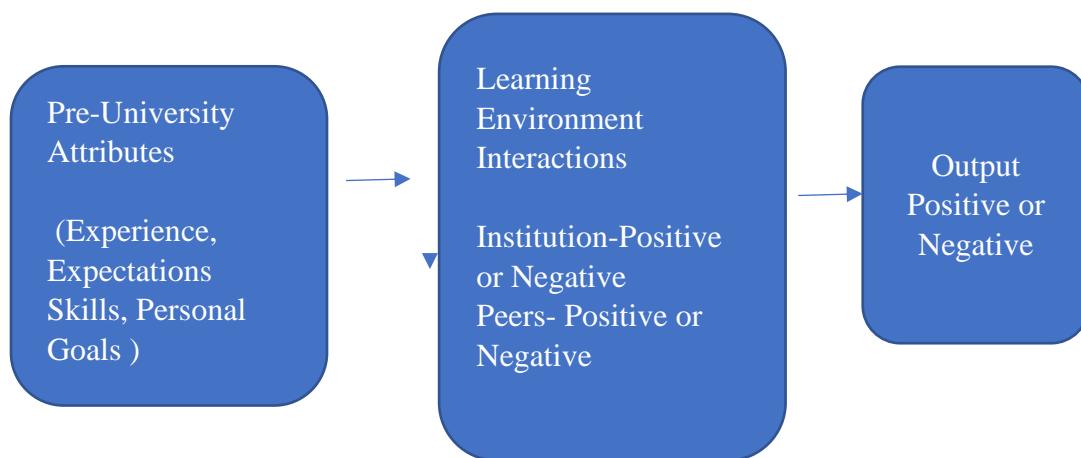
Tinto suggests that persistence was largely a function of the quality of a student's interaction with the academic and social systems of the institution. Many studies have confirmed the validly pf this model. Pascarella and Terenzini (1981) conducted a study of first-year student persistence and found that student-faculty relationships impact student persistence in a positive way. A student's attitude towards learning can be influenced by these relationships, as the ability to learn can be based on a comfortable relationship with peers and faculty.

In conclusion, Astin's theory of involvement and Tinto Integration framework highlights the role of both the students and the institution in the learning environment. The active interactions of both parties are critical for student success and satisfaction in higher education learning environments. By actively involving themselves in the college experience, students have the opportunity to grow, learn, and develop, ultimately enhancing their overall educational outcomes.

Methods

This research is an Action Research undertaken as part of the dissertation for the EdD Leadership in Education Program. This type of research was chosen because of its systematic form of investigation, which allows for the connection between theory and practice. The aim of this type of research was to address the local level problems at SEBI (Craig, 2020).

The research consisted of 3 cycles of research; cycle 0, 1 and 2. During cycle 0 the researcher used a mixed method to investigate *SEBI students' attitudes towards learning*. The results of that cycle showed that the program's structure and the

University's general policies in relation to student-focus initiatives are motivating, but the learning environment is not conducive to learning. The results also showed that there is a need for improvement in the facilities, quality of lecturers, the learning environment and pedagogy. Although the study was limited by accessibility to the participants and the number of participants (3/1500), the results suggest that the students at SEBI are not motivated to get involved in activities at SEBI. During cycle 1, the focus was on student participation, specifically, and data was collected to give insight into the participants' *perception of student participation in class*. The main findings of the research indicate that student participation was dependent on teaching style, institutional and class environment, and support for students. The participants reported having little interest in participating in class activities, even though the lecture made them feel comfortable, and they were satisfied with the activities. The results also indicate that most students prefer to sit quietly in class rather than be involved in the discussions. Participation in class activities is positively correlated with teacher style and learning style, although the data showed that students' participation is also based on the course content, the environment, and culture. Cycle 1 also showed that the students felt that institutional support is important towards motivating them.

Based on the results of the previous two cycles, the researcher embarked on the current study that focused on *students' perceptions of student support services*. Similar to the previous cycles, this research used a mixed method research, which consists of the collection, analysis, and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2017). The current research was conducted during the months of May to June 2023- a 5-month period. The sample for this study was 9 lecturers, 3 academic advisors, 4 SEBI

student representatives, and one hundred and eighteen SEBI first- and second-year students enrolled at the School during the academic years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023.

The students enrolled in the academic years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 were completing their second and first years respectively. According to the literature, first-year and second-year students are more vulnerable to withdrawal (Yorke, & London; 2008; Lim et al, 2015), and are less motivated and persistent due to ambiguity and lack of proper guidance, but they do not necessarily withdraw (Watt, 2020). In addition, in SEBI's context, this group of students can be used to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of an innovation, given that students are expected to spend a minimum of 4 years to complete a bachelor of science Degree program. Therefore, students who completed their first year have a minimum of three more years, and those who completed their second year have a minimum of two more years. The group that was sampled had completed their first and second years.

Data Collection

The researcher used surveys and interviews to collect qualitative and quantitative data that aid in the investigation of the framework of student support services at SEBI. The questions were designed to gather data on students' and lecturers' experiences and perspectives of student support at SEBI. Both sets of data collection methods provided greater insight into participants' experiences and perspectives.

One survey instrument was designed specifically for the students, and the other for the faculty and academic advisors. The Student Survey was designed to collect data on students' demographics (age, gender, ethnicity), Grade Point Average (GPA), year of study, and enrolment status. Data was also collected on students' experiences,

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perspectives, and professional characteristics. The survey for faculty and academic

advisors, was designed to collect data on their perspectives with regards to SEBI student

support, their experiences with students (in and out of class), and their level of

motivation. The Surveys were designed in Google Forms and were distributed during

June of the academic year 2022/2023. The month of June is the end of semester, where

students are known to be taking final assessments, and some are preparing for the Recess

or Summer period.

The link to the survey along with the consent letter, was emailed to all the

students who were completing their first year and the students who were completing their

second year at SEBI. These were all the students who enrolled in the Orientation class for

the academic year 2021/2022, and academic year 2022/2023. The Orientation class is

comprised of all first year Bachelor of Science Program students. The total emails sent

were seven hundred and eighty, and students indicated their interest in participating in the

Survey and consenting to the Survey, by "clicking next" and completing the Survey.

Unlike the student survey distribution, the 9 faculty members and 3 academic advisors

were contacted via telephone and asked if they were interested in participating in the

survey and subsequent interview. After receiving an affirmative, the link to the survey

and the consent letter for faculty members and academic advisors were emailed to the

participants. The response to the surveys were one hundred and eighteen students, 3

academic advisors, and 9 lecturers.

Data Analysis

The completed survey forms were downloaded to Microsoft Excel, formatted and

cleaned for analysis. The Mean for each dataset was calculated for all the categories of

data and was used to determine the perceptions of students on SEBI's student support services, and to investigate the current framework of student support services. The descriptive statistics which included quantitative data on gender, age, ethnicity/ race, year of study, enrolment status, program of study, and family education levels, were generated. The data was then analyzed with the use of correlation analysis, pie charts, and histograms (these are discussed in the next section).

The interview recordings were uploaded to the researcher's computer and were transcribed manually. The researcher used thematic analysis to organize the data. This included identifying patterns and themes in the data, which were assigned codes that describe specific content. A spreadsheet was created in Excel that allowed for the compilation of the data. The summary of the data is presented in Table 7.

Findings

The findings of the data collected showed that approximately 70% of the students enrolled in the first and second years at SEBI are females, and 30 % are males (no student identified as other). It was important to assess the gender of the students because this information is not readily available at the University of Guyana. Notwithstanding that gender is important in determining access to support service, as women are more likely to seek support than men (Grebennikov & Skaines, 2009).

The data, illustrated in Figure 8, showed that 60 % of the students are within the age range 20 to 30, while the 31 % of students fall in the age range 31 to 40. The respondents that identified as below 18, were omitted from the results.

Figure 8

Mean Age Range of Sampled Students
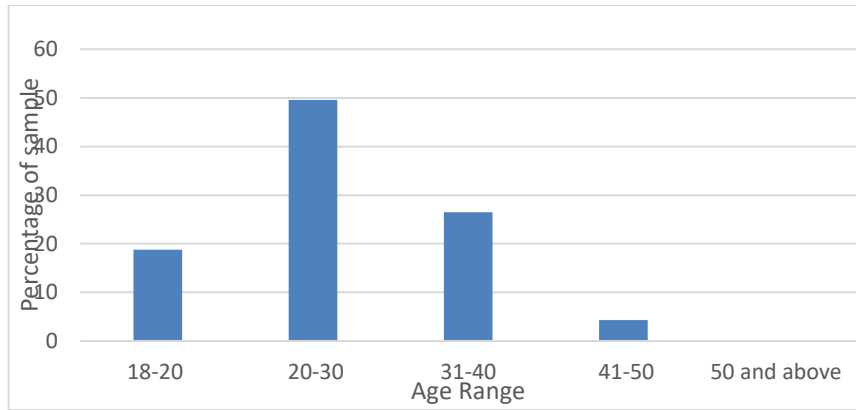
Source: SRMS database

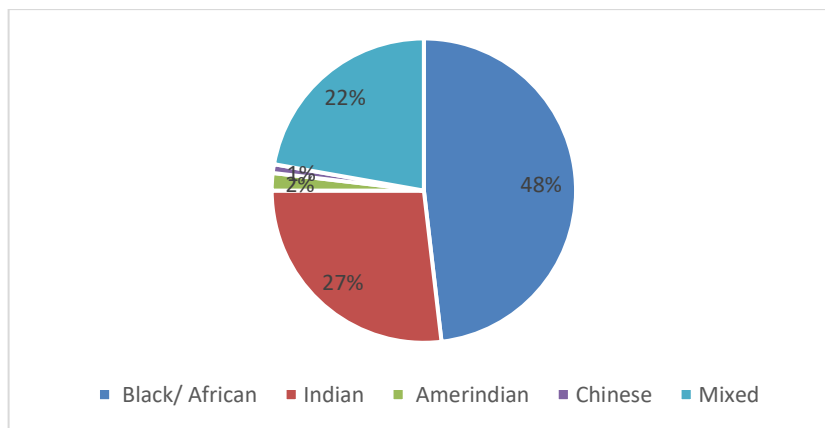In terms of race, Figure 9 illustrates that 48% of the respondents identified as black/African students, while 27% identified as Indian students, and 22 % identified as mixed race. Given the multi ethnicity of Guyana, the results reflect representativeness of the sample used.

Figure 9

Student Representation by Ethnicity

Source: SRMS database

The aggregated data on the other key categorical, continuous, and ordinal variables, such as Grade Point Average (GPA), program of study, enrolment status, and family education were also collected through the Survey, and were tabled with the use of histograms. The results are presented in figure 10 and showed that 39 % of the students had a GPA within the range of 3.5 to 4, while the average GPA were 3 to 3.4 with a standard deviation of 0.99, and a standard error of 0.09.

Figure 10

Grade Point Average of Participants
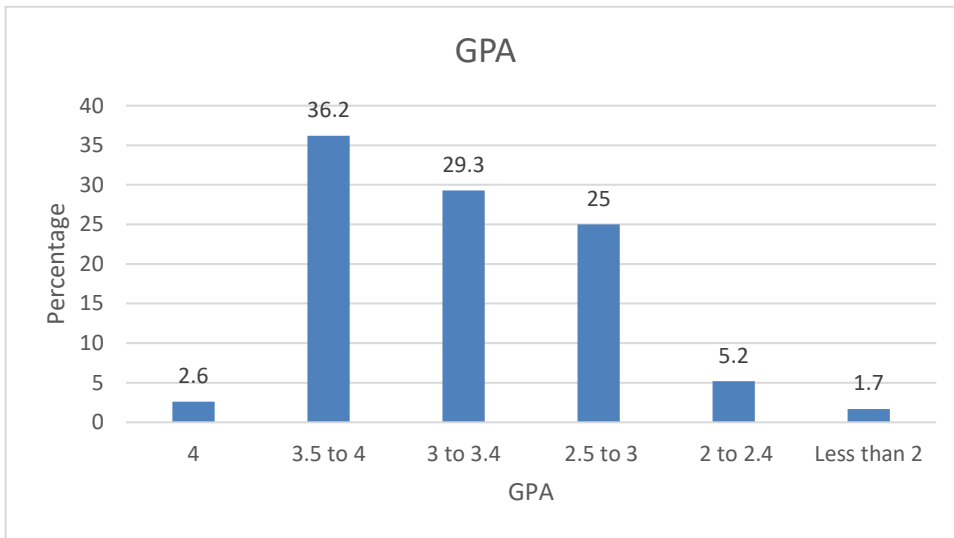
Source: SRMS database

The aggregated data also showed that the largest enrolment of students at SEBI are pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Management. This data is consistent with available data on the University database, which shows that the students pursuing the Management degree represents 42 % of the total students enrolled in the degree programs at SEBI. Supply Chain Management and Accountancy represents 14 % and 15 %, respectively. Figure 10 illustrated that 19 % of the respondents to the Survey were from the accounting

program, 17 % from the supply chain program, and 15 % from the Management program. 53 % of the respondents indicated that they are not first-time University students, and 82 % indicated that they are employed and attend classes on a part-time basis. 45 % responded that they are not the first in their families to attend university, while 50 % indicated that they have family members with a university degree.

Figure 11

Total Enrolled First and Second-Year Students by Major
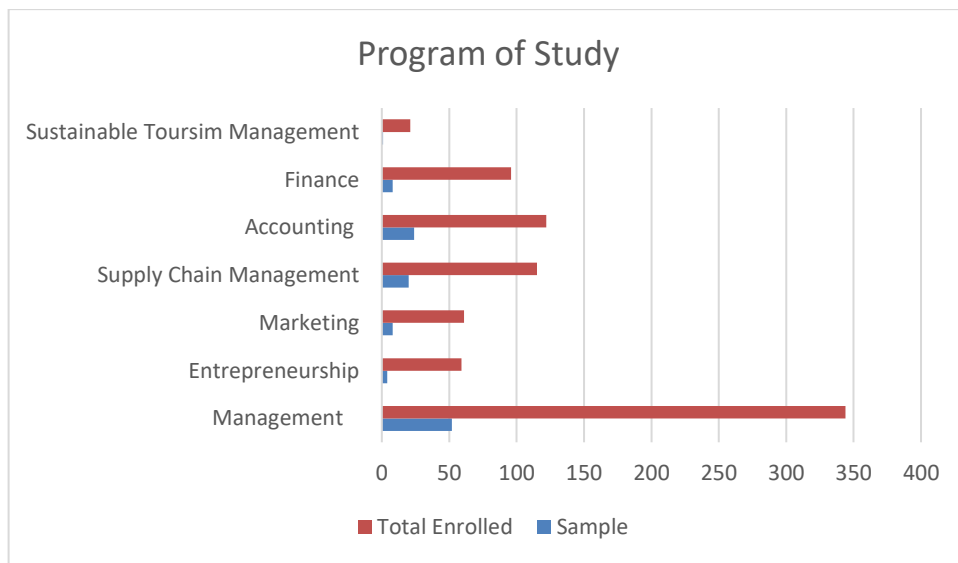
Source: SRMS database

In regards to the questions relating to student support services, 61% of the respondents indicated that they are aware of the academic advice services offered by SEBI, and 54 % said that they use the service. Figure 13 indicates that 56% of the students reported that the reasons for using the service were for registration issues, while 6% and 7% respectively, used the service to increase their academic performance and to seek career guidance. Figure 12 illustrates that 32 % reported that they made contact with the support service less than 5 times, and 20 % made contact between 5

and 10 times. 38 % indicated that they never made contact with the support services, while 4% indicated that they frequently use the services.

Figure 12

Use of the Support Services
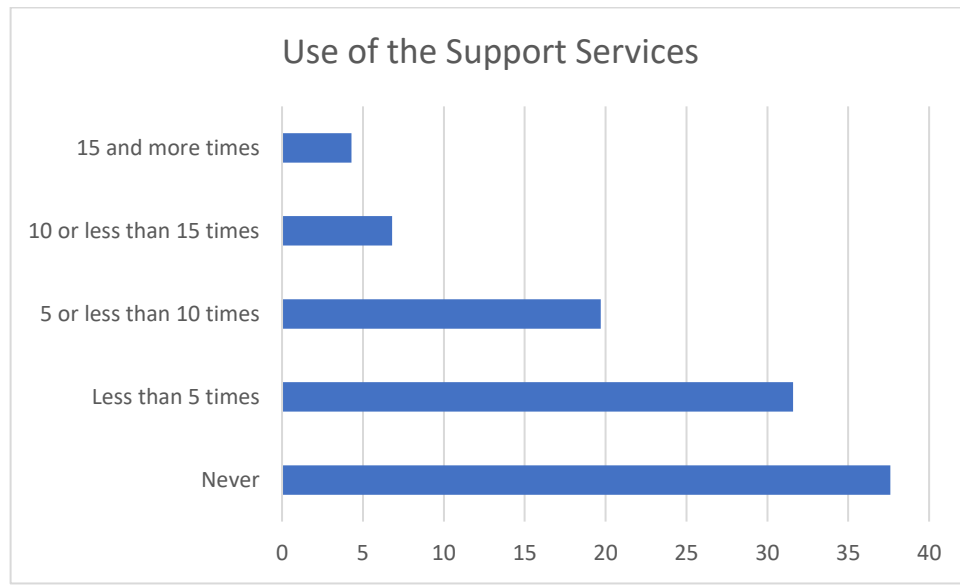
Figure 13

Reasons for using the Support Services

The variables, student engagement, peer support, academic performance, student persistence, and SEBI Student Support, were aggregated and the average response of each variable were analyzed using averages and correlation analysis. The researcher

placed the total percentage of response opinions and experiences under categories of positive, satisfactory, and negative, and presented the results in Table 8 and Table 9. The categories were determined with the use of the Likert scale - never, rarely, sometimes, often, always. The researcher defined positive as never and rarely, satisfa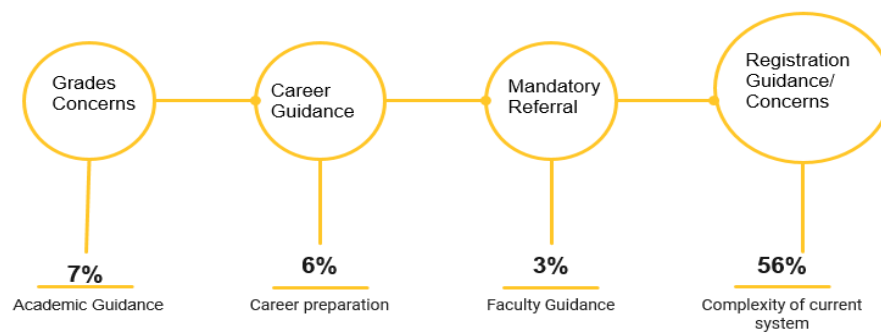ctory as sometimes, and often and always as negative. This showed the perception of the respondents to student support services, peer support, and faculty support. The results are illustrated Table 7 and shows that 38 % of the respondents view SEBI positively. 33 % opined that SEBI academic advice is relevant and has been effective for them, while 16.5 respondents believe that faculty support is helpful, though 26 % view faculty support negatively, and is out of touch with their needs. 35 % of the students indicated that they spent extra time engaging in academic materials, and believe this is responsible for their success, while 29 % credits their success to support from their peers.

Table 8

Student Perspectives of Student Support Services

Support Services	Positive	Satisfactory	Negative
SEBI Overall Student Support	38.1	24.2	3.9
Academic Advisement	33.3	24.8	9.5
Faculty Support	16.5	21.2	26.1
Students Peer Support	29.3	27.7	5.6
Students Persistence	35.2	19.8	4.7

The variables were also disaggregated into 3 levels: high, medium, and low. The levels were determined by dividing 100 % by 3. High representing mean response percentage of above 66.6, medium 33.3 and below 66.6, and low below 33.3. This was necessary to determine the general perspective of each student on each indicator. The

results indicate that student's willingness to engage with support services at SEBI is low, and their engagement with peers is also low.

Table 9

Levels of Perspective on Key Indicators

Indicators	Variables	No.	Level
Student Engagement	• Willingness to invest time and effort in Support Services. • Number of contact times.	21	low
Students Persistence	• Personal characteristics- goals values.	20	low
Peer Support	• Engagement with peers.	21	low
Support services	• Quality of Support Services	20	low

Table 10 illustrates Pearson Chi-square significance test results provided evidence about the significance of the correlation between the demographic variable and students' perceptions. The Correlation analysis results show that there is a small or zero correlation between the student's age, GPA, gender, and year of study, and their perspective on the support provided for students, their perspective on peer support, and their persistence.

The researcher found that there is a strong relationship between student persistence and their perspective of the student support offered. There is a moderate relationship between student persistence and peer support, and peer support and the perspective of the student support.

Table 10

Pearson Correlation Coefficient Results

Variable 1	Variable 2	"r" Value	Degree of Relationship
Student Persistence (SP)	Perspective on Student Support (PSS)	0.5	Strong
Student Persistence (SP)	Peer Support (PS)	0.39	Moderate
Peer Support (PS)	Perspective on Student Support (PSS)	0.4	Moderate
Year of Study	PSS, SP, PS	0.3	Small
GPA	PSS, SP, PS	0.1	Small
Age	PSS, SP, PS	0.04	Small
Gender	PSS, SP, PS	0.017	Small

The interview data was coded and presented in Table 11. The results indicated that the students' representatives shared positive views about the support services offered at SEBI, but raised concerns about other departments at the University of Guyana. In response to the questions on reasons for volunteering as a student representative, one student said "I felt the need to assist my peers who are having difficulties navigating the University" another one noted that "I am an advocate for my peers". The consensus being that they were overwhelmed by complaints by their peers and wanted to make a change. Two of them reported that in addition to change, they see their role as a student representative as a personal development opportunity for them.

The data collected from faculty which includes the academic advisors, showed that students are generally passive in terms of their behaviour but are persistent. They communicate mainly to clarify course assessments. One faculty member interviewee stated that "students only make contact with me to query assessments". One academic

advisor also stated that "students make contact as a last resort" while advisor two said "students seek advise as a reaction to an issue". The faculty interviewees also gave their perspectives on student's behaviour and their motivation as a member of SEBI. One faculty member said that "I am motivated by my students….i feel motivated when I see the change in academic results". When asked about feedback on their performance from the management of SEBI, 2 reported that they get feedback often, while 4 reported that they do not receive feedback on performance, however, 4 of them said that they feel appreciated by the institution. In terms of keeping office hours the faculty noted that it is almost impossible, given the volume of students.

Table 11

Interview Themes

Themes	Data Extracted
Student Interactions	Lecturer- "As a lecturer students only make contact with me to query assessments" AA- "Students make contact as a last resort" Student Rep- "Students feel more comfortable contacting me as a representative"
Motivation	Lecturer – "The students motivate me. Interacting with them helps to build relationships and trust" AA- "The students that I help. It is hard trying to keep track of them" Student Rep- "I see myself as an advocate for change"
Expectation	Student – "I did not know what to expect. I am from a foreign country and was scared"
Peer Representation	Student- "I started to advocate for students because I was tired of hearing students complain about issues with making contact with the university".

Table 12

Aggregated Qualitative Data

Perceptions of SEBI Learning Environment and Student Support Services

Faculty

*Reason for Students' communication/ participation
        in class.*

Clarity on course content -1	20%
Clarity on course assignment-2	70%
General advisement- 3	10%

Perception of Support Services

Keep office hours	0%
Willingness to go beyond	80%
Motivated	70%

Students Representatives

Reason for being a peer representative

Advocacy -1	50
Personal Development- 2	50
Number of Complaints -3	100

Results

The research objective was to investigate the framework of student support at

SEBI. The research set out to answer 3 research questions as identified in the

introduction. The results of the findings conclude that the perspective of the students on

the support services offered at SEBI is hopeful. The support services play a vital role in

assisting the students with their needs, as indicated by their positive response to the

impact of student support services at SEBI. Similarly, the perspective of using peer

support for student development is in particular important to the students. The results

indicate that student support services as well as peer support are important elements for

student development. There is much opportunities for the development of the support

program at SEBI, even though the barriers are few, which can be budgetary allocation

and student persistence. The perception of student support services is related to the level

of student persistence and peer support.

     In terms of the lecturers' perspective, the researcher concludes that the faculty or

lecturers, are motivated by their students to go beyond the call of duty to ensure their

student success. The consensus, however, is that the large student population is a barrier

to having effective student faculty relationships. The research did not find a direct

relationship between the use of the student support services and students' overall GPA.

The researcher will need a longitudinal study to determine this. There is also a need for

an inclusive plan, for the development of the support services offered.

Discussion and Implications for the field

Student support services are key to stimulating engagements between students and

the institution. These engagements are necessary to identify the needs of both the students

and the institution, to increase student persistence, and to design programs that will

relieve ambiguity and increase retention and output (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1995). Student

support procedures, policies, and structures should therefore be designed to enable

student persistence (Nsamba & Makoe, 2017). Since the establishment of the School of

Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation in 2017, there has been an unwritten policy on

student-faculty engagement at SEBI. The academic advisors as student support were introduced to solidify this engagement, giving students an opportunity to reach out to the institution without hindrances and much bureaucracy.

The theories of student support highlighted the relevance of support services and student engagement with support services to a successful student-faculty engagement. Actually, Tinto and Astin modelled the nurturing environment and its importance to successful student-faculty engagement that eliminates ambiguity and increases retention. This research focused on five factors that influence the use of student support services, in keeping with the literature on the student's interactions with educational institutions. These are academic performance, student engagement, student persistence, peer support, and faculty motivation.

The results as presented in the previous section show zero or a small relationship between the demographic variables but a strong to moderate relationship between the qualitative variables in particular- student persistence, peer support. The research highlighted the need for the institution to utilize the attributes and relationships that has developed among the students in the learning environment. These relationships can be vital to student success and the institution reaching its mandate.

Peer support is high at SEBI as students feel more comfortable with their peers than the university. The student representatives can act as mediator between students and the School. This natural system works to the benefit of both parties. As I have discussed earlier, this psychological function and support network of the student plays a pivotal role in their success.

Table 13

Implications of the Findings

Research Questions	Results	Implications	Next Steps
Identify and examine the perspectives of first and second year SEBI students about the opportunities, barriers, and strategies used by support services to increase engagement.	Positive Hopeful	Students are eager and willing play a part in the establishment and sustainability of student support.	Create a program that allows students to lead the support for their peers
Identify and examine the perspectives of SEBI's lecturers about the opportunities, barriers, and strategies used by support services to increase engagement.	Satisfactory But hopeful.	SEBI can create an enabling environment that will enhance and nurture the relationships between SEBI and the students.	Create a program for support. Faculty to play a major role. Managed by AAs.
Explore to what extent students who engage with SEBI's support services show any significant differences in their academic performance	No results	Need for longitudinal study. Over 2 semesters or 2 years	Future research

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of the findings show that the perspective of the

students on the support services offered at SEBI is hopeful. Hopeful for a future

whereby faculty and students can work towards an inclusive plan for student

development. Hopeful for open communication, and fair procedures, and equity. Hope

for mutual development. All this hope requires a necessary collaboration with students

to design a support service that is efficient and effective, to collaborate to design course content based on student needs, and support based on individual needs. This new era of collaboration will enhance persistence and peer support among students, while creating an efficient and effective support service that will increase interactions and nurturing, eliminate ambiguity and improve academic results. This proposed program is discussed in chapter 4.

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CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

During my journey to my EdD, I have gained much insight into many concepts and philosophies that discuss the phenomena of students' behaviour in the learning environment, pedagogy of teaching, and learning styles. The Social Cognitive Theory of Albert Bandura, the Social Constructivist theory of Liv Vygotsky's, and the Constructivist Learning Theory of Jean Piaget, have all contributed to my thinking, and have impacted my research. The notion behind these philosophies is the schematic understanding of knowledge, where students think about their environment and act to benefit themselves through social negotiations in the environment. John Dewy's pragmatic views on education have greatly influenced this thinking.

John Dewy's views on social learning, asserts that learning takes place in the social environment and students learn by doing. This is similar to Vygotsky's theory on constructivism, which perpetuates that knowledge is achieved through collaboration and partnerships, as individuals learn from one another in the learning environment. Most importantly, social constructivism highlights the interactions that occur within the social environment that allows students to learn from each other. These concepts and theories postulate that peer relationships between students, and student and faculty relationships are important for learning to take place.

The schematics of these relationships are explained by Vincent Tinto and Alexander Astin, both of whom modelled the philosophy of their predecessors. By

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highlighting the process of the social interactions in the learning environment and the outcomes from these interactions. The most interesting of these outcomes being that as the relationships lingers over time, these relationships form a normal and essential part of the learning process.

In the context of SEBI, students form relationships based on various needs. Most often for an education and social need, a sense of belonging, and to be part of the in crowd. Within these relationships, students' behaviors are diverse, some students are more active than others. Some are gritty (Duckworth. 2007), others are self-regulated, while others are inactive and passive, all of which may depends on their values and goals (Carter, 2012). It is these differences that creates learning and motivation within relationships in the social environment, especially peer relationships. A student's attitude towards learning can be influenced by these relationships, and the capability to learn can be grounded on mutual respect and an appreciation for each other. Therefore, successful relationships can influence learning only as much as people motivate each other in the learning environment. The literature identifies peer support as that group of likeminded people supporting each other to reach their goals (Altermat, 2019; Suresh.et al. 2021). In as much as each member supporting each other, or one member supporting all, or a few members supporting all, peer relationships require support from the other player in the learning environment. This player, the institution, is required to support peer relationships.

Another important element of successful relationships in the learning environment is student persistence. According to the literature, student persistence is often tied to the

psychological elements of the student, which determines their interactions in the learning environment, whether this interaction is with peers or with the institution. Student persistence is modeled by Vincent Tinto and shows the possible outcomes of student's persistence in the learning environment (Tinto, 1993). The study undertaking examined the barriers to students' persistence in the learning environment at SEBI and their perception of the support given to aid and demolish barriers to their persistence. According to Tinto (1993), students have to engage in the academic and social environment of the institution, in order to remain persistent, and to achieve academic success. Therefore, it is the duty of the institution to engage its students at every stage of their academic life, beginning with enrolment. At the time of enrolment, the institution can identify those important characteristics, that will aid in the provision of both academic and non-academic support. All these actions will increase the students' persistence (Tinto, 1993).

The lack of inclusive planning at SEBI is a major barrier to student persistence. SEBI provides support to its students, but is this support enough for student development? Does this support meet the student's needs? At SEBI, support is designed without the student's input, and the faculty and the academic advisors' involvement. For instance, the key features of mandatory academic advisement were implemented without the student's involvement, and the involvement of the technical department of the University. Providing support to our students is not enough, we need to understand the student's needs, in every aspect of a student's life academically and socially, this can only be possible through inclusiveness and inclusive planning. SEBI also need to have the

necessary infrastructure in place to make the support successful. Therefore, student support should be designed to cover the technical, pedagogical, and administrative aspects of the University, SEBI, and the student.

The research found that both student persistence and peer support are low, but have positive outlook. Stimulating both student persistence and peer support can be a challenge without the encouragement of SEBI. A program is therefore designed and discussed in the next section that will see a collaboration between SEBI faculty and students towards the provision of a sound support system for students. This program will require the implantation of a supportive community of practice, as well as SMART strategies for effective implementation.

Professor John Kotter identified an eight-step process for creating major changes in an institution. He believes that in order for change to be effective, we must be able to win over the minds and hearts of the people, and there must be effective leadership and management (Kotter, 2020). In practice, these steps are envisioned by leadership and become part of a system that is operated by management. At the SEBI, I recognize that there is an urgent need to address student support services and student persistence. This was discussed many times at the level of the SEBI School Board as well as the staff meeting. The stakeholders have expressed their concerns but have not been able to fix the issue, because it requires like-minded thinking and an advocate for change.
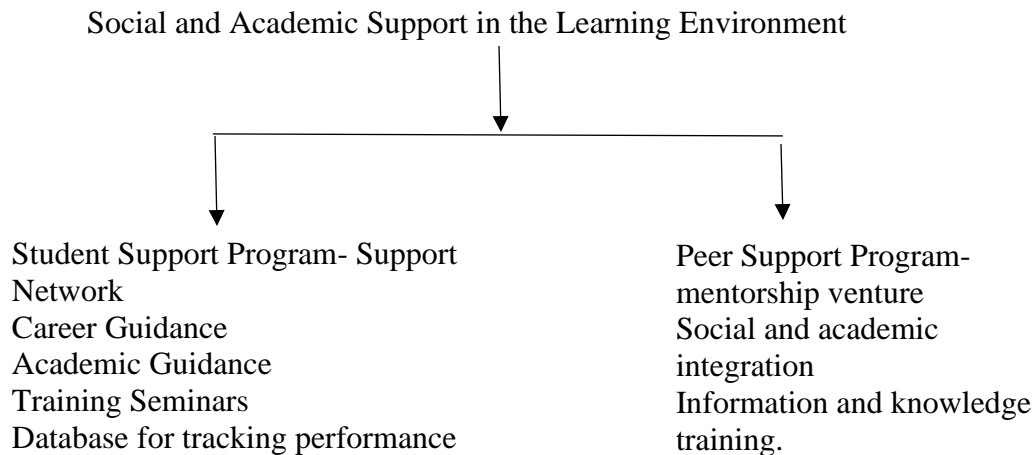
Innovation Prototype

Inclusive Student Support at SEBI

An innovation for efficient and effective student support services, that will increase students use and benefits at SEBI. The innovation provides students with access to academic and social support services, which will be established to help students to enhance academic and soft skills that are necessary for success at the University of Guyana an in their future endeavors. This innovation is developed with two components. The first is a *student support program* managed by the faculty and staff of SEBI, and the second is a *peer support program* designed in collaboration with students.

Figure 14

Innovation Prototype

Social and Academic Support in the Learning Environment

Student Support Program- Support Network	Peer Support Program-mentorship venture
Career Guidance	Social and academic integration
Academic Guidance	Information and knowledge training.
Training Seminars	
Database for tracking performance	

The **Student Support Program** is designed in recognition that each student have different academic, social, and financial needs. Regardless of these needs, one key factor to student success is their engagement in academic and social activities at the University. The program will place a greater emphasis on SEBI meeting the needs of the student. The first aspect will be to reduce the ratio of student to faculty, by having more faculty

members responsible for academic advisement. This program will be threefold, and includes;

I.   the establishment of a student support unit (outlined in **Appendix A**),

II. the development of a comprehensive student support model,

III. and the establishment of a Student Support database.

The establishment of a Student Support Unit- will entail dual duties of all faculty members. Presently faculty members are only responsible for teaching. The program will allow faculty members to be advisors as well as lecturers. The Unit therefore will have academic advisors, faculty, and administrative staff. This will help to reduce the ratio of student to faculty, by having more faculty members responsible for academic advisement.

Development of a Comprehensive Student Support Model- In this model, each student will be assigned an academic advisor based on the program of study, for the first two years after admittance. After the completion of the two years, the student will be referred to a career/professional advisor who will be responsible for career guidance and professional development. This is beneficial to the students because for the first two years students are thought foundation courses and basic skills for success, after which they enter their third and fourth years where specialized courses are delivered. For a second-year student to be transferred to a career adviser, that student will have to have completed all foundation courses.

Establishment of a Student Support Database-The innovation will also implement a SEBI Student Support Services Database (SSSD), which will include two components: an advisement component and a career guidance component, and an appointment

scheduling component. The creation of this database will require collaboration between SEBI and the University of Guyana Technical Department. The advisement component will have reports on students' progress and personal notes that are important for student success. Scheduling and appointments will create a systematic process for engagement and success. The system will track all students' communication, send out early alerts, create plans schedules for students, allow students to set appointments, alerts for students who missed two appointments and whose GPA reduces, while lecturers will be allowed to set schedules and input student information or "red flags" that will require further intervention by the advisors. This database will allow support staff to identify students' needs and plan to address these needs. Quarterly reports on students' academic progress and to approve registration for the next classes will be made available for analysis.

The second aspect is the **Peer Support Program**. This will be implemented by the SEBI in collaboration with student representatives and Alumni. The program will have a more social aspect of learning. The literature showed that students who are actively involved in campus life focused more on their academics, therefore a social aspect to support would be implemented. The Peer Support Program will help students learn educational skills through activities. Astin (1986) believes that as students integrated and interact in the institution, the greater the likelihood that they will become more persistent. The most influential types of involvement are academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with student peer groups (Astin, 1986).

I envision the peer support program will assist in the integration of students into university, by allowing more experienced students to support new students in their transition to higher level skills achievement /development (Shahrill, 2014). The program

will see the involvement of mainly students in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the program. Student's role will be to provide a level of comfort and understanding in a relaxed cognitive process.

The vision and goals will be clearly defined and communicated to all students. The program will be reviewed every semester (quarterly) for feedback on key outputs and expectations. Part of the key outputs will be improvement in self-regulation and efficacy, development of creative, practical, and analytical thinking skills. These will be assessed through academic output and presentation skills. Faculty will act as administrators, providing needed support.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A

1) Gender
    a.   □ Male
    b.   □ Female

2) Age
    a.   □ below 20
    b.   □ 20-30
    c.   □ 31-40
    d.   □ 41-50
    e.   □ 50 and above

3) Ethnicity
    a.   □ Black/ African
    b.   □ Indian
    c.   □ Amerindian
    d.   □ Chinese
    e.   □ Mixed

4) Employment status
    a.   Employed
    b.   Unemployed
    c.   Homemaker

5) Program of study
    a.   □ Management
    b.   □ Entrepreneurship
    c.   □ Marketing
    d.   □ Supply Chain Management
    e.   □ Accounting
    f.   □ Finance

6) Year of study
    a.   □ First
    b.   □ Second

7) Do you currently have a degree or diploma from any university?
    a.   □ Yes
    b.   □ No

8) Are you the first in your family to attend the University?
    a.   □ Yes
    b.   □ No

9) What is the highest level of education in your family?
    a.   □ Primary
    b.   □ Secondary
    c.   □ Tertiary/ Training
    d.   □ University

10) What is your GPA?
     a.   4
     b.   3.5 to 4
     c.   3 to 3.4
     d.   2.5 to 3
     e.   2 to 2.4
     f.   Less than 2

11) Do you know about the academic advisement service at SEBI?
     a. □ Yes   b □ No

12) Do you use the academic advisement services?
     a. □ Yes   b. □ No

13) How many times have you used the academic advisement services?

   a) □ Never

   b) □ Less than 5 times

   c) □ 5 or less than 10 times

   d) □ 10 or less than 15 times

   e) □ 15 and more times

12)   How do you contact your adviser?

   a) Telephone

   c) Emails

   d) walk in face to face

11. Why did you make contact with the adviser?

   a) □ Registration issues

   b) □ Registration guidance

   c) □ Referred by the HOD

   d) □ Career guidance

   e) □ Grades concern

SECTION B

Questions	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
1. Do you use the lecture office hours?					
2. I am happy to seek advice and support from the faculty.					
3. I feel the support services offered by SEBI is beneficial to my success.					
4. I feel the academic advisement offered by SEBI is beneficial to my success.					
5. I feel my academic adviser cares.					
6. I feel out of touch with the faculty and my adviser.					
7. I feel out of touch with the faculty and my adviser.					
8. My academic advisor is approachable.					
9. I feel more support can be given to students					
10. I make an effort to contact me academic advisor					
11. I know about lecturers office hours					
12. I contact my lecturers after class for advice.					
13. I contact my lecturers after class for clarification on course content.					
14. I do additional reading on most of the course content					

15. I do additional reading on my favorite course content					
16. I feel like SEBI cares about my success					
Peer Support					
17. My classmates helps to build my academic confidence					
18. I feel confident seeking advice from my classmates.					
19. In class collaboration and participation have helped my academic performance.					
20. The learning environment and climate are positive and supportive.					
21. I feel building relationships in and out of class is beneficial to my academic performance					
Academic Performance					
22. My grades are consistently poor.					
23. My GPA is unacceptable to me.					
24. My grades have improved from last semester					
25. My GPA has improved from last semester.					
26. I put in extra effort and work hard to get improved grades.					
27. I receive support from SEBI to help my performance. 28. Since using the support services my grades have improved.					

APPENDIX B
FACULTY SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

FACULTY SURVEY

Questions	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
1. I receive positive feedback on my teaching from my students.					
2. I receive positive feedback from the students I advise.					
3. I receive positive feedback from SEBI on my performance as a lecturer.					
4. I receive positive feedback from SEBI on my performance as an academic adviser.					
5. I feel meeting students outside of class will be beneficial to SEBI and the student.					
6. I feel the support I gave to students will help them to succeed.					
7. I feel SEBI should improve its support services for staff.					
8. I feel SEBI should improve its support services for students.					

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

FACULTY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) How long have you been working in academia and at SEBI?

2) How would you rank your students' communication with you in class?

3) Do the students make contact with you outside of class? If yes, how often?

4) Do the students raise questions in class? How often?

5) Are there one set of students that raise questions?

6) What percentage of students raise questions?

7) Do you know about the office hours policy for lecturers?

8) Do you keep office hours? Why/ why not?

9) Are you willing to have one-on-one half-hour Sessions with students?

10) Does the learning environment at SEBI motivate you to go beyond the call of duty?

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) As a student, did SEBI meet your expectations?

2) How? Why not?

3) What factors do you attribute to them meeting expectations/ not meeting expectations?

4) Why did you have an interest in representing the students?

5) As a student, which areas of the university do you think needs improvement?

6) Do you think this will help students to have a better academic performance?

7) Are you willing to assist in the creation of a unit that focus on student development?

8) How will you contribute to this unit?

9) Do you plan to pursue another program after graduating?

10) Why/ Why not

APPENDIX D

STUDENT SUPPORT PROTOTYPE

Implementation Model – Student Support

Levels of Intervention	Purpose	Expected Outcomes
Level 1- Define Roles and Responsibilities.	The roles and responsibilities of each faculty member are important for: ● Efficiency ● Accountability, ● Identified positions on the team, ● Build faculty and student motivation, ● Remove unnecessary overlapping of responsibilities, ● Saves time to process inquiries, and ● Highlights faculty needs and institutional needs	● Motivated faculty and students. ● Efficiency within the institution. ● The creation of a structural match between the institution and students. ● The provision of better student outcomes.
Level 2- Establish a Student Support Unit	● The goal of the unit will be to provide support to all SEBI students. ● The unit will operate as an early alert system. ● Faculty members whose roles and responsibilities are to regularly engage students, will occupy this unit. These will be the academic advisors and the assistant dean, who has direct	● Students will be motivated to engage the institution. ● The institutions can easily identify students' needs. ● Students will have easy access to support. ● Institution can easily engage students.

	responsibility to engage students and the wider university on students' behalf.	● There will be a structure for advisement, guidance, and reporting.
Level 3- Develop a comprehensive Student Support Model (SSM)	● This model is necessary to provide segmentation of students. (First and Second year) and (Third and Fourth year). Each category or segment of students has specific learning needs, teaching expectations, and career and academic goals.	● Students will receive support based on learning needs and desired outcomes.
Level 4- Establish a Student Support Database	● This will be important to record pertinent student information which can be vital to their successes. ● Provide easy access to student information. ● Establish a structure for reporting for better teaching and learning strategies.	● Efficient and effective advisement and support. Improve communication between students and support services. Increase access to support. ●

Roles and Responsibility

Roles	Responsibility
Provide support and explain the values, mission, and policies of the institution to students.	SEBI admin team- academic advisors, Dean, Assistant Deans, Head of Departments.
Evaluate the academic and social experiences of students to improve program efficiency.	Academic Advisers Dean
Develop and impose students' standards	SEBI admin team- academic advisors, Dean, Assistant Deans, Head of Departments, student bodies.
Aid in the provision of essential services such as admissions, registration, counselling, financial aid, and personal development, in accordance with the mission and objectives of the institution.	University of Guyana Registry Department Student loan department Academic advisors
Support and contribute to the creation of cultural competence.	Academic Advisors Student body
Assists students in the transition to university life.	Academic Advisors
Help students explore and clarify their values.	Academic Advisors
Assist students on how to solve personal and group conflicts.	Academic Advisors
Provide special programs and services for students who have learning difficulties.	Academic Advisors Faculty/ career advisor
Create opportunities for leadership development.	SEBI Management Team

	Provide counselling and career guidance, by helping to clarify professional goals, and exploring options for further study or employment.	Academic Advisors Faculty/ career advisor

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Model- Peer Support

Roles	Objectives	Expected Outcomes
Understand the functions, values, policies and procedures of the Institution	To gain knowledge and an understanding of SEBI and the University of Guyana	Provide adequate information to peers
Provide support to peers	To help relieve ambiguity among peers. To provide social and academic support to peers	Student who are supported by peers will be a better-rounded student.
Work in collaboration with the Student Support Unit.	To contribute to all planning for students development. To be up to date with all aspect of student development.	Consistent cohesive and inclusive planning.

APPENDIX E

IRB Study Approval

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Gustavo Fischman
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Dear Gustavo Fischman:

On 7/12/2023 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Assessing the Potential of Student Engagement with Student Support Services at The University of Guyana, School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation
Investigator:	Gustavo Fischman
IRB ID:	STUDY00018190
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Ethics Approval University of Guyana Ed. D Leadership and Innovation Programme, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • Faculty Recruitment .pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • interview consent (2).pdf, Category: Consent Form; • IRB Social Behavioral Protocol 2 (1) (1).docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Students survey letter (1) (1).pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Tracy Alves Supporting _Documents.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);