

## **Comparative analysis of academic performance of extended and mainstream programme students in the sociology discipline of a South African University**

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**Abstract:** This study aims at examining the academic performance of students in the Extended programme (4-year qualification) as compared to the Mainstream programme (3-year programme) in the Sociology Unit at the Walter Sisulu University. It aims to establish whether there is a significant difference between extended programme students and those registered in the mainstream programme. This study sought to investigate whether the Mainstream programme performs better than Extended Curricula Program students as expected by the South African Council of Higher Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training and this was done over a period of three years (2019, 2020, and 2021). Findings in the study indicate a positive percentage improvement for mainstream in 2020 and negative percentage changes for many extended curricula modules in 2021. This shows that extended curricula may develop or perform better than mainstream curricula over a three-year period. However, there are negative changes that indicate declines or poor performance in expanded curricula when compared to mainstream curricula. Overall, while the mainstream students outperform the extended curriculum ones in some modules and years, the extended curriculum students also paced over the mainstream in other instances. Mainstream. While it is established that the mainstream students are slightly ahead, the extended curriculum students are not comparatively worse off. Attention should rather be paid to module specificity to improve the performance of the extended programme students, where they lagged the mainstream.

**Keywords:** Extended curricula programme, Academic performance, Mainstream programmes.

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## INTRODUCTION

Academic performance is a major concern for students, parents, teachers, and government officials worldwide. Lamas (2015) contends that it incorporates a variety of difficulties and conceptualizations, including school preparation and achievement. It is the product of facilitator-led teaching and student learning, representing what students have learned in the classroom in terms of understanding and knowledge of a certain subject. Maphosa (2014) agrees, stating that traditionally advantaged universities have seen students lacking specific levels of knowledge and abilities, which contributes to higher failure and dropout rates.

This study aims at examining the academic performance of students in the Extended programme (4-year qualification) as compared to the Mainstream programme (3-year programme) in the Sociology Unit. Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECPs) were introduced in the early 2000s to help historically marginalized students gain access to and succeed in higher education. White Paper document number three, "A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education" (1997), suggested inclusive ECPs to meet the nation's social and economic demands. Maphosa (2014) defines ECPs as first-year undergraduate degree or diploma programs that include additional fundamental education.

ECPs were to be accommodated by flexible certification frameworks, according to the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education. Expanded to 22 South African universities at present, such as Walter Sisulu University and University of Free State, ECPs are 4-year, fully approved programs created to assist students who do not fit the typical prerequisites for entrance. Academic preparation is evaluated through policies, initiatives, and faculty readiness prior to implementation.

Course and module preparedness is assessed by tutorials, additional training for difficult courses, and "at risk" student coaching. ECPs are not like earlier bridging programs, which frequently had financial difficulties. With the introduction of designated money for ECPs in the Ministerial Funding Statement of 2003, universities were required to submit plans for fully approved programs that ensured qualification upon completion. Unlike earlier stand-alone programs, this strategy provides a more integrated pathway for students.

## REVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION EXTENDED PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK

The foundation provision in departmentally authorized programs at institutions such as Walter Sisulu University seeks to improve the academic performance of students from underserved educational backgrounds. Many of these students, despite fulfilling the minimum admission requirements, struggle in mainstream programs due to insufficient preparation. The extended program solves this issue by offering additional learning activities suited to their specific needs, allowing them to flourish in their chosen fields of study.

The Higher Education Foundation Phase/Policy serves an important role in assisting educationally disadvantaged individuals who may be unprepared while reaching basic entrance criteria. It focuses mostly on first-time university entrants and is especially essential for historically advantaged colleges that want to admit students who match statutory admission standards but not program-specific criteria. However, good foundation provision management is required to minimize over-enrolment, which may result in financial concerns within the teaching input sub-block grant.

### RESEARCH PROBLEM

The extended curriculum program was established by the Department of Higher Education (DHE) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) to help students from disadvantaged schools who had previously struggled academically gain entrance to mainstream programs. This program is aimed at students who do not fulfil the minimal entry standards for mainstream programs, with a special emphasis on providing access for black students who lack basic abilities such as English and computer competency to historically white institutions (WHIs).

Although previously, many students admitted to the extended program had admission points of less than thirty, there has been a recent trend toward an increase in the proportion of students enrolling in the program with 35 points or more. It's interesting to note that when combined with mainstream students in levels two and three of the curricula, those admitted using lesser point systems typically perform better.

The aim of this study is to compare the academic performance of students in the Extended Program (a four-year certification) to those in the Mainstream Program (a three-year qualification) within the Sociology subject. The study subject specifically tries to determine if Extended Program students outperform Mainstream Program students in terms of academic achievement, as well as to investigate probable variables contributing to this performance gap.

### ASSUMPTIONS/HYPOTHESES/QUESTIONS

This study assumes that students registered in the mainstream programme perform better than those registered in the Extended curricula programme.

### METHODS

#### *Study area.*

This study is conducted in Walter Sisulu University (WSU) in Mthatha. WSU is a

university that has 4 campuses in the Eastern Cape province. These campuses are Mthatha (Nelson Mandela drive and Zamukulingisa site), East London (Buffalo City), Butterworth (Ibika campus) and Komani (Queenstown campus) in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, which came into existence on 1 July 2005 as a result of a merger between Border Technikon, Eastern Cape Technikon and the University of Transkei.

The university is named after Walter Sisulu, a prominent figure in the struggle against apartheid. WSU has 12 faculties across the four campuses with the extended programme existing in over 50% of the faculties in the university. WSU was chosen because it offers both Mainstream programmes and Extended Curriculum Programmes. Sociology as the module under study is also offered at both Mainstream and Extended Programme.

#### *Programme under study.*

This study concentrates on the Faculty of Humanities, Social Science and Law in the Sociology Unit. Sociology has been offering ECP modules since 2015 and it was one of the modules that introduced the first cohort of graduates in ECP 2019. This makes the module one of the oldest modules that introduced the ECP programme in the faculty. The researcher has taught in Sociology under ECP which is why it is the chosen module.

The modules under study under ECP are: ESOC3M2- Research methods and project for Social Science  
ESOC3M1- Critical modernisation and post modernism  
ESOC3M3- Population and sustainable rural and urban development  
ESOC3M4- Sociology of work and labour conflicts and resolutions  
The modules under study in Mainstream are:  
SOC30M2-Research methods and project  
SOC32M4-Sociology of work, labour conflicts and resolutions'  
SOC32M8-Sociology of health, illness, and medicine

SOC31M1-Critical modernisation and post modernism

All the modules are level 3 modules from the years 2019 and 2021 in Sociology in the Mainstream and Extended Curriculum Programme. The study uses a quantitative approach using the Statistical package of Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyse data. Data will be acquired from assessment schedules from the years stipulated and the modules stipulated to allow comparisons to be concluded. Sampling in the study is a random sampling approach where the researcher will only use the Sociology module leaving out other modules in the faculty.

The researcher only makes use of the year mark and the final mark of students from each module to assess student performance between the programmes and the different years. Since this research will use assessment schedules hence making it secondary data collection. This means that the lecturer will not be collecting marks in the classroom putting forth that the data collected is not originally collected and rather obtained from already published exam schedules from the ITS (Integrated Tertiary Software) system.

While permission to conduct this study was received from the Student Affairs Directorate of the University, all ethical considerations were observed during the data collection process and Ethical Clearance Certificate received from the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Law Research and Higher Degrees Committee (Number REC/ 04/ /2023).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to investigate the initial Extended curricula programme policy that stipulates that students registered in the Extended programme are less privileged at registration and lack computer and language skills as compared to those qualifying for mainstream programmes. The fact that they are perceived to lack skills that qualify them into the mainstream

programme means that over the course of the four years as compared to the 3-year programme of the mainstream, these students should be able to meet or catch up with those registered in the mainstream in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, extended/2<sup>nd</sup> year mainstream.

### Enrolment Figures for Mainstream and Extended Programmes in Sociology 2019 – 2021

The enrolment figures in years used in comparison are 2019, 2020 and 2021 and the modules used to compare in years are Research Methods and Project, Critical Modernisation – Post modernism, Sociology of Work, Labour Conflicts and Resolution, Environment and Sustainable Development Studies, and Sociology of Health, Illness and Medicine in Mainstream.

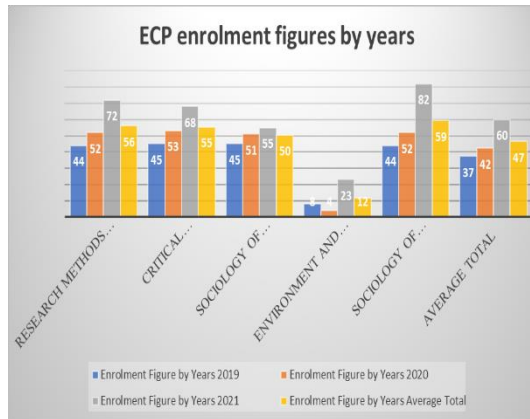
**TABLE 1: Enrolment figures for Mainstream**

Enrolment Figure by Years				
	2019	2020	2021	Average Total
Sociology Mainstream				
Research Methods and Project	32	30	38	33
Critical Modernisation - Post modernism	62	37	40	46
Sociology of Work, Labour Conflicts and Resolution	36	64	91	64
Environment and Sustainable Development Studies	8	11	15	11
Sociology of Health, Illness and Medicine	51	58	105	71
<b>Average Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>45</b>

Table 1 depicts mainstream enrolment trends across five modules, indicating significant differences in student involvement. Critical Modernization had the greatest enrolment in the specified modules, with 62 students, followed closely by Sociology of Health, Illness, and Medicine, which had 51 students.

Figure 1 on the other hand depicts the enrolment figures for students enrolled in the extended curriculum program in 2019, 2020, and 2021. Critical Modernisation and Sociology of Work had the largest enrolment in 2019, with 45 students apiece. Sociology of Health and Illness and Research Methods were close behind with 44 students apiece, while Environment and Sustainable Development had the lowest enrolment.

**Figure 1: Enrolment figures for Extended Program**



The popularity of several modules within the extended curriculum program fluctuated from 2019 to 2021. Critical Modernisation was the most popular module in 2020, with 53 students, while Sociology of Health and Illness had the most in 2021, with 60. On the other hand, Environment and Sustainable Development has continually had the lowest registration numbers, with only 8 students in 2020 and 23 in 2021.

The average overall enrolment across all modules grew over three years, from 37 students in 2019 to 60 students in 2021. This graph reflects changes in student choices and module popularity over time. Comparing enrolment figures between mainstream and extended programs is critical, given the many factors that influence student choices.

**Comparative analysis for Mainstream and Extended Programmes in Sociology 2019 - 2021**

In 2019, 32 students registered in Research Methods in the normal program, whereas 44 enrolled in the extended program, indicating that Research Methods and Projects consistently have greater enrolment figures than the mainstream program. However, the extended program experienced a considerable fall in 2020, followed by a significant increase in 2021, indicating possible shifts in student preferences.

In Critical Modernisation and Post-Modernism, the average enrolment

was 62 students in the core program and 45 in the extended program. Both programs saw a drop in average enrolment in 2020, but the extended program rebounded in 2021, outnumbering the mainstream program in enrolment.

In Sociology of Work, Labor Conflicts, and Resolutions, the mainstream program had an average of 36 students, while the extended program had 45 students. Enrolment fluctuated significantly, with the extended program consistently outpacing mainstream numbers. However, the extended program decreased significantly in 2021, whereas the mainstream program increased.

Both Environment and Sustainable Development Studies programs had an average of 8 students, indicating constant but low enrolment rates. In Sociology of Health, Illness, and Medicine, the mainstream program had an average of 51 student’s vs 37 in the extended program. Both programs fluctuated, with the extended program declining significantly in 2020 and the mainstream program remaining relatively unchanged.

These analyses emphasize the disparities in enrolment figures between mainstream and extended programs across several modules, indicating probable shifts in student choices and program popularity during the indicated years.

**Table 2: Comparative enrolment figures by year**

Modules	2019			2020			2021			Average Total	
	SOC	ESOC	Ave	SOC	ESOC	Ave	SOC	ESOC	Y Ave	SOC	ESOC
Research Methods and Project	32	44	38	30	52	41	38	72	55	33	56
Critical Modernisation – Post modernism	62	45	54	37	53	45	40	68	54	46	55
Sociology of Work, Labour Conflicts and Resolution	36	45	41	64	51	58	91	55	73	64	50
Environment and Sustainable Development	8	8	8	11	4	8	15	23	19	11	12
Sociology of Health, Illness and Medicine	51	44	48	58	52	55	105	82	94	71	59
<b>Average Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>47</b>

In 2020, there was an increase in Research Methods and Projects enrolment in the mainstream program,

averaging 38 students, while the extended program saw a decline to 30. Critical Modernism and Postmodernism experienced decreases in both programs as compared to 2019, with averages of 54 in the mainstream and 37 in the extended program. Sociology of Work and Labour Conflicts had growth in both programs in 2020, with averages of 41 in the mainstream and 64 in the extended program, with the mainstream regularly attracting more students.

Both programs saw growth in 2021, with the mainstream holding a significant lead. In Environment and Sustainable Development Studies, the regular program averaged 11 students, while the extended program declined significantly to 4 in 2020. In 2020, Sociology of Health, Illness, and Medicine had an average of 58 in the mainstream and 52 in the extended program. In 2021, there were significant differences from previous years. The average for Research Methods and Projects was 33 in the mainstream and 56 in the extended program.

Critical Modernism and Postmodernism scored an average of 45 in the mainstream and 55 in the extended program. Sociology of Work, Labour Conflicts, and Resolutions had an average of 64 in the mainstream and 50 in the extended program. Environment and Sustainable Development Studies had an average score of 11 in the mainstream and 12 in the extended program. Sociology of Health, Illness, and Medicine had an average of 71 in the mainstream and 59 in the extended program.

The extended program fluctuated, with considerable increases in 2021 across various modules. Enrolment figures for Critical Modernisation, Postmodernism, and Sociology of Work, Labour Conflicts, and Resolutions changed significantly.

In 2021, Research Methods and Projects showed a comeback in the extended program. Sociology of Health, Illness, and Medicine has consistently greater enrolments than the mainstream

curriculum. These data point to changing student choices, indicating probable shifts in program popularity, course options, or external factors influencing enrolment. Further examination into these aspects could yield useful insights for program planning and development.

### **Mainstream and Extended Programme Class Performance**

The term class performance refers to the overall/average performance of students registered within a particular module. Table 3 provides information on the class performance of students in the mainstream program in 2019, 2020, and 2021. The table contains the percentage change year over year (2019-2021), providing insight into the performance changes during this time.

In 2020, there was an increase in Research Methods and Projects enrolment in the mainstream program, averaging 38 students, while the extended program saw a decline to 30. Critical Modernism and Postmodernism experienced decreases in both programs as compared to 2019, with averages of 54 in the mainstream and 37 in the extended program. Sociology of Work and Labour Conflicts had growth in both programs in 2020, with averages of 41 in the mainstream and 64 in the extended program, with the mainstream regularly attracting more students. Both programs saw growth in 2021, with the mainstream holding a significant lead.

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**3: Mainstream class performance by years and % change year in year**

Sociology Mainstream	Class Performance/Pass Rate % by Years and % Change Year in Year					
	2019	2020	2021	Average Total	%Change 2020	%Change 2021
Research Methods and Project	60	61	62	61	2	2
Critical Modernisation - Post modernism	61	64	63	63	5	-1
Sociology of Work, Labour Conflicts and Resolution	52	59	54	55	12	-8
Environment and Sustainable Development Studies	56	57	58	57	2	0
Sociology of Health, Illness and Medicine	69	66	59	65	-4	-11
Average Total	60	62	59	60	3	-4

Table 3 depicts students' performance in the mainstream program from 2019 to 2021, including percentage changes in pass rates. Research Methods and Project had a 60% pass rate in 2019, which rose to 61% in 2020 and 62% in 2021. The overall average pass rate over three years was 61%, with a constant 2% annual improvement in performance.

Critical Modernisation and Post-Modernism started with a 61% pass rate in 2019, then increased to 64% in 2020 before falling slightly to 63% in 2021.

The performance change from 2019 to 2020 was 5%, while changes from 2020 to 2021 remained at 2%. Despite slight changes, the data show a gradual increase in pass rates over a three-year period, indicating consistent success within the mainstream program.

**ECP class performance by years**

Table 4 displays the annual ECP class performance for five modules: Research Methods, Critical Modernisation, Sociology of Work, Environment and Sustainable Development, and Sociology of Health, Illness, and Medicine in 2019, 2020, and 2021. The class performance for the Research Methods and Project module in 2019 was 59, which dropped to 55 in 2020 but increased to 63 in 2021.

The module's average total is also included. The table shows a clear visual overview of class performance patterns across three years for the specified courses, which aids comprehension. The diversity in the Research Methods and Project module decreases in 2020, followed by a significant increase in 2021, indicating probable enhancements or revisions to course content or teaching methods.

Despite the succinct and structured display above, a more extensive breakdown or comparison of modules could provide deeper insights into each module's relative strengths and weaknesses over the three years which follows in the next section.

**Table 4: ECP class performance**

Sociology Extended	Class Performance/Pass Rate % by Years and % Change Year in Year					
	2019	2020	2021	Average Total	%change 2020	%change 2021
Research Methods and Project	59	55	63	59	-7	13
Critical Modernisation - Post modernism	63	63	61	62	-1	-3
Sociology of Work, Labour Conflicts and Resolution	59	60	56	58	1	-6
Environment and Sustainable Development Studies	56	59	54	56	6	-8
Sociology of Health, Illness and Medicine	70	68	61	66	-3	-11
Average Total	61	61	59	60	-1	-3

Sociology of Work and Labour fluctuated, experiencing a minor increase in 2020 but a decrease in 2021, resulting in a negative average percentage change. Environment and Sustainable Development showed poor performance

throughout the period. Sociology of Health, Illness, and Medicine saw a decline from 2019 to 2021, leading to a significant negative average percentage change. Overall, the cumulative average for all modules decreased from 61 in 2019 and 2020 to 59 in 2021.

### Comparative Class Performance Analysis between the Mainstream and Extended Programme

Conflicts, and Resolution had a positive percentage change of 6 in 2020, showing that the expanded curricula outperformed the mainstream.

However, there was a 7% drop in 2021, indicating a relatively bad performance. The extended program in Environment and Sustainable Development Studies showed a positive percentage change of 4 in 2020, indicating greater performance than the

**Table 5: Comparative Class Performance**

Modules	2019			2020			2021			Average		Total Average Year	%Change 2020	%change2021
	SOC	ESOC	Year Ave	SOC	ESOC	Year Ave	SOC	ESOC	Year Ave	SOC	ESOC			
Research Methods and Project	60	59	60	61	55	58	62	63	63	61	59	60	-2	7
Critical Modernisation – Post modernism	61	63	62	64	63	63	63	61	62	63	62	62	2	-2
Sociology of Work, Labour Conflicts and Resolution	52	59	55	59	60	59	54	56	55	55	58	56	6	-7
Environment and Sustainable Development Studies	56	56	56	57	59	58	58	54	56	57	56	57	4	-4
Sociology of Health, Illness and Medicine	69	70	70	66	68	67	59	61	60	65	66	66	-3	-11
<b>Average Total Year</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-4</b>

Comparative analysis (Table 5) refers to a side-by-side comparison that systematically compares the Mainstream program to the Extended curricula programme to pinpoint their similarities and differences on module performance across three years (2019, 2020, and 2021) of the Extended Curricula Programme (ESOC).

The analysis focuses on annual averages and totals, analysing the performance of various modules in both mainstream and extended curricula programs. The ESOC is used to calculate the percentage change, which provides insight into how each module performed in comparison to the mainstream. The percentage change for Research Methods in 2020 was -2, meaning that the expanded curriculum program fared 2% worse than the mainstream program.

However, by 2021, Research Methods had outperformed the mainstream by 7%. In 2020, the percentage change for Critical Modernisation was 2, implying that the extended curricula outperformed the mainstream by 2%. However, there was a decrease in 2021, with a percentage change of -2. Sociology of Work, Labor

mainstream.

In 2020, the overall percentage change for all modules was one, indicating a slight improvement in the expanded curriculum. However, there was a decrease in 2021, with an overall percentage change of -4. The table provides a detailed overview of module performance trends within the ESOC, allowing for a three-year comparison examination.

The description of percentage changes aids comprehension of the relative performance of extended curricula programs in comparison to the mainstream. While the table contains useful information about modifications, it lacks specifics about each module's absolute performance scores, restricting a more in-depth review of overall module efficacy.

The reasons for the observed variations are not explained, resulting in a lack of comprehension of the elements affecting performance swings. Incorporating additional context or qualitative insights could improve data interpretation, providing a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics impacting module performance.



### Comparative performance by year % difference between groups (SOC & ESOC)

Table 6 illustrates the comparative performance, defined in percentage differences, of the mainstream and extended curricula programs across multiple modules for the years 2019, 2020, and 2021.

In Research Methods and Project, the mainstream (SOC) scored 60 in 2019, while the extended curriculum program (ESOC) scored 59, resulting in a -1-percentage difference.

In 2020, SOC scored 61 and ESOC scored 55, resulting in a -10-percentage difference. Soc scored 62 and ESOC scored 63 in 2021, for a percentage difference of 0. The average total for Soc was 61, for ESOC it was 59, and the module's overall percentage difference was -4. In 2019, ESOC outperformed Soc

Conflicts, and Resolutions was 13, with SOC scoring 52 and ESOC scoring 59. The percentage difference in 2020 was 2, with ESOC scoring 60 and Soc scoring 59. In 2021, SOC received 55 points, ESOC received 58 points, and the percentage difference was 6.

The percentage disparities in Environment and Sustainable Development Studies were -1 in 2019, 3 in 2020, and -6 in 2021. Over three years, the overall percentage difference for the entire module was -1. The Sociology of Health, Illness, and Medicine showed a percentage difference of two in 2019, three in 2020, and two in 2021.

Overall, the table communicates the comparative performance of mainstream and extended curricula programs across modules and years well. The percentage differences provide a quantitative measure that may be used to

**Table 6: Comparative performance by year % difference between groups**

Modules	2019			2020			2021			Average Total		
	SOC	ESOC	%Diff	SOC	ESOC	%Diff	SOC	ESOC	%Diff	SOC	ESOC	%Diff
Research Methods and Project	60	59	-1	61	55	-10	62	63	0	61	59	-4
Critical Modernisation – Post modernism	61	63	4	64	63	-2	63	61	-4	63	62	-1
Sociology of Work, Labour Conflicts and Resolution	52	59	13	59	60	2	54	56	4	55	58	6
Environment and Sustainable Development Studies	56	56	-1	57	59	3	58	54	-6	57	56	-1
Sociology of Health, Illness and Medicine	69	70	2	66	68	3	59	61	2	65	66	2
<b>Average Total Year</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>1</b>

in Critical Modernisation and Post-Modernism, with a score of 63 to Soc's 60, resulting in a 4% difference. In 2020, Soc scored 64, while ESOC scored 63, for a -2-percentage difference. In 2021, Soc received 63 points, ESOC received 62 points, and the percentage difference was -1.

In 2019, the percentage difference between Sociology of Work, Labour

compare the performance of the two groups.

While the table shows disparities, it does not provide an in-depth study or discussion of potential explanations for performance variations. More context or qualitative insights would improve data interpretation, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the observed trends.

Additional information about the significance of the percentage discrepancies and their implications for decision-making or program development would help the overall critique.

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The ECP class performance throughout the years demonstrates variances in performance across modules within the Sociology Unit, demonstrating the dynamic character of these modules and underscoring the importance of ongoing review and improvement. The major impact of the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020 and 2021 has resulted in a significant drop in student performance in the Sociology extended program. The epidemic caused difficulties like as reduced attendance and lockdown limitations, which had a substantial impact on the learning environment.

According to Gonzalez et al. (2020), colleges responded to the epidemic by recommending a move away from face-to-face instruction and toward online alternatives where possible. However, difficulties occurred in the evaluation and independent learning parts of the educational process, particularly for students who did not have sufficient resources such as network connection, data, and electronic devices.

Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs), such as Walter Sisulu University (WSU), had difficulty moving from face-to-face to online or hybrid learning, owing to their lack of preparation for such a change.

According to Makgahlela (2021), students from previously disadvantaged universities, mainly from underprivileged rural communities, have difficulty accessing remote learning. This difficulty was attributed to reasons such as a lack of information and communication technology (ICT) devices and network connectivity challenges, which were compounded by COVID-19 restrictions.

The overall findings on the efficacy of ECP modules highlight the importance of constant assessment and adaptation within these modules. They underline the necessity of addressing external obstacles such as the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in guaranteeing fair access to education for pupils from varied backgrounds. In the face of changing circumstances and challenges, the need for continuous development is critical for providing high-quality education.

It is critical to emphasize that, in terms of the performance of the Extended Curricular Programme (ECP) throughout time and the percentage change from year to year, research methodologies and projects show a positive percentage change. This indicates that successful changes or improvements in teaching techniques and curriculum have occurred. Notably, research methods and projects are integral modules in sociology, representing a significant component of the curriculum beginning with the first year of study. According to Ragoosa and Lee (2012), students perform better in modules that are key components of their disciplines because they benefit from the fundamental knowledge and concentrated attention given to these core modules as opposed to elective ones.

The reported reduction in the Sociology of Health, Illness, and Medicine module, on the other hand, may demand a closer assessment of the curriculum or teaching methodologies. It is worth mentioning that this subject is elective and is frequently chosen by students in their second and third years of study.

Given the mixed results in the Sociology of Work and Labour module, tailored interventions to address fluctuations may be required. One possible explanation for this variance is that this module is only offered in the third year of study, implying that students may not completely comprehend it in their previous years.

In summary, the findings in the performance of ECP students imply that module performance varies, with main modules generally improving and elective modules declining. These tendencies can influence future research and initiatives aimed at improving the program's overall performance.

When the performance of mainstream and extended curricula modules is compared over three years (2019, 2020, and 2021), there are positive percentage improvements for mainstream in 2020 and negative percentage changes for many extended curricula modules in 2021. This shows that extended curricula may develop or perform better than mainstream curricula over a three-year period. According to Lekhehle (2020), South African institutions' Extended Programmes frequently generate students who are "underprepared," requiring additional support when compared to those in regular programs.

However, there are negative changes that indicate declines or poor performance in expanded curricula when compared to mainstream curricula. According to Lekhehle (2020), this is due to several variables, including a disadvantaged background, kids from underprivileged areas, low self-esteem, a lack of necessary help from external stakeholders such as Academic advisors and extended coordinators, and bad schooling.

These difficulties were especially noticeable during the years when COVID-19 was present. The overall performance patterns across modules indicate variances, stressing the importance of tailored interventions and additional research to improve program efficacy. Lekhehle (2020) underlines the significance of interventions such as faculty support, the extended program office, capacity building for lecturers, extended program coordinators, Academic advisers, and teaching development specialists.

Lastly, these findings highlight the importance of regularly monitoring and changing the extended curriculum program to resolve performance discrepancies and improve overall educational outcomes while matching with higher education goals. A critical part of the study is the comparative performance analysis, which examines the percentage difference between groups (SOC & ESOC) in the mainstream and extended programs.

This component reveals significant differences in performance between the two groups throughout modules and years. The discovered inconsistencies highlight the dynamic nature of performance dynamics within the programs.

Significant discrepancies are visible in 2019, particularly in Sociology of Work and Labour, where extended program students greatly outperformed their mainstream counterparts. In contrast, extended program students had difficulties in Research Methods in 2020, and discrepancies in Environment and Sustainable Development appeared in 2021. These variances could be explained by Lekhehle's (2020) observations, which suggested that during lockdowns and restrictions, students in extended programs faced impaired assistance and capacitation, which had a negative impact on their performance.

These results highlight differences in particular years, indicating possible benefits or drawbacks for either traditional or expanded curricula. The performance variations highlight how crucial it is to conduct ongoing assessments and implement focused interventions, such as Academic Development through Learning and Teaching centres/directorates, to improve program effectiveness and capacity.

According to Maphosa (2014), issues with extended curriculum programs include things like a lack of personnel (lecturers, tutors, and PAL

instructors), scarce resources, and obstacles with program comprehension. This highlights the complexity of the difficulties that students enrolled in extended programs encounter.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study's findings unequivocally show that students participating in the Extended Curricula Program (ECP) are not outperforming their Mainstream program counterparts in terms of performance. This demonstrates the continued significance and applicability of the goals established by the ECP. These results emphasize the need for more research and focused interventions to address the differences in performance between the two programs.

They also stress how important it is to keep evaluating and modifying the ECP to make sure that it is serving all students' educational needs. To address performance trends and variations in both mainstream and extended curricula programs, this research emphasizes the significance of ongoing monitoring and curriculum adaptation.

Extended curriculum modules had difficulties in 2021, despite favourable revisions in mainstream modules in 2020. Notwithstanding the challenges encountered by students enrolled in Extended Programs, focused interventions are required to raise program efficacy and raise general learning objectives.

The discrepancies in performance between modules highlight the necessity of regular assessments and well-planned interventions to resolve inequalities and guarantee long-term progress. All things considered, these results highlight how crucial it is to have a sophisticated grasp of performance dynamics and to put specific strategies into place to maximize learning outcomes in programs with both mainstream and extended curricula.

In conclusion, the results imply that although some modules might prefer one program over another, the

performance dynamics are flexible and call for a detailed comprehension of the circumstances of each module. In general, these observations highlight how crucial it is to conduct ongoing assessments and implement thoughtful interventions to maximize learning outcomes across the expanded curriculum.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS**

The preceding discourse on the above findings emphasizes the significance of the goals established by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Council of Higher Education (CHE) for Extended Curriculum initiatives. Enrolled students in these courses constantly need aid and support, which includes financial, emotional, and interpersonal support in addition to academic support.

The office of the Learning and Teaching Directorate normally oversees the provision of these services, which are assisted by Academic Advisors (AA), Teaching Development Specialists (TDS), and Coordinators of Extended Curricula Programs (ECPC).

The Extended programs are designed for students who meet certain academic requirements and who are typically economically challenged and come from remote areas. Nonetheless, there are issues with university admissions. Universities often admit students not because of lower Academic Performance Scores (APS) but rather because of capacity difficulties in the Mainstream programs, notwithstanding the intended criterion for admission into the Extended programs. Because of space limitations, students who would have been eligible for the Mainstream but were diverted may be included in the cohort for the Extended programs.

Institutional difficulties, such as a lack of full knowledge of the Extended programs' goal and financial challenges, complicate matters further. Inadequate financing makes it difficult for faculties to run properly, resulting in inadequate

manpower especially devoted for Extended programs. Staff members assigned as lecturers for both the Mainstream and Extended programs may encounter greater workloads, limiting their ability to appropriately support Extended program students. The start of COVID-19 compounded difficulties for students in the Extended program.

The transition to remote learning jeopardized the livelihoods of both students and staff by disrupting face-to-face contacts that were essential to the support network. The Extended program's issues were exacerbated by institutions' lack of readiness for this shift, which stemmed from a lack of resources for students and staff.

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