A Theory and Process Evaluation of the Yabonga GAP Year Student Programme

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION: This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this research proposal from the work, or works of other people has been attributed, cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate Date: 12 February 2024

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CCR	Career and College Readiness Programmes
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CV	Curriculum Vitae
EBSCO	Elton Bryson Stephens Company
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
JSTOR	Journal Storage
MANCOSA	Management College of Southern Africa
READY	Rochester Evaluation of Asset Development for Youth
SD	Standard Deviation
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UCT	University of Cape Town
USA	United States of America
YDP	Youth Development Programmes

ABSTRACT

There is a significant need for positive outcomes amongst South African youth, especially given that they make up a considerable proportion of the population. This group is highly vulnerable and faced with a multitude of socio-economic challenges, particularly lack of resources and job opportunities, poverty, and drug and alcohol abuse. Youth development programmes play a crucial role in addressing these challenges by providing at-risk youth with psycho-social support, skills development, and social capital to enable them to lead improved lives with more prospects. This dissertation presents the findings of an evaluation of the Yabonga GAP year programme, a youth development programme operating in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. The evaluation comprises a theory evaluation and a process evaluation. A blended research approach was utilised, whereby a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods was applied to address the evaluation questions posed. Data collection methods included interviews with programme staff, focus group discussions and a survey of Yabonga GAP students. The overall findings indicate that a) the programme's theory was highly consistent with similar youth development programmes, and the causal logic was deemed plausible; b) programme youth participants were satisfied with the programme activities; c) the programme was implemented with high levels of fidelity; and d) there was a moderate level of uncertainty amongst youth who completed the programme, in terms of the next steps in their lives. The evaluation presented many positive results and outcomes; however, the evaluator made several recommendations and enhancements for programme improvement based on the findings of the evaluation. This research contributes to an area of limited research on evaluations within the South African youth development context.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The following dissertation documents an evaluation conducted on a youth development programme implemented in Cape Town, South Africa, by a non-profit organisation. The evaluation was conducted in 2021 and covered both the 2020 and 2021 programme cohorts. This chapter begins by providing a literature review comprising an overview of youth development, youth development programmes (YDP), career and college readiness (CCR) programmes, and GAP year programmes, followed by a description of the evaluand, evaluation scope, and questions.

Background to the Evaluation

Young people are a significant proportion of the world's total population, particularly in Africa, known as the world's youngest continent in terms of age demographics (Metu et al., 2020). A study by Naseem (2020) stated that youth are often regarded as the 'future of the nation'. Therefore, much consideration needs to be placed on ensuring they are fully equipped to tackle any future challenges they might face. Youth will shape the future and play a pivotal role in nation-building, thus representing an invaluable asset when they are adequately trained and upskilled (Metu et al., 2020). Countries that neglect their youth do so at their peril, as youth who are empowered and capable better serve all and future generations (Buzinde et al., 2019). Reaching their full potential may be challenging, as many youth have limited secure job opportunities, need more skills and experience, and, thus, face adverse economic prospects (Metu et al., 2020). The situation is more pronounced in sub-Saharan Africa, where youth unemployment is roughly double the rate for older adults (Metu et al., 2020). Youth development programmes play a key role in addressing these challenges and improving the economic future for many young people.

Exploring the Dynamics of Youth Development: Concepts and Foundations

Youth development is an approach founded in developmental systems that acknowledges that all people have growth potential (McDavid et al., 2019). Arnold (2020) expanded the definition by describing youth development as a natural process, a philosophy of youth programming, to achieve positive outcomes. Their research is also based on ecological systems theory, indicating that youth grow and develop in multiple contexts, including families, schools, neighbourhoods, and communities.

The literature on youth development also covers the field of prevention science, focusing on preventing problematic behaviours and promoting positive attributes, including social connectedness, social-emotional skills, efficacy, and identity (Zeldin et al., 2013).

Youth development can also be understood through the lens of the Five Cs, a widely accepted framework used to conceptualise core characteristics of youth development and well-being: competence, character, connection, confidence, and caring (Travis Jr & Leech, 2014). The Five Cs, in turn, lead to a sixth C, contribution, which includes actions to improve the individual's well-being and that of their community (Lerner et al., 2005). This highlights the important role youth development plays in broader society, as it is based on the premise that engaged and empowered youth will become engaged and empowered adults (Gonzalez et al., 2020). Empowered and engaged youth are envisioned to have both a behavioural component as well as an ideological component (Lerner et al., 2005). When youth believe that they should contribute to themselves and their communities, they will not only act on these beliefs and promote their positive self-development but also focus on the improvement of their surrounding communities. Not only does youth development contribute to improvement of their communities and society, often youth development is required amongst youth in marginalised communities.

Large bodies of research has shown that young people raised in marginalized communities with dire socioeconomic conditions have an increased likelihood of poor physical and mental health, behavioural problems and low academic achievement (Alivernini et al., 2023). Investment in youth development assists in alleviating these risks and develops young adults who are positive contributors to their communities. Literature evidence has shown that this has a positive impact not only on individuals but also on their families and communities, which form part of their context (Arnold, 2020).

Youth development can also indicate occurrences where youth take on leadership roles, either within their communities or within organisations, through activities that involve them in governance, organising, activism, media, and research (Zeldin et al., 2013). Engagement is a key component of youth development, emphasising the need to foster initiative and involve youth as active contributors to their communities (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008).

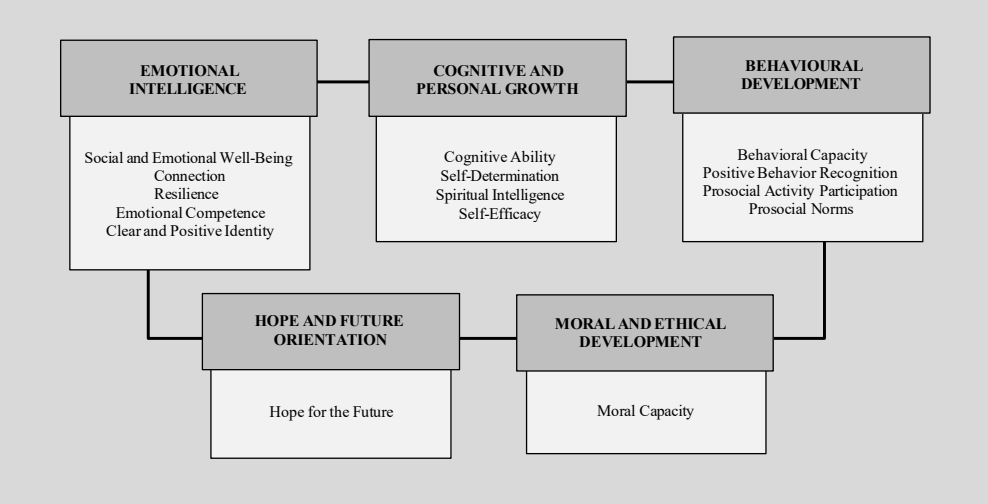
It is critical to acknowledge that the definitions and conceptualisation of youth development are primarily based on Western research, and very few attempts have been made to integrate concepts across various cultures.

Overview of Youth Development Programmes

Youth Development Programmes (YDP) are the mechanisms (interventions) used to deliver positive outcomes and benefits to youth development. They are developmentally appropriate programmes designed to prepare youth for productive adulthood by providing opportunities to gain the skills, competencies, and knowledge to meet the increasing challenges as they enter adulthood (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). These programmes typically focus on various aspects of a young person's life, aiming to enhance their personal, social, emotional, and cognitive development.

YDPs also promote youth development through sustained relationships with at least one committed adult, who provides opportunities to enhance the young person's healthy and active engagement within the community (Lerner, 2004). YDPs are generally provided at minimal cost and have been found to be extremely valuable to youth from marginalised communities (McDavid et al., 2019). These programmes provide resources, support, and opportunities, enabling underserved youth to engage in activities that would typically be beyond their reach. Intervention activities can include diverse dimensions that contribute to the holistic development of youth development which involve emotional intelligence through building resilence and positive self-image. It fosters personal growth by enhancing self-efficacy and spiritual intelligence and encourages behavioural development prosocial activities. Build hope and a future orientation through positive affirmation and moral and ethic development through creating moral capacity. Catalano et al. (2004) classify five key themes , they are presented and summarised in Figure 1 overleaf.

Figure 1.
Diverse Dimensions of Youth Development adapted from Catalano et al. (2004)



YDP participation has been shown to result in competent, confident, and caring youth who have positive character and social connections, which results in youth exhibiting lower levels of risk behaviour (Scales et al., 2000). Investment in well-organised YDPs broadens youths' positive social connections, promotes prosocial behaviour and protective factors, and improves well-being (Thomas Page et al., 2023). Lack of investment in youth development in the short-term can lead to greater costs over the long-term, both economically as well as socially. YDPs are, therefore, crucial in building a pipeline of future leaders, thereby addressing past inequities and providing many youth with opportunities simultaneously.

Literature on YDPs, particularly on key components of effective youth development programmes, supports that these kinds of interventions should include the 'Big Three' components (Lerner et al., 2005). The 'Big Three' includes, firstly, a positive and sustainable adult-youth relationship, which needs to be maintained for at least one year by a competent and caring adult. Secondly, the interventions need to include life-skill-building activities, i.e., activities that enhance or optimise goals. Lastly, the programmes should include opportunities for youth to contribute to and take the leadership of valued family, school, and community activities (Tirrell et al., 2020). These three components need to be provided within the context of a safe environment for young people, and all the 'Big Three' need to be present simultaneously for positive youth development to occur (Lerner et al., 2005). The 'Big Three' does not overtly recognize the important role building leadership skills can play in positive youth development, this is discussed in the next section.

Leadership skills Contribution to YDPs

Youth development through building leadership skills has been shown to prepare youth for future careers, learning and overall development (Bates et al., 2019). The key leadership skills include critical thinking, communication, decision-making, problem-solving, team-building, and self-awareness (Bates et al., 2019). To develop these leadership skills, a combination of teaching and training in leadership skills, together with hands-on practical experience is needed. This allows young people to advance their leadership skills and style. There are a variety of different forms of YDPs where leadership skills are incorporated, including physical activity and sports, as well as volunteering and community involvement programmes. An overview of each will be provided in the subsequent sections.

Leadership Skills Development through Physical Activity and Sports

A strong connection exists between team sports participation and leadership development. This is evident when a sports team captain displays exceptional leadership qualities to lead a team to victory. To determine how sports participation can facilitate leadership development, various leadership and sports programmes were evaluated across Canada over one year. (Bean & Forneris, 2016). Evidence from the research showed that through the combination of sports and leadership, there were substantially greater outcomes for participants, and the intervention scored higher on programme quality (Bean & Forneris, 2016).

Furthermore, the research also uncovered unintended outcomes, such as the development of emotional intelligence and stronger personal values (Bean & Forneris, 2016). Sporting activity requires regular and high levels of engagement and practice over time. This fosters the development of solid relationships among the participants.

Similar outcomes were uncovered through research conducted in the United States amongst underprivileged youth who participated in a programme which combined tennis as a sporting activity and leadership training. The results showed that combining sports participation and leadership development proved to yield better outcomes but also improved the participants' overall health and well-being (Berlin et al., 2007). It also nurtured a closer relationship between parents/guardians and their children (Berlin et al., 2007).

Research amongst high-school students who participated in a summer physical-activity-based youth development programme saw a marked increase in confidence, self-worth and leadership compared to non-participants (Ullrich-French & McDonough, 2013). Furthermore, when the programme was run for another year, those who returned exhibited sustained positive perceptions of self-worth and hope and managed to foster better personal relationships.

Leadership Skills Development through Volunteering and Community Involvement

Commmunity-based volunteering was added to the programme activities of a YDP based in the USA to examine the impact of this programme activity addition. The evaluation results pointed out that there was a high probability that youths who participated in community volunteering would continue to volunteer into adulthood (Harris & Beckert, 2019). In addition, volunteering fostered a strong intrinsic motivation among participants, and they had

a profoundly positive effect on their surrounding communities (Harris & Beckert, 2019).

Comparable findings were uncovered in research based on a Canadian-based YDP targeting marginalised communities that focused on volunteering activities, where participants had the autonomy to build and create their own workshops and events (Naseem, 2020). The qualitative research results showed that participation in this form of YDP led to an improvement in quality of life, the development of leadership skills and abilities, and future community participation (Naseem, 2020). Furthermore, participants' 'soft skills' improved, which included self-confidence, communication skills as well as working as a team (Naseem, 2020).

A community change YDP based in the United States aimed to develop leadership skills within the context of a diverse society. An evaluation was commissioned to study the effectiveness of this YDP and its delivery of outcomes. The evaluation found that when the young participants were involved in community service initiatives, it led to greater levels of youth empowerment as well as a continuation of community service throughout their lifetime (Otis, 2006). Multiple evaluations of YDPs have uncovered similar results. Through community service and involvement, participants continued to have a strong sense of service and belonging to the community (Buschlen et al., 2018; Halsall & Forneris, 2018). In addition, to leadership skills, there are additional considerations regarding the target audience which youth development programmes are aimed at, these will be discussed in the subsequent section.

Target Participant Considerations to foster Leadership Skills Development

Youth development programmes generally target youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years (Maja & Ngcaweni, 2023). YDPs are primarily focused on marginalised or minority groups, who are often neglected or disparaged, with little attention directed toward these youth, their families, and the community (Leman et al., 2017). These youths are often from underserved communities with limited social capital and economic opportunities. This youth group is faced with various challenges and considerations, particularly in terms of gender, age, and diversity. These considerations are summarised in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1.

Target Participant Considerations

Considerations	Description	Academic literature sources
Gender	Equal representation of females as well as female orientated YDPs deliver improved outcomes as they provides a safe and supportive environment.	(Eva et al., 2021); (Franchett et al., 2019).
Age	Youth Development, mainly leadership development, is highly beneficial in the formative years. It provides a strong foundation to the development of emotional intelligence, which is crucial to leadership ability.	(Scheer & Dale Safrit, 2001); (Balsano et al., 2009)
Diversity	Increased levels of diversity amongst YDP participants, better prepare participants with critical skills like resilience and empathy. These are key leadership skills, as well as assisting participants in coping with challenges like discrimination prevalent in society.	(Alvarez & Alvarez, 2018); (Allen-Handy et al., 2021).

Three considerations were identified consistently across the literature, firstly, focusing the importance of gender and having equal female representation in YDPs. Secondly, the importance of focusing on the formative years as this is where leaderships skills can be nurtured. Thirdly, highly levels of diversity amongst participants contribute better leadership outcomes. These are critical considerations, to foster leadership skills amongst youth.

Most of the literature sources cited for YDPs up to this point focused primarily on evaluations and research conducted within Western societies. The next section of this chapter will focus mainly on the needs of YDPs within the South African context.

The Necessity of YDPs within the South African Context

Youth development programmes are particularly crucial in the South African context, given that the youth constitute a substantial proportion of the population, and unemployment rates are significantly higher among this demographic (Metu et al., 2020). Given the large number of young people within South Africa and the lack of resources, there is limited capacity within the educational system to support all young people (Matsela, 2015). The drop-out rate within the school system represents another challenge (Matsela, 2015). As a result, many young people are not able to access an adequate education and, therefore, struggle to enter the labour market

to provide for their families and themselves. Consequently, many of these young people are at risk of poverty. Alcohol and drug abuse are rife in impoverished communities, and many are also tempted to join gangs and participate in illegal activity to obtain an income (Matsela, 2015).

Therefore, YDPs play an essential role in providing additional support in these under-resourced communities and aim to assist with the challenges mentioned above. There are different types of YDPs in South Africa, and their structures and goals vary widely. Youth leadership programmes, sports for development initiatives, and career and college readiness (CCR) programmes are some of the most common YDPs in the country. The following sections provide a focused review of CCR and GAP year programmes, which are youth development initiatives designed to equip youths with the requisite skills and knowledge necessary for success in their next stage of life, whether it be academia or working careers. This specific focus has been chosen because these kinds of interventions align with the objectives of the evaluand of this dissertation, which aim to improve employability and career- and university-readiness.

College and Career Readiness Programmes

Overview of CCR Programmes

CCR programmes are defined as programmes that traditionally focus on building skills to assist with college and financial aid applications, test-taking, and career exploration (Bates et al., 2019). However, the focus of CCR programmes has expanded and now includes other activities, such as leadership skills development and preparing youth through career and college internship opportunities. Research has shown that combining traditional CCR programmes with leadership skills development as well as internship opportunities promotes positive social outcomes for vulnerable youth (Bates et al., 2019). This is further supported by similar programmes, which include work placement and internships that allow students to obtain a deeper understanding of the work environment and working culture, benefitting them from a career readiness point of view (Cannona et al., 2020).

The more diverse, experiential and immersive the CCR programmes are, the better the outcomes and richer the learning opportunities (Gee et al., 2021b). Including considerations of cultural nuances, physical activity and the inclusion of parents and family members as part of the CCR programmes has had a positive impact on enrolment rates compared to programmes

that ignore these considerations (Brooks, 2018). Horrillo et al. (2021) also highlight the important role parents and guardians play in youths' tertiary and career readiness by supporting and assisting youth in tertiary education selection, planning and the application for financial aid (Horrillo et al., 2021).

In reviewing the literature on CCR programmes, three common components emerged across multiple programmes. These included academic support, mentorship, and adaptability. These will be covered in the subsequent sections.

CCR Academic Support

Providing academic support has been shown to prepare high school students from under-resourced communities better to obtain entry into colleges and universities (Millett & Kevelson, 2018). Better academic grades will improve their chances of gaining access to university and college programmes and meeting the requirements. Academic support needs to occur consistently and continuously with regular feedback loops to identify where further support is required (Page et al., 2019). Summer bridge academic programmes conducted in the USA amongst high school learners assisted in bridging uneven educational backgrounds, which further enhanced their college preparedness (Horrillo et al., 2021).

CCR Mentorship, Counselling and Skill Development

For college preparedness, an immersive process of taking students onto campus through mentorship programmes with current students and academic staff allowed for better insight into college life. This additional level of social support assisted vulnerable youth in building self-efficacy, communication skills and critical thinking skills (Gale, 2021).

Youth development, specifically related to career services during high school, is shown to be more effective in ensuring career and college preparedness upon graduation (Cheeks, 2018). Providing career counselling when primary school leavers start high school has been shown to be beneficial for college preparation as well as career planning (Douglass, 2016). Counsellors, as well as students, can track students' progress through high school in order to ascertain the value of providing the intervention earlier in their academic career while collecting valuable information for creating viable future college and career interventions (Douglass, 2016). A Hong Kong study showed that a peer-career-counselling programme consisting of a 3.5-day training and a school-based service project was effective in enhancing career readiness (Wong et al., 2016).

Self-care programmes have also been implemented as part of CCR programmes to equip students from underserved communities who might be entering into a college community with predominately 'white' students (Knotek et al., 2019). Through mentorships, social-emotional support and education are provided to prepare students with the skills of self-management, self-belonging, self-advocacy, growth mindset and community and cultural wealth (Knotek et al., 2019). CCR mentorships also include assistance with obtaining financial aid and college applications, as well as providing counselling on other potential career opportunities, like joining the armed forces (John, 2018). Similar to CCR and academic support, regular feedback and 'check-ins' by mentors with students result in better professional skills and career preparedness (Marx et al., 2020).

CCR Adaptability

CCR programmes focusing on adaptability and integration have become critical, specifically to assist youth later in their careers and students when faced with adversity. Research on CCR programmes, which emphasise fostering greater career adaptability and focusing on concern, control and curiosity, has reported greater quality of employment and raised their chances of finding a new job if they have lost their job (Koen et al., 2012).

Evidence from the literature illustrates that the more layered the CCR programmes are in terms of programme activities, the better the outcomes for participants. Support, mentorship, and skills development play key roles together. Furthermore, combining career-orientated activities, such as internships with college readiness programmes, appears to be highly beneficial. Throughout the literature research process, it was evident that the majority of the literature focuses specifically on youth development programmes and CCR programmes, mainly targeting high school youth. Very little research exists on gap year programmes. The following section provides an overview of the available literature on gap year programmes and the association of gap year programmes with positive youth development outcomes.

Gap Year Programmes

An Overview of Gap Year Programmes

A gap year is widely used to refer to a range of activities involving a combination of paid work or volunteerism, leisure, training, and travel (Heath, 2007). It is described as a 'zone of transition' for young people to do identity work and negotiate the shift from one life stage to the next (O'Shea, 2011). This transitional period refers to the period between completing high school and before entering tertiary education or starting a full-time career. It affords young people the opportunity to create a gap in the continuum of study–work to allow space in which to contemplate possible futures and potential career pathways (Pensiero & Green, 2017). It is evident from the research, however, that there is no single definition of a gap year, as it is highly dependent on the country and context in which it takes place (Vogt, 2018).

Evidence from the literature indicates that several factors influence the decision to take a gap year, with a student's gender and socio-economic background emerging as significant determinants. Notably, the likelihood of female students participating in gap years is higher than that of their male counterparts (Vogt, 2018). Likewise, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds exhibit a greater inclination to engage in gap year programmes (Rose Birch & Miller, 2007).

Benefits of Participating in Gap Year Programmes

Gap year activities have grown in popularity over the last few decades due to their benefits (Romanelli, 2013). Research has shown that gap year activities positively influence mental constructs that shape cultural identities (Romanelli, 2013; see also Brown et al., 2018). Research has also demonstrated that a well-structured gap year could help build soft skills (Heath, 2007). This is further supported by research conducted by Stehlik (2010) and King (2011), whereby gap year participants have claimed it assisted them in building the skills required in the modern world of work, which include communication, teamwork and organisational skills. It also provides students with the opportunity to take on leadership roles in a supportive environment (Clerkin, 2018). In addition to the soft skills, gap year activities have also fostered effective technical skill development and innovative skills to keep up with market requirements (Kureel & Verma, 2018). Participation in gap year programmes has been shown to improve students' higher-education progression and significantly lower dropout rates (Hannon et al., 2017; see also Staines & Moran, 2020).

First-year university students often exhibit considerably different levels of proficiency due to different levels of education and academic performance (Daza et al., 2013). This often translates into a level of fear and anxiety among students and can create negative emotions during the first year of study. This fear of social failure is the greatest during the transition period in young people's lives and can have a lasting impact on adulthood (Panadero et al., 2020).

The Yabonga GAP year student programme aims to alleviate these fears amongst students by preparing them with the necessary skills and providing support to succeed in tertiary education or the workforce.

The Evaluand

The Yabonga GAP year student programme was launched in 2011, targeting youth aged 17 to 24 years old who have completed high school. Students are recruited from high schools located in Khayelitsha and seven surrounding areas in the Western Cape, who have been marginalised through challenging socio-economic circumstances as well as the impact of HIV. These factors often inhibit someone's readiness and ability to reach their full potential in the next stage of early adulthood. Emphasis is, thus, placed on the transitional year, where students pivot from high school to either tertiary education or starting a career. This is found to be the period where students find the most difficulty. Many students require assistance with preparation to access tertiary education, as well as skills to perform effectively within the tertiary educational environment. Those wanting to start a career lack the necessary skills and experience. The Yabonga GAP year programme aims to address these challenges by preparing students for the next stage in their lives over a year-long programme. GAP students undergo a rigorous selection and recruitment process, including an interview where successful candidates are shortlisted and entered into the programme.

The year-long programme consists of four key activities: 1) computer training, 2) career guidance workshops, 3) community projects, and 4) life skills development. In addition, throughout the programme, students are provided with psycho-social support and counselling to help them navigate the transition period and address any challenges they may face. GAP students also assist younger learners with school homework through an after-school programme provided by Yabonga. For the year, students are provided with a monthly stipend to assist with transport and living costs. While the programme has been operational for over a decade, the

environment and context have shifted dramatically over the last two years, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The organisation's structure has also shifted over this time, with new staff members joining and implementing changes to the programme. A high level of attrition amongst participants has also been experienced. The management team also highlighted programme implementation inefficiencies as a key area of concern. This prompted the need for this evaluation, as the management team would like to re-design the programme to address the challenges mentioned above. This evaluation sought to assess the programme's design, implementation strengths and challenges and propose recommendations that can feed into programme re-design and improvement.

Evaluation Scope

The evaluation consisted of two phases: 1) a theory evaluation and 2) a process evaluation. The scope and evaluation questions related to each of these evaluations are detailed below.

Programme Theory Evaluation

Bickman (1987) describes a programme theory evaluation as the construction of a plausible and sensible model of how a programme is supposed to work. It encompasses a rigorous and independent assessment of either completed or ongoing activities to determine the extent to which they are achieving stated objectives and contributing to decision-making (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). It also involves building a programme theory by describing the programme inputs, activities, assumptions and causal linkages in detail. Similarly, the central focus of this evaluation is to construct a clearly articulated programme theory for the Yabonga GAP year student programme and assess its plausibility. This theory evaluation aims to compare this programme to similar programmes and test whether the underlying causal assumptions are valid. The theory evaluation addressed the following questions:

1. What are the underlying assumptions of the Yabonga GAP year student programme?
2. Are the causal links between the programme activities and the intended outcomes plausible?
3. What programme elements could be enhanced or added to improve the overall intended outcomes?

Input obtained from the theory evaluation informed the process evaluation, which was the next part of the evaluation's scope.

Process Evaluation

A process evaluation covers three areas, namely, implementation fidelity, programme coverage and the quality of service delivered (Rossi et al., 2004). Programme implementation fidelity refers to the degree to which a programme or intervention is delivered as intended (Carroll et al., 2007). This evaluation aimed to provide an understanding of whether the Yabonga GAP programme is being implemented as intended. It provides a view of current programme performance to identify opportunities for improvement. The scope of this process evaluation was split into three areas: firstly, service utilisation, measured the breadth and depth of programme coverage, reach and attrition. The second assessed implementation fidelity, which determines whether activities are implemented as intended. The third, service delivery, evaluated whether programme facilitators are well-equipped to deliver the programme activities at an adequate level of quality. The proposed process evaluation addressed the following questions pertaining to service utilisation, implementation fidelity and service delivery:

Service Utilisation

4. How many post-high school students participated in the GAP year student programme in 2021? Did all the GAP students attend all activities for the entire year? Did any students drop out? (Reach, Coverage & Attrition)

Implementation Fidelity and Service Delivery

5. Are the current programme activities implemented as intended?
6. Does the programme implementation staff have sufficient training and expertise to implement the programme activities?
7. Are the GAP students satisfied with the GAP programme content and activities?

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

This section will provide an overview of the method undertaken for the theory evaluation and the process evaluation. A two-phased evaluation approach was used, and thus, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part provides an overview of the methods applied for the theory evaluation, which consists of the first phase of the evaluation. This is followed by the second part, which covers the methods employed for the process evaluation and details the second phase of the evaluation. Ethical clearance for both evaluations was received from the University of Cape Town's Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee (include ref no. if you have one) before any research was undertaken.

Method for Programme Theory Evaluation

Research Design

For the programme theory evaluation, a descriptive research design was employed, applying qualitative research methods. Descriptive research design provides a picture of a phenomenon as it naturally occurs (Hedrick et al., 1993). Collaborative engagements, led by the evaluator, working together with the programme staff, assisted in co-creating the programme theory. The engagement process utilised for the theory evaluation creation was modelled on the five-step approach by Donaldson (2012). The five-step process is detailed below.

Step 1: Engagement with Stakeholders

At the first engagement, the evaluator conducted informal, unstructured interviews with the programme managers. The purpose was to delve deep into the knowledge and experience of the programme managers, particularly focusing on the programme activities, needs and services. The evaluator described the evaluation that would be conducted, asked the programme managers for their consent to continue and allowed the programme managers to express any concerns and ask any questions. These engagements were conducted virtually and were recorded, to ensure the evaluator could refer back to any key discussion points when analysing the results. The questions focused programme recruitment, overall goals and and programme activities. The interview consent and interview schedule can be found in Appendix A.

Step 2: Develop the First Programme Theory Draft

At the second engagement, the evaluator asked detailed questions regarding the various programme activities, outcomes, causal linkages, and relationships. This engagement was

conducted using a backward reasoning approach, whereby the evaluator started with the proposed programme outcomes and reasoned back to the programme activities (Chen, 2003).

For example, one of the outcomes was increased employeability, the programme manager needed to provide the details of the programme activities and initiatives which helped deliver that specific outcome. They needed to provide a detailed rationale and justification for each out programme outcomes, using the programme programme activities and the supporting programme content. The interview consent and interview guide used for this engagement can be found in Appendix A.

Step 3: Present the First Draft to Stakeholders

The evaluator collated all the information from previous engagements. The evaluator independently developed the first draft of the programme theory, including all the programme activities, casual linkages and relationships. The evaluator presented this to the programme manager and general manager in a final face-to-face meeting to obtain any final amendments, if any. The details of this will be shared in the results chapter.

Step 4: Plausibility Check

Once the alignment was reached between the programme staff and the evaluator on the programme theory in Step 3, the evaluator meticulously assessed the plausibility of the final programme theory. The assessment involved an extensive literature search focusing on each causal linkage and relationship. The evaluator reviewed various social science research and literature. An electronic literature search was done using the following databases: Google Scholar, EBSCO Host, JSTOR and Emerald. The following keywords were used individually and collectively (AND/OR): youth development, career readiness programmes, college access programmes, GAP year student development programmes, high school development programmes, youth empowerment programmes, work readiness programmes, and university readiness programmes. The evaluator compared the programme theory to other similar programmes to identify coherence and gaps.

Step 5: Final Model

To conclude the engagements, at the final step, once all information was gathered and analysed, the evaluator made a final assessment of the theory's plausibility. Based on the results of the final assessment, the evaluator provided recommendations for amendments and sought final approval amongst all stakeholders.

Method for Process Evaluation

Research Design

A descriptive research design was employed to address the process evaluation questions. The application of this approach provides a current picture of whether the programme was implemented according to its original intended programme plan and delivered the desired outcomes. A detailed analysis of the current programme implementation processes and relevant data could provide insights and recommendations which could improve the overall programme.

Sampling Methods

The process evaluation made use of non-probability sampling, which allowed the evaluator to review the current operations of the Yabonga GAP year student programme. Non-probability sampling involves the selection of participants for the research sample in a non-random manner with a specific purpose (McGregor, 2018). This evaluation required feedback from specific groups of participants, which included the programme staff and the GAP students; therefore, judgemental sampling was utilised. Judgemental sampling was relevant, as the evaluator was interested in obtaining data from programme participants regarding programme operations and activities (McGregor, 2018). The evaluator selected participants based on their subject matter knowledge of the programme activities (Perla & Provost, 2012).

The sample of GAP students comprised of a total of n = 9 students who completed the programme in 2021. There were n = 5 females and there were n = 4 males in this group and their ages varied from 19 years old to 22 years old. There was an additional sample of n = 10 students who complated the programme in 2020. This group consisted of n = 6 females and n = 4 males, their ages varied from 20 years old to 24 years old.

The data collection methods, procedures, and tools, as they pertain to service utilisation, implementation fidelity, and service delivery, are outlined below.

Methods for service utilisation

Question 1: How many post-high-school students participated in the GAP year student programme in 2021? Did all the GAP students attend all activities for the entire year? Did any students drop out? (Reach, Coverage & Attrition)

Data Collection

Secondary data sources were collated and examined, which included attendance records, as well as recruitment and selection data obtained at the commencement of the 2021 Yabonga GAP year programme. Attendance records were received for a limited period and in photograph format. In addition, further qualitative data regarding attendance and coverage were received through staff interviews.

Procedure

Each photograph was reviewed, and the data points were captured and transferred using Microsoft Excel for analysis. Given the availability of records, only two periods were provided, i.e., April and August. Staff interviews were recorded upon their permission and transcribed into Microsoft Word for analysis purposes.

Data Analysis

Analysis of this data provided a view of the programme's reach and coverage. This was done using SPSS and was tabulated using descriptive statistics. To support the quantitative findings, qualitative, relevant feedback from staff interviews was analysed in conjunction.

Methods for Implementation Fidelity

Question 2: Are the current programme activities implemented as intended?

Data Sources

To measure implementation fidelity, the programme plan was reviewed against actual implementation. This was done by reviewing available programme records of activities completed against the planned programme schedule for the year.

Procedure

The programme manager provided digital photographs of the programme schedules and activity plans for 2021. This was provided by week and was captured using Microsoft Excel for analysis purposes.

Data Analysis

The programme schedules for 2021 were compared against the programme activities provided at the onset of the evaluation to determine whether the programme was implemented as intended. A comparison was made across each week to obtain the implementation fidelity.

Methods for Service Delivery

Question 3: Do the programme implementation staff have sufficient training and expertise to implement the programme activities?

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with their key programme staff (n = 2 facilitators, n = 1 programme manager) to gauge the level of training received and the adequacy of the training. The interview guide included questions relating to the level of satisfaction with training received throughout the programme as well as the programme implementation strengths and challenges. The interviews also included questions which highlighted changes made to the programme due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The staff interview consent and guide can be found in Appendix B.

Procedure

A detailed consent letter describing the purpose of the research and the interview questions used during the interview process. The interviews took place online at a time convenient for the interviewees. All interviews were recorded upon receiving consent from respondents. All information was treated as strictly confidential and anonymous; therefore, respondents' identities were not revealed in the analysis. Each interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

All interview data were transcribed and analysed by the evaluator using a thematic analysis approach, whereby common ideas, themes, and patterns in the responses were grouped together (Clarke & Braun, 2018). Qualitative data were analysed using ATLAS.ti software. This software allowed the researcher to locate, code and annotate features within using large bodies of unstructured qualitative data. This allows the researcher to summarise using the coding into key themes for analysis.

Question 4: Are the GAP students satisfied with the GAP programme content and activities?

The following section will focus on the approach used to assess the current and past GAP students' level of satisfaction regarding the programme content and activities.

Data Source

These data were sourced from the current cohort of n=33 GAP year students as well as past students who were contactable and available to participate. To qualify, all participants had to have completed the programme and the activities for the entire year.

Data Collection

A self-report questionnaire and focus group discussions were used to obtain a combination of both quantitative and qualitative feedback regarding current and past GAP students' level of satisfaction with the programme activities and content. The data collection process started with a short self-report questionnaire. The self-report questionnaire focused on the level of satisfaction with the various programme activities and training students received throughout the year. Likert scale questions were used in the questionnaire to gauge the level of programme satisfaction. Likert scales are widely used across many questionnaires and are a convenient scale for obtaining the level of agreement with various statements and generating appropriate results for statistical inference (Heo et al., 2022). In addition, an adapted version of the READY Tool (Rochester Evaluation of Asset Development for Youth) was used for the assessment of four areas of youth development: caring adult relationships, basic social skills, decision-making, and constructive use of leisure time (Sabaratnam & Klein, 2006).

Demographic questions were added at the end of the questionnaire and were used for descriptive analysis purposes only. Once all students had completed the questionnaire, the focus group discussions began.

The group discussions focused on the relevance of the activities, highlights, challenges and whether participants felt they were adequately equipped to move to the next stage of their early adulthood. The focus group discussion was conducted using a semi-structured interview guide which covered key discussion topics, including students' programme highlights, their challenges and their recommendations for programme improvement. Both the self-report questionnaire and the focus group discussion guide can be found in Appendix C.

Procedure

The evaluator facilitated the focus group discussions. A total of n = 2 focus group discussions were conducted, the first amongst current students and the second amongst past students. The demographic breakdown of the two groups is displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2.

Demographics of Focus Group Samples

Year of completion	Sex	Age
Current Students (2021)	F	19
n = 9	F	21
	F	21
	F	22
	F	22
	M	19
	M	21
	M	21
	M	22
Past students (2020)	F	20
n = 10	F	20
	F	21
	F	21
	F	21
	F	22
	M	23
	M	23
	M	23
	M	24

Before the focus group discussion began, each student completed with a short self-completion questionnaire, which took approximately 15 minutes to complete independently. Once the questionnaire was completed, it was collected by the researcher and followed by a group discussion led by the evaluator using a semi-structured discussion guide. All data collection instruments and group discussions were in English, based on the recommendation from the programme management team, as all students felt comfortable speaking English. Both focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed for analytical purposes upon receiving consent from participants. Throughout the interview and group discussion process, strict COVID-19 protocols were adhered to. Each focus group discussion lasted for approximately 60 minutes.

Data analysis

A combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods was used for the data analysis. For the quantitative analysis, SPSS was used to tabulate and summarise the data set using averages, frequency distributions and variances. The focus group discussions, were analysed using a thematic analytical approach. Qualitative analytical software, ATLAS.ti was used to analyse all qualitative data.

This chapter provided an overview of the methods used for both the theory evaluation and the process evaluation. A two-phased evaluation approach was presented, starting with the theory evaluation followed by the process evaluation. The next chapter will apply the method described in the theory evaluation and present the subsequent results.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was received from the Commerce Faculty's Ethics in Research committee. Once this ethics clearance was received, the evaluator commenced the data collection process. Consent was obtained from all participants in the research at the start of the interview process. Due to GAP students being older than 18 years, parental consent was not required. Permission to conduct research with GAP students was required and received from the Yabonga programme management team as well as suitable times for the interviews to take place.

Each questionnaire included a consent letter stating the purpose of the research, duration and

requesting participant consent. All interviews have been treated with the strictest confidentiality and anonymity. All data obtained from the study was anonymised therefore the respondents' responses cannot be traced back to them in the final report. Individual responses will be grouped and analysed thematically. During the interview or the focus group discussion process, if any respondent felt uncomfortable at any point, they were free to exit the interview or focus group discussion.

CHAPTER 3: PROGRAMME THEORY EVALUATION RESULTS

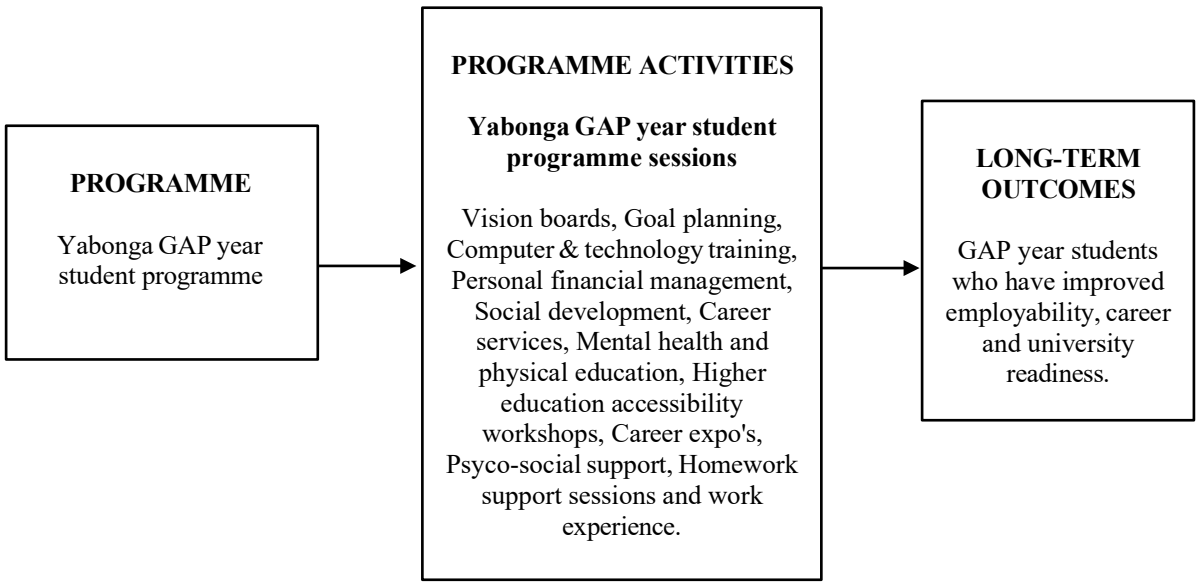
This chapter provides an overview of the programme theory evaluation of the Yabonga GAP programme. This section is divided into three main parts: the development of the programme theory, the plausibility assessment of the programme theory, and the identification of programme elements for potential enhancement.

The Development of the Yabonga GAP Year Programme Theory

Evaluation Question 1: What are the underlying assumptions of the Yabonga GAP year student programme?

The development of the initial underlying theory of the Yabonga GAP programme spanned five interrelated steps, as prescribed by Donaldson (2012). For the first step, the evaluator held engagements with the programme management team, which included two senior members, to uncover the programme fundamentals as they understood them. This included the programme activities as well as long-term programme outcomes. Figure 2 illustrates a basic programme logic outlining the activities and desired long-term outcomes resulting from the first engagement.

Figure 2.
Basic Yabonga GAP Programme Logic



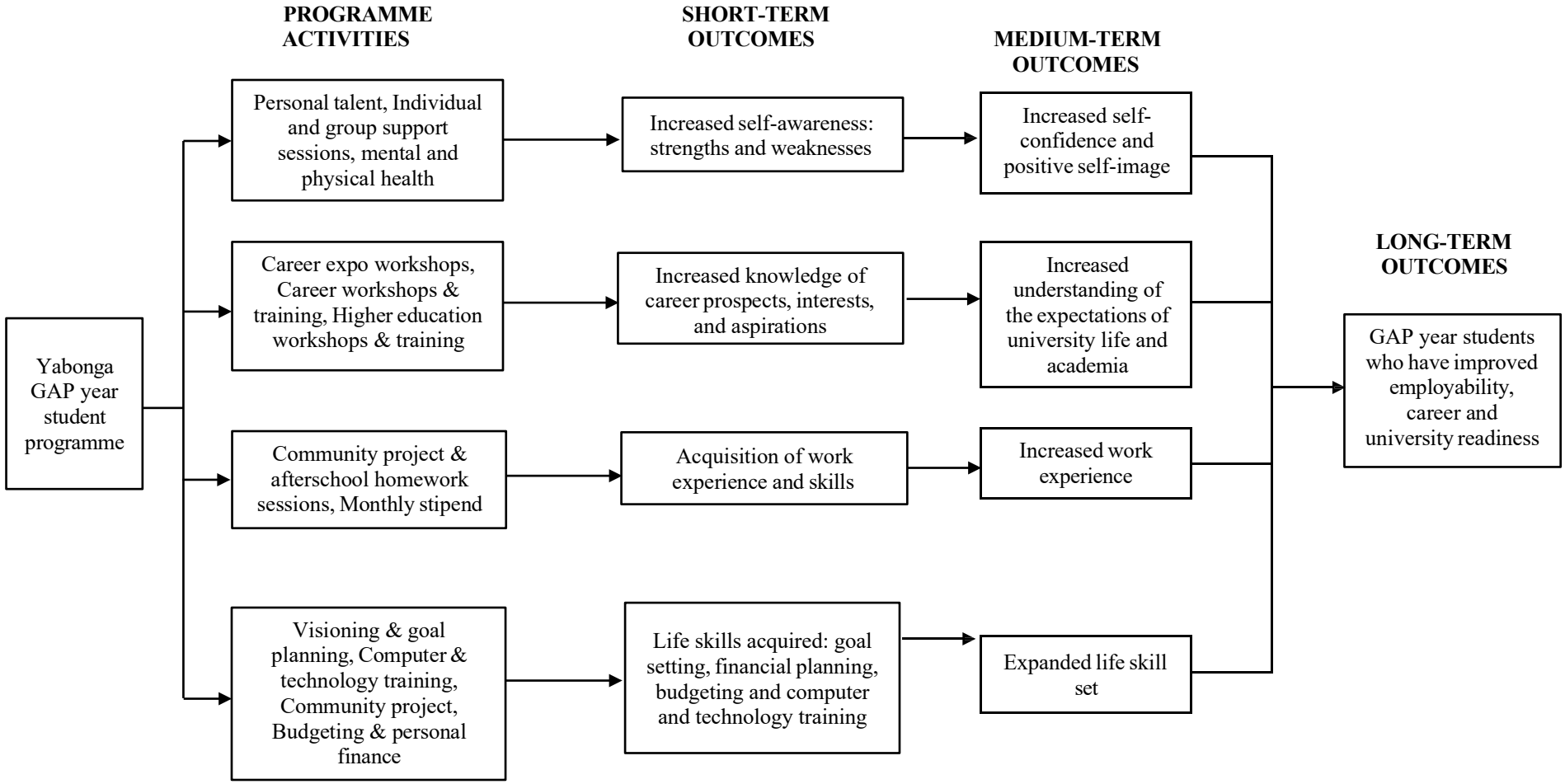
The process of articulating programme activities and desired long-term outcomes (Donaldson's first step) assisted in providing a high-level view of the main assumptions underlying the Yabonga GAP programme. The programme management team asserted that the various programme activities shown in Figure 2 would result in GAP students having improved employability, career readiness, and university readiness. This was based on the assumption that if GAP students have a clear vision and goal-setting for themselves, this would prepare them for the next stage in their lives. Together with the appropriate training, work experience, and exposure to potential career and study opportunities, this improves their employability as well as their university readiness if they should decide to take this path. It was agreed amongst the programme management team that this would only be possible if students were given an appropriate level of psycho-social support and good guidance by the programme facilitators.

Once the first step was completed, the evaluator reconvened with the programme management team (second engagement) to include the short-term and medium-term outcomes into the programme theory. This is the second step of Donaldson's process. Through robust discussion amongst the programme management team, the short-term outcomes included increased self-awareness, increased knowledge of career opportunities and aspirations, work experience and skill acquisition.

The short-term outcomes of the programme are anticipated to result in the following medium-term outcomes: increased self-confidence and positive self-image, increased understanding of the expectations of university life and academia, increased work experience and expanded life skills. The expanded programme theory following the second engagement is illustrated in Figure 3 overleaf.

Figure 3.

First Draft: Programme Theory



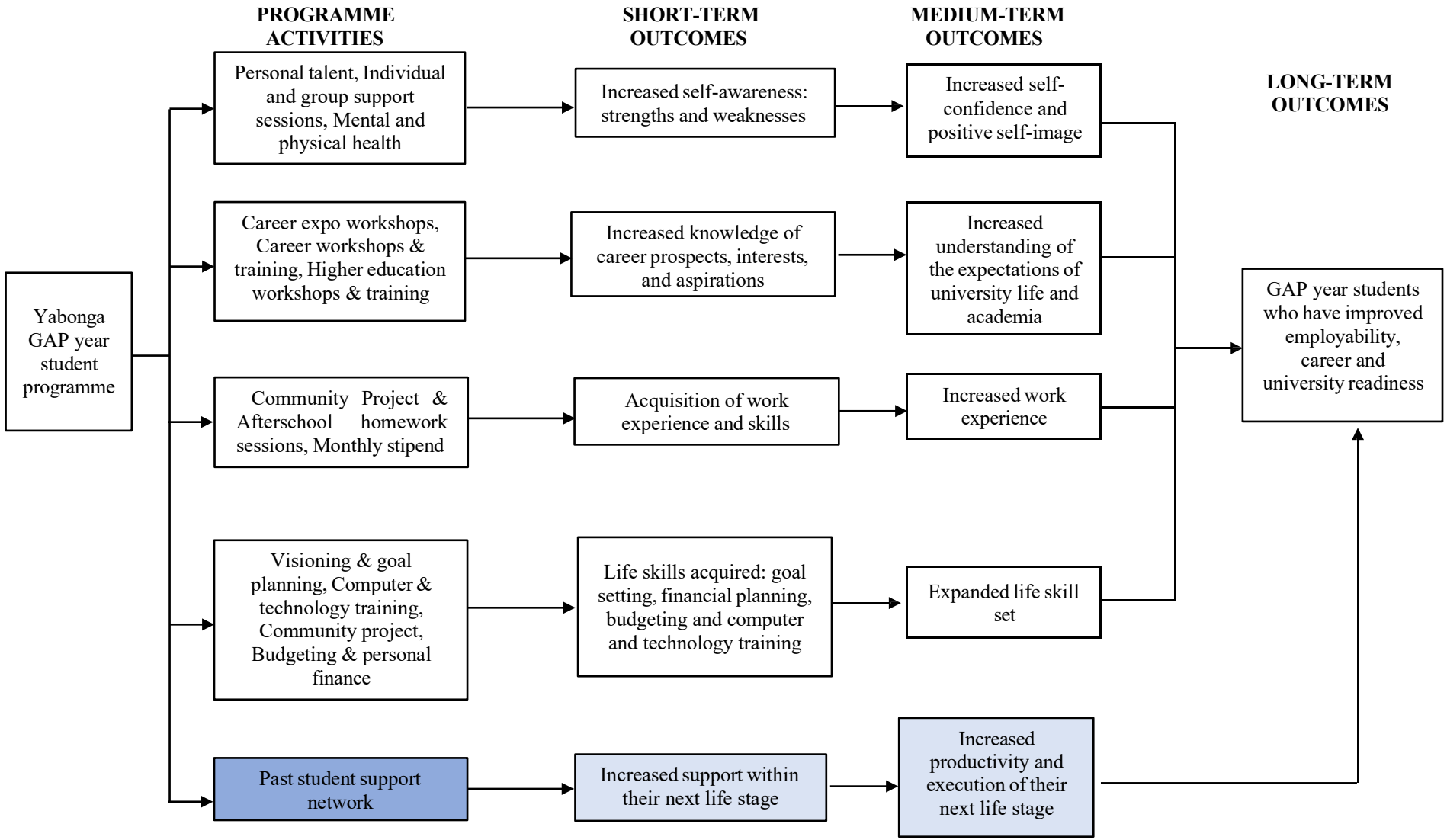
The completed draft of the programme theory (Figure 3) shows the interrelationship between the short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes. For example, acquiring work experience will give GAP students work experience to include on their CVs, which should increase their employability.

The identification of these outcomes was achieved through backward reasoning from the programme outcomes and working back to the programme activities. Through this process, the evaluator and the programme management team could include the causal linkages between the activities and the outcomes. There was consensus that the draft programme theory represented the current programme activities and intent.

The first draft of the programme theory was presented virtually to the Yabonga programme management team for their comments as per Donaldson's third step. This draft of the programme theory received overwhelming agreement from the programme management team as it accurately reflected the underlying assumptions and outcomes of the programme. Through a review process, the programme management team indicated that the current draft did not include how the programme addresses the students' challenges once completing the programme. Once GAP students move into the next stage, be it employment or tertiary education, they are still faced with challenges and require further support. There was an incident where a past student struggled with transport money to get to university. Eventually, the student graduated and then worked for Yabonga. Therefore, the programme team emphasised that their programme includes a past student network, which is essentially an open communication channel to remain in contact with participants after the completion of the Yabonga GAP year programme. This channel helps students to increase their employability or their ability to thrive within the tertiary education space. After that, the evaluator added the past student network as well as the corresponding short-term and medium outcomes. These changes emanating from step three have been highlighted in blue in Figure 4 (blue boxes) overleaf. The programme management team agreed with all other elements of the draft programme theory, and signed off on the draft theory.

Figure 4.

Programme Theory with Past Students Network Components added



Following the addition of a past student support network to the programme theory, the evaluator moved to the fourth step, which involved the plausibility assessment. This assessment was based on the agreed programme theory, as shown in Figure 4.

The Plausibility of the Yabonga GAP Year Programme

Evaluation Question 2: Are the causal links between the programme activities and the intended outcomes plausible?

To ascertain plausibility, a comparison was made of programme activities, outcomes, and casual linkages with what was found in the literature. The Yabonga GAP year programme theory was evaluated against the available literature on similar programmes, which included out-of-school programmes, college readiness programmes, youth development programmes, career readiness programmes, and youth mentoring programmes. This represents the fourth step, as per Donaldson's theory-driven approach. The following sections on plausibility are presented according to programme activities and content, outcomes, and causal linkages.

The Programme Activities

The evaluator conducted an extensive literature review on youth development programmes to ascertain alignment between the Yabonga GAP year programme activities and similar youth programmes. It was evident from the literature search that there is no single definition of what specific activities make up a youth development programme; it can differ vastly across programmes. Despite these variations, there was a common theme across programmes in the way programme activities were structured and organised and the intent of these activities, where youth take leadership and agency in their development and build helpful life skills (Mahoney et al., 2009).

Youth programmes often contain three key characteristics which promote positive development (Lerner et al., 2005). Firstly, there are positive and sustained adult-youth relationships, which include mentoring, counselling, and coaching; secondly, life skill building, which includes presentation skills, technological training, and time management; thirdly, organising and participating in a community development and volunteering (Youniss & Reinders, 2010). Increased participation in youth development programmes has been linked to positive youth development outcomes, which include increased self-esteem, confidence,

resilience and readiness for adulthood (Balsano et al., 2009; Mahoney et al., 2009).

Similarly, the Yabonga GAP year programme is a well-structured annual programme with a set sequence of key activities and development interventions. The programme consists of 11 key activities covering various life skills, community-based work, volunteering, and work experience training. GAP students are required to attend the sessions at the Yabonga centre on a daily basis. Through the course of the day, they will receive training and be responsible for mentoring and assisting school-going children at the centre with their homework. Daily attendance and participation are further entrenched through a financial stipend, which they receive on a monthly basis. The GAP year programme culminates with a youth camp. The programme activities which drive positive youth development outcomes are consistent with what was found in the literature.

The Programme Content

The content of the Yabonga GAP year programme was reviewed against the literature on similar youth development programmes. The literature review was based on the six key components of the programme activities: self-awareness, skill building, work experience, teamwork, mentoring and counselling, and physical activity. It was evident from the literature search on youth development programmes that all six key components were found widely across the literature. Table 3 overleaf summarises the key programme activities as well as the supporting academic references of each of the areas.

Table 3.

Summary of the Plausibility Assessment Results

Programme activities	Description	Academic literature sources
Self-awareness	Programme activities which involve self-reflection and introspection. Building a positive self-image and identity.	(Chauveron et al., 2016); (Parikh, 2013); (Pierce, 2015); (Kannan, 2021); (Khost et al., 2017); (Lerner et al., 2005); (Ramey et al., 2018); (Tirrell et al., 2021); (Zareei mahmoodabadi z et al., 2023)
Skill Building	Activities centred around learning interventions focused on emotional and intellectual intelligence (e.g., communication skills, presentation skills, technological skills, career, tertiary information sharing).	(Amaro-Jiménez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013); (Ballard et al., 2023); (Borden et al., 2006); (Christensen et al., 2023); (Gray-Nicolas, 2017); (Griffin, 2016); (Harrington & Rogalski, 2020); (Knotek et al., 2019); (Lane et al., 2020); (Licea, 2015); (Khost et al., 2017); (David Nkosi, 2019); (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014a); (Parikh, 2013); (Peskin et al., 2015); (Sudan et al., 2014); (Sullivan et al., 2020); (Walsh et al., 2022)
Work Experience	These activities are focused on obtaining relevant work experience within a desired vocation.	(Bates et al., 2019); (Dymnicki et al., 2021); (Jackson, 2019)
Teamwork	Activities which encourage group work either in pairs or larger groups.	(Balsano et al., 2009); (Furness et al., 2017); (McDavid et al., 2019); (Miller & Trzesniewski, 2020); (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014b); (Page et al., 2019)
Mentoring & Counselling	Relationships between adults and youth that foster and inspire confidence in youth's abilities and planning their goals for their lives. Also including activities to provide psycho-social support to deal with any life challenges.	(Busse et al., 2018); (Cates & Schaefle, 2011); (Cureton, 2022); (Furness et al., 2017); (Hirsch et al., 2011); (Jones, 2019); (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014b); (Thomas, 2022); (Wilson, 2018); (Yavuz et al., 2019)
Physical Activity	Activities geared towards physical movement and exercise. This involves physical training or sport on both an individual and team level.	(Malete et al., 2022); (Mansfield et al., 2020); (Mendoza, 2017); (Ullrich-French & McDonough, 2013); (Van der Klashorst, 2018); (Weiss et al., 2014)

It is evident from Table 3 that the Yabonga GAP year programme activities were found to be aligned with what was uncovered through the literature review on similar youth development programmes. The Yabonga GAP year programme activities are, therefore, suitable for the design of effective YDPs.

The Programme Outcomes

The outcomes of the Yabonga GAP year programme were summarised into five outcome themes and were assessed against applicable literature sources. All of them were found to be aligned with the outcomes of similar YDPs. Table 4 below summarises the intended outcomes for the Yabonga GAP year programme and the supporting literature, which corroborates that these outcomes are achievable.

Table 4.

Summary of the Outcomes found in the YPD Literature

Outcomes	Academic literature sources
Increased self-awareness	(Cannona et al., 2020); (Chauveron et al., 2016); (Khost et al., 2017); (Klein et al., 2006; Ramey et al., 2018); (Tirrell et al., 2020); (Zareei mahmoodabadi z et al., 2023)
Increase knowledge of career prospects and tertiary education aspirations	(Almeida, 2016); (Baber, 2014); (Cates & Schaefle, 2011); (Cates & Schaefle, 2011); (Gray-Nicolas, 2017); (Hoefer, 2018); (Kannan, 2021); (Khost et al., 2017); (Lane et al., 2020); (Licea, 2015); (Parikh, 2013); (Starlin, 2020); (Thomas, 2022)
Acquisition of work experience	(Bates et al., 2019); (Dymnicki et al., 2021); (Jackson, 2019); (Lane et al., 2020)
Skill and knowledge acquisition	(Ballard et al., 2023); (Borden et al., 2006); (Furness et al., 2017); (Hirsch et al., 2011); (Knotek et al., 2019); (Mansfield et al., 2020); (McDavid et al., 2019); (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014b; O'Shea, 2011); (Thomas Page et al., 2023); (Parikh, 2013); (Peskin et al., 2015); (Pierce, 2015); (Walsh et al., 2022); (Weiss et al., 2014)
Improved employability, career readiness and university readiness	(Amaro-Jiménez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013); (Balsano et al., 2009); (Brooks, 2018); (Cates & Schaefle, 2011); (Durlak et al., 2007); (Gee et al., 2021a); (Kallison, 2018); (Le et al., 2016); (Page et al., 2019); (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003); (Tirrell et al., 2021); (Venezia & Voloch, 2012);

The results of the theory evaluation highlight that youth programmes, like Yabonga GAP, play a critical role in the development of individual and social skills. It assists in building soft skills like self-awareness as well as hard skills like the acquisition of knowledge, work experience, and skills. These outcomes were consistent with what was found in the literature; therefore, the Yabonga GAP year programme outcomes are deemed to be attainable. The following section will conclude the plausibility assessment by evaluating the causal linkages between programme activities and outcomes.

Causal Linkages between Programme Activities and Outcomes

To conclude the plausibility assessment of the Yabonga GAP year programme, an evaluation of the causal linkages between programme activities and outcomes was conducted.

Many youth development programmes focus their activities on self-reflection, introspection, and building a positive self-image (Cannona et al., 2020). These activities assist young people in developing a stronger positive self-identity and self-confidence (Klein et al., 2006; Ramey et al., 2018). The Yabonga GAP year programme is coherent with the literature that states that activities centred on self-awareness will result in positive self-esteem outcomes.

In addition, learning interventions focused on building a variety of life skills was one of the most common features of youth development programmes (Gray-Nicolas, 2017; Griffin, 2016; Harrington & Rogalski, 2020; Knotek et al., 2019; Lane et al., 2020; Licea, 2015; Khost et al., 2017). These activities require time, effort, and high levels of engagement to acquire the desired skills. On completion, participants have a feeling of accomplishment and competence. This can have a positive impact on the participants' outlook in life and increase their self-esteem, which reinforces positive behaviour and development (Bartko & Eccles, 2003).

Evidence from the literature also indicates that career readiness programmes are common youth development programmes, as they assist participants in obtaining relevant work experience within a desired vocation (Bates et al., 2019; Dymnicki et al., 2021; Jackson, 2019). Providing participants with the opportunity to gain valuable work experience in their potential field of work gives them a better understanding of their potential career and work life. This might further motivate them and increase their confidence in their decision-making on their future career decisions.

Physical activity and sports have also been associated with positive youth development outcomes, such as improving youth’s overall health and well-being, as well as imparting teamwork skills as well as leadership skills (Berlin et al., 2007). In addition, they are also known to boost self-esteem and confidence among participants as well as increase personal values, friendships, and social values (Bean & Forneris, 2016).

When reviewing the literature on youth development programmes, team-based activities are a common occurrence (Balsano et al., 2009; Furness et al., 2017; McDavid et al., 2019; Miller & Trzesniewski, 2020; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014b; Page et al., 2019). Similar to physical and sporting activities, team-based activities are important for building interpersonal and personal skills. Teamwork encourages collaboration, communication, and an increased feeling of being part of a team and, thus, a feeling of connectedness. These are important skills that prepare participants for the working world, as well as tertiary education, where strong teamwork skills are valuable.

Furthermore, mentoring and counselling are a common feature across many youth development programmes as they help nurture relationships between adults and youth that foster and inspire confidence in youth's abilities and planning their goals for their life (Cureton, 2022; Furness et al., 2017; Hirsch et al., 2011; Jones, 2019; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014b). In addition, they also include activities to provide psycho-social support to deal with any life challenges and assist in building the required coping mechanisms. These activities result in increased emotional resilience, positive self-image, and improved mental health (Ramey et al., 2018).

The causal linkages between the programme activities and outcomes are evident in the literature, deeming the proposed programme theory components as well as the causal linkages to be plausible. The programme theory being plausible is not enough to ensure that the programme achieves its outcomes. Research has shown that how the programme theory is implemented can have a significant impact on whether the programme achieves its outcomes (Law & Shek, 2011).

As part of the literature review process, various programme implementation considerations were uncovered. These will be discussed in the following section as they pertain to the Yabonga GAP year programme.

Programme Implementation Considerations

Evaluation Question 3: What programme elements could be enhanced or added to improve the overall intended outcomes?

The manner and the level of quality in which the programme activities are implemented can have a significant impact on the overall outcomes. Research has illustrated that the teaching process, context and programme adherence are significant predictors of programme quality and success (Law & Shek, 2011). Consideration of contextual factors, like gender, age, and level of diversity, also contributes to skills development and better outcomes (Alvarez & Alvarez, 2018). The qualities and skills of the programme staff and, particularly, the quality of the relationship between the staff and programme participants are critical determinants of programme success (Ramey et al., 2018). Each of these programme implementation considerations will be explored in detail in the following sections.

Target Participant Considerations

When implementing youth development programmes, there are multiple challenges. Through the literature research, considerations regarding the target participants were uncovered. These considerations could be grouped into three themes, namely gender inequality, age and diversity. These are highly relevant to the context of the Yabonga GAP year programme and will be discussed in more detail below.

Gender Considerations

Globally, gender inequality has been under the spotlight, with particular emphasis on the representation of females in leadership positions. Studies evaluating youth development programmes targeting young females specifically have shown that they provide a safe environment where women are supported and have high levels of empathy (Eva et al., 2021). These results echoed the evaluation findings of a female leadership development programme in Pakistan, which found that support and mentoring resulted in optimal performance as well as outcomes (Franchett et al., 2019). This is particularly relevant within the South African context; gender inequality and representation remain a key challenge, and the gender ratio of Yabonga's annual student intake needs to be considered during enrollment.

Age Considerations

Youths' exposure to leadership development and training at an early age can have a significant impact on their leadership abilities as adults. An evaluation was conducted on an American-based leadership development programme targeting young children, using age-appropriate content, which focused on building self-awareness (Scheer & Dale Safrit, 2001). The research results highlighted that the programme was instrumental in building self-awareness and other life skills over the formative years but also provided the foundation to build future leaders as adolescents and into adulthood (Scheer & Dale Safrit, 2001). The broader Yabonga Programme activities, which provide access to after-school homework sessions, could be an excellent platform to impact leadership skills in the formative years. These students form the pipeline to the Yabonga GAP year programme once they have completed high school.

Increased Levels of Diversity

Diversity and inclusion, spanning race, gender, age, and sexuality, have garnered increased attention worldwide, propelled notably by the heightened momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. Consequently, youth participants have to cultivate heightened levels of empathy to address intricate challenges effectively. Evidence from a Canadian YDP has shown that enhanced levels of diversity, particularly among immigrant participants, facilitated more substantive debates and discussions, thereby engendering a more comprehensive understanding of pivotal social issues (Alvarez & Alvarez, 2018). The results have also demonstrated that engaging in these nuanced discussions cultivates leaders who are more resilient and empathetic (Alvarez & Alvarez, 2018).

Multiple YDPs found comparable results, where heightened diversity contributed to the cultivation of skills deemed essential in a global context (Allen-Handy et al., 2021). Furthermore, collaboration amongst a diverse group of participants allowed for meaningful conversations among programme participants. Inclusion or interaction with other participants from different YDPs from different backgrounds could add value in terms of broadening world views.

Programme Staff Quality

Programme staff play a crucial role in delivering successful outcomes and the quality of the programme. The following section examines the programme staff and the qualities and skills required to obtain better programme outcomes. The level of empathy, leadership skill and experience, relationship dynamics, and experience are reviewed in detail below.

Level of Empathy of Programme Staff

The skill level of the programme staff is vital, as it can significantly influence the delivery of the programme activities and content it provides to the programme participants. Soft skills like listening skills and the level of empathy shown by programme staff can shape the experience of the programme participants (Bulanda & McCrea, 2013). The empathy shown by programme staff towards the programme participants has resulted in programme participants who are more engaged, have greater programme participation, are more resilient and have a higher level of empathy towards fellow participants (Bulanda & McCrea, 2013). Programme participants often mirror the behaviour and traits of the programme staff, as they view them as leadership role models. Programme staff displaying high levels of empathy and adding this skill training into their programme activities could result in programme improvement and enhance the programme participants' leadership abilities and skills.

Relation-dynamic between Programme Staff and Programme Participants

An environment where there is shared power between the programme staff and the participants fosters the advancement of leadership skills and abilities (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014). Co-creating programme content and activities together with the programme participants promotes the development of life skills, which include negotiation skills and the ability to deal with difficult conversations (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014). This is supported by findings from other YDPs, which have also shown that power-sharing strengthens and legitimises the participants' perspectives (Ramey et al., 2018). Furthermore, this builds a trusting relationship between participants and staff and engenders confidence.

Respect was also identified as a critical element that influences youths' perceptions of adult authority (Deutsch & Jones, 2008). Research findings indicate the importance of bidirectional

respect to balance the youths' need for autonomy and the programme staff's need for authority (Deutsch & Jones, 2008). The embedding of a balanced approach to the power dynamic has been shown to lead to a less hierarchical and more close relationship between the programme participants and staff (Walker, 2011). A closer relationship allows the programme staff to be more attuned to the needs of the participants and address them instantaneously (Walker, 2011).

Programme Staff's Experience, Skill, and Confidence Level in the Field

The programme staff's skill level, years of experience, and competence could have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the programme delivery and the quality of the programme outcomes. Programme staff who lack confidence in their abilities and skills could negatively hamper programme efficacy (Brumbaugh & Cater, 2016). Being knowledgeable in programme content is essential for all programme staff, as they need to effectively disseminate this content to all the programme participants (Brumbaugh & Cater, 2016). Continuously learning and training for programme staff is vital, particularly on programme content, to ensure they have the most recent training material. Programme staff should also have the opportunity to collaborate with other programme staff to share learnings and best practices. Various evaluations have found that programme quality and the quality of the programme staff had a direct influence on the overall programme effectiveness (Shek et al., 2017).

Programme Staff and Participants' Shared Background

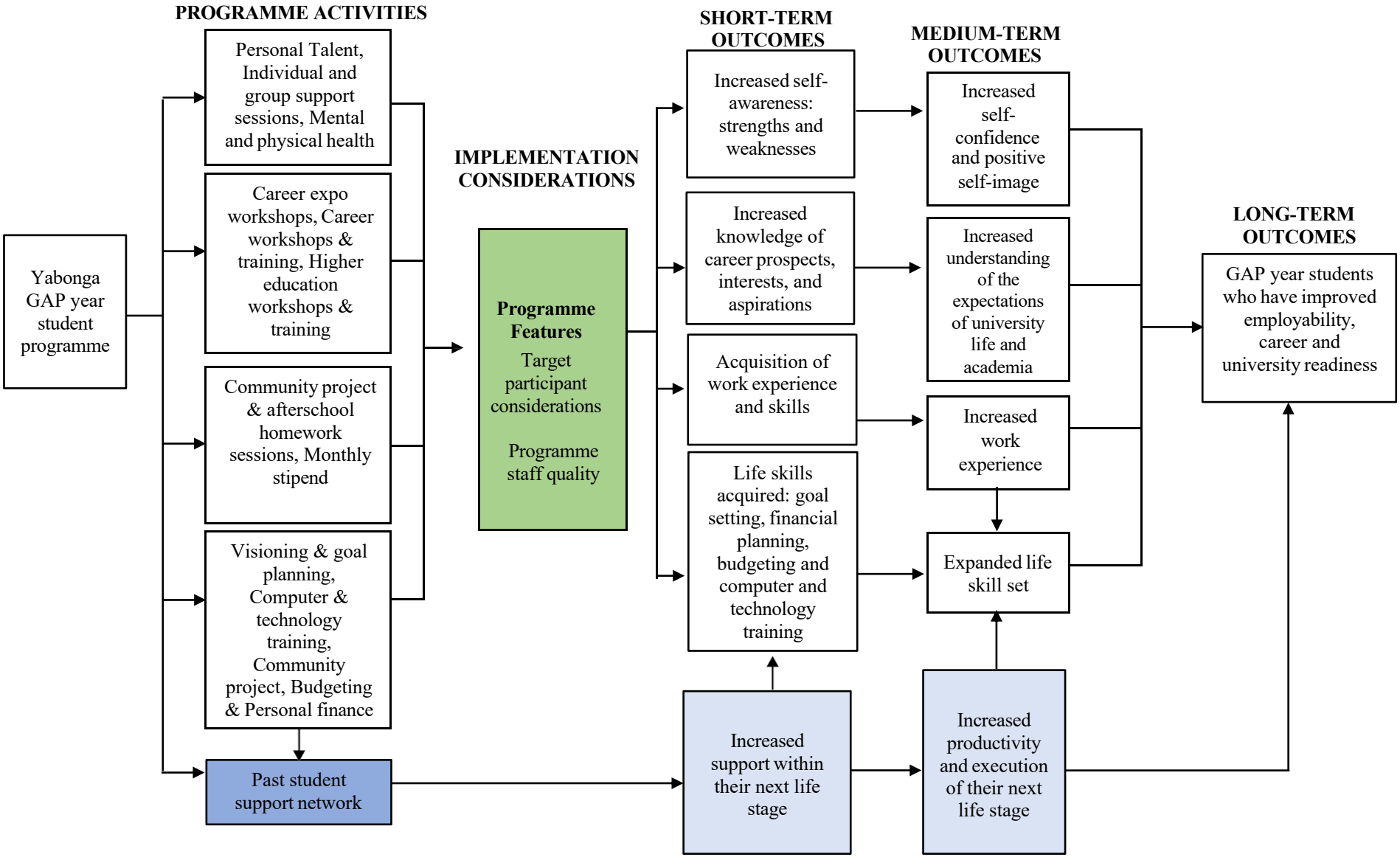
Previous studies suggest that when program staff share a similar background with program beneficiaries, it tends to positively influence the outcomes of youth development programs (McGovern et al., 2020). Under their shared background, programme staff can cultivate deeper connections with beneficiaries and assist them in navigating experiences of discrimination (McGovern et al., 2020). Through these connections with the programme staff enabled participants and their families to access valuable social capital. (McGovern et al., 2020). Moreover, it contributes to fostering a greater appreciation of cultural identities and diversity among the programme participants, which might assist them as they engage in a diverse society in the future.

Given the vital role programme staff play in the delivery of the Yabonga GAP year programme, it is critical to ensure that the appropriate quality of programme staff is employed and recruited, as well as trained.

Figure 5 (green boxes) overleaf has been updated with all the implementation considerations mentioned above for the finalised Yabonga GAP year programme theory. This represents the fifth and final step as per Donaldson's step approach, where the final programme model was presented.

Figure 5.

Final Programme Theory, including Implementation Considerations



CHAPTER 4: PROCESS EVALUATION RESULTS

The process evaluation aimed to assess the overall effectiveness of the implementation of the Yabonga GAP year programme. The programme's service utilisation, implementation fidelity, and service delivery were assessed. The results are presented according to the corresponding evaluation questions presented in Chapter 2.

Service Utilisation Results

Evaluation Question 4: How many post-high-school students participated in the GAP year student programme in 2021? Did all the GAP students attend all activities for the entire year? Did any students drop out? (Reach, Coverage & Attrition)

A total of n = 70 applications were received for the 2021 cohort, and through a rigorous selection process, a total of n = 50 applicants were shortlisted for interviews. Post the interview process, a total of n = 37 applicants were accepted into the GAP programme, which represents an increase of 48% from the previous year (n = 25 students in the 2020 cohort). The programme continues to grow its numbers year-on-year, and 2021 was one of its larger student intakes since the programme started over a decade ago. Through discussions with the programme manager, it was raised that, due to the pandemic, young people were faced with fewer post-high-school opportunities, therefore making the Yabonga GAP programme a highly attractive opportunity.

Due to restricted access to attendance records, analysis was conducted using records from two months, April and August 2021. Complete monthly attendance records were only available for these two months. Table 5 overleaf provides the descriptive statistics of attendance for each of the selected months. The mean statistics shown in the table indicate the average attendance per month for the 2021 cohort.

Table 5.

Descriptive Statistics for 2021 GAP Student Attendance

Month	***Class size (n)***	***Minimum attendance***	***Maximum attendance***	***M (SD)***
April	37	22	33	28.07 *(3.06)*
August	37	17	34	24.15 *(5.94)*

Minimum attendance refers to the lowest number of participants present during the months of April and August. April has the highest mean attendance. One could assume this is because the programme would have started with high levels of enthusiasm and minimal dropouts. Just after midway through the programme, in August, attendance dropped. Overall, the attendance rates were high, surpassing 60% for both months: 76% in April and 65% in August. Feedback from the programme staff highlighted that the stipend was a significant contributing factor to the attendance success. If students attended all the sessions, they would receive their full stipend; however, in cases where students missed sessions, the stipend would be paid on a pro-rata basis, further highlighting the role of the stipend in promoting consistent attendance. Further feedback from the programme staff indicated that many students had transport challenges or even financial challenges, with no money for transport. This presents a lost opportunity as GAP students would not obtain the full benefit of all the programme activity planned for the days which they were not present.

Throughout the year, a total of n = 7 GAP students dropped out of the programme, which is up from the previous year, which saw n = 5 GAP students dropping out of the 2020 cohort. When interviewing the programme manager and director, the main reason given for GAP students dropping out was that it was financially driven. Families put pressure on the GAP students to seek employment to support the broader family financially. COVID-19 had a particular impact, as, in specific households, the primary breadwinner might have lost their job. Staff stated that the stipend GAP students receive throughout the programme might have been insufficient to cover the family's financial obligations. However, as indicated in the exert below, some students found the stipend to be helpful:

"I also had to buy food at home, so ever since I joined Yabonga, I get paid by stipend. It already helped me because now I was able to be the one who was buying groceries and then my father would focus on other expenses. It was a happy house now because before I was not working, we were all stressed. I have to buy food. I have to buy clothes for the children".

(2021 GAP student interviewee)

"We had financial issues. My mother was the only one who was supporting us. When I joined Yabonga, I could also assist her."

(2021 GAP student interviewee)

"Like the other guy said it was challenging financially. Since my father left, he was the only one who was working at home. I had to take my stipend to take care of things at home."

(2021 GAP student interviewee)

It is worth noting that the stipend may have had both a positive and negative impact on attendance rates. Highlighting it by participants showed that it was a key driver for whether GAP students participated in the programme or not.

In fewer cases, accessibility was also mentioned as a reason for GAP students dropping out and impacting attendance levels. In many of the communities in which the GAP students reside, there is often a lack of access to reliable public transport. Coupled with regular strike action, this has harmed attendance rates and, in some instances, has resulted in students dropping out. It was also noted through discussions and interviews with both students and programme staff that parents and guardians had limited involvement in the programme overall. However, they had a substantial impact on attendance rates due to economic pressures.

The service utilisation results point out that the programme has been successful in reaching high-school learners before joining the programme and achieved reasonable attendance rates. As shown above, financial challenges and lack of accessibility have resulted in GAP students dropping out of the programme. These challenges became more pronounced in 2021 as families started to feel the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and employment in many households was at risk. These factors appear to impact how many students could potentially utilise the services of this programme.

Implementation Fidelity Results

Evaluation Question 5: Are the current programme activities implemented as intended?

This aspect of the evaluation sought to establish whether the 2021 programme was implemented in accordance with its original plan. The programme plan is split into two components: first, personal development workshops and second, community-based work. Each week, GAP students should spend three days (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday) focusing on community-based work and two days (Thursday and Friday) completing personal development workshops.

The evaluation findings showed that the programme was implemented according to plan in 2021, marking a notable improvement on the challenges faced in the previous year

(2020). The implementation of the programme in 2020 was significantly hampered by COVID-19 lockdowns and associated social distancing measures imposed by the government, posing considerable obstacles to community-based work. Fortunately, in 2021, with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, the programme was successfully executed as initially intended.

Table 6.

GAP Programme Implementation (Plan versus Actual)

	Original Programme Plan	***2021 cohort*** *Full-programme implemented*
Community-based work	After-school homework sessions	✓
	Work experience at Yabonga centres	✓
Personal development workshops and activities	Vision board & goal planning	✓
	Computer and technology training	✓
	Budgeting and personal finance management	✓
	Community Project	✓
	Career workshops and training	✓
	Mental and Physical Health	✓
	Higher education workshops and training	✓
	Personal Talents	✓
	Group support sessions	✓
	Individual support sessions	✓

As shown in Table 6 above, the programme for 2021 was implemented fully according to the original plan, based on the feedback from the programme manager. Due to the easing of COVID-19 restrictions and the roll-out of vaccinations, the programme was implemented as originally intended. Feedback from the programme manager suggested supports this:

> *"There were no shifts in 2021. We ran the programme, recruited, implemented, and delivered the programme as per plan or objectives".*
>
> (Staff interviewee)

"We went back to running the programmme as previously as planned. We delivered the programme much better than we did in 2020."

(Staff interviewee)

Programme implementation was 'normalised' in 2021 to the pre-COVID-19 plan with minimal impact of the pandemic restrictions. This feedback was consistent with that of multiple staff members.

Service Delivery Results

Evaluation Question 6: Do the programme implementation staff have sufficient training and expertise to implement the programme activities?

A key component of this process evaluation was to obtain feedback from the programme staff implementing the Yabonga GAP year programme. Qualitative feedback received from staff showed that staff were adequately trained: they had a good understanding of the programme objectives and content, and made use of experts to conduct workshops in specialised fields. These three themes will be discussed in more detail below.

Theme One: Adequate Training Received

This theme relates to the training the programme staff received throughout the programme. All programme staff received training, including the facilitators who were interviewed. This training covered a wide variety of topics and differed across the programme staff interviewed. There appeared to be a high level of tailoring the training requirements to the needs of each staff member and the areas for which they are responsible. All programme staff, including both the facilitators and the programme manager, felt that they received adequate training to implement the programme and were highly satisfied with the training interventions they attended.

"For the activities I have facilitated I have received training for most of the things I have coordinated in the programme. For instance, I attended a CV workshop conducted by Career Services at the University of Cape Town (UCT). I also visited the personal advisor at Career Services, which helps you tailor your CV when you are a student. I used that knowledge".

(Staff Interviewee)

"I got many trainings at Yabonga: child counselling training, personal loss, psycho-social support training, first aid".

(Staff Interviewee)

"Because there are many programmes that we are doing, counselling, facilitating, too many to remember. Yes, I do feel confident, sometimes they take us to MANCOSA and do the training there. I accept any training Yabonga is offering me, so yes, I do feel confident".

(Staff Interviewee)

One staff member was upskilled through a learnership programme for over one year to obtain a promotion within the programme. This staff member started as a child counsellor and, after completing the learnership, was promoted to facilitator.

"I have been working at Yabonga since 1st August 2017 and started as a child counsellor. I got a learnership to do the childcare worker course, and in 2019 until now. I am a supervisor now".

(Staff Interviewee)

Another staff member, who is also now a supervisor, described a similar career progression.

"I have been working at Yabonga since 2016 as a child counsellor, then 2017, I became a team leader and now I am a supervisor".

(Staff Interviewee)

Staff also claimed to utilise their pre-existing skill set. A staff member used their social worker experience and skill set to manage social support workshops with students on

both an individual level as well as a group level.

Theme Two: Confidence in Programme Objectives and Content

All programme staff had a clear understanding of the programme objectives and could clearly articulate the programme goals. They were highly confident in the content and the importance of the programme. They all had a good understanding of the need it was fulfilling in the community and South Africa.

"There is a huge need in South Africa to close the gap for matric students".

(Staff Interviewee)

Programme staff described the challenges faced by young people in their community and how the programme addresses these challenges. They explained how the programme's goal aims to provide GAP students with skills and foster personal development.

"There is a gap. Students mostly take time to find themselves. Their world is either higher education or the work environment. We create a platform, a programme for young people, it has to do with skills development. It has to do with personal development".

(Staff Interviewee)

There was also a high level of confidence in their skills and experience in delivering the programme confidently.

"Most of the work is about social development. I have the skill set for that. As someone who has received a degree in higher education myself and who is a social worker and working in the space of social development, so I do believe I have the confidence and skills to deliver the programme".

(Staff Interviewee)

Theme Three: Utilising Industry Experts

Where staff felt they lacked the expertise and experience on specialised topics, they made use of experts in key fields. They have brought in admission officers from various universities and colleges to provide detailed information on admission to these institutions.

"I have invited different entities to the programme to provide more detailed information on how to gain access to a particular college or university. I get a representative from their admission office to inform the students how to gain access to UCT or False Bay College".

(Staff Interviewee)

"Where I have lacked the skills, I have brought in someone capable of running such a workshop".

(Staff Interviewee)

Evaluation Question 7: Are the GAP students satisfied with the GAP programme content and activities?

GAP students in both 2020 and 2021 cohorts were asked about their perceptions of their overall experience throughout the year-long programme. They were also asked to provide feedback on the programme content and the programme facilitators. The COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted the 2020 cohort, while the 2021 COVID-19 restrictions were eased, and the impact on the programme was reduced. Comparing the two cohorts' results could provide a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on programme satisfaction scores and feedback.

Overall Satisfaction with the GAP Year Programme

Programme participants were requested to respond to four attributes which assessed their overall satisfaction with the GAP year programme. Table 7 overleaf outlines the descriptive statistics for each of the attributes below.

Table 7.

Descriptive *Statistics of 2021 GAP Programme Activities*

Item	***n***	***Minimum***	***Maximum***	***Mean (SD)***
I enjoyed the Yabonga GAP year programme experience.	9	4	5	4.67 *(.500)*
I have learnt new skills and gained knowledge I can use in the future.	9	5	5	5.00 *(.000)*
Participating in the programme has adequately prepared me to face the challenges in the next stages of my life.	9	4	5	4.50 *(.527)*
Participating in the programme has given me clarity on what I want to do next in my life.	9	4	5	4.56 *(.527)*

The findings indicate that the 2021 GAP students were highly satisfied with the programme experience, with a mean score of 4.67 (SD = .500). This is evident in their ratings, with 100% of the 2021 GAP students either strongly agreeing or agreeing to this attribute. All students felt strongly that, through participation in the 2021 programme, they learnt new skills and gained new knowledge, with a mean score of 5 (SD = .000).

Preparedness for the challenges in life and clarity in terms of the following stages in life received the lowest mean rating of 4.56 (SD = .527); however, the results were still positive overall on both attributes, but there could be room to improve. (Only 56% strongly agreed to these attributes.)

These results are in contrast to the 2020 GAP student cohort, who scored all attributes slightly lower. The overall programme experience achieved an overall mean score of 4.40 (SD = .510), and learning new skills and gaining knowledge achieved a mean score of 4.60 (SD = .516). Preparedness for life experience and clarity for the next life stage both achieved a mean score of 4.56 (SD = .427). While scores are still positive, there is

a slight dissatisfaction with the programme experience, which could be a result of the programme not being implemented to its full extent due to COVID-19 restrictions.

In addition to the two cohorts completing a self-report questionnaire, they also participated in focus group discussions to elicit in-depth feedback on their overall experience. Both the 2020 and 2021 groups' feedback on the overall experience was overwhelmingly positive. This corresponds to the high mean score ratings on the four attributes encompassing their overall experience. Across both cohorts, two key themes emerged: first, their overall experience helped develop self-confidence, and second, they increased their knowledge and skills in two areas: technology and communication. These themes will be discussed in more detail below.

Theme One: Developed Self-confidence

The majority of students in both cohorts reflected on how their self-confidence had improved after completing the programme. Some felt they had been shy and introverted, and since completing the programme, their confidence had improved vastly. This is illustrated in some of the quotations below.

> *"I am more independent and confident when working with people".*
>
> (2021 GAP Student interviewee)

> *"I was an introvert. I learnt social skills and now I am more confident in social settings".*
>
> (2020 GAP Student interviewee)

Confidence also transcended beyond confidence in their skills and abilities but also in knowing what they will be doing in the future. They demonstrated confidence and clarity in terms of the next stage of their lives:

"I am more confident in what I will be doing next year with my life".

(2021 GAP Student Interviewee)

"It was quite an experience. I learnt a lot about what I am going to do next year. How to start a life and it gave me something to do".

(2021 GAP Student interviewee)

Theme Two: Increased Knowledge and Skills

Across both student cohorts, there was a consistent acknowledgement that, through participation in the GAP programme, their skill and knowledge had increased:

"I learnt a lot of things I did not know about, it was a teaching experience".

(2021 GAP Student Interviewee)

There was a particular mention of the computer training received; many students felt this added the most value to their lives.

"It helped me learn about computers, I did not know how to use a computer".

(2021 GAP Student Interviewee)

"It prepared me for the work environment. It taught me about computers and how to use them".

(2021 GAP Student interviewee)

In addition, many students across both cohorts mentioned that the programme also taught them the skills to engage with people and how to work within a group or team setting:

"I learnt how to be around and work with people".

(2021 GAP Student Interviewee)

"I learnt how to work as a team and do group work".

(2020 GAP Student Interviewee)

It is worth noting that, throughout the focus group discussion, many students mentioned that they would like to continue working for Yabonga, but their actual career ambitions were vastly different. This can be illustrated by one student mentioning that she aspired to be an actor and study drama; however, employment at the Yabonga offices provided financial security. This was a recurring theme prevalent across both student cohorts, highlighting the tension between the student's career aspirations and their economic reality and financial constraints.

GAP Year Programme Activities Ratings

The 2021 GAP student cohort was requested to rate the importance of each of the programme activities they covered throughout the year. The descriptive statistics for each programme activity are presented in Table 8 overleaf. The findings show that all GAP students rated all programme activities as being important, with the mean scores ranging from 4.11 (SD = .333) to 5.00 (SD = .000). The table indicates the mean importance of each of the 2021 GAP year programme activities. Activities are ranked from highest to lowest mean score. The 'Vision board and goal planning', 'Computer and technology training' and 'After school homework sessions' were rated as the most important programme activities.

Table 8.

Descriptive Statistics for each 2021 GAP year Programme Activity

Activity	***n***	***Minimum***	***Maximum***	***Mean (SD)***
Vision board and goal planning	9	5	5	5.00 *(.000)*
Computer and technology training	9	4	5	4.89 *(.333)*
Afterschool homework sessions	9	4	5	4.89 *(.333)*
Personal talents	9	4	5	4.67 *(.500)*
Career workshops and training	9	4	5	4.44 *(.527)*
Higher education workshops and training	9	4	5	4.44 *(.527)*
Individual support sessions	9	4	5	4.44 *(.527)*
Mental and physical health	9	4	5	4.33 *(.500)*
Career expo workshops	9	4	5	4.33 *(.500)*
Group support sessions	9	4	5	4.33 *(.500)*
Monthly stipend	9	2	5	4.33 *(1.00)*
Community project	9	3	5	4.22 *(.667)*
Budgeting and personal finance management	9	4	5	4.11 *(.333)*

The mean scores for all programme activities are above the mid-point of 3; however, there are minimums at 3 and below 3, indicating that some students found some activities less important. For example, one student rated the 'Monthly stipend' as 'Less important'.

Relevance of GAP Year Programme Activities

GAP students were also asked about the relevance of programme activities and their reasoning for thinking they were relevant. For both cohorts of students, it was unanimous that none of the programme activities were irrelevant. This was evident amongst the 2020 cohort, who would have already entered the next stage of their lives at the time of this fieldwork.

"The purpose of the programme was to help us and guide us. No activity did not add any value".

(2021 GAP Student Interviewee)

Four key programme activities stood out the most across both cohorts. These are discussed below and ranked in terms of relevance based on the number of mentions across both cohorts. The most relevant programme activities were computer training, vision board and goal setting, communication skills, and finance and budgeting skills.

Theme One: Computer Training and Skills

Many students stated that they did not have much experience or skills in using computers prior to joining the programme. Since its completion, the 2020 cohort has explicitly used the computer skills they gained extensively either in their work or in their studies. For others, it has been highly beneficial in building their career or progressing with their studies.

"I was not familiar with computers, but now I am more comfortable. It has helped me a lot in my work".

(2021 GAP Student Interviewee)

"Now that I have computer skills, I teach young kids at Yabonga about computers and computer literacy".

(2020 GAP Student Interviewee)

Theme Two: Vision Board and Goal Planning

Many students across both cohorts felt that this programme activity was highly relevant. It provided them with a sense of purpose and guidance in terms of planning their futures. They mentioned that it gave them the tools to set goals and focus on their futures. This assisted them in monitoring whether they were on course or track with their life plans and goals and getting back on track if they might detract from their path.

"Vision board helps you to know where you are going to. It's a guide, to stay in your lane and be focused. To Plan your goals and know where you are going in life".

(2021 GAP Student Interviewee)

"Action without a vision is a day dream. Action without a vision is also a nightmare. We need to know what our long-term and short-term goals are".

(2020 GAP Student Interviewee)

Theme Three: Communication Skills

This was mentioned as an invaluable skill set learnt throughout the programme, particularly amongst the 2020 cohort. They found these skills to be highly beneficial in their work and studies.

"The communication skills I have built over the programme has improved my confidence and its skills I use a lot in my work".

(2020 GAP Student Interviewee)

Theme Four: Budgeting and Finance Skills

This was mentioned as a critical skill across both cohorts. It was invaluable, especially in the next phase of their lives, when they might be earning an income. Some of the students who had entered into tertiary education also raised it as a critical skill, as it helped with the management of their student funding.

"Financial training and budgeting was a very important one. It taught me how to budget my money and this also helps me to support others".

(2021 GAP Student Interviewee)

Programme Facilitator Ratings

In addition to understanding how the 2021 GAP students perceived the programme content and activities, the evaluation also sought to provide insight into how students perceived the programme facilitators. This included an assessment of the facilitators'

knowledge of the content, the extent to which the facilitators encouraged engagement, and how they dealt with students throughout the programme. This assessment was conducted through a quantitative self-completion survey. The results are shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9.

Descriptive Statistics of the 2021 GAP Programme Facilitators' Attributes

Attributes	***n***	***Minimum***	***Maximum***	***Mean (SD)***
The programme facilitators were knowledgeable in what they were presenting.	9	4	5	4.11 *(.333)*
Facilitators allowed me to ask questions.	9	4	5	4.11 *(.333)*
Facilitators made me feel comfortable.	9	3	5	4.33 *(.707)*
Facilitator treated all students with respect.	9	2	5	4.44 *(1.014)*
Facilitators challenged me to try my best.	9	4	5	4.44 *(.527)*
Facilitators provided me with adequate feedback on my areas of improvement on completion of a task.	9	4	5	4.22 *(.441)*
I felt comfortable to speak to the facilitators about any problems or challenges I would be facing.	9	4	5	4.44 *(.527)*

All students either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ with the statement that programme facilitators were knowledgeable. Programme facilitators provided an open and welcoming environment where the majority of students felt comfortable confiding about their challenges and asking questions, which is also evident in the high mean scores for these supporting attributes. Also, students felt that they were challenged by facilitators to try their best and provided adequate feedback, indicating that facilitators provided an environment for robust engagement.

Students also felt that facilitators treated them with respect, with 89% of students either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the corresponding statement. There was one student who felt they were not treated with respect by the facilitator.

For the 2020 GAP student cohort, all attributes were rated slightly higher in terms of their mean scores, with the exception of providing adequate feedback, which was rated the lowest, with a mean score of 3.90 (SD = .316).

In summary, the process implementation results indicate that the programme was implemented with high fidelity. The programme was implemented according to plan throughout 2021. In contrast, 2020 proved to be a tumultuous year, with the COVID-19 pandemic imposing numerous constraints and barriers that significantly impacted program implementation. Overcoming these constraints and barriers in 2020 has taught the programme team many invaluable lessons which could be implemented in the programme in the future. The service utilisation results indicate that the programme reached many more students than it did previously. The findings also show that programme facilitators were adequately trained to implement the programme and were highly confident in the content and programme goals. All of these factors translated into a high overall satisfaction with programme activities amongst the majority of GAP students. Students felt very strongly that all programme activities were highly valuable in preparing them for the next stage of their lives, whether it be entering into work or furthering their studies.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall objective of this evaluation was to elicit the Yabonga GAP programme theory, assess its plausibility and evaluate the programme's implementation fidelity. This chapter will discuss both the theory and implementation evaluation findings presented in the previous two chapters. It includes the contribution to knowledge of the study, study limitations and recommendations.

Programme Theory Evaluation

The in-depth literature review conducted as part of the theory evaluation found that the programme logic model was consistent with what was found in similar programmes. While there were many youth development programmes with similar activities, it was challenging to find a programme that was implemented in a similar way to the Yabonga GAP year programme. Nevertheless, numerous similarities were identified across the various programme components, aligning consistently with social science literature. Most of the youth development programmes found in the literature utilised learning interventions focused on building emotional and intellectual intelligence. These activities included communication, technology, presentation, and career training (Amaro-Jiménez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Ballard et al., 2023; Borden et al., 2006). Upon assessing the programme content and activities in comparison to the existing literature, it appears highly likely that the overall Yabonga GAP year programme will achieve the expected outcomes.

There were a few components of youth development programmes that would be worth highlighting. Firstly, to better prepare youth for the next phase of their lives, whether attending tertiary education or entering the workforce, four key dimensions were consistently found across youth development programmes. These included key cognitive strategies, content knowledge, learning strategies, and transitional knowledge and skills (Bates et al., 2019). These will be discussed in detail below.

Cognitive strategies include the ability to formulate problem or opportunity research. At the same time, content knowledge is the academic skills one would have in a specific field before entry to study in this field (Bates et al., 2019). There is evidence of cognitive strategies being employed through the GAP year programme activities, specifically the

community projects, where students need to build and execute a community business project. Content knowledge on specific fields of study was presented through Yabonga GAP year programme activities. However, it had limitations, as this could differ vastly across students who might have differing interests. While the Yabonga GAP year programme activities focused on personal talents, there was no evidence of one-on-one content knowledge-sharing based on each student's personal interests and talents. This could contribute to students' uncertainty in terms of the next stage of their lives and broaden their ambitions outside of employment at the Yabonga offices.

Furthermore, learning strategies refer to non-academic skills, which include time management, study skills, and goal setting. Transitional skills and knowledge are an understanding of how the academic and workplace operates and the norms (Bates et al., 2019). Ensuring these components are added to the programme activities has been shown to improve youths' adjustment and transition into either the workplace or the tertiary education space. Equipping youth with both these 'hard' and 'soft' skills improves their ability to thrive and adjust to this new environment. Multiple GAP year programme activities were focused on learning strategies and developing non-academic skills.

Delving into the tertiary education transition in more detail, finding congruency between youths' personal interests, choice of university degree, and financial costs has been identified as a key obstacle (Horrillo et al., 2021). Youth require a deep understanding of their personal interests and talents and should match this to a suitable tertiary qualification or career path. One of the biggest barriers for many youth is the financial costs of tertiary education; youth often lack knowledge of the various financial options available to them and their implications (Gee et al., 2021b). Improving awareness of these options reduces the pressure and may open this avenue as a viable option when many educational paths might not even be considered due to this barrier. Career workshops and training, and career expo workshops were some of the key GAP year programme activities; however, based on the literature evidence, there appears to be an opportunity for a more personalised approach to career development.

Secondly, parents and guardians play an important role in youths' tertiary and career readiness. They assist in promoting success by supporting and assisting youth in tertiary education selection and planning, as well as supporting the application for financial aid (Horrillo et al., 2021). For many youth residing in underserviced and at-risk communities, the cost of tertiary education can be a significant barrier. Youth programmes, which include support with assistance in improving knowledge of, and confidence in using, various financial aid options amongst the youth and their parents or guardians, can assist in overcoming this barrier. Furthermore, parents and guardians can also play a key role in providing emotional support and motivation. It is, therefore, particularly important that they are involved in goal-setting and career planning (Gee et al., 2020). Integration of guardians and parents into the programme is vital as they will play a supportive role in delivering successful youth development outcomes. Based on the feedback from facilitators and the current GAP year programme theory, parents and guardians do not appear to play a significant role. Given their importance, this does represent a significant opportunity for engagement.

A third component, which was highlighted in similar programmes, is the importance of the inclusion of alums into the programme activities. Alum members from the communities where the youth reside play a critical role model role and build a more realistic and attainable future of the possibilities for the youth. This motivates youth that their ambitions are achievable, as they have first-hand evidence that individuals from the same context as theirs have achieved great things (Gee et al., 2021b). This is particularly important for the Yabonga GAP year programme, as it improves students' self-confidence and allows them to relate to students who have completed the same journey successfully. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated in similar youth programmes that alums could also provide potential employment opportunities, mentoring, and a networking platform.

Lastly, workforce development through providing 'real-world' work experience has been shown to equip students to face the working environment better. This assists youth in understanding workplace norms, etiquette, workplace cultures, and leadership styles (Mitchell-Hawkins & Mellon, 2022). Incorporating experiential learning models into the programme design allows youth to generalise and incorporate key lessons learnt. As part of the GAP year programme activities, students work within the Yabonga offices. However, there is an opportunity for broader work experience outside of the GAP office

in other workplaces.

Workforce development involves four key focus areas: 1) using a positive youth development perspective to identify youths' talent and transferable skills (Solberg et al., 2021); 2) building social intelligence skills and skills focused on the 4th Industrial Revolution; 3) utilising trauma-informed strategies that encourage care and support; and 4) addressing gender and racial inequalities within the workplace (Solberg et al., 2021).

Incorporating these elements into the programme design has been shown to improve youths' workforce and career readiness. Programme staff play a key role in the development and implementation of programme activities. The following sections will explore the quality of programme staff together with the target participant consideration for the Yabonga GAP year programme in detail.

Quality of Programme staff

The quality and skills of programme staff, as well as the relationships between staff and participants, can have a direct impact on the programme's success (Ramey et al., 2018). Programme staff are key role models, and students often model their behaviours and traits based on those of the programme staff. Listening, care, and empathy on the part of staff are key traits that could place programme participants in good stead for future endeavours (Bulanda & Mccrea, 2013). Fostering their skills amongst the programme staff so that they could impart them to the programme participants would be highly beneficial. There is a noticeable level of comfort, trust, openness, and ease between the Yabonga programme facilitators and GAP year students, which is evident in their ratings of the facilitators across these attributes.

Leadership development can be further enhanced when power-sharing is driven between programme staff and participants (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014). It is, therefore, imperative that a positive and engaging relationship is built between students and programme participants. Evaluating the feedback from GAP year students, there was substantial evidence of respect; students felt that programme facilitators treated all students with respect. Facilitators were also seen to challenge GAP students to try their best. There was a two-way communication channel between students and programme facilitators; they felt comfortable asking questions, and facilitators provided adequate

feedback.

Programme staff's skills and competencies can have a positive impact on programme outcomes (Shek et al., 2017). Yabonga GAP year programme staff showed a high degree of confidence in the programme objectives and plans. They were well-equipped with the programme content and also received adequate training. Furthermore, this was confirmed by the GAP students' feedback: they felt programme facilitators were knowledgeable in what they were presenting. Where programme staff felt they lacked the expertise, they also made use of industry experts to ensure that the quality of the programme content was at the highest level.

A shared background between the programme participants and staff has also been proven to lead to positive programme outcomes. The shared background between programme participants and staff can build a closer relationship and assist with challenges faced by participants, like discrimination. Given that programme staff might have first-hand experience in tackling these challenges, they are equipped to coach and mentor through these challenges. Furthermore, programme staff with a shared background present as a more realistic role model and represent more attainable aspirations (McGovern et al., 2020). Yabonga GAP year programme facilitators displayed a deep understanding of the needs of the students and the challenges faced by young people, as they are from the same communities, thus strong levels of empathy.

Target participant considerations

Addressing contextual and societal challenges when designing, implementing, and selecting participants for the Yabonga GAP year programme is critical. Gender inequality is a pervasive issue across spheres of society, particularly evident in the next stage of the GAP year student's life. There could also be an opportunity to develop separate programme activities focused on female empowerment. This is particularly relevant from a female standpoint, equipping students with the social and emotional resilience skills to manage these challenges. Research has shown that when young

women were together in a female-focused programme, they felt more supported and had a secure environment (Franchett et al., 2019).

Age also plays a key role in leadership and skills development, as this often occurs in the formative years. Critical life, leadership, and social skills are developed at an early age and providing an opportunity to nurture these skills from this young age into future leaders in adulthood is desirable (Scheer & Dale Safrit, 2001). Yabonga could incorporate age-appropriate leadership skills development in other programmes targeted at younger children.

Increased levels of diversity have also been shown to broaden youths' perspectives and develop greater empathy. Ensuring a broader diversity of youth to participate in such a programme has been shown to improve resilience and collaboration (Allen-Handy et al., 2021). These are key skills required both in the future workplace and within tertiary education, where youth will need to engage with individuals from various backgrounds. There is an opportunity for Yabonga to possibly partner with other similar youth development programmes with students from different backgrounds to collaborate on projects or initiatives.

The next section of this chapter will discuss the process evaluation results in more detail, particularly as they pertain to the implementation and delivery of the Yabonga GAP year programme.

Process Evaluation

This section will provide a detailed discussion covering service utilisation, implementation fidelity, and service delivery.

Service utilisation

The Yabonga GAP year programme was able to reach a significantly higher number of students in 2021, the highest number since its inception. The programme was seen to be highly attractive to many students, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many students were faced with high levels of uncertainty for their future.

This increase in demand could place Yabonga under strain in terms of their available resources and could negatively impact the quality of service delivery.

Overall, the programme achieved reasonable attendance rates, particularly in 2021. However, these attendance rates were impacted by COVID-19 during the height of the pandemic. Many students faced financial pressure within their family environments, and some had to drop out to assist their families with their financial obligations. This had a negative impact on the potential number of students who utilised the programme's services. Throughout 2021, as COVID-19 restrictions eased, attendance rates improved.

Programme staff applied lessons and were able to adapt to changing COVID-19 restrictive legislation, highlighting a key programme staff trait that required agility. Ensuring that a key competency like agility is built into programme staff's training as well as the students' programme activities would be critical. Faced with an ever-changing context, having these skills would be beneficial to both the Yabonga GAP year students and the programme staff.

Accessibility to all the attendance records was limited for this evaluation. Thus, only two months' records were analysed for this study. The available attendance data were analysed and provided a view of attendance, although it was not the complete view. This presents some disadvantages, mainly related to the generalisation of the attendance rates for the outstanding months, as well as potentially underestimating the service utilisation component of this evaluation (Redmond et al., 2021)

Implementation fidelity

Over 2021, as COVID-19 restrictions eased, implementation improved vastly, and all programme activities were implemented as per plan, indicating a high level of implementation fidelity. It has been demonstrated across multiple studies that programmes characterised with high implementation fidelity have a higher likelihood of reaching their outcomes (Pascual et al., 2011).

Applying lessons learnt from the previous year, the programme team was able to adapt and overcome the challenges to deliver the programme as it was intended. This is supported by numerous studies that have shown that being able to adapt to the current context has been shown to drive programme effectiveness (Schaap et al., 2018). Increased flexibility in programme implementation by addressing the needs of the current programme context has achieved positive outcomes (Schaap et al., 2018). These are important attributes for the staff to embody as they can adapt to various complex environments and situations. Furthermore, it would be a beneficial skill to impart to the Yabonga GAP year programme students.

To further support the high implementation fidelity in 2021, programme staff felt that they were well-equipped and trained to deliver the programme activities. Staff also had a firm understanding of the programme's objectives as well as the ability to articulate them clearly. They also displayed a high degree of confidence in the programme content. This is supported by the literature: programme staff training can have a positive impact on the programme implementation fidelity as they are better equipped to deliver programme activities (Fagan et al., 2008). Furthermore, where they felt they had knowledge or expertise gaps, programme staff made use of industry experts. The high level of implementation fidelity supported by the knowledgeable and skilled staff has translated into overall positive feedback in service delivery, which will be discussed in the subsequent sectio

Service Delivery

There was a high level of satisfaction with the programme experience from the Yabonga GAP year students' perspective. They were overwhelmingly positive in terms of their responses to the programme activities. Participating in the GAP year programme, students' self-confidence improved significantly, particularly in social contexts. They felt that, through completing the programme, they had acquired new skills and gained more knowledge. Students' preparedness for the next stage of their lives received the lowest rating, which, however, was still very high. It appears that, while the programme was highly effective at skills development on both a technical and social level, there was room to improve students' decisiveness for the next stage of their lives. This was also made evident in their feedback on the various programme activities. The activities that aimed at improving life and technical skills received high ratings, while the activities focused on the next stage of their lives, like career planning and higher education workshops, received slightly lower ratings. This could point to students' lack of confidence in the next stage of their lives. They were not absolutely clear and were still faced with a level of uncertainty in terms of their next life stage. It also points to an observation made during the student interviews that there is a lack of students having broader ambitions outside of the confines of the Yabonga GAP year programme.

In terms of relevance, computer training, vision board and goal planning, communication skills and budgeting and financial skills were identified as the most relevant skills acquired throughout the programme and would be most beneficial for the next stage of their lives. This pointed to the learning strategies, which are non-academic skills. At the same time, none of the programme activities focused on developing cognitive strategies, content knowledge and transitional skills were deemed as relevant. There is an opportunity to review these programme activities, as they are essential components of youth development found across various YDPs.

The Yabonga GAP year students' experience of the programme staff was overwhelmingly positive. Not only did the programme staff themselves feel confident in the programme content, but this was also evident from the student's perspective; they felt that the programme staff were highly knowledgeable. Furthermore, students felt that staff were highly engaging and treated them with respect. These characteristics were

illustrated in the literature as being key ingredients for successful programme outcomes, particularly the relationship between the programme staff and the participants. Programme staff's delivery of the programme activities was highly rated amongst the Yabonga GAP year students, further supporting the fact that the programme was well-executed.

Recommendations

This evaluation sought to provide actionable insights and recommendations that the Yabonga management team could implement to improve the GAP programme's performance. The following section provides recommendations based on the findings uncovered in both the theory and process evaluations based on the gaps identified. Outlined below are the key recommendations suggested by the evaluator:

- The evaluator recommends investing in a robust digital monitoring and evaluation system to capture key indicators like attendance and engagement. An access card system is suggested to be installed, which will automatically record GAP students' movements. This will enable the Yabonga management team to monitor attendance rates in real time and to identify any areas for programme improvement. It is also recommended that dedicated, trained, and experienced staff members conduct the required analysis.

- The Yabonga management team should place greater emphasis on programme activities that focus on career development and tertiary education. Career development should include internships or work shadowing to increase students' exposure to the working environment. Implementing tertiary education tours at various institutions would increase students' exposure to university or college life.

- The evaluator also suggests that the Yabonga GAP year programme partners with similar programmes where students are from different contexts and backgrounds. This could be an opportunity to network and engage with students from diverse backgrounds. Embracing and fostering diversity has been shown to improve youth development outcomes and their ability to thrive in the early stages of adulthood.

- The evaluator also recommends that a database of all alums be built and that contact and engagement be continuously maintained. This could be a database

from which to draw potential guest speakers and to be used for recruitment for potential job opportunities.

- The Yabonga management team should put in place a training programme for their staff focused on building adaptability, agility, and resilience skills to assist them when dealing with adversity. This should also be incorporated into the student's programme content, as these are critical skills required as students enter into the next stage of their lives, especially to cope with challenging situations.

- The evaluator also suggests increased engagement and inclusion of GAP students' parents and guardians, particularly around career planning and tertiary education decisions through regular engagement initiatives.

Contribution to knowledge

This evaluation has contributed to a developing area of research on programme theory and process evaluations, particularly within the field of youth development programmes. Through the literature review process, it was found that very few studies focused on assessing programme implementation and design, with the focus being on programme outcomes and impact.

There is limited research on youth development programmes within the African context and, more specifically, within South Africa. In South Africa, a few evaluations have been conducted for various youth development programmes; however, most of them focus on primary and secondary school learners, and very few focus on young adults and those who have completed high school. Therefore, this evaluation aimed to contribute to this very niche area of literature within the African context.

This was the first evaluation for the Yabonga GAP year programme, and it provided new knowledge to the Yabonga team. The evaluation sought to provide sufficient information that would contribute to programme improvement and foster organisational learning and development.

This research also provides an opportunity for other researchers to expand on topics uncovered in this evaluation. This includes the impact of the level of diversity and gender equality on youth development programmes, particularly amongst programme participants.

Limitations

The theory evaluation was limited due to the scarcity of South African literature on youth development programmes. This resulted in the theory evaluation and plausibility assessment being mainly based on research conducted in Western societies. While the societal dynamics differ vastly from those in South Africa, the target participants they seek to serve are very similar. Most of these programmes target at-risk youth and aim to assist them in transitioning into adult life. Given that the target participants and programme objectives were comparable, therefore the programmes could be reviewed. Evidence from Western societies could be compared to those programmes within the South African context.

A further limitation of the theory evaluation is related to the use of prior evaluations to determine the plausibility of the Yabonga GAP year programme. Each youth development programme differs, is unique, and operates in different contexts, making it difficult to find a programme comparable to that of the Yabonga GAP programme. Terminologies and descriptions of concepts can differ, making the theory evaluation difficult to verify the programme theory against the relevant literature. To overcome these challenges, the evaluator conducted the plausibility assessment by breaking down each component of the Yabonga GAP year programme and comparing it to the available relevant literature. This process is also recommended by Rossi et al. (2018), where the programme theory is broken into components to overcome these challenges.

Limited access to attendance records provided only a limited view of actual programme attendance and not the complete picture. The evaluator, therefore, could not extrapolate the attendance for the whole year duration of the programme.

Programme staff interviews could have included an element of self-reporting and bias. They might not have been entirely open and transparent in their responses owing to the fear of their negative feedback being reported. To minimise this, the evaluator anonymised the identity of the staff members to keep their responses strictly confidential.

Not all GAP year students participated in the research, as some might have dropped out. Therefore, we do not have a clear assessment of their responses. There might be valuable insights that might have been excluded from this research.

Conclusions

The evaluation concluded that the Yabonga GAP year programme provides young adults in South Africa with positive and uplifting personal development outcomes as they approach the next stage of their lives. The underlying Yabonga GAP year programme theory was deemed to be plausible and consistent with relevant youth development literature. This provides a strong case for the Yabonga GAP year programme to achieve its expected outcomes. Through the literature and theory evaluation, there were some important considerations programme staff would need to take into account when implementing the Yabonga GAP year programme. Key programme features need to be considered: firstly, the target participant should be considered in terms of gender, diversity, and age. The target participant considerations can influence the participants' programme experience and the outcomes. Secondly, the programme staff is critical in terms of their level of empathy, relationship, and power dynamic with the participants, as well as their skills, experience, and shared background with the participants. Paying careful attention to staff quality is critical as they play a key role in the successful delivery of the programme.

In terms of the process evaluation, the research found high levels of implementation fidelity are strongly related to successful programme outcomes. The results showed that the Yabonga GAP year programme was implemented with high levels of fidelity. Furthermore, the service utilisation results illustrated that the programme accommodated many more youth than it did previously. Programme facilitators were well-equipped and trained to implement the programme, which resulted in high overall satisfaction amongst the programme participants. The strong results translated into youth who were much better prepared for the next stage of their lives.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Theory Evaluation Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

My name is Brent Adams, and I am currently a graduate student from the University of Cape Town (UCT). I am completing a Master in Philosophy in Programme Evaluation and part of the requirements of completing this master degree involves conducting a real-life evaluation. I have partnered with Yabonga and will be conducting a process and theory evaluation for the Yabonga GAP year student programme. I would like to welcome you to participate in this evaluation research as you are a key member of the programme staff. As part of this study, you would be required to answer a series of questions, I will share with you. If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign the consent section below in this letter. Please note that participation is completely voluntary and if you feel that you would not like to participate you are welcome to exit at any point.

This research has been approved by our Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

The workshop duration will last for approximately 120 minutes and there is a series of two workshops planned as part of this research. No compensation will be provided for participating or is there any known risk. We can assure you that all information gathered in this workshop, will be treated as strictly confidential.

The data obtained will be invaluable to further the improvement of the Yabonga GAP year student programme. If you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me using the contact details provided below.

Sincerely,
Brent Adams
ADMBRE004@myuct.ac.za

If you are not satisfied with the way this study is being conducted, you may report (anonymously, if you so choose) any complaints to the course convenor, Dr Adiilah Boodhoo, adiilah.boodhoo@uct.ac.za

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I am a willing participant for this research project and have had the opportunity to ask any questions.

……..	……..	……..……
Name of participant	Date	Signature
……..	……..	……..……
Name of participant	Date	Signature

THEORY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

WORKSHOP 1: Duration: approximately 2-hour session

- Who is the target population?
    - How are they identified, recruited, and selected?
    - How many are accepted into the programme?
- What is the overall goal of the Yabonga GAP year student programme?
    - What are the short-term goals?
    - What are the long-term goals?
- What are the programme activities and schedule?
    - Can you describe them in detail?
    - How are these activities delivered and by whom?
    - Who is responsible for facilitating these programme activities?
    - What are the outputs of these activities?
    - What resources are used to ensure that the activities are implemented as intended?

WORKSHOP 2: Duration: approximately 2-hour session

- Does everyone agree that the activities presented represents the reality?
    - Are there any amends and adjustments?
- What are the underlying assumptions of the Yabonga GAP year student programme?
    - What is the flow of activities? Are they in the right sequence?
    - Do they lead to the outputs in a logical manner?
    - Which short-term outcomes lead to which medium-term outcomes logically?
    - Do both the short and long-term outcomes lead to the long-term outcomes logically?

Appendix B: Programme Staff Interview Guide

Dear Participant,

My name is Brent Adams, and I am currently a graduate student from the University of Cape Town (UCT). I am completing a Master in Philosophy in Programme Evaluation and part of the requirements of completing this master degree involves conducting a real-life evaluation. I have partnered with Yabonga and will be conducting a process and theory evaluation for the Yabonga GAP year student programme. I would like to welcome you to participate in this evaluation research as you are a key member of the programme staff. As part of this study, you would be required to answer a series of questions, I will share with you. If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign the consent section below in this letter. Please note that participation is completely voluntary and if you feel that you would not like to participate you are welcome to exit at any point.

This research has been approved by our Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

The interview duration will last for approximately 60 minutes. No compensation will be provided for participating or is there any known risk. We can assure you that all information gathered in this interview, will be treated as strictly confidential.

The data obtained will be invaluable to further the improvement of the Yabonga GAP year student programme. If you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me using the contact details provided below.

Sincerely,
Brent Adams
ADMBRE004@myuct.ac.za

If you are not satisfied with the way this study is being conducted, you may report (anonymously, if you so choose) any complaints to the course convenor, Dr Adiilah Boodhoo, adiilah.boodhoo@uct.ac.za

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I am a willing participant for this research project and have had the opportunity to ask any questions.

……..	……..	……..……
Name of participant	Date	Signature
……..	……..	……..……
Name of participant	Date	Signature

PROGRAMME STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE

This is an interview for the evaluation research on the Yabonga GAP year student programme for a Master in Philosophy in Programme Evaluation. You are kindly requested to participate in this research study as your responses would add tremendous value. This interview aims to gather as much feedback from key programme organizational staff as possible and will focus on programme implementation and activities. All responses will be treated a strictly confidential and feedback will not be identified by name or will be traced back to you. Only the researcher will have access to the data of the research study. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you will be free to withdraw from the research process at any time. This research study will follow the strict ethical codes. Thank you for your time.

SECTION A:

Respondent code: ……

SECTION B:

Interview questions:

1. What is your role and what programme activities are you responsible for?
2. How long have you been working at Yabonga? And the GAP year programme?
3. Why is the GAP year programme important? What needs does it fulfil?
4. Do you have a clear understanding of the programme goals and objectives?
5. Were you able to deliver all the intended activities you were assigned?
   If not, what prevented you from implementing these activities?
6. Were there any changes made to the schedule of programme activities?
   If yes, what were the changes and reasons why these changes were made?
7. Have you received any training for the activities you are facilitating?
8. Do you feel adequately equipped with the skills and training to implement the programme activities confidently?
9. What has the impact been positive and/or negative of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of the programme activities?
10. Thinking back to a period before 2020, how has the programme changed and what is different?
11. What has been the implementation strengths and challenges?
12. Is there any other further feedback you would you like to provide regarding the GAP year programme? Are there any recommendations for improvement?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

Appendix C: GAP Student Questionnaire & Discussion guide

Dear GAP student,

My name is Brent Adams and I am currently a post-graduate student at the University of Cape Town (UCT). As part of the requirements of my degree, I am evaluating the Yabonga GAP year student programme. The purpose of this evaluation, this questionnaire and group discussion is to gather as much information as possible about your experience and perception of the Yabonga GAP year programme. This research has been approved by Ethics in Research Committee of the Faculty of Commerce. There are no evident risks to you participating in this research study and participation is completely voluntary you are free to withdraw at any point in time.

There is no need to write down your name on this questionnaire and all your answers will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Please complete all the questions provided in this questionnaire and it should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. This will be followed by a group discussion with your classmates, led by a trained moderator, which will last approximately 90 minutes.

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

If you have any questions or queries, please feel free to contact me at:
ADMBRE004@myuct.ac.za

Sincerely,
Brent Adams

SECTION A: SELF-COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE (approximately 30mins)

1. GAP student's overall satisfaction of the programme (based on the intended programme outputs and outcomes):

Thinking back to your experience as being part of the Yabonga GAP year programme. Please tick your response to the statements below on a scale of 1-5, where 5 means you strongly agree and 1 means you strongly disagree.

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Not sure 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
1.	I enjoyed the Yabonga GAP year programme experience					
2.	I have learnt new skills and gain knowledge I can use in the future					
3.	Participating in the programme has adequately prepared me to face the challenges in the next stages of my life					
4.	Participating in the programme has given me clarity on what I want to do next in my life					

2. Rating of GAP programme activities (based on the programme schedule provided)

I would now like you to think of all the programme activities you have participated in. On a scale of 1-5, where 5 means you believe it is very important and 1 means you believe it is not important at all, please rate the importance of all the programme activities below to you?

No.	Programme activities	Not at all important 1	Less important 2	Not sure 3	Important 4	Very Important 5	Did not participate in activity
1.	Vision Board and goal planning						
2	Computer and Technology training						
3.	Budgeting and personal finance management						
4.	Community project						
5.	Career workshops and training						
6.	Mental and Physical Health						
7.	Higher education workshops and training						
8.	Career Expo workshops						
9.	Personal Talents						
10.	After school homework sessions						
11.	Group support sessions						
12.	Individual support sessions						
13.	Monthly Stipend						

3. Rating of the programme facilitators (adopted from Ready Tool, (Klein et al., 2006)

Thinking back to your experience as being part of the Yabonga GAP year programme and the programme facilitators who ran the various training session. Please tick your response to the statements below on a scale of 1-5, where 5 means you strongly agree and 1 means you strongly disagree.

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Not sure 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
1.	The programme facilitators were knowledgeable in what they were presenting					
2.	Facilitators allowed me to ask questions					
3.	Facilitators made me feel comfortable					
4.	Facilitator treated all students with respect					
5.	Facilitators challenged me to try my best					
6.	Facilitators provided me with adequate feedback on my areas of improvement on completion of a task					
7.	I felt comfortable to speak to the facilitators about any problems or challenges I would be facing					

4. Demographic information (for analytical purposes only)

I. Date of birth: ☐

II. **Gender:** FEMALE ☐ MALE ☐ PREFER NOT TO DISCLOSE ☐

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

SECTION B: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (approximately 60 minutes)

Current students:

1. What were the **highlights** of your overall experience of the entire GAP year programme and why?
2. What were some of the **challenges** you faced over the GAP year programme and how did you overcome them?
3. Which programme activities were the most **relevant**? Why?
4. Which programme activities were **irrelevant**? Why?
5. Have you **decided** what you will do next year?
    a. What are your plans for next year?
    b. How has the programme helped you decide on your plans for next year?
    c. Do you feel adequately prepared for the next stage in your life? Why?
6. Lastly, would you recommend any changes to the Yabonga GAP year programme? If so, what would they be?

Past students:

1. What were the **highlights** of your overall experience of the entire GAP year programme and why?
2. What were some of the **challenges** you faced over the GAP year programme and how did you overcome them?
3. Which programme activities were the most **relevant**? Why?
4. Which programme activities were **irrelevant**? Why?
5. How has the programme helped you decide on your plans?
6. Did you feel **adequately prepared** when you completed the programme? Why?
7. Lastly, would you **recommend** any changes to the Yabonga GAP year programme? If so, what would they be?

Appendix D: Letter of Agreement

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

In order to comply with the rules of the Faculty of Commerce, we request you sign below to indicate that you are aware of the research / evaluation been undertaken by one of our students in your organisation, and that you will support the student to access programme data, records and recipients if applicable.

Yours sincerely,

Associate Professor Sarah Chapman

COURSE CONVENOR: MPhil Programme Evaluation and PhD in Programme Evaluation

AGREEMENT FOR STUDENT TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH AND/OR AN EVALUATION IN YOUR ORGANISATION:

....
Signature of Authorised Person Organisation Date

.....

Name of the programme student will evaluate (if applicable)

Appendix E: Ethics Clearance Certificate

Faculty of Commerce

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch, 7701
2.26 Leslie Commerce Building, Upper Campus
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 4375/ 5748 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 4369
E-mail: jacques.rousseau@uct.ac.za
Internet: www.uct.ac.za
@Commerce UCT UCT Commerce Faculty Office

08 11 2021

Brent Adams

School of Management Studies

University of Cape Town

REF: REC 2021/11/006

A Theory and Process Evaluation of the Yabonga GAP Year Student Programme

We are pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved. Unless otherwise specified this ethical clearance is valid until 31-Dec-2022 .

Your clearance may be renewed upon application.

Please be aware that you need to notify the Ethics Committee immediately should any aspect of your study regarding the engagement with participants as approved in this application, change. This may include aspects such as changes to the research design, questionnaires, or choice of participants.

The ongoing ethical conduct throughout the duration of the study remains the responsibility of the principal investigator.

We wish you well for your research.

2021.11.08
23:27:27 +02'00'

Jacques Rousseau
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University of Cape Town
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