



Examining the Role of Student Representative Council (SRC) on Student's Well-being at the Higher Education Institution

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v6i11.1644>

Abstract

Students as a political constituency have always been admired, acknowledged, and feared for their adopted political views and campaigns they engage in. This has been the case since 1976 when students in Soweto went to the streets in direct defiance of the apartheid regime. In Higher Education Institutions (HEI), Student Representative Council (SRC) is entrusted with the primary responsibility of representing, overseeing, and managing academic concerns for students. In other words, they serve as student leaders and representatives on institutional committees and councils to champion the interests of students. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of SRC in enhancing student well-being at institutions of higher learning. The research draws upon existing literature reviews of scholarly articles, reports, and published studies. It is solely a desktop study. The paper highlights the significant contributions of SRCs to the overall well-being of students at institutions of higher learning, through advocacy, engagement, and policy involvement. This paper recommends continued recognition of SRC at the HEIs and the important role they play in creating a platform to effectively address students' needs which contributes to a positive and thriving campus environment.

Keywords: SRC; Higher Education Institution; Student Well-being; Advocacy and Representation

Introduction

Higher Education Institutions play a pivotal role in shaping students' academic and personal development (Hemmings, Hill & Sharp, 2013). In this dynamic environment, it is essential to have mechanisms in place that not only foster academic success but also ensure the overall well-being of students. The Student Representative Council (SRC), a body comprising elected student leaders, holds a

unique position in this regard (Nyundu, Naidoo & Chagonda, 2015). The SRC serves as a bridge between students and the university management in advocating for student interests and engaging in activities that contribute to a positive campus environment. In this research, the authors delved into the multifaceted role of the SRC in promoting student well-being at higher institutions. Bhana (2021) postulates that SRC serves as a powerful voice for students within the institutional framework. It represents the diverse needs and concerns of the student body, allowing students to actively participate in shaping their educational experience. This student body provides a platform for open dialogue with the university management to ensure students' voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes (Bourne & Winstone, 2021). This democratic representation fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment among students, which is vital for their overall well-being.

The SRC often takes a proactive stance in addressing pressing issues that affect student wellbeing (Ntsala & Mahlatji, 2016). This may include advocating for improved mental health services, promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives, or spearheading campaigns to raise awareness about various student concerns. Through these actions, the SRC not only addresses immediate challenges but also plays a role in creating a campus culture that prioritizes the holistic development of students. It plays a crucial role in organizing extracurricular activities and events that contribute to the social and emotional well-being of students (Sekhri, 2019). These activities go beyond the classroom and provide opportunities for students to build friendships, develop leadership skills, and explore their interests. Through organizing cultural festivals, sports events, or community service projects, the SRC fosters a vibrant campus life that enhances the overall quality of student life. In addition to advocating for student interests and organizing events, the SRC often provides essential support services to students (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004). This includes offering guidance and assistance to students facing academic challenges, facilitating mentorship programs, and providing resources for personal development. These services contribute to a sense of safety and support that is integral to student wellbeing.

Methodology

The design, organization, strategy, and procedures used to collect and analyse data for a study are referred to as research methodology (Gupta & Gupta, 2022). This conceptual paper is based solely on a review and analysis of research and data from the existing literature. The insights offered in this study are based on secondary data, which is derived from primary or published data. Secondary analysis is the process of using information from previously completed and published research to address a question that was not addressed in the original piece (Johnston, 2014). The information gathered ought to be sufficient, and pertinent, but not excessive (Tripathy, 2013). To gather secondary data considering this, the researchers employed a purposive sampling technique. Additional sources for this secondary data were acquired from several research platforms, including Google Scholar, Jstor, EbcoHost, Institutional Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD) repositories, and Sabinet, which were all dedicated to the topic at hand.

Promoting Inclusivity and Diversity

The promotion of inclusivity and diversity is crucial for the success of HEIs. Crimmins (2022) postulates that HEIs advocate for inclusivity and diversity. The SRC plays a multifaceted and vital role in cultivating a campus environment that embraces and thrives on inclusivity and diversity, directly impacting students' overall well-being (Lebelo, 2021). Through a range of initiatives, the SRC actively promotes an atmosphere where students from all backgrounds feel valued, respected, and supported. Through organizing events such as cultural festivals, heritage celebrations etc, the SRC creates spaces that celebrate the unique identities and traditions of every student. These events not only foster a sense of belonging but also broaden students' perspectives, enriching their academic experience (Styron Jr, 2010).

The SRC's commitment to inclusivity and diversity extends to educational initiatives as well. Through workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns, the SRC educates the campus community about the importance of understanding and respecting different cultures (Cross, 2004). These efforts go beyond surface-level appreciation, encouraging meaningful conversations about social issues, privilege, and equity. By providing a platform for students to engage in these dialogues, the SRC equips them with the tools to advocate for inclusivity beyond the campus borders, positively impacting their personal growth and sense of purpose.

Perhaps most importantly, the SRC's commitment to advancing inclusivity and diversity conveys a strong message that the institutions of higher learning should support each student's individuality. Wang and Castañeda-Sound (2008) state that the affirmation can have a profound effect on students' self-esteem, mental well-being, and overall academic success. The sense of belonging that stems from being part of an inclusive community can reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, contributing to a healthier campus environment. In essence, the SRC's duty is not only to enhance students' well-being during their time on campus but also to prepare them to navigate a global society that increasingly values diversity and intercultural competence.

Peer Mentorship Programs

Peer mentorship programs orchestrated by the SRC play a pivotal role in fostering a supportive and empowering campus environment, directly enriching students' overall well-being (Graham, 1999). These programs create a unique avenue for students to connect, learn, and grow from one another's experiences. The SRC facilitates a transfer of knowledge and guidance that extends beyond academics, aiding students in navigating the challenges of Higher Learning Institution life more effectively by pairing upperclassmen with newcomers. New students often face the stress of adjusting to unfamiliar academic and social settings (Ahrari, Krauss, Suandi, Abdullah, Sahimi, Olutokunbo & Dahalan, 2019). The mentorship initiative alleviates these challenges by offering a safe space for mentees to seek advice on a range of topics, from course selections and study strategies to time management and campus involvement. Through peer mentorship programs, the SRC provides a platform for meaningful interpersonal relationships to flourish. The mentor-mentee bond can evolve into a valuable friendship, nurturing a sense of belonging and reducing feelings of isolation, which are essential components of students' overall well-being (Peirson, 1993).

The peer mentorship programs championed by the SRC contribute to the holistic development of both mentors and mentees. Mentors sharpen leadership and communication skills as they guide their peers, boosting their own confidence and sense of responsibility. Meanwhile, mentees benefit from personalized advice and gain insights into navigating the intricacies of institutions of higher learning life. According to Senyshyn (2019) the two-way exchange of knowledge fosters a culture of collaborative learning and empathy, enhancing students' interpersonal skills and their capacity to cope with academic and personal challenges. The SRC's initiative goes beyond conventional educational support, actively nurturing an environment where students feel empowered, valued, and capable of succeeding in their academic journey (Mohtady, Könings, Al-Eraky, Muijtjens & van Merriënboer, 2019).

Liaison with Faculty and Administration

The SRC plays a critical role in enhancing students' well-being by serving as a vital bridge between the student body and the faculty/administration. The SRC's role in fostering effective communication and collaboration between students and academic authorities directly impacts the overall quality of education and campus life. By establishing an open line of communication, the SRC ensures that students' concerns, needs, and perspectives are heard and considered, thus contributing to a more student-centered and responsive educational environment (Akkurt, 2014). One significant contribution of the SRC in liaising with faculty and administration is the ability to convey feedback on academic matters

(Chinsamy, 1995). Through surveys, town hall meetings, and formal discussions, the SRC gathers insights from the student body regarding teaching methodologies, course content, and assessment methods. By presenting this feedback constructively to faculty and administrators, the SRC influences positive changes that align with students' learning needs. This two-way dialogue enhances the academic experience, reduces potential sources of stress, and promotes an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding.

In facilitating feedback, the SRC also plays a critical role in advocating for policies that directly affect students' well-being. Whether it's proposing changes to examination schedules, advocating for better access to resources, or addressing concerns about campus facilities, the SRC ensures that students' voices are represented in decision-making processes (Varnham, Olliffe, Waite, K.A.T.R.I.N.A & Cahill, 2017). This advocacy goes beyond individual concerns; it contributes to creating an environment where students feel that their education and overall experience are being prioritized. By actively engaging with the faculty and administration, the SRC reinforces the notion that the campus community functions as a cohesive and collaborative entity, which in turn has a positive impact on students' mental and emotional well-being.

Study Support Initiatives

The SRC significantly enhances students' overall well-being through its implementation of study support initiatives (Halliday, Kern, Garrett & Turnbull, 2019). Recognizing that academic success and well-being are closely intertwined, the SRC's focus on study support initiatives directly addresses the challenges students face in managing their coursework effectively. By offering resources and strategies to improve study skills, time management, and academic performance, the SRC plays a vital role in reducing academic-related stress and promoting a balanced student life.

One key contribution of the SRC's study support initiatives is the provision of workshops and seminars focused on study skills and time management (Gerrard & Billington, 2014). These workshops equip students with essential tools for organizing their coursework, optimizing study sessions, and effectively managing their time. By imparting these skills, the SRC empowers students to approach their studies with confidence and competence, resulting in improved academic performance. Moreover, the acquisition of effective study strategies can alleviate the pressure that often accompanies academic challenges, contributing to students' mental well-being.

Additionally, the SRC's provision of study resources further contributes to students' academic success and overall well-being (Holfve-Sabel, 2014). By curating collections of past exam papers, sample essays, and study guides, the SRC enables students to access valuable materials that aid their preparation. This resource-sharing fosters a collaborative atmosphere where students support one another in their academic endeavours, fostering a sense of community and reducing the isolation that can sometimes accompany academic struggles. Furthermore, the SRC's study support initiatives extend beyond tangible resources to include emotional support and peer interaction. The SRC can organize study groups, where students can collaborate, ask questions, and clarify doubts in a supportive environment. This interaction not only enhances academic learning but also nurtures a sense of camaraderie that contributes to students' social and emotional well-being. By facilitating connections and peer-based learning, the SRC's initiatives foster a holistic approach to well-being that encompasses both academic success and personal growth (Sheikhhattari, Mehravaran, Apata, Silver, Murphy, Hurtado & Kamangar, 2022).

Awareness Campaigns and Workshops

SRC makes a substantial impact on students' well-being through its organization of awareness campaigns and workshops (Mthethwa & Chikoko, 2020). These initiatives provide a platform to address a wide range of topics related to mental health, diversity, social issues, and personal development. By actively raising awareness and fostering conversations on these critical subjects, the SRC contributes to a

campus environment that is informed, empathetic, and supportive, ultimately enhancing students' overall well-being. One of the primary contributions of the SRC's awareness campaigns and workshops is the destigmatization of mental health (Smith, 2015). By hosting events that focus on mental health awareness, stress management, and self-care, the SRC helps to break down barriers that prevent students from seeking help when needed. These initiatives encourage open conversations about mental health, reducing the isolation that often accompanies struggles and encouraging students to prioritize their emotional well-being. In doing so, the SRC contributes to a campus culture that values mental health as an integral component of overall wellness.

The workshops and campaigns organized by the SRC foster personal growth and self-awareness among students. By offering sessions on topics such as communication skills, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution, the SRC equips students with valuable life skills that extend beyond the classroom (Black, Walsh, Magee, Hutchins, Berman & Groundwater, 2014). These workshops empower students to navigate social and interpersonal challenges effectively, promoting positive relationships and personal resilience. As students acquire these skills, they become better equipped to handle the complexities of life, which in turn positively impacts their emotional and social well-being.

Creating Safe Spaces

The establishment of safe spaces by the SRC is a fundamental contribution to enhancing students' well-being on campus. These safe spaces offer an essential sanctuary where students can openly express themselves, share their experiences, and seek support without fear of judgment or discrimination. By creating an environment of trust and empathy, the SRC fosters a sense of belonging and emotional well-being among students who may otherwise feel isolated or marginalized (Hubner, 2021). One significant aspect of the SRC's creation of safe spaces is its role in addressing mental health concerns. These spaces provide an avenue for students to discuss their struggles, challenges, and feelings with their peers. By normalizing conversations around mental health, the SRC contributes to reducing the stigma associated with seeking help. Students can find solace in knowing that they are not alone in their experiences, which can be a powerful factor in alleviating feelings of isolation and promoting positive mental well-being (Sheperis, Cuff & Sheperis, 2023).

Safe spaces established by the SRC contribute to a more inclusive campus culture. These spaces can be designated for specific communities, such as LGBTQ+ individuals, international students, or racial and ethnic minorities, providing an environment where students can connect with others who share similar backgrounds and experiences. This fosters a sense of solidarity and belonging, enhancing students' social well-being and creating a more diverse and tolerant campus community. Additionally, safe spaces can serve as platforms for open discussions on sensitive topics, such as discrimination, harassment, and social injustices. The SRC can organize workshops, panels, and dialogues that encourage critical thinking and awareness of these issues. By providing a space for students to engage in respectful and informative conversations, the SRC facilitates a deeper understanding of complex societal problems, promoting empathy and cultivating socially responsible individuals who contribute positively to their communities (Bordignon, 2016).

Scholarship and Grant Information

SRC plays a crucial role in positively impacting students' well-being by providing valuable information and resources related to scholarships and grants (Van Gyampo, Debrah & Aggrey, 2016). These initiatives alleviate financial burdens and open up opportunities for students to pursue higher education without excessive financial strain. By centralizing information and advocating for increased access to financial support, the SRC contributes to a more equitable and accessible education for all students, fostering a sense of security and well-being. One of the primary contributions of the SRC in disseminating scholarship and grant information is the empowerment of students to make informed decisions about their education (Cheng & Moses, 2016). Many students may not be aware of the various

scholarships and grants available to them, and the SRC's efforts in compiling and sharing this information can significantly impact their ability to secure financial assistance. These initiatives level the playing field and ensure that students from diverse backgrounds have equal access to opportunities that can shape their academic journey.

The SRC's work in providing scholarship and grant information helps to alleviate financial stress and reduce the pressure on students to secure part-time jobs that might interfere with their studies (Wellings, Black, Craven, Freshwater & Harding, 2019). By equipping students with the knowledge needed to apply for financial aid, the SRC contributes to a healthier work-life balance and allows students to focus more on their academic pursuits. This not only enhances their academic performance but also positively influences their overall well-being by minimizing financial anxieties. In addition to assisting students in accessing financial support, the SRC's efforts in promoting scholarships and grants underscore its commitment to supporting students' aspirations. By advocating for transparent and easily accessible information, the SRC conveys the message that higher education should be attainable for all students, regardless of their financial circumstances. This emphasis on access and opportunity fosters a sense of belonging and purpose, contributing to students' overall well-being by reinforcing the idea that their education and future are valued and supported by the institution and their peers (Bruna, Farley, McNelly, Sellers & Johnson, 2017).

Emergency Fund Advocacy

The advocacy for emergency funds by the Student Representative Council (SRC) is a vital contribution to enhancing students' well-being and ensuring their financial security during times of unexpected hardship. These funds serve as a safety net for students facing unforeseen financial crises, such as medical emergencies, sudden job loss, or family emergencies. By championing the establishment and accessibility of emergency funds, the SRC actively supports students in their pursuit of education and contributes to a campus environment where students feel cared for and supported (Willis, 2008).

One significant impact of the SRC's advocacy for emergency funds is the reduction of financial stress (Comey, Litschwartz, & Pettit, 2012). Sudden financial setbacks can have a detrimental effect on students' mental health and academic performance. The availability of emergency funds provides students with the assurance that they will have assistance during challenging times, reducing anxiety about how they will manage their financial obligations and allowing them to focus on their studies. This alleviation of financial pressure contributes directly to students' overall well-being, ensuring that their education remains a priority even when faced with unexpected financial burdens. The SRC's efforts in advocating for emergency funds contribute to a more inclusive and equitable campus community. Financial emergencies can disproportionately affect students from marginalized backgrounds, exacerbating existing inequalities (Christie, 2007). By ensuring that emergency funds are accessible to all students, the SRC promotes a sense of fairness and social support. This inclusivity sends a powerful message that the institution values the well-being of all its students and is committed to helping them overcome financial challenges that may otherwise hinder their academic progress.

In addition to their immediate impact, emergency funds advocated for by the SRC also promote a culture of caring and mutual support (Best & Hamer, 2021). The creation of emergency funds underscores the importance of community and collective responsibility, as both the institution and fellow students contribute to helping their peers in times of need. This culture of support contributes to students' sense of belonging and emotional well-being, fostering an environment where students are not only focused on their personal success but are also invested in the well-being of their peers.

Conclusion

In line with examining the role of SRC on student well-being at HEIs, it can be concluded that the SRC plays a significant and positive role in promoting and enhancing student well-being. The SRC acts as a bridge between the student body and the administration, advocating for students' needs and interests while collaborating with the institution to implement policies and initiatives that support student well-being. The SRC serves as a platform for student voices and concerns to be heard. By actively engaging with students, organizing feedback mechanisms, and conducting surveys, the SRC ensures that students' opinions and needs are considered when decisions are made.

This helps create a sense of inclusivity and empowerment among students, ultimately contributing to their overall well-being. SRC plays a crucial role in addressing various aspects of student well-being, such as mental health, physical well-being, and academic support. They collaborate with the institution's counselling services to advocate for increased resources and support for mental health issues. Additionally, the SRC organize events, workshops, and awareness campaigns to promote healthy lifestyles, stress management, and overall physical well-being. They also work closely with academic departments to improve teaching and learning conditions, advocate for fair assessment practices, and provide academic support services.

The SRC acts as a liaison between students and the administration, ensuring that student concerns and grievances are effectively communicated and addressed. They represent students' interests in administrative meetings, participate in decision-making processes, and negotiate for positive changes that enhance student well-being. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of trust, transparency, and accountability within the institution, leading to an improved student experience and well-being. The SRC facilitate the creation of a vibrant and inclusive student community through organizing social and cultural events, clubs, and societies. These activities foster a sense of belonging, encourage social interaction, and provide opportunities for personal and professional development. A strong sense of community positively impacts student well-being by reducing feelings of isolation and promoting social connections.

Recommendation

The paper recommends the followings:

- Recognition of the SRC as a legitimate and influential body is fundamental to its effectiveness.
- Institution's administration, faculty, and students to acknowledge the SRC as a key player in decision-making processes.
- The SRC should continue actively engaging with various student organizations and clubs, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity among students.
- The SRC should work closely with university administrations to establish comprehensive mental health programs that address the unique challenges students face during their academic journey.
- SRC should facilitating effective communication and feedback mechanisms should be a top priority to the Student.
- The SRC should establish transparent and accessible channels through which students can voice their concerns, provide feedback, and express their needs.
- The Institutional management should create a platform where students will engage and report their challenged to be attended effectively.

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