

Teaching and Learning in Human Movement Science in South Africa: Scoping Review and Community of Practice Insights

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Abstract

Many Human Movement Science (HMS) lecturers in South Africa seek to implement evidence-based teaching practices to improve student success, yet little research explores whether SoTL literature meets their needs. This study examines how Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) literature in Biokinetics, Sport Science, Coaching Science, Recreation Sciences, and Kinderkinetics aligns with the needs of a Community of Practice (CoP) at a South African university. A scoping review of SoTL publications (2013–2024) identified 35 articles categorised into seven themes. Findings were compared with qualitative insights from three Action Learning Set (ALS) meetings conducted using a Participatory Action Learning and Action Research study design. The analysis revealed gaps in understanding HMS students and the mental well-being of both lecturers and students, along with challenges in blended learning. Potential solutions include re-evaluating entry requirements, integrating reflective exercises, fostering professional identity through authentic learning, incorporating psychometric assessments, and deploying early diagnostic tools to identify at-risk students.

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Blended learning strategies like team-based learning may enhance student engagement. Furthermore, collaborative efforts by students, lecturers, and experts may support teaching practices. These findings extend beyond South Africa, offering practical steps for addressing a CoP's needs through literature and ALS meetings. Future research should involve a broader range of higher education settings and integrate diverse perspectives within Communities of Practice to further refine evidence-based teaching strategies.

Keywords: community of practice, human movement sciences, participatory action learning and action research, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, scoping review, South Africa

Résumé

En Afrique du Sud, de nombreux enseignants en sciences du mouvement humain (SMH) cherchent à mettre en œuvre des pratiques d'enseignement fondées sur des données probantes afin d'améliorer la réussite des étudiants. Toutefois, peu de recherches explorent la question de savoir si la documentation sur la science de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage répond à leurs besoins. Cette étude menée dans une université sud-africaine examine comment la littérature sur la science de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage (SoTL) en biocinétique, sciences du sport, sciences de l'entraînement, sciences des loisirs et kinderkinétique s'aligne sur les besoins d'une communauté de pratique (CoP) dans une sud-africaine. Un examen approfondi des publications sur la science de l'apprentissage (2013-2024) a permis d'identifier 35 articles classés en sept thèmes. Les résultats ont été comparés aux observations qualitatives de trois réunions d'apprentissage par l'action (ALS) menées selon un modèle d'apprentissage par l'action participatif et de recherche par l'action. L'analyse a révélé des lacunes dans la compréhension des étudiants en HMS et du bien-être mental des enseignants et des étudiants, ainsi que des défis liés à l'apprentissage mixte. Les solutions potentielles comprennent la réévaluation des conditions d'entrée, l'intégration d'exercices de réflexion, la promotion de l'identité professionnelle par l'apprentissage authentique, l'intégration d'évaluations psychométriques et le déploiement d'outils de diagnostic précoce pour identifier les étudiants à risque. Les stratégies d'apprentissage mixte, comme l'apprentissage en équipe, peuvent renforcer l'engagement des étudiants. En outre, les efforts de collaboration entre les étudiants, les enseignants et les experts peuvent soutenir les pratiques d'enseignement. Ces résultats dépassent le cadre de l'Afrique du Sud et proposent des mesures pratiques pour répondre aux besoins d'une CdP par le biais de la littérature et des réunions d'ALS. Les recherches futures devraient porter sur un plus grand nombre d'établissements d'enseignement supérieur et

intégrer diverses perspectives au sein des communautés de pratique afin d'affiner les stratégies d'enseignement fondées sur des données probantes.

Mots clés: communauté de pratique, sciences du mouvement humain, apprentissage participatif et recherche-action, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, étude exploratoire, Afrique du Sud

Introduction

Ernest Boyer's (1991) seminal work on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) established a foundation for academics in higher education to systematically research their teaching and learning practices. Building on these foundational efforts, SoTL has gained notable attention in South Africa, evidenced by the launch of the *SoTL in the South Journal* and the inaugural SoTL conference in 2017 (Simpson & Looker, 2018). These milestones underscored the importance of educational research to complement traditional discipline-focused studies, emphasising the need to adapt SoTL for the educational contexts of the Global South (Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2018). Furthermore, the South African Council on Higher Education has recognised SoTL as a means of addressing potential systemic problems arising from the misconception that teaching and learning are merely "common sense" (Webbstock & Fisher, 2016, pp.170-171). Rather, SoTL is seen as instrumental in fostering student career-focused skill development, social responsiveness, and the development of graduate attributes, among other benefits.

Building on Boyer's foundational perspective, SoTL research is an evidence-based inquiry into teaching and learning practices, aimed at disseminating findings within the teaching and learning community (Kim et al., 2020; Swart et al., 2017). Fanghanel et al. (2015) state that a definitional framework for SoTL has yet to be established. For this paper, SoTL is defined as research that (a) systematically inquires into teaching and learning; (b) examines strategies or frameworks to enhance educational outcomes; (c) involves student and/or lecturer perspectives; (d) evaluates or proposes pedagogical modifications; (e) incorporates reflective practice; and/or (f) synthesises relevant educational research (Fanghanel et al., 2015; Swart et al., 2017). This evidence-based approach seeks to improve instructional practices, foster professional development, and encourage scholarly publication. Despite its growing prominence, there is limited understanding of how existing South African-based SoTL literature addresses the specific teaching and learning needs of Human Movement Science (HMS) disciplines within South Africa. Similar to other Health Science disciplines, HMS is inherently discipline-specific.

Therefore, integrating SoTL is often regarded as a standalone entity, leaving a largely unexplored and uncharted landscape (De Jongh et al., 2014).

To address the gap in understanding of how well South African-based SoTL aligns with lecturers' needs, this study examines whether the existing HMS-based SoTL literature meets the requirements of a Community of Practice (CoP) at North-West University (NWU). The School of HMS at NWU offers programs in Biokinetics, Kinderkinetics, Coaching Science, and Recreation Science, with plans to add Sports Science as an independent qualification (NWU, 2025). Lecturers from these disciplines formed a CoP comprising six doctoral-qualified staff members (three male, three female) with over 30 years of collective teaching experience. CoP members have received faculty teaching and learning awards and participated in multiple teaching-development initiatives, indicating a commitment to enhancing pedagogical expertise. Operating across NWU's Mafikeng and Potchefstroom campuses, the CoP was established to examine the concept of SoTL, explore its integration into discipline-specific fields such as HMS, and identify relevant research topics.

However, the emergence of this CoP coincided with significant shifts in South African higher education. Since the CoP's inception in 2021, South African higher education has been shaped by several factors: the rapid shift to online learning due to COVID-19 (Leal Filho et al., 2022), student protests over delayed National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) payments (Ntombana et al., 2023), prolonged power outages known as loadshedding (Thembane, 2024), and increasing calls for decolonised education that integrates Indigenous Knowledge and multilingual approaches (Du Plessis, 2021). The rise of Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIED) also presents challenges and opportunities linked to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Patel & Ragolane, 2024). Across Africa, universities face many of these same issues, along with additional financial barriers, unstable infrastructure, curriculum transformation, and digital inequalities that hinder student success and lecturer capacity (Uleanya, 2024).

Against this backdrop, this study compares a scoping review with qualitative insights from the CoP's Action Learning Set (ALS) meetings (2021–2023) to answer the research question: How does South African SoTL literature in Biokinetics, Sport Science, Coaching Science, Recreation Sciences, and Kinderkinetics align with the needs of a CoP at a South African university? In doing so, the study identifies gaps and offers insights to guide future SoTL initiatives, enhancing teaching and learning in South Africa's HMS sector. By addressing the CoP's needs through a hybrid approach – combining a scoping review of existing literature with collaborative

decision-making during ALS meetings – this study provides a dynamic framework for informed decision-making to strengthen SoTL integration within HMS.

Methods

Following the methodological framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), a scoping review was deemed appropriate for this study because it allowed the researchers to map the breadth and depth of literature in an emerging and underexplored area (Peterson et al., 2017). In this study, the approach was essential for examining how South African-based SoTL in HMS disciplines addresses the needs of a CoP. The five-stage process included: (1) identifying the research question, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) selecting studies, (4) charting the data, and (5) collating, summarising, and reporting the results (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). To answer this study's research question, a systematic search was conducted in ERIC, Sabinet, and Google Scholar using Boolean operators and key terms. The search terms included (Biokinetics OR "Coaching Science" OR "Sports Science" OR "Recreation Science" OR Kinderkinetics) and ("Scholarship of Teaching and Learning" and "South Africa"), as well as (Biokinetics OR "Coaching Science" OR "Sports Science" OR "Recreation Science" OR Kinderkinetics) and ("Teaching and Learning" OR "Student Experience") and "South Africa". The search focused on publications from 2013 to 2024. The researchers included studies if they demonstrated a systematic inquiry into teaching and learning; examined strategies or frameworks to enhance educational outcomes; involved student or lecturer perspectives; evaluated or proposed pedagogical modifications; incorporated reflective practice; integrated synthesised educational research; addressed the HMS disciplines focused on in this study; and/or fell within the specified time frame. All retrieved articles were catalogued in Excel, with an initial screening of titles followed by abstract reviews and then full-text analysis. Based on the extracted information, articles were placed into themes based on their primary focus. A transparent and systematic process – defined by clear inclusion criteria, rigorous database searches, and an independent article review by two researchers – helped ensure the validity and reliability of the articles retrieved.

To evaluate whether the reviewed literature met the needs of the CoP, three ALS meetings held between 2021 and 2022, with additional reflective meetings in 2023, were transcribed and collaboratively analysed by the CoP members. An ALS is a collaborative group formed to address common problems through inquiry and reflection, fostering shared experiences and learning among members (Wood, 2019). These ALS discussions focused on the implementation of SoTL within HMS and the lecturers' teaching

and learning needs. To generate qualitative data during the ALS meetings, democratic dialogue (Gustavsen, 1996) and participatory activities as described by Brookfield and Preskill (2016) were employed. This approach aligned with the CoP's adoption of the Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) study design (Wood, 2019). PALAR integrates action learning and action research principles in a participatory and collaborative manner, allowing members to collectively identify, analyse, and reflect on their teaching and learning needs.

In alignment with PALAR's Figure Eight model of the application (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018, p.18), the CoP prioritised establishing strong relationships before embarking on research initiatives. To implement this model, the CoP adopted a relational ontology and dialectic epistemology (Wood, 2019), highlighting the importance of interconnectedness and continuous dialogue among members. Additionally, the CoP adhered to the 7Cs and 3Rs of PALAR as its guiding axiology. This framework emphasises collaboration, communication, commitment, compromise, a critical attitude, competence, and coaching (7Cs), as well as fostering relationships through engagement with reflection and recognition (3Rs) (Wood, 2019). For a practical example of the CoP's application of PALAR, see Kahts-Kramer et al. (2023).

To facilitate collaborative data analysis, transcripts of the ALS meetings were shared on a common platform for all CoP members to access. Pairs of CoP members independently performed an inductive analysis on separate transcript sets, with each pair analysing one of the three transcripts. This approach allowed themes to emerge organically without preconceived notions (Azungah, 2018). The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis process (Terry et al., 2017). A consensus meeting involving all ALS members was subsequently conducted to finalise the analysis and ensure coherence across the identified themes. Member checking was therefore used (Birt et al., 2016), with themes and categories presented to the group for input, ensuring alignment with the experiences and perspectives. Through iterative discussions, data saturation was achieved, where no further themes or categories were identified (Saunders et al., 2018).

The ALS successfully met the validity criteria of PALAR by fostering continuous collaboration, employing action-oriented approaches, engaging in reflective learning cycles, and addressing SoTL challenges, thereby ensuring the robustness and reliability of the study's findings (Wood, 2019). The CoP adhered to the validity criteria outlined by Herr and Anderson (2014), including outcome validity, which was verified through

member checking to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the findings. Process validity was ensured through multiple ALS meetings, supported by transparent documentation and critical reflection. Catalytic validity was demonstrated by taking actionable steps towards achieving the CoP's objectives, while democratic validity was achieved by sharing findings with the broader academic community, such as at conferences and workshops, to invite critique and feedback.

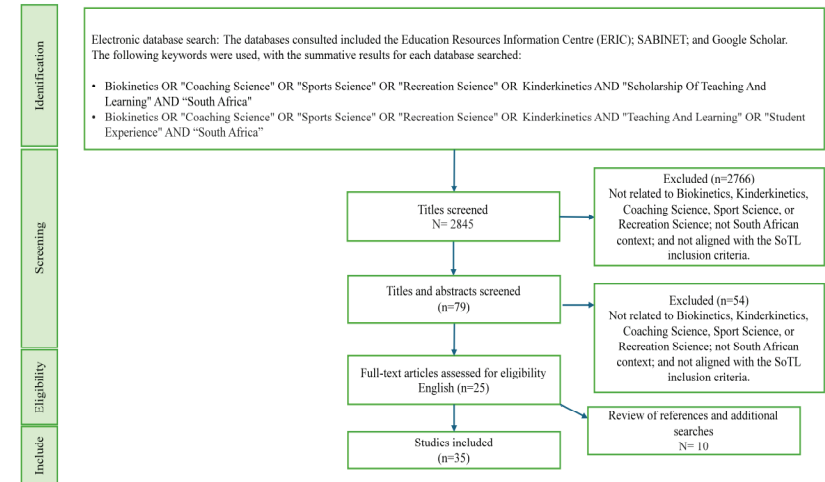
The CoP upheld participatory ethical principles by prioritising inclusivity, collaboration, and shared decision-making in the application of anonymity, justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence (Wood & Kahts-Kramer, 2022). The CoP created a code of conduct and constantly reflected on its implementation to uphold these principles. The CoP also used codes (for example, P1) to represent each member's thoughts. The Health Research Ethics Committee approved this study (NWU-00028-22-A1), attesting to its adherence to ethical principles.

While the study's methodology offers valuable insights, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results and findings. First, our scoping review was intentionally designed to map existing literature within South Africa and capture emerging evidence within the local context, rather than to incorporate international perspectives or a systematic review. Although this approach facilitated a broad overview without the constraints of a very narrow focus, it may limit the comprehensiveness and breadth of potential solutions considered. Additionally, because the findings reflect the experiences of a single CoP within one institution, they are not intended to be generalisable to all universities. Instead, the study serves as a blueprint for other institutions to establish their own CoPs, explore HMS literature to enhance teaching and learning practices, identify gaps, and inform future directions, with its applicability varying depending on institutional contexts and challenges and CoP member representatives.

Results of the Literature Review

A review of 2854 articles published between 2013 and 2024 identified 35 articles that met inclusion criteria. Figure 1 identifies the flow diagram of included and excluded articles.

Figure 1: Flow Diagram of Included and Excluded Articles



The 35 articles, categorised into themes, are summarised in Table 1. The identified themes include technology-enhanced learning (TEL), authentic learning, equity in education, curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, staff development, and student psychological profiles. Authentic learning – encompassing work-integrated learning (WIL), inter-professional education (IPE), internships, and service-learning – emerged as the most prominent theme, which is not surprising given the practical nature of HMS and its inherent need for interdisciplinary collaboration. TEL ranked as the second most prominent theme, aligning with the advancements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Patel & Reguline, 2024).

Authentic Learning

Within the authentic learning opportunities examined, IPE received the most attention (Africa et al., 2024; Botma & Labuschagne, 2019; Butler, 2016; Delawala et al., 2023; Frantz et al., 2016; Moodley & Singh, 2018; Nyasulu et al., 2021; Reitsma et al., 2019; Rhoda et al., 2016; Waggie & Laattoe, 2014). These studies highlight both the potential benefits (e.g., improved teamwork, collaboration, graduate attribute development, enhanced patient care) and challenges (e.g., time constraints, developing multidisciplinary case studies, logistical planning, financial limitations, creating credit-bearing opportunities, and fostering collaborative cultural norms).

Table 1: HMS-based SoTL Research in South Africa

Theme	Authors	Focus	Participants
Technology-enhanced learning	Botha-Ravyse et al. (2018)	Gamification	Sport and Recreation Management and Sport Science students
	Habib et al. (2023)	e-learning and mobile health	Biokinetics and Sport Science students
	Heymans (2021)	TBL in blended learning platform	Biokinetics, Recreation, Sports Science and Coaching Science
	Titus (2016)	Digital gaming for multi-cultural interactions	Sport Science students
	Titus & Ng'Ambi (2023)	Digital gaming	Sport Science students
	Menon & Motala (2022)	COVID-19 effect and emergency remote and online learning	Biokinetics academia
	Noorbhai (2020)	Quality assurance in m-health and e-learning	Biokinetics students
	Noorbhai & Ojo (2023)	m-health and e-learning	Biokinetics staff and students
	Authentic learning	Africa et al. (2024)	IPE: perceptions of whether IPE achieves sustainable development goals
Frantz et al. (2016)		IPE: academics' perceptions on interprofessional community-based participatory research	Sport Science academics
Butler (2016)		IPE: students' perceptions of new IPE module	Biokinetics students
Botma & Labuschagne (2019)		IPE: students' perceptions of IPE and collaborative practice via drawings	Biokinetics students
Delawala et al. (2023)		IPE: programme development of IPE via scoping review, review of institutions programmes, international expert reviews, and university context analysis. Hereafter presentation to faculty for review via nominal group technique.	Biokinetics programme

	Goslin et al. (2016)	Adapted service learning: student reflections via reflective journals on collaborative in-depth learning	Recreation science students
	Moodley & Singh (2018)	Community-based clinical training: Academics views on strengths and challenges	Biokinetics and exercise disciplines included
	Nel (2014)	Internships: perceptions of Biokineticists who had completed their internship before 2014	Biokinetics who had completed their internships
	Nyasulu et al. (2021)	IPE at community site: facilitator and students' reflections on experiences documented	Biokinetics sites included
	Reitsma et al. (2019)	IPE: students' perceptions of IPE experiences via reflective journals	Human Movement Science students
	Waggie & Laattoe (2014)	IPE: researchers' lessons learned from examining IPE exemplars	Sport Science and Recreation students
	Cripps et al. (2023)	Bimodal work-integrated learning: students' experiences of on- and off-campus WIL	Exercise and Sport
	Ismail et al. (2024)	IPE: scoping review highlighting gap in musculoskeletal healthcare professionals	Included studies focused on Biokinetics
	Rhoda et al. (2016)	IPE: students' perceptions of IPE collaborative practice intervention	Biokinetics students
Equity in education	Ntjana et al. (2022)	Academic challenges faced by students and admission requirements	Biokinetics students
	Higgins-Opitz & Tufts (2014)	Identifying struggling students	Sport Science students
	Sikhwari et al. (2019)	Factors influencing academic achievement: student perceptions	Biokinetic students
Curriculum design	Paul-Joseph (2021)	Curriculum design for first years (horizontal and vertical articulation)	Biokinetics students
	Msiza et al. (2020)	Peer assessment in large classes: lecturer perceptions	Sport Science lecturer

Pedagogical approaches	Schreck et al. (2020 a, b; 2022)	Field- and classroom-based experiential learning: student experiences	Recreation students
	Van den Berg (2014)	Coaching philosophies	Sport Science
	Van den Berg et al. (2017)	Amazing race focused on learning content	Sports students
Staff development in SoTL	De Jongh et al. (2014)	SoTL staff development and research with students	Sport, Recreation and Exercise Science lecturers
Student psychological profiles	Pienaar et al. (2022)	Psychosocial profile and academic performance of first-generation students	Sport and recreation
	Fichardt et al. (2023)	Psychological well-being, stressors, coping strategies	Biokinetics and Sport Coaching students

Collectively, these studies challenge entrenched professional stereotypes, promote clearer role understanding, and support efforts to meet South Africa's Sustainable Development Goals related to good health and well-being.

A notable barrier to IPE is the dominance of physiotherapy within rehabilitation services – often at the expense of professions such as Biokinetics, Chiropractic, Podiatry, and Osteopathy – potentially limiting awareness of other professional skill sets (Ismail et al., 2024). Regarding service learning, efforts to enhance it include promoting reflective practice (Goslin et al., 2016), involving community members in decision-making processes (Frantz et al., 2016), and collaborating with the university and Department of Health to develop business plans (Moodley & Singh, 2018). Nyasulu et al. (2021) further recommend site visits and strategic planning to better prepare a student health workforce for effective collaboration. On the contrary, Nel (2014) calls for improved internship experiences, noting issues such as underpayment, excessive workloads, and unmet clinical hour requirements for Biokinetics interns. Cripps et al. (2023) highlight the possibilities of implementing work-integrated learning through bimodal models with both on- and off-campus work-based opportunities.

Technology-Enhanced Learning

The prominence of Technology-Enhanced Learning is reflected in research exploring online and blended learning models, especially in Biokinetics and Sports Science (see Table 1). For instance, Heymans (2021) demonstrated the efficacy of Team-Based Learning (TBL) in large online health education cohorts, while Botha-Ravuse et al. (2018) highlighted the positive impact of well-designed gamification strategies, emphasising their alignment with

course objectives and assessments. Titus (2016) and Titus and Ng'Ambi (2023) suggest that gamification can foster multicultural collaborations among Sport Science students. However, the authors note the complexity of the South African educational landscape due to lingering apartheid-era legacies, with students self-organising along cultural lines, necessitating continuous collaborative efforts by lecturers.

Habib et al. (2023, p.17) advocate for multi-modal platforms integrating “text, audio-visual resources and face-to-face workplace learning activities”, highlighting their potential to support students’ psychological well-being, especially since online learning can be isolating. Furthermore, Noorbhai (2020) states that online platforms should be collaboratively developed with students and staff as part of quality assurance, especially given their questionable success rates and the availability of diverse alternatives. However, according to Noorbhai and Ojo (2023), there remains a lack of comprehensive training for health science lecturers, indicating an overall unpreparedness to fully leverage emerging technologies. While research on e-learning, m-health, and digital gaming is growing, the integration of Artificial Intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality is still limited (Table 1). Moreover, fields such as Recreation Sciences, Coaching Sciences, and Kinderkinetics remain relatively underexplored, presenting opportunities for future innovation and improvement.

Equity in Education

The presence of equity-centred research is not surprising given South Africa's complex historical legacy and the enduring influence of Western epistemologies (Cleophas, 2021). The shift to remote learning during COVID-19 exposed ongoing issues with pedagogical inclusion (Menon & Motala, 2022), while the digital divide – where many students lack access to educational platforms – further complicates TEL implementation (Habib et al., 2023). Though online education offers enhanced opportunities and flexibility, it also raises challenges such as limited student interactivity, isolation and demotivation.

In response to these structural inequalities, scholars have explored ways to balance academic integrity with inclusivity. Ntjana et al. (2022) advocate redefining admissions standards – standardising entry criteria at the mean required level rather than lowering prerequisite scores – to maintain academic integrity while accommodating diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Building on this, early identification of struggling students is important to ensure retention and academic success. Higgins-Opitz et al. (2014), for example, identify the first-class test as a valuable early-warning system, enabling timely interventions for at-risk students. Ntjana et al.

(2022) recommend the use of psychometric tests to identify at-risk students for early intervention, although they do not specify which assessments would be most appropriate. Ntjana et al. (2022) further highlight the underexplored potential of incorporating indigenous languages into curricula to enhance student success; however, how to do so successfully necessitates further exploration.

While much of the discourse on educational equity centres on how institutions can support students, it is equally important to acknowledge the resilience and agency that students bring to their academic journeys. Sikhwari et al. (2019) highlight that, despite economic disadvantage, many students remain highly motivated to succeed academically and improve their families' economic circumstances. This underscores the need for a balanced approach – one that not only enhances institutional support structures but also builds on students' existing strengths and determination.

Pedagogical Approaches and Curriculum Design

Studies in Table 1 demonstrate that peer assessment (Msiza et al., 2020) can enhance students' content knowledge and experiential learning can improve students' graduate attributes, although time management and group work remain challenging (Schreck et al., 2022; Schreck et al., 2020a, 2020b). Additional pedagogical strategies include guiding students to develop coaching philosophies and implement them practically (Van den Berg, 2014), as well as incorporating outdoor activities (e.g., "amazing race" tasks) to facilitate learning (Van den Berg et al., 2017). Paul-Joseph (2021) endeavoured to create a first-year conceptual framework specifically tailored for Biokinetics students, ensuring horizontal and vertical articulation of content.

Although pedagogical approaches and curriculum design for first-year students have gained attention, comprehensive curriculum revisions and alignment of content with industry standards need further exploration. Such alignment is vital, as South African business managers report that graduates often lack critical job skills (Mobarak, 2021). Mobarak (2021) further suggests limiting university subsidies to two years, with businesses taking responsibility for subsequent on-the-job training. The author emphasises the time-intensive nature of upskilling new employees and underscores the role of universities in ensuring that students are adequately prepared to enter the workforce.

Student Psychological Profiles

From a psychological perspective, Pienaar (2022) and Fichardt et al. (2023) offer valuable insights into factors affecting student well-being. Pienaar

et al. (2022) used the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), and the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) to explore reasons why some first-generation students fail or are not promoted to their next year of study. Their findings show that inadequate support (from family, friends, or other sources), financial stress, anxiety and depression, social dysfunction (challenges with routine tasks, reduced social engagement, lower productivity), and lower Grade 12 marks significantly increase students' risk of academic failure. In alignment with these observations, Fichardt et al. (2023) found that the students faced a range of COVID-19-related stressors: academic, psychological, financial, interpersonal, physical health, and spiritual. The goal for lecturers and students would be to determine whether students are employing adaptive coping strategies (e.g., direct problem-solving, seeking emotional support) rather than maladaptive strategies (e.g., distraction, denial, substance abuse) to cope with life's challenges. Fichardt et al. (2023) utilised the Brief Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced (COPE) to come to these conclusions. Taken together, these studies emphasise how comprehensive assessments of students' psychological profiles, particularly post-COVID-19, can inform interventions to enhance resilience and academic success.

Building on the scoping review findings, the subsequent thematic analysis will explore the CoP's needs and evaluate whether the reviewed literature in Table 1 adequately addresses these needs.

Findings From the CoP and Their Alignment With the Reviewed Literature

Four themes emerged from the ALS meetings: 1) understanding HMS students' motivations; 2) supporting mental well-being; 3) clarifying online and blended learning; and 4) forming CoPs for SoTL. Verbatim quotes and comparison to literature, assist with answering the research question: *What is the alignment between South African-based SoTL literature in Biokinetics, Sport Science, Coaching Science, Recreation Sciences, and Kinderkinetics, and the needs of a CoP within a South African university?*

Theme 1: Understanding HMS Students' Motivations

The CoP explored various pedagogical strategies to support HMS students, comparing them to existing approaches in Table 1. Comparisons included gamification (Botha-Ravyse et al., 2018; Titus, 2016; Titus & Ng'Ambi, 2023), peer assessments (Msiza et al., 2020), authentic learning experiences (Africa et al., 2024), and experiential learning (Schreck et al., 2020a, 2020b; Schreck et al., 2022). The CoP also discussed the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and language (Du Plessis, 2021). However, a

critical foundational challenge overshadowed the urgency of implementing solutions: the pressing need to gain a more nuanced understanding of HMS students and their motivations, as one member explained:

We don't know who the people [our students] are at this stage. The first phase [of our SoTL research] is just to see what these students possess, why they are here, and what they are capable of. You know!?... We must first see who are the guys. Are they thriving in the current systems we have? And is it necessary for us to change? (P3)

The CoP further debated whether pedagogical strategies should cater to all students or focus only on motivated individuals, as some students seemed to lack genuine interest in their studies. One member remarked, "We can only take the horse to water, but not make him drink it" (P1). This lack of interest was attributed to some students selecting HMS as a fallback option after failing to gain admission to their preferred fields, resulting in a misalignment between their current studies and true aspirations.

The CoP discussions identified a range of factors that they believed influenced student engagement and success, spanning systemic challenges to individual characteristics. Systemic issues – including poor literacy skills and inadequate preparation in primary and secondary schooling – were viewed as significant barriers. One member remarked, "They [students] cannot read" (P6). Additionally, the CoP believed the lowered entry requirements were not conducive to student success. As Ntjana et al. (2022) argue, lowering entry requirements fails to address equality concerns and may exacerbate disengagement among underprepared students. Pienaar et al. (2022) further support this by showing that higher matriculation marks correlate with improved student success.

On an individual level, the need for self-reflection, self-discipline, and a clear understanding of educational relevance were emphasised. As one participant noted: "They do not do self-reflection and ask, what could I have done differently? [They do not have] ...that self-discipline. They just want to know what the lecturer can give me to make it easier. I am looking for the bare minimum" (P1). Goslin et al. (2016) and Reitsma et al. (2019) provide some guidelines on the types of reflective questions that could be asked to gain an understanding of student experiences and perhaps alter their perspectives towards achieving only the bare minimum, albeit these guidelines were originally intended to explore service learning and IPE experiences. Goslin et al. (2016, p.116) asks: "What went well, and why? What didn't go so well, and why? What could we have done differently, and how?". Reitsma et al. (2019, p.3) add: "What did you learn from the contact session? What theoretical knowledge did you use? What previous

experiences could you link to the session? What do you need to find out or learn for the next session?" And "How did you experience the facilitation and interaction?"

These insights suggest that many students struggle to see the practical relevance of their education and its connection to their future careers, which can deepen their disengagement. One participant noted, "They [students] do not know what they can do with their qualifications" (P4). Without a clear understanding of how their qualifications translate into employment or entrepreneurial opportunities, students may perceive their education as lacking purpose. Integrating or enhancing authentic learning experiences (Table 1) could help bridge this gap by improving students' awareness of potential career pathways and how their unique strengths align with their chosen profession. However, none of the authentic learning studies reviewed offer guidance on enabling students to explore the full spectrum of entrepreneurial and employment opportunities associated with their qualifications, nor do they provide strategies for developing a strong professional identity within their field.

Recognising the complexity of these issues, the CoP concluded that understanding their students – their identities, interests, strengths, weaknesses, and motivations for choosing HMS – is essential. The literature in Table 1 provided some guidance, such as re-evaluating entry requirements, incorporating reflective questions, and linking authentic learning opportunities to career prospects. However, this realisation highlighted the need to identify which authentic learning experiences and reflective questions could deepen the CoP's understanding of students and enhance motivation by emphasising the career opportunities tied to their qualifications and professional identity development.

Theme 2: Supporting Mental Well-Being for Students and Lecturers

The CoP highlighted the significant challenges of maintaining mental well-being in the post-COVID-19 era, particularly due to the shift to online education, which deprived lecturers of meaningful interactions with students. The CoP stressed that this issue is critical for the future of SoTL in HMS, as it directly affects the learning environment and the overall well-being of both lecturers and students in an increasingly digital educational landscape. One CoP member expressed her dissatisfaction with online education and its impact on her happiness and job satisfaction:

I do not like my work at the moment... I am not happy. For the first time in 15 years, I am not happy. I miss face-to-face [teaching]. I miss giving class. I miss where at the end of a semester... there were four students that stepped in initially and did not have a clue about what direction

to take in life, and now they do. And now, all of a sudden [with online education], there is nothing. I feel I do this, and I do that... and the students know nothing.... (P5)

The ALS CoP members observed that their own mental health challenges might reflect the struggles students face in the post-COVID-19 era. One member remarked: “Students, they are not coping... They do not know how to cope and change something and make it good. To say to themselves: This is not the end of the world, I have a solution” (P2). The challenges South African students face in navigating post-pandemic education are well-documented (Poalses & Bezuidenhout, 2018).

The CoP noted that while students' psychological profiles are included in Table 1, they are not extensively addressed. However, insights from Fichardt et al. (2023) and Pienaar et al. (2022) provide some guidance. Fichardt et al. (2023) highlighted that students experienced a range of COVID-19-related stressors and emphasised the need for lecturers to collaborate with students in developing mental health training initiatives. These initiatives should foster healthy coping strategies, such as taking direct action to address problems. Additionally, Fichardt et al. (2023) used the COPE scale, which could be a valuable tool for identifying students' coping strategies and enabling targeted, collaborative interventions. Similarly, Pienaar et al. (2022) stressed the importance of targeted support for first-generation students by assessing their levels of social support. Their study found that enhanced social support improves academic performance, whereas social dysfunction – such as challenges in interpersonal relationships and support networks – and family responsibilities (e.g., caregiving and household duties) hinder it. To better understand and address students' mental health and social challenges, Pienaar et al. (2022) used tools such as the MSPSS, GHQ-12, and GSE.

In response to these findings, the ALS CoP agreed that prioritising the mental health of both lecturers and students is essential and should be addressed collaboratively through psychometric assessments. However, they also recognised the need for interdisciplinary collaboration with various university departments, including psychology, theology, business, education, and social work. Engaging these disciplines could foster a holistic approach to student and lecturer wellbeing by integrating expertise in mental health, pedagogy, career readiness, social support, digital accessibility, and spiritual and physical wellbeing.

Theme 3: Clarifying Online and Blended Learning

The CoP faced significant challenges in developing HMS students into competent professionals during the transition to online education. Recognising that the future of education is increasingly tied to online learning, the CoP viewed this shift as a foundational element for advancing SoTL in HMS. However, the literature reviewed (Table 1) revealed gaps in addressing the CoP's practical, day-to-day challenges. While gamification and e-learning approaches were discussed, they often proved unsuitable for the hands-on, practice-oriented nature of HMS.

An additional challenge identified by the CoP was students' difficulty in effectively using online platforms. This struggle was attributed to factors such as limited experience with formal communication norms, language barriers, poor time management, and anxiety about making mistakes: “This is the era we are in with technology. They can't send an e-mail to you and share the correct information. You have to beg them the entire time to tell you what is wrong. So that I can help you...” (P4). Another pressing issue was academic integrity during online assessments and students' lack of intrinsic motivation to engage deeply with learning. As one CoP member observed: “Getting 50% is what students want... they don't have a willingness to learn” (P5). Habib et al. (2023) highlight that students often rely on extrinsic motivation, and that isolated online learning environments can be distressing.

To improve students' online education while considering their technological literacy and lack of motivation, the CoP found Habib et al.'s (2023) emphasis on blended learning models particularly relevant. These models not only integrate online components but also foster student-centred, meaningful engagement with the content through face-to-face interactions and online communities of practice. Within this blended learning framework, the use of TBL was also discussed. As suggested by Heymans et al. (2021), TBL enhances behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement, helping to reduce students' reliance on extrinsic motivation and fostering deeper, more meaningful learning experiences. By promoting collaboration and accountability, TBL strengthens students' problem-solving skills and prepares them for teamwork, which is essential in HMS professions. Furthermore, the TBL approach would help address institutional challenges faced by lecturers, including inconsistent guidance on online and blended learning methods, which has led to confusion:

...There was never effective communication to us as lecturers about what is the approach we should consider with online teaching. And as

a lecturer, I do it my way, [he] does it his way... Everyone [should have] just started at the same point. And then, as we evolve... improve, plan our strategy together, and move forward together. (P2).

The CoP recognised that while multiple approaches to online and blended education exist, additional training is needed to keep them up to date with emerging trends, particularly in Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence. As Noorbhai (2020) and Noorbhai and Ojo (2023) highlight, collaboration between staff and students can support the selection of the most appropriate online learning platform, particularly because many Health Science staff are not yet fully equipped to meet the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. To address this, interdepartmental collaboration, alongside staff and student involvement, has also been deemed essential, particularly with experts in online and blended learning.

Theme 4: Forming CoPs to Support SoTL Adoption

The CoP emphasised the importance of communities of practice in identifying contextual challenges, addressing practical needs, and supporting staff mental health. This was particularly important for discipline-focused lecturers who are not education specialists. One CoP member expressed her feelings about the difficulty of SoTL research and the lack of time to learn about it, and how the CoP could overcome this barrier:

I think as we move forward, out of my own experience... because I have read these articles, and it feels like this [SoTL] is very difficult. I mean, I have spent a lot of time learning behaviourism, etc. Everything is new to me and weird. And I feel I do not have time to do this. So, it feels that if I am going to take part in this, and I do want to, then we need to work on each group member's strengths. Those in the group who already understand this must do it for us... (P1)

Another member expressed their uncertainty and perceived difficulties in aligning SoTL with their discipline-specific focus: "How can you align your SoTL project with your discipline-specific focus?... It's impossible... SoTL is different from our research focus areas" (P4). However, the support and expertise provided within the CoP helped some members overcome perceived barriers and instead feel energised to engage in SoTL: "There is an old saying in sports motivation videos that everything you need is already inside of you! Just go out and do it! I think we have... the literature you [*first author*] have been giving us really just gets our juices going!" (P3).

Furthermore, the CoP provided access to various levels of expertise and opportunities to share and learn from each other. One member highlighted this benefit, saying:

... there's a lot of issues [*in teaching and learning*] I already managed by, by the years I've been involved in academia... She [*one of the ALS members*] has been here forever, so she's already made a few mistakes. So, now she can tell me: But don't do this, it's not going to work, try this or whatever. So, you don't have to reinvent the wheel... I think that is the novelty [*of being in a CoP*]... The support we're having and the strengths is what is making the group, I think, real. (P2)

Since most HMS lecturers are discipline-specific rather than SoTL experts, a CoP can support them in overcoming perceptual barriers to action, enabling them to initiate their own SoTL research projects and contribute to the advancement of SoTL in HMS. Furthermore, the CoP can source experts from other departments to assist with problem-solving.

Commencing SoTL, as experienced by the CoP in this study, is oftentimes stymied by the steep learning curve, as outlined by McEwan (2022). Yet, the myriad of benefits - from collective wisdom to surmounting teaching and learning obstacles - as argued by Wilson-Mah et al. (2022) make the endeavour worthwhile. Given that HMS lecturers often lack formal training in pedagogy, this CoP offers a structured approach to integrating SoTL into their disciplines. No published literature on CoPs in HMS have been identified using PALAR as a foundational method (as shown in Table 1). To the best of the researchers' knowledge, and within the disciplines investigated in this study, the CoP in this study is the first to provide PALAR-based guidelines (du Plessis et al., 2025).

Conclusion

The South African-based literature-informed strategies provided actionable steps to address the needs of a CoP. However, given the limited availability of SoTL-based HMS literature in South Africa, the CoP acknowledged that expanding the literature search to include international perspectives would offer broader insights. Based on the literature reviewed, four key priorities emerged. First, understanding student motivations and preparedness remains essential. This includes re-evaluating entry requirements, incorporating reflective questions, and linking authentic learning opportunities to career prospects and professional identity development. Further research is needed to determine the most effective approaches for HMS disciplines. Second, promoting mental well-being requires a collaborative approach that supports both students and lecturers. Psychometric assessments such as the COPE scale, MSPSS, GHQ-12,

and GSE can provide valuable insights into student challenges, but their integration into HMS curricula – developed in partnership with students – requires further research. Lecturer well-being must also be prioritised, as their ability to effectively support students depends on institutional structures that foster resilience and mental health. Cross-disciplinary collaboration with mental health professionals could strengthen support systems, but sustainable implementation strategies must be explored. Third, optimising blended learning strategies is critical. While TBL has shown promise, its effectiveness in HMS requires further research, particularly in integrating indigenous knowledge, multilingual resources, and discipline-specific practical experiences. Ongoing lecturer training in emerging technologies, such as AI and virtual reality, could further improve digital teaching practices. Fourth, expanding CoPs focused on HMS across institutions could facilitate continuous pedagogical development and improve SoTL adoption while ensuring teaching and learning strategies remain contextually relevant. However, further work is needed to establish best practices for CoPs that include students and other professionals while maintaining meaningful engagement and ethical conduct.

Future Directions

Despite its limitations, this study integrates literature-driven insights with ALS meetings to offer actionable steps for enhancing teaching and learning. Future research should expand CoPs across multiple institutions and foster cross-disciplinary engagement among students, lecturers, and experts to strengthen support frameworks and problem-solving within ALS. Additionally, exploring innovative pedagogies – such as TBL, multi-modal platforms, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality – could refine blended learning models for HMS, provided these approaches are developed with input from both students and lecturers to address their well-being as well as practical job and entrepreneurial needs. More broadly, given the shared structural and pedagogical challenges across African higher education institutions, the findings of this study suggest promising opportunities to advance SoTL practices within HMS continent-wide.

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