



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

**Exploring the social and academic experiences of international
students in South African Universities**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS

in the Faculty of Education

at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

30 November 2017

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.”

Ratshilaya Azwifaneli Justice (11330652)


30 NOVEMBER 2017

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



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- Informed consent/assent,
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Ethics Committee 10 November 2016

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Best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Liesel Ebersöhn'.

Prof Liesel Ebersöhn
Chair: Ethics
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Education

DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this research to my family, more especially to my late father Jim Lebeko Kgakishi Skolmeisie Raselaya for the inspiration and my mother Agnes Muthuhadini Musekwa for ensuring that I continue with my university studies even after the death of my father. Lastly, I dedicate this research to my late grandmother Sarah Nwaledzani Khakhu Musekwa for contributing financially to my undergraduate studies. May her Soul rest in perfect peace “*makhulu*”.

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ABSTRACT

Many international students register at South African public universities but encounter serious difficulties in integrating into the culture of these institutions. This study identified and analysed factors contributing to the integration of international students in South Africa and the universities at which they are registered, using Tinto's Student Integration Model as a theoretical framework.

The purpose of this study was to explore the academic and social experiences of international students at South African universities, the influence of their academic and social experiences on their integration in South Africa and the institutions they are registered at, as well as the coping strategies they employ to facilitate their integration in this new environment.

Secondary data analysis was used to explore the experiences of international students in South Africa. The data were originally gathered for the purposes of a project on student mobility in Africa using a mixed methods design. For the purpose of this study, only qualitative data collected from face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 50 international students from five South African universities was used. A thematic method was used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that international students at South African universities are faced with numerous challenges in their attempts to integrate in the new environment. These include language barriers, unfamiliar teaching styles, discrimination and crime, and a lack of socialisation with domestic students. However, the findings also revealed that international students appreciated the academic benefits they gained from studying at South African universities.

Key words: International students; Academic experiences; Social experiences; Coping strategies

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To whom it may concern

This is to confirm that I, Ruth Angela Scheepers, edited the following dissertation for language and style. The onus is, however, on the student to implement the changes that I suggested.

Title of dissertation: EXPLORING THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

Student: Azwifaneli Justice Ratshilaya (11330652)



RASheepers

RA Scheepers (Dr)

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAU	Association of African Universities
AU	African Union
CHE	Council of Higher Education
CUT	Central University of Technology
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
MNAUSS	Mwalimu Nyerere African Union Scholarship Scheme
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa Development
PAU	Pan-African University
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SIM	Student Integration Model
SRC	Student Representative Council
UCT	University of Cape Town
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
US	United States

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Research conducted on the experiences of international students reveals that they encounter numerous challenges while studying in foreign countries. These may result in negative attitudes towards the host institution and country (Trice, 2007). In South Africa there is limited literature on the experiences of international students, despite South Africa being ranked among the top destinations for international students in the region and in the world.

This study has drawn from a major project which sought to explore the phenomenon of international student mobility in South Africa. The project sought to understand the rationale for international students choosing South Africa and a particular institution, their experiences and their future plans upon completion. While a great deal of data were collected, a limited analysis was made of the experiences of international students and their choice of South Africa and institution (Lee and Sehoole, 2015). The project coordinators did not focus on the experiences of international students in South Africa. Therefore, this study was based on a secondary analysis of qualitative data collected for the main project. The study focused on an exploration of the experiences of international students in South Africa with the hope that its findings would add to the limited literature on this phenomenon. Using Tinto's student integration model, this study explored international students' experiences at five South African universities, focusing on social and academic experiences and strategies these students employ to cope within the new environment.

In this chapter, the background to this study is explained in detail, the problem statement is outlined, the main question and sub-questions are listed, the rationale for the study is provided, the purpose explained and key concepts clarified. The chapter ends with a brief-outline of the remaining chapters.

1.2 Background to the study

The South African higher education sector has recorded a significant increase in international students since 1994 (Kwaramba, 2012). MacGregor (2014) observes that South African universities registered 12 557 international students in 1994; this increased to 72 999 in 2014 (DHET, 2016). This growth in numbers of international

students entering South African universities is attributed to the perceived high quality of education, the use of the English language in most South African universities and the high employability rate of South African graduates in their home countries (Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck, 2015). Furthermore, a UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) study (2012) has pointed out that the South African higher education sector attracts many African international students because it is better resourced than its counterparts in other African countries. Apart from reasons pointed out in the literature, students may also have their own personal reasons for preferring to study in South Africa (Lee and Sehoole, 2015). The majority of international students at South African universities are from other African countries. This high number is influenced by several regional policies that seek to promote regionalisation and brain circulation within Africa.

Once international students have arrived in the host country and at the particular institution, they are expected to integrate academically and socially in the new society. The literature reveals that integration by these students is characterised by both positive and negative experiences (Lee, 2010; Mudhovozi, 2011; Murshidi, 2014). Furthermore, the experiences of these international students have an impact on their adjustment to their new environment (Trice, 2007).

1.3 Problem statement

The process of internationalisation of higher education continues to attract the attention of scholars, governments and institutions of higher education globally, because its purpose is the development of new international networks and research collaborations (Teferra, 2008) and further responses to globalisation (Sehoole, 2006). Governments and institutions worldwide participate in various international, continental, regional and domestic initiatives with the aim of reducing obstacles which might deter student mobility (UNESCO UIS, 2012).

Governments and institutions of higher education have invested resources and time in recruiting international students (Green and Koch, 2010). Challenges arise when international students who are finally enrolled at various institutions of higher education are left on their own to navigate and to ensure that they adjust to the new environment. The host institutions do very little to assist them (Dzensi and Monnapula-

Mapesela, 2012). This despite the fact that international students bring financial gain, cultural diversity, knowledge and intellectual benefit to the host countries and institutions (Lee, 2010).

A study by UNESCO UIS (2012) found that after 1994, South African institutions of higher education began to experience an influx of African international students. South Africa has emerged not only as a regional hub but as an international destination for students who wish to pursue tertiary education. This is clear from evidence that nearly half of international students prefer South Africa as their higher education destination (Lee and Sehoole, 2015). Lee and Sehoole (2015) found that in 2013, data from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) recorded that almost seven percent of all students at South African universities were international students. Seventy-five percent of these international students came from SADC countries, of which Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland topped the list. Sixteen percent of international students came from the rest of Africa, while nine percent came from other parts of the world. This underlines the importance of exploring the social and academic experiences of these foreign students, their integration and the coping strategies they employ at South African universities.

1.4 The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore and analyse the experiences of international students and the strategies they use to cope at South African universities, and to determine the influence of their academic and social experiences on their integration within the new learning environment.

1.5 Research questions

1.5.1 The main research question

What are the experiences of international students and how do these experiences affect their social and academic integration in South African higher education institutions?

1.5.2 Sub-questions

What are the academic experiences of international students at South African universities?

What are the social experiences of international students at South African universities?

How do the social and academic experiences of international students influence their integration into their institution and South Africa?

What are the strategies international students use to facilitate their integration?

1.6 Rationale

The fact that South African universities are registering significant numbers of international students encouraged me to conduct this study on their experiences at South African institutions of higher education. Understanding international students' experiences in South Africa is critical to enhancing their satisfaction and ensuring the successful completion of their studies and their contribution to knowledge.

Kwaramba (2012) and UNESCO UIS (2012) observe that international students are choosing to study in South Africa because the higher education sector in this country offers high quality and internationally recognised qualifications at an affordable cost. The quality and availability of resources also serves as a pull factor, encouraging international students to study in South Africa.

Although McLellan (2009) has studied the experiences of international students in South Africa, his study was limited to a small group of African international students at three campuses. My study will contribute significantly to the limited literature on international students in South Africa by analysing existing qualitative data gathered from 50 international students from five South African universities.

The fact that international students encounter several challenges while studying in foreign countries and yet manage to complete their education warrants a closer

examination of the strategies they employ to cope or adjust in the new learning environment.

1.7 Overview of the research methodology

This study was based on secondary analysis. The data were collected primarily to answer three research questions in a project on student mobility in South Africa:

- Why do international students choose South Africa?
- What are the differences based on regional, continental and global student mobility?
- What are international students' experiences and future plans and how do these vary by region and country of origin, major and degree programme?

These data collected to answer the research question on international students' experiences were not analysed by the project coordinators.

The question investigated in the secondary study was guided by Tinto's student integration model. This fulfilled the first step suggested in Johnston (2014), that development of a secondary study research question must be informed by the theoretical framework.

Some authors have argued that secondary analysts should have an understanding of how the existing data were collected (Johnston, 2014; Smith, 2008; Long-Sutehall et al., 2010). In this study, only qualitative data were analysed, even though the data were collected using mixed methods. The decision to analyse only qualitative data was influenced by De Vos et al. (2014), who argue that qualitative research is more appropriate for studying experiences, attitudes and perceptions. This study sought to explore the experiences of international students in South African universities.

The population of the project on student mobility in South Africa was international students in seven universities: the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Pretoria, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, North West University, the University of the Western Cape and the University of Cape Town. Survey questionnaires were sent to these universities and

international students who were interested in participating in a student mobility study were asked to complete them. The questionnaire was completed and returned by 1682 international students. Respondents were requested to indicate on the survey questionnaire whether they were willing to participate further in face-to-face interviews. Interviews were conducted at the University of Pretoria, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, the University of the Western Cape and the University of Cape Town.

In an attempt to answer questions posed in this study, a thematic analysis technique was employed. A number of relevant themes concerning academic experiences, social experiences and coping strategies were identified using this technique that is well established in qualitative research (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

1.8 Ethical considerations

The ethical requirements for conducting research were observed. Application for ethical clearance was submitted and the University of Pretoria Ethics Committee granted me permission to conduct this study. One of the basic requirements when engaging in secondary study is to seek permission from the custodian of the data set (Smith, 2008; De Vos et al., 2014). The project coordinators granted me permission to use the existing data.

It is also a requirement of ethical research to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of participants or respondents (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). In order to meet this requirement, code(s) such as IS 1 (International Student 1) were used to identify participants, despite the project coordinators using pseudonyms and numbers to maintain anonymity of participants.

1.9 Clarification of concepts

Academic integration refers to the congruence of a student's academic attitude, performance and commitment with a university's policies (Zhou and Zhang, 2014).

Integration is the act of gathering individuals from different groups with the aim of creating equal opportunities for them in a foreign country without making them feel

inferior to other groups. Tinto (1975) refers to integration as the “degree of congruence between an individual and his/her social environment”.

International students are individuals who are not South African citizens studying at South African universities.

Secondary analysis involves the researcher working on existing data that was collected by someone else for different purposes. It may also occur when a researcher who collected data has completed analysing them in a primary study but decides to work on the data again to answer different research questions in another study.

Social integration refers to a student’s acceptance into the social environment on campus and in the community (Tinto, 1975).

1.10 Breakdown of chapters

The chapters in this dissertation are briefly outlined in this section.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2 of this study international and South African literature is reviewed for the purpose of understanding the current trends on the phenomenon under study. The focus is on internationalisation of higher education, student mobility in Africa, student mobility in the South African context, socialisation of the international student, possible barriers to integration of international students and their coping strategies.

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3 the theoretical framework is discussed. In this study, Tinto’s (1975) student integration model (SIM) is explained and each component or variable of the model is discussed. The reasons for choosing this model and the shortfalls of SIM are discussed.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, the secondary analysis is discussed in detail as the research methodology of this study. The research design of the project on student mobility in South Africa is briefly outlined and the methods used to collect data for analysis are

explained. Themes were identified and categorised under the following headings: academic experiences, social experiences and coping strategies. Ethical issues and the limitations of the study are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 discusses the findings derived from the analysis of responses from the 50 international students from five South African universities who participated in this study.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 is the final chapter of this study. This chapter contains, recommendations to improve the conditions of international students in South African universities, suggestions for future research and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review is organised into four main sections. The first section explores the literature on the internationalisation of higher education, student mobility in an African context and student mobility in the South African context. The second section explores the issue of socialisation, including both the academic and social integration experiences of international students in relation to language, culture and student-student and student-faculty staff interaction. The third section investigates possible barriers to international student academic and social integration and includes experiences of discrimination and xenophobia. The last section reviews the literature on coping strategies used by international students.

2.2 Internationalisation of higher education

Internationalisation of higher education is a global phenomenon that should be viewed as a response to globalisation (Sehoole, 2006; Rouhani, 2007), as the world has become interconnected and countries depend on one another to flourish (Teferra, 2008). Knight and Sehoole (2013) argue that internationalisation of higher education should be understood 1) as the movement of students to institutions in other countries to pursue their studies and of teaching staff to pursue their career ambitions; 2) as a partnership between institutions of higher education in research projects; 3) as occurring when institutions in other countries establish branch campuses and offer distance and face-to-face education in foreign countries.

This study focuses on one aspect of internationalisation, namely student mobility, by exploring the experiences of international students at South African universities.

2.3 Student mobility in Africa

Africa has the oldest system of higher education, which can be traced back to the age of the University of Timbuktu in the Kingdom of Mali, the school of Holy Scriptures in Ethiopia and Al-Azhar in Egypt (Teferra, 2008). Internationalisation of higher education in Africa has been witnessed ever since scholars from other continents and countries migrated to African centres of education (Teferra, 2008).

During the colonial era and after the independence of many Africa countries, student mobility in Africa was typified by the outward bound mobility of African students from their own countries to developed countries. Hyams-Ssekasi et al. (2014) observe that the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), France and Germany enrolled the majority of international students from African countries. This movement from Africa to Western countries followed the pattern of colonisation, where student mobility was linked to countries of the previous coloniser. This was evident in students from Francophone countries enrolling at French universities, while in Anglophone countries the majority of students preferred to study in English-speaking countries (Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck, 2015)

Internationalisation of higher education emphasises knowledge exchange through student and academic staff mobility and collaboration of higher education institutions across the globe. Developing countries have suffered a brain drain in this process (Knight, 2008). The problems associated with the “*brain drain*” arise when international students decide to remain in the host country after completion of their studies. This argument is supported by Marginson (2011), who observes that almost 40 percent of international students in Australia alone do not return to their home countries after graduating. In an attempt to counter the brain drain and its negative impact, Africa countries were required to retain human resources and expertise within the continent through various initiatives such as Mwalimu Nyerere African Union Scholarship Scheme (MNAUSS) designed to encourage academics to remain and study in Africa. This scheme was established by the African Union (AU) for the purpose of boosting both student and academic staff mobility between African countries through funding (UNESCO UIS, 2012). This scheme further fulfils the aspirations of African students who intend studying in other African countries with the intention of securing employment opportunities on the continent after completing their studies (Lee and Sehoole, 2015). The promotion of the regionalisation of higher education by the AU is aimed at encouraging African students to study within the region so that critical human resource capacity does not move out of the region (Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck, 2015). Furthermore, the AU promotes the notion of ‘*brain circulation*’ within the African continent (UNESCO UIS, 2012). Student mobility in the African region is gaining momentum and is emerging as a new trend. In this process, the role of South Africa as a destination for international students is crucial.

2.4 Student mobility in the South African context

The South African system of higher education can be traced to the 1820s when the University of Cape Town was established (Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck, 2015). However, this system was designed mainly to serve white people. Sehoole (2006) observes that black South African students were forced to seek admission elsewhere because they were denied access to higher education locally. This resulted in outward bound international student mobility, with students going abroad to further their studies (Sehoole, 2006).

The South African higher education system, through the Council of Higher Education (CHE) participated in the Accra Declaration on General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the Internationalisation of Higher Education in Africa, which resolved to promote students' mobility within the African continent by reducing obstacles that limited student mobility (Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck, 2015). The AU, through the Accra Declaration on GATS and the Internationalisation of Higher Education in Africa, committed itself to promoting both national and regional agreements with regard to quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications (UNESCO UIS, 2012).

South Africa continues to participate in AU initiatives to enhance cooperation and partnership among African countries and institutions of higher education through the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD) programmes (McLellan, 2009). As a result, partnerships and cooperation are promoted through institutional partnerships and research collaborations between universities (UNESCO UIS, 2012).

Factors that make South Africa attractive to international students, particularly those from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) include the relatively low cost of tuition fees charged by South African universities compared to highly ranked universities from the developed countries, economic stability, which is a strong pull factor (Mudhovozi, 2011) and the use of English as a primary language of instruction in South African universities (Kwaramba, 2012). On the other hand, a lack of adequate resources in their home country universities pushes many international students to study in South Africa (Lee and Sehoole, 2015). The participation of South Africa in regional initiatives such as the SADC protocol, which seeks to improve cooperation

among SADC member states (Kwaramba, 2012; Sehoole, 2006; McLellan, 2009) is also a pull factor. South Africa is a signatory to the SADC Protocol on Education and Training that requires students from SADC member states to be afforded the same status as domestic students. It further encourages universities in the member state countries to reserve 5% of admission slots for the enrolment of students from SADC countries (UNESCO UIS, 2012). South African universities also attract international students because they are better resourced (UNESCO UIS, 2012) and offer a wider variety of courses than most African universities (Rouhani, 2007).

South Africa registers a significant number of international students from other African countries. According to the Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa released by the DHET in 2014 (DHET, 2016), the South African public higher education system registered 72 999 international students, the majority of whom were from African countries (Table 1). This number increased from about 12 600 in 1994 (MacGregor, 2014). From the 2014 statistics released by the DHET it appears that the majority, over 55% (40 350), were contact students while distance students accounted for 32 649, or slightly below 45%.

Table 2.1 below shows that South Africa is a significant player in facilitating intra-Africa student mobility.

Table 2.1: Number of foreign students enrolled in public HEIs

Country	<u>Total students</u>		
	contact	distance	contact and distance
Zimbabwe	10 498	16 350	26 848
Namibia	2 602	3 156	5 758
Swaziland	2 234	1 991	4 225
Lesotho	2 526	1 543	4 069
Nigeria	2 526	1 167	3 693
Democratic Republic of the Congo	2 806	760	3 566
Botswana	1 319	1 389	2 708
Zambia	1 097	763	1 860
Kenya	1 113	500	1 613
United State of America	1 181	129	1 310
Other foreign nationalities	12 448	4 901	17 349
Total	40 350	32 649	72 999

Source: 2014 HEMIS database, by DHET (2016)

The pattern of international students' enrolment in South Africa supports the view that these students prefer to study within their region and, in particular, where the host country shares a boundary with their home country. For example, the majority of international students at South African universities (26 848 or 37%) in 2014 came from Zimbabwe, followed by Namibia with (5 758 or 7.8%), Swaziland 4 225 (5.7%) and Lesotho by (4 069 or 5.5%). These high numbers from SADC member states can be attributed to the SADC Protocol on Education and Training which encourages student mobility within the region (McLellan, 2009). Nigeria is the non-SADC African country that sends the highest number of students to South Africa (3 693). In 2014, American international students at South African public universities amounted to 1 310. However, the reviewed literature points to the fact that the majority of US and European international students in developing countries like South Africa prefer short-stay exchange programmes with the purpose of broadening their educational and cultural experiences (Rouhani, 2007).

As student mobility is on the increase, it is important to explore these foreign students' academic and social experiences as they engage in the socialisation process upon their arrival at South African institutions.

2.5 Socialisation of international students

Weidman et al. (2001) define socialisation as a process in which an individual acquires the knowledge, skills and disposition that makes him or her more or less an effective member of a particular society. A person will acquire knowledge and skills through interaction with other members of the society, which assists him or her in gaining membership of a group or society (Weidman et al., 2001). Once a student has gained the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes appropriate to the host university society, he or she becomes an accepted member of that community. This allows integration with other students and academic staff (Weidman et al., 2001). The dispositional aspects of the student become evident when he or she shows commitment to goals and to the institution by embracing its rules and regulations (Tinto, 1975).

International students go through a double socialisation process, namely socialisation into academia and socialisation into the host community. In a study conducted on international graduate student socialisation, Murshidi (2014) found that classroom

group discussion enhanced socialisation between American students and international students. This process of student socialisation should not be left to students themselves; rather, universities, through their academic staff, should provide the necessary support to international students to facilitate academic socialisation (Arkoundis and Tran, 2010).

Watson (2013) believes that socialisation of the international student should start not during the orientation programme conducted upon their arrival but that universities should manage socialisation prior to students' arrival. This would raise international students' awareness of the challenges they would be likely to encounter on their arrival and also help them to establish friendships before their arrival (Watson, 2013). This would in turn alleviate the problem of loneliness and isolation experienced by international students when they join the host institution (Bamford, 2008), and limit culture shock (Mudhovozi, 2011).

2.6 Academic and social experiences of international students

It is important to mention that most literature on academic and social experiences of international students has emerged from places such as the UK, US and Australia. However, some studies have been conducted on the experiences of African international students at South African universities, but the researchers were not focused on the academic and social integration experiences.

The integration of international students into the host country and its institutions requires exploration, since several studies have found that a lack of student integration generally affects student retention (Tinto, 1975; Koen, 2007; Severiens and Schmidt, 2008). Dzensi and Monnapula-Mapesela (2012), in a study conducted on 120 international students registered at the Central University of Technology (CUT) in the Free State province in South Africa, found that the academic and social experiences that international students had at the host institution and in the country had an impact on their decision to persist or to drop out. Karp et al. (2008) describes integration as a sense of belonging on campus. Integration of international students in a university campus can be realised through social and academic interaction in the institutional environment (Ghalayini, 2014).

The experience of students is largely influenced by their background and previous experiences (Lee, 2010; Koen, 2007; Tinto, 1975). International students may find it difficult to cope in the new learning environment upon arrival at the host institution, because they have different languages, norms, cultural values and customs, which may make it challenging to sojourners who have to cope with the language, cultural values and customs of the host country (Mudhovozi, 2011). This means that international students will experience their integration in the new learning environment differently depending on their initial experience, their culture and country of origin. For example, a Canadian student, a European student and an African student at the same US university experience social and academic integration differently (Lee, 2010). Lee (2010) argues that students from Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East have more negative integration experiences in the US than their counterparts from European countries. Similarly, McLellan (2009) argues that international African students have negative social experiences such as xenophobia and discrimination while studying in South Africa. On the other hand, European and American students have positive experiences in South Africa, because they employ externally-targeted control strategies to adapt their external environment to suit their needs (Mudhovozi, 2011).

The following section will highlight some of the academic and social experiences of international students in relation to language, culture and interaction with fellow students and academics while studying abroad.

2.6.1 Language

Language plays an important role in the integration of international students into the new institutional culture because successful academic and social integration depends on communication with members of the community, peers and university staff (Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009). Poor language competence among non-English international students has the potential to limit their academic development and also to have a negative impact on their confidence, making them feel inferior among other students with good language proficiency (Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009). Furthermore, international students with poor language competence find it difficult to forge friendships with other students for whom English is a primary language (Lee, 2010)

and struggle to access academic or social assistance from academic staff, fellow students and the community (Zhou and Zhang, 2014).

Several studies conducted on international students have found that poor language competence is at the root of feelings of loneliness, homesickness, sadness and frustration (Bartram, 2008; Gomes et al., 2014; Mudhovozi, 2011). This lack of skill in the language limits their social interaction and social networking with other social groups. International students with language and cultural barriers tend to feel isolated and lonely (Wu et al., 2015). Even their accents hinder integration with domestic students and make adaptation to the new culture of the host country difficult (Lee, 2010). This may lead to international students experiencing socialisation discomfort (Heggins and Jackson, 2003). Maringe and Jenkins (2014) believe that language competence is at the heart of international students' academic success, because postgraduate students are assessed based on extended pieces of academic writing. Maringe and Jenkins (2014) further stress that it becomes difficult for non-native English speakers who took English as first additional or second additional language at school to write good English.

Despite the fact that most South African universities use English as the language of teaching and learning, international students still encounter language challenges at higher education institutions. This challenge is exacerbated by the dominance of indigenous languages such as Sepedi, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu and Afrikaans, to mention only a few, which are used by domestic students outside the classroom (Dzensi and Monnapula-Mapesela, 2012). As a result, international students feel left out (Maudeni et al., 2010).

Language deficiencies form a barrier to the promotion of intercultural awareness (Kinging, 2015), especially in countries such as the UK, where international students' culture and language are perceived to be inferior (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014).

2.6.2 Culture

Upon their arrival at the host institution, many international students find themselves in a cross-cultural situation (Sawir et al., 2008). They are from a different cultural background but are expected to cope in a new culture that is completely unfamiliar to them.

Sawir et al. (2008) argue that student mobility exposes international students to a new learning environment, which provides them with an opportunity to learn the academic and social culture of the host institution and country. Based on a study conducted in the UK by Bamford (2008), it appears that international students are excluded by academics when they fail to incorporate various teaching methods that would cater to the academic needs of international students. As a result, these students may undergo traumatic academic experiences. In order to assist students to deal with such negative experiences, the host institution should offer new international students well-developed support programmes to assist them in understanding and integrating into the academic culture of the institution, and to help them to cope with new learning strategies (Guo and Chase, 2011).

In their study, Severiens and Schmidt (2008) found that curricula such as the Problem Learning Curriculum promoted a collective culture of learning and enhanced peer interaction. As a result, international students found themselves interacting with other students, and social integration among students was realised. This argument is further supported by Gopaul (2011) and McLellan (2009), who mention that institutions assist international students to integrate in the new institutional culture by encouraging collaborative work among postgraduate students because they have very little time to attend classes.

Guo and Chase (2011) found that international students with collectivist cultural backgrounds found it difficult to integrate into the culture of individualism that is prevalent in Canada, the US and the UK. The emphasis in collectivism is on team work or working together, and this is highly regarded by Asians (Guo and Chase, 2011). On the other hand, in the west it is believed that a culture of individualism encourages independence and autonomy. Such opposing cultures create a culture shock for new international students. It has been argued that international students coming from individualistic cultures possess limited integration skills when compared to those from collectivist cultures (Guo and Chase, 2011). As a result, they are more likely to experience loneliness in the host institution, while those from collectivist cultures makes friends easily at the new institution (Sawir et al., 2008).

2.6.3 Student-student and student-faculty staff interaction

For us to understand the academic experiences of students in the new learning environment we need to explore student-academic staff interactions in class and outside the classroom (Koen, 2007).

It has been explained above that international students arrive at the host institution with different perceptions of the host country and institution they have enrolled in. Arkoudis and Tran (2010) argue that international students also bring different experiences and academic cultures that will influence their academic experience during the integration process. This is because the academic performance of international students is largely shaped by their experience in the new learning environment (Sawir et al. 2008). The experience that international students gain in their daily interactions with academic staff, other students and unfamiliar university regulations influences their academic performance and intellectual development. These students' academic performance and intellectual development thrives when they feel attached to a host institution (Karp et al. 2008; this occurs when academic staff members are approachable and willing to assist students (Bartram, 2008). This kind of relationship between students and academic staff has a positive impact on the former's academic performance and intellectual development (Bartram, 2008).

The involvement of international students in extra-curricular activities such as sports and student organisations at the university also enhances social integration and creates positive experiences for them (Zhou and Zhang, 2014).

2.7 Possible barriers to international student integration

Negative academic and social experiences of international students in host institutions arise from factors such as culture, language, discrimination, xenophobia (Lee, 2010; Buthelezi, 2009; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012) and the particular country's regulations and policies governing foreign nationals (McLellan, 2009; Dzensi and Monnapula-Mapesela, 2012).

2.7.1 Discrimination

In the US and the UK international students find it difficult to integrate socially and academically in the new institutional culture as they are faced with discrimination upon arrival at the host institution (Hyams-Ssekasi, 2014; Lee (2010). This discrimination

against some international students is attributed to their accent, culture and country of origin (Buthelezi, 2009; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012). Lee (2010) equates discrimination against non-western international students with neo-racism, the notion of cultural or national superiority and a growing rationale for marginalising or assimilating groups in the globalising world. In her article, Lee (2010) describes neo-racism as a new form of racism that justifies discrimination on the basis of culture and national order. Neo-racism manifests itself through verbal assaults and direct confrontation, insulting jokes and negative statements about others' countries (Lee, 2010). Discrimination against Asian international students was experienced in Australia when students were physically attacked by their domestic counterparts (Marginson, 2011), while in South Africa discrimination towards African international students is more prevalent. Other African nationals including African international students are called derogatory names such as "*Amakwerekwere*", "*Kalangass*" or "*Grigambas*" (all these names are derogatory and ridicule African foreigners because of their dark hue or language) (Buthelezi, 2009; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012).

Buthelezi (2009) argues that discrimination is also apparent when there is exclusion of people from other countries from jobs and educational opportunities. Lee (2010) concurs with Buthelezi (2009), adding that some government legislation has discriminatory implications for international students. In the US, strict policies such as the National Security Entry-Exit Registration were introduced after the September 11 attacks. These have had a discriminatory impact on Muslim and Arab students (Lee, 2010), while international students in Australia are subjected to strict language tests and immigration regulations that give the minister the power to discriminate (Marginson, 2011).

Wu et al. (2015) believe that discrimination against international students arises from domestic students, faculty officials and from members of the community. International students are exposed to discrimination in residential areas and in extra-curricular activities (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012); this creates negative academic and social experiences for international students and affects their attitude to the host country and institution (Lee, 2010; Wu et al., 2015).

2.7.2 Xenophobia

Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2012) describe xenophobia as the fear and dislike of other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or cultural differences. Similarly, Buthelezi (2009) describes xenophobia as a hostile attitude towards the foreigner, characterised by dislike, fear or hatred.

Despite the fact that South African universities continue to attract increasing numbers of international students from other African countries in particular, there is growing concern that African international students are treated differently from European, American and Asian students by domestic students and community members (McLellan, 2009). International students from other African countries are subjected to xenophobic attacks by black South Africans (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012).

International students live in constant fear of victimisation from domestic students and members of the community, which results in these students isolating themselves in order to avoid confrontation and conflicts with local students (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012). This avoidance of confrontation with local students also limits the participation of international students in extra-curricular activities such as sports and student organisations on campus. This in turn creates negative social experiences.

2.8 Coping strategies used by international students and institutional support

Maundeni et al. (2010) observe that some international students find themselves becoming very anxious even before they reach the host country and institution because they are not sure what to expect. It is important to explore the strategies that international students employ to cope once they have arrived in the host country because their successful adjustment is crucial for the achievement of their set goals (Wang, 2003).

The reviewed literature makes it clear that most international institutions of higher education have devoted resources to facilities, programmes and services aimed at assisting international students to integrate successfully in the new institutional culture (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014; Gomes et al., 2014; Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009). This willingness to support international students is evident in the fact that universities in the UK introduce support programmes such as assisting new international students

with the opening of bank accounts, by throwing welcome parties and providing remedial classes to assist those with poor language proficiency. They also provide induction programmes (Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009). In Australia, universities display signs of a commitment to support international students by conducting orientation programmes upon their arrival to familiarise them with various support services and other campus activities, which assists students to integrate successfully (Gomes et al., 2014). Mudhovozi (2011) highlights the fact that universities provide social support to international students, such as counselling facilities to assist them in coping with the new learning environment (Wu et al., 2015).

Despite universities making services such as counselling available for students, some international students, in particular Black African and Asian students, do not make use of these services (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014) because they associate counselling with mental health or weakness (Heggins and Jackson, 2003). As a result, they feel more comfortable when sharing their frustrations or receiving advice from their elders or senior students from their home country (Lee, 2010). Some turn to their parents and older friends for help (Sawir et al., 2008).

As mentioned above in 2.6.1, findings from several studies have confirmed that the language competence of non-native English speakers emerges as a major barrier to possible integration by international students in the host institution and country (Wu et al., 2015; Lee, 2010; McLellan, 2009; Maringe and Jenkins, 2014; Sawir et al., 2008). The learning of local languages by international students makes them more acceptable within the social circles and promotes social integration (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2014). However, failure to adjust to the host institution may create relationship problems and anxiety among international students, which may lead to isolation and loneliness and to serious depression (Sawir et al., 2008; Mudhovozi, 2011). In order to cope with loneliness, some international students may engage in various religious activities or seek professional help from institutional facilities that have been established to assist them (Sawir et al., 2008). Others prefer social networking as a mechanism to deal with personal loneliness, communicating with friends and relatives from their home country. This kind of interaction with family and friends through social networking has emerged as a source of support that helps them to persist academically (Gomes et al., 2014).

Schweisfurth and Gu (2009), like McLellan (2009), observe that when international students find it difficult to forge friendships with local students to ease the tension they end up socialising with other international students from the same cultural background.

2.9 Conclusion

It is clear that international students are confronted with numerous challenges that make it very difficult for some of them to integrate in the new learning environment.

Several studies have pointed to factors such as language, culture, interaction among peers and with academic staff as the major obstacles facing international students in their efforts to integrate socially and academically upon arrival in the country and university (Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009; Gomes et al., 2014; Guo and Chase, 2011; Sawir et al. 2008). However, most international universities have practical programmes and support facilities to help international students to integrate in the new learning environment.

There is general consensus among researchers (Tinto, 1975; Mudhovozi, 2011; Dzensi and Monnapula-Mapesela, 2012; Severiens and Schmidt, 2008) that inadequate academic and social integration by students in higher education institutions contributes to their decision to drop out of their studies, while positive experiences promote integration that translate to their retention.

There is a great deal of literature on the experiences of international students and their academic adjustment in developed countries such as the US, UK, Canada and Australia (Adams, 2014). However, there is a dearth of literature exploring academic and social integration experiences of international students in developing countries, despite the fact that developing countries like South Africa attract high numbers of international students. The intention of this study was to contribute to the understanding of the academic and social experiences of international students in South Africa and its institutions. It explored the academic and social experiences of international students, how their experiences influenced their integration into the host institution and country, and attempted to reveal strategies they employed to facilitate their integration process. It was hoped that such an understanding of the academic and social experiences of international students would ultimately assist host institutions and policy makers to develop policies that would assist in promoting the

internationalisation of campuses, and to increase retention of international students (Zhou and Zhang, 2014)

The following chapter focuses on the theoretical framework and discusses Tinto's student integration theory that was used when exploring the academic and social integration experiences of international students at South African public universities.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This study focused on the academic and social experiences of international students at South African universities. In this study, I employed Tinto's (1975) student integration theory. Tinto developed this theory primarily to explain retention or dropout in higher education institutions in the USA. The theory explains the academic and social integration experienced by students upon joining higher education institutions and also provides a picture of how the process of integration unfolds to the point at which the student makes a decision to persist or to drop out. The exploration of the integration experiences of international students at South African institutions requires attention to academic and social integration.

3.2 Tinto's Student Integration theory

Selected concepts from Tinto's theory provided a useful framework within which to explore the academic and social integration experiences of international students at South African universities. Figure 1 is a graphic representation of Tinto's theory. This is followed by an explanation of the various concepts that are included in the theory: pre-entry attributes; intentions, goals and commitment; academic integration; social integration; and persistence or departure decisions (Tinto, 1975, 1998).

Tinto's student integration theory is based on the analogy used in suicide theory by Durkheim (1951). Durkheim's suicide theory argued that individual support and sufficient networking increase the level of a person's integration in society and minimise the possibility of him or her committing suicide. Koen (2007) mentions that Tinto's theory was influenced not only by Durkheim's work; he also drew the elements of interaction and organisational experience from Spady's (1970) work. In addition, "the rite of passage notion" was drawn from the work of social anthropologist Van Gennep (1960). Tinto (1975) found the rite of passage notion more appropriate to his student integration theory in explaining the integration process that a new student in higher education goes through, from separation from the secondary school environment to the point when he or she can cope with the new learning environment.

Tinto (1975) argued that dropping out of higher education is the outcome of an individual student's failure to integrate academically and socially in the university

community. This means that in the case of international students, their attitude towards the host country and the institution they attend is influenced by their academic and social experiences.

Tinto (2014) argues that the decision of students to persist or withdraw from university or college can be attributed to factors such as academic difficulty, lack of both academic and social integration, and adjustment difficulties. Lack of student integration and adjustment difficulties are challenges that international students find themselves battling with upon arrival in the foreign country or institution (Mudhovozi, 2011; Ghalayini, 2014), while persistence or dropout is seen as the output of a longitudinal interactive process between international students and their new learning environment (Zhou and Zhang, 2014).

For the purpose of coherence in this study, all elements of Tinto's student integration model are explained in brief: pre-entry attributes; intentions, goal and commitment; academic integration; social integration; and persistence or departure decisions. However, for the purpose of exploring and analysing the academic and social integration experiences of international students, the focus is on academic and social integration.

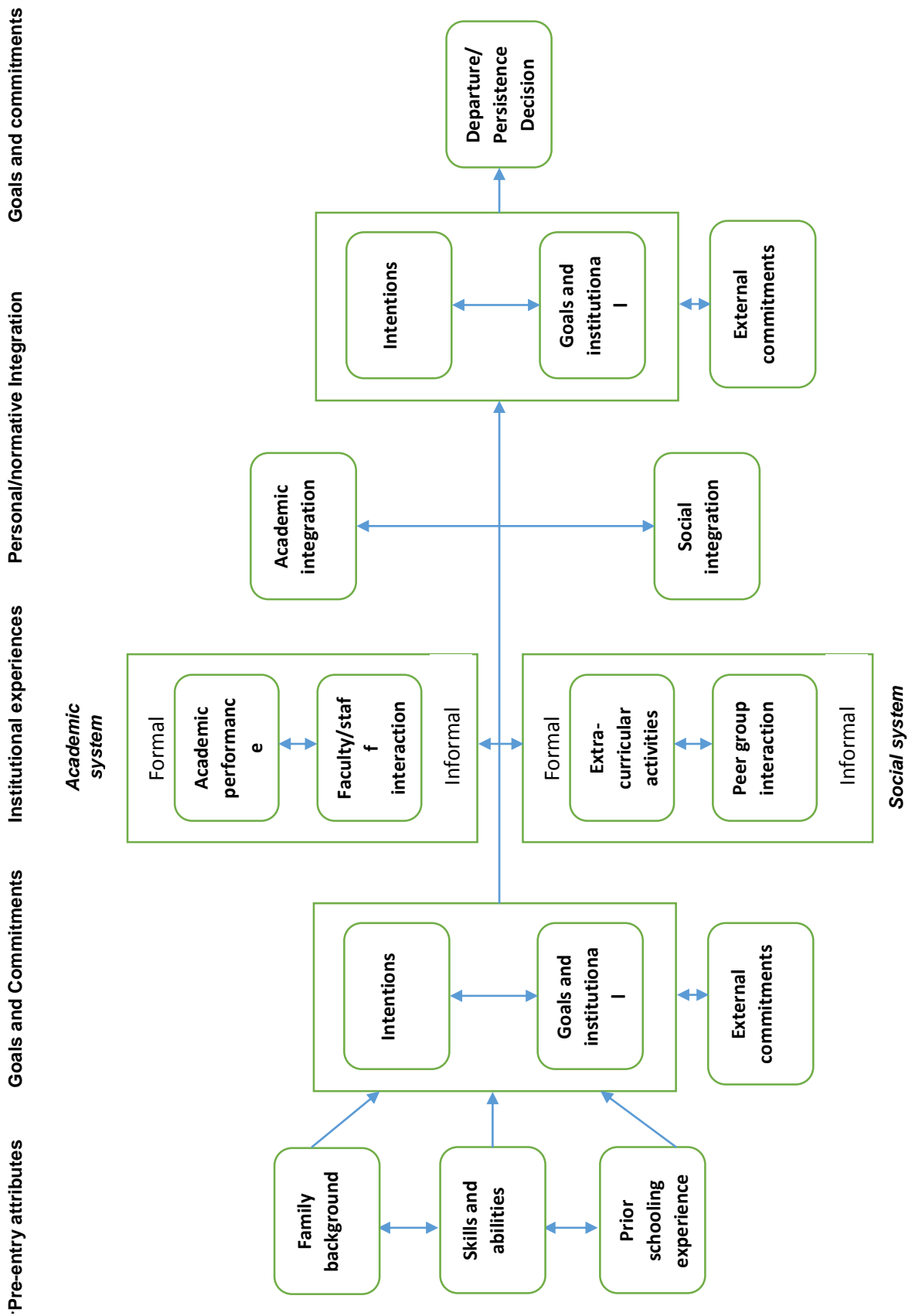


Figure 3.1 Tinto's theory of Student Integration (1975)
 Source: Ghalayini (2014)

3.2.1 Pre-entry attributes

Tinto (1975) argues that when students join a university or college they come with pre-entry attributes from their levels of previous academic preparation (schooling experience), their social background and abilities, or what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as cultural capital.

Tinto (1975) describes previous academic experience of the individual student as grade scores that determine the student's preparedness to join the higher education institution, as secondary school scores predict students' future academic performance. Tinto's (1975) argument is supported by Zhou and Zhang (2014), who mention that international students come with foreign educational system experiences that differ radically from those of the host institution and may have an impact on their future performance.

Social background, including nationality, gender, age, race and socio-economic status has an influence on a student's social interaction outcomes (Tinto, 1975). On the other hand, the educational background of a student's family influences student integration within the new learning culture (Brunsden et al., 2000) because students draw support and strength from their family members who have experience in higher learning institutions (Tinto, 1975).

3.2.2 Intentions, commitments and goals

According to Tinto's (1975) theory, a student's goals are influenced by pre-entry attributes such as social background and prior educational experiences, while the student's commitment to complete his/her degree is driven by career expectations and educational plans (Brunsden et al., 2000).

International students' desire to acquire qualifications from a foreign higher education institution, some in full knowledge of the challenges facing them such as xenophobia, neo-racism and discrimination (Lee, 2010; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012) are motivated by career ambitions. Others are driven by the desire to be associated with prestigious universities that offer internationally acclaimed qualifications (Kwaramba, 2012).

3.2.3 Academic integration

Tinto (1975) argues that grade performance and intellectual development are indicators of academic integration in higher education institutions. He makes the point that grade performance is realised when an individual student progresses academically, where intellectual development is seen as a knowledge acquiring process and an evaluation of the academic system. Zhou and Zhang (2014), explaining the challenges and experiences of social integration of first-year international students at a Canadian university, argue that academic integration of international students depends on their academic attitude, performance and commitment to the institution and its academic policy. Therefore, successful integration of these students into the new academic system is witnessed when there is positive academic performance and student-faculty/staff interaction (Ghalayini, 2014). As a result of positive academic experiences, students become attached to the intellectual life of the institution (Karp et al., 2008). At the same time, the commitment of international students to the institution is the result of feeling comfortable with the institution's academic policy and academic progress, as academic performance is linked to students' positive integration experiences in the new learning institution (Tinto, 2014). Students' failure to progress academically may be associated with academic exclusion from the institution, which translates to negative experience (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto (2014) argues that classroom experience forms the basis of a student's academic experience, as most academic staff-student and student-student interaction occurs in the classroom (Karp et al., 2008; Arnekrans, 2014). Mudhovozi (2011) highlights the notion that academic progress or achievement among international students is influenced by interaction between academics and students, teaching culture and the language in the classroom. However, this faculty/staff (academic-student) interaction must be understood as informal academic integration (Ghalayini, 2014). Academic integration of international students occurs when they are attached to the intellectual life of the institution through engagement with fellow students and lecturers (Zhou and Zhang, 2014).

Poor interaction on the part of students results in both insufficient intellectual development and low grade point averages (Tinto, 1975). Insufficient intellectual

development of international students is attributed to a failure of students to integrate in the climate of the new academic system (Ghalayini, 2014).

3.2.4 Social integration

Tinto (1975) describes social integration as the interaction between the student and the social environment. In relation to international students, Ghalayini (2014) observes that social integration becomes possible through formal interaction that includes extracurricular and informal interaction realised through peer group interaction within the university system. International students realise social integration through informal peer interaction, informal academic and student interaction and semi-formal extracurricular interaction (Zhou and Zhang, 2014). Tinto (1975) believed that successful social integration resulted in friendships with other students. Positive social integration of international students is evident when they become members of a social group and are able to establish friendships with local students. This friendship becomes possible because of informal peer interaction. Lee (2010) argues that, to some extent, this friendship influences the academic performance of international students, because when a student establishes a friendship with a group that is academically strong, the group pushes him/her to perform (Tinto, 1975). Tinto further argues that over-socialisation by students, for instance partying and dating, may result in poor academic performance and may lead to academic dismissal, while insufficient social interaction may lead to voluntary withdrawal from the institution.

With regard to whether sufficient social integration influences the academic performance of students, Tinto (1975) observes only that student participation in extracurricular activities contributes to the positive social experience of students in the new institutional culture and may lead to persistence.

3.2.5 Intentions, commitments and goals

Tinto (1975) believes that positive academic and social integration experiences influence student commitment to goal attainment and to the institution, because individual students assess their goal commitment based on their integration experiences (Brunsden et al., 2000). The importance of extracurricular activities in higher education is affirmed by Zhou and Zhang (2014) who emphasise that participation of both international and domestic students promotes social interaction,

which enhances their institutional commitment. Tinto (2014) argues that a lack of institutional commitment and poor goal orientation on the part of students may result in their dropping out.

Tinto (1975) summarises commitments and goals by explaining that academic integration experience influences student goal commitment, while institutional commitment is influenced by sufficient social integration. Therefore, a student's decision to persist or to drop out from a higher education institution is influenced by academic and social integration, individual goals and institutional commitments (Tinto, 1975).

3.2.6 Persistence and departure decision

Tinto (1975) and Brunson et al. (2000) maintain that the decision to persist or to drop out is influenced by pre-entry attributes, the degree of commitment to a goal, and the student's academic and social integration experiences when interacting with the higher education system. In his theory, Tinto (1975) maintains that insufficient integration makes the possibility of dropout relatively high, while sufficient integration experiences increase the level of persistence because such students can be regarded as committed to their goals.

Gomes et al. (2014) argue that international students who manage to establish friendships with domestic students and who participate in extracurricular activities are more likely to persist, because peer group interaction influences individual student social integration experience and increases the level of institutional commitment (Ghalayini, 2014). Tinto believes that high levels of institutional commitment among students may translate to high level goal commitments, resulting in persistence. Koen (2007) highlights the point that students' positive academic and social experiences increase their persistence levels in higher education institutions.

3.3 Criticism of Tinto's (1975) student integration theory

Despite the fact that Tinto's (1975) student integration theory has been widely used to explore attrition in higher education in the US, it has been criticised for its disregard of students engaged in distance learning and its exclusion of elements such as finance

and culture, and for its use of Durkheim's analogy of suicide in the higher education system.

Distance learning and part-time students appear to experience minimal social interaction because they only attend academic activities and then leave the university campus (Guo and Chase, 2011). Tinto's theory seems to suggest that a residential student is more likely to persist because of his/her involvement in social activities that enhance the social interaction experiences; distance learning students have a greater likelihood of dropping out as a result of fewer social interaction experiences. Karp et al. (2008) argue that students engaged in distance learning do not experience sufficient social integration on campus because they only interact academically. Karp et al.'s (2008) argument has been brushed aside by Zhou and Zhang (2014) as they mention that academic activities lead to social relationships. For instance, students may begin by engaging each other on academic matters even beyond the classroom and this may create close friendships. Zhou and Zhang (2014) maintain that the argument that students realise social integration in higher education only by participating in extracurricular activities is misleading.

Koen (2007) argued that Tinto's theory ignored the contribution of factors such as finance and race and ethnicity on retention in higher education institutions by focusing only on academic and social integration. Several international and national studies conducted on experiences and adjustment by international students have revealed that finance and cultural shock result in negative integration experiences (Lee, 2010; Hyams-Ssekese, 2014; Zhou and Zhang, 2014; Mudhovozi, 2011; Dzensi and Monnapula-Mapesela, 2012).

Among criticisms levelled against Tinto's student integration theory is his disregard of factors such as lack of financial support and the fact that not all student withdrawals from the university system are negative and associated with failure to integrate in the new learning environment. Dropping out may in fact be beneficial to some students (Brunsden et al., 2000).

3.4 Why using Tinto's student integration model is ideal for this study

The intention of this study is to explore the experiences of international students from 20 different countries and to determine how their experiences in South African universities affect their academic and social integration.

The use of Tinto's student integration theory, which was developed primarily to explain student attrition, arose from remarks made by Lee (2010), who argues that the education experiences of international students can best be explored by using student retention or dropout theory. Tinto's theory explains the process that a student undergoes when joining a university or college, up to the time that this student is rejected or fits into the new institutional culture and university community (Chikoko, 2010; Ghalayini, 2014). Furthermore, the theory contains very important variables or dimensions such as academic integration and social integration, which help us to understand the integration experiences of university students (Karp et al., 2008), including international students in South African universities. This is because an individual student perceives his or her integration success in these two dimensions (Brunsdon et al., 2000).

In his theory, Tinto (1975) emphasizes that students' academic and social experiences are a major determinant of his/her integration into the post-secondary institution. For this reason, when international students experience positive grade performance and intellectual development and when they are comfortable with the academic policy of the institution, this is an indicator of their successful academic integration in the university.

At the same time, their inability to socialise with local students or to communicate effectively with university staff and other students, and their inability to participate in various extracurricular activities such as sports, or in student organisations and social programmes within the community is an indication of insufficient social integration. Adequate academic and social integration by students contributes to a greater degree of educational and institutional commitment (Tinto, 1975).

This theory provided a useful framework within which to explore academic and social integration experiences of international students at South African universities, through the analysis of secondary data collected from five South African universities.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This study is based on the secondary analysis of qualitative data. These data were used in a larger project that explored the experiences of international students in five South African universities.

The first section of this chapter explains the research design, that is, secondary analysis. This is followed by the research design of the primary project, data analysis, validity, ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

Secondary analysis is more commonly used in quantitative research (Rew et al., 2000); however, qualitative secondary data analysis is gaining ground as a social science research methodology (Heaton, 2000).

4.2 Secondary analysis

Secondary analysis, as described by Smith (2008), is the study of specific problems by the analysis of existing data that were originally collected for purposes other than those of the present study. Several authors including Rew et al. (2000), Heaton (2000), Boslaugh (2007) and Johnston (2014) in describing secondary data analysis, emphasise that the data should have been collected by someone else for the purpose of answering the research questions set out in primary study. In this regard, the secondary analyst was not involved in designing the methods and actual collection of data, qualifying this as secondary data analysis.

Crossman (2017) makes a clear distinction between primary data and secondary data: in a primary study the researcher is involved in the development of the research design and the collection of data. In my case, I joined the project on student mobility in Africa after the data had been collected, hence the use of secondary analysis methodology.

Boslaugh (2007) believes that the advantage of using secondary analysis in research is that it is less complicated: the secondary analyst is not involved in the demanding and time-consuming activity of data gathering. Several authors maintain that the most significant advantage of using a secondary analysis methodology is that it is less expensive; a researcher can spend a great deal on money when collecting data for a

primary study (De Vos et al., 2014; Smith, 2008; Boslaugh, 2007). The use of secondary data affords novice researchers the opportunity to access large data sets (Johnston, 2014). The second advantage of secondary analysis is that the researcher accesses data that have already been cleaned and stored in electronic format, giving the analyst the opportunity to spend more time on analysing the data (Crossman, 2017).

The disadvantage, however, is that the secondary analyst may find it difficult to access more relevant data to answer the research question of the secondary study (Long-Sutehall et al., 2010). A second major disadvantage of secondary analysis arises if the data were collected in a different region or from a population that is not of interest to the secondary researcher (Crossman, 2017). Rew et al. (2000) believe that the non-involvement of the analyst in the collection of data is a major disadvantage of secondary analysis since variables of interest may not be included; this may result in data that are inadequate in answering the secondary research questions. De Vos (2014) argues that a further disadvantage that arises from the use of secondary analysis is its potential to affect the ethical principles, for instance by intruding on the issue of confidentiality or anonymity. More importantly, a disadvantage of using secondary data in qualitative research is that the analyst may find it difficult to detect any bias on the part of the primary researcher when the data were collected (Thorne, 1998), or any manipulation of data by person(s) or organisations with the intention of justifying or vilifying a particular argument (Tasić and Feruh, 2012). This might be very difficult for a novice researcher to detect.

An individual who decides to conduct a study using secondary analysis methodology should consider the following evaluative steps (Johnston, 2014):

- 1st Step: Develop the research question

In this step, the secondary analyst must develop a research question guided by theoretical knowledge or a conceptual framework.

- 2nd Step: Identify the data set

In identifying the data set, the secondary researcher should establish whether the existing data set will answer the secondary study's research question. In this step, the researcher needs to engage extensively with the literature as this will reveal whether a relevant data set already exists or not.

- 3rd Step: Evaluating the data set

When evaluating the existing data set, the secondary researcher must determine its relevance by establishing the following: the purpose of the original study, the person(s) responsible for collecting the data or information, the nature of the information that was actually collected and the methodology employed when obtaining the data (Johnston, 2014).

These evaluative steps suggested by Johnston (2014) simply mean that secondary analysis usually begins after the primary investigator has analysed the data for a purpose that differs from that of the researcher in the secondary study. In this regard, I analysed data that were collected by others before I joined the project on student mobility in Africa.

When going through the existing data, I discovered that it covered a wide spectrum as it sought to answer three questions posed in the project. Only qualitative data that reflected the academic and social experiences and coping strategies used by international students upon their arrival in South Africa were selected from the data set. The focus on qualitative data was a result of the unique interpretative process that occurs in an individual when dealing with a particular experience (Lacey and Luff, 2007). This assisted me in making meaning of the lived experiences of international students in South Africa (Creswell, 2014).

Johnston (2014) concurs with Rew et al. (2000) that managing the existing data is important as it assists the secondary analyst in accessing all relevant documentation from the primary researcher. In this case, the project coordinators made documents such as the interview protocol, transcribed data and published work on the same data documents available to me. This made it easy for me to manage the existing data. All these documents helped me to create a clear picture of the nature of the study

population and the methodology that was used to obtain the data (Long-Sutehall et al., 2010; Johnston, 2014).

4.3 The research design of the primary project

The data were originally collected to address the following questions in the primary project: Why do international students choose South Africa? What are the differences, based on regional, continental and global mobility? What are international students' experiences and future plans and how do they vary by region and country of origin, major and degree programme?

4.3.1 Research methods

The existing data were collected using mixed methods; that is, both a qualitative and a quantitative approach were employed to collect the existing data. The project coordinators of the student mobility project used an explanatory mixed methods design, starting by distributing survey questionnaires to international students. Only 1682 participants returned the questionnaires from the following seven South African universities: University of Pretoria, University of the Western Cape, University of Cape Town, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Witwatersrand University and University of the North West. According to the description of provided by De Vos (2014), an explanatory mixed methods study starts with the collection and analysis of quantitative data and later collects and analyses qualitative data to help to explain the quantitative data.

At a later stage, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 50 participants from five South African universities: University of Pretoria, University of the Western Cape, University of Cape Town, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and Cape Peninsula University of Technology. The project coordinators sampled only these 50 participants based on the convenient distance of selected universities and the availability of participants, in order to save costs as they were working with a limited budget. A sample of 50 participants made it easy and meaningful for the project coordinators as it would be easy to transcribe the recorded audio data.

4.3.2 Research setting

The existing data were collected from international students attending seven South African universities. The types of universities that participated were traditionally research, comprehensive and technology universities from the following provinces: Eastern Cape, Gauteng, North West and Western Cape. These provinces include both urban and rural settings.

4.3.3 Data collection

In the quantitative part of the study, the primary project coordinators sent survey questionnaires to the population of international students at seven South African universities; 1682 of these students voluntarily responded to the survey. It is important to note that in the survey questionnaires, respondents were requested to indicate whether they were willing to participate in face-to-face interviews. This meant that in the qualitative part of the study, convenience sampling was used because the researchers had already established contact with the respondents when collecting the quantitative data. Du Plooy-Cillier (2014) argues that convenience sampling occurs when the researcher samples subjects he or she already knows or with whom he or she has had some form of contact. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 international students.

Most importantly, the quantitative sample reflected the diversity of international students at South African universities and included females (52%) and males (48%), while 76% were from African countries. The remaining students were Asian (8%), North American (8%) and European (4%), with 1% from other countries.

Predetermined items were listed in the survey and respondents were requested to choose possible answers. At the same time, respondents were requested to provide further comments in response to open-ended survey questions and to elaborate on their choice of answers. Qualitative data were collected in semi-structured interviews with those respondents who indicated their willingness to participate.

Fifty international students from 20 countries at five South African universities were interviewed for the purposes of collecting qualitative data. The participants came from the countries listed in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: No. of participants per country/ %

Country	No. participants	%
Gabon	6	12
Democratic Republic of Congo	4	8
Mozambique	2	4
Cameroon	6	12
Tanzania	2	4
Botswana	2	4
Nigeria	4	8
Swaziland	3	6
Lesotho	1	2
Zimbabwe	5	10
Ethiopia	2	4
Namibia	2	4
Rwanda	2	4
Ghana	1	2
USA	2	4
Zambia	1	2
Sudan	1	2
Kenya	2	4
Uganda	1	2
Germany	1	2

Source: Primary project (Lee and Sehoole, 2015)

As indicated in Table 4.1 above, 22 participants were from SADC countries, while 25 were from other African countries. Only two participants were from the USA and one was from Germany. Of these 50 participants, one was on an exchange programme; the remainder were registered for full degrees and diplomas. It is impossible to determine how many males and females were interviewed because information on gender was not available.

4.3.4 Data analysis

The purpose of analysing the data was to answer the following main research question, supplemented by four sub-questions. These questions were guided by Tinto's student integration model, which was used as theoretical framework for the study. My decision to connect this research question to the theoretical framework was influenced by the evaluative steps suggested by Johnston (2014), mentioned above in section 4.2.

What are the experiences of international students and how do these experiences affect their social and academic integration in South African higher education institutions?

Sub-questions

- What are the academic experiences of international students at South African universities?
- What are the social experiences of international students at South African universities?
- How do the social and academic experiences of international students influence their integration into their institution and South Africa?
- What are the strategies international students use to facilitate their integration?

It is important to mention at the outset that the data analysis process explained here was conducted in the secondary study: when I joined the project on student mobility in Africa the data had already been transcribed and was ready for analysis.

As was explained above in section 4.3.1, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the primary project. However, in this study only qualitative data was analysed for the purpose of exploring the experiences of international students at South African universities, because human experiences are explored in depth using qualitative research (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). During the data analysis process, only qualitative data that addressed the research questions of the secondary study were considered. In the case of the present study, thematic methods were used to analyse data as this method is well established in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014).

White (2005) argues that there is no right or wrong way to analyse qualitative data. However, Creswell (2014) and Lacey and Luff (2007) maintain that during the process of qualitative data analysis, in particular when using the thematic method, the researcher should consider certain steps. Creswell (2014) recommends that the steps listed below. As I received data that had already been transcribed by the project coordinators, step 1, which refers to transcribing raw data that is mostly in an audio and visual form, had already been concluded. I could thus focus on the following steps:

Step 2: Familiarising oneself with the information by reading and re-reading the transcripts

Step 3: Coding process

Step 4: Generating themes and categories or sub-themes

Step 5: Presentation of themes

Step 6: Interpretation of findings

During qualitative data analysis the researcher makes meaning out of text, sorting and organising the data (de Vos et al., 2014). Familiarising myself with the data provided me with the opportunity to identify words and phrases from participants' responses that were repeated frequently and which described academic experiences, social experiences and coping strategies used by international students to facilitate their integration in the new environment.

As I read the transcripts repeatedly, I used different colours to highlight important sections. These identified words and phrases were given codes. Creswell (2014) observes that coding refers to organising and sorting data by recording words and phrases that belong to a particular category. When sorting and organising data that addressed the research questions, I wrote the category name next to the highlighted word or phrase.

When generating themes and sub-themes, similar codes were used. Phrases and words highlighted in the same colour were assigned to the same code and this helped to connect codes to form themes that were relevant in addressing my research questions. Themes were also extracted from common descriptors used by participants in their communication when describing their daily experiences.

During coding I identified themes that referred to academic experiences, social experiences and coping strategies. Themes were connected to encapsulate the essence of participants' integration experiences and these were supported by significant phrases that were extracted from participants' responses. I then used these generated themes as headings when presenting the findings in Chapter 5.

Computer software was not used in the data analysis in this study; instead, the data were hand coded, although this was a time-consuming process.

Recurring identified codes were categorised into the following themes under the academic and social experiences of international students: classroom experiences; academic demand and workload; language challenges; student-faculty staff interactions and academic benefit; socialising with other students; participation in social activities; language as a socialisation barrier; discrimination, xenophobia and crime; and cultural experiences.

During the interpretation step, findings were validated with information obtained from the literature review, while Tinto's (1975) student integration model was confirmed in some of the findings.

4.3.5 Validity

Scholars agree that validity and reliability are important to both quantitative and qualitative research (Lacey and Luff, 2007; Briggs et al., 2014; Creswell, 2014). In order for the researcher to convince the audience or readers he or she must demonstrate that the findings of the study are accurate and reliable. Creswell (2014) explains that validity in qualitative research is about determining whether the findings of a study are trustworthy by using strategies such as triangulation, member checking, thick description, bias, negative or discrepant information, peer debriefing and external auditing. In this study, triangulation, negative or discrepant information and an external auditor were used as strategies to determine validity.

When analysing data, I relied on the reviewed literature and on the data at hand to arrive at themes that addressed the research questions. Themes were triangulated when comparing data that had been collected by more than three data collectors from five different universities, because triangulation in qualitative research is about corroboration of information from three or more perspectives (Pierce, 2008). In this study, all views of participants from the five universities were taken into account when providing their perspective of their integration experiences, the phenomenon under study.

Discrepant information was also used as a validation strategy when supporting themes with relevant quotes from participants' responses. Discrepant information provides different perspectives (Creswell, 2014). In determining validity using a discrepant

information strategy, relevant phrases from participant responses were quoted to support identified themes.

External auditing occurs when a researcher uses someone knowledgeable to review the entire study and provide an objective assessment (Creswell, 2014). This strategy was used when my supervisor and co-supervisor, who had extensive knowledge of student mobility and socialisation of international students, assessed my study. Above all, the supervisor and co-supervisor had access to the data I was analysing and they made an objective assessment that assisted in validating the findings of the study. An external auditor assists in eliminating bias on the part of the analyst (Briggs et al., 2014).

4.3.6 Ethical considerations

Despite of the fact that a secondary analyst does not have any contact with participants, he or she is still required to adhere to the ethical principles of research. These include issues such as obtaining permission from the custodians of the data, applying for ethical clearance from the appropriate ethics committee, preserving the confidentiality or anonymity of participants and ensuring non-maleficence (Thorne, 1998). All these steps were followed and adhered to.

Permission

It is an ethical imperative (De Vos et al., 2014) for a secondary researcher to obtain written permission from the custodian of the existing data before embarking on any analysis. I requested permission to use the existing data from the custodians of the data and this was granted. This permission, together with the application forms for ethical clearance, was submitted to the University of Pretoria Ethics Committee. Ethical clearance was granted, allowing me to continue with the secondary research.

Confidentiality

Cohen et al. (2007) and Maree (2010) emphasise the importance of ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants when conducting research. In this regard, the primary researcher used pseudonyms and numbers to represent participants, although the institutions they were attending, their degree programmes and their

countries of origin were mentioned by name. For the purpose of continuing to ensure that the identity of participants was masked, the secondary analyst used numbers IS1, 2, 3 ... (international student 1, 2, 3 ...) to identify participants.

Non-maleficence

Participants must be protected from any harm that may result from the research study (Maree, 2010). In this study, the privacy of participants was upheld and no attempts were made by the secondary analyst to meet them. The analyst relied on the documents provided by the previous project's coordinators.

4.3.7 Limitations of the study

White (2005) argues that limitations are inherent in both qualitative and quantitative studies, while du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) describe limitations as "constraints or limits which the researcher is aware of but cannot do anything to address those constraints". Secondary studies are not exempt from any potential weakness that might arise during their conduct.

In secondary studies, the existing data may not adequately address the research questions (Rew et al., 2000), although I had the opportunity to examine the interview protocol in order to establish whether the existing data would answer the research questions. It is common that limitations arise from the inadequacy of existing data to answer the research question in a secondary study, because the purpose of the primary study was different from that of the secondary study (Smith, 2008). Despite the identified limitation in the present study, the available data were adequate in explaining the academic and social integration of international students, as well as their coping strategies to facilitate their integration in the institution and South Africa.

A second limitation which surfaced during the analysis of data was the result of the fact that I had not been involved in the original data collection. This prevented me from reflecting on the transcribed responses of participants and accompanying documents. However, a positive point for the purposes of triangulation was that many data collectors had been involved in the study. I realised that some data collectors did not pose follow-up questions for clarity, while others did. This made it difficult to understand some of the responses.

As mentioned in section 4.3.1 above, the data for the project on student mobility in Africa was collected using mixed methods. The decision to analyse only qualitative data limited me to the responses of 50 international students from five South African universities. This had an impact on the generalisability of the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings on the academic and social integration experiences of international students are explored and the coping strategies which they employ to realise sufficient integration in South Africa and its universities are discussed.

Five themes were identified under academic experiences: classroom experience; academic demand and workload; language challenges; student-faculty staff interaction; and academic benefit. Themes such as socialising with other students, language as a socialisation barrier, participation in social activities, discrimination, xenophobia and crime, and culture experience were identified as part of the social experiences of international students in South Africa. Coping strategies used by international students to adapt to South Africa were categorised into three themes: use of support structure; dealing with language problems; and extra-curricular activities. These are discussed in this chapter.

5.2 Academic experiences

The academic experiences of participants are presented in themes that serve as sub-topics in this discussion.

5.2.1 Classroom experience

Some participants found teaching and learning styles quite different from those of their home countries, particularly the use of technology and interactive teaching. Interactive teaching is practised in group projects, laboratory meetings and seminars. This finding suggests that interactive learning encourages knowledge sharing among students. This was a positive experience as interactive teaching allowed the students to gain skills such as writing, self-organising and self-discipline from their classmates. Interestingly, one participant related the interaction to a teaching style which was less authoritarian than the one in his home country:

“Is a lot more interactive... the main difference is that the lecturers here are not much of an authority... the learning and teaching style is completely different because we use technology here. When I talk of technology I’m

talking about something informative, ... the advantage that I see here is people are sharing knowledge first because it's science, it's research, so we always are constantly sharing knowledge through lab meetings, seminars, ..."

Some participants found that the teaching style in South African universities led to a more independent style of learning. Students spent most of their time studying on their own. Students were given a great deal of work while presentations done in class were very short. Participants cited this as an example of a comparison with their home country,

"But here no, they have short presentations and they encourage students to read more, to do their own research compared to my country. At home we spend more time in the classroom than here in South Africa. Here course presentation is short but they give you too much work. So you read on your own. The work is excessive compared to my country."

An independent style of learning was more prevalent at postgraduate level, such as Master's and PhD level, where students write and send material to their supervisor and wait for feedback. Students mostly interacted with supervisors through emails. Therefore, participants held the view that this kind of approach minimises interaction between students and lecturer as well as between students, as academic interaction mostly took place in the classroom. One participant recounted her experiences like this:

"I think a PhD is not about writing, you know like sending emails, meeting once in a while in class to tell the student you have to do this, you have to do that. I think it should be a process in which lecturers have to interact more with their students, so that there will be moral support, unlike when you send an email to the lecturer and the lecturer sends back with comments to say you've done this and that."

While independent work may inhibit social and academic integration, participants often appreciated the availability of resources and guidance they received from lecturers, compared to their home country where they relied on lecture notes from their lecturers:

“In Nigeria I think to an extent we are being spoon fed, as you have your readymade notes. The lecturer comes to class with notes and all you have to do is to read the notes. But here you are given lots of articles and you have to read on your own. You are only being guided.”

During the interviews, several participants expressed their satisfaction and appreciation of the way classroom teaching was conducted, compared to their own countries. They also found that teaching in South African universities was more advanced, professional and faster because of modern technology such as the software PowerPoint. This observation is supported by one of the participants:

“In Sudan, the teaching is actually writing on the board, and the speed of lectures is slow, because they don’t have many books. Access to the internet is a problem, so lecturers will repeat one thing as many times as possible so that the students understand. But here in South Africa things are advanced, lecturers use PowerPoint to teach and lecturers give you some points, then you go and look for information on your own.”

Another positive experience relates to the organisation of academic studies. Lecturers prepared students in advance by informing them of topics that would be covered in classes, even though in class professors gave information bit by bit until everything was covered. By providing students with information in advance, lecturers assisted students in their preparation before attending class and before the examinations. This preparedness for class was mentioned by participants during interviews:

“The difference is that for you ... Here the difference is that we are told what to prepare for the coming class and to the lecturers give you the topic and the things they are going to cover in the class.”

On the issue of class size, participants seemed to hold different views, some arguing that South African universities had reasonably small and manageable classes that promoted student-lecturer interaction, while others found the class size, in particular in the case of undergraduate lectures, to be bigger than they were used to. This made it difficult for lecturers to engage in one-on-one interaction with students. However, most participants appreciated the fact that classrooms were well equipped with audio-visual equipment that facilitated learning.

“... I remember the first semester when I did my teaching I had a very big class of a 100 students. But the amphitheatre was big, and it had all the equipment, audio-visual equipment that I could use..., such as the fact that the air conditioner was working in the classroom and so on.”

The majority of international students from other African countries found that the different teaching styles and classroom environment was conducive to positive academic experiences. Others found the classroom experiences disappointing and frustrating. A participant from Germany expressed disappointment with the standard of presentations by professors. Poor classroom presentations contributed to her negative experience of South African universities because poor presentation affects the standard of learning. She described classroom presentation as follows:

“It’s not good, it’s basically lower than the materials covered, is not as much, the professors are just worse at presenting and explaining here than in Germany. It’s just that ... it’s not that it’s any particular issue. It’s just that the overall level of learning is lower than in Germany.”

In addition to the participant from Germany who felt that professors should work on their classroom presentations, other participants were also unimpressed by the limited knowledge displayed by lecturers and the focus on the South African context. One participant expressed dissatisfaction about lecturers’ knowledge, mentioning:

“Not really you know, they don’t share anything beyond a textbook and I mean our discussion in class is just limited to our textbook. They need to go beyond that and this is something that we have to take into consideration, knowing that we are living in a global world where everything relies on the global economy. So you have to watch the trend, what’s going on and this is something that we haven’t got into our department. We always base everything on the South African context and the lecturers sometimes have limited knowledge in terms of African countries.”

Nevertheless, it appears that the majority of participants were satisfied with the teaching style and organisation of academic studies they encountered in South African universities. From the information provided by participants, it seems that an interactive learning approach enhances interaction amongst students as it promotes academic

integration through knowledge sharing. On the other hand, an independent learning approach limits student-student interaction. Dissatisfaction among participants about limited knowledge of the broader African context and poor presentation by lecturers meant that they had a negative attitude towards their academic experiences at university in South Africa.

5.2.2 Academic demand and workload

When participants responded on the issue of academic demand and workload, the majority said that they found that the academic demands of South African universities were greater than at their home institutions. At the same time, participants expressed their appreciation of the fact that even though the academic demand and workload was relatively high, lecturers were willing to support them and to help them to cope with these demands. In this regard, one participant contended,

“I think it is fair ... because of the reputation of the universities they have quite high demands, they are on different scale. I would say pretty much, most universities would at least try to maintain high standards, ... and I would say is a lot higher here than it is back home.”

Participants maintained that what increased the academic demands and workload, especially at postgraduate level, was the basic knowledge they were assumed to have from their undergraduate degree. This was not always the case, however, since they came from a different academic system and they often struggled to keep pace with other students.

“My greatest challenge was that the standard, the level of education was a little higher than the one we are used to and there were also things that they assumed we had a basic knowledge of from our undergrad study, but this was not the case... I had no basics on those things and they assumed that we had them, and we were struggling to keep pace with other students.”

Many participants found it difficult to cope with the academic workload. Students found that the demands made by multiple assignments in different subjects that they were expected to submit on different dates split their focus and required great effort. In fields such as nursing, students were required to do their practical work in a hospital, where they were expected to work until five o'clock in the evening, and then prepare for tests

after work. On the other hand, the university required them to register for several subjects. One participant recollected her experiences of the demands students were faced with, saying:

“And if three of the subjects require for instance assignments, this could be seen as too demanding because it’s a lot of work that will be involved in the different assignments for different subjects. You know you will be split into a variety of groups with some other people. This is what makes it a bit difficult.”

The assessment requirements, particularly continuous assessments could sometimes be frustrating but international students were impressed with the connection between exercises and assignments. Even though there were many compulsory assignments, lecturers followed up with the students to ensure that they completed and submitted their assignments, which was sign of support. One student maintained that in his home country assignments had less importance:

“In my university there is connection between exercises and assignments. For example, you find the assignments and classwork amount to half your marks. Where I come from, assignments counted for less than a third so I think assignments are more strategic and more directed to the final results.”

While the majority of participants thought that academic standards and demands were higher, some perceived them to be lower than in their home countries. They attributed low academic demands and a low standard to several issues such as, repetition of courses already completed during undergraduate studies but repeated in a postgraduate honour’s degree programme; students were spoiled by being given reading material and an idea of examination questions because that made them lazy. This was believed to ultimately lower the standard of education at most South African universities. One participant raised a concern about examination questions being given to students:

“The scope that they give students in some South African universities, they give you the things that you should expect in the exam, which makes it very easy and which makes some of us lazy to work because you know that if you get the scope, even if you do not study hard, with the scope, you would still be able to get 80/90%.”

On the issue of academic demand and the standard of higher education in South Africa, participants from Zimbabwe indicated that first-year courses were fairly simple and they found them easy as a result of their high level of secondary education in their home country compared to that of South Africa. As they progressed to second year they found the courses more challenging, however.

“When we came here for first year, most of the stuff we were doing we had already covered in high school, in our final year in Zimbabwe high school. So first year was like a walk through, you would sit up the night before the exam, you would study then write the exam and get an A.”

Most participants felt that the academic demands and workload in South African universities was higher than those of their home countries. The academic demands and heavy workload included multiple assignments in different subjects and practical work in the medical and engineering fields. It is evident from the responses of some participants that they struggled to cope with the workload, which they were not used to. The academic pressure experienced by international students contributed to poor academic integration in universities because it had a negative effect on their academic performance. However, some participants reported that they experienced low academic standards at their South African university as students were spoon fed by lecturers, encouraging laziness as they obtained high marks without putting in a great deal of effort. The indication was that both high and low academic demands had a negative impact on the academic integration of international students in South Africa.

5.2.3 Language challenges

English is the main language of teaching and learning in South African universities. However, many international students are non-native English speakers, and English may be either be their first or second additional language. For some students, English is not even their second language; they have to learn the language while at the same time receiving education through a language that is foreign to them. Furthermore, some participants who were proficient English speakers found it difficult to understand the South African accent as it differed from the English accent in their home countries. One participant recalled how he struggled to understand the different accents at his university:

“I think the main difference would be that when I came to South Africa most of my lecturers were from all over the world, so you would have French accents, you would have German accents, but in Swaziland it was predominantly British. So it’s easy to understand, it’s easy to hear, hence it’s easy to understand. But when you come to South Africa and you have all these foreign voices teaching you, you know you have to concentrate first and then only later on will you figure out what they are teaching you.”

Although many international students struggled to understand some lecturers, they grew used to their accents over time.

Poor language proficiency affects students’ learning ability, which in turn retards their academic progression; international students may find it difficult or even impossible to communicate with lecturers and to express their views.

Poor English language proficiency among international students has a direct impact on their academic literacy. The reason for this is that students are assessed on their writing, listening and presentation skills, all of which are expressed in English. In this study, non-native English speakers found themselves frustrated by their lack of understanding of the terminology used in their disciplines and that was essential to academic writing. In expressing this frustration, one participant remarked:

“There are books to read but my issue, truly an issue, is just the language. It’s true that I’ve been living here for four years but I’m still struggling at times with the English language. Sometimes you want to study and there is some terminology that you don’t understand at first and it frustrates you. This is what prevents you from studying at times.”

In addition, the poor language skills of some international students eroded their confidence as they felt nervous when giving presentations in the classroom. Apart from losing confidence, participants felt frustrated when they were unable to have a fruitful consultation with their lecturers because of their limited language proficiency. One of the participants recalled the frustration of trying to explain this difficulty to his lecturer:

“So okay, I do not understand that, but to explain in detail, what I don’t understand was also difficult, so the lecturer asked me how he could assist me if I was not able to explain what I did not understand.”

These participants believed that their poor language skills had a bearing on their intellectual development because they could not communicate effectively with their lecturers or other students. They found themselves under enormous pressure when they were unable to conduct a fruitful conversation. Poor language proficiency also affected their academic achievement. As a result, those with poor language skills were unable to integrate in South African universities.

Participants felt disappointed that some lecturers, instead of assisting students whose language skills were inadequate, excluded them and ignored them in the classroom, using South African languages to explain. This benefitted only some of the students and alienated the rest, in particular international students. Participants regarded this as a deliberate exclusion of international students from learning and teaching. Participants also felt that the use of local languages created a hostile classroom atmosphere for students who did not understand these languages.

“In the classroom, I’ve had complaints from students that some of the academic staff, lecturers, as I was saying about the language issue, when students ask about something they don’t understand the lecturer responds in a native language. Some of the students are not bold enough to say ‘Please can you repeat what you just told this guy in English?’ So you find that it’s something that is going to benefit only the native-speaking people.”

Some participants felt excluded by other students who preferred to use their native language while doing group work. One of them expressed frustration, saying,

“... I mean they don’t get involved in a group assignment or sometimes when you do get involved with them in a group assignment, they just speak in their own language and you don’t understand anything. It does make me feel frustrated, you know”.

On this theme, participants revealed that the poor English proficiency of international students affected their academic progress because they found it difficult to understand

lecturers in the classroom and also difficult to have meaningful consultations with their lecturers. The limited ability of international students to understand and speak English hindered academic integration in the new learning environment.

5.2.4 Student-faculty staff interaction

According to these international students, student-faculty staff interaction was at the centre of their academic experiences. In this regard, participants recounted their interaction experiences not only with their lecturers but also with other faculty staff beyond the classroom.

The majority of participants found that the relationship between students and lecturers and even professors was very good. This good relationship was the result of a willingness on the part of lecturers to assist students, even beyond the classroom. Participants also found that this good relationship enhanced interaction and feelings of welcome among international students. One participant, when expressing his appreciation for lecturers in South African universities, said:

“What I like about my university is that faculty, the professors, are more open, especially when you’re a student you can easily disturb someone, although normally you should make an appointment. The people are quite open to help, and always give a hand if you have any problems.”

Participants were impressed by the conduct of lecturers and students at South African universities and felt that both parties understood their responsibilities very well. In some cases, the relationship between students and their supervisors was described as that with a brother or uncle. This kind of relationship between international students and their lecturers made participants feel welcome and supported. Once international students felt supported and welcomed by faculty staff they experienced greater academic integration within the new institution:

“... I can speak to my supervisor who is acting as the Deputy Dean of the Medical School like my brother or my uncle ... especially at this university, they give you the opportunity to speak to everybody, because they don’t want you as a foreigner to feel as if they don’t help you, or that you fail because you didn’t have any support.”

Also on the theme of student-faculty staff relationships, several participants indicated that this relationship depended on the individual lecturer or faculty official, although they agreed that most lecturers were approachable, supportive and willing to help students. Some participants mentioned specific experiences with lecturers when they found them to be dictatorial with students, unfriendly, rude or lacking professionalism. Other lecturers were judgemental about international students. A good example was given by a participant from Swaziland who mentioned:

“Yes, like when he says, ‘You Swazis and your king, Swazis are like this and that.’ You should not judge a nation based on one person that we follow like the king. We actually don’t.”

Participants found that attitude among lecturers and university officials contributed to poor relationships between international students and university staff, and subsequently affected students’ academic integration in the new learning environment. One participant shared the same frustrations during an interview:

“.... I came and asked for an application form, she did not mind and ... she asked me what I was looking for. I said I’m an international student and I’m looking for an application form for the next year and she answered me. I said, no I came from the faculty of history they sent me to the administrative building to ask for an application form, and she shouted at me and said that I was supposed to get the application from my faculty. I said, ‘No I came from the faculty of history and they sent me back to your office, so that’s why I came here.’ Then she took a paper and sort of threw it in my face.”

The majority of participants appreciated good relationships between student and faculty staff and believed they enhanced their academic integration since this made them feel welcome at their university. However, not all participants had positive experiences in their interaction with faculty staff. Once faculty staff fails to embrace international students it becomes difficult for them to have positive academic experiences because a lack of interaction between students and faculty staff is an indication of poor academic integration in the institution they are attending.

5.2.5 Academic benefit

When analysing the academic experiences of international students in South Africa, academic benefit emerged as one of the major themes. During the interview, participants acknowledged that although they found studying in a foreign country to be a challenging experience the decision to enrol at a South African university came with great benefits. This became evident when participants mentioned that studying in South Africa had advantages such as providing the opportunity to interact with people from all walks of life, to gain writing skills, and to use state of the art equipment that is found in most South African universities. Others were satisfied with the opportunities they were getting to present and publish academic papers:

“I think the exposure the university [gives us] provides platforms, I think a lot, especially in terms of as a researcher, you are able to publish a lot of your work in the peer reviewed journals, and you have the opportunity to go to conferences...”

Participants believed that studying at reputable South African universities afforded them the opportunity to gain practical knowledge that would prepare them when joining any company after studying. One participant indicated that:

“Well, the knowledge ... if I may say first of all because they are very practical, they don't give you cumbersome stuff, stuff that you don't need, what applies to your area of studies is what they give. You see, so it helps you to be, specific in your knowledge and you learn enough and you are able to bring something new in every firm that you might go to after studying.”

Despite the fact that most South African universities are connected to various industries, participants felt discriminated against when they were not afforded the same opportunities to engage in in-service training in South African industries. According to the participants, it was difficult for international student to access private companies where they could do the in-service training that was a requirement of their qualification. One participant expressed his frustration, mentioning that:

“Sometimes like, if I take my case, like I'm a second year student, I'm almost finishing my semester, so I'm supposed to be doing my in-service training as It's not only my case: a lot of my classmates and friends, we are struggling

because of our status, we are not South African citizens, so we have a lot of opportunities but they are only available for South African citizens.”

Participants expressed feelings of appreciation for the knowledge they had gained while studying in South Africa. This had helped them to gain confidence and to grow academically in their various fields. For them, the confidence and academic growth they were experiencing in South Africa could be attributed to the fact that they were provided with opportunities to specialise, helping them to focus on a particular field or discipline. One participant was happy to be afforded the opportunity to specialise in the field of his choice:

“Like now I have an opportunity to specialise in a particular area, I never knew anything about that, but now I specialise in insolvency law which will definitely open doors, more opportunities to me and all that.”

As far as the academic experiences of international students in South African universities were concerned, participants spoke in their responses of their experiences in the classroom, the academic demands and workload, language challenges, student and faculty staff interaction and the academic benefits they were receiving.

When participants gave their account of their academic experiences, they constantly compared their home experiences to their new experiences at South African universities. It appeared that most participants had had positive academic experiences in South Africa as they appreciated the teaching style and the good relationships between students and lecturers that made them feel at home. Participants also made it clear that by enrolling at a South African university they were experiencing considerable academic benefit as they were exposed to various experiences which were preparing them to face the world. However, they emphasised that language proficiency and the South African English accent were a serious impediment to their academic success, since they found it difficult to express their thoughts in the classroom and to have fruitful conversations with other students and lecturers. The language challenge appeared to be at the centre of the poor academic integration experienced by international students.

5.3 Social experiences

Tinto (1975) argues that social integration is about the extent to which a student is integrated within the new environment. Social integration is evident when international students are able to form friendships with other students or members of the community and to take part in social activities.

For the purpose of this study, the social integration experiences of international students at South African universities were classified during data analysis into themes which were identified as follows: socialising with other students; participation in social activities; language is a socialisation barrier; discrimination, xenophobia and crime; and cultural experiences.

5.3.1 Socialising with other students

Participants were asked about their relationships with other students. Many observed that they had found that both international students and local students were friendly. For this reason, participants were able to form friendships with both local and international students. One participant maintained that most of his friends were from the Southern African region, not from his home country:

“Most of my friends are let’s say either from ..., mostly Southern African or Zimbabweans. I’d say most are from the Southern African region here.”

Some participants found it exciting to interact with different kinds of people from different places or countries because this expanded their knowledge of different experiences. For this reason, some international students were encouraged to break out of the circle of students from their home countries and to forge relationships with other international students as well as local students. In this regard one participant mentioned that:

“Wow, I don’t know, I think it’s the fact that you learn so much from different people, I think I have a craving to learn from different people’s experiences, and it’s exciting to basically meet someone who’s completely different from you ...”

International students maintained that it was very easy for them to make friends with both local and international students as a result of classroom or on-campus interaction.

Interestingly, some participants argued that participation in the classroom made them better known to their classmates, which created a good platform for establishing friendships with them. From this finding it appeared that classroom interaction and participation were enablers of social integration within a new environment.

Participants mentioned that they attended the same academic programmes and lived with local students in the same residences, thus spending a great deal of time with them. This made it easier to form friendships with these students. It was easier to forge relationships when the international students and local students shared a language, however:

“Mostly they are South African students, because we speak almost more or less the same language, so it was easy for me to make friends with South Africans.”

Participants appreciated the hospitality they received from South Africans once the latter realised that they were foreigners. They found that good treatment encouraged them to form friendships with South Africans. One student from America who participated in the interviews had this to say about her interaction experiences with local people:

“To be in South Africa is fun and the people are very kind, overall. They love people, they really do, and they love international people. Like especially when I go to townships then they know that I’m a foreigner, they like to treat me extra special, sometimes.”

Another student only said, *“Luckily enough I’m treated as fairly as anyone...”*

One positive point mentioned by participants was that they observed that local students were very pleasant, approachable and helpful to international students. This finding suggests that the status that was afforded to international students from Europe and the US served as an enabler for social integration, while students from other African countries found that their national status was a barrier to social integration in South African townships communities, where they felt that they were not welcome. However, local white students took time before they established relationships with

international students because they first established trust and confidence with these foreigners:

“I think they are nice, you can see, if you approach them they talk, but there’s nothing wrong is just that they are not confident with strangers, there is that, I don’t know, it’s protection, they don’t talk too much but they are fine.”

Some participants revealed that most local students made it difficult for international students to make friends with them because local students spent most of their time on their phones. This type of behaviour by local students made it difficult for international students to interact with them. One participant mentioned:

“Ja, social life here at the university is a bit different from my country. People prefer spending their time on their telephone than talking to people they don’t know.”,

In this regard, it was evident that some international students found it easy to interact and form friendships with local students for various reasons such as interaction in the classroom, living in the same residence and sharing a language. However, others felt that socialisation with local students was unsatisfactory at South African universities. They attributed this poor socialisation to perceptions of foreigners held by South Africans; some local students believed that international students were in South Africa to take scarce resources. Subsequently, this resulted in negative social experiences for international students. One participant shared his frustration when mentioning:

“Yes the people ... some people are not happy. They are not happy, you know, you like meet friends, South Africans, some are like complaining that, no, the country is being invaded, there are too many of us from elsewhere here They don’t like the idea, it’s like we’ve come to compete for jobs with them.”

In addition, some participants put poor socialisation with local students down to the racial grouping that was prevalent at South African universities and in South African society as a whole. They found that South African students still associated along racial, ethnic, language and colour lines. This made it difficult for international students to experience positive social integration at university and in the community. However,

participants acknowledged the political past of South Africa, when people were grouped according to their language, race and colour:

“... so the effect of apartheid has meant that those people perceive society on racial lines. So blacks are mostly with blacks, white people with white people, people from Francophone countries speaking to French speaking people ...”

In explaining insufficient interaction with local students at South African universities, some participants mentioned that most South African postgraduate students studied part-time and did not attend classes regularly, which made it even more difficult to interact with them. One participant said:

“I think most of the time, most of the South African students are working ...”

Some participants found that living off campus also contributed to poor socialisation with other students, as they only went to the campus to attend classes and left once they had done so. This arrangement made it difficult for students living off campus to participate in various social activities organised on campus. When making this point one participant said:

“It’s mainly because I’m not living on campus. I’m living in Alps, so they are not just ..., there’s not a lot of South African students who live there and is harder to be friends with them when you’re here and there and you can’t travel back and forth very easily.”

Some participants reported that it was difficult for international students to form a sustainable relationship with local students because the latter based their friendships on material things. One participant recalled how his effort to establish a friendship with South Africans hit the wall:

“I tried to make South African friends but it’s a bit difficult, you know, because the type of friendship is based on what I can call materials things. Even here in the office if you see them knocking at this door they just want free coffee, or do you have lunch, do you have sweets, do you have something. They will never say can I help you to do this. And you will never get even a single Rand from a South African, even a single cent.”

These findings revealed that international students at South African universities experienced socialisation differently since some found it easy to socialise with local students, translating to positive social integration. Positive social integration emerged as a result of international students' ability to establish friendships with local students. During the interviews, several participants repeated that they had encountered difficulties in socialising with local students for reasons such as the perceptions local students had about international students and the political history of South Africa, which encouraged racial groupings that are still in place at South African universities. Poor socialisation among students resulted in negative social experiences as international students felt unwelcome. These findings further revealed that international students experienced different treatment in South Africa, depending on their nationality. For example, students from the US and Europe were treated well while those from other African countries were not well received in the townships. This is an indication that international students from African countries may have experienced negative social integration while their counterparts from other countries may have achieved positive social integration in South Africa.

5.3.2 Language is a socialisation barrier

Language is at the centre of both the academic and the social experiences of international students upon their arrival in the host country, because language is used to access social amenities and services such as transport, registrations and accommodation. Language is at the centre of socialisation. Most international students are fluent in English, which facilitates their academic integration, but English is not always helpful for social interaction with local students and the South African community.

Several participants revealed during interviews that language was the biggest obstacle to socialisation in South Africa and at South African universities. They maintained that English was a challenge to both international students and local students because it was not the home language of the majority of local students or international students, but rather a second or third language. This made it difficult both for international students and local students to make conversation since they all felt uncomfortable speaking English. One participant described his experience with regard to language as follows:

“... the experience as a foreign student is the language barrier, but they [local students] are also having problems with the language barrier, because some people ... I learnt for myself here that some people study all their high school and primary school in Xhosa for example or Afrikaans ... You do your best to speak English. So when you go to the university you actually have the same problem as me but you don't tell me that, do you understand?”

Participants found that non-English speakers' command of the language presented a barrier to socialisation, since it became difficult for students to have a proper conversation with other people. For this reason, the use of native languages by both local students and international students was prevalent as neither group was fluent in English. The use of native languages was evident when students grouped themselves on the basis of their native languages. One participant expressed frustration at her inability to engage in conversation with other people:

“My greatest challenge was the language, obviously the studies were not that difficult but the language. Sometimes you understand the things but the way you want to put it, is not easy, yeah.”

Some participants not only found it difficult to participate in conversation with local students but also felt isolated from the group when local students started talking in their own languages without considering that some among them did not understand these languages. This type of behaviour by local students made international students feel lonely as they had no one to communicate with in the group. Participants revealed that the use of native languages in the presence of a person who could not speak these languages affected their long-term relationships with other people. One participant expressed the challenge faced by international students when local students spoke their native language in his presence:

“... but sometimes I face the challenges of language, like people in a group, let's say a group of five and other people, four people speak the same language, so that sometimes affects your comfort because it is not easy to speak in their language, so that sometimes stops me from having a long term relationship with other people.”

The use of native language occurred not only among local students; international students also preferred to speak their native languages among themselves. One participant said:

“Ja I’m speaking English with them but mostly we speak our language.”

Social integration among international students was not confined to the university campus but extended beyond the university premises. For this reason, participants recounted their social experiences outside the university. International students found that language was again the major barrier to interaction with South Africans. Participants recounted frustrating experiences which were the result of this language barrier. Many participants mentioned that South Africans off campus did not appreciate it when they spoke English to them, obliging the student to use the particular local South African language. International students found this very frustrating as most of them did not understand these languages. To a certain extent, people distance themselves from someone who does not speak their native language. One participant remarked that he had no objection to speaking English with other students:

“On campus, no, but off the campus. You know some people, when you maybe ask your way, and you speak English, ja, I’ve had some, you know, people telling you why are you talking in English, people oblige you to talk in the local language, I think there is some frustration, frustration you know, ja.”

These students felt that South Africans expected them to speak a South African language, assuming that because they were black they should be able to understand and speak languages such as IsiXhosa or Sesotho. What particularly frustrated international students was that some people made rude comments if the students were unable to speak the local language. This frustration was expressed by one participant:

“... so people feel the need to speak to me in Xhosa which I understand a little but now ... like in a taxi. I missed orientation because of that. I didn’t know that people in the taxi can just speak to you in a random language. So when you answer and you tell them ‘I only speak English’ they’re think I’m a snob, and make comments and all that ..., they are not going to speak to you in English which is very frustrating.”

Besides the difficulties that arose from an inability to use the local languages, participants reported that there were many different accents in South Africa, which made it difficult to understand some people even when they were speaking English:

“The greatest challenge, like the beginning is the language barrier, like you know the way you pronounce words here ... like if you don’t have, I don’t know how to answer that but like it was hard for me to communicate with some of the students because they are so fluent so they will be talking in their South African accent or in their mother tongue So it is hard for me to understand the pronunciation”

Contrary to the general consensus among participants that language was the major barrier facing their attempts at socialisation in a foreign country, a few provided specific experiences to support their argument that language per se was not an obstacle to socialisation; rather, an individual’s negative attitude was the major impediment to interaction with other people. One participant mentioned that integration was possible when people enjoyed interacting with others:

“... I have some friends that I have established a long-term relationship with but I love to be around all over, talking to everyone. Although I don’t understand the language I just love to interact with everyone.”

These findings revealed that the majority of participants found language to be the biggest barrier to interaction between international students and South Africans; ultimately, this hindered social integration as people grouped themselves according to their home languages. Both international and local students were not comfortable speaking English, with the result that they tended to resort to their home language, making integration among students more difficult.

5.3.3 Participation in social activities

During the interviews, participants were asked about their involvement in social activities. The majority indicated that they had not actively participated in social activities but they were members of international students’ organisations in their various universities. However, there were some who were involved in various activities on and off campus, even though some only participated in international students’

organisations on campus. One participant confirmed his involvement in such an organisation on campus, when mentioning:

“Yes the United Nations Association of South Africa, the University Chapter. I’ve been quite heavily involved with that one. I was the head chair for the model United Nations at UCT in 2012. I served as the secretary for the organisation in general, 2012/13 and then the student/MCA as well.”

Some participants expressed feelings of appreciation for the work done by students’ organisations that have been established at various South African universities with the purpose of assisting international students. Most participants felt that these offices assisted in facilitating positive social integration through organising various social gatherings for students such as parties, sports and cultural activities. They suggested that international offices should organise social activities that involved both local and international students; this would improve the interaction of students on university campuses. Some participants also maintained that participation in social activities would help international and local students to understand each other’s accents. One participant expressed his feelings in this way:

“... I feel like a lot of international students don’t get the chance to meet local people not because they don’t have like gathering or social gatherings ... I really didn’t understand the accent ... I think they need more social gatherings to make people aware of it.”

Participants who were involved in various community organisations believed that participating in those that uplifted disadvantaged students in the community would enhance international students’ integration in the community as they would be motivated by making a difference in the community. He recalled his achievement:

“I think the greatest thing that I’ve actually achieved in UCT so far is that we’ve started our own educational organisation called Dikakapa also known as Everyday Heroes and we basically mentor disadvantaged students from different regions of Cape Town ..., what I found very interesting was that as much as they are motivated by us, we get motivated by them”

Despite the fact that most participants conceded that involvement in social activities enhanced social integration, others felt that people should be careful not to spend too much of their time on social activities; rather, they should find a balance between social pleasure and academic demands. Some believed that too much concentration on social activities such as parties had the potential to work to the detriment of their academic progress. In addition, participants argued that commitments outside academic life made it difficult for students to participate in social activities such as parties or simply relaxing with friends:

“... but we also have some sacrifices to make, as I was talking about a party, you don’t always have time to go and party, to go and chill with friends, that is the problem.”

While some students found it difficult to manage both social activities and academic workload, a few participants felt that participation in social activities held no benefits for them. One of them said:

“I just don’t find benefit, even with Golden Key, I just don’t feel like..., I understand there’s an international student organisation here somewhere but it is not really active.”

The finding on this theme revealed that most participants were involved in the extramural activities that were provided on the various campuses. Their participation in student and community organisations assisted them in achieving adequate social integration as they interacted with members of the community. Others restricted their participation in social activities as they believed that too much socialisation could affect their academic performance negatively, as it was not always easy to balance academic work and social activities. More importantly, participants reported that participation in social activities enhanced their communication skills and this facilitated their social integration in the host community.

5.3.4 Discrimination, xenophobia and crime against international students

Even though some participants indicated that South African universities were multicultural, issues such as discrimination, xenophobia and crime against international students occurred on and off some campuses. It was evident that there were isolated incidents of discrimination levelled against international students.

International students expressed their disappointment at the discrimination they experienced at the hands of lecturers. They wondered whether the discrimination they were witnessing from professionals such as lecturers was the result of their race or culture. One participant was very worried when an Indian student was dropped at the last minute from the faculty team that was going to New York and replaced by a white student. The participant perceived this as a race issue:

My friend was supposed to go with eight students on an exchange programme. Like he sent in everything, they asked him to send the passport, you know all those things, he was one of them and then at the last minute they told him he would not be going because they couldn't afford to send two Indians. So I don't know how that makes sense. I would understand if you were sending two whites, two blacks, two Indians but they couldn't send two Indian people but they could send four white people, it doesn't make sense."

Apart from observing elements of discrimination from lecturers directed at other students of colour in the faculty, some participants were very upset when they were exposed to racist and derogatory remarks from lecturers. One participant recalled that a certain lecturer made disparaging remarks about Swazi people in class:

"You Swazis and your king, Swazis are like this and that is not right, how can you judge based on one person that we follow the king. We actually do not."

As a result, participants felt that this attitude towards international students had the potential to affect social integration with other students who were not exposed to other nationalities, such as Swazis, as they might believe what lecturers said about those nationalities. Some participants were disappointed to hear negative remarks from professionals to whom they looked up.

More importantly, some participants considered institutions and their structures, such as the SRC, to be perpetuating discrimination towards international students. Participants argued that these structures only represented the aspirations of South African students, while disregarding the unique challenges that international students were encountering at these institutions. This was evident when one participant mentioned that:

“... even the Student Representative Council, we feel that they represent mostly South African students, they don't fight for us. It seems that especially during registration at the beginning of the year, they fight to get financial aid for South African students, but they don't fight to give us the support in terms of paying registration fees and stuff like that. We are always stuck each and every year at the beginning with this financial issue, we have to pay the full amount ... so we need the support also from the international office or the SRC to help us in that way.”

It also emerged that participants felt discriminated against by universities as they were required to pay their fees in full upon registration while South African students were allowed to pay in instalments. Furthermore, participants mentioned that they felt discriminated against by the university when they were not afforded the same opportunities as South African students. This frustration was supported by one participant who mentioned that:

“...I feel most of the opportunities like part-time jobs that are available within the university, I tend to think because the institution is an international institution, in a way they ought to embrace each and every student”

Participants claimed that international students were subjected to derogatory comments not only from lecturers, but also from members of the community and some local students. One participant recounted how he was called “makwerekwere”:

“Yeah, it has happened, someone saw you in a funny way. Like a normal student, before you ... even beyond me, I think there's a word for us “makwerekwere” meaning strangers”

What disappointed some participants was that international students, particularly Africans, were subjected to this kind of discrimination by black South African students.

However, most international students experienced discrimination outside the campus when they interacted with members of the community. Some shared their experiences of taxi drivers who had mistreated them. One participant explained that he was charged extra when boarding a taxi just because he was black but living in a coloured area:

“Ja, in a taxi, I paid R1 extra just because I’m a black person living in a coloured area, and these are black taxi drivers, so I paid R1 extra because I was living in a coloured people area. Why didn’t I live in the black people’s area?”

Furthermore, participants mentioned that international students of Nigerian nationality found themselves in a peculiar situation as they were racially profiled as criminals in South Africa by police and community members without any proof. One participant narrated the story of a friend’s experience:

“No, I don’t know, they identified him as a criminal which he wasn’t, so they were sort of like racial profiling and then they chased him down and he was scared because they were many and they were intimidating and he also ran away because he was scared. And when they caught him they started beating him up and they told him they thought he had drugs on him or something like that ... then he was sort of cheeky to them so they beat him and then they told him ‘go back to your country’.”

On the issue of xenophobia, participants maintained that they had not witnessed incidents on campus, but that incidents did occur in the community between African foreigners and black South Africans. The general feeling of participants was that incidents of xenophobia in communities were fuelled by the belief that foreigners were being given more opportunities than local people. One participant commented that:

“It is in the communities, yes, that’s where it happens, and I think it’s mainly because of foreign nationals who come into the country, they probably work harder, or they seem to have their things going on quite well, their little business or whatever seems to be flourishing and then the locals are not getting as many opportunities, so there’s a feeling that we are sharing our resources with the locals. But as far as the university context is concerned, none whatsoever.”

Despite the fact that participants had not been victims of xenophobia on university campuses, they revealed that foreigners from other African countries did experience xenophobia in South Africa. This type of action directed at African foreigner nationals

had a direct impact on social interaction with South Africans because African international students limited their movements.

Even though there was no sign of xenophobia on campuses, some participants observed that black South African students appreciated white international students from Europe and US, but displayed signs of dislike towards international students from African countries. One participant substantiated his argument by saying that:

“Discrimination. Look I’m black, if I’m a white you may think I’m discriminated against, what I actually feel is, if you know discrimination, the black South Africans don’t discriminate against the white Americans or the British, they are their best friends. You may say black South African ... I know Charles he is my friend, Charles ... is a white, he’s British, or he’s American but you may say I hate ... because she is black.”

Participants emphasised that there were very few discriminatory and xenophobic tendencies exhibited by South African students towards international students on university campuses, and they felt welcome there. Some participants attributed this lack of discrimination and xenophobia on campuses to students’ level of education. One participant reinforced this view as follows:

“According to me the level of education plays a crucial role in the way in which people think. Students are educated, actually more educated than others, so it’s going to be difficult to find this kind of attitude at tertiary level, but in the street, in the township yes it’s normal. They are frustrated, they are experiencing poverty, they don’t have the minimum for life.”

However, some participants found crimes against international students a serious issue and one that contributed to poor social integration in the South African community.

Most participants believed they were soft targets for criminals and also reported that they had themselves been victims of robbery, theft and attacks by criminals because they were perceived by South Africans to be rich. One participant said:

“Off campus yes, like when they see international students, some South Africans have the perception that these people are rich, they come here because they have money and when they see you walking alone, they want to rob you and I’ve seen some students being robbed”

On the issue of crime, participants indicated that this mostly occurred off campus, when they were travelling to or from university.

These findings revealed that international students had had some adverse experiences of social integration in South Africa as a result of discrimination and crime. But participants also indicated that they had not been subjected to xenophobic attacks at university, although a few participants knew of xenophobic attacks against African foreign nationals in other parts of South Africa.

5.3.5 Cultural experiences

It is important for international students to understand the culture of their host country and for local students in turn to appreciate the culture of foreign students who join South African universities if social integration between the two groups is to occur.

Some participants revealed a growing appreciation for new cultures in South Africa and its universities and demonstrated a willingness to learn from these cultures as well as to share their own ways and knowledge with other students. They believed that learning and understanding other cultures would widen their knowledge of how other tribes or nations achieved their goals. One of the participants shared his appreciation for having been exposed to new cultures:

“... now I understand different cultures, I’m no longer that person who believes that there’s only one right way. Now I know that you can go ... you can achieve the same goal through different means, because I’ve seen how different cultures, how different tribes, how different nations tackle the same problem and get the same result.”

Participants acknowledged that studying in foreign country gave them cultural exposure. However, some mentioned that it was difficult to interact with white students in South Africa because of their culture. They found that it was not easy for white

students to interact with strangers until they had established or understood their intentions. On this issue, one participant commented that:

“Other cultures, I think it is the culture of our white colleagues, they never accept you until they study you first, until they know your intentions and ... but after sometime things are okay with them.”

Most participants found that South African universities were multicultural. The positive aspect of this was that students left university prepared to deal with any culture in the world of work. Some explained the importance of being exposed to a multicultural society:

“... South Africa, I mean it is part of the culture, you know where you are in terms of respect, so that’s why I’ve realised that South Africans are more ... what can I say, they are patient, they can easily accept anything, and this is part of the culture.”

According to some participants, coming to South Africa had exposed them to other cultures and made them appreciate other peoples’ way of life. When they understood that other cultures existed on the university campus they embraced and internalised them; this assisted them in achieving satisfactory integration in the new society.

However, participants indicated that food was a challenge for some international students as they were not used either to the staple food or to how food was prepared in South Africa. They were disappointed by the fact that university catering did not provide a variety of food for students:

“And so I miss spaghetti and other stuff. I like to bake here but they don’t know how to bake here, and here they don’t have things like chocolate chips, you know ... so I miss my baking stuff. I tried baking here and I think the first couple times I made such a flop and then I told my friends, you know, I’m actually really a good baker.”

In addition to complaints about the way food was prepared and the lack of variety in university canteens, participants complained that food in South Africa was expensive.

The above demonstrates that culture and food have an impact on the social integration of international students since they come to the host country from a different cultural background. Interestingly, participants indicated that they had been exposed to various cultures and their awareness and appreciation of other cultures had increased, which would help them in life after university. This suggests that when students were exposed to different cultures on campus and in the community, these provided students with an opportunity to build sustainable friendships with other students. These findings also revealed that food contributed a great deal to students' difficulties to integrate, since they missed familiar food and this led to feelings of homesickness.

These findings revealed that socialisation among students was positive, even though there were challenges during the process of social integration. The majority of participants indicated that they found it easier to establish friendships among themselves than with local students.

This seems to be the result of the language barrier, since international students who shared a language with local students found it easier to integrate in their new environment. It also appeared that international students who participated in social activities had achieved positive social integration. However, it was also found that issues such as discrimination and crime posed a major challenge for international students, resulting in poor social interaction with South Africans and ultimately affecting their integration negatively. The analysis further revealed that poor social integration resulted in international students feeling lonely, homesick and isolated.

5.4 Coping strategies

From the literature review it became apparent that international students across the world encounter numerous challenges when arriving in a foreign country. They have to overcome these before they can integrate in the new environment (Ghalayini, 2014). This study revealed that international students in South Africa are faced with challenges that include language barriers, unfamiliar teaching styles, unfamiliar culture and food, crime, loneliness and homesickness. These factors have an impact on their academic and social integration.

5.4.1 Use of support structures

International students need support from their institutions, faculty staff, friends and family members if they are to successfully adapt and overcome challenges they are faced with in a foreign country and institution.

International students find themselves alone and far from family members, the communities they are familiar with and friends who in normal circumstances would provide support during difficult times. In order to establish a new support structure, international students in this study resorted to socialising among themselves. The findings revealed that the majority of international students counted on friends for support when going through the adjustment to their new environment, since they were far away from their families. They found it easier to establish friendships with other international students, because they were going through the same experience, sharing the same difficulties and came from similar cultural backgrounds even if they were from different countries. It was evident that most participants used socialisation with other international students as a strategy to cope with their difficulties. One participant said:

“So we are just avoiding problems as foreigners, so we stay together with people who can understand the problem we are experiencing in this country ... maybe we also have the same culture because I’m from Gabon and most of my friends are Congolese. We have similar cultures. So we understand each other.”

Beside the fact that international students socialised among themselves because they shared common cultures and experiences, some preferred to be friends with students from their home country because sharing the same region and language made them comfortable. In support of this view one participant said:

“It happens naturally because we use the same language, we understand each other very well, better than someone who is from a different country. Although I do get along with them most of the time I am with the Swazis.”

Some participants remarked that international students preferred to spend most of their time with students from their home countries because they knew each other from home and had cultural connections. As a result, they did not have to struggle on their

own without someone to share their frustrations. Most importantly, international students supported each other. One participant justified this association with fellow countrymen:

“Ja, because I know them from home so that’s why. And even if you go somewhere and you find someone from one country, you will automatically be a friend of that person, it’s that thing we don’t control, it’s natural when you find someone from your country somewhere, you just befriend him.”

The findings of this study indicated that most international students socialised amongst themselves because they shared similar cultures, languages and challenges; sharing these aspects made it easier for them to support one another.

5.4.2 Dealing with the language problem

The findings of this study revealed that English presented the biggest challenge to academic integration since most participants emphasised their struggle to understand lecturers in the classroom. It was evident that the academic progress of international students with a poor background in English was negatively affected, as was their interaction with lecturers and other students. They also found it difficult to have a meaningful conversation with both friends and academic staff. For this reason, during interviews participants expressed the necessity for international students struggling with English to register for an English course at a college prior or concurrently with their major degree in order to improve their English language. This was essential to both academic and social integration. This suggestion of registering for an English course at a centre or college was supported by one participant:

“Okay, I come in 2010, I spent one year learning English and I started my BMA programme in 2011.”

Some participants explained that in order to cope with the language problem they socialised with English speakers, watched more English programmes on television, while others arranged for English tutors to assist them with their academic writing. One participant remarked:

“... so I think I will advise people to hang out more with people, English-speaking people and that will greatly improve their English especially in the academic field.”

Besides English presenting both an academic and a social integration challenge for some international students, the biggest barrier to social integration between local and international students was the use of native languages by local students and South Africans. One participant was proud to mention that:

“I’m better at doing projects, working with people, and I’m even better at speaking Afrikaans, I guess ... I know I can understand people now ... that was a good. I learnt that and that’s about it.”

In order to cope with the use of local languages such as Afrikaans, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu and Sesotho, international students resorted to learning to speak some South African native languages.

5.4.3 Extracurricular activities

When students participated in social activities such as sports, students’ organisations, parties and above all in community programmes, these activities enhanced their social integration experiences in their new environment. Participants also recommended that international students participate in various extramural and other social activities if they wished to integrate in the new institution. One participant confirmed that by participating in social activities, he began to feel welcome:

“..., you’re doing something like sports, just to make us feel like we are also part of a society here, and if they’re supporting you feel like you’re part of it. And then I’m also get involved in organising parties and making money to support people, and buy books for library.”

Participants were asked to make suggestions about aspects that they thought required improvement at South African universities. Most participants suggested that institutions should introduce cultural awareness programmes during orientation so that students could understand each other’s cultures. They believed that such cultural awareness would improve interaction among students. This awareness could be achieved by focusing on aspects such as types of food, clothing and dance. One

participant believed that this would encourage students to appreciate other people and their cultures:

“With cultural awareness, maybe during the orientation ... if during orientation they could have a programme in which they would educate ... the same way they educate first years about health issues, HIV, sex education ... if there was education about foreign students and how to relate to them and why they are here and not for them to be xenophobic and act strangely around foreign students.”

The study revealed that upon their arrival at South African universities, international students employed various strategies to adapt to the new environment. It was evident that structural support was at the centre of international students' adjustment. Lack of such support forced them to resort to associating among themselves. Language emerged as a barrier to both academic and social integration for international students in their new environment. It was very clear from the findings that international students put extra effort into developing effective communication skills by attending extra lessons to improve their English and learning the local languages. The findings also revealed that participating in extramural and co-curricular activities facilitated their integration in the new community.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The discussion of the findings of this study is the focus of this chapter. This discussion addresses the following research questions: 1) What are the academic experiences of international students at South African universities? 2) What are the social experiences of international students in South Africa? 3) How do the academic and social experiences of international students influence their integration into the institution and South Africa? 4) What strategies do international students use to facilitate their integration? Tinto's (1975) student integration model was applied when exploring the experiences of international students. This model assisted me in interpreting the results presented in Chapter 5 of this study.

The findings emerged from the analysis of qualitative data collected from 50 international students. Recommendations to improve the conditions of international students in South Africa are made. In addition, suggestions for future research on the experiences of international students are made.

6.2 Discussion

6.2.1 The academic experiences of international students at South African Universities

The literature reviewed in this study indicated that classroom experiences form the basis of any academic experience of international students (Gou and Chase, 2011; Sawir et al., 2008). The findings revealed that international students had mixed academic experiences in South African universities, both positive and negative. Most international students reported that they experienced a classroom atmosphere in South Africa that differed from their home experiences. This classroom atmosphere was the result of unfamiliar learning approaches and pedagogy. This challenge is not unique to South African universities since other studies have revealed that institutions are not characterised by heterogeneous learning styles and approaches (Reinties et al., 2014; Hosseini, 2014).

In South African universities, independent and interactive learning styles are more dominant, depending on the academic level. For instance, interactive learning is more evident in undergraduate classes while independent learning is more common at

master and doctoral level. The findings of this study revealed that some international students struggled to adjust to these unfamiliar learning styles but once they grew used to the learning approach and pedagogy they enjoyed their studies and felt happier. The struggle to adjust to the South African learning culture might have been influenced by international students' cultures of individualism or collectivism. Maringe and Jenkins (2014) indicate that an individualistic culture is associated with independent learning styles whereas interactive learning styles are more common in a collectivist culture.

This study found further that most international students felt that the South African university classroom environment was conducive to learning because of the freedom students were given in class. This freedom created a relaxed classroom atmosphere that was enhanced by positive student-lecturer relationships. These good relationships between students and lecturers facilitated positive learning experiences among international students as they found that lecturers were approachable and supportive of students. This finding is similar to that of Adams (2014), who found that in a relaxed classroom atmosphere students felt freer to ask questions of lecturers, to offer their views and to participate voluntarily and effectively in classroom discussions.

Despite the fact that most international students in this study were satisfied with the classroom atmosphere and interaction between students and lecturers, students from the US reported some disappointment and frustration as a result of the attitude some lecturers had towards students who questioned them.

The reviewed literature emphasised the lack of preparedness among international students for the new academic demands and workload, which contributed to their negative academic experiences at South African universities. In this study, this was exacerbated by the assumption that all students possessed the same knowledge, and by the unfamiliar academic schedule. International students struggled to cope with the new academic demands, to the detriment of their academic integration. Interestingly, some international students were concerned about the low standard and lack of academic demand of South African universities. They indicated that this was the result of a repetition of undergraduate work at honour's degree level, examination hints and notes provided to students by lecturers. International students believed that these factors encouraged laziness, because students did not have to work as hard to pass

with good marks. In addition, students, mostly from Zimbabwe, reported that the academic demand of the first-year curriculum was very similar to that of their final year of secondary school.

As was the case in findings from studies conducted internationally, regionally and in South Africa on the experiences of international students (Mudhovozi, 2011; Maundeni et al., 2010; Lee, 2010; McLellan, 2009; Zhou and Zhang, 2014), poor English proved to be the main challenge faced by international students with regard to academic integration. As in other studies, this study confirmed that most international students in the sample were non-native English speakers. They had difficulty understanding the terminology of their discipline as well as the subject content. Furthermore, poor English proficiency had a negative impact on students' writing skills, presentations in the classroom and laboratory work and also affected their participation in class and discussions with their peers. As a result, students with poor English skills lacked confidence and were reluctant to participate in class. This affected their self-esteem. This finding corresponds to those of Schweisfurth and Gu (2009) and Maringe and Jenkins (2014), who showed that poor language proficiency in the main language of teaching limited the academic achievement of international students.

One finding that is not as prominent in the literature is the international student's difficulty in understanding various accents that occur in South African universities. This study found that even students who were native English speakers had some difficulty understanding South African accents. This difficulty was exacerbated by the fact that lecturers were often foreigners and from different ethnic groups, bringing yet more different accents to the classroom. These accents had a negative effect on the academic performance of some international students because it took them a while to understand their lecturers. At the same time, international students felt excluded by lecturers who used local languages in class without translating their words into English to accommodate them. Bamford (2008) revealed that exclusion by lecturers and students resulted in a traumatic academic experience for those who could not understand the language.

Despite several challenges facing international students in South Africa, this study found that many of them gained great academic benefit from studying at a South African university. These benefits encouraged them to overcome any challenges.

Kwaramba's (2012) study revealed that international students were attracted to studying abroad because of the potential benefits after the completion of their studies. Studying in South Africa exposed international students to a new educational experience, very advanced technological equipment, and opportunities to interact and to share ideas with other people through participating in various international and local conferences.

Even though the majority of international students were satisfied with the academic benefits of studying in South Africa, some had had negative experiences because they had struggled to secure placement for in-service training with South African industries. This was of particular concern in fields such as engineering, where in-service training is a prerequisite for the completion of a degree or diploma.

6.2.2 The social experiences of international students in South Africa

Several studies conducted on student integration have found that social interaction begins in the classroom when students participate in various academic activities (Tinto, 1975; Ghalayini, 2014; Zhou and Zhang, 2014). This argument is supported by the findings in this study which revealed that international students who participated actively in classroom activities found it easier to make friends with classmates as such participation made them more popular with other students.

This study also found that most international students were willing to socialise with local students, but found it difficult to establish a sustainable relationship with them. They attributed this to the following factors: firstly, local students in most instances grouped themselves along racial or ethnic lines; secondly, most local students only befriended international students if there was a prospect of benefiting either academically or materially from these students; thirdly, local students were too busy on their telephones and had no time for other people. For these reasons international students resorted to socialising among themselves.

This study also highlighted the fact that sharing similar experiences of being in a foreign country, sharing languages and cultures contributed to socialisation and the forging of bonds among international students. This finding corroborates that of Maundeni et al. (2010), who found that international students bonded together because of their similar experiences and the influence of their colonial history.

Zhou and Zhang (2014), Wu et al. (2015) and Mudhovozi (2011) have pointed out that poor language proficiency is a major hindrance to socialisation for international students in a foreign country. The findings of this study revealed that good English proficiency facilitated academic integration, but contributed very little to social integration because outside the classroom local languages such as IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Afrikaans and Sepedi dominated. This limited social interaction between South Africans and international students who could only speak English. This brings us to a finding that suggests that sharing a language and culture makes it easier for people to interact. This is evident in the fact that international students who shared languages with other ethnic groups found in South Africa integrated more easily than those students with different languages and cultures.

A finding that is less emphasised in the literature is the perceptions local students and international students hold about each other, which make it difficult for socialisation to occur amongst them. For example, some local students believed that international students were in South Africa to use resources that were intended to benefit South Africans only, while on the other hand international students perceived local students to be lazy and arrogant.

This study found that when international students participated in social activities they expanded their social network with other students. This also helped them to understand local languages and to familiarise themselves with South African accents. Furthermore, participating in social activities promoted a cultural exchange between local students and international students and reduced cultural shock. This finding confirms that of Schweisfurth and Gu (2009), who revealed that participation in social activities such as sports and parties created a good opportunity for international students to build friendships and interaction with other people. However, some international students limited their participation in social activities out of fear of losing focus on their academic priority. This finding affirms the argument made by Tinto (1975) that too much concentration on social activities can have a negative effect on the academic progress of individual students.

The literature also revealed that discrimination, xenophobia and crime have a negative impact on the experiences of international students in foreign countries (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing, 2015; Buthelezi, 2009; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012). In South

Africa, discrimination is common on and off campus when international students interact with community members. International students reported that on campus they felt discriminated against by university systems, faculty staff and their peers, while outside campus they were discriminated against by local people. They believed that discrimination by university systems arose from unequal treatment of local students and international students with regard to tuition payment, and exclusion by faculty staff and peers who used local languages knowing full well that international students could not speak these languages.

Adams (2014) made an interesting finding, revealing the existence of majority-minority status, which had an impact on the social experiences of international students. When an individual moved from a majority to a minority status, his or her experience was negatively affected by the change of status (Adams, 2014). However, findings in this study indicated that white international students from countries where they enjoyed majority status, assumed a minority status when they joined South African universities. Interestingly, this study showed that black international students from other African countries continued to keep their majority status in South Africa but, surprisingly, they experienced discrimination from their fellow black South Africans while their white counterparts were welcomed and appreciated by black South Africans. This finding confirms those of previous studies conducted in South Africa by McLellan (2009) and Dzensi and Monnapula-Mapesela (2008), who found that white international students felt more welcome in South Africa than their black counterparts from other African states.

Buthelezi (2009), Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2012) and Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing (2015) report that xenophobia poses a significant challenge to African international students in South Africa. The literature revealed also that xenophobia limits interaction between African international students and South Africans. However, this study indicated that interviewed students had not experienced any form of xenophobia in South Africa but had witnessed foreigners from other African countries being subjected to xenophobic attacks. Nonetheless, international students held the view that xenophobia in South Africa was exacerbated by the perception that foreign nationals, in particular Africans, were in the country to take limited jobs and other resources, and also arose from the profiling of African foreign nationals as criminals. The irony was

that international students were soft targets for crimes such as robbery and theft because many South Africans perceived them to be rich.

Scholars have argued that international students bring cultural diversity to the host institution (Wu et al., 2015). A study by Mudhovozi (2011) indicated that the main challenge faced by international students when joining the host society was cultural shock. This cultural shock arises from for instance food, how students interact with professors in the classroom as well as little things such as greetings.

This study found that some international students chose to study in South Africa for the purpose of broadening their knowledge about South African cultures. However, the way international students experience the culture of the host society is influenced by their own cultural background (Ghalayini, 2014). The findings confirmed that some students experienced cultural shock as they found that most South African cultures were quite different from their own, even though the literature argues that globalisation has reduced cultural shock as most international students are exposed to foreign cultures through the media while they are still in their home countries (Adams, 2014). More importantly, this study revealed that geographical proximity and the sharing of a similar culture and language with other ethnic groups in South Africa eliminated cultural shock from the experiences of international students from neighbouring countries. In support of the argument that globalisation has reduced cultural shock, this study found that the majority of international students did not experience shock as a result of the food they encountered in South Africa. They reported that the availability of globalised food chains and staples such as rice and bread reduced any shock related to food. However, the findings showed that different ways of preparing food led to homesickness for some international students because they missed their favourite foods.

6.2.3 The influence of academic and social experiences on international students' integration in the institution and South Africa

Tinto's (1975, 1998) student integration model was used to determine the influence of international students' academic and social experiences of integration into South Africa and its institutions. According to this theory, student integration is influenced by academic and social experiences. Grade progression, intellectual development, together with commitment to the university policy and its academic requirements are

all indicators identified for academic integration. Tinto (1975) further indicates that social integration becomes possible when there is sufficient interaction between student and faculty staff, participation in extracurricular activities by students and positive peer group association.

The findings of this study indicated that international students at South African universities experienced the classroom atmosphere differently, as a result of their diverse previous classroom experiences. This finding affirms the argument made by Tinto (1975) in his model, that students' experiences in higher education institutions are influenced by the individual student's previous educational experience. In this study most international students revealed that at the beginning they struggled to cope with the new teaching styles they encountered at South African universities, but once they were used to these methods, they enjoyed learning new teaching approaches. This positive academic experience was facilitated by the good relationships they formed with their faculty staff, in particular their supervisors and lecturers. This interaction between student and faculty staff is at the core of the academic integration of international students (Ghalayini, 2014). From these findings it appears that the support international students receive from lecturers facilitates positive academic integration in South African universities. Furthermore, the interaction between international students and other students is enhanced by interactive learning that encourages the sharing of ideas with peers through group discussions, laboratory projects and participation at conferences. This interactive learning approach enhances students' intellectual development, which is at the core of academic integration. However, independent learning approaches can limit the integration of international students as they experience less interaction with lecturers and other students.

The findings of this study suggest that not all international student participants had positive interactions with faculty staff. Some students revealed that they found some faculty staff to be unwelcoming because their interaction with the students was characterised by a lack of patience, rudeness and unfair or judgemental comments about them. This kind of behaviour resulted in feelings of exclusion and isolation on the part of students. Once international students felt excluded by professionals such as lecturers, they became lonely and homesick, an indication of insufficient integration within the new institution of learning.

In addition to the fact that international students felt excluded by the comments and behaviour of faculty staff; this study found that poor English proficiency was a major obstacle to international students' academic integration. Poor English skills limited student-lecturer interaction, negatively affecting their academic performance and their confidence. This finding corresponds to those of Ghalayini (2014) and Adams (2014), who argue that poor language proficiency negatively affects international students' grade performance.

Tinto (1975) argues that intellectual development of students is a process of gaining knowledge and also appreciating the ideas of others. Most international students in this study indicated that they appreciated the exposure they had to technologically advanced equipment and the knowledge they gained from conference presentations. This is an indication of their positive intellectual development. On the other hand, some students noted with disappointment that academic standards at South African universities were lower than at the universities in their home countries. They attributed this to examination hints, notes provided by lecturers and the repetition of undergraduate work at honour's degree level. This had a negative effect on their academic experiences.

Song (2013) highlighted the point that the success of international students should be measured not only in their obtaining degrees, but in their successful social integration in the society in which they are living. The success of social integration is determined by the ability of students to build friendships with others. In this model, interaction is in an informal or semi-formal setting such as in extracurricular activities and peer group associations that enhance social integration (Tinto, 1975).

The findings of this study revealed that language facilitated both the academic and the social integration of international students in the host country and institution. Language further determined peer group association in the sense that most international students found it difficult to associate with local students in South Africa because they spoke local indigenous languages which international students did not understand. In addition, the study revealed that when international students socialised among themselves, language also influenced with whom they spent most of their time. Language was thus a barrier to social interaction between international and local students. At the same time, ethnicity and racial grouping also had an impact on

student-student interaction. However, international students who spoke languages that were similar to those of some South African ethnic groups managed to integrate successfully in South African society. Negative social experiences such as poor social interaction between international students and local students resulted in feelings of loneliness and isolation (Song, 2013; Mudhovozi, 2011). These feelings were an indication of poor social integration.

In his student integration model, Tinto (1975) emphasises that extracurricular activities enhance social integration. In this regard, international students at South African universities indicated that there was a lack of social activities that enhanced interaction between local and international students. Drawing from the model, this suggests that this lack of social activities that bring local and international students together made it more likely that international students would experience inadequate social integration at university. This assumption was confirmed when some students who were actively involved in social activities revealed that through this participation they were able to understand other languages and accents and to expand their social network. This is an indication of positive social integration. This finding is similar to that of Zhou and Zhang (2014), who found that extracurricular activities created a good opportunity for international students and local students to understand each other, and also facilitated peer group association.

Tinto (1975) maintained that peer group association facilitates social integration of students within a new environment. However, the findings of this study indicated that social interaction in this case was limited between local and international students as a result of issues such as discrimination and crime. International students engaged in limited peer group interaction because they avoided interacting with local students.

6.2.4 The coping strategies employed by international students to facilitate their integration

Most literature on the experiences of international students concurs that studying in a foreign country has its challenges and requires international students to devise coping strategies (Maudeni et al., 2010; Maringe and Jenkins, 2014; Adams, 2014). The findings of this study revealed that international students in South Africa were faced with problems of communication, difficulties in building friendships with local students,

difficulty in coping with new teaching and learning styles unfamiliar to them and unfamiliar academic schedules.

The study found that some South African universities were not providing enough support for international students who were struggling with the English language. For this reason, some students took it upon themselves to improve their English by enrolling in remedial English classes with private institutions, while others depended on friends for support. The strategy of remedial classes is common even among international students in the UK (Maringe and Jenkins, 2014). The study also reported that some students befriended English speakers in the hope that if they spoke English regularly their command of the language would improve, whereas others arranged for tutors to assist them.

Even though international students put more effort into improving their English in South Africa, challenges arose from the use of South African indigenous languages outside the classroom. In order to achieve social interaction with peer groups and the community, some international student learned to speak a local language. This strategy was also reported in a study by Mudhovozi (2011).

This study also revealed that participating in extracurricular activities was a mechanism used by international students to cope with their inability to make friends; through these activities they were able to build friendships with other students. Wu et al. (2015) also found that the availability of services and organisations such as student associations and other recreational activities improved interaction amongst students.

Many international students failed to build sustainable relationships with local students; as a result, they resorted to socialising among themselves. This was a coping mechanism as they supported each other on their journey of integration. This study also reported that international students employed avoidance strategies to deal with the problems of discrimination and crime. However, these strategies limited their interaction with South Africans.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 Implementation to practice and policy

This study found that international students are faced with many challenges during their integration process, both at South African universities and in the general community. It is thus imperative to find ways to improve the conditions of international students at South African universities and to identify areas where further research is required.

Firstly, participants voiced concerns that international students at South African universities were discriminated against by university policies. International students are not afforded opportunities equal to those provided for local students because the latter are given priority when it comes to funding. For instance, international students are required to pay their tuition fees in advance. Universities should arrange funding for high performing international students and should also make part-time jobs available to them; this would alleviate their financial burden, which currently has a negative impact on their academic and social integration.

Secondly, the study showed that faculty staff found it difficult to accommodate students from diverse cultural backgrounds. For this reason, universities should train faculty staff members to deal with the diverse student cultures they encounter in the classroom. This training would also encourage faculty staff such as lecturers to be more sensitive to the needs of international students in the classroom, thus improving student-faculty staff relationships.

Thirdly, this study showed that most international students preferred to build friendships amongst themselves rather than with local students. This suggests that there was limited integration between international and local students. In order to encourage socialisation between local and international students, universities should organise social activities through existing structures such as the SRC and International Student Offices. These would assist in bringing students together and would help each group to understand and appreciate the cultures and languages of the other. This would ensure that integration would not be merely superficial.

Fourthly, the findings revealed that these international students struggled to secure in-service training in South African industry, despite their excellent academic

achievements. This resulted in their taking longer to complete their degrees or diplomas. Therefore, this study suggests that universities should negotiate work-based placement for international students to enable them to complete their studies on time.

Lastly, one finding indicated that language was the biggest challenge for international students. It appeared that universities were doing very little to assist international students to improve their poor English proficiency. It should not be left to international students alone to improve their English language proficiency; universities admit international students, such as those from Francophone countries, knowing full well that they do not have an English language background. This study recommends that universities assist international students who have poor English language skills by introducing English remedial classes for students who need assistance.

This dissertation sought to fill the gap in the South African literature by providing knowledge on the integration of international students in the South African higher education system and in the country. In an attempt to understand the challenges, they encounter during the integration process, their academic and social experiences were interrogated using Tinto's student integration model. This study has contributed to the existing literature by identifying areas that call for improvement to ensure better integration of international students in South Africa and its institutions. It has also made recommendations for further research.

6.3.2 Suggestions for further research

This study focused on exploring the experiences of international students at South African universities, using Tinto's (1975) student integration model. The focus was on institutional experiences while disregarding other theoretical elements such as pre-entry, goals and commitment, and decision to withdraw or persist. As Tinto's student integration model is a through-put theory, a longitudinal study could be conducted to determine whether the academic and social experiences of international students influence their decisions to persist or withdraw.

The findings indicated that the perceptions international students have about local students had a significant influence on their decision to associate or form friendships with local students. A future study could be conducted on the perceptions of host

students of international students and how these influence integration of international students in the new environment. Integration of international students into the university community should not be viewed as the sole responsibility of international students.

This study was based on qualitative data that were collected from 50 participants at five South African universities. It did not include the quantitative data that were collected from 1682 respondents from seven South African universities. Therefore, future secondary studies could include both qualitative and quantitative data.

6.4 Conclusion

The reviewed literature revealed that South Africa continues to attract a significant number of international students from different countries to its public institutions (Lee and Sehoole, 2015; UNESCO UIS, 2012; McLellan, 2009). This study thus explored the academic and social experiences of international students, the influence of their experiences of integration in the institution they were attending and in the country. The strategies international students employed to cope with challenges encountered in South Africa were also investigated.

Findings revealed that challenges encountered by international students at South African universities affected their integration in the new environment somewhat negatively. However, the findings also indicated that there was some positive interaction between students and lecturers or supervisors and fellow students. Participation in social activities enhanced both their academic and social integration. In dealing with challenges, international students developed strategies that assisted them in integrating in the host institutions. These strategies included attending remedial English classes, learning the local languages, soliciting the services of tutors and socialising amongst themselves. However, strategies such as avoidance did not promote social integration within the host community. The findings of this study further indicated that international students were motivated by the benefits of studying at a South African university.

This study produced several findings on the integration of international students in South African universities. These universities should provide programmes that will assist international students to integrate successfully. These students struggle to

integrate socially in the host community as a result of limited interaction that stems from the dominance of indigenous South African languages.

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ANNEXURE A: LETTER OF PERMISSION



Faculty of Education

Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

Dear researcher

Thank you for your application and request to conduct research titled: Academic student mobility in Africa: The case of Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Egypt Cameroon and Senegal, which is conducted under the leadership of Professors Chika Schoole and Jenny Lee. I hereby grant permission for the research to be conducted at University of Ibadan.

Looking forward to the research and its outcomes

In the survey questionnaire on international student mobility you indicated your willingness to participate further in this project by being interviewed. You are hereby invited to participate in an interview for this project. The purpose of the interview is to explore further some of the questions that were asked in the survey, particularly your experiences as an international student in this country and your institution. The data collected for this study will further our understanding of international student experiences and address the needs of current and future international students in Nigeria.

Your identification will be strictly anonymous. No attempt will be made to link your identity to your responses. All answers will be kept strictly confidential, and your participation is voluntary. You will free to withdraw from participation in this project at any time and should you wish to do so, know that this will not affect your status or relationship with this university. The interview will take at a place convenient for you. Please make sure that the place is quite enough to allow for recording of our interview. All data collected with public funding may be made available in open repository for public and scientific use.

This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions, please contact Jenny Lee at JennyLee@arizona.edu or Professor Chika Schoole at chika.schoole@up.ac.za.

If you agree to participate, please complete the survey, which is available at (survey link).

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chika Schoole', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Professor Chika Schoole

ANNEXURE B: PROTOCOL LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A SURVEY



**UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA**
Faculty of Education

Protocol Letter of Invitation to participate in a survey on international students in South Africa

Dear International Student:

You have been invited to participate in this research study, conducted Professor Jenny J. Lee, a Fulbright Scholar in South Africa and a faculty member in the US and Professor Chika Sehoole, a faculty member at the University of Pretoria. This is the first comprehensive survey on international students in South Africa. The data collected for this study will further our understanding of international student experiences and address the needs of current and future international students in South Africa.

You have been invited to participate because you were identified as an international student. Your identification will be strictly anonymous. No attempt will be made to link your identity to your responses. All answers will be kept strictly confidential, and your participation is voluntary. You will free to withdraw from participation in this project at any time and should you wish to do so, know that this will not affect your status or relationship with this university. This survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, please contact Dr Jenny Lee at JennyLee@arizona.edu or Professor Chika Sehoole at Chika.Sehoole@up.ac.za

If you agree to participate, please complete the survey, which is available at (survey link).

Thank you,

.....

Jenny J. Lee
Associate Professor
University of Arizona

.....

Chika Sehoole
Associate Professor
University of Pretoria