INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING IN A SELECTED UNIVERSITY IN KWAZULU-NATAL

By

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ABSTRACT

The voices of international postgraduate students are more often than not missing from the conversation about their learning experiences at their host university. Therefore this study explores the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. By exploring these diverse students' learning experiences, this study also explored the influence of experience on the type of resources these students uses to support and improve their learning in the host university. The study clarifies the role of internationalisation policy on the mobility of international students and the students' learning in different context. The bio-ecosystemic theory was used to guide the study. The study followed the qualitative approach and adopted the interpretive paradigm in conducting a single case study research in one university in KwaZulu-Natal. The photovoice participatory visual method and focus group discussion were the methods employed by the researcher to generate data from eight full time international postgraduate students enrolled in a MEd. and PhD programme in 2014.The data from the students' responses was analysed thematically and the results of this study are illustrated and discussed.

The findings are that the international postgraduate students viewed the university as both an enabling and also a constraining learning environment as they identified diverse factors which impacted on their learning within and outside the university environment. The Influence of the international postgraduate students' experiences on their learning were identified. The findings showed that the students' developed diverse personal and academic skills that shaped their learning and enabled them to achieve their academic goals. In addition, the result also identified diverse university resources used by the international postgraduate students such as various teaching and learning activities like conferences, presentations, ICT, workshops, seminars etc., the academics and sports and recreational facilities that supported and enabled their learning. This study therefore challenges the argument that international students are 'victims of pathology' in experiencing only hardship in their host environment, hardship that negatively affects their learning. The study concludes that international students' learning is a result of their interrelationships and interactions with people, resources and the environment which helped to develop their personal experiences, improve their knowledge, develop skills and enable change in behaviour to achieve their academic goals. Furthermore, this study also concludes that the use of photovoice as a participatory visual method enabled dialogue among the international students and bring into visual awareness international postgraduate students' ideas about their learning experiences.

DECLARATION

I, Peace Ginika Nwokedi, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work, both in conception and execution and that all the sources used have been acknowledged by means of complete reference. In addition, this research study has not been previously submitted for a degree at any other university**.**

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Student's signature   Date

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Supervisor' signature   Date

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

DHET   Department of Higher Education and Training

HEIs   Higher Education Institutions

UKZN   University of KwaZulu-Natal

IAU   International Association of Universities

ICT   Information and Communication Technology

UK   United Kingdom

USA   United States of America

IEASA   International Education Association of South Africa

EU   European Union

PhD   Doctorate of Philosophy

PPCT   Process, Person, Context, Time

HIV   Human Immune Deficiency Virus

AIDS   Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

MEd   Masters of Education

PV   Photovoice

FG1   Focus Group1

FG2   Focus Group 2

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CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Internationally, education is considered a significant tool for the development of society's economic, social, political resources and of the holistic well-being of all humans. Since the emergence of a democratic society in South Africa in 1994, the government of South Africa has begun to promote and emphasise the importance of education in the country by increasing access to education to all students, including students from other countries around the world. Therefore, this introductory chapter begins by presenting and discussing the background to the study. It also provides the purpose and the rationale of conducting this study, the significance of this study, and the key research questions used in underpinning this study. In addition, the overview of the research design and the delimitations of the study was presented and ends with a brief conclusion of the chapter.

In South Africa, during the post-apartheid period in the twentieth century and in the twenty-first century, educational policies have been developed, redesigned and implemented in order to provide frameworks and guidelines to assist access to education. For instance, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2013, p.11) states that their clear objective is to "improve cross border movements of staffs and students; develop policies in order to avoid discrimination; to ensure access to learning and working for foreign students and staffs; international research collaborations; increasing inclusion of international, intercultural and global students that may in turn contribute to the economic development of the country". DHET (2013) intends to improve the country's economic development through many activities. Amongst these is the intention to ensure open access for foreign or international students. Besides the design of policies on higher education, there has been an influx of new institutions which have been built, merged and erected in the country. Examples of these various higher education institutions (HEIs thereafter), both public and private, are: community colleges, technical, vocational and training colleges, public colleges, and the South African institutions for vocational education, continuous education and training, and further educational and training institutions and universities.

In university education, there is a large number of international students in South African universities. University-based education in South Africa is structured under different categories, which include comprehensive universities, traditional universities and the universities of technology. Large cohorts of these international students are found in these higher education institutions. A study conducted by McGregor (2007) has shown that between 1994 and 2006 the number of international students in South African public universities quadrupled from 12 557 to 53733. In addition to this, DHET (2013) revealed that in 2011 70,061 foreign students were studying in South African public universities, which is equivalent to 7 per cent of the total student body. According to Maharaj, Perumal and Perumal (2011), international students represent an increasing emerging group of students at all major higher education institutions around the world. Generally, Majyambere (2012) argues that internationalisation of the higher education sector across the world has represented an essential element for each nation's development and this applies equally to South African universities. The international students bring many lived experiences and have developed many new ones in these institutions.

DHET (2013) highlight many important issues related to the expanding of education within learning institutions. One of the particular interests in the current study is that of "improving and building appropriate diversity within the universities … and "providing learning programmes, modes of learning, methods of teaching and the assessment for diverse students' bodies that would support flexibility and innovations" (DHET, 2013, p. 28). The DHET report explained clearly that there are diverse students in universities and therefore, learning programmes and modes of teaching and learning should be diverse, flexible and innovative. Learning is a complex phenomenon, and it is influenced by many issues, lived experiences and evolving university realities (Garton, 2004). There are many programmes in place to enrich learning experiences and opportunities for international students, according to Cantwell and Maldonaldo-Maldonaldo (2009). On the other hand, Hughes (2013) asserts that international students bring considerable strengths and challenges to their learning, especially with regard to their varied cultural and linguistic knowledge, and professional and educational experiences. It is also claimed that international students have become a vibrant part of the diversity in South Africa's education sector and have provided immense benefits to the economy, educational institutions, local students and educators (Maharaj et al., 2011).

However, much of the literature pertaining to international students' learning experiences is predominantly negative in tone and is focused on those aspects of the macrosystemic level such as poverty and international policies that excludes the voices of foreign or international students (Sargeant & Tucker, 2009; Fritz, Chan & DeMarnis, 2008; Graycar, 2010; Sawir, Margison, Deumert, Nyland & Ramia, 2008). This study however, intends to include the voices of international students through photovoice – a participatory visual methodology, to find out how international students in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal in South African construct their learning.

1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Firstly, my intention to conduct research in this area is motivated by my personal experience as an international postgraduate student studying in the School of Education in a university in KwaZulu-Natal. During both my B.Ed. Honours degree and currently in my second year of the Master Degree in education, I have experienced many challenges and successes and I have noticed how I have changed and influenced change in other students in their learning. My daily university experiences have involved interacting with different people such as learners, lecturers, and administrators, including those in the international students' offices, over many issues as a student and as a 'foreigner', as I am usually called by fellow students. For example, my peers had difficulties with my accent in the lecture and during the discussion group. In the module that I taught as a Part-Time Lecturer and as a library assistant, I had a first-hand experience of what it means to study and teach away from home. When I asked students about my accent, the possible answers included; "we can't hear you", "it's funny and amusing" or they just laugh at me. As a consequence of living through those experiences, I was socially affected and my academic work was also affected. In addition to this, my experiences as a tutor and working in the library brought another dimension to my learning experience in the university.

Much of the literatures both internationally and nationally focus mainly on the problems faced by international students in their host country (Menzies & Baron, 2014; Brennan & Osborne, 2008; Hwang, Wang & Sodanine, 2011). For example, nationally, Ayliff and Wang (2006) identify both learning shock and culture shock. Rajpal (2012) identifies as key issues xenophobia, the language barrier, lack of communication, non-issuance of work permit and accommodation. Lastly Majyambere (2012) identifies cultural and financial issues, academic needs, and loneliness as experiences of international students in the University of KwaZulu-

Natal (UKZN thereafter) Pietermaritzburg campus. In as much research has been done on international experiences the focus has been more on their challenges, thereby showing a deficit model (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010).

My argument is that universities should be truly safe and enabling so that all the needs of diverse students are met and advanced, particularly in relation to what is happening now at the universities. For example, due to social issues like xenophobic attacks, there has been an increase emphasis on research productivity, and a growing patterns of collaborative research in South Africans universities. In KwaZulu-Natal, while some universities for example the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), University of Zululand (UniZulu), Durban University of technology (DUT) and Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) create spaces for international students to be fully integrated by addressing their concerns and providing opportunities to learn and thrive, some students' voices might still be unheard. This study attempts to delve into the voices of international students in a selected university, particularly, postgraduate students in the School of Education, to explore their learning experiences, using photovoice – a participatory arts-based methodology (De Lange & Geldenhuys, 2012; Mitchell, 2011).

1.3   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The experiences and voices of students in post-apartheid South Africa are of paramount importance and research of this nature has grown extensively since 1994. The experiences and voices of postgraduate students who come from other countries are different but also important to the functioning and welfare of the university. The majority of postgraduate students are above 18 years of age, and are adults, mature men and women (Oluwafemi, 2012). Others are on study leave grants from their countries and have an obligation to complete their studies and go back to their countries. Other international students also have to deal with systematic issues such as study permits, labour laws, immigration and academic and psychosocial issues in their daily lives (Menzies & Baron, 2014; Brennan & Osborne, 2008; Hwang, et al., 2011).

After careful consideration, policies and procedures have been put in place to expand access to education, to improve the quality of learning and teaching and increase the number of international students in higher education and embrace the diversities they bring into the universities (DHET, 2013). For many international students, universities should be a site of

learning, knowledge advancement, care and support (DHET, 2013), not of alienation and disenfranchisement (Rajpal, 2012). International students, as with any university students, are not only experiencing challenges and should not be viewed as vulnerable but they also bring their vast store of lived experiences which makes them assets in learning. The question is: what are the learning experiences of international postgraduate students in this selected university? What type of resources do they use to support their learning? Considering the fact that every individual, including international students, has their in-built abilities (Khanare, 2009), it is therefore necessary to hear their voices.

Now that education embraces the issues of diversity and indigenous knowledge systems, the international students' experiences of learning and the nature of resources they use to improve their learning come to the fore. It is important to gain deeper understanding of what international postgraduate students have to say about their learning experiences and contribute to understanding resources in terms of complex and diverse needs of international postgraduate students within the challenging context such as the university. To achieve this, the voices of the international postgraduate students about their learning experiences in a selected university will be explored and are central to this study.

1.4   AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The above problem statement led me to formulate the aim and objective of the current study. The research aim is to explore the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal in relation to what resources can emerge in support of teaching and learning in the university. Based on the research aim, this study is undertaken with the following objectives:

- To explore and understand the international postgraduate students' experiences in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal.
- To explore how these experiences influence the international postgraduate students' learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal.
- To explore the resources the international postgraduate students draw on towards their learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal.

1.5   KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study will seek to answer three critical questions underpinning it which are:

- What are the international postgraduate students' experiences in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal?
- How do the international postgraduate students' experiences influence their learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal?
- What resources do the international postgraduate students draw on towards their learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal?

1.6   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As pointed out, the international postgraduate students of the School of Education form a significant part of the international student cohort and it is hoped that the findings of this study contributes to the ongoing debates about the learning experiences of international students in this selected university and in South Africa.

Furthermore, the findings might also assist the university where the study was conducted in improving the learning and teaching policies by making them more sensitive to the diverse needs of students, including the international students. Moreover, the study will make a contribution to the existing literature on participatory visual methodologies, especially photo voice method, in doing research with university students.

1.7   CLARIFICATION OF TERMS AND KEY CONCEPTS

The purpose of this section is to provide the operational definitions of terms and key concepts that have been used in this study.

1.7.1   Internationalisation of higher education

The term internationalisation is very complex and fluid, therefore, there is no clear definition or explanation. In addition to this, Cross, Mhlanga and Ojo (2011, p.76) contend that "internationalisation of higher education is complex, multidimensional and often a fragmented

process and a response to globalization". Chan and Dimmock (2008) assert that it is a multifaceted concept with many different interpretations and purposes. Neale-Shutte and Fourie (2006) describe internationalisation as entailing a complex process of institutions engagement with other international institutions for academic, cultural, political and economic reasons. There is also evidence from research that "internationalisation is equated with globalization" (Harris, 2008, p.353). Lee (2008) indicates that the internationalisation of higher education is seen as a remarkable trend. Chan and Dimmock (2008, p.185) suggest that "internationalisation of higher education is a process of integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of education of the university concerned".

Therefore according to Neale-Shutte and Fourie (2006, p.121) the "internationalisation of higher education, does not apply to the coming in and going out of exchange students and staff member, but it involves curriculum changes such as the use of international examples/case studies, changes to methods and modes of teaching with research that allows the local and global knowledge frontiers to be interconnected". There are many examples of internationalisation policies like the mobility of students and staffs, intercultural learning, access to quality education, collaborations of universities etc. which are complex and which differ according to their context. In the context of this study, which is conducted in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, the term "internationalisation" of higher education refers to the experiences of the international postgraduate students, their enrolment in a foreign university, the modes of teaching and learning, research, and the resources that supports and improve their learning in the host university.

Learning

The concept 'learning' has no universal acceptable definition this is because there is no homogeneous definition that can serve all researchers and disciplines. Muro and Jeffery (2008) assert that what learning is and how humans learn is a difficult question to answer. In the words of other writers, "learning is described as change in a person's insight, behaviour, perception or motivation leading to added knowledge or the ability to do something that the student could not do before" (Du Plessis, Conley & Du Plessis, 2007, p.3). De Houwer, Barnes-Holmes and Moors (2013, p. 631) concur with Du Plessis et al. (2007) and propose that learning "…is an ontogenetic adaptation which is the changes in the behaviour of an organism that result from regularities in the environment of the organism". Therefore this concept 'learning' will be

explored only in a manner that aids its understanding in the context of the study. Learning does not take place in a vacuum or isolation as mentioned earlier but within a school or university system and in different ways. The concept learning will be explored from the point of how the international postgraduate students learn in different ways and how their learning is being influenced by their personal, social and professional experiences and environment.

Experiences of learning

The word 'experiences of learning' in the context of this study is often at times used interchangeably with the concept 'learning experiences'. This is because both words have the same meaning. The words 'experiences of learning' or 'learning experiences' describe any interaction, course, programme or other experiences in which learning takes place, whether it occurs in traditional academic setting namely schools or classrooms; or it includes non-traditional interactions such as students learning through games and interactive software applications (Great School Partnership, 2013). However for the purpose of this study, this concept is unreservedly linked to the diverse ways in which the international postgraduate students learn which forms their learning experiences, for example, the use of diverse resources like technology, software programmes, database research, their personal learning (reflection, self-assessment), social and professional learning experiences.

International students

Andrade (2006, p.134) asserts that the "term international students is defined as individuals enrolled in institutions of higher education who are on temporary student visas". Therefore this term 'international students' is oftentimes used interchangeably with foreign students. Furthermore, international postgraduate students are part of the international student group who have obtained a bachelor degree, honours or master's degree from a university in their home country and moved to another country to further their studies for a more advanced qualification.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory visual art methodology that invites people to participate in the co-creation of knowledge about themselves (Coles & Knowles, 2008). The word "photovoice" is defined differently by different researchers; which means it has no homogeneous definition. Wang (1999, p.186) asserts that "photovoice is a method that enables people to control the photographic process in order to express, reflect and communicate their everyday life". Further, Harrison (2002, p.167) defines photovoice as "a qualitative research methodology which is

design to specifically tap into daily realities and core meaning of these realities as defined by research participants themselves". It is a method that enables people to define for themselves and others, including policy makers, what is worth remembering and what needs to be changed" (Wang, 2009, p.4).

Increasingly, 21st Century researchers have embraced visual methods, especially photography, as a means to create knowledge and convey understanding. Therefore in this study photovoice as a participatory visual methodology was used as a method of generating data by increasing dialogue among the participants. Similarly, Wang & Redwood-Jones (2001, p.560) refer to photovoice as a "powerful photographic technique that promotes critical dialogue and produces knowledge". In addition, photovoice method is rooted in democratic ideals; the methodology entails providing people with cameras so that they can photograph their everyday realities (Moletsane, Lange, Mitchell, Stuart, Buthelezi & Taylor, 2009).

1.8 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.8.1 Research design

This study adopts a qualitative approach and an interpretive paradigmatic stand (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) to explore the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. A qualitative research approach involves examining and reflecting on the less tangible aspects of a research subject, e.g. values, attitudes, experiences and perceptions (Rajeseka, Philominathan, & Chinnathambi, 2013). The study aimed to understand how the international postgraduate students' experiences influence their learning and what resources they draw on towards their learning. The study, therefore, employed a case study approach (Rule & John, 2011) to gain an in-depth understanding in the international postgraduate students' perceptions of their experience of learning. However, the decision for using this particular research design is based on the following reasons:

- A qualitative research approach is used in understanding the process, the social and cultural contexts which underlie various behavioural patterns. It is mostly concerned with the "why" questions of research (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p.51). Struwig and Stead (2013) argues that the qualitative research approach helps the researcher in understanding the phenomenon being researched from the perspectives of the research participants. The data that emerges from qualitative research are qualitative data which

are non-numerical information, for example, words, pictures, drawing, paintings, photographs, films, videotapes, music and sound track with which a researcher gathers information during an interactive process (Struwig and Stead, 2013). Therefore, the focus is to understand how things occur, that is, in this case, how the international postgraduate students' experiences influence their learning and how they draw on resources towards their learning.

- An interpretive paradigm aims to describe, understand and examine human behaviours, interaction and experiences within and around the social and cultural context in which they occur (Kim, 2003). Cohen et al. (2011) assert that an interpretive paradigm is used to understand individuals' interpretations of the world around them and their experiences. Meanwhile, this study will try to understand how the international postgraduate students' experiences influence their learning and on the resources they draw on towards their learning at a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal.

Rule and John (2011, p.4) describe case study "as a systematic and indepth investigation of a particular instance in its context in order to generate knowledge". Shuttleworth (2008) similarly, asserts that a case study is used to study a particular situation in depth. Case study generates an understanding of and insights into a particular instance by providing a thick, rich description of the case and by illuminating its relation to its broader context (Rule & John, 2011). This study is a case of the international postgraduate students at one of the campuses of the selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. Therefore, the use of case study in this research is to describe in depth the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning at a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal, how the international postgraduate students' experiences influence their learning and on the type of resources in which these students draw on towards their learning at a selected university in Kwa Zulu-Natal.

1.8.2 Research Methodology
- **Sampling**

In the context of this study, the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal will be the focus of this study. The location in which this research study took place was specifically in the School of Education and on one of the campuses of the selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. Eight postgraduate students were

purposively selected as the sample of this study. The purposive sampling and a convenience sampling method are chosen in order to get rich and accurate data. Cohen et al. (2011, p.157) argue that in many cases purposive sampling is used with a convenience sampling method in order to access "knowledgeable people" who have in-depth knowledge about a particular issue through their experiences. In relation to this, this study specifically chose a location and participants which were easily accessible, by using both purposive and convenience sampling (Christiansen, Bertram & Land, 2010).

- **Data generation methods**

Although designed along the qualitative case study approach, this study employed mixed method approach in generating data. Gibbert and Ruigrok (2010) argued that the data' for case studies are generated by using multiple methods. Cohen et al. (2011) further highlight the use of multiple methods when generating data is significant in triangulating the findings. This study will utilise the focus group discussion method (Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011) and photovoice method (Wang, 2009; Mitchell, 2011) as data generating methods in order to generate rich and descriptive data for the study. Both data generation methods were used in accordance to the aim and objective of this study.

With the permission of the participants, an audio recorder was used to record their discussions with their photo interpretations which were transcribed and analysed. A thematic analysis was used to analyse the data as recommended by Tesch (1990). Interpretation and discussion of the data were linked to the Bronfenbrenner (1994, 2004) bio-ecosystemic framework and to the literature reviewed with the aim of understanding the international students' experience of learning at a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal.

- **Ethical consideration**

In the context of this study, permission was sought and obtained from the university in which the research was conducted; prospective participants were issued a consent letter to sign. This contained details of the study and gave them the option of participating or withdrawing at any stage of the research (Christiansen et al., 2010). During the focus group discussion, it was ensured that the rights of the participants were not violated throughout the research process (Cohen et al., 2011). Steps were taken to ensure that the study was beneficial to the participants

(Christiansen et al., 2010). Lastly the participants' anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed with the use of pseudonyms (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

Furthermore, the participants were trained on the ethical issues involved in a photovoice method, which was about the avoidance of identifiable issues while taking photographs, for example, people, signs or symbol with names during the photovoice sessions (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Ethical aspects were considered and permeate the study to ensure trustworthiness of the study. Details of the research design and methodology are provided in detail in Chapter Three of this study.

1.9 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

In essence, this research study is specifically situated in Educational Psychology, which focuses mainly on how students learn and develop. It also focuses on how learning is influenced by the social cultural context of the classroom and environment. Based on the perspective of this discipline, the study explored the experiences of learning of the international postgraduate students; how the international postgraduate students' experiences influence their learning and on the type of resources in which these students draw on towards their learning at a selected university in Kwa Zulu-Natal. The study was delimited to one of the campuses of the selected university in KwaZulu-Natal South Africa because of time constraints for the master's research work, limited financial resources and access to study participants. The study comprised a sample of eight international postgraduate students who were registered for the 2014 academic year at the Edgewood campus and who have spent more than two years as postgraduate students studying in the particular campus and university (see Chapter 4).

1.10 CHAPTER OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

In determining an appropriate approach to this study, the following structure has been used. This study comprises six chapters, and the list of references. The chapters in this study are as follows:

Chapter One introduces the background to the study as well as the motivation for this study. In addition this chapter provided the overview of the study. Furthermore the objectives and critical research questions were also introduced in this chapter.

Chapter Two discusses the relevant literature that provides the contextual framework of the study. This review will be drawing on international and national literatures on the internationalisation policies of different countries/ higher institutions and also on international students' experiences worldwide.

Chapter Three presents the theoretical framework that was employed to understand the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning in their host country. In addition, the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bio-ecosystemic framework to the study will be clearly indicated and discussed in detail**.**

Chapter Four presents and describes in detail the research design and methodology guiding this study. It employed a qualitative research approach and its paradigmatic position is interpretive. The chapter also highlights the research style, sampling procedures used in selecting the international postgraduate students, the procedure for data generation method and analysis, location of the study and procedure for ensuring trustworthiness, while some ethical considerations are outlined.

Chapter Five: This chapter presents the results of the study and sets out the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning, how the international postgraduate students' learning are influenced by their experiences and the resources these students drawn on towards their learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. The findings in this study will be outlined, interpreted and discussed.

Chapter Six concludes the study by offering a summary of findings in relation to knowledge about international postgraduate students' experiences of learning at a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. The limitations of the study were put forward. The chapter concludes with summary and recommendations for future research directions.

1.11   CONCLUSION

In this introductory chapter, a brief background of the study was provided. The purpose and rationale of undertaking this study, the significance of the study and finally the key research questions that guided the phenomena under investigation were identified. This first chapter has provided an overview of the research design and methodology underpinning this study.

Prominent aspects include the research paradigm and approach, research style, sampling, data generation methods and analysis and ethical consideration of the study. The literature to contextualise and frame the study will be presented in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the review of selected scholarly literature relevant to the research study. The literatures reviewed were selected on the basis of their relevance to the current research, firstly, the researcher examined the internationalisation policy guiding international students' enrolment; explaining its rationale, benefits and challenges in higher education. In addition literature on the concept of international students was explored, followed by the reason they study abroad. The researcher further explored the various studies that was conducted on international students' experiences in their host country and lastly, the international students learning experiences were examined and related to positive and negative learning experiences of the international students in their host countries.

Whilst much of the scholarly literature will be reviewed from the perspective of the internationalisation policy of higher education and of the learning experiences of international students, the contextual differences in the literatures will be reviewed in the following order internationally, continentally and in South Africa. Lastly the chapter ends with a brief conclusion that underlines the importance of this study.

2.2   UNDERSTANDING THE INTERNATIONALISATION POLICY OF HIGHER EDUCATION (HEIs)

2.2.1   Emergence and Meaning

The internationalisation of higher education worldwide is not a new phenomenon. This is because it is a vital policy issue in the growth of higher education. Lee (2008) argues that internationalisation is a remarkable trend in higher education. The internationalisation of higher education is basically concerned with the combining of international activities into the teaching of higher educational institutions. Historically, the internationalisation of higher education was regarded as the movement of international students from developing countries to developed countries according to Sehoole (2006). It emerged in the twentieth century as a development introduced mainly in the United States of America (USA) and in the UK for reasons of foreign policy and for national security. Whilst at the end of the cold war in 1991 the international dimension grew up into a strategic process known as the "internationalisation of higher education" (Sehoole, 2006, p.2). Healey (2008) reports that in the context of universities,

internationalisation began in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in religious seminaries, teaching in Latin and attracting scholars and students from across the medieval western world and the sharing of second languages from Latin, German and English. It has now resulted in scientific innovation and promoted the international mobility of academics.

Current literature, for example, (Kreber, 2009; Dewey & Duff, 2009) on internationalisation of higher education has shown that international activities in most of the higher institutions worldwide increased over the recent years. The debate on the meaning, features and problems embedded in internationalisation policy reveals that the reason and implications for countries and universities engaged in it are still unknown and unclear. Paul (2009, p.38) asserts that "…internationalisation is not an unknown phenomenon in higher education in India and other developing countries because it started in the eighteenth centuries ago during the period they were colonised by the Britain. Knight (2008) concurs with Paul and posits that internationalisation is not a new term nor is the debate over its definition new. Meanwhile, Knight (2008, p.2) states that "internationalisation has been used for years in political science and governmental relations but its popularity in the education sector soared only since the early 1980's".

There are different views in regards to the meaning of internationalisation in higher education. This is because the concept 'internationalisation' does not have a homogeneous definition. To buttress my point, I note that Montgomery (2009) asserts that the definitions of the nature of internationalisation vary according to context and perspective. Lee (2008, p.8) stipulates that "internationalisation is an important policy issue in higher education; yet, what precisely internationalisation means with regards to teaching and learning and what it can add to the students learning experience is far less often talked or written about". Chan and Dimmock (2008) concur with Lee and argue that internationalisation is a multifaceted concept with many different interpretations and purposes. Furthermore, "internationalisation is the increasing border activities amidst persistence borders" according to Teichler (2009, p.95). Similarly, Tange (2010) claims that "internationalisation is a process of organisational change motivated by an increase in the proportion of non-native students and staff". Dewey and Duff (2009) contend that internationalisation is the involvement of the whole school in different networks, research, creative work, exchanges, professional development, curricular development, study abroad programmes and institutional partnerships. Vincent-Lancrin (2009, p.20) goes further to argue that the "term internationalisation refers to any relationship across borders between national or between single institutions situated within different national systems".

Additionally, in Africa, the concept internationalisation is viewed by Bennett and Kane (2009) as involving several sets of activities, managerial inclinations, organisational and funding arrangements and strategic decisions in the internationalisation sphere. In addition, the study by Neale-Shutte and Fourie (2006) affirms that internationalisation of higher education involves a complex process of an institution's engagement with other international institutions for academic, cultural, political and economic reasons.

From the South African perspectives, Dzvimbo and Moloi (2013) assert that internationalisation is a philosophical ideology that is not economic in genesis but political and social in intent. Therefore it is described as the variety of policies and programmes that universities and governments implement to respond to globalisation (Dzvimbo & Moloi, 2013). Kwaramba (2012) argues that it is considered as a cooperation based interaction across national borders aimed at achieving more or less common goals and mutual benefits.

According to some of the literature, the internationalisation of higher education evolves through different processes of change. The International Association of Universities (hereafter IAU, 2012) posits that internationalisation of higher education is a dynamic process, continuously shaped and reshaped by the international context. Knight (2008); Zolfaghari, Sabran and Zolfaghari (2009); Cross, Mhlanga and Ojo (2011) and Zeleza (2012), concur with the view that internationalisation of higher education is complex, dynamic and a multidimensional process which is not based on a set of isolated activities. In addition, Lee (2008) argues further that internationalisation in the university systems brings with it changes, for example, having more students from diverse social backgrounds, changes in the professoriate, changes in academic administration in which knowledge has become increasingly international and links among institutions worldwide that have continued to expand.

Moreover, some scholars sees internationalisation as infusing international values into the HEIs' curriculum. Zolfaghari et al. (2009) further assert that a commonly accepted universal definition of internationalisation of higher education is the one stated by Knight (2008, p.22) as "the process of integrating an international /intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service elements of an institution".

Consequently, Zeleza (2012, p.9) succinctly points out that internationalisation of higher education is in two parts.

Firstly, internationalisation encompasses at the curriculum level, infusing international, global and comparative dimensions, foreign language study, and joint or double degrees; at the teaching and learning level it includes actively recruiting international students and scholars and effectively using students and academics who have returned abroad; at the extracurricular level it encompasses encouraging international and intercultural events on campus and liaising with local diaspora cultural and ethnic groups and at the research level promoting international exchange programmes, conferences and seminars, joint research projects and publications and building area and thematic centers (Zeleza, 2012, p.9).

Therefore internationalisation is intensified by globalisation (Knight, 2008; Neale-Shutte & Fourie, 2006) but it is driven by different reasons and different goals due to different staffs' ideologies of internationalisation and the external forces (national and international policies) affecting it. In essence, Montgomery (2009) asserts that internationalisation aims to encourage students to understand, appreciate and articulate the reality of interdependence among nations and also to prepare them to live and work in an intercultural context. In contrast, IAU (2012, p.2) suggests that the aim of internationalisation "evolves from educating global citizens, building capacity for research, generating income from international students tuition fees and the quest to enhance institutional prestige".

2.2.1   The rationale of internationalisation in higher education

Every higher education institution has its specific rationale for involving in internationalisation activities (Zolfaghari et al., 2009). Knight (2008) argues that the rationale of internationalisation in higher education indicates the benefits or its expected outcomes of involved. Therefore there are different rationales behind the development and implementation of internationalisation policies in higher educational institutions.

Drawing from international literatures, Knight (2008) identifies that, traditionally, the rationales for internationalisation of higher education have been presented in four groups, namely the social/cultural, political, academic, and economic. The studies conducted by Stansaker, Frolich, Gornitzka and Maassen (2008), Jiang (2008), Harris (2008), Zeleza (2012) and Kreber (2009) categorised the reasons for internationalisation in higher education into four similar ways namely academic purposes, sociocultural purposes, political purposes and economics purposes.

Kreber (2009, p.4) identified different motivations to internationalisation as "the political, cultural and academic rationales that are based on an ethos of cooperation and the economic one which is based on an ethos of competition". Kreber (2009) explains further that the political rationale is primarily related to issues of national security, stability, peace and ideological influences resulting from internationalisation efforts; the academic rationale on the other hand is particularly directed to the goal of achieving international standards for teaching and research in order to enrich the quality of higher education. The sociocultural rationale indicates respect for the different cultures and languages of nations and lastly the economic rationale is associated to the economic dimension of globalisation (neo-liberalism) (Kreber, 2009).

Knight (2008) study divided the higher education into two levels, namely the national level and institutional level, and asserts that the rationales that appears to drive internationalisation in the national level are human resources development(brain power), strategic alliances, income generation and commercial trade, nation building/institution building, socio cultural development and mutual understanding. In the institutional level Knight (2008) found that many factors are behind the rationale for the internationalisation of higher education, such as international profile and reputation, quality enhancement/international standards, student and staff development, income generation, strategic alliances and research and knowledge production.

Lee (2008) also claim that the rationale behind internationalisation in Australia is a means to many ends and represent broad interests and varied perceptions. According to Lee (2008) internationalisation is a means of raising revenue for the higher educational institutions, secondly the internationalisation of higher education functions as a means of enhancing the international outlook of the country, international impact and international relations and lastly internationalisation is also a means of enriching cultural understanding. In contrast, the study by Zimitat (2008) points to different reasons for internationalisation which are staff and student mobility, student and staff development, mechanisms for maintaining academic standards, quality assurance and research collaboration.

Nevertheless, the survey by Bennett and Kane (2009) identified the rising levels of students' demand for internationalised courses, the growing influence of international and multinational businesses and the large numbers of cross borders mergers, strategic alliances, company expansions to have stimulated employers needs for staffs with international knowledge and

perspectives as the reason for internationalisation process in UK and it has focused specifically on business schools.

Zolfaghari et al. (2009, p.9) in a descending level of importance identified the following reasons for internationalisation of higher education in their study as:

> …. mobility and exchanges for students and teachers, teaching and research collaboration, academic standards and quality, research projects, co-operation, and development assistance, curriculum development, international and intercultural understanding, promotion and profile of institution, diversify source of faculty and students, regional issues and integration, international students' recruitment and diversify income generation (Zolfaghari et al., 2009, p. 9).

The study by Maringe (2008), Bolsmann and Miller (2008) identified several reasons for the internationalisation of universities in UK as follows: for generating money from extortionately high international students' fees; enriching the experiences of students and staff through a variety of models of cross border educational experiences, incorporating an international dimension into the teaching and research; raising the status and international standing of the university. And further, improving the quality of educational provision and experiences of students; preparing graduates for global employment careers; maintain international security and peaceful relations; export educational services and products and lastly by achieving international standards (Maringe & Gibson, 2008).

Consequently, there is limited current literature on internationalisation in Africa universities, but the study by Neale-Shutte and Fourie (2006) in Kenya reports that the reasons for internationalisation are the mutual exchange of students and academic staff, institutional collaboration and policies and internationalised curricula which have contributed to the development of Kenyan higher education. Dzvimbo and Moloi (2013) in their study conducted on the globalisation and the internationalisation of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa identify that the rationale behind internationalisation in African universities and in the western world is economically orientated. Zeleza (2012) concurred with Dzvimbo and Moloi and argued that due to the consuming drive for international recognition and branding, the economic rationale has gained ascendancy over the other rationales for implementing internationalisation policies in higher educational institutions in Africa. In contrast, Adamu (2011) indicates that the major rationale for internationalisation in Africa is to strengthen research and knowledge production in African institutions.

Furthermore, in the South African context, Sehoole (2006) point outs that internationalisation in colonial and post-colonial South African context is fragmented, driven by self-interest and pursued to achieve different goals. Dolby (2011) reports that South Africa is the leading economic and political force in sub-Saharan Africa with a more developed infrastructure and internationalisation policy than other African countries, similarly Kwaramba (2012) reports that South Africa is a major exporter of higher education in Africa. Kotecha (2012) claims that the rationale for the internationalisation of higher education particularly in South African universities in this post-apartheid period is to prepare students to live in a world that is more connected in both cultural and economic terms as well as, the need for increased economic development and competitiveness. Furthermore, Cross et al. (2009) report that the general convincing rationale for internationalisation in South African higher education was due to the fact that the modern world is moving fast into an age where society, economy and knowledge are all part of a global environment characterised by a mix of local and global influences. Therefore, the above literature shows that internationalisation plays a key role in knowledge building within academia and consequently in the development of countries nationally and internationally (Kotecha, 2012).

2.2.2 Approaches to internationalisation in HEIs

This section relates to the way in which internationalisation policies are being defined and implemented in higher educational institutions worldwide. The internationalisation approaches of every country and each higher education institution are different. Guo and Chase (2011, p.307) assert that "an approach to internationalisation differs from the definition and is described by the values, priorities and actions that are displayed during the work towards implementing internationalisation". Similarly, Knight (2008) states that there are various ways used in addressing the process of internationalisation process an approach taken with regard to internationalisation reflects on the values, priorities and actions that are shown while working towards the implementation. DeWit (2010) also asserts that the changing dynamic in internationalisation reflects on the approaches used in the internationalisation of higher education by the different stakeholders involved.

However, Luxon and Peelo (2009) argue in their study that more emphasis has been placed on the national and institutional approach of internationalisation in UK higher education institutions by stakeholders and this has tended to obscure the issue at the teaching and learning

level. They further (2009) suggest that teaching and learning in UK higher institution must be addressed through curriculum designs as another approach of internationalisation which takes into account the population of international students'. De Wit's (2010, p.10) study in the Netherlands also identified four approaches to the internationalisation of their higher educational institutions as: the activity approach, rationale approach, the competency approach which describes internationalisation in terms of developing new skills, attitudes and knowledge in students, faculty and staff and lastly the process approach that integrates an international dimension or perspective into the major functions of the institution. In Canada, Guo and Chase's (2011) study identified programmatic and research activities as well as organisational policies and practices as approaches used by HEIs to implement their internationalisation policies.

In the African context, Jowi (2009, p.263) argues that "the approaches to internationalisation of Africa countries just like other countries in the world, are seen in a way that reflects their history, culture and context and in a way consistent with their current needs, priorities and circumstances". Ogachi's (2009) study on internationalisation versus regionalisation of higher education in East Africa identified social science approach and regional approaches to internationalisation used by higher institutions. Similarly, another study by Ayoo (2009) on the reflections of the digital divide (ICT) and its implication for the internationalisation of higher education in the developing region of East Africa suggests African universities should use internationalised curriculum as an approach of internationalisation in bridging the gaps created by digital divide (ICT) between African higher education and the international community. Singh (2010) also notes that internationalisation in African higher education encompasses normative, ideological and pragmatic approaches that ranges from the focus on academic mobility in Africa to the borrowing from dominant Northern conceptions and strategies of internationalisation.

In the South Africa context, Kwaramba (2012) identified four approaches to internationalisation of education in which three of the approaches have a strong economics emphasis, namely skilled migration, revenue generation and capacity building, whilst the fourth approach is on mutual understanding, which consists of political, cultural, academic and development aid goals. Rouhani (2007) also identified two approaches used in the internationalisation of higher education in South Africa. Firstly, the process approach which involves the interrelationship among the student mobility, staff mobility and curriculum development, which plan a key role in the implementation phase, and secondly the institutional

approach which helps to show the commitment of an institution to internationalisation. Cross et al. (2009) found that the internationalisation approach of institutions in Africa at the institutional level was mainly focused on inward mobility of staff and students rather than an outward movement of staffs and students. At the national level, it showed the impact of the absence of a cohesive and systematic internationalisation policy framework which remains unexplored and represents a challenge to all the stakeholders (Cross et al., 2009). In this regards, universities and HEIs in South Africa are required to create and disseminate knowledge; and engage in research and teaching. Moreover, universities are internationalised by "exchanging ideas through international academic conferences, books, journals, sharing faculty and ensuring that both research and teaching conforms to the present knowledge base as it is internationally based" (Healey, 2008, p.334).

2.2.3   Benefits of internationalisation in HEIs

The benefits associated with internationalisation are reflected in the different approaches applied by the different higher educational institutions involved in the process. In the international context, Henard, Diamond and Roseveare (2012) contend that one of the main objectives of internationalising higher education is to provide the most relevant education to students who will be citizens, entrepreneurs and scientist of tomorrow. However Maringe's (2009) study in UK indicates that in research, pre-1992 universities have three top benefits of internationalisation namely the enhanced quality and market position; maintaining institutional reputation and integration of diverse cultures; and lastly the knowledge bases for global competitiveness. In comparison, in the post-1994 universities, the benefits of internationalisation were revealed as increasing institutional competitiveness; attracting more international students and attracting more international staff (Maringe, 2009).

Childress (2009) in USA identifies five benefits of an internationalisation namely, as a road map to the integration of international activities to research and teaching in universities; a vehicle to develop, a tool for fundraising, a medium for interdisciplinary collaboration and a mechanism for explaining the meaning and goals of internationalisation. Moreover, Healey's (2008) study in Australia and China also shows that the benefits of internationalisation is for direct and indirect economic benefits as well as the gains accrued in exporting culture and raising international awareness of the host country.

According to Henard et al. (2012) internationalisation of higher education institutions can spur on strategic thinking leading to innovations, offering advantages in modernizing pedagogy; encouraging students and faculty collaboration, and stimulating new approaches to learning assessments. Knight (2007) argues that the two most important benefits of internationalisation identified by HEIs worldwide was on having internationally orientated staff/ students and improved academic quality, while the three least important benefits are national and international citizenship, revenue generation and brain gain. However, in the IAU 2014 survey carried out on 1336 higher education institutions in 131 different countries, the findings indicated that students' knowledge of international issues was the most significant benefit of internationalisation (Egron-Polack & Hudson, 2014).

Significantly, Osfield and Terell (2009) note in their study various benefits of internationalisation such as heightened national and global security, economic gain, enhanced foreign policy and finally that international education provides significant learning outcomes that are essential to living in this age, for example, developing a better understanding of self, identifying different models of successful leadership, learning about appreciating differences, intercultural knowledge, developing multiple perspectives on international issues and being less ethnocentric. Knobel (2011) reports from Brazil that internationalisation is a positive influence on the learning environment of students. It is the presence of a greater cultural diversity that benefits the broader students' population and helps to broaden democratic values, ethics, broaden dialogue and mutual understanding (Knobel, 2011).

In Africa, Knight and Sehoole (2013) argue that internationalisation supports African institutions in harnessing the power of science, technology and innovation to transform its societies. This is by helping to address the low research capacity of many African universities through research partnerships and collaborations and other capacity building initiatives; it also has the potential to strengthen the curricular in many African universities contributing to improved quality of the learning outcome and lastly the enhancement of the curriculum through internationalisation can contribute to the design of high quality programmes and the infusion of new relevant knowledge(such as ICT) (Knight & Sehoole, 2013). Adamu (2011) and Shabani (2008) concur with Knight and Sehoole and argue that the major benefits of internationalisation are seen from the academic rationale, which is enhancing institutional capacity, promoting academic mobility, improving quality assurance mechanism, strengthening research capacity and improving of ICT facilities. Oyewole (2009) on the other

hand, indicates that internationalisation has the potential of improving the quality of curriculum, students, programmes, staff and facilities in higher education.

Neale-Shutte and Fourie (2006) claim that internationalisation helps students to secure a place in the job market and develop skills that are transferable across cultures, climates and contexts in South Africa. Botha (2009) contends that with regard to academics and institutions, internationalisation generates income, helps in expanding research and the horizons of lecturing through international links, services a diverse student body with different cultures and also services students that are geographically situated outside the country's borders (distance education). Lastly internationalisation strengthens ties between governments and countries in the aspect of trade, agriculture, development and the military (Botha, 2009).

2.2.4 Challenges of internationalisation in HEIs

Internationally, Haigh (2008) asserts that the main challenge facing internationalisation is due to the HEIs' orientation to financial goals. This needs to change in order to create a positive future for the students. On the other hand, Maringe (2009) identified conceptual and structural deficiencies in the organisation of institutional internationalisation; over emphasis on human exchange initiatives as against cultural integration efforts and lastly the increasing undercurrents of feelings among staff and students regarding global attention at the expense of local needs. The study by Tange (2010) on university lecturers' experiences of internationalisation in Denmark found that the issue of language and cultural activity (diversity) posed a serious challenge for internationalisation in Danish universities. However, Knight (2007) found three major challenges facing the internationalisation of higher education institution: the commercialisation and commodification of education programmes, the increase in the number of foreign "degree mills" and low quality providers and lastly the brain drain. In contrast, the least challenges were indicated as the loss of cultural or national identity; the jeopardy of the quality of higher education and the homogenisation of curriculum (Knight, 2007). Egron-Polack and Hudson (2014) also identify that international opportunities that are only available to students with financial resources and the issue of commodification/commercialisation of education remain the greatest challenge to internationalisation in high institutions worldwide. Zolfaghari et al. (2009) assert that the challenges of internationalisation are national challenges related to economic, social and

cultural problems and the regional challenges that depends on the rate of the countries' development.

On the African continent Adamu (2011) identifies the recognition of studies and visa restriction on students to study abroad as a major challenge for the internationalisation of higher education in Africa. On the other hand, Ogachi (2009) identifies the challenges of quality assurance and knowledge production as an impediment to internationalisation in East African universities.

Neale-Shutte and Fourie (2006, pp.124-130) explored the different challenges to internationalisation in African higher education and identified them as:

> the lack of funding for academic, administrative and social activities; low participation/ enrolment rate of international students to African universities due to lack of resources and stagnant economies with already limited job offerings, lack of teaching and learning resources, lack of human resource development, HIV/AIDS, poor research and inadequate research infrastructure leading to resources such as journals, periodicals and data base either lacking or extremely scarce, poor standard curriculum development and implementation; language policies (preserving the richness of all national languages with English), quality and relevance of the teaching and learning and lastly technology issues which is as a result of ICT not universally available due to limited cost, infrastructure, energy supply, and telephone connections (Neale-Shutte & Fourie, 2006, pp.124-130).

Furthermore, Singh (2010) finds that the continuing lack of local capacity, continuing geopolitical conditions of structural inequality, and insufficient interrogation and contextualisation of dominant concepts and models of internationalisation pose problems toward an alternative internationalisation policies in African higher education.

The International Education Association of South Africa (2005, IEASA thereafter) contends that internationalisation in South African higher education is challenged due to globalisation and global restructuring as a result of the lack of harmonisation and clarity of the different policies, rules, regulations, practices and procedures for the internationalisation process between government departments and higher education sectors. Malaza (2011) supports the views of IEASA and argues that internationalisation in South African higher institutions lack national policy measures. Rouhani (2007) also argues that the internationalisation process in South African higher institutions suffers due to a lack of comprehensive documentation in the area of research on international students' education and their mobility; and also to the lack of

a national policy framework on internationalisation unlike other western counterparts. Dzvimbo and Moloi in their (2013) study on the globalisation and internationalisation of higher education in South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa point to free market regulation ideologies as a key challenge to internationalisation. These privilege neo-liberal global knowledge economies that imposes on HEIs curricula, pedagogies, research goals, discourses, funding practices, performance related budgets and orientations.

2.3   THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students are described as students who chose to travel to another country to study. In other words, referred to as 'foreign students' in their host countries, they left the shores of their home countries in order to gain international knowledge, experience and qualification. Drawing from the European context, Trahar and Hyland (2011, p.623) define "international students as students studying full time and not resident ordinarily in the UK or another EU country". Waters and Brooks (2011) in their study describe international students as potential global citizens, cosmopolitans and ambassadors of inter-cultural understanding. Smith and Khawaja (2011) concur with this view and argues that international student brings with them a wide range of knowledge and skills across many disciplines, thereby contributing to the intellectual capital of their host country and adding to the work force. Townsend and Poh (2008) assert that an international student is considered from the economic, political and social perspectives of their host country. In contrast, Volet and Jones (2012) argue that international students are heterogeneous groups in which the only factor they have in common is the sojourner status in the country in which they are studying. In the African context, Kwaramba (2012 p.5) defines an international student as "one who undertakes all or part of his/her higher education experience in a country other than the home country". Mda (2010) is of the view that international students are regarded as students who are in their early adult stage studying in foreign educational institutions and universities worldwide

In this regards, being a heterogeneous group is regarded as challenging for the international students because the students consist of individuals who comes from a diverse range of ethnicities (Volet & Jones, 2012). Based on this, Ryan and Viete (2009) argue that any discussion on the issues concerning international students' needs to take account of the heterogeneity of the international students' population due to the fact that the international students come from diverse cultural, economic, social and linguistic background. In the UK

context, Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo (2009, p.40) suggest that international students should be seen not as passive recipients of a rarefied 'UK' geographical knowledge but as agents of the flows of geographical knowledge within the global discipline from and to the specific places that the students are coming from. Therefore, international students offer cultural knowledge and many skills that can certainly improve learning and scholarship in an increasingly global society (Lee, 2010). Therefore the reason international students study abroad according to Sherry, Thomas and Chui (2009) – is in order to explore a different culture and improve their cross cultural knowledge and relationship skills.

2.4   INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' REASONS FOR STUDYING ABROAD

A considerable body of literature has identified different reasons behind international students' studying abroad. The reasons can be said to be the push and pull model used to describe the forces within the home country that 'push' a student to seek education elsewhere and the forces within the host country that 'pull' a student to a particular host country or institution (Lee, 2010). Goel, De-Jong and Schnusenberg (2010) found that international students' character traits play a major role in beliefs that have to do with the study abroad intents and different character traits influence different beliefs to differing extents. Internationally, Stroud (2010) identifies that the interest of improving their understanding of other cultures and countries has a positive influence on American students' decision to study abroad. Allen (2010), who studied language learning motivation during the short term study abroad of US students reveals that the reasons the students study abroad were three factors which were to achieve a language fluency, being career oriented and to learn different cultures. Lee (2010) identifies lack of specialised fields, political repression, greater educational opportunities, higher quality education and better quality of life as the rationale for studying abroad by international students in the USA.

Parey and Waldinger (2010) in their study also identified that one reason students study abroad is to increase their probability of working in a foreign country by about 15 percentage points. On the other hand, King, Findlay, Ahrens and Dunne (2011) in the findings of their study conducted in England revealed that the reason English students study abroad is because of the quality of the university, the desire for adventure, parental wealth/social class and because the foreign experience potentially enhances the students' interculturalism and graduate labour

market competitiveness. However, it also raises the spectre of the brain drain of the brightest and best.

A study conducted by Bodycott (2009) in mainland China on the factors that drive or push students or parents to seek higher educational study outside of their country identified that the parents and students have different factors that push them to study abroad. According to Bodycott (2009) the findings of the study are that the decision in seeking to study abroad and their choice of a school were influenced by factors grounded in cultural, political and socio economic pragmatism by the parents. From the perspectives of the students, the study revealed that they desired a higher quality education, opportunities for employment, a strong economic background and international/intercultural experiences (Bodycott, 2009). Brooks and Walters (2009) in the UK find that students seeking to study abroad at the undergraduate level have highly supportive families with solidly middle class backgrounds while at the postgraduate level studying abroad was seen as a life experience and an avenue where opportunities for postgraduate funding are offered. Furthermore, it plays a significant role in furthering differences in cultural, social and economic capital at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

In South Africa, Mpinganjira (2011) reveals that the most important influencing factors were the quality of education offered, the lower cost associated with studying in the country and the geographical proximity of the country to home countries of most of the students hosted. In contrast, Bezuidenhout, Joubert, Hiemstra and Struwig (2009) assert that the reasons for doctors' migration from South African to study abroad were financial factors, better job opportunities after studying, the high crime rate in South Africa and better schooling opportunities for their children that also played a role in their decision to study abroad.

In another study by Mpinganjira (2009) on the different factors influencing the decision to study abroad among different groups of international students in South Africa, the findings are that supply-related conditions in home countries influence the decision to study abroad; more so, the opportunities to enhance their career prospects through acquiring high quality education with qualifications that are recognised worldwide were the most important factor behind international students' study in South Africa universities. Furthermore, Kwaramba (2012) identified several factors behind international students' decision to study in South Africa, for example, scholarships for postgraduate studies, international recognised academic qualifications, competent lecturers and higher research institutions capabilities, student

assistantship (international postgraduate students being provided assistants by being tutors and assistant lecturers), and having a good infrastructure (specifically in ICT). However it is imperative to identify the experiences of international students studying abroad. Therefore various scholarly literatures on international students' experiences will examined in the next section.

2.5   VARIOUS STUDIES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN HEIs

A growing body of literature has reported on international students' experiences in higher education. O'Reilly, Hickey and Ryan (2013) identify that international students experience sociocultural and psychological difficulties and lack of interest in internationalisation. In Australia Smith and Khawaja (2011) focus on the acculturation experiences of international students. McMahon (2011) explores the voices and context of Chinese students experiences of living and studying in the UK. Similarly, Bilecen (2013) explores the cosmopolitan experiences of international doctoral students in Germany. Robinson-Pant (2009) reports on international PhD students' understanding of and responses to the perceived differences between academic cultures of host (UK) and home universities. Leask (2009) explores the use of formal and informal curricular to improve interactions between home students and international students in New-Zealand. Fritz, Chin and DeMarinis (2008) investigate if the international students experience greater anxiety, irritability and stress from being apart from family and friends, pressure from school, and difficulties with language, work and finances than international students with permanent US residency. Rosenthal, Russell and Thomson (2008) describe the health and well-being of international students at an Australian university.

Moving on, Eaves (2011) examines the relevance of learning styles on international pedagogy and students in UK. Weurlander, Soderberg, Scheja, Hakan, Hult and Wernerson (2012) report on international students' experiences of different methods of formative assessment in which the study showed a positive contribution on the international students learning abilities while being assessed. Brown (2009) in England conducted an ethnographic study on the international student experience of the transformative power of their international sojourn. Gruber, Fub, Voss and Glaser-Zikuda (2010) used a new measurement tool and investigated how international students perceived the services they were offered at a German university and the satisfaction they derived from it. Green, Johansson, Rosser, Tengnah and Segrott (2008)

describe a multi case study on experiences of international nursing students in UK. Walters and Brooks (2010) report on the experiences of UK students studying overseas and indicate that the students are not overtly motivated by strategic concerns but are studying overseas in order to seek excitement for adventure purposes.

Moreover, the study by Crossman and Clarke (2010) in Australia found that all stakeholders identify clear connections between international experience and employability, given outcomes associated with the forging of networks, opportunities for experiential learning; language acquisition and the development of soft skills relating to cultural understandings, personal characteristics and change in the ways of thinking(Crossman & Clarke, 2010).The study by Fritz et al. (2008) also argue that international students in the US experienced difficulties of not being able to work, socially related problems and financial stress unlike the international students with a permanent US residency. Lastly, Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune (2011) indicate that international students' experienced friendship networks, social connectedness, home-sickness and satisfaction level in their host country.

In South Africa, Maharaj, Perumal and Perumal (2011) give an account of the international students' perceptions on the challenges of diversity management at a South African university. Aloyo and Wentzel (2011) focus on the potential skill contribution of international students in South Africa and find that the majority of the international students are registered in disciplines where skills shortages exist. A significant number of the students are young and would love to remain and work in the host country (Aloyo & Wentzel, 2011). Majyambere (2012) reports specifically on the information needs and information-seeking behaviours of international students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Several other studies that were conducted on international students' experiences focused mainly on the hardships, challenges and violence experienced by international students in their host country of study. An exploratory research study conducted by Townsend and Poh (2008) on the international students studying and living in a regional area of Australia shows that the students faced difficulties which were as a result of the differences in the education, finance and cultural system. A similar study by Sargeant and Tucker (2009) in Canada and the UK identified different layers of vulnerabilities experienced by the international students which were due to factors like language, security and finance. Similarly, Brown and Holloway (2008) in their ethnographic study on the adjustment journey of international students at an English university in UK, find that the students' challenges were due to foreign language, the use of

unfamiliar academic language, a sociocultural environment which causes home-sickness and loneliness amongst international students.

Graycar (2010) also identifies issues such as racial victimization, lack of intercultural interactions and gender violence as experienced by international students. Nyland, Forbes-Mewet, Margison, Ramia, Sawir and Smith (2009) also report that international students who were also workers in Australia represent a new vulnerable workforce that are compelled to accept very poor conditions of employment in the labour market in order to survive. Sherry et al. (2009) examined international students as a vulnerable student population in Spain. They identify cultural barriers, financial problems, poor English language fluency, racial discrimination, interpersonal problems and social exclusion as the challenges experienced by international students. This is also similar to the study conducted by Lee (2010) on the experiences and attitudes of international students at a US host higher institution which indicates that neo-racism was the cause of discrimination among the international students and their perception of unequal treatment was a major negative influence on their attitudes.

Furthermore, Tarry (2011) shows that international students in Britain universities experience social and cultural tension. Fritz et al. (2008) in the USA reveal that international students are confronted with the difficulties of not getting a job; socially related problem, financial difficulties, language difficulties and the stress of being apart from home and family. Sawir, Margison, Duemert, Nyland, and Ramia (2008) in Australia also identify the issue of adaptation, acculturation and the different forms of loneliness –personal loneliness, social loneliness and cultural loneliness – as the challenges experienced by the international students. Liu and Winder (2014) report that international students experience difficulties in acculturation, adaptation, and development of identity in a foreign country.

Not much literature addresses the experiences of international postgraduate students in African HEIs which clearly shows a dearth/paucity of research on international postgraduate students' experiences of higher education in other sub-Saharan Africa countries, although several studies for example Gopal (2013), Vandeyar (2010), Rajpal (2012), Majyambere (2012) have been conducted in the South African context on international students in high education and in high schools. The study by Mda (2010) on African international students in South African universities reports that the students were experiencing xenophobia, lack of sense of belonging, confusing identity, identity crises and local group stratification. Zar (2009) examines the effects that living in South Africa has on international students' sense of identity and finds out that the

international students experience a range of difficulties in acculturating to life in South Africa including feelings of loneliness, fear and alienation.

The study conducted by Gopal (2013) in a South African high school explored how grade 12 foreign learners experience their host country and revealed that the learners described their emotional and physical exposure to various forms of xenophobia perpetrated either at the level of the community /or at school. This study is similar to that of Vandeyar (2010) on the educational and socio-cultural experiences of immigrant students in South African schools, which reveals that particularly black immigrant students from other African countries have to contend with discrimination and harassment which involves marginalisation, devaluation and stigmatisation while they struggle with issues of language, curriculum and instructional strategies that do not address their cultural or linguistic background. They feel a sense of alienation and not one of belonging. The study by Mudhovozi (2011) on the adjustment experiences of international students at a South African university also reports that the international students experience both academic and social challenges like home-sickness, food, isolation and loneliness, fear of failure, academic concerns and language concerns.

Based on the literature reviewed in this section, we can see that much of the evidence is of the challenges, acculturation and adaptation experiences of international students in their host countries. The next section explores the international students' learning experiences.

2.6   THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING

This section deals specifically on international students' diverse experiences of HEIs which relate to their learning. Therefore, the concept 'learning' does not have a homogenous definition. Muro and Jeffery (2008, p.327) assert that "what is learning and how human learn are difficult questions to answer". Houwer, Barnes-Holmes and Moors (2013) in their definition of learning state that it is an ontogenetic adaptation which bring about changes in organisms that result from regularities in the environment of the organism. This definition implies that people learn as a result of the change experienced by them in their environment as they adapt to the change. In essence, several recent studies has also identified that international students' learning styles are different from those of the local students (Ruhanen & McLennan, 2012; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Barron, Baum & Conway, 2009).

Moreover, literature shows that international students have diverse learning experiences and also experience a lot of challenges and learning issues that affects their educational experiences (Georgiou & Sawidou, 2014; Carson, 2008; Ryan & Viete, 2009; Wadsworth, Hetcht & Jung, 2008; Johnson, 2008). However a few studies have also revealed that international students navigate through these challenges and learning issues to become more successful in their studies and complete their academic programme more successfully than their domestic counterparts (Montgomery, 2014; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Urban & Palmer, 2014). Therefore, the next sections addresses the negative and positive learning experiences of the international students in their host countries.

2.6.1   International students' negative learning experiences

Ryan (2011) argues that the benefits to both nation and university are at risk due to a range of teaching and learning issues that affect the learning experiences of international students and are problematic for both staff and students. The studies conducted on international students' learning experiences have identified several negative factors affecting international students learning in their host country. Campbell and Li (2008) report how Asian students at a New Zealand university experienced several challenges like language difficulties, cultural differences due to cultural communication barriers, unfamiliar patterns of classroom interactions, lack of knowledge of academic norms and conventions, inadequate learning support, difficulties in making friends with domestic students and the lack of a sense of belonging. According to Campbell and Li (2008) all these challenges combine to affect the Asian students' perceptions and levels of satisfaction with their learning experiences at the university.

 Menzies and Baron (2014) find that language barriers and culture shock were experienced by the international students. Hughes (2013) reports international students' use of online information resources for study purposes in Australia universities and identifies that the students were experiencing challenges of unfamiliarity and loneliness or strangeness related to the information learning environment at their host university, academic practices involving the use of information resources, academic conventions like referencing and avoiding plagiarism, accessing academic online resources and English language. Gu, Schweisfurth and Day (2010) also find that international students experience financial difficulties, food problems, loneliness, language difficulties, exposure to new pedagogies and powerlessness, and lack a sense of

belonging. This is supported by the study conducted by Karuppan and Barari (2011) in USA. They argue that lack of English proficiency causes the international students to experience discrimination which negatively affects their learning outcomes.

Leask (2009) identifies because of the lack of formal and informal curricular to improve interactions between home and international students, international students experienced\ challenges in adapting to the school culture and it affects their learning. In contrast, the study conducted by Ruhanen and McLennan (2012) in Australia which explored the learning experiences and preferences of tourism postgraduate students showed that the postgraduate students required more interactive learning experiences, for example, work experience, field trips, real word activities, case studies and group projects when compared to the passive learning styles they are being given. This finding is supported by Menzies and Baron (2014) who argues that international postgraduate students needs to learn through different forms of social support within and outside the school environment.

Moores and Popadiuk (2011) identify various negative experiences such as depression, culture shock, self-doubt, cultural differences and the demand of independent living experienced by international students. O'Reilly et al. (2013) report on identified sociocultural, psychological and academic difficulties, practical problems, discrimination and linguistic challenges as challenges of international students' experiences during their learning in an Irish university. Similarly, Tarry (2011) reports that Thai students while studying at a British university experienced difficulties with language, changes in attitude and culture shock. McMahon (2011) describes how Chinese students living and studying in the UK used different study techniques from their Western counterparts and were often unfairly pigeonholed into the category of shallow learners by Western lecturers which affected their scholastic performance and social life. Eaves (2011) also reports cultural differences in the western and non-western learning styles which clearly affected the learning behaviours or process of international students in western countries. Hwang, Wang and Sodanine (2011) argue that the lack of financial assistance and lack of social support are challenges to international students' learning performance in Taiwan.

Barron et al. (2009) similarly analyse how international students experience learning issues (the students working extremely hard to conform to the rigid education system), living issues, working issues (engaging in part time/fulltime employment) and financial difficulties. Carroll (2011) identifies that key learning issues for international students in the Western world are as

a result of language (English proficiency), academic transition (conforming to new practices, assumptions, and expectations; a new standards), lacking appropriate skills, the issue of engagement and participation, collaboration and mixing with local students which involved having their knowledge and experience valued.

The various studies reviewed above indicate that international students are prone to have different barriers that affect their experiences of learning as they struggle to survive in their host countries. This view accords well with the findings of Brown and Holloway (2008) in their ethnographic research, different from the photovoice research method that was used in this study; it indicates that the challenges and anxiety experienced by international students are associated with culture shock, home-sickness, sleeplessness, tearfulness, loneliness, fear, racial victimisation, discrimination, disorientation and depression that affect their academic performance. This is supported by the argument of Nyland et al. (2009) that international students face much difficulty given their relative deficiency with regard to language skills, local kin support and cultural knowledge, and in many cases because of not earning wages. The study by Furnham (2010) also reveals that the international students were working under conditions of racial discrimination.

There is considerable literature on international students' experiences in HEIs in Africa, including South Africa (Neale-Shutte & Fourie, 2006). International students generally have diverse learning experiences and there are many factors contributing to their learning experiences for example the study by Aloyo and Wentzel |(2011) shows that international students in South African HEIs faced several difficulties and challenges like xenophobia, language difficulties, low self-esteem, loneliness and financial issues.

Paola and Lemmer (2013) report that international students in South Africa experience fluidity in their stages of cultural adjustment and the impact of race and gender adjustment. Dzansi and Mogashoa (2013) identify different learning challenges faced by international students in South Africa due to cultural adjustment and shock, culturally insensitive classrooms, collaborative classroom environment, classroom participation and communication assessment methods. Oluwafemi (2012) also describes exorbitant international fees, the discriminatory policies of some universities, lack of funding and scholarship (local and international) for postgraduate students from non-South African Development Community (SADC) nations as the negative experiences of international students in South Africa. This is supported by MacGregor (2014) who argues that the challenges experienced by international students studying in South African

include accommodation issues, financial pressures, high medical insurance cost, language, support and adjustment challenges, lack of friends and xenophobia.

Ayliff and Wang (2006) describe how Chinese students learning English language in a South African tertiary institution were experiencing culture shock and learning issues that inhibited their learning experiences. In concurring with the studies of Ayliff and Wang, Rajpal (2012) also indicates that the African international postgraduate students in UKZN experienced issues like xenophobia, financial difficulties, accommodation issues, a language barrier, lack of communication with local students, non-issuance of work permits, teaching methods which are learner centered.

Similarly, Majyambere (2012), reporting on the information needs and information-seeking behaviours of international students at UKZN Pietermaritzburg campus, found that students experienced several challenges like language difficulties, accommodation issues, cultural and financial issues, library anxiety, social and personal uncertainties, academic needs, lack of information literacy skill, and the difficulty in getting study visas that affected their learning. Therefore this body of literature reviewed above provides evidence that international students in South Africa experienced hardship in their host universities.

2.6.2   International students' positive learning experiences

Several studies reviewed on international students' experiences has regarded them as high risk students, victims and also as students who are isolated and disadvantaged by their lack of contact with the culture of their host country (Montgomery, 2010). Contrary to these views, Gu et al. (2010) describe international students as active agents or participants rather than victims of pathology (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008) in their quest to change their identity, adapt, develop and achieve their academic/educational goals.

In addition, as the international students interact within different educational environments, cultures and society they began experiencing improved knowledge, self-awareness, skills and attitudes which enable them to function effectively within both their host and home countries (Gu et al., 2010).Moreover, Pence and Macgillivray (2008) identify that the international students experienced a change in their professional and personal life such as increased confidence, a better appreciation and respect for differences of others and other cultures.

Furthermore, some researchers have shown that international students' ability to adjust and adapt to their cultural transition is determined by the level of support they receive from their fellow international students and lecturers in their host environment. Arkoudius and Tran (2010) argue that international students sees the support they get from their lecturers as vital in helping them attain their educational goals. Montgomery and McDowell (2009) reveal that international students have social resources in form of an international network in which they share their powerful motivation to succeed and they support each other as an international community academically, socially and to a certain extent emotionally. Tran (2008) also reveals that international students perceived the one on one consultations with their lecturers, feedback on their assessments and dialogue with their lecturers as imperative and a way of increasing their academic knowledge. Borg and Cefai (2014) identify how international students studying in Malta were able to adjust to their academic life due to the care and support they received from their lecturers.

Montgomery (2010) also reports that the international students perceive their ability to communicate well with others of different cultural and social backgrounds to be an important skill and one that will be useful in future work and social life in a global context. Barnes (2010) asserts that international students' meeting and engaging with diverse students with different ideas and beliefs enhances their academic motivation, engagement and achievement. Brown and Holloway (2008) concur with Barnes and argue that regular social gathering and having an exciting opportunity to meet with diverse people help the international students to enjoy a sense of belonging.

On the other hand, the study by Lillyman and Bennett (2014) indicated that international students positive learning experiences were derived through sharing of knowledge, cultural understanding and by engaging in joint research and development with the assistance and understanding of the university, academic, local students and themselves. Arkoudis and Tran (2007) indicate that lecturers need to create room for dialogue with their international students in order to create new understanding and practices within their learning environment.

However, studies has revealed that it is the responsibility of the academics and managements of the university to provide a positive learning environment for their students (international and local) which is by organising and implementing different learning programmes and activities to engage their international and local students. Amaechi, Bennett Ganyu, Kayit, Lillyman, Okeke and Paticiente (2013) argue in their study that it is the duty of the university to provide

a positive learning environment for their international students by including them in their social activities and introducing them to peers and academic staffs. Pilote and Benabdeljalil (2007) with Fishchbacher-Smith, MacVicar, McEwan, and Cheng et al. (2015) in their study also note that in order to provide a positive learning environment for international students; institutions must offer educational courses and workshop programmes to address the issues the international students face when they arrive newly in their host environment and also establish space for self-reflection on the difficulties they encounter in their studies. They need also to share their experiences with other students in order to overcome isolation and improve integration within the university environment.

However, Amaechi et al. (2013) with Pilote and Benabdeljalil (2007) indicate that engaging and involving the academics and school management in preparing courses and delivery could also show how positive learning experiences can overcome intercultural challenges and assist in accommodating the international students in their host university. This view is supported by Yukl (2006) who indicates that it is the duty of management to develop and implement future programmes and strategies in the institution and to make necessary changes, communicate and explain the vision and lastly motivate and inspire people to attain the vision. Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) further assert that with the support of these people, for example, lecturers, local and international peers, adjustment and adaptation to their host environment become easy for the international students.

Campbell and Li (2008) find that Asian students had an overall satisfaction with their learning experiences at the university in New Zealand due to a large number of factors, such as high quality education, practical programmes, favourable learning environments, friendly, helpful, supportive and highly qualified lecturers and tutors, good teacher-student relationships, development of language and intercultural communication skills, and personal and intellectual growth. This can also be seen in the findings by Bistak (2013) who identifies that Asian international students' relationships with peers, faculty and administrative staff result in different positive learning experiences like personal development, acquiring knowledge in science and technology and in general education, vocational preparation and the development of intellectual skills.

Wu et al. (2015) report that the transitional difficulties faced by the international students when they arrive in their host country motivate them to develop strategies for problem solving and made them become independent leaners as they develop new learning strategies to deal with

difficulties. Campbell (2010) and Kelly (2010) agree with Wu et al. (2015) postulate that international students generate diverse perceptions and personal growth to become independent thinkers and change agents. Warring (2010) argues that international students gain more confidence and become independent in their learning. In addition, Kumi-Yeboah (2014) reveals that the international students' adjustment to transformative learning is embedded in their gaining of self-confidence and also in their ability to develop self or inner awareness from their experiences.

Montgomery (2009) also reports that the international students viewed cross-cultural group work as part of their positive learning experiences, and one that potentially prepares them to work in international contexts. Kelly (2010) claims that by the time they get back to their home, their employability level in the labour world has become high because of their diverse international experiences. Furham (2004) argues that the international students' learning experiences help in shaping their thinking and reasoning about things. Kelly (2010) concurs with Furham and claims that international students' experiences helps to change their ideas and thinking on how they relate and interact with people and their environment.

Furthermore, the study by Moores and Popadiuk (2011) in the US which explored the positive learning aspects, experiences and resources the international students find helpful during their transition, identifies that the students through their challenges developed personally, had a change in perspective, observed academic growth and had a supportive living environment and support from the international environment. In addition, they were engaged in general cultural learning, had cultural guidance, recognised academic differences, involved themselves in extracurricular activities, and received academic and personal support from faculty and staffs of the school. Their challenges provided a motivation for success, and enabled them to have a sense of belonging (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011).Glass (2011) reports that international students' involvement in physical, social and cocurricular activity is a support to their educational experiences. Hwang et al. (2011) report on their investigation of factors that influence the learning performance of international students in Taiwan. They found that acculturative and academic stressors (adjustment) and social support had a significant impact on the learning performance of the international students. Burton and Kirshbaum (2013) content that engaging international students in programmes that involve them working and supporting each other in groups enhances their learning and that peer coaching helps in developing their academic and practical ways of progressing in their studies.

Moores and Popadiuk (2011) agrees with Burton and Kirshbaum and argue that due to the shared status of being student sojourners in their host environment, the international students easily developed interpersonal relationship with each other and also share an interest in exploring new cultures and creating new friendships. The study by Arthur and Popadiuk (2013) also found that interpersonal relationships shared among the international students was a key influence in helping them overcome barriers and that they also offered each other emotional and instrumental support in reaching their career goals.

In Western and English speaking countries, the issue of language was identified as a major constraint for international students. In contrast, Montgomery (2010) notes that international students have positive learning experiences in developing language skills as a means of learning to live with others and learning about the culture of the new context. Xu (2012) examines the English language development of three Chinese research students with high proficiency in Australia and reveals that the international students contributed to their own learning through their agency in learning English. Karuppan and Barari (2011) also contend that English proficiency by international students is the single most important enabler of a positive learning outcome because it dampens the effects of discrimination, and promotes a pleasant and enriching educational experience on the campuses irrespective of ethnicity. This view is supported by Montgomery (2010) who further stresses that English language is viewed as an international language that enables students to gain entry into a more global environment.

Contextually, Zar (2009) identifies among the international students' successful adaptive strategies is their reliance on social support from family members and other international students. MacGregor (2014) shows that international students in South Africa have had positive learning experiences, for example, in developing skills and acquiring critical thinking skills, receiving quality education and becoming computer literate.

In essence, the above review clearly demonstrates the need for the study which aims to contribute to the development of the body of research on the international students experiences of learning in which the area of learning experiences of the international students in Africa and in South Africa is under researched, although there are available studies which shows the complexities of doing research with international students in Africa. Therefore, from what the literature has revealed, much has not been said about international postgraduate students' experiences of learning in the school of education and in particular using photovoice which is a participatory visual methodology within qualitative research (Mitchell, 2011) to generate

data. In other words, this study explores and understand the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. This study explores how these international postgraduate students experiences influence their learning and also explore the resources that these international postgraduate students draw on towards their learning in the selected university in KwaZulu-Natal

2.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter reviewed the literature related to the study by exploring the policy of internationalisation guiding international students studying abroad, explaining the importance and rationale of the policy and discussing the challenges of the policy. The researcher then reviewed literatures by defining international students and examining the learning experiences of international students in their host country. International students' learning experiences was looked at from different context: international, continental and South African. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework guiding this study.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF THE INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two presented the literature review that informed the study. Thereafter this chapter explores the theoretical framework used in guiding this study. This is the bio-ecosystemic theory of Bronfenbrenner (1994) that presents a good basis for understanding and exploring the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning; how their experiences influence their learning and the resources that these students draw on towards their learning.

3.2   THE BIO-ECOSYSTEMIC THEORY

3.2.1   The origin of the bio-ecosystemic theory

This study is located in the area of educational psychology and employs the bio-ecosystemic theory of Bronfenbrenner (1994), also known as the theory of human development that was developed in 1979 by Urie Bronfenbrenner. Bronfenbrenner was a well renowned child psychologist who was born in 1917 in Russia and died in 2005 in New York State (Harkonen, 2007; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The work and theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner were greatly influenced by a German psychologist known as the father of social psychology, Kurt Lewin, in his classical fields' theory. This human behaviour formula he (Bronfenbrenner) transformed to suit his needs in describing human development (Harkonen, 2007).

Krishnan (2010, p.5) states that "Bronfenbrenner's perspective has some bearing on the works of Bandura and Vygostky because the environment is either explicitly or implicitly considered as a primary mechanism in children's development by the three theorists". In 1979, Bronfenbrenner developed an ecological systems theory, detailed in his book *The Ecology Of Human Development,* which focused mainly on child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In this book and theory the child was placed at the centre of many levels of contexts (or systems) that interact and influence development over time; whilst the child had previously been seen as a passive human being that is influenced by the environment that affects his/her growth and development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner (1995) with some other theorists criticised the theory of human development on the grounds that the ecological systems theory laid too much emphasis on the child's environment and also made the child to become a passive being rather than an active being in the environment. Therefore Bronfenbrenner developed another theory which he called the bio-ecological systems theory which the child still situated at the centre of many levels of the systems, interact, interrelate, and reciprocate back to the system by influencing his/her development over time in the environment (Tudge et al., 2009). In this new theory the child becomes an active human being and helps to construct the system through interacting and influencing the systems and his/her development (Bronfenbrenner & Morrison, 2006; Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

According to the bio-ecosystemic theory an individual is considered "as an active agent in, and on, its environment" involving changes in his or her properties depending on growth, learning and alterations in its psychobiological state (Nitsch, 2009, p.155). Lewthwaite and Wiebe (2011) also argue that the bio-ecological theory goes beyond providing a framework for identifying and conceptualizing the multi-system factors that influence development. It considers an individual's topology in his or her setting and the way in which individual and external forces interplay to influence development (Lewthwaite and Wiebe, 2011). According to Bronfenbrenner (1994) individuals do not develop in isolation or a social vacuum but within the systems of interrelationship (larger social structures of community, economics and politics) (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002).

3.2.2 The development of the individual in the bio-ecosystemic theory

The development of the individual in the bio-ecosystemic theory can be explained not by using one single concept but by using more multidimensional and complex concepts like interactions, interrelationships, interconnectedness, interdependency and reciprocity (Krishnan, 2010). In essence, different scholars, for example, Tudge et al. (2009); Krishnan (2010); Harkonen (2007); with Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), argue that in the bio-ecosystemic theory four major components of the model, namely process, person, context and time (PPCT thereafter) are used to understand the theory. Tudge et al. (2009) further asserts that the bio-ecosystemic theory deals with the interrelationship among these four: process, person, context and time. The elements of the PPCT model are explained as follows:

- **Process**

This is the first element of the PPCT model which Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006, p.795) call the 'core' of the model. Krishnan (2010) asserts that it consists of all sorts of transactions between the person and his/her immediate surroundings that are responsible for the person's competencies and general wellbeing and that this transaction drives the individual's development. Tudge et al. (2009) point out that learning new skills and reading constitute the engines of development because it is by engaging in these actions that the individuals come to make sense of their world and understand their place in it and they both play their part in changing the prevailing order while fitting into the existing one. Therefore "the nature of the proximal processes is seen as the engine of development and encompasses particular forms of interaction between the person and environment that operates over time and are posited as the primary mechanism producing human development" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.795).

- **Person**

The influence of the family, caregivers or peers is determined by the characteristics of the individual itself (Krishnan, 2010). In essence individual variables such like sex, age, temperaments, illness can be linked to development and these variables can influence the proximal process either indirectly or directly(Krishnan, 2010). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) identify three personal characteristics namely disposition, resources and demand as shaping the future of development and also affecting the direction and power of the proximal processes. In the same vein, Tudge et al. (2009) also identify three characteristics of a person, which are demand, resources and force. These personal characteristics are distinguished and explained as follows:

Demand: These are regarded as the personal stimulus and characteristic that act as the immediate stimulus to other people, such as age, gender, skin, colour and physical appearance (Tudge et al., 2009; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Resource: This characteristic is not immediately apparent but it includes elements that relate partly to mental and emotional resources such as past experiences, skills and intelligence and also to social and material resources (Tudge et al., 2009; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Disposition/Force: This deals with the differences of temperament like motivation and persistence (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Tudge et al., 2009).

- **Context**

This is the most important of all the four elements of the PPCT model (Krishnan, 2010). Krishnann (2010) asserts that 'context' refers to the multiple venues modifying the proximal processes and they include the environment which the individuals is always in constant interaction with, which is either the physical, social or economic. This also consists of the four interrelated systems, for example, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Tudge et al. 2009). However, the four systems structures of interactions, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, influences and affects the growth and development of the individual (person). These systems structures of Bronfenbrenner's theory are highlighted and explained with a diagram illustration showing their level of importance in the individual's development. Figure 3.1 below is a diagram of the bio-ecosystemic framework of Bronfenbrenner showing the five interrelated systems of environment.
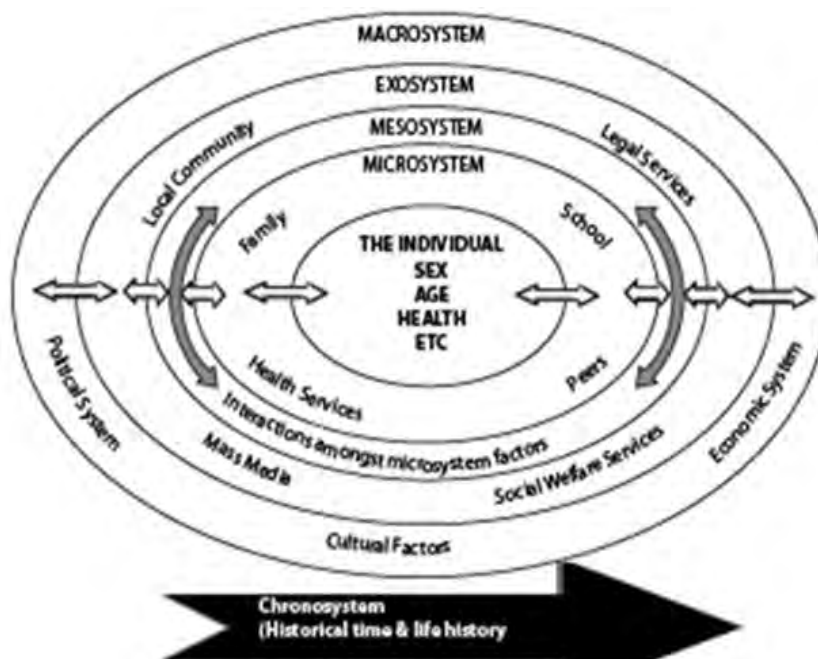
Figure 1 Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model (Adapted from Upham 2012, p. 24)

The microsystem

This is known as the first system of interaction where the individuals are directly active and learn about the world. This system involves the experiences of developing trust and mutuality with significant people in the individual's life, for example, family, school, church and peers (Swick & William, 2006; Dersken, 2010). Bronfenbrenner (1994, p.32) defines the microsystem as "a pattern of interpersonal relationships, roles and activities that a developing individual experiences in a particular face-to-face situation with specific material and physical entities including other people having unique belief systems, temperament and personality traits". It also consists of the social roles, activities and the interpersonal relationships which the individual is exposed to during his/her development in the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Additionally, it implies that the quality of relationships within each setting is important, with dyadic relationships (e.g., between individuals and families) being the foundation (Moloney, Weston, Qu, & Hayes, 2012). However, how these significant people (peers, lecturers, family, community, school,) interact with the individuals have an effect and impact on how the individual develops in that environment. In addition, how the individual reacts and acts to these people in the micro system affects how they treat him/her in return. An example is how other students' (peers]) attitudes towards the international postgraduate students in the classroom and in the school environment (context) might influence them positively or negatively. Therefore Malindi and Theron (2010) indicate that the microsystem provides a rich social support outside the individual family which can been seen in the support received by students from peers (local and international) and also from their lecturers/supervisors.

The mesosystem

This is the second system of interaction which contains the microsystem and where interaction within the microsystem influences the individual through the decisions made by people in the systems (Bronfenbrenner 1994; Krishnan, 2010). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006, p.817) define the mesosystem "as comprising the relationships existing between two or more settings; in short, it is a system of two or more microsystems". It also describes how the different parts of an individual microsystem work together for the sake of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This system helps the individual to connect and interact with two or more systems in which he/she lives in (Swick & William, 2006). An example is the university system including

the international students' office, registration office, and the residency office (accommodation).

The exosystem

This is the third system of interaction that has an indirect influence on the individual because the individual is not an active participant in this system. The exosystem includes the other people and places that the individual may not interact with directly but it influences the micro system and mesosystem and still has a large effect on the individual such as the Department of Home Affairs(e.g., in relation to permits), medical aid, legal system and police forces (Dersken, 2010).

The macrosystem

This is the fourth system of interaction that involves the individual's cultural beliefs, values and what happens in his/her community, which all acts as a powerful influence on the individuals' lives. The macrosystem refers to cultural fabric of the individual's society, for example, the political system, the economic system, the degree of freedom permitted by the government, and the international students' policy (Boon, Cottrell, King, Stevenson, & Miller, 2012). All of these things can affect an individual either positively or negatively.

- **Time**

This is the last element of the PPCT model. According to Tudge et al. (2009), time plays a major role in the bio-ecosystemic theory. Tudge et al. (2009) with Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) assert that time is divided into two, namely microtime, which occurs during a specific activity, and mesotime, which is the extent of the activities and interactions that occur with some consistency in the developing person's environment. Krishnan (2009) also points out that time is important in the PPCT model because all aspects of the PPCT model can be thought of in terms of relative constancy and change. More importantly, in order to incorporate the dimension of time as it relates to an individual's environment the chronosystem was added (Tudge et al., 2009; Krishnan, 2010).

The chronosystem

This is the last system which encompasses all the other four systems structures in the bio-ecosystemic model. Bronfenbrenner and Morrison (2006) assert that the system develops as a result of the individual's experiences in his/her life, which includes the environmental events

and transitions in an individual's life and the individual's changes through time (e.g. cross-national migration, timing of migration, duration in the host society and other major life changes overtime). Krishnan (2010) concurs with Bronfenbrenner and Morrison and asserts that the chronosystem involves the internal and external changes such as the socio-historical context, transitions due to life, time and migration of an individual. This also includes the history of an individual and the events that happen to them in their daily life (Swick & William, 2006).Therefore, in this system of interaction, time and space play an important role in the bio-ecosystemic theory.

3.2.3 Different studies to which the bio-ecosystemic theory has been applied

This theory has been widely acknowledged and used in different fields such as in physics, psychology, economics, medicine and education. For example, Lewthwaite and Wiebe (2010) in Canada used this theory in the field of science education. Boon et al. (2012) also apply this theory in exploring community resilience to natural disasters, whilst Nitsch (2009) applies it in an ecological approach to sport activity. In addition, Moloney et al. (2012) use this theory to explore families' life events and family service delivery. Harkonen (2007, p.16) asserts that the bio-ecosystemic theory is used in "articulating the process of human socialization and it has been a key to understanding education".

In Rio de Janeiro Kejerfors (2007) uses the theory to explore the physical and social context for parenting in a shantytown, examining parenting and subsequent child outcomes among a sample of families living in the shantytown and lastly exploring factors that contributed to difference among parents on how they nurture and protect their children. Lui (2010) also used the theory in China to explore the uniqueness of Chinese-only children's learning environments. Hoffman and Kruczek (2011) also use the theory in America to examine the effects of mass trauma developing from psychosocial interventions and advocacy to address the needs of affected individuals, system and communities.

More so, Ndengu (2009) study in Malawi uses the bio-ecological systems theory to understand adolescents' vulnerability to the Human Immune Deficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS thereafter) and to understand the processes of intervention. In a similar vein, Khanare (2008) also uses this theory in her study in South Africa to understand school and how the relationships within the school social context respond to challenges facing learners orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. Simpson (2012)

draws on bio-ecosystemic theory to gain an understanding of the experiences that scholarship learners have within independent school environments and to find out what the opportunities were and the challenges that the students might be facing. Upman (2012) similarly explores adolescent perceptions of gambling. Lastly Barnes (2011) uses the bio-ecosystemic theory to investigate teachers' perceptions and understanding of diversity and inclusive education in a South African school.

3.3   THE APPLICATION OF THE BIO-ECOSYSTEMIC THEORY IN THE STUDY

The key issue in the bio-ecosystemic theory is that each of the five systems directly or indirectly influences or affects the other. Therefore, the concepts of interaction, interrelationship, interdependence and reciprocity are common constructs used in this theory.

This theory shows how the various bio-ecological systems influence, interacts, interdepend and interconnect; in the case of this study, the international postgraduate students are viewed as a system within other sub systems (Pillay, 2012). In other words, the time and context in which learning is experienced by the postgraduate students indicate how other systems influence one another and how the international postgraduate students respond to these experiences as a system and in the system (Swick & William, 2006).). In the ecological framework, other systems includes the university, residence, peers, lecturers, policies, laws, the economic and political systems, church, and the campus. The individual (international postgraduate student) placed in the middle of the systems responds back to the system by influencing the systems' as active human beings indicator variables like developing new knowledge, learning new skills, values, experience, sex, gender, health, risk, and motivation   shows the level of their development in   the environment. In addition, the interactions, interrelationships and interdependence between the international students' and people, objects, university, symbols in the system can affect the students' development negatively or positively in the period of studying in the university.

The international postgraduate students' learning does not take place in a vacuum (Khanare, 2009), as mentioned earlier in the study, but involves interactions within a wide range of human and non-human systems within the university. For example, in the microsystem the postgraduate students have a bidirectional interaction with fellow peers/students, lecturers and the school environment, the resulting effect of which can be either positive or negative. More

so the use of the bio-ecosystemic theory in this study shows the interaction, interrelation and interdependent of the international postgraduate students and the other subsystems of the model which represent the peers and other stakeholders of the university institution, namely policies, university buildings and other material resources that form part of the university environment in which the international postgraduate students find themselves (Pillay, 2012). Therefore, it is assumed that the interconnectedness and interactions between any of the different systems may influence the students' development and learning. According to Boon et al. (2012, p.399) the environment (e.g. home, work, community, state, and nation) where an individual is located is conceived of as ''a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls''.

Based on these different views, the bio-ecosystemic theory is chosen by the researcher as the best suitable theory for exploring and gaining deeper understanding of the international postgraduate students'– in particular the postgraduate students of education–experiences of learning this is because the students comes from different environments with their own diverse knowledge and experiences.

3.4   THE LIMITATIONS OF THE BIO-ECOSYSTEMIC THEORY

The importance of the theory cannot be ruled out although I am aware that the bio-ecological theory has been criticised in different ways by different scholars in their studies. Lewthwaite (2011) criticises the theory by proposing that some factors identified in the systems could reside in more than one system as the boundaries between systems seemed blurred, which is to be expected in any complex systems model. Ossa (2013) also criticises the theory in that it tried to cover so much that it ends up missing on a few variables such as cultural background, ethnic implications and religious views that might affect the model in the development of the person/individual. Krishnan (2010) in her study also identified several limitations to this theoretical framework despite its importance to this study. According to Krishnan (2010)

> "Investigations based on bioecological theory are limited due to the paucity of data. It is also important to note that there is a lack of primary data to fully understand interactions at all level of social ecology; data are largely drawn from a secondary source, thereby limiting the availability of variable. The absence of variables pertaining to individuals' responses is a notable limitation; data are largely drawn from a secondary source, thereby limiting it. In addition, data are mainly cross sectional, and therefore, hard to establish causal relationships.

Under these circumstances, the ecological model appears to be a paradox with little or no opportunity for researchers to replicate earlier designs, if any, and also which affects utilizing the model to its fullest potential"(Krishnan, 2010, pp.13-14).

However, despite all these limitations I posit that in qualitative research, flexibility is allowed in using different research methods and it is also unique to each context therefore the manner in which I intend to use this theory is based on the principles of qualitative research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) which informs my research study.

3.5   CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework that guides the study, which is Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bio-ecosystemic theory. The study has used this theory to explore the issue, which is the learning experience of the international postgraduate students at a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal, in order to understand what influences their leaning experiences and from what the resources in which the international postgraduate students draw their learning experiences. The theory shows how different systems in the life of an individual interact, interrelate and influence the individual's development and how the individual responds to the system too. Therefore the next chapter presents the research design and methodology adopted for this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter three outlined and discussed the relevant theoretical framework that informed the study. This chapter presents and discusses the research design and methodology that was adopted in conducting this study in order to answer the key research question guiding the study. The chapter begins by providing an overview of the research paradigm and then describes the qualitative nature of the study. Furthermore, the methodological strategy, sampling, data generation methods and data generation procedures are discussed. Issues of trustworthiness and ethical consideration that were applied are also analysed.

4.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is qualitative in nature and located within the interpretive paradigm to explore international students' learning experiences in a selected university in South Africa. Through case study, a multi-modal approach which involved the photovoice process and focused group discussion was employed to provide insights into the international students' experiences of learning in a selected university in South Africa. This research design sets out in detail a strategy showing how research should be executed to address the research questions (Creswell, 2009). The major components of this research are discussed in the following sections.

4.2.1 Interpretive paradigm

This study is positioned within the interpretive paradigm. Shuttleworth (2008) claims that a paradigm is a framework or a dominant way of thinking and doing things that involves shared expectations and rules. Many researchers claim that there are different viewpoints, hence, multiple paradigms. Neuman (2009, p.81) states that the main paradigms in social science are the "positivist, interpretive, and critical paradigms". Therefore researchers position themselves in these different paradigms based on their beliefs or assumptions about the phenomenon under investigation (Christiansen, Bertram & Land, 2010; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2012); the paradigm that informs this study is situated in the interpretive. This approach to research differs from the positivist paradigm which interprets natural laws in order to predict or control events, and from the critical paradigm, which tries to emancipate or transform society.

This study is situated within an interpretive paradigm whose aim, as Cohen et al. (2011) assert, is to understand individuals' interpretations of the world around them and their experiences. This process of engagement therefore allows the researcher to describe, understand and examine human behaviour, interaction and experiences within and around the social and cultural context in which they occur, according to Kim (2003).This is in line with Cohen et al. (2011) who assert that in the paradigm individuals are studied with their many opinions, characteristics, behaviour, attitudes, and experiences. Interpretive researchers argue that there is no one reality, rather that, through social interactions, multiple realities are partly created (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Mack, 2010). Therefore, the emphasis of interpretive paradigm is to understand and interpret people's lived experiences within the context in which they live (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Taking into consideration the focus of this study, the interpretive paradigm is suited to this study as it attempts to understand how international students talk about and give meaning to their experience of learning in a selected South African university. In essence, the interpretive paradigm will also give me an opportunity to make sense and gain a broader understanding of meanings, reasons and their actions.

4.2.2   Qualitative research

The research methodology is the procedures or approaches by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena (Rajeseka, Philominathan & Chinnathambi, 2013). It is also defined as the study of methods by which knowledge is gained and aims to give the work plan of research (Christiansen et al., 2010).This study adopted a qualitative approach to explore international students' learning experiences. "Qualitative research aims to understand the experiences and attitudes of individuals or a community on a particular issue" (Bricki& Green, 2007, p.3). According to Nieuwenhuis (2007, p.51), qualitative research is used in understanding the process, the social and cultural contexts which underlie various behavioural patterns and mostly concerns with the "why" questions of research. In other word, qualitative research affirms multiple realities which are socially and contextually constructed. It produces rich and descriptive data through participants' words or images, rather than number, according to Cohen et al. (2011) and Rajeseka et al. (2013).

Additionally, Hogan et al. (2009) highlight that qualitative research allows the researcher to do in-depth study and use flexible methods. They assert that qualitative research has traditionally been conducted by means of direct observation of a sample, case studies, personal experiences, introspection, an examination of relevant texts, interviews, focused groups, life stories and the researcher's own participation in the settings that she/he is researching (Hogan et al., 2009). Therefore, it is reasonable to note that qualitative research allows the researcher to employ multiple methods of data generation that will allow the participants to provide detailed views regarding the explored phenomenon. The data in qualitative research can include words and/pictures (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007).

 In the following section, the researcher outline the choice of case study as a specific research methodology within which the data was generated.

4.2.3   Case study

This study was conducted using a case study design. A case study is defined by Rule and John (2011, p.4) "as a systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular instance in its context in order to generate knowledge". Shuttleworth (2008) supports this view and asserts that a case study is used to study a particular situation in depth. Therefore, the intention of case study is to offer explanation of a specific issue or human activity in the real world. In this way, Babbie (2013, p.338) indicates that "the chief purpose of a case study research is to do an in-depth study of a particular case which can yield explanatory insights and tries to understand the structure and process of the case". The emphasis on the context of the participants is a contribution to the field of case study research (Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Yin, 2009). "Case study generates an understanding of and insights into a particular instance by providing a thick, rich description of the case and illuminating its relation to its broader contexts" (Rule & John, 2011, p.7). It can be used to describe a unit of analysis, such as a case study of a particular organisation or to describe a research method (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This brings to the fact that that there are many case study designs and therefore it is important for the researcher to recognise the multiplicity of case study designs.

Researchers in the field of case study research have identified a variety of characteristics. For instance, there are two different types of case studies research design known as the intrinsic and instrumental case or a combination of the two (Rule & John, 2011). "In an intrinsic case

study, the interest is in the case itself as a unique or innovative situation that is worth understanding more fully while an instrumental case study takes its focus on a particular issue and examines cases to explore this issue in depth" (Rule & John, 2011, p. 9). Gay et al. (2009), for example, point out that the researcher can carry out a single case study, multiple case studies, or a collective case study of a particular phenomenon. This study used a single case study design which involves a particular group, which is the international postgraduate students learning together at a selected university. Case study was suitable for this study since these students are experts on their own learning and have insights into the ways in which they make meaning of their learning at the university. The significance of a case study is further related to the researcher's flexibility of using various methods and provides platform for participants' voices to be heard (Cohen et al., 2011). This is to say, the choice of photovoice and focus group discussion was still informed by the assumption of case study design. The manner in which the sampling procedures unfolded is discussed in the next section.

4.2.4   Research context

This section describes the context – a university located in KwaZulu-Natal province – in which international postgraduate students' experiences of learning unfolded. The criterion for selecting this university was the fact that it was convenient for me as an international postgraduate student, as discussed in Chapter One. Convenience sampling is concerned with getting participants whom the researcher has easy access to and are convenient to reach. In convenience sampling, the participants does not represent any group apart from itself and does not seek to generalise about the wider population (Cohen et al., 2011).

There are four universities in KwaZulu-Natal. Three of the universities are located around Durban Metropolitan area and one located outside Durban metropolitan. Of those universities located within the Durban metropolitan area, one of them offer teacher education programmes and other degree and postgraduate programmes. The researcher decided to include one of the university located within the Durban metropolitan area that offers teacher education programmes on one of its campuses, including postgraduate programmes in education. The school is a multicultural and multiracial campus which consists predominantly of black students followed by Indians, coloured, and white students from diverse provinces in South Africa. Furthermore, the campus boasts a diverse group of students from different countries like Lesotho, Ethiopia, Turkey, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Kenya, Cameroun, Germany,

China, France, Nigeria and so on. There are students' residences inside and outside the campus, while some students commute to and from the campus on a daily basis. The students that participated in this study were predominantly African international postgraduate students from different countries who are residing on campus. At the time of data generation process, postgraduate international students who were studying at the campus of the selected university are shown in Figure 1 below.

NATIONALITY CODE	NATIONALITY NAME	Total No. of students
101	NAMIBIA	1
103	LESOTHO	10
104	BOTSWANA	5
105	SWAZILAND	87
106	MOZAMBIQUE	1
108	ZAMBIA	4
109	MALAWI	4
111	MAURITIUS-SADC	36
203	BURKINA FASO	1
205	CAMEROON	4
215	ETHIOPIA	1
218	GHANA	2
22	KENYA	2
224	LIBYA	1
230	NIGERIA	26
231	CONGO	1
232	RWANDA	2
240	UGANDA	3
249	INDIA	1
263	TURKEY	1
412	URUGUAY	1
		250

Figure 2 The international postgraduate students' studying at a campus in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal

4.2.5   Sampling and selection of participants

Purposive sampling and convenient sampling are typically used in qualitative research since the researcher selects participants that are suitable for the study (Maree & Pietersen, 2007). In purposive sampling, as Teddlie and Yu (2007) confirm, purposive sampling in education typically involves selecting individuals or schools to answer the research questions of a study based on a specific purpose. Rule and John (2011) further assert that in purposive sampling participants are deliberately chosen or selected because of their relevant knowledge, interest and experience in relation to the case. In this regard, the researcher used purposive sampling deliberately to select the participants because they have been studying in this campus pursuing their postgraduate degrees. Following Cohen et al. (2011, p.157)'s assertion that purposive sampling is made up of "knowledgeable people who have in-depth knowledge about a particular issue through their experiences", the participants in this study were selected as 'knowers' of their own learning experiences.

Struwig and Stead (2013) assert that a convenience sample is chosen purely on the basis of availability and participants are selected because they are accessible and co-operative, whilst Cohen et al. (2011, p.155) note that "convenience sampling involves choosing the individuals nearest to you to serve as your participants". Therefore the reason for selecting this type of sampling was because all the participants were knowledgeable to me and were within easy access as we all were accommodated in the campus in which this study took place. The participants were chosen because their experiences of learning in a foreign country was central to this study and they were within easy reach as we were all staying on campus.

Furthermore, qualitative case study research involves few participants or cases because the intention is not to generalise the findings but to understand fully the participants' worldviews and experiences (Christiansen et al., 2010). Hence eight participants were purposively selected to acquire rich information regarding their experiences of learning in a selected South African university. While there are many postgraduate international students that could have participated, the sample size consists of those who were accessible to me and who were convenient to work with. According to Rule and John (2011, p.63) "…it is often impossible

for a case study researcher to consult everyone involved in a case therefore the researcher has to choose people who can shed most light or different lights on a case". On selecting the participants for this study purposive sampling and convenient sampling were used, and selection was based on the basis of three key issues:

- International postgraduate students residing in the university campus
- International postgraduate students in their Masters of Education (MEd thereafter) or PhD level
- International postgraduate students who have been in the university for 2 years or more.

Figure 2shows the biographic information of the eight international postgraduate students who participated in this study. Pseudonyms were used to maintain issues of confidentiality in this study.

NO.	NAME	GENDER	AGE	NO. OF YEARS IN THE UNIVERSITY	LEVEL OF STUDY	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
1	Participant A	Male	28 years	3 years	PhD	Zimbabwean
2	Participant B	Female	33 years	2 years	MEd	Lesotho
3	ParticipantC	Female	29 years	3 years	MEd	Cameroon
4	ParticipantD	Female	34 years	3 years	MEd	Cameroon
5	ParticipantE	Male	31 years	3 years	MEd	Nigeria
6	ParticipantF	Male	43 years	3 years	PhD	Nigeria
7	ParticipantG	Male	47 years	4 years	PhD	Nigeria
8	ParticipantH	Male	42 years	2 years	PhD	Rwanda

Figure 3 Presents the biographic information of the participants

4.2.6 Methods of data generation

This section discusses the methods that were employed to generate data in this study. A research method consists of a set of specific procedures, tools and techniques to gather and analyse data (Wahyuni, 2012). More so, the qualitative researchers such as Cohen et al. (2011) and Rule and John (2011) have always used the word 'data collection method' but the researcher has conferred herself to the word 'data generation' because data are generated by asking or probing with questions. However in qualitative research, there are different methods

of data generation employed namely, the observation method, interview method, focus group discussion, focused group interview, life history, document analysis and visual media (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, the study at hand employed two data generation method used in a qualitative research approach known as the photovoice method (Mitchell, 2008; Wang & Burris, 1997) and focused group discussion method (Bricki & Green, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011).

4.2.6.1 The photovoice method

The photovoice method is one of the participatory visual methods of research "that enables people to control the photographic process in order to express, reflect and communicate their everyday life and experiences" (Wang, 2009, p.4). "Photovoice is a powerful photographic technique that promotes critical dialogue and produces knowledge" (Wang & Red wood-Jones, 2001, p.560).Therefore, the use of photovoice might stimulate discussion among participants (Mitchell, 2011) and it might make the student to become more active (Wang, 2009). However Estrella (2012) indicates that it is also time consuming. Despite this, photovoice was used by the researcher as a research method to make the participants see themselves as researchers, photographers and data collectors, involved in interpreting those data and doing something with the data to help improve critical consciousness and solve problems (Wang, 2009). Harkness and Stallworth (2013) asserts that the exchange of ideas among the participants was promoted while using the photovoice method and they also gained valuable skills in reflecting on the realities of their lives (Khanare, 2012), and are supported to see both sides of an issue, to see what is not obvious, and to educate others about these things (Wang, 1999). Meanwhile engaging in the photovoice method, the participants might have trouble presenting complex or abstract ideas through their photographs (Bagnoli, 2009). However, in this study, the researcher drew on the guidelines of Mitchell (2008), De Lange, Mitchell and Stuart (2007) and with Sides, Annis, Rachel and Dornian (2005) on the process of photovoice to gain guidance in the use of the technique.

4.2.6.2 Focused group discussion method

This method of generating data is different from the focus group interview. The focus group discussion method is another alternative method of producing data that is used to explore people's feelings, thoughts and behaviours during discussion (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). It is a group interview of contrived settings that brings together participants to dialogue on a particular given theme or topic, where the researcher asks a question and the interaction with the groups leads to data and outcomes (Cohen et al., 2011). The study at hand employed the

focus group discussion method as the main data generation method. Within the focus group discussion method the researcher used the participatory visual method of photovoice to trigger and stimulate discussion from the participants. The focus group discussion was a method of obtaining valuable data and all participants including the researcher had an opportunity to ask questions, which produced more information (Holloway & Wheelers, 2002) than in a focus group interviews. While using this method the researcher might be faced with the problem of managing debates and controlling the process from the participants (Holloway & Wheelers, 2002).

However, in this study, the researcher chose the focus group discussion method to complement it with the photovoice method in generating data because during the interpretation of the photographs not every detail of the pictures was dealt with by the participants, so the use of the focus group discussion helped the researcher in dealing with some of the issues that could not be dealt with during the photo interpretations/narrations. The focus group discussion was conducted twice in the research commons boardroom which was convenient for the participants at the campus of the School of Education and each session lasted for two hours with four participants each in a group.

The focus group discussion helped the researcher to explore the participants' thoughts on how their experiences influence their learning in this particular campus by providing more debate and generating rich data for the study. The reason for choosing this method was that it helped the participants to engage in discussion through open ended questions, to reflect, argue and produce rich and in-depth information about their experiences of learning at the campus. The researcher also took notes as the moderator and facilitator while the process was audio recorded with the permission of the participants. Consequently, using these two data generating methods strengthened the credibility and add more value to the data collected. More so, this process of data collection, using these two methods, enhances triangulation (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2011).

4.2.6.3 The triangulation purposes
Cohen et al. (2011, p.195) define triangulation as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour. Guion et al. (2011) indicate that data triangulation involves using different sources of information in order to increase the validity of a study. In this study triangulation purposes were enhanced by using two data

generations methods (methodological triangulation) and the field notes which helped the researcher to compare the data's generated from these two methods in order to derive similar or concurrent results. In addition the use of photovoice and focus group discussion methods added depth to the results of the data generated thereby increasing the validity and utility of the findings in the study (Guion, et al., 2011).

4.2.7   Data generation process

After obtaining ethical clearance, in the evening of the 23rd of September by 6 p.m. the researcher visited her participants on a one on one basis in their respective residences on campus to inform them about her interest in using them as participants for her research study. During the cause of the one on one visitation, the researcher verbally explained the purpose of the research study to the students she has chosen to use for her study individually which was to 'explore the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal' and also sought their consent in being part of her participants for the study in which the participants consented. The researcher then issued a detailed informed consent letter that explained everything about the research study to the participants for them to sign and to bring with them on the 13th of October during the photovoice process, a date to which they all agreed. The informed consent letter explained how the information giving to the researcher would be treated as confidential and private. Also that their identification would be anonymous and the participant has a right to back out of the study at any stage, if there was an issue during the photovoice method or focus group discussion. The researcher also explained to the participant individually that notes will be taken by her during the focus group discussions and that key points will be summarized while taking the notes. The researcher further ensured the participants on how long the photovoice process and the focus group discussion will take, which was for 3 hours and for 1 hour30 minutes only. After ensuring that the participants consented using the informed consent letter, the researcher then went further to generate data for the study using the photovoice and focus group discussion methods.

 However, data for this study was generated over a period of three months from October to December 2014. The photovoice process/ session was held on the 13th of October 2014 between the hours of 12 pm to 2 pm while two separate focus group discussions was held for the participants on the 14th of November 2014 and on the 4th of December 2014.

While within the process of the photovoice method, the researcher's familiarity with the use of photovoice and the experience she acquired in the photovoice training in one of the modules she did in Social Science Education during her BEd. Honours degree in 2013, enabled her to conduct a one day three hours training session with the participants in a convenient place which was chosen by the participants in the campus where the research was conducted. This training was divided into three sessions shown below, in which the three sessions were conducted for an hour each.

Session 1

Photovoice workshop

This included the photovoice process namely, explaining to the participants what photovoice method was and giving a brief Power Point presentation on the use of photovoice and cameras by explaining to the participants how photovoice has been used in different parts of the world. In this aspect, the researcher used an example of the assignment she did on the use of photovoice in one of her modules in Social Science Education during her Honours programme to show the participants how photovoice was used. She lastly discussed the ethical guidelines for taking photographs in the university context (Wang & Redwood-Jones 1999; Mitchell, 2011).

Session 2

Photo shooting

In this stage, the researcher requested her participants to come with their individual cameras and also suggested that they could also use the cameras on their mobile phones during the process, which the participants agreed to. This was done telephonically in the afternoon of the 12th of October to remind the participants of the photovoice process scheduled for the next day at 12 pm. With their individual cameras and mobile phone cameras the participants was told that before they take any pictures they must think carefully and critically on the kind of pictures they planned to take that will represent their views. The participants were informed to take four photographs while using the cameras to represent their positive learning experiences, another four photographs to represent their negative experiences of learning in their host university and lastly four photographs, making the total twelve, to represent the resources on which they drew towards their learning in their host university. This process took an hour. Moreover, the reason the researcher chose twelve photographs each from the participants, making it ninety six photographs in total, was in order to get a more accurate and rich descriptive data from their

interpretations of the photographs, which drew on the participants' experiences of learning and on the resources used for their learning. On returning with their photographs, the researcher opened eight folders on her personal laptop for each participants and uploaded their pictures into it and saved them.

Session 3

Photo narration/ interpretation

According to Mitchell (2011) this involves a process in which the participants generate and explain the meaning in which the pictures they took portrays. The researcher requested that the participants narrate/interpret their photographs using a Power Point sheet with content and caption design which was given to the participants with their pictures printed on it to interpret their photographs. This was an important process in using this method to generate data because it elicited the participants' meanings and intentions behind each photograph. As described by Cohen et al. (2011, p.530) "in photo elicitation sets of photographs are used to invoke, prompt and promote discussion, reflections, comments, observations and memories". The participants' interpretation of their photographs during the photo elicitation was guided by the following prompts known as SHOWeD mnemonics (Wang &Burris 1997) to give a full detail of what the pictures entails. Further, questions like the following were used to probe their thoughts:

- What/ who is in the photograph?
- Why did you take the photograph?
- How do you feel about the photograph?

The researcher's motive for using the photovoice method in the study was to help stimulate and trigger dialogue/discussion among the international postgraduate students on their learning experiences and on the resources from which they draw towards their learning during the focus group discussion. The use of photovoice in the study also worked well with Bronfenbrenner (1994) theory of bio-ecosystemic theory in which the international postgraduate students are active and are situated at the centre of the system, so their learning does not exist in a vacuum(Khanare, 2009). The use of photovoice also allowed the participants to talk about their experiences using artefacts, that is, their photographs.

4.2.8   Data analysis

Data analysis is the most important part of the research project as it is where the data generated from various methods are studied so that conclusions can be drawn about drawbacks and prospects regarding the topic at hand (Newton, 2010). According to Levine (2002), data analysis is a body of methods that helps to describe facts, detects patterns, develop explanations and test hypothesis. Mouton (2001) further explains that the aim of analysis is to understand the various constitutive elements of one's data through an inspection of the relationship between concepts, constructs and variables, to see if there are any patterns or trends that can be identified or isolated, and to establish themes concerning the data. However, Cohen et al. (2011) posit that qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data; in short making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situations, noting patterns, theme, categories and regularities. The data obtained from the photovoice interpretation and transcribed verbatim audio recorder were analysed thematically (Tesch, 1990).

In the study, thematic analysis was done by coding and categorising the data obtained which were later put into themes and subthemes for analysis in order to assist the researcher in understanding and explaining the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning. In addition, pictures were used in the discussion of the paper in the themes where necessary. Since the study used primary data (visual and textual), its collection from multiple sources was analysed thematically. Thematic analysis was used in this study to analyse data because it is widely used as a qualitative research technique and it is a more flexible form of analysing data from research that has already been conducted (Tesch, 1990; Christiansen et al., 2010). Codes were identified from the participants' transcripts and photographs after the researcher has immersed herself in the data (Cohen et al., 2011). This was followed by grouping codes of similar responses together to formulate categories in which themes were formed. The thematic analysis of the direct quotations from the focus group discussion and interpretation of the photographs by the participants' responses revealed specific themes which were identified based on their appropriateness to the study and commonality between the participants (Tesch, 1990).The themes are classified according to the responses from each of the research questions.

The data were categorised and put into themes; the themes that emerged from the data were concerning information from participants that speaks about their experiences of learning in the university, on how their experiences influence their learning and on the resources they draw on

towards their learning at the selected university. After the transcription by the field researcher, the participants were given the opportunity to look at the transcripts while they were promised that access to the thesis and published work would be made available to them after the study. Figure 4 shows how the data was analysed through coding of the text and categorising the text to form different themes to answer the research questions.

Transcribed text of the focused group discussion and photovoice interpretation. The set of data was read to form impression of single utterance.	Segment units of meaning were formed using one or two sentences.	Labels was giving to a unit of meaning in more than a single word.

Possible groupings of codes were looked for

A list of all the codes was made and the researcher immersed herself in the data as she read and re-read the whole text again to see whether the codes made sense and whether there is some coherence. The researcher also made sure that the codes can be related to the research questions guiding the study.

Figure 4 A diagrammatic representation of the data analysis (adapted from Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004, p.104)

The above diagram illustrates how the data generated through the photovoice method and focus group discussion were analysed. The photovoice method was used to stimulate and trigger discussion among the participants during the focus group discussion whilst the focus group discussion was used to complement the photovoice method. The data generated from these two methods were analysed thematically after transcribing the data gotten from the verbatim audio recording during the focus group discussion and from the photo interpretation with the photographs generated during the photovoice session, thereby developing transcripts.

Thereafter the researcher read and read the transcripts several times to immersed herself in the data in order to gain a deeper understanding of each participants' views on their experiences of learning (DeVos, 2004).

4.2.9   Trustworthiness of the study

This is a qualitative study where measurement is not needed, hence in this study issues of trustworthiness were ensured in order to deal with description of data (Mack, 2010).Ensuring trustworthiness in a qualitative research study is important as it concerns the issues of validity and reliability. Therefore, in a qualitative research project, four issues of trustworthiness demands attention: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Christiansen et al., 2010). The aim of this research is to explore and understand the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning at a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. So in enhancing and ensuring trustworthiness in this research study, four issues of trustworthiness used in a qualitative research was applied by the researcher namely:-

- Credibility**:** this is described by Christiansen et al. (2010) as when the findings of the research study show the realities and lived experiences of the participants. The researcher addressed credibility in this study by employing three techniques. Firstly, an audio recorder was used with the permission of the participants and field notes in recording what the participants were discussing during the two sessions of focus group discussion. Secondly, the researcher enlisted the help of a competent field worker who assisted in transcribing the data from the audio recorder after the two sessions. Lastly the researcher took the transcripts of the data back to the eight participants to check for accuracy and see if anything was added to their responses or any word was omitted.

- Dependability: The issues of dependability was addressed in this study by providing an adequate audit trail in order to explain how data was collected, how the data was analysed and the research procedures followed in conducting the research study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) assert that dependability in a qualitative research is an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation.

- Confirmability: This is a measure of how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data collected (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I addressed the issue of confirmability in this study by making sure that I had sufficient evidence to back my data

interpretations and that I do not make unsubstantiated claims in my findings, drawing on the triangulation purposes.

- Transferability: Christiansen et al. (2010) assert that transferability is the degree to which the findings of this research study can be apply or transferred beyond the bounds of this project. To enhance transferability in this study, the researcher used the literatures that were reviewed in the study and the theoretical framework to recontextualise (Moore, 2007) the data analysis and interpretations of the findings.

4.2.10 Ethical considerations

Ethics in research is seen as a very important issue, most especially while conducting research with humans and animals (Christiansen et al., 2010).Different ethical permissions were considered and applied for before conducting this research study, for instance permission was sought and obtained by the researcher from the university where the research was conducted. Permission was also obtained from the participants in this study; the purpose of the study was explained in detail to the participants and they were issued consent letters which they signed before the study was conducted. They were made aware of their rights to participate or withdraw at any stage of the research (Cohen et al., 2010; Rule & John, 2011; Christiansen et al., 2010). During the data generation method (photovoice session and focus group discussion), the researcher ensured that the rights of the participants were not violated throughout the research process (Cohen et al., 2011). In addition, the researcher made sure that the research study was beneficial to the participants by expanding their knowledge and understanding of their experiences of learning in their context (Christiansen et al., 2010). Lastly the participant's anonymity and confidentiality was also guaranteed with the use of pseudonyms (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2007); the researcher gave the participants the right to choose names which will be indicated on top of their photographs.

However, the participants were reminded of the photovoice ethical measure, including the avoidance of identifiable issues while taking photographs, for example, people, signs or symbol with names (Mitchell, 2011). The participants were advised by the researcher to issue a consent letter called the "Photo waiver" in case they wanted to take a photograph of someone, showing the person has given permission for his or her pictures that could be used for the study (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001, p.565) See Appendix Six. The reason for doing this is that in visual ethics the researcher cannot guarantee confidentiality of the pictures, but if something goes wrong measures will be employed by the researcher to blur the photographs (Mitchell, 2011).

4.3   CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the research methodology that was employed to conduct this research study. The paradigm, approach and design of the study were discussed together with the justification and rationale for choosing them. This chapter also provided an explanation of the data generation methods employed aligning with a qualitative methodological approach. Furthermore, the triangulation of the data generation methods was also discussed. The issue of trustworthiness of the data gathered was considered as the best option to be used in the study because of the qualitative approach underpinned to carry out the study. Finally ethical considerations of the study were discussed. The next chapter will focus on the analysis and discussion of the data which emerged from the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on data analysis and discussion of the findings from the data generated from the photovoice and focus group discussion. The data is presented using themes and categories that emerged from the study. Further, in presenting the data, the researcher uses verbatim quotations and where necessary, inserts participants' photographs and accompanying explanations to ensure that the 'voices' of the participants remain intact in the study. The existing literature is infused into the discussion of findings

5.2   DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Three broad themes that emerged in the data analysis are used as heading to present data in this chapter. **Theme One: The Experiences of International Postgraduate Students in a Selected University in KwaZulu-Natal**; **Theme Two: The Influence of Experience on International Postgraduate Students' Learning: and Theme Three**: **Insights into International Postgraduate Students' Resources that Matter in their Learning**

These themes are discussed in-depth in the following sections.

5.2.1   THEME ONE: THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A SELECTED UNIVERSITY IN KWAZULUNATAL

In this theme, the researcher set the scene by asking the participants to talk about their experiences of learning in a South African university, particularly in the field of education. A number of issues were shared by the participants; these leant dominantly towards relationships. Drawing from the nature of these relationships, the researcher has categorised them into enabling and constraining factors, which were found in the individuals, amongst peers, within the university, and beyond the university. The experiences of international postgraduate students were grouped into two sub-themes that emerged from data, as discussed in the following section.

5.2.1.1 University experienced as an enabling environment

An enabling environment as suggested by the participants in this study as including these factors: having good caring relationships with the members of the community, interacting with one another, a health-promoting environment and seizing meaningful opportunities. These will be discussed in the next sections.

- ***Building relationships and networking with fellow students***

The participants' responses suggest that learning in a foreign university was able to help them build relationships and enable networks with fellow international students. Building or strengthening relationships were terms repeatedly mentioned by the participants in their articulation, as the examples below illustrate.

Participant D stated:

> *"The opportunity to relate with diverse students, the opportunity to relate and communicate with diverse students, to learn from these diverse students, relate with different people."*

Participant G:

> *"It has strengthened my relationship with people of different cultures and backgrounds"*

Participant F excitedly said:

> *"Yeah! I have also extended my connections with other international students from other countries.*

For the participants in this study, the university created a space to build relationships, to connect with fellow students and have a sense of belonging or a sense of cultural belonging as international postgraduate students. Brown and Holloway (2008) point out that building a sense of belonging is key for most international students. This is because they can be easily isolated and feel lonely in the new environment or new country. Arthur and Popadiuk (2013) report that interpersonal relationships shared among the international students was a key influence in helping them overcome barriers. Moores and Popadiuk (2011) also find that international

students developed interpersonal relationships with one another easily due to the common status and interest they shared as student sojourners and also in exploring new culture and creating new friendships networks.

- ***Rapport with lecturers and supervisors***

Participants also referred to the relationships as another factor that make the university an enabling environment for international postgraduate students. The people they referred to were lecturers, supervisors and professors. It was not surprising as these were the students either in the MEd or PhD programmes and might be interacting a lot with their supervisors. Nevertheless, the point of establishing relationships and interacting with the lecturers was described as a good experience by the participants in this study. The utterances from some of the participants presented below explains this clearly

Participant G

> *"The personal rapport that we have with our supervisors is a good experience and encouraging to be at the university".*

Participant D:

> *"....the students' and lecturer relationships, those things play a role in shaping whom we are in academics".*

Participant C:

> *".... another positive aspect I found here is the way of working with supervisors".*

To some participants talking to lecturers was a privilege, and to them it was a good experience compared to the universities in the country of their origin. One participant spoke eloquently and said:

Participant F:

> *"...ehmm based on where I come from, we do not have such privileges of relationship with our lecturers. Here you are free to call your lecturer, ask your lecturer one or two questions".*

For these participants, building rapport and relationships with other members of the university other than fellow students was regarded as important in shaping their lives and opportunity to ask questions. It shows that in the absence of fellow students, international postgraduate students can turn to their lecturers for assistance and be encouraged to learn. Bistak (2013) study identified that due to this student-lecturer relationship, Asian international students studying in Australia experienced an overall positive learning experience.

Drawing from Bronfenbrenner's microsystem level, peer-to-peer relationship contributes to a sense of belonging (Donald et al., 2006), as it provides a rich social support outside one's family (Malindi & Theron, 2010). In this study, fellow international postgraduate students became a source of support to their fellow students. These findings are consistent with some previous studies. In a study by Arthur and Popadiuk (2013), it was found that international students offered each other emotional and instrumental support in reaching their career goals. Moores and Popadiuk (2011) also found that international students developed a sense of belonging as they supported each other socially and emotionally.

Additionally, from the participants it appears that relationships amongst lecturers, supervisors or professors and international postgraduate students are characterised as a good experience. Teachers (lecturers) are one key actors in the microsystem level (Donald et al., 2006) and they interact regularly with their students. It was interesting to note the absence of other members of the university from the participants' responses. These findings to me provide an opportunity to understand international postgraduate students' experiences within the context in which they find themselves in.

- *Job opportunities*

When talking about their experiences of studying in a foreign university, the participants also talked about the opportunity of working. These opportunities included: part-time lecturing, tutoring, and library assistants. These experiences were regarded as exciting but also as part of these participants' growth and development. While the utterances below came from three participants, all other participants during focus group discussion concurred with the view:

Participant D:

> *"… you know like having opportunity to lecture students, it has been highly helpful in developing me…I think ehmmm that the opportunity has been great you know".*

Another participant stated:

> *"...both in my teachings, in my lecturing I have developed due to the opportunity giving to us to tutor here. So I think the good experiences and the positive experiences has highly impacted on my general development as a human being and as a professional".* (Participant B).

To these participants the job opportunities offered at the university were characterised as great and contributing to human development generally. Some participants' experiences of working suggest that the economic welfare of these students was enhanced and reduced the burden that their families were experiencing. One of the participants provided a candid comment that sums this up as follows:

Participant D:

> *"Another positive experience let me put it that way is the privilege we have to work, to earn some money to help ourselves without us depending on our parents or our people for assistance. I think that one also is another way of helping the students especially foreign students. That is another positive way".*

The responses of the participants above also confirm the argument made by other scholars. For example, Kelly (2010) supports the idea of job opportunities for international students and affirms that by the time they get back to their home, their employability level in the labour world becomes high because of their diverse international experiences. Similarly, Neale-Shutte and Fourie (2006) indicate that engaging in the process of internationalisation helps students to secure a place in the job market and develop skills that are transferable across cultures, climates and contexts. Importantly, the findings of the current study not only revealed job opportunities as a great experience for the participants, but also suggest that they have potential to take charge in addressing their financial challenges. This also confirms the bio-ecosystemic contention that "the individuals are active agents in their environment" (Nitsch, 2009, p.155).

Therefore, the participants in this study were able to identify factors in the university systems which according to them were regarded as positive experiences as shown in the discussion above. However, not all factors contributed to students' positive experiences, but there were other factors that were identified by the participants as constraining. In the next section, the

researcher discussed findings related to the second sub-theme titled, '*university experienced as constraining environment*'.

5.2.1.2 University experienced as a constraining environment

From the participants' responses it was evident that there were negative experiences that they came across in their day-to-day lives in the university. These were still notably from the university environment (mainly local students and non-academic/support staff) and beyond university environment (such as, Home Affairs personnel, international policies, and economic and social issues). The diagram below presents the aforementioned examples using the conception of interrelated systems adapted from Donald et al. (2002, p.47).

Figure 5 Interrelated systems (adapted from Donald et al., 2002, p.47)

The local community in the diagram represents the university in this study. The participants in this study identified their negative experiences related to the relationships they have with the local students. They also spoke eloquently about support staff particularly, those assigned to work with international students to address their diverse needs.

Within the neighbouring community of the university, the participants talked extensively about other departments and processes they had to undergo as international students. These included: South African Police Services; South African immigration laws and policies; visa applications; Department of Health-related issues, such as medical aid processes.

From the wider community, the constraining factors were found to be related to economic issues, lack of funding and scholarships, accommodation, rent, medical aid fees, all of which had a large influence on their experiences of learning in a selected South African university. Some of these factors are discussed in the next sections to provide an in-depth analysis of how and why they were regarded as significant to constraining experiences by these participants.

- *Perceived social exclusion by peers*

The findings in this study suggest that most of the participants perceived social exclusion by their peers. The factors relating to this social exclusion fall into two categories: language barrier and group dynamics in the lecture rooms, which in turn made international postgraduate students felt like outsiders. The following excerpts from some of the participants illustrate this.

Participant A:

> *"Ehmm one of the first major things that would be said on the negative is about the accent, the way I speak when I came it was a bit difficult to communicate with people around here because you need to speak or repeat some of the things you say a lot of times when there is a need for you and you won't be able to communicate with people".*

Some of the participants also point out that not speaking the local vernacular, most especially isiZulu, which is the dominant spoken language in KwaZulu-Natal, the province in which this study is situated, leads international postgraduate students to claim to have difficulty in interacting with local students and to feeling 'left out'. During the focus group discussion one of the participants provided a candid comment as shown below:

Participant B stated:

> *"Language is a challenge because ehmmm most of the people we had in our classrooms where people that are from black South Africans which their medium or mode of communication is their local language which is IsiZulu, so it was a bit difficult to break into their cycle sometimes. Sometimes you feel left out when you are in a setting, when you need to interact with the group that are mostly black South African".*

Similarly, another participant added a comment.

Participant D:

> *"Ehmm regarding my experiences as my colleague's mention it is the problem of integration. Here the language issue is very problematic because of when you do not*

speak IsiZulu ehh, it is difficult to be integrated in the community. Ehmm so there is that kind of hostility against foreigners what I found here".

Another factor that reflects the participants' social exclusion was the group formations in lecture. Most of the participants spoke about feeling socially isolated as they were not fitting in any of the peer groups. Groups were likely depicting certain cultural or racial backgrounds which participants were not part of. The following statement by one participants sums this up.

Participant D:

"During lectures students pair or sit in groups according to their race and culture. It is always difficult for me to communicate with these group of students due to language barrier and I always feel so isolated and lonely in the classroom because I am the only international students in their mix especially when they communicate they use their language not caring if you understand them or not"(PV).

The findings of this study revealed that the perceived social exclusion by peers, especially local students, was negatively related to accent and not being able to speak the local language, in this, case isiZulu. It was also evidenced in group dynamics formed based on cultural or racial backgrounds. The finding of this study resonates with Mudhovozi (2012), Vandeyar (2010) with Brown and Holloway (2008) in their various studies identified that the language issues experienced by the international students caused alienation, loneliness and lack of sense of belonging. McMahon (2011) reveals language barriers as the major challenge which Chinese students experienced both in the classroom and beyond the classroom that subsequently affected their scholastic performance and social life.

- *University support staff*

Another theme emerging from the participants' responses was the lack of support from the university support staff, particularly those involved with the International Office. The following comments were made by the participants.

Participant C:

"...as an international student if you have a very critical issue, no-one from the international students' office is there to assist you and this impacts negatively on our learning and I don't understand the duties of the international student's office, they are not there to help us international students when we have issues or problem".

Participant B:

> *"Ehmmm for me, I think I question the role of International Office, as international students ehmmm Isee no help from the International Office. I do not really know its role except to ehhh during registration is the only time I go to that office. So I think it is an office also which can revisit ehhh its tasks, its duties in order to help or facilitate international students"*.

One of the participants who spoke with intense feeling stressed that:

> *"The International Office is just a monument, we don't receive any information from them. No help from the International Office. Then what is the use of having International Office. Then what is the use of having International Office when you are facing challenges you cannot receive any help from them, they won't answer, they won't talk to you. What is the need of it? All these things, if all these things should be removed at least we will have a rest of mind and focus on the things that, that is important of the things that will uplift our development. The thing that will contribute to the positive learning experience in which we came here for"*(Participant B).

These responses reveal that the International Office personnel are significant for the holistic wellbeing of the international students. Many participants were mindful about the role of the International office as a space to receive information, listen to their problems and challenges and provide assistance with regard to their everyday life and learning. Despite this recognition, the International Office was 'just monuments' and impacting negatively in the lives of many international students. The environment within which one is situated directly contributes to the development of that individual (Donald et al., 2006). The findings of this study reveal that students were not benefiting from the offices that were designed to assist them; instead they constrain their learning. The ecosystemic theory indicates that a person's development takes place within a complex reciprocal interaction in their immediate environment. Thus, when a particular agency (university management) refuses to support them, the international students' learning becomes negatively affected (Krishnan, 2010). A similar view is taken by Amaechi et al. (2013) who suggest that the university management should provide a positive learning environment for international students by including them in social activities and introduction to peers and academic staff. This was not the case in the current study.

- *Neighbouring communities*

The international postgraduate students have to acquire many documents other than their registration forms. Another theme emerging from the data was the processes of acquiring relevant official documents for studying in the foreign university. These other documents included visas, study permits, work permits and so on. Some of these documents are renewed annually. The findings show that the processes of getting services at other departments were regarded as negative experiences by all the participants in this study. Some of the comments made by the participants were as follows.

Participant B:

> *"South African immigration policy generally is affecting those of us that are foreigners and through these policies".*

Participant F also stated that:

> *"The policy is not friendly to foreigners most especially to people like me who are African international postgraduates' students. Due to the new South African immigration policy, I am struggling to renew my students visa/permit and this affects my learning here at this campus. Without the permit/student visa I will not be able to register for my studies and to continue my studies".*

Participant C is of the view that:

> *"The immigration laws are anti-foreign and as a student that is very disturbing because if you think about not having a valid document as a student you cannot be productive. So it is very problematic and it really disturbs our mind"*(FG 1).

Lastly participant B comments that:

> *"Their policy here is kind of sending information to you that you just should go, we do not need you. It will affect your performance, it will affect your input, and it will also affect your output. You see there is something we call vicious cycle, it goes round, when one thing is going wrong, it will affect everything altogether. So all this issues, their attitudes, their policies, the way they relate to foreigners are affecting both our learning and our performances".*

The data reveal that all the international students' responses identified the new immigration policies, and the non-issuance of students' visa/ permits as contextual factors beyond the

university environment that has negatively affected their learning. The findings are consistent with the studies of Majyambere (2012) and Rajpal (2013) which indicated that the difficulty in getting a study visa/permit affects the international students' studies in South Africa. The university is not responsible for issuing visa, study permits or medical aid to the international students, the students has to acquire them from other departments such as Home Affairs and the Health Department. This is what the mesosystem level reveals, that is, the interaction between departments indirectly affects a person's development which can act as a powerful influence (positively or negatively) on the individuals' lives (Boon et al., 2012).In this regard, non-issuance of study permits, delays or negative attitudes of staff in these departments can lead to international students' negative experiences.

- *Socio-economic issues*

As shown in Figure 5, under wider community, the participants identified several financial constraints in describing some of their experiences of learning in a selected university in South Africa. Financial constraints took three main forms. The most prevalent was lack of funding or scholarships for international students, as indicated by the following participants in this study:

Participant B:

> *"I experience a lot of financial constraint as an international students here. Sometimes I fast and only eat bread because I have to pay my fees and accommodation bills. No funding is received from the school".*

> Another participant indicated that:

> *"We need money to study. So I will emphasize on the monetary aspects in form of scholarships for international students and by the way how many of us, we are quite a few in this campus that are international students"* (Participant C, FG2).

This view was supported by participants A who affirmed that:

> *"Any scholarship you see is for South African, we are excluded as international students and we are the one, we are producing a number of research for this university and they are using this research to develop this country. If the university can open our own international scholarship that will be fine".*

Some of the participants during the focus group discussion expressed the need for an increase in the school residence accommodation which is negatively affecting their learning

experiences. According to participant D the increase in the accommodation fee every year is affecting him psychologically. As he notes:

> *"Housing rent/accommodation fees is becoming unbearable. It is too much making us every day think on how to pay them. I could remember in 2011 rent was around 14000, in 2012 is 17000, in 2013 it was 20000 and 2014 it is now 25000. You see every year it is increasing with ten percent and the equipment's are deteriorating, they should look into that to reduce the amount."* (FG 1).

More so, another participants stated:

> *"…international students rents rooms but they are not able to cater for themselves, you know to pay for it is not easy the trouble of that only is enough to actually discourage us personally in our learning"*(Participant B, FG 1).

Furthermore, the participants also revealed that medical aid bills should be reduced or abolished for them due to the kind of service being offered through them. Most of the participants expressed the view that that the university should either introduce a lesser medical aid policy for them to ease their financial burden or remove medical aid from their fees.

The following responses indicates the views on medical aid from the participants:

> *"If they can give us a lesser medical aid unlike me if I am paying medical aid per year for R1200 it is easy for me as an international student. The university should look into the medical aids and look for more options because some of the international students are not working"*(Participant C, FG2).

In contrast participant D points out that:

> *"…they should remove what they call medical aid because it is of no use and any help to the international students. It is a way I describe it as a day light robbery. For me I paid medical aid for this year I have never made use of it because I don't fall sick where I come from. Since four years I having been paying medical aid bills I have never used it. Last year the same thing I paid for it, I didn't make use of it too".*

From the above data, it is apparent that financial constraints posed as a great and significant threat which negatively affects the participants' learning experiences and development in the university. The findings of the study resonates with the study by Oluwafemi (2012) who identifies exorbitant international fees, discriminatory policies of some universities, lack of

funding and scholarships (local and international) for postgraduate students from non-South African Development Community (SADC thereafter) nations as the negative experiences of international students in South Africa. MacGregor (2014) similarly reports that the challenges experienced by international students studying in South African are due to accommodation issues, financial pressures, and high medical insurance costs. Gu, Schweisfurth and Day (2010) also identify that international students are experiencing financial difficulties in their host country. Hwang et al. (2011) reveal a lack of financial assistance as posing a challenge to international students' learning performance in Taiwan. Barron et al. (2009) agree with them that international students experience financial difficulties, learning issues and working issues which impact negatively on their learning. All the literature aligns with the findings of this study that the participants' experienced financial difficulties in their host country.

In theme one, the findings revealed the university as a complex space, with both enabling and constraining factors in the lives of international postgraduate students. The verbatim quotations of the participants reveal that building relationships with peers and academic staff makes the university an enabling space. On the other hand, local peers and support staff, especially those related to addressing international students' needs ,are regarded as contributing to perceived social exclusion by some of the participants. Furthermore, processes involved in acquiring other related documents to study at the university such as medical aid, study permits, and financial challenges due to lack of funding and scholarships targeting international postgraduate students, pose major constraints for their learning experiences.

A closer examination of the findings in this theme revealed that there are more constraining factors that these international postgraduate students' face and that if not recognised are likely to hinder their learning. Evidence of the above claims is relevant to bio-ecosystemic theory analysis (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), where Bronfenbrenner posits that individual development takes place in complex environments involving interactions interrelationships and interdependence between people, objects, symbols and systems, which in turn can negatively or possibly shapes one's development (Bronfenbrenner & Morrison, 2006). An individual is also identified as an active agent who is capable of changing his or her own environment in the bio-ecosystemic framework (1999). In the next theme, the discussion focuses on how the international postgraduate students' experiences influenced their learning.

5.2.2 THEME TWO: THE INFLUENCE OF EXPERIENCE ON INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' LEARNING

The findings in the previous theme suggest that these international postgraduate students experience the university in various ways because they are always interacting in a dynamic way with different people, with the majority of them identifying more barriers than enabling factors in the university. Some of the classics theories of psychology, such as Bronfenbrenner (1979), focus on the importance of experience and how it shapes one's development. The second theme emerging from the data analysis provides the discussion on the importance of the participants' experiences and how it influenced or shaped their learning. The analysis of the focus group discussion suggests many different influences which were grouped into five main themes namely 'being resilient' 'self-confidence' 'improved social skills' 'enhanced academic skill' and 'time management'. These themes are now presented and discussed in the following sections.

5.2.2.1 Being resilient

The findings suggest that majority of the international postgraduate student became resilient and adopt a variety of adaptive strategies to cope with their learning. Some of the participants' provided the following utterances:

> *"To me I will say that because of where we come from we are resilient, we don't allow issues to becloud our thinking, and we don't allow challenges to take over ourselves"* (Participant D).

Another participant inferred:

> *"It's just that some of us are resilient we know where we came from we know that we have to finish, we must survive, that is why we are bearing all these things"* (Participant H).

Participant B noted:

> *"...developed resilience to different challenges I am experiencing here on this campus".*

Some participants mentioned that their resilience was setting a goal that they want to achieve which helped them overcome the challenges they were facing.

"Despite the challenges I think when you have a certain goal you can't leave what you are doing so you keep on working despite the challenges".(Participant E).

"...even though we are discouraged due to the challenges we are experiencing here, but I always have something at the back of my mind I know where I am going and I know I have goals to achieve"(Participant F).

In Theme One, it was noted that most international students experienced and perceived social exclusion because of language barriers. The findings in the current theme revealed that they did not succumb to their adversities but they bounced back and developed coping strategies. The most popular response was independent learning. Participant B demonstrated this by taking a photograph of a student studying alone and during the focus group discussion, elaborating and telling the group what the photograph depicted. He asserted:

"This picture is about me…personally I can sit down in my room, I can sit down anywhere and do any research I want to do comfortably" (FG 1).

Figure 6 Independent learning

In a similar way, Participant D indicated that:

"...I can research and search online numerous books, articles, newspapers, and other resources on my own and this has enhanced my academic performances".

The findings suggest that although university could be lonely for some international postgraduate students, the experience of loneliness had influenced these students to adopt strategies and become independent learners. This finding corroborated with the study of Pilote and Benabdeljalil (2007) that found international students were resilient and had the ability to draw on their own resources. Moores and Popadiuk (2011) also report that the students through their challenges develop personally, have a change in perspectives, and observe academic growth. Campbell (2010) and Kelly (2010) also find that international students generate diverse perceptions and personal growth to become independent thinkers and change agents.

5.2.2.2 Self confidence

The findings of this study point out that international postgraduate students developed confidence in themselves. This is not a surprise as this could be linked to the previous issue of resilience, as the above cases have shown. In this aspect, data from the participants' revealed development in self-confidence and how it influenced learning, as was expressed by the following participants:

Participant A stated:

> *"I can analyse anything differently now, have my own perspectives, develop my own philosophy of life. I see myself as a qualified person in my own profession and both in my teachings, in my lecturing and I have developed holistically"* *(Participant A, FG 2).*

Participant D indicated being confident to supervise student should a chance arise. This finding is also influenced by the fact that international postgraduate students had an experience of part-time lecturing and tutoring as shown in the previous theme where they spoke generally about their experiences (see Theme One, Section, 3.3.1.1). The following quotation indicates how participants expressed their views on improved confidence.

Participant D

> *"Even now if I am given some honours students to supervise I can say yes and supervise them without any problem"* *(Participant D, FG2).*

Another of the participant indicated:

> *"I have developed a broader idea of how to do so many things on my own and if giving student to supervise I will do it perfectly"* *(Participant A, FG 2).*

The data revealed that the international postgraduate students experienced improved self-confidence. This was evident in the participant's responses of becoming an independent thinker, having own perspective, feeling competent as professional teachers and developing holistically. This findings resonates with Warring (2010), who reports that international students gain more confidence and become independent in their learning. Pence and Macgillivray (2008) also indicate that the international students experience a change in their professional and personal life such as increased confidence. Gu et al. (2010) also reveal that as the international students interact within different educational environments, cultures and society they begin to experience improved knowledge, self-awareness, skills and attitudes

which enable them to function effectively within both their host and home countries. Campbell and Li (2008) also note in their study that international students develop personally and intellectually. Yeboah (2014) confirms this and reveals that African international students in USA adjust to transformative learning due to gaining self-confidence and the ability of developing self or inner awareness from their experiences. Therefore the above discussion indicates that the international postgraduate students develop self-confidence which influences their learning in the university as they aim to achieve their academic goals. Thus the findings from the study are also that the international students improved on their social skills.

5.2.2.3 Improved social skills

All the participants' responses revealed that they were able to improve on the way they relate and interact with peers (local and international) and other people in their host environment. In addition, the data showed that the participants adjusted their attitudes and behaviour to accommodate the situation, needs and desires of their host university. The following data from the participants' responses indicated improved social skills.

Participant E stated

"My relationship skill with people of different cultures and backgrounds has strengthened while studying on this campus"(PV).

Participant C also asserted:

"I have improved on how to relate with people and share ideas with them which has been quite helpful in my learning" (FG 2).

Another participant affirmed that:

"...the way we communicate and relate with people has improved" (Participant C, FG 2).

The participating students' responses revealed that the way they relate and interact with people (peers and lecturers) in their host environment has improved. In addition the international students identified strengthened relationship sand improvement in sharing ideas with people as helpful in their learning, Literatures also show that international students develop relationship skills. Campbell and Li (2008) find that international students develop more intercultural communication skills in their host country. Similarly, Sherry et al. (2009) identify improvement

in cross cultural knowledge and relationship skills among the international students. Kelly (2010) report that the experiences of international students help to change their ideas and thinking on how they relate and interact with people and their environment. Therefore the above discussion showed a positive influence on the international students' experiences on their learning while achieving their academic goals.

5.2.2.4 Enhanced academic skills

All participants indicated that their interactions with the wider broader university settings and the experiences enhanced their academic skills. The data indicated responsiveness and growth in their development, to varying degrees and in different ways. Some of the academic skills included improved academic writing, being aware of the plagiarism policy and consequences, presentation skills, discovering new technological resources to use for their research and becoming critical thinkers. The rich story of each participant's development is shown in the following quotes.

Participant B indicated that:

> "...what impacted on me positively is some of the assignments and some of the work we do here like presentations, and some of the work then looks tasking for me. From where I come from, I never knew about plagiarism although it seems to be a normal thing here. But now I have discovered that I need to synthesize and cite in, and do all the necessary stuff that will make my writing to be an academic writing. So I think the way things has been put in here has really impacted my life positively".

Participant A indicated learning many things and mentioned specific lessons, as shown in the following quote.

> "...so many things I have learnt that I didn't know in my life, like how to write thesis, how to ahhh, I mean analyse, you know theoretical framework, how to get you know articles and paraphrasing. Paraphrasing alone is something that I have never know before but now I think I know it, I know a lot".

Some participants indicated that the presence of computers and research commons (see Theme 3) influenced them to discover some of the technologies that they can use to improve their learning. This was summed by Participants D during the focus group discussion:

Participant D:

> *"Academically, I have grown, I have discovered some new technologies, new software's I can use in research. Ehmmm I have acquired some skills from writing academically, papers, presenting them academically".*

One of the participants pointed that he became a critical thinker:

> *"To me I came here to develop academically and I think that I have achieved that and I still want to achieve more and I think I can describe myself as a critical thinker"* (Participant B).

Additionally, some participants mentioned that from their experiences such as being exposed to conferences and seminars (see Theme 3, Section 5.3.3.2), certain academic skills were developed.

According to Participant C, the experience of conferences resulted in networking with expert and enhanced publishing skills, as show in the following quote:

> *"...the positive experience I have is the exposure to other scholars and by participating in some conferences where I met real people who have good knowledge in history subject and to publish articles".*

The findings from the above verbatim statements of the participants showed that the international students developed diverse academic skills such as improved academic writing, became analytical and learnt to paraphrase, developed ICT skills, became critical thinkers and developed publishing and presentation skills. The finding is consistent with MacGregor (2010) who reports that international students in South Africa develop academic skills, receive critical thinking skills and a quality education, and become computer literate. Bistak (2013) also identifies that international students develop intellectual skills in their host country. Furham (2004) finds that the international students' thinking and reasoning are shaped by their learning experiences. The findings of the study contrast with those of Hughes (2013), who finds that international students experience challenges while engaging in academic practices that involves the use of information resources, with academic conventions like referencing and avoiding plagiarism, and with accessing academic online resources. Rather, in the findings of this study, the students developed in their learning and found the academic practices interesting and helpful in improving their learning. Therefore the findings of this study has clearly revealed

that the international students developed academic skills which positively impacted on their learning.

5.2.2.5 Time management

The findings also point to the fact that there were certain behavioural skills that were influenced by students' interaction with different people. In particular, the participants spoke about being able to improve their time management skills. Again, this was influenced by working with supervisor who demonstrated certain characteristics (see Theme One, Section 5.3.1.1 and Theme Three, Section 5.3.3.1). The verbatim quotes below are confirmation of the finding of this study:

Participants A spoke eloquently and said:

"I have learnt a lot about timing, my supervisor is time courteous. If she says submit your work by 9 o'clock, if she checks her system and the work is not there, if you don't submit within that time that means you have to queue. She will tell you I have given you your time you did not submit your work. So I know when she says submit I must submit. If I cannot submit I will tell her in advance, so that culture of you being time cautious I have developed it". (FG1).

Whereas participant D has this to say:

"There is nothing like an African time with our supervisor, two o'clock is two o'clock, no failure" (FG 2).

The above responses showed that the international students acquired time management skills as they were influenced by their supervisors which caused a change in their behaviour in managing their time. Tarry (2011) reports that Thai international students studying in a British university experience a change in attitude. Similarly Kelly (2010) observes a change in international students' ideas and thinking. In addition, Pence and Macgillivray (2008) also reported change in the international students' professional and personal life. Significantly, the findings of this study showed a change in the international students' behaviour as they improved on their time management skills.

Therefore, the findings in this theme, as revealed in the verbatim responses of the participants, clearly identified the different influences on the experiences of the international postgraduate students' learning that has contributed to the improvement and development of diverse skills. These include resilience, individual adaptive coping strategies, analytic skills, social skills,

academic skills and behavioural skills, all of which enhanced their learning in the university. The chronosystem makes us to understand that people's experiences are influenced by the events that happen to them in their daily life as they interact with their environment, which causes internal and external change (Swick & William, 2006).The findings further suggest that while there were different influences on their experiences that enhanced their learning, the international postgraduate students were able to identify different resources that was helpful to them in achieving their academic goals in this study as I discuss in the next section.

5.2.3 THEME THREE: INSIGHTS INTO INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' RESOURCES THAT MATTER IN THEIR LEARNING

The university as a focus of analysis in this study is due to the fact that most international postgraduate students spend most of their time in it during their study in South Africa. Theme one and two have revealed that they interact with different people within and beyond the university. This interaction can have either an enabling or constraining influence on their learning and well-being. The two themes provided evidence on how international postgraduate students use various resources. These resources were explored further, whereby, the participants were asked to identify the most effective resources to meeting international postgraduate students' needs. Photovoice process was the dominant approach that brought into focus these various resources that matters to the students learning. The process included self-generated photographs, written captions and accompanying explanations of photographs during focus group discussions.

Theme three identifies varying resources and demonstrates how they are important to international postgraduate students. Figure 7 is an overview of the resources identified using the conception of asset-map adopted from (Khanare, 2009, p. 66).
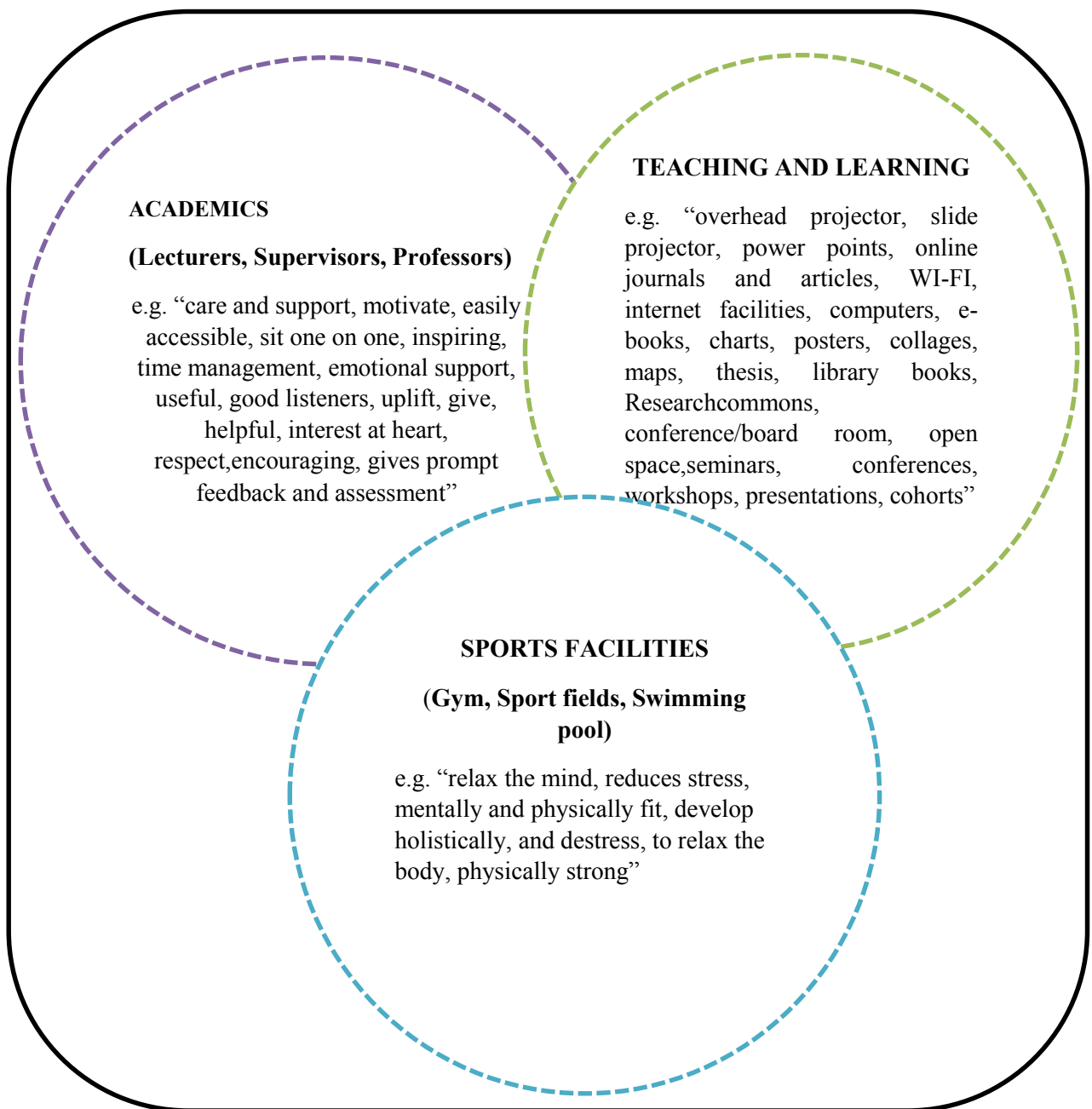
Figure 7 Resource map of international postgraduate students (adapted from Khanare, 2009, p. 66)

An analysis of participants' resources revealed three key themes such as: academics as resources, teaching and learning resources and sports and recreational resources. Each one of these will be discussed in depth in the following sections.

5.2.3.1 Academics as resources

The discussion here shows the variability in how academics were represented by the participants in this study. The participants' representation of university academics are discussed in four categories: emotional support; academic support; being respectful, helpful and accessible; and professionalism

- *Emotional support*

According to the participants' academics were regarded as resourceful because they provided emotional and psychological support to the international postgraduate students. The following quotes were highlighted by the participants in how some academics were resourceful.

> *"My supervisors also encourages me when I am emotionally down and going through tough situations"* (Participant C).

> *"I think some of our lecturers have been actually encouraging to us"* (Participant B)

> *"... such a motivation from my supervisors are very helpful"* (Participant, E)*.*

> *"I have also had a lot of support from my lecturers as my mentors"* (Participant, H)

The emotional support from their supervisors and lecturers was a resource on which the students draw towards their learning experiences. Borg and Cefai (2014) in their study identified that international students were able to adjust to their academic life due to the care and support they received from their lecturers. The international students were encouraged and motivated by their lecturers which helped them to overcome their challenges as was found in this study. Wu et al. (2015) in their study found that adjustment and adaptation was easy for the international students due to the support and encouragement they got from their lecturers.

- *Academic support*

Most participating international students also attributed their personal growth and development towards the support they get from their lecturers and supervisors. The participants see their supervisors to be a resource that they draw on towards their learning experiences as they indicate them to be helpful to them in their learning experience. This is seen in the case of Participant C when explaining her photograph:
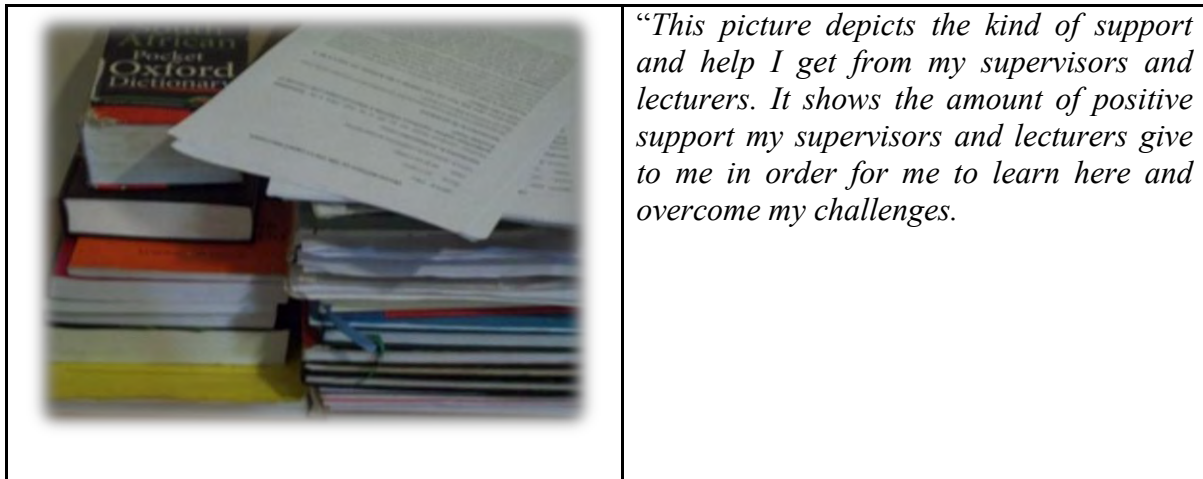
| | "*This picture depicts the kind of support and help I get from my supervisors and lecturers. It shows the amount of positive support my supervisors and lecturers give to me in order for me to learn here and overcome my challenges.*" |

Figure 8 Books and academic materials

The participants also identified their lecturers as helping them to manage their time, as in the case of Participant F:

> "*My personal communication and interaction with my lecturers and supervisors has shown me that for me to be an academician I have to keep to time like them always and know how to manage my time efficiently*" (PV).

Some of the participants also identified that their lecturers' and supervisors' support has helped them in growing academically and achieving their academic goals. According to the participants:

> "*I can remember one of my professors here in science education since I came in 2012 he has been extremely helpful in making me grow academically*" (Participant B, FG1).

> "*Their support has brought me this far in achieving my academic goals*" (Participant C, FG1).

The findings showed academics as a resource that enabled the international students to improve their learning experiences. Arkoudis and Tran (2010) find that the support the international students receive from their lecturers is vital in helping them attain their academic goals. The students indicated that the support they received from their lecturers in terms of academic materials and on time management was helpful to them in growing academically and in achieving their academic goals. This is in line with Campbell and Li (2008) who report that the Asian students they studied had overall satisfaction from their learning experiences due to the support they received from their friendly, supportive and highly qualified lecturers.

- *Respectful, helpful and accessible*

The participants identified that they received respect and help from their lecturers. In addition, the international students viewed access to lecturers and supervisors as easy and as part of the resources in which they draw on towards their learning. Some of the participants mentioned that their supervisors and lecturers were respectful and helpful to them. Other participants spoke about the academics being useful to them, easy to communicate with on a one and one basis; and always readily available for discussion.

Participant C noted:

> *"... Positive aspect I found here is the way of working with supervisors. I found out that they are human beings like us they try to help me so that I can do what I am supposed to do here".*

Participant E mentioned:

> *"My supervisor in particular is very helpful and useful to me as they put me through some of the things that I don't know in research".*

While Participant H stated:

> *"Here you are free to call your lecturer, ask your lecturer one or two questions, when you are confused with one thing, you sit one on one with your lecturer. It is a good thing and a kind of encouragement, you learn, you draw experiences from that kind of relationship"* (FG1).

> *"...input from our lecturers and supervisors when you have people who gives you the directions to follow and all those things. Yea, those things have really been very helpful".* (Participant G, FG1).

To some of the participants using email was a very important tool for communication between them and their supervisors. The international students identified email as a very convenient way to communicate and discuss with their supervisors at any giving time. Most of the participants revealed email as the major means of receiving prompt feedback and corrections on their academic work.

> *"You see my supervisor gives me prompt feedback and assess my work anytime I sent it by email and I think it has really helped me in completing my MEd. degree"* (Participant A, FG2).

"There is no time I send emails to her whether in the morning or night 11 o'clock or 12 o'clock, this woman will reply me even at weekends" (Participant F).

"Personally my supervisor is busy so she prefers email communication a lot we do meet one on one but not so much like emails" (Participant B).

The support from the academics in the above data is a significant resource to the international students' academic achievement. . The study revealed that the international students received academic support in term of help, respect, access to communicate and discuss with the lecturers and supervisors, prompt feedback by email that was helpful and useful to their learning experiences. This resonates with Tran (2008) who reports that international students perceive the one on one consultations with their lecturers, feedback on their assessments and dialogue with their lecturers in class or by email as helpful in increasing their academic knowledge. In addition, Arkoudis and Tran (2007) argue that lecturers should create space for dialogue with their international students in order for them to develop new understanding and practices within their learning environment.

- *Maintaining professionalism*

According to all the participants a resourceful lecturer maintains professionalism. The international students revealed that maintaining professionalism by the academics means 'keeping to time', 'being apologetic' and 'sharing ideas and information' which was helpful in developing and in meeting their academically needs as was shown in the following quotations:

"They keep to time as professionals" (Participant H).

"The lecturers and supervisors here keep to time always" (Participant, G).

"...my supervisor is time courteous". (Participant, E).

Some of the participants' also mentioned that their lecturers and supervisors displayed a high level of professionalism such like making sure they are informed and apologise anytime they cancel their appointments.

As Participant A indicated:

> *"...anytime my supervisor wants to attend meetings or engagements he must inform me by email or telephonically to cancel the appointment".*

Participants H also noted:

> *"....having a meeting or busy at any time, my supervisor always inform us students earlier ahead to cancel the appointments".*

Some students also expressed that sharing of ideas and information with their lecturers was helpful in their academic development which influenced their life generally.

> *"...sharing ideas with us has been quite helpful in developing me as a professional generally"* (Participant D, FG1)

> *"The way they handle and treat us like professionals is another lesson that I learn there which are some of the things that has influenced my life generally and my academic growth" (*Participant B*, FG2).*

The responses indicated that the academics displayed professionalism in their dealings with the international students. This helped to improve the students' academic needs in diverse ways such as keeping to time, being apologetic and sharing of ideas and information. However the literature tells a contrasting tale: The study by Arkoudis and Tran (2007) found that the international postgraduate students' learning experiences were negative due to poor treatment from their lecturers and supervisors, lack of quality supervision and unavailability of the supervisors whenever they are required. Majyambere (2012) also reports that international students' academic needs were not met and supported. Rajpal (2012) reports that international African postgraduate students studying in a South African university were being taken advantage of by their individual lecturers in their educational journey. This findings is in contrast with this study which found that international students' academics needs were supported in diverse professional and friendly ways.

The findings illustrate how the participants represented the university academics in various ways. This includes providing emotional support, being helpful and accessible, respecting these students and developing students academically by being professionals. The roles played by the university academics are broad in the sense that they support both learning skills and holistic

well-being of their postgraduate students. Moores and Popadiuk (2011) indicate how international students received academic and personal support from the academic staffs which helped them to acquire a positive learning experience. The next section discusses the teaching and learning resources available for the international students to improve their learning.

5.2.3.2 Availability of teaching and learning resources

Another common element shared by all the participants in this study was the availability of dynamic resources available for students to improve their learning. The resources were used for different purposes. The resources are grouped into three categories: teaching and learning aids, learning spaces and academic activities, as discussed in the following sections.

- *Teaching and learning aids*

Participants spoke about teaching and learning aids which can be divided into high tech (such as computers, projectors, internet facilities and so on) and low tech (books, thesis, posters, collages and so on). Some of the participants' photographs and accompanying explanations are as follows:

In explaining his photo Participant F said:

"This picture denotes the print resources which I draw my learning experiences from. The print resources consists of current books and edited books with book sections, reference materials, journals, thesis and dissertation which enables me to understand and do my work easily. I was having some challenges when I arrived newly here on how to cite and avoid plagiarism but this print materials has helped and impacted on my learning positively from it. I have learnt how to write abstracts, do in text citation, avoid plagiarism, learnt how to edit and revise my work and also on how to write and conduct research on my own".

Figure 9 Library materials

This participant's explanation shows a wide range of print resources and the dynamic way in which they were resourceful to the participants. The sentiments were shared by many participants in this study, and as a result, evidenced growth in students' learning. Other

resources regarded as low-tech were identified by other participants. Some of the participants took pictures of posters or collages generated by other international postgraduate students, as shown by Participant H's photograph below:

"I learnt how to design and make different teaching resources like a poster here which expanded my horizon".
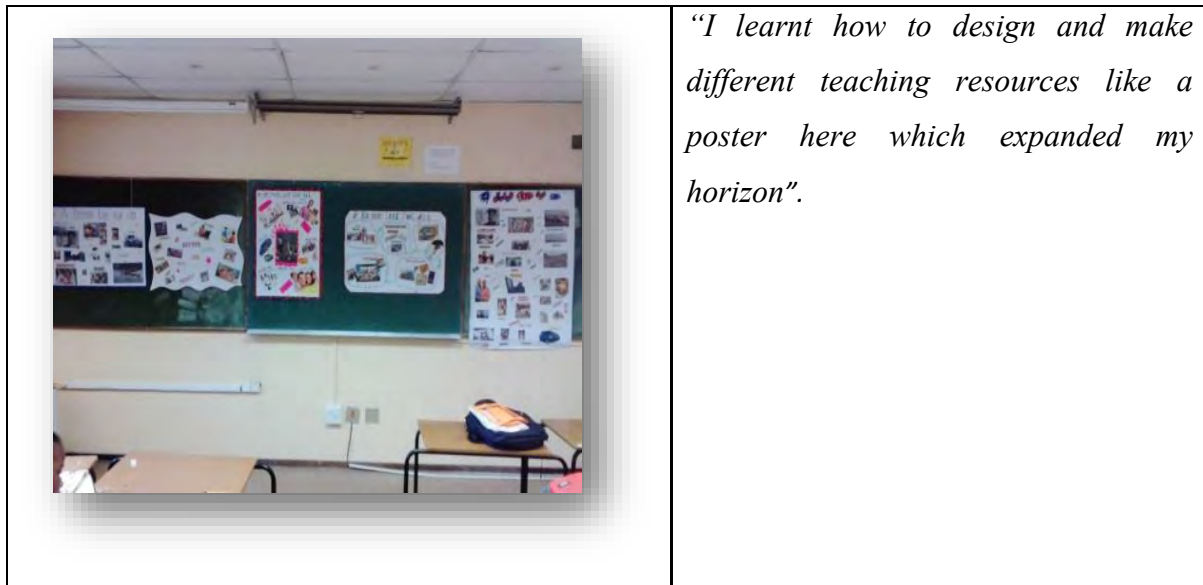
Figure 10 Posters done by international postgraduate students

Participant D commented:

> *"I had to create my own personal learning resources, for example, posters which aid me in teaching and learning".*

Some of the participants in the study also identified that using the various ICT facilities to teach and learn enhanced their learning and helped them to develop various innovative skills. Participant A in his photographs indicated that:
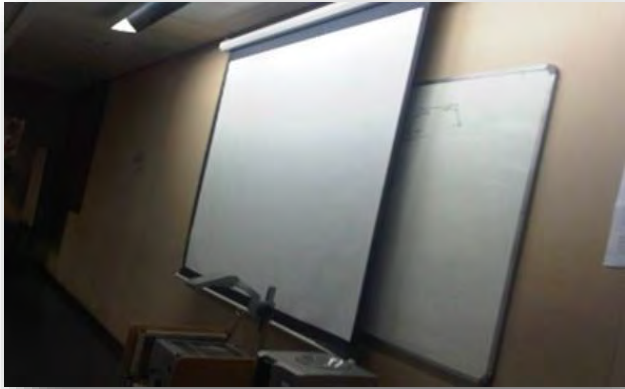
> "*This picture depicts a projector which is one of the current innovative facilities in education that makes teaching and learning easy. As a tutor and a part-time lecturer I learnt how to use this innovative technology in making PowerPoint slides for presentations during seminars and while teaching. I learnt how to use this equipment here on this campus. It is very educative and informative when a lecturer uses this technology to teach because it helps to engage the students in the classroom. This technology is effective which makes me understand things fast and easily as a students in the classroom*".

Figure 11 An innovative teaching technology

Some participants added resources like the Wi-Fi, as illustrated by Participant H.

> "*...the availability of Wi-Fi access inside the four corners of the university environment boosted my work. One can connect to the internet using the Wi-Fi from anywhere within the campus. Being a research student, I could easily communicate with my supervisor via email using my laptop, search for materials online, and stay in touch with friends and family using the web*".

The study revealed that international postgraduate students were able to identify resources in the form of different teaching and learning aids that improved their learning. Most of their photographs depicted what the researcher referred to as high and low tech materials such as Wi-Fi, computers, data projectors, posters or collages generated by other students with other learning materials too (see Resource Map in Figure 7).The findings resonate with those of Campbell and Li (2008), that the Asian students had an overall satisfaction with their learning experiences at their university due to the ICT facilities, educational quality, programme offering and learning support that enhanced their learning. The literature shows that engaging in the internationalisation agenda is ensuring quality learning through improving international students' knowledge of learning with ICT (Adamu, 2010; Shabbani, 2008), as is shown in the

findings of this study. Henard et al. (2012) also identify that international students developed new approaches to learning while using different ICT facilities.

- *Learning spaces*

Another emerged theme relating to the resources that international postgraduate student use towards their learning which involves the physical spaces or university building. This is illustrated in Figure 12, where the participants took a picture of the computer room, normally known as 'research commons'. Participant H's caption reads '*a collaborative work environment*' because the university research commons are dedicated to all postgraduate students. They can work individually and in groups.

"This *picture depicts a collaborative work environment filled with computers and internet facilities. This facility provides an opportunity for me to meet other international postgraduate students and local postgraduate students too and it enables us to interact and relate together while sharing ideas relating to our research work*".
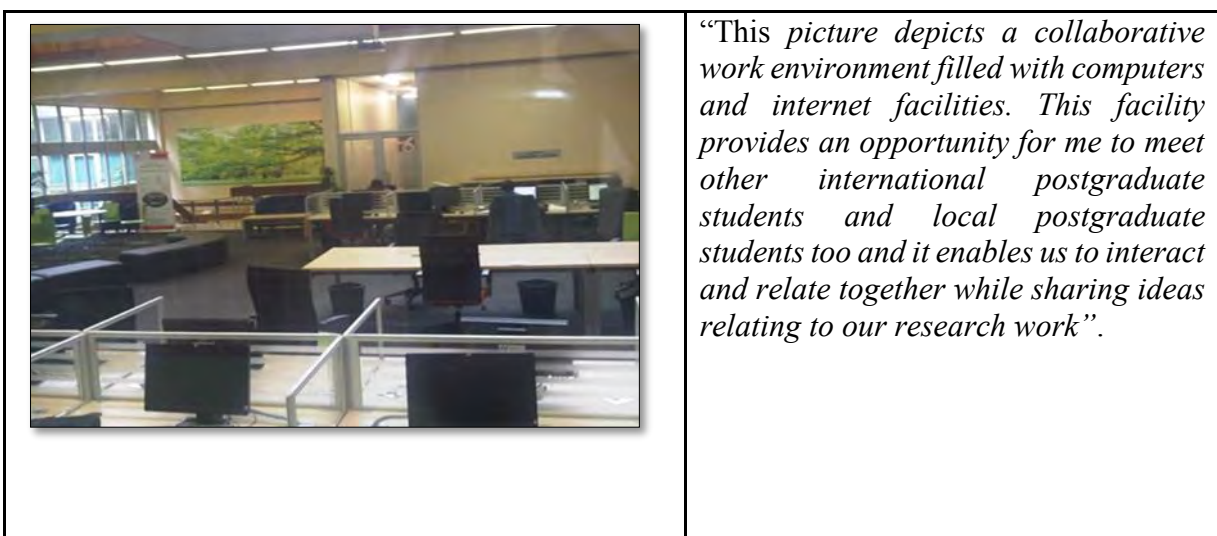
Figure 12 A collaborative work environment

Participants agreed that open learning spaces were the library, conference rooms, LAN, and boardrooms as mentioned in their various responses.

According to Participant D:

> *"The library is a conducive environment that enhances my learning positively."*

Participant E indicated:

> *"The pictures depicts the availability of a conference hall which contributes to students learning positively. In the sense that it provides opportunity for group of students to study together, have group discussions, share ideas and listen to one another".*

"The conference room is where cohorts and seminars are being held and it encourages collaborative learning which is very useful to me as a postgraduate student"(Participant A).

"....the computer LAN in the campus facility is for internet, photocopy and printing of my research work. It has contributed positively to my studies" (Participant G).

"... the boardroom is where cohorts, seminars are held for postgraduate student and information is shared between the postgraduate students and the lecturers here".

Other participating students in this study also identified other learning spaces different from the ones mentioned above such as the classroom and TV rooms where they can relax and also do group work.

"The TV room is one of the relaxation rooms in the university residence that I enjoy staying in after reading and working. It helps me and my colleagues to develop cooperative learning as well as work as a team in doing our study here".

"...the lecture venues are a conducive learning environment. They are quiet, clean, with comfortable chairs and table to read with".

The study showed that the international postgraduate students use the open learning spaces in the university environment as resources towards improving their learning. According to the participants the research commons, library, LAN, conference rooms, boardrooms, lecture venues and TV rooms were identified by the students as conducive learning environments for relaxation, sharing of information with peers and lecturers, for doing group works and for collaborative/cooperative learning. The students also identified that this learning space positively enhanced their learning. Similarly the findings of Campbell and Li (2008) are that international students' experience favourable learning environment which positively impact on their learning. This study identifies different learning spaces made available in the university environment that encouraged and enhanced the students learning. Barnes (2010) also reports that meeting and engaging with diverse students with different ideas and beliefs enhances the international students' academic motivation, engagement and achievement. Similarly, Montgomery (2009) reports that cross cultural group work was viewed by the international

students as part of their positive learning experience that was potentially preparing them to work in an international contexts.

- *Academic activities*

Alongside academic as resources, teaching aids and learning spaces, the majority of the participants' photographs featured discernible activities taking place which the participants regarded as resourceful to their learning. The most prevalent activities were student cohorts, seminars and participating in conferences (see Figure 7). Some of these activities were featured as supplementing learning, where students share ideas and learn collaboratively, as can be seen in Participant H's quotation.

Participant H stated:

> *"…Cohort group, seminars, workshops, I enjoyed in my cluster. This arrangement impacts very positively in my learning. As postgraduate students, we learn how to share ideas and information's together, support each other in our research work and also do collaborative learning…to develop my creative skills and ability to think critically while doing my studies in this campus".*

One of the participants has this to say too:

> *"I have learn how to interact with people also because I do group work, group activities, with people and group studying. Also we learn from each other and encourage each other". (Participant B).*

Some of the participants pointed out that attending conferences was a positive learning experience for them and they emphasised that it gave them exposure to scholars and to meet 'real' people in the academic world.

> *"…another positive experience I have is the exposure to other scholars. By participating and attending conferences, I had a chance to attend a historian conference in Johannesburg and I met real people who have good knowledge in the subject and it helped me to become a member of the historian association and to publish articles".* (Participant E).

The findings suggest that academic activities have a fundamental role to play in international postgraduate students' learning. The activities identified by the participant in this study created spaces to share ideas, to support each other and work together. These findings have shown a

link with some of the findings in the first theme whereby international students claimed a sense of loneliness or social exclusion. However, the academic activities identified made them overcome such feelings and find learning enjoyable, as is the case of Participant H above.

The above findings certainly demonstrate the ability of international postgraduate students to identify a wide range of teaching and learning resources which play significant roles in their learning. As the rich responses and photographs of the participants have shown, there were many resources to meeting the different learning experiences – This can be seen in Bronfenbrenner's theory (Tudge et al., 2009) that in the PPCT model individuals portray certain characteristic which are not immediately apparent but which relate partly to psychological and emotional resources such as past experiences, skills and intelligence and also to social and material resources. In the context of this study, resources included academic activities, whereby students take an active role, such as, sharing ideas, attending conferences and other activities, which in turn, develop their academic skills. Indeed the findings are consistent with those of Campbell (2010) and Kelly (2010) that the international students generated diverse perceptions and personal growth to become independent thinkers and change agents, and also in line with the contention by Bronfenbrenner (Nitsch, 2009) that individuals are naturally active and are capable of participating in meaningful activities.

5.2.3.3 Sports and recreational resources

As indicated in the participants' 'Resource Map' (see Figure 7), the participants did not only take photographs depicting academic resources only but also sport and other recreational activities were featured, such as the gym, swimming pool and sports ground. The participants indicated varying level of benefits from these resources. Some were used as health promoting activities, as show below:

	"The picture depicts the gym where I do my exercise from time to time in order to be fit physically and mentally. This gym helps me in developing holistically as a student" (Participant G).

	"The swimming pool is one of the many sports facilities here on this campus. It helps me to keep fit and also to destress myself whenever I am worried about something" (Participant B).
	*"...academic activities are mentally tiring for me, so I use the university sport field as a place to relax myself by watching soccer matches and by doing some physical exercises. It allows me to avoid some stressful situations"(*Participant F).

Figure 13 Sports recreational resources identified by the participants

Some indicated sporting activities as means to socialise, as illustrated in the following quote.

> *"I am a member of the gym and I go there to exercise my body and also to socialise in order to get to know some other students"*(Participant H).

The above responses showed the resources international students draw on towards their learning which goes beyond academic activities and encompasses extracurricular activities such as sports and recreation in order for them to be physically and mentally fit, develop holistically, to destress, relax and to socialise. Menzies and Baron (2014) assert that international postgraduate students need interaction to learn through different forms of social support within and outside the school environment. In line with these findings Glass (2011) and Moores and Popadiuk (2011) report that international students in USA experience positive educational learning due to the support gotten from engaging in extracurricular activities, for example, sports activities, social gatherings, and practical programmes. The above findings indicate that learning resources can be in human, material and non-human form. The verbatim

quotation from the participants shows the importance of learning with the various resources they identified in achieving their academic goals.

In the study, the findings in theme three showed diverse and complex resources that matter to the international students' learning. However, it was evident in the findings that the degree of support these various resources offered to the international students differed. For example, in the aspect of the support by academics, it showed humans as resources who were helpful, useful and supportive to the international students' academic development and in achieving their academic goals. Whilst in the aspect of teaching and learning aids and sports recreation resources, the students identified various non-human resources that improved their learning experiences. Literature shows that in the microsystem notion of complex interactions "human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between active, evolving bio-psychological human organism, objects and symbols in its immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p.38). For example, figure 7 above illustrates the complex interaction that takes place between the various resources (human and non-human materials) and the international students in their environment (university) which enabled them to develop holistically and academically (Pillay, 2012). In addition, international students are seen as active agents in the environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morrison, 2006).

5.3   CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the data analysis and discussion of findings from the data generated from the photovoice and the focus group discussion. The data presentation was done as themes and categories generated from the study. In addition, verbatim quotations were also employed to ensure that the voices of the participants were intact and not left out of the presentation. In the discussion of the findings, references to the relevant literature were also infused in the appropriate places. The next chapter deals specifically with the summary, recommendation and conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1   INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the researcher presented the data analysis and discussion of the findings of this study. This is the last chapter which provides the summary of the findings that responded to the research questions. Recommendations from the findings as well as limitations are provided by the researcher. The recommendations for future research are also highlighted.

6.2   SUMMARY OF THE KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section provides the summary of the findings that responded to the three key research questions used in framing this study:

1. What are the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal?
2. How did the international postgraduate students' experiences influence their learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal?
3. What resources do the international postgraduate students draw on towards their learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal?

The responses to the above questions will be presented as themes that have emerged out of this study.

6.2.1   The experiences of international postgraduate students in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal

The findings in this theme are that the international postgraduate students experienced the university environment as both enabling and constraining to their learning. This shows that the international postgraduate students had a realistic view concerning the university as an enabling learning environment as it created an opportunity for them to build relationships and network with their fellow international students, established relationships with their lecturers and supervisors, and also provided job opportunities to work as library assistants, tutors and part-time lecturers. Students felt a sense of belonging as they relate with each other and their lecturers. Their living conditions were enhanced which showed the burden placed on their families back home reduced and they also grew and developed holistically.

On the other hand, the findings of the study also revealed that the international postgraduate students experienced the university as a constraining learning environment as they identified several factors within their university environments and beyond the university environments as constraint to their learning experiences. The constraint found within the university environment was the perceived social exclusion by the local students due to the language barrier and the group dynamics that form classroom relationships which made them feel isolated and lonely. In addition, lack of support from the university staff in particularly in the International Office was also identified as one of the constraints within the university which negatively affected their learning. The constraints found beyond the university environment that affected the students' learning were categorised into two parts. The first are the constraints within the neighbouring community, such as the different processes (government institutions and agencies) involved in order for the international students to acquire relevant documents such as study permits, work permits, and visas to stay and study some of which are renewed yearly, and the constraint found in the wider community related to socio economic issues, such as financial constraints like lack of funding and scholarship, accommodation and rental fees, and medical aid fees. These constraints posed as a significant threat to the international students learning as it negatively affected their learning experiences and their personal development in the university.

It is clearly evident from the findings that the international students experienced more constraining factors like social exclusion from local peers and university staffs, processes involved in acquiring study visas, medical aid, lack of funding and scholarships than enabling factors which hindered their learning.

6.2.2 The influence of experience on the international postgraduate students' learning

The findings from the theme showed different influences of experience on the international postgraduate students' learning which helped in developing and shaping their learning in the university. The international postgraduate students' showed that they were resilient to the constraints they identified within and outside their environment by developing adapting strategies and becoming independent learners. The students also developed self-confidence by being independent thinkers, having their own perspective, being able to supervise students, feeling competent as professional teachers and also developing holistically. Moreover, it was

revealed in the findings that the international postgraduate students improved on their social skills by adjusting their attitudes and behaviours to accommodate other individuals in their environment. The students also strengthened their relationships skills and improved in sharing ideas with people whom they recognised as helpful to their learning. In this theme, a significant finding was that the international postgraduate students identified growth and development in their academic skills through their various interactions with the broader university settings and through their individual experiences. For example, academic skills like academic writing, being analytical, being able to paraphrase, ICT skills, being a critical thinker, publishing skills and presentation skills were identified by the students.

The development and enhancement of these diverse academic skills mentioned above by the international postgraduate students influenced their learning experiences and enabled them achieve their academic goals. Another important finding in this theme showed a change in the international postgraduates' students' behaviours due to the influence of their relationship with their supervisor as they acquired time management skills.

6.2.3 Insights into international postgraduate students' resources that 'matter' in their learning

The findings in this theme showed various resources identified by the international postgraduate students which met their academic needs. The students identified different resources (human, non-human and material) in their university environment that supported their learning experiences. The students first identified the academics (lecturers, supervisors, professors) as a vital resource to their learning because they provided them with emotional and psychological support and academic support, and are respectful, helpful and accessible. The academics encouraged and motivated the students, supported them with academic materials to improve their learning, taught them how to manage their time and were always available, helpful, and easy to communicate with.

Another finding was that the students identified rich and dynamic resources in the university environment that were made available to enhance their learning. These dynamic resources were identified as the teaching and learning materials and activities which comprise high tech materials (computers, projectors, internet facilities) and low tech materials (books, thesis, posters, collages) which helped the students to grow and improve on their learning. Findings are also that different learning spaces made available in the university environment that

enhanced the students learning were the LAN, board room, conference room, library, TV room and lecture venues. These learning spaces encouraged collaborative learning, group work and the sharing of ideas among the students with peers and lecturers. Academic activities were a significant resource to the international students' learning as they impacted on their learning positively and helped them to grow academically. These various academic activities identified by the international postgraduate students such as seminars, conferences, workshops, cohorts and presentation made learning fun and enjoyable for the students, created space for them to work together and share ideas and also enabled them to develop different academic skills. Further the international postgraduate students also identified various sports and recreation resources, for example, the gym, swimming pool and the sports grounds which were regarded as enabling health promoting activities that helped them to socialise, relax, become physically and mentally fit and also to destress. Therefore it is imperative to note that engaging in these health promoting activities helped the international students in their holistic development. Significantly, the study showed that the international postgraduate students reported a higher level of agency towards their academic activities. A possible explanation may be found in the diverse set of university activities and resources that the students access for support towards their learning.

6.3   RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clearly evident that in this study, international students learning experiences are more constraining than enabling but there are various measures the university can employ to enhance these students' learning experiences based on the findings of this study. The measure mentioned below are some that the university in this study can consider and employ. Other universities and HEIs can also borrow some of these measure that could be employed by the university in this study.

The study has shown that international students need adequate support from all stake holders (local peers, lecturers, managements) in the university environment to enhance their learning. Therefore I strongly recommend:

- The creation of more avenues and opportunities for international students to meet, relate, interact and network.
- The International Office in the university should encourage regular gathering of international students in order for them to interact and also create international clubs

in order for the international students to be able to connect together thereby supporting each other socially and having a sense of belonging.

- More support is also required from the lecturers, supervisors, and professors to assist, encourage and help the international students in their learning.

- More job opportunities should be created for the international students in order to help ease their various financial burdens and to develop them professionally and personally.

- The university should be a place that encourages cross cultural interaction between the local students and international students. In addition, they should provide the international students the opportunities to relate and share their cultural knowledge and ideas with the local students in order to overcome language barriers and social exclusion caused by group dynamics.

- I strongly recommend the international students officers of this university to revisit their roles regarding international students and support them in their learning. In addition, the international students' officer must be able to address issues faced by their international student pertaining especially to the issues of their study visas and study permit.

- Funding and financial resources in the form of scholarships should be made available for the international postgraduate students in order to support them in their research work and learning.

- The university should introduce a lesser medical aid policy with more benefits.

- The university should be a place filled with new innovative teaching and learning resources like videos, cameras, latest online and print books and articles etc. So I strongly suggest that more resources that will enhance and shape the student learning be made available.

- More advanced teaching and learning technologies should be implemented in the university in order to equip the international students with the necessary skills that will enhance their learning and help them in meeting their academic needs.

- More learning spaces should be created in the university learning environment in order to support international and local students in learning collaborative, doing group work, sharing ideas and developing their skills.

- University lecturers and supervisors should ensure that they engage their students in their teaching by using the various learner-centered strategies identified in the findings of this study like seminars, cohorts, conferences, workshops, and presentation in order

for the students to become active in their learning and also to develop their academic and critical thinking skills.

- Different sport and recreation resources should be created in the university in order to engage the students in keeping physically and mentally fit. .

- The integration of photovoice as an interdisciplinary tool should be pursued in all disciplines of the university in order to promote critical thinking, easy communication and creativity and create active learning among the students and lecturers in the university.

- Improve the teaching and learning methods of the university by encouraging learning with visual methods.

6.4   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following recommendations for further research are presented below:

- Further studies which specifically explore how international students construct their learning experiences with more participants using participatory visual methodologies, for example, the use of video and camera should be undertaken.

- Further studies that focuses on the learning experiences of international students in a different context, such as in a private university or in another country, should be undertaken.

- Further studies exploring the international postgraduate students' experience of learning from the lens of social justice should be undertaken.

- The study was specifically aimed at international postgraduate students; it will be significant if the study will be aimed at international undergraduate students for a more comprehensive picture of international students' experiences of learning.

- Lastly this study also contributes to the existing literature on the participatory visual methodology known as photovoice method in doing research with university students. Therefore it is imperative that further research is recommended to ascertain and investigate the use of photovoice in education and in doing research most especially in the South African context.

6.5   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Rule and John (2011) assert that research often does not go according to the original plans which indicates that all research carries certain limitation. In this aspect, the limitation of this research study stems from so many reasons, for example, the context, sample size and time.

6.5.1   Research context

The context in which the research study was conducted was in only one of the campuses of the selected university in KwaZulu-Natal and not in all of the campuses.

6.5.2   The sample size

The study was limited to only eight international postgraduate students who have been studying in the selected university for more than two years, in their MEd and PhD studies and also living in the residence of the campus. However the study did not include all representatives of the international postgraduate students studying in the selected university, most especially studying in the campus of the School of Education where this study was conducted.

6.5.3   Research method

Thirdly, due to the limited time frame designated for this master's study, the data generation method known as the photovoice method took more time as it was the participants' first time in engaging in this new visual method. This is because during the photo shooting in the photovoice process, the participants were required to think critically before taking the photographs and also in choosing photographs that made meaning to them during the photo interpretation session. In addition the photovoice method and focus group discussion method were scheduled and rescheduled for more than three times due to the participants' busy schedules as they were all working as tutors and part-time lecturers in their respective departments. Therefore it is evident to note that this qualitative research study cannot be generalized as to encompass international students in the other campuses of the university.

6.6   CONCLUSION

The study explored the international postgraduate students experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal in relation to what resources can emerge in support of teaching and learning. The study showed that the international postgraduate students' learning

experiences in the university environment were both enabling and constraining. Whilst there were more constraining factors than enabling, the study revealed that the international students development and academic growth is determined by their level of interactions, interrelationships, interconnectedness, interdependency with the broader university setting (people, resources, departments) which influences their learning and also supported, shaped and improved their knowledge, skills and their academic achievements in the university. Therefore in this study, the researcher argues and emphasise that international students are not passive beings rather they are active beings and they do not learn in isolation or in a vacuum but their learning experiences are shaped by the interactions, interrelationship and interdependency they have with people and resources in their environment.

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APPENDIX A ETHICAL CLEARANCE

APPENDIX B   INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

School of Educational studies

College of Humanities,

University of KwaZulu-Natal,

Edgewood Campus,

Dear Participant,

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Peace Ginika Nwokedi, I am a Masters candidate at Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The research study currently undertaking is for the fulfilment of M.ED degree in Educational Psychology.

I am interested in exploring your experiences of learning as international postgraduate students in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. This research aims at exploring how your experiences influence your learning and the resources you drawn on towards your learning here in this selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. In other words, you are one of my case studies because you have been studying in this campus for at least two years. Therefore to gather the information for my research study, I am interested in asking you some questions.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion and by the use of a pseudonym.
- The focus group discussion session may last for about one and half hours and may be split depending on your preference.
- I cordially invite you to participate in a photovoice process. This will involve a session of a photovoice workshop in the use of cameras, ethics in taking photographs and what photovoice is all about which will last for an hour. The second session will be on photo shooting which will last for an hour and the last session will be on photo interpretation which will last for an hour too.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research study only.

- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.

- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.

- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.

- If you are willing to participate in the focus group discussion and photovoice process sessions, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		
Photographic equipment		
Video equipment		

I can be contacted at:

Email: peaceginika@rocketmail.com

Cell: 0717448006

My supervisor is Dr. Fumane Khanare who is located in the School of Educational studies, at Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pinetown.

Contact details: email: Khanare@ukzn.ac.za

Cell &Phone number: 0834321772 0r 031260354.

You may also contact the HSSREC Research Ethics Office:

Ms. P. Ximba (0312603587)

HSSREC Research Ethics Office,

Private bag X54001, Durban, 4000.

E-mail: XIMBAP@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

I………………………………………………………………… (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio record my focus group discussion	**Yes / No**
Video record my focus group discussion	**Yes / No**
Use of my photographs for research purposes	**Yes / No**

……………………………………   **…………………………………**

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   **DATE**

APPENDIX C PHOTOVOICE PROCESS SCHEDULE

Data generation through Photovoice

You are invited to participate in this study which explores the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. The study explores how these experiences influence the international postgraduate students' learning and the resources these international postgraduate students drawn on towards their learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. Participation in this photovoice process is voluntary and you are free not to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with or to withdraw from participating at any time.

Title of study: International postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal

Introduction by Facilitator

Hello, my name is [Peace Nwokedi]. Thank you for taking the time to participate in the photovoice process in relation to the study mentioned above.

Introduction by the participants

Let's do a quick round of introductions. Can each of you tell us your name, nationality and what you are studying at Edgewood campus?

(NOTE TO THE INTERVIEWER: **The following questions will guide the photovoice process).**

Session 1:

Photovoice workshop: - This includes the photovoice process namely:

- Exploring what photovoice is? Using a PowerPoint slide.
- The use of camera (explaining the different type of cameras for example digital and manual cameras)
- Discussing the ethics in photovoice method (Wang & Redwood- jones, 1999).

Session 2:

Photo shooting: - In this session, participants will be given cameras to take photographs that will depict their learning experiences at Edgewood campus using the following guiding prompts:

- Using a camera, take photographs of four (4) negative experiences of your learning in this selected university in KwaZulu-Natal.
- Using a camera, take photographs of four (4) positive experiences of your learning in this selected university in KwaZulu-Natal.
- Using a camera, take four (4) photographs showing the resources you draw on towards your learning in this selected university in KwaZulu-Natal.

After the photo shooting, the researcher will open a folder on her laptop for each of the participants and upload their pictures inside it.

Session 3:

Photo Description: Each of the photographs will be printed out on an A4 power point paper with content and caption design and the participant will be requested to interpret the reason they took the photographs using guiding prompts to give a full detail of what the photographs is all about**.**

Using the SHOWeD Mnemonics as the guiding prompts:-

- Who is in the photographs?
- Why did you take the photographs?
- What is in the photographs?

The end of the session:

Thank you so much for your time!

APPENDIX D FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

You are invited to participate in this study which explores the international postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. The study explores how these experiences influence the international postgraduate students' learning and the resources the international postgraduate students drawn on towards their learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal. Participation in the focus group discussion is voluntary and you are free not to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with or to withdraw from participation at any time.

Title of study: International postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal.

Hello, my name is [Peace Nwokedi]. Thank you for taking your time to participate in the focus group discussion in relation to the study mentioned above.

Introductions by the participants

Let's do a quick round of introductions. Can each of you tell the group your name, nationality and what you are studying at Edgewood campus?

(NOTE TO THE INTERVIEWER: **The following questions will guide the discussion)**

1. First, I would like to hear about the experiences that influence your learning at this campus
   a. How long have you been studying at this particular campus
   b. What is it like to study at this campus? Remember you can draw from many experiences: lecture rooms, residences, library, LAN, sport fields etc.
   c. In what ways do you feel/think that these experiences have improved your learning
   d. In what ways do you feel/think that these experiences fell short in helping you learn at the campus?

2. At this point I would like to hear about the learning resources that you as postgraduate students' use in order to learn at this campus.
   a. What are the resources that you consider helpful towards your learning?
   b. Probe: Remember, This can be a wide range of resources: the materials resources, non-material or human resources etc.

c. What are your suggestions for resources that the campus could offer to make it easier for international postgraduate students' learning?

d. In what ways do you feel that the services fell short in helping you reach your goals?

3. Is there anything else we have not discussed yet that you think is important in relation to your learning experience at this campus

Thank you so much for your time!

APPENDIX E   RESPONDENT'S PROFILE

	Biographic data			
1.	What is your gender	Male	Female	Other
2.	Age			
3.	Race			
4.	Nationality			
5.	Degree			
6.	Area of specialisation			
7.	How long have been in studying in this selected university in KwaZulu-Natal?			

APPENDIX F   PHOTOGRAPH WAIVER

I, _____ (print name), give my permission for a photograph to be taken of me for use in the project: **International postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal.**

This photograph will be used for research purposes and I will be consulted and further permission will be sought if my photograph is to be used for exhibitions and/or other dissemination purposes. No further use of this photograph will be made without my express permission.

…………………………………….   ………………………………
             Signature   Date

I can be contacted at:
Email: peaceginika@rocketmail.com
Cell: 0717448006

My supervisor is Dr. Fumane Khanare
Contact details: email: Khanare@ukzn.ac.za
Cell &Phone number: 0834321772 0r 031260354.

You may also contact the Research Office through:
Mbali Ngcobo
HSSREC Research Office,
Edgewood Campus. UKZN
E-mail: ngcobom4@ukzn.ac.za

Thanks for your time and help!

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Crispin Hemson

15 Morris Place

Glenwood

Durban

South Africa 4001
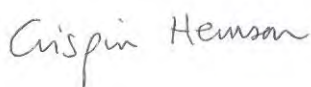
hemson@ukzn.ac.za

C: 082 926 5333
H: 031 206 1738

9th December 2015

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to record that I have carried out language editing of the article by Peace Ginika, entitled '**International postgraduate students' experiences of learning in a selected university in KwaZulu-Natal.'**

The editing has not included checking on the accuracy of quotations or of corrections to the text undertaken since the first editing.

Crispin Hemson